

2015 Mobility Cup Regatta

A Memorable Experience!

Linda Clarke

It was suggested, this summer, that I should compete in the Mobility Cup held near Victoria, British Columbia, International Disabled Sailing competition sailing Martin 16's, a boat designed specifically for the disabled.

I have raced in several Ontario, regattas, but flying to British Columbia would be a tad more challenging in several areas. I then discovered that WESTJET offers a complimentary companion flight within Canada for a disabled person. Luckily my friend Sandy was able to get the week off work to accompany me as an excellent caregiver and travel mate. Who knew when I met her 34 years ago when I cared for her kids, the tables would be turned.

The adventure began Friday with packing, both Lani and Sharon helped. I took clothing for every weather including a toque, light weight foul gear which I needed as a wind breaker and protection against sea spray.

Sandy arrived Saturday at 4:00PM and we piled into my friend's Marie's accessible van and her husband, Mike drove us to the airport, piled our luggage onto a cart and delivered us to check in! (I like full service). This is the first time I've traveled with my power wheelchair, it gives me so much more independence. The flight was long, over 7 hours (I could have flown to UK in that time!) with 2 stops, but I had chosen this route so we wouldn't have to change planes, and to assure my wheelchair would arrive with me! We left Toronto sunny and very hot, landed in Calgary to snow and arrived in Victoria to low teens temperature and heavy rain. Luckily we didn't see



Linda in front of Judy Winship, followed by Renuka Senaratne next, then Trevor Ashwell, PHOTO: Mark Rounding - Bailey

any more rain all week.

My power wheelchair was brought to the door of the plane, all is good until no taxi, it's midnight, but feels like the 3:00AM at home! I'd prearranged an accessible taxi through the airport shuttle service and another passenger waiting told me he was here, holding my name but took off with someone else, NICE! Eventually we got to the hotel around 2:00AM.

Our hotel was 2 kilometres from Canadian Arm Forces Base in Esquimalt BC (7KM from Victoria) where the regatta was held.

We met Faye on Sunday, who explained everything about the facilities and transportation, and was around to help us all week when the accessible vehicle didn't show up. It was quite an angled ride down to the docks which became much steeper when the tide went out. I had yet to learn how the tide would effect my sailing, not good!

We mingled with the other competitors, Tracy and Peter (who won the gold hence the trophy) whom I know from Queens Quay Disabled sailing in Toronto, Al from Burlington and Karen-Ann Xavier who provides the Martin 16's in Canada. She was responsible for the logistics of shipping 3 boats to BC and made sure the boat Tracy and I sailed was rigged correctly to perform well.

Monday is practice race and seminars. Our transportation arrives at 9.15AM and I'm ready to go on the water by 10. I meet my sailing companion/coach for that day, Claire in the Silver fleet. We are assigned a different companion every day so their skills are evenly distributed. I had requested my companions be both aware and comfortable with my loss of speech, due to ALS.

At home I had prepared a write up of my skills, the help I would need and a few hand signals such as hand on head means "help!" I only had to use it once when my cushion and I were falling off the seat! It covered both sides of a regular page! Claire had already read it and was well prepared. Being from the area, she knew the tides. She had sailed a fair amount with a local who also had lost his voice; my confidence raises as we discuss start strategy. Sounds impressive but not my strongest point, I'm uncomfortable with being in the "pack" on the line. I'd made 3 suggestions in my sailing dossier, we chose the "Keith" system of port tack from pin end switching to starboard in the middle of the line just in time to start.

We had to wait a bit longer for the boat lift on the first day, as they were still working out the system, so we unfortunately, missed all but one of

the practice starts. We did well in both and achieved 6th place. There was moderate wind and calm seas so I did enjoy my first sail in British Columbia. My travel companion Sandy, a non sailor, enjoyed the event from the spectator boat.

Two seminars were offered, one on rules and one on handling the Martin 16's by the designer himself, Don Martin, which was very interesting. Builder of the Martin 16 is KAPE Boatworks, owned and operated by Karen-Ann Xavier and Paula Stone, who generously donate their boats and time to Disabled Sailing Regattas across Canada.

The Opening Ceremony featured a "Bagpiper" to lead the competitors down the hill, some walking, some wheeling. The flags were flying for each Province and State of the competitors. I discovered that the Disabled Sailing Association in Canada was established 24 years ago, equal to the number of years I've been sailing. Following the speeches, the 41 disabled competitors and over 70 volunteers enjoyed a tasty BBQ.

We alternate morning and afternoon sails with the Gold fleet, sharing boats. Tuesday is an afternoon sail for me so no rush, a leisurely breakfast with the other silver fleet sailors: Alyssa from New Brunswick, Renuka from Vancouver and her sister. Our transportation arrived on time and we are ready to go as soon as the gold fleet returns to the dock. I meet my assigned companion, (crew and helper) for the day, we, once again, discuss my sheet of skills and the help I need. She also is experienced with sailors who can't speak, so understands that I can't ask questions while sailing, hence my need for a running commentary on other boats positions (especially if they are behind on the down wind leg and stealing my wind), where the marks are and where the kelp hides out. Kelp is seaweed which detaches from the sea bed at this time of year and looks like a long tube floating on the surface, if it attaches to your boat your speed diminishes! I hear its quite good for you.

Paula (self named "the dock b@#ch") runs the docks, you DO

NOT go down to the dock before your boat is ready for you as there are too many wheelchairs. You have your life jacket on and, for those who use the hoist lift, also have a sling in place for transfer from lift to the boat. The dock crew was very efficient loading us onto boats, subsequently, getting us out on the water early.

The wind is stronger and the waves larger today, making it not a dry day! We took some waves over the bow so my feet were slushing around in water. The Martin 16 is a keel boat designed specifically for the disabled; it is designed to not tip or sink even when filled with water.

Today I tasted the salt of the sea! I shouldn't sail with my mouth open! I did well getting a 9th and 5th, better than I'd expected, my aim was not to come last overall, so it's looking good!

Wednesday up early again, winds are calmer. Not a good race day. I didn't make the windward mark twice because of the current due to the tide! So decide to go into Victoria to sightsee, really the only free time we had all week.

The Mobility Cup, recognized as Canada's International Regatta for Sailor's with Disabilities was held this year in beautiful British Columbia from September 7-11.

The Disabled Sailing Association of British Columbia - Victoria Branch, the Canadian Forces Sailing Association - Esquimalt Squadron, hosted the event which this year marks the 20th anniversary of the first Mobility Cup Regatta hosted in Victoria in 1995. It is also the 20th anniversary of the Martin 16 sailboat. Sailing is now one of the fastest-growing sports for people with a disability from across Canada and the United States as well as Europe and as far away as New Zealand.

PHOTO:

Finish Line - Chris Watson





From Left to Right: Marc Villeneuve (2nd), Pierre Richard (3rd), Emily Boardman, Chairman of Mobility Cup, Victoria, Peter Eager (1st), David Mitchell (Commodore CFSA) Kris Thannhauser (Commodore DSA BC-Victoria) PHOTO- Chris Watson

Thursday is an afternoon race, but the shuttle doesn't show up, we phone Fran and she makes quick alternative arrangements while Renuka and I put our rain gear on in the parking lot of the hotel. We go straight to the dock where they are waiting to transfer us onto our boats. Today my companion is Karen-Ann Xavier, we had discussed my sheet the day before and she coached me though the pack on the starting line. I had two very good starts and came 4th and 5th in the races proving the start is crucial. One of the races I'd been close enough on the finishing down wind leg to steal his wind thus catching up, coming alongside and it was a photo finish but I just squeaked by! That was the highlight of my week.

Karen-Ann made me smile when I was the windward boat and another boat called me to go up, she called back "old sails"!

Friday brings our last day of racing and there is very little wind. Jen from Montreal is my companion. I had a really bad start in the first race. In light wind you need to keep close to the line, I did not. In the second race I had a great start and was in a good position on the lay line to the mark, on a port tack, assessing boats to duck when I got to the mark then more "kelp!" I had to fall off to avoid it which put me on a collision course with another boat. So again, I had to alter my course to avoid that boat. Not a good day.

As we finished the last race of the regatta the committee boat gave us all a standing ovation by waving flags and sounding fog horns. I came in 10th overall, in the Silver fleet, not last, so I had achieved my goal and had a lot of fun doing it. It was a pleasure sailing in this location. The scenery was beautiful the weather was great.

The closing ceremony and awards handing out was next with Peter Eagar out of Queens Quay Disabled Sailing Program (QQDSP) winning Gold, and the overall Mobility Cup Trophy. Al Nicolls from Burlington came in 3rd in the Silver fleet; our representatives did well. I have to extend a special thank you to all of the volunteers who helped make this event possible!

Sandy and I head straight to the

airport to catch the red eye home. We chose to travel this way rather than get up very early to catch the morning flight. This time we do have to change planes in Calgary, no big deal, the gates are next to each other. Then the problem started, a WESTJET employee approached us with phone in hand, he showed us a picture of my wheelchair with a flat tire. He asked me whether they should keep the chair and repair or send it on to Toronto for repair there, I chose the latter.

When the flight attendant opened the door at Toronto, there was a WESTJET representative waiting to give me an update. WESTJET baggage claims had notified Global repair and made sure both myself and the wheelchair didn't miss the transportation I had booked to take me home. My chair was successfully repaired at my condo before 4:00PM, by Shoppers Drug Mart who originally supplied it to me.

Thank you WESTJET and SHOPPERS and to all who helped. Very impressive customer service.

A great week, a great adventure!

The 2016 Mobility Cup will be hosted by Pointe-Claire Yacht Club in Montreal, Quebec. I shall brush up on my French! 

Linda sails out of the Queens Quay Disabled Sailing Program (QQDSP). lindasnxtadventure@hotmail.com



Linda (in front) with her sailing companion Karen -Ann Xavier