



Vol. 4-2

## PGRC Pitch Meter

Summer 2013

### Ann O’Keefe, Co-Chair of the Preservation Campaign

Ann was raised on Crystal Lake, just east of Albany, New York. She spent her days on the water - sailing and fishing in the summer and playing ice hockey when ice covered the lake. She took a brief hiatus from hockey and figure skating to pursue her education. “I learned a lot while I was a cadet at the US Air Force Academy,” she says, “including a new challenge as a competitive golfer.” After graduating from Skidmore College, she moved to Pennsylvania to attend law school at Villanova University.

Ann returned to the skating world, getting involved in administration and competition support roles. As a National Music Coordinator, she travels across the country helping all types of competitions. She admits "it was a blast" working at the Salt Lake City Olympics. You may even hear her voice this fall on television announcing at competitions! Bringing her skills as an attorney to the sport, she has judged grievances and served on the Oversight Committee. She recently completed service



as Eastern Vice-President for US Figure Skating.

When she began to write a history of the Philadelphia Skating Club & Humane Society, she found PGRC, its original home. An invitation to try rowing immediately hooked her, though she says, “The hardest part about rowing is the Schuylkill River. I’m a lake kid, and we learned a lot of respect for rivers.” She adds, “Rowing has changed

my perspective on Philadelphia. The river is like a secret place, where I can briefly escape from everyday demands. Rowers have the best seat to enjoy this beautiful environment, and they get an opportunity to better understand our relationship to both the boathouse and the river.”

Ann’s work as a business attorney gives her the flexibility to be able to help non-profits, especially those giving back to sports. She is willing to serve as Co-Chair of the Preservation Campaign because “It’s important to keep the campaign moving forward. I want to help preserve a very special place for our community, and that means more than the rowers alone.”

She is a stray dog collector, living at “Wagtail Farm” in Haverford with five dogs and two cats.

PGRC Friends!  
Contact us via our website  
[Philadelphiagirlsrowingclub.org](http://Philadelphiagirlsrowingclub.org)  
~  
and on Facebook

Next Members’ Meeting  
August 1, 2013  
7:00 PM at PGRC

Philadelphia Girls’ Rowing  
Club  
#14 Boathouse Row  
Kelly Drive  
Philadelphia PA 19130

# PGRC Pitch Meter

## On the Ropes

by Essie Abrahams

In many ways, learning to row is acting like Ginger Rogers, who did everything Fred Astaire did, but backwards and in high heels. We do everything backwards – and rowing is complex, requiring knowledge of the basic skills, equipment and the river. In my novice year, I was fortunate enough to row in a quad we dubbed “The Four Professors,” as we were all educators in our late forties to mid-fifties taking up the sport.

One Sunday, as we approached the lighthouse, a pesky tailwind gusted, blowing us off course. The bow Jenny had no time to adjust and we missed our dock. We were too far away to catch hold, no one was there to catch us and pull us in anyway, but we were headed straight for a neighboring dock, where we didn’t know we were permitted to land. Jenny determined we would just have to loop around and try again.

“Gina, ask that kid to push us out,” she directed while she calculated our course. Gina called to a young rower standing on the dock, who readily obliged, sending us toward the center of the river, where we should have had room to turn the boat safely. Instead, with his push and the rising wind, we landed on a half-submerged tree. After minutes of wrangling, Gina was able to guide us free, only to discover we were headed toward the falls.

Now if there is one lesson and only one lesson learned during the classes, it is this: Do not go near the falls, ever. The intensifying wind and increasing current demanded we row ever harder, yet despite our efforts, we continued toward the falls. My hands tightened on the oars, moving into the death grip. This is considered poor form.

“Grab the ropes,” yelled a voice. We looked up and there she was, our rescuer, racing

towards us with a megaphone in one hand and steering the launch with the other. We sighed and cheered. We would be towed back. We were saved! “Grab the ropes,” she repeated. We each reached out and caught a slimy, mud covered rope hanging from the steel cable.

The coach directed us to strategize, taking into account the wind and the current. She circled around us, moving between us and the falls and then out again. “No,” she said, “there’s no rope, no way to tow you back. Just work together. You aren’t going over the falls.”

Hunched forward to catch my oars with my hips so they wouldn’t slide away, I hung onto the algae encrusted rope, in modified fetal position. This is considered poor form.

“I am not letting go of this rope until there is a plan. Just let me know what and when,” I hissed to Gina, who was listening to the frenzied debate. She reported that Jenny and Emma, the two most experienced in water crafts and safety, were arguing about the best way to move, but added quietly, “When I say row, row hard.”

Our boat was positioned so that the bow faced east – Kelly Drive, the Art Museum and the falls. We needed to turn the boat around toward the west, toward the zoo and the Twin Bridges to move up river. The discussion involved which side offered the better advantage to apply pressure to turn the boat. In our inexperience, we only knew one way to turn a boat, that required space, and one way to row, forward. Emma determined that the stern pair should drop their ropes and row hard, which would turn the bow. Whether this conversation took thirty seconds or thirty minutes, it felt like thirty hours.

“Row now,” Gina called. I dropped the rope, grabbed my oars and rowed, as we all did,

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## On the Ropes (cont.)

as if our lives depended upon it. Traveling up the river, I noticed what I could not see previously: people everywhere watching the unfolding drama. Fred and Ginger captivated their audiences though their intricate dance steps; we held our audience spellbound through our dance of ineptitude.

We went about one mile up river, turned and hit the dock on our first try, dazed and covered with river slime. We dragged ourselves up to the locker room, where we plunked down on benches and began shedding our muddy clothes. No one wanted to speak beyond, "Did you fill out the book?" or "Who got the most slime?" We just craved hot showers, dry clothes and firm land.

A friend came bouncing in, "Anybody available for a 6 a.m. row tomorrow? We need a fourth." I volunteered.

Next day, sitting in the middle of a boat at dawn, the shaking began. What had I done? What had I agreed to do? Rowing so soon after the incident had seemed like a good idea. Breathing deeply, I completed the row.

Years later, we have expanded our circle to include other rowers, but the tradition of a Sunday row together continues. Our technique has greatly improved, we can turn a boat on a dime, and while we have had a variety of escapades, we have never duplicated the misadventures of our novice year. Still, on a windy day or in a dangerous situation, there are few other women I would trust more.

When legendary rower Fred Duling was struggling to recover from a serious fall, we sent cards and letters with stories to boost his spirits. He'd been in rehab for months, not speaking. After hearing this story, he uttered his first word, "Wow!"

## Summer Safety

Summertime is blazing. We tough rowers tend to underestimate the dangers of exercising in hot, humid weather. Your body normally cools itself by sweating, but during hot weather and high humidity, sweating just isn't enough, and you can develop [heat illness](#). Heat illnesses occur from staying out in the heat and exercising too much for your age and physical condition. Drink fluids to prevent dehydration, replenish salt and minerals, and limit time in the heat. Drink more than you think you need, about 28-40 ounces of fluid per hour of exercise. Drink fluids before exercise and periodically during exercise. Acclimatize yourself to the heat gradually, and listen to your body.

Warning signs of heat illness and dehydration include thirst, irritability, headache, dizziness, muscle cramping, unusual fatigue, nausea, vomiting, hyperventilation, and confusion or problems walking. Heat illnesses can progress in severity from cramps, headache and fatigue to exhaustion and stroke.

Heat stroke can kill or cause damage to the brain and other internal organs. Heat stroke mainly affects people over age 50. Disorientation, loss of coordination, hot dry skin and unconsciousness follow, and immediate cooling and hospitalization are required. If you suspect that someone has heat stroke, call 911 immediately, and render first aid until paramedics arrive. Move the person to a cool, shady area and remove any unnecessary clothing. Fan air over the patient, while wetting the skin with water. Apply ice packs to the patient's armpits, groin, neck, and back, areas rich with blood vessels close to the skin. Cooling them can reduce body temperature. Immerse the patient in a shower or tub of cool water, or an ice bath.

Using common sense and being proactive about staying hydrated is the best way to avoid heat related illnesses. *(info from NIH and CDC)*

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## 2013 Braxton Scholars

PGRC members and many of Bill Braxton's family and friends met in July to award this year's scholarships. Cine Braxton, of the Braxton Regatta Committee and the Braxton Scholarship Interview Committee, presented the scholarships to two students she dubbed "accidental rowers."

Kurt Vostal, at Christian Brothers Academy in Lincroft, New Jersey, planned to row in the fall and play baseball in the spring, but he fell in love with rowing. Kurt served as team captain during his senior year and was voted Varsity MVP during his junior year. He and his teammates won the championship at the Garden State Scholastic and Navy Day 2011. His team placed at the SRAA Nationals, Stotesbury, US Rowing Mid-Atlantic Junior Districts – and the Bill Braxton Memorial Regatta. Kurt earned over 140 hours of community service, leading a book drive for his community that distributed 2500 books.



Kurt attended a 6-week pre-college engineering studies program at Vanderbilt University during the summer of his junior year. In the fall, he will row for Bucknell University, where he will major in engineering.

Hope Watson, at Owen J. Roberts High School in Pottstown, Pennsylvania, attended the wrong meeting. What she thought was a student government meeting was a meeting of the rowing team. Intrigued, she added rowing to her busy day: running in the morning, rowing in the afternoon, playing in the school band in the evening. Between these activities, she attended classes, served on the student council and completed community service with an emphasis on recycling. She is the recipient of the Theresa and William Braxton Senior Scholarship. This summer, she is rowing at Vesper with the goal of traveling to the Canadian Henley. In addition, she has won an internship at The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia – and is a life guard. This fall, Hope will row for Temple University, Hope looks to join the Peace Corps and become a cardiologist.

### Race Results

#### Schuylkill Navy Regatta

Masters' Mixed 2x

3<sup>rd</sup> Malta/PGRC (T.Trocky, T.Savard)

Women's Master 2x

1<sup>st</sup> Fairmount/PGRC (A.Northrup, S.Sargent)

Mixed Master 4x

1<sup>st</sup> Malta/PGRC (T.Trocky, T.Savard,  
A.Northrup, M.Brown)

#### Independence Day Regatta

Mixed Masters 2x

3<sup>rd</sup> Malta/PGRC (T.Trocky, T.Savard)

Womens Masters Lwt. 1x

3<sup>rd</sup> PGRC (E.Abler)

#### City Championships

Lwt. 4+

3<sup>rd</sup> AIS (Agnes Irwin School)

Novice 1x

4<sup>th</sup> AIS (V. Patel)

#### Stotesbury Regatta

Lwt. 4+ 4<sup>th</sup> AIS

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Diana Post, Editor

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