

Racing On Puget Sound, 2014
By Carl Petterson

This photograph shows a moment in time on Saturday morning, June 14, 2014. I will try to explain our weekend activity based on this picture. The leaders on our octuple, an eight-place racing shell, made an error. Our stroke, the lead rower, suggested to our cox that we warm up before the start and we misjudged the time. Just before this picture was taken, a loud horn signaled the start of this race and we are looking around as the other contestants began their race. The starting point was the dock at the right side of this picture. We turned our 60 foot-long boat, rowed to the starting line, and tried to catch the earlier contestants.



On the outward leg of this out-and-back race, all boats must pass by the Whidby Island Ferry Dock. Racers often have to stop to let the enormous ferries pass by. Some racers often choose to play chicken with the ferry, rushing by so they won't add minutes to their racing time. The more timid rowers wait.

In the background you can see circa-1900 Officer Row Houses, part of Fort Worden State Park. We were in Port Townsend, WA, to participate in the Rat Island Regatta. The day before we had driven from Portland pulling a long boat trailer with our 60 foot-long racing shell perched on top. That night, our group celebrated with a dinner at the funky Ajax Café in Port Hadlock. With our long years of rowing together we share a lot of great stories about rowing. A big part of rowing is about friendships and camaraderie. Saturday morning, very early, we all gathered to assemble our boat for this race.

Rat Island, the mid-point for the race, is a half mile-long gravel island on the far side of Puget Sound. The club that sponsored this regatta, Rat Island Rowing and Sculling Club, named their club after this odd little island. The Rat Island club raced an old wooden octuple that year which is similar to ours. They had just restored it with a \$9,235 crowd funding effort and lots of elbow grease. This was the first year they raced the restored boat and their inaugural crew (younger and stronger) was more than a match for our enthusiastic middle-aged gang.

By 2019 I had raced in this regatta eight times. In seven of these races we got blue ribbons from being first in class. The 2014 regatta was the only time we placed second in our class and received a red ribbon. In 2014 our elapsed time for the 7.8 mile-long race, including time lost

by our late start, was 1:04:06.5. We were 7 minutes behind the first-place finisher and 3 minutes behind the fourth place Rat Island octuple, our competition. Our team's flat-water design boats easily catch the larger waves. That means they don't survive as well as the open water design boats in the wind chop and larger waves of Puget Sound. On another year we almost capsized, but that's another story.

Our crew in this picture is a mixed team of men and women, with one boy. Our cox, Judi is on your left. (Only she can see where we are going). The rowers all face backward and seats are counted from the bow (front) of the boat to the stern (back), seat one through eight. "One seat" is called bow seat and "eight seat" is the stroke seat. Our stroke that day was Dan. This position sets the pace for the boat crew. Behind him, in seven seat, is our young lad, my grand-nephew, Ari. I was in six seat that day.

You can tell in the picture this day in 2014 was warm and sunny, a day when nothing much could go wrong. We weren't crushed by our second-place in the race. After the race, the Rat Island Club sponsored a great pot luck with fresh baked salmon and craft beer. Following the abundant pot luck we moved on to the awards ceremony where ribbons were received, many with cheering and hugs. Finally, weary but undaunted, we dismantled our boat, secured it and our sixteen oars to the boat trailer, and drove the long trip back into the real world.

And, after that day, another treasured experience was stored in our memories.

One additional note: Ari, our youngest rower, was about 15 in 2014. In high school he excelled in math and science and was spending an inordinate amount of time working with computers. His mom, who sat behind me in the 2014 race, feared he would become a complete introvert and made him join a Junior rowing program to get more exercise and exposure to kids his age. He liked it and developed both talent and speed as a light-weight rower. Now he is a MIT Junior in Aero-Space Engineering Program and also in their Rowing Program. The MIT Rowing Coach said his personal recommendation might help him to get into this university and it did.

Carl Petterson, October 27,2020