

## **THIS IS YOUR LIFE .... CWA**

by Marge Cline (from August, 1979 *Gradient*)

CWA is a group of about 200 paddlers who are primarily interested in paddling whitewater rivers, not an easy task, considering there are not many whitewater rivers located in the immediate vicinity. We seldom think twice when asked if we want to go to the river; the answer is usually yes, the problem is that it's a long drive. But, for quite a few of us the thrills of whitewater far outweigh the complicated logistics of getting to it. "Birds of a feather, flock together," might well be the reason for the existence of CWA. To paddle safely, the trips must be done as a group.

Up until a few years ago, I was unaware of the existence of such a group when I finally managed to enroll in a "Y" class. Much to my amazement, I discovered that the people who taught this class, did so because they loved their sport, not for any remuneration they received. After being a member for several years now, I greatly wanted to know how this club was born. Maybe the in thing after "*Roots*" is to trace family trees, but tracing the genealogy of CWA was not going to be an easy task I quickly discovered. It was necessary to corner Bruce Campbell, Pam Allen, and Ann Wohead one night while I "just happened" to have a tape recorder handy. I was greatly enlightened (and quite amused) and I would like to pass on to all of you what I managed to find out.

These people were 3 of the original 14 or so who formed CWA. Bruce related that Will Provine, who at the time was a tennis coach at the University of Chicago, arranged for himself and "selected friends" to use the pool at Boucher Hall for practicing. Bruce, fortunately, was a "selected friend" and learned his paddling from Will. Shortly thereafter, the group was known as the University of Chicago Wildwater Club. Pam said she used to go to these sessions, because she didn't have a car and it was someplace she could walk to. As more people became involved, the group found it increasingly difficult to sneak into the pool under the guise of students. Early in January, 1972 the decision was made to form a paddling club to be known as the Chicago Whitewater Association. CWA received its charter from the state as a corporation on April 25, 1972. The reasons for incorporation then were the same as they are today. The more experienced paddlers, realizing the inherent dangers of the sport, did not want to be liable for lawsuits in the eventuality that someone got hurt. While willing to pass on their knowledge to others, the legal repercussions in the event of injury could be a serious threat to personal security.

The original board consisted of Bruce Weber, president; Bruce Campbell, vice-president; Carolyn Leja, treasurer; and John Jonker, secretary. Other members recalled were Elaine Jonker, Pam Allen, John and Jeanne Lange, Ann Wohead, the Anglins, Steve Rock, Mike Smith, and Steve Hessel. Getting a trip together in those days evidently involved a lot more pre-planning and coercing than it does today. A trip to the Wolf usually involved paddlers from Chicago, the Hoofers outing Club in Madison, and paddlers from the Minnesota Canoe Association. This meant long distance phone calls between the three states to insure enough paddlers would meet at the river. One member of the group volunteered to do the cooking for all, and the costs would be divvied up at the campsite. However, this was probably easier than it sounds, as the trips might only have consisted of 10 or 12 people, not the 20, 30, or 40

we now sometimes wind up with. Pam recalls Bruce saying, "Someday we would be big enough so we won't all have to go to the river at the same time." By 1973 the club roster indicated CWA had already grown to 35 members. Bill Leja seemed to play the role of the Apostle Paul, he recruited a lot of members.

As the size of the group increased, it was necessary to seek additional pool time for members. Mike Smith was instrumental in securing pool time at Oak Park YMCA. The agreement with the Y was the same then as it is today; the club would supply the boats and instructors, in return the Y donated pool time for club members to practice their own skills. Oak Park sessions were started in the fall of 1972. Steve Rock managed to organize things at Circle Campus while he was a student there. He even arranged for a pool slalom there one year. Charlie Guthrie, an early recruit to the ranks and our present president, began the classes at Des Plaines in 1975, while Barb Canter set up the sessions at Naperville 2 years ago. There was also one year of classes held at Downers Grove, but these are no longer held.

Bruce stated, "CWA was formed with the minimum amount of structure necessary to get by with. Early members were refugees from AYH, which was and still is over organized. Any suggestion of adding necessary structure met with serious resistance." (Seems I have finally discovered why most of the trips I have been on, are planned on Thursday night) As the size of the group increased, it became evident that a means of communication other than Ma Bell was necessary. Thus *THE GRADIENT* was conceived by John Jonker, who named it, wrote it, and nursed it through its infancy. In 1974, Barb Canter assumed the responsibility for its publication and distribution. In the spring of this year, yours truly was volunteered in order to keep *THE GRADIENT* arriving at your doorstep.

Besides the pool sessions, several things have become tradition with the club: The Peshtigo Race was instituted in the spring of 1972. The question at the time was, "Was it safe to run the Peshtigo right after the ice breakup?" Most paddlers chose to run the Wolf at this time, because of the high water. After agreeing to safety boats below every drop, the ACA did sanction the race. Pam and Bruce recall the first race was preceded by a snowball fight in front of the bar at Highway C. The Weber Special, held in the fall, is a well established tradition. It is called the Weber Special, naturally in honor of CWA's first president. However, Bruce Weber was not only the first president, but was also a gourmet cook, who learned trailside cooking from many Western raft trips he had participated in. His idea of a quick and easy trailside lunch was cocktails, soup, salad, steak and baked potatoes. Bruce said, "We added the wine and dessert and named it the Weber." For the last two years, Pat Mueller has been establishing a great tradition, "The Weird Food Frolics." Pam says this came about all because Pat received a new cookbook that had some far out recipes for vegetables and she wanted to try them out. Charlie Guthrie's summertime board meeting could rapidly become another tradition. Last one saw about 45 people in attendance, some from as far away as Indiana. Our early spring runs on the Vermilion River with the people from the Y classes are also traditional. And I'm hoping you all like lasagna enough to make that a custom on the beginner's trip to the Wolf.

At the conclusion of our talk I asked the three veterans the following question, "How do you feel about the rapid growth of CWA from a core of 14 people to over 200 in the space of only

seven years?" Their answers to the above question, I believe make a more than fitting conclusion to CWA's family tree.

Bruce: The club has sort of grown by itself. I've been sort of amused to sit back and watch it go its own way. I'm working very hard at being retired, so I find it fun just watching the way it's going these days. It developed as an offshoot of the interests of the people involved, and it's still going that way. We've got a lot of new people getting active and helping out in organizing new things and keeping the old things going. I like the fact that it's continued with minimum structure and it still depends on the efforts of interested members to keep things going.

Pam: Certainly shows that people are interested and I think it's good we have this club, because other things like the Olympics have made people interested. Hopefully it won't get so big that you meet yourself coming and going like happens in some sports. At least we have a club that's going to protect people, so you won't have dead people, because they didn't know how to handle themselves.

Ann: It's gratifying to know that people have been watching you and have evidently gotten enough encouragement from you to join the sport and continue on themselves. I think having the pool sessions really had a lot to do with expanding the number of people involved. There's definitely a different feeling, because you can't have the same close feeling with 200 people that we had with 14, but still, if you want something to continue, you have to see it grow in number. It's gratifying to know that there's a certain amount of success in the effort you put into it.

Thank you Bruce, Pam and Ann. I enjoyed doing this report. See ya on the river!