

“SNUG”—The Centenary of a Rowboat *by Bernadette Mertens-McAllister* September 2024



It was in January 1977 that a surprise was waiting for me in the yard. For my birthday, an old clinker-built rowboat was lying behind the shed. Immediately I noticed how graceful the lines were, somewhat like a Whitehall but with a slightly wider beam. Walking closer I could see that under the dull gray chipping paint, the planks were dry and sound; however a lot of rusty nails were showing; most of the oak ribs were cracked; there were no seats or oarlocks. What was I going to do with this old boat when my daughter was just a few months old?



Two year old Ingrid in 1979, snug in the painstakingly refurbished Snug.

It took me weeks and months to carefully remove all the nasty nails and replace them with copper fasteners. Wearing a safety mask, I had to get back to the raw wood using one of those old flame torches. The job was long and tedious and only possible when my daughter was sleeping. With the help of dear friends and expert boat builders of Sidney, I slowly transformed the old unwanted junk into a sweet classic rowboat.



I gave her the name “Snug”, a word that doesn’t really translate well in French, my mother tongue. I felt the boat was small, cozy and, in a way, very reliable and safe.

Bernadette Mertens, assisted by her two year old daughter Ingrid, accomplished the 3 mile Fernie Island course in 64 minutes 57 seconds. Their pulling boat, 'Snug' was originally built for the Setchell family in Deep Cove during the 1930's; in 1943 it was sold to Mr. and Mrs. Holder who subsequently used it in their boat rental business. Ms. Mertens restored the craft this year, with the help of friends, and has since rowed it around Saltspring Island.



TWO YEAR OLD Ingrid Mertens joined with her mother in entering the Rowing Review.

This kind of vessel was originally used to go fishing and community-gathering in Saanich Inlet. Apparently, Snug was built during the 1930's for the Setchell family in Deep Cove. In 1943 she was sold to Mr. and

Mrs. Holder, who subsequently used her in their rental business (*according to an article from the Sidney Review above*). A round plug on the side of the hull reveals that she had a small motor at one point; probably a one-cylinder.

For 47 years, Snug traveled from place to place with me as I moved here and there in BC. In Vernon, after a second refurbishing, I was happily rowing her on the warm and smooth water of Kalamalka Lake. I remember finding a long rattlesnake which I spooked as I was walking on the wild shore of the lake.

When I moved to Victoria for three years, Snug had to wait for me. Then she spent 16 years in a shed as I was ranching in the Chilcotin. The packrats got into the sail, leaving holes here and there, and the dust was piling slowly on the varnished seats. But miraculously, the old trailer was kept intact. Finally, for our retirement in 2012, the call of the ocean brought my husband and me to Salt Spring Island.



The trips on Snug have been numerous, demanding and extremely rewarding! It started with a regatta in Sidney in 1979. My daughter Ingrid (then two years old) and I completed a three mile race with great success! We were the only ones in the class!!!!



At that time, from Sidney, I rowed around SSI and ventured to the Olympic Peninsula in the States.



Now, living on SSI, I continue to row...a round trip of SSI or perhaps of Portland or Prevost Island. Now my companion and co-rower is my dog Sophie! I am very grateful to be able to keep Snug at the SSI Sailing Club for a while each summer.

