

## **My personal story by Steve Conlon (of what may have been the beginnings of the club)**

Back in my 20's I went to the College of DuPage. There I was captain of the men's gymnastics team, All-American and A National champion. I majored in Electronic Technology and in my class was this interesting guy. Remember this was the early 70's during the peace, love, flower power movement. There was this hippie looking guy with long dreadlocks, holes in his t-shirt, holes in his blue jeans and beat up old tennis shoes. I was, at the time a straight, laced clean cut, sports dude. I didn't drink, smoke, do drugs or make free love as it was the trend of the times. It was coming to the end of my sports career and I knew it. There was no place for me to go with my sport of gymnastics as it was not popular like it is today!

Walking across the parking lot one day after class, I saw this guy headed to his full-size window van with double decker racks and 6 strange looking boats on top. I went up to him and said "Hi, I'm Steve in your electronics class, what is all that up there?" He said, "I'm Rick (Diebold) and those are our racing canoes, would you like to come with me and my brothers to our practice, I can set you up in a boat with my brother Robert. It was the end of my gymnastic career which was my life for so many years and I needed something to move on too, so this sounded possibly entertaining. Little did I know it would be painfully wonderful and as dedicated a sport as being a gymnast if you want to be your best. What I didn't realize is the three brothers needed a fourth for their Olympic C4 and I was it.

Every day of the week the Diebold brothers would leave their home in Glen Ellen and pick me up in Wheaton on our way to St. Charles for practice at Potawatomie Park. We'd paddle USCA cruisers up to Novak park get a drink out of the hand pump there and return. On Fridays we often weren't paddling because we traveled to a weekend race somewhere. In those days we traveled a lot usually to Indiana. Indiana had all the good races, boat busters but great races. We just repaired our equipment ever week. It was easy and cheap back then!

Howard Turner of Wasco had two of three children who were amazing athletes, Brent and Anne who were both on the US Olympic Canoe & Kayak team in kayaks in the Summer Olympic Games and both on the US Olympic Cross-country Ski Team for the Winter Games. Howard was later named the head of the US Canoe & Kayak Olympic committee. One weekend each year there was a race was on what we called Turner's Lake in Wasco. It was a small lake with a 250-meter five lane course on the lake just behind their house. I had never been an Olympic C1 canoe before, but Rick Diebold wanted me to start to learn at the lake there off to the side while they were all racing. He said "I'll give you 5 dry seconds"; I think I had 3! I spent the entire day as the entertainment for everyone falling out and getting in, desperately trying to put a couple strokes together throughout the day, while everyone from all around the country raced Olympic style boats.

Eventually, I became part of the group of four to paddle Olympic boats up to the park and back every day with a coach now, Lyn (Joe) Tuttle sitting on the park bench carving his wood ducks yelling commands from the shore. Several commands I remember vividly "miles (more) miles" and "Reach" and "drive on that blade" but mostly "miles"! We eventually became National Champions in the C4 but I never really got fast in a single. It takes 1 year to stay upright, one year to steer and one year to get fast if you know what to do and train hard. I preferred the fun we had back then of marathon racing and the fun of having a different partner every race and often a partner from all the different state. It made fun, interesting and unpredictable racing!

Races in the 70's were mostly both Saturday and Sunday with many Saturday morning sprints including C4 war canoe (4 paddlers in a C2, if you didn't sink you probably won!) sometimes a solemn course and later Saturday afternoon, everyone raced Mixed couples. We always camped and camped together with everyone from the race. In the evening it was games, frisbee, hiking in the park, festivals in town which was associated with many races and often late nights around the campfire enjoying the company of everyone racing from all the surrounding states.

I remember my first race. It was with Kurt Duberstein in the man and boy class. I was the man at 21 and he was the boy. I thought I was real hot shit being a ripped ex-gymnast training for "a whole month", ha, ha with the best coaches, Rick & John Diebold! Well . . . sitting on the starting line in the mass start of some marathon I can't quite remember, Rick and John looked over at me and Rick yelled, "Hey Steve" "You see those two girls sitting in the boat next to you . . . they're going to blow you off the water" "If your lucky you might see them for a couple strokes before they're gone". I don't think it was even a couple strokes and they were gone. It was the Triebold sisters, Carol and Roxanne! Two girls who every weekend humiliated many men who thought they were tough. A good lesson in humility and proof that the sport of paddling is virtually equal when it comes to men and women!

The actual beginning of our club began in the early to mid-70's with the parents of 4 family's, the Turners, the Diebolds, the Yuills and the Finnells. These parents had meetings at each of their houses and over time formulated the club which we enjoy today. It was because of these families, the parents in particular, that have made us the successful club that we have enjoyed for these many years!