

Remembering Brian Biddlecombe

Dear Editor;

It's been a few weeks now since the passing of Brian Biddlecombe. I can't get that tragic loss off my mind. Memories of Brian over the years, his charisma, his community spirit and huge contributions to the fabric of Bowen Island keep drifting through my thoughts. Those of you that have been here for awhile won't need a refresher course on all that Brian has contributed to our Island over the years but I'm thinking that the way we roll here is what has attracted so many new people that have come to be part of, what it is to live here. Brian was an anchor to me in this regard.

Right out of the gate in 1980 what a thrill it was, as a young couple from the city, to come home after concerts or parties in town, on "The Cabrini" (water taxi). Seems to me there was a smelly furnace in the bottom of the boat we huddled around, while the boat rolled and pitched as the Squamish wind howled outside. Brian at the helm making it all happen, and he continued to make it happen for our family, for the next 42 years. There were early morning commutes for my husband when the ferry broke down, family picnics up Howe Sound so meaningful to my 80 year old father (he lived there after the war), trips with Boy scouts, garden clubs and conservation groups to mention a very few.

Years later when I was a Paramedic on Bowen, Brian myself and others, transferred so many of our community members mid night, pelting rain freezing ramps to navigate at low tide into a water taxi for the trip to HSB and onto a waiting Ambulance from Lions Bay. I can't even imagine the impact that must have had on his life and sleep (as well as his wife's, Leanne) over the years. And ...this was just his day (and half the night) job.

Brian was also the Fire Chief and Emergency Program Coordinator. After talking me into becoming the Emergency Social Services Director we worked together for about 15 years in that capacity. Brian was a huge support to our program and attended many of our meetings to be part of what the volunteers were doing. I often tried to imagine what he would do in a disaster situation, (think earthquake) as the three roles he was responsible for, would all be the most important to the Island. Fire Chief, Emergency, Program Coordinator and the water taxi and barge service to get folks (and animals) to and from the disaster if the Ferries were down. In recent years Brian and I were both on the Executive Committee for the Emergency Program. It was such a comfort to have him on that committee with his knowledge of the Island and the history he was part of, in the building of that program as it is today.

Honestly, I could go on and on but I think you get the idea of how much Brian contributed over the years. I would be remiss not to mention what a large part Brian played in our son Ivor's life as well. They were partners in Cormorant Tug and Barge but that didn't happen over night. Ivor trained as a deck hand with Brian while still in high school and went on the get his Captains ticket, and various licences thanks to Brian and Leanne's support. They were good friends and I know Ivor will miss Brian, as we all do. He really was, such great guy.

- Reidun van Kervel

One of many reminiscences of Brian...

I was compelled to relate this tale, if only to bring a smile to Brian's many knowing friends and family, and selfishly to help assuage my own grief at the passing of this island legend.

It was Bowfest Day, and as I rode my bicycle up Government Road after the parade was over, (stopping for yet another rest break), a red blur blew past me. It was Brian at the wheel of a tiny Shriners mini-car, looking like a child's push-pedal car! His hair streamed out

behind him as he sped along, giving me a jaunty wave as he tore by me.

By the time I reached Artisan turn-off, it was to witness this cartoon vision of a tiny vehicle, and its joyous boy-like driver take that sharp corner on 2 wheels and roar up the hill. He was in a hurry to return the wee car to its Shriners owner after gassing the car up (and forgetting the gas cap!) All was well, and there were no repurcussions, but someone had a BALL!

With respect, and Love,

- Maggie Davidson



A Tribute to Brian Biddlecombe,

My first recollection of Brian was a cheerful one. He was getting signatures from the neighbourhood approving the Firefighter's annual fundraiser - the Dock Dance which was then held at the Dallas marina. My husband, Bob, and I were happy to attend and support the effort. Little did we know then that we would have to rely heavily upon their services, because, ultimately, Bob would be confined to a wheelchair for many years. Bowen's emergency personnel were ever ready to offer their efficient, prompt and caring responses in the face of many stressful occasions, some of which entailed transport by water taxi and helicopter to the hospital.

Both Leanne and Brian, in his capacity as Fire Chief, and as neighbours, never failed to be in attendance, and we came to appreciate Brian's quiet strength. Despite the many times I required assistance, Leanne and Brian never implied that my requests were burdensome.

A pivotal memory of Brian's graciousness and caring will ever remain with my family. Having received a call from the hospital to tell me that my husband may die, I phoned Brian to ask I could be taken to Horseshoe Bay. He arranged, without hesitation, and for no fee, for the water taxi to make an extra run on my behalf despite being past its last run of the night.

Ultimately, it was Brian's boat, with Brian at the helm, that took the family out to Cape Roger Curtis, where Bob's ashes were scattered in a serene and tranquil observance.

I am sure mine is not the only story of Brian's compassion and dedication. I join with the community to mourn his passing and to celebrate his quiet, gentle strength and service.

- Patricia Adams

A letter to the editor:

Over the last 40 years, marine ambulance operator Brian Biddlecombe has responded to countless 911 emergency calls on Bowen Island - likely more than any single BCEHS paramedic on this Island, ever. Of the hundreds of paramedics who have passed through the doors of Station 225 - Bowen Island, not a single one will forget Brian. We are all extremely fortunate for the opportunity to have worked alongside him as both Fire Chief, and Captain of our primary transport to the Mainland. Brian's dedication to the safety and well being of the Bowen Island community was evident on every call, and every trip. He shared his experience, insight, and knowledge with our paramedic crews at every scene to ensure the best possible outcome for patients. He made us all better.

Cormorant Marine and Bowen Island, are among the very first in the province to utilize a specifically designed and dedicated water taxi to transport BCEHS patients off island. Designing and building this boat was no small task, and only made possible by Brian's commitment to his community and passion for its residents. For us, the Bowen Responder will live on as Brian's legacy. We are grateful to have worked alongside him, to have learned from him, and to have known him. We will miss you Brian, you can turn off your pager and stand down.

Sincere condolences,

- BC Emergency Health Services and the Bowen Island crews



Brian and Ivor Kerr, along with trusty dockhand Shauny, aboard 'The Barney Mac' (above); Brian serving in his role as Fire Chief with Assistant Fire Chief Bob Clark (below)

