From Tony Trocchi class of '72

S. Crew history, a personal look back.

So it has been fifty years since this grand experience began. I was looking at the the current website and read the history there in - it is an inaccurate portrayal of that inaugural year. So let me try and set the record straight.

Bart Gullong was interning as a student counselor and somehow got to speaking with Jim Crocco about rowing and whether or not there might be an interest in starting up a team at the school. Jim spread the word and the core group attended a talk by Bart about the excitement of rowing and the hard work involved in getting ready to head out on the water. We were sold on the idea and the wheels started to turn to actually bring about a new team at the school. We began to organize and started working out in the winter of 1971. Bart lined up three, four man coxed shells for the team, on loan from a benefactor in southern Connecticut. The team was taking form and we started working out, calisthenics and long distance, for me anyway, running. I was in driver’s ed so I fortunately missed many of the initial suffer-fests - Karen and Faith joined the team at the very beginning and were excited to be a part of something new and original. Things were going well until the administration caught wind of women on the team and lowered the boom on Bart and us.

Thanks to the efforts of the parents, we were able to salvage the team as an independent club, free from the shackles of the administration. We were on our own and happy about it. There was a great esprit du corps and a feeling of us against the world. Winter work-outs continued until we received our boats and found a place to row, which ended up being on lake Congamond in Massachusetts.

Once the winter snows melted and the lake was free of ice, we headed out from school in Mike Paine’s dad’s Ford F-350 dump truck. Those days we could get away with packing ten or so people in the back of an open truck and driving over state lines to work out after school. The drive up and back also included the occasional mooning of passing cars. Upon arriving at the lake, the requisite five mile run ensued. I, not being a fan of running such a distance, would hide under the dock with a few others until it was time to get out on the lake. The boats of four were arranged in a hierarchy, the first two boats were starters from the football team - they were the favorites of Bart. My boat was a mix of characters from our stroke - Bob Faber, a captain of the soccer team and super strong competitive skier racer, to third seat Jim Rowlett, cross country, Larry Vanderjagt also I believe cross country and me in the bow, football. The other boats were lighter guys matched in size and ability. My boat had a great rivalry with the one and two boats. We had many race-offs until the day we “got it together”. We were behind by a boat length when Bart proclaimed “20 strokes to the end of the race!”. Gary Lubben called “power twenty sprint”, we took it up and our boat was suddenly in perfect unison. It felt like we were hydroplaning, we rapidly walked up on the other two boats and when Bart called twenty he declared boat one to have won, while from my seat I observed that we were one seat ahead.

Bob slammed his oar and shouted “F you Bart, we won!”. Bart at a later time confided to us that we had actually won, but was using the loss to motivate us. We never lost another race-off after that day.

Another thing about where we rowed was that when the wind blew, the water got quite rough. I remember the waves actually breaking on my shoulders at times. Our boat became quite proficient at rowing on rough water, which was to our benefit when we rowed in our first regatta on the Connecticut River. We actually won that first regatta in Middletown, CT on a rough water day. We had a unique way to celebrate our boat’s victory by laying down at the end of our stroke and gliding set up until the next stroke. It was a fantastic feeling to win. At the state championship regatta in Old Lyme our day was not so great, I caught a crab and crushed Larry’s back, while East Lyme pulled ahead to take the win. We sprinted our butts off and dead heated with Middletown for second.

The row back to the dock was excruciating, every muscle cramped, even my toes curled up in pain. It was the culmination of a great season. As a team we went to Prudence Island in Rhode Island for a celebratory weekend. There was a grinder sale to raise funds for the team, a tradition to this day. There was also the time Karen and Faith got dragged into the boy’s shower, to their great embarrassment, and most of the guys were pretty freaked out too, we all took it in stride though. Then there was the crew party at the end of the year at Al Shope’s house. We had a great time joking around, listening to the music of the time and had a great barbecue. The team picked up Bart’s Mustang and moved it to a difficult position to drive. Also, I got up the courage to actually ask Faith to go to the party with me and she said yes, though she disappeared for most of the night because she was upset that she had discovered she would be moving away that summer before her senior year. After I dropped her home that was the last time I saw her.

All in all it was a phenomenal experience and I am proud to have been a small part of making history with the first co-ed team ever to exist in high school sports. Bart went on to testify before Congress in regards to Title Nine (giving women and handicapped persons equality in sports programs)and to coach at a college in Hartford. Most of the underclass persons went on to row the next year based at the Loomis School in Windsor. I would like to remember Arno Shwarz who passed in a car crash when we were 23, Jim Rowlett who was killed by a police officer during a psychotic break at his parent’s home in Florida and Bill De Mallie who ended his life 27 years ago after a long struggle with CFS - they were great friends, especially Arno and Bill with whom I spent many a night camping atop Fa mountain and who I cut my rock climbing teeth with. I can’t believe fifty years have passed since that first meeting to create S.Crew, which is what we told the authorities to do and went on to create a great tradition.

Namaste, Tony Trocchi class of '72