

## "Heaven Can Wait" Okanagan Quality Life Society serving our seniors in care for 18 years

In the 80's in the long term care facilities there was little opportunity for residents in care to access the water. We would have our annual voyage to Kelowna for a cruise on the Fintry Queen or a trip to Sicamous for a cruise on the Pheobe Ann.

The Polson residential facility would load up the bus drive for an hour to Pillar Lake rent one of their homemade patio boats fish for an hour or two and then head back to Vernon. It made for a long day and only the hardest of residents could take in this trip.

Gateby in those years would use a homemade patio boat belonging to Trudi Clark to cruise Okanagan Lake. This boat had oil drums welded together for pontoons. None of these boats were CSA approved and liability was becoming a growing issue; also there was a pontoon boat accident in the late 80's on the island that claimed the lives of some of the handicapped people on board. There was pressure from our organizations and administration to ensure we were operating and carrying out our

programs in a safe secure environment.

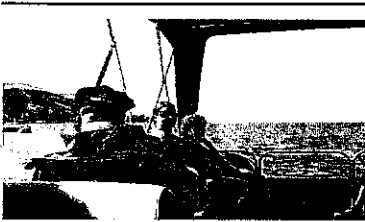
At around this time the facilities in this area were lucky enough to have a volunteer by the name of Frank Wright. Frank spent a lot time helping out around Noric and Gateby. He was one of the volunteers that would accompany Trudi on her homemade patio boat cruising Okanagan Lake. Frank got to see first hand the pleasure that our residents experienced by being able to pursue the boat and lake activity. He, like all of us working in the care facilities, felt that being in care shouldn't limit a person's ability to enjoy the lake.

In the fall of 1991 we were having North Okanagan Therapeutic Recreation Association (NOTRA) Meeting when Frank happened to drop in. He heard that some of these lake activities were going to be curtailed due to policies being developed by our administrations due to the liability issues. To Frank this was not a problem. He suggested that it was time we had our own boat. He pointed out that we already had a committee in place with

our NOTRA group. That was the day the society was born. We each took a role in creating the society, from fund raising, promoting society in the North Okanagan and registering the society under the society's act.

It took Frank and the society six months to raise \$15000.00. We were \$7500.00 short with summer just around the corner and we needed to order the pontoon boat or we would miss the boating season.

Frank decided that it was time the three biggest care facilities in the area showed their support. He made appointments to see the administrators. He talked all three of the administrators at the time to lend our society \$2500.00 each with a promise to pay them back within six months. Frank was a man of his word and by the end of September 1992 our society owned a 24 foot pontoon boat by the name of "Heaven Can Wait". Our boat was named by a 103 years old lady from Bethany (Heritage Square) her name was Rose Griffin and she enjoyed three more years of boating after she named it. (Continued on page 3)



## "Heaven Can Wait" (continued)

With the boat ordered our next problem was where to moor a 24 ft pontoon boat. Frank approached Sid and Fran Seymour who owned a marina and campsite where the Blue Heron Pub is now situated. He convinced them we had a worthy cause and got them to donate a spot for our boat. The society always appreciated Sid and Fran's generosity. The spot they gave us was the easiest one for us to access. They made any adaptations we needed with no questions or reservations.

Through out this whole process Frank had a right hand man by the name of Mike Kayzer. Mike accompanied Frank on many of his speaking engagements to sell our society and raise funds for the boat. He was also our maintenance and handy man. He spent many hours making alterations to the boat and docks to make access easier.

I also have to recognize the contribution of Grace and Alf Rutten. They joined the society shortly after we got the boat in the water. Grace

has looked after the books for the society and any government documentation that has been required. Alf has worked as a handyman, a captain, the Captain Coordinator, and boat maintenance coordinator.

Sadly Frank passed away in 2004, Mike Kayzer has curtailed his involvement in the society due to health issues.

Grace and Alf have moved to the lower mainland to be closer to their family.

The society has been very fortunate that we had and continue to have great support from the people of Vernon.

Thank You to Ron Hueman our current OQLS president and the great team he has compiled. His executive and group of captains are committed to providing lake access to seniors and other challenged people in the North Okanagan.

The Vernon Yacht Club has come on board and given us free moorage since 1997 when Seymour Marina closed.

The original NOTRA group included Trudi Clark (Gateby),

Sherrie Thorlakson (Noric), Marg Kardelis (Enderby), Debbie Radies (Bethany), Sue Myre (Downs) and Randy Niro (Polson).

Our goal was provide lake access for residents in care by purchasing a pontoon boat. We even had dreams of land on the lake where we could set up a camp for seniors but with the escalating price of land and taxes on the lake it wasn't realistic.

For those that don't know the acronym for boat is

- B – Bring
- O – Out
- A – Another
- T – Thousand

In the last 4 years we have purchased a new motor, automatic inflating life jackets and Biminis tops.

Thanks to support the support of service club, organizations and generous individuals We have been able to keep our boat afloat.

We sell memberships to our society at a yearly cost of \$5.00 to help raise funds. Anyone wanting to donate money or time to our society can talk to Randy Niro (Recreation Therapist Polson).

