

In 2001 or 2002 I took the adult learn to row at BHRA, and so began my and my children's relationship with BHRA. Initially I was the only rower and sometimes James came with me and rode in the launch with Coach Stockton. Then James entered 7th grade and decided that he would like to row. Smart move Coach Stockton, letting that little guy ride in the launch. At that time there was no Modified team, everybody was together, A Boat, B Boat, C Boat, D Boat and those were all 8's. One day when I went to pick up James from fall practice in 2002, Chris Stockton said, "Mrs. Flacke I think you should join the board." "No, what do I know about crew?" and so it went back and forth for a few months. Finally, I could hear my dad's voice saying, "If not you than who?" So I agreed to a board position.

I had spent time involved in PTA and a few years too many as the fundraising chair of the Burnt Hills Junior Baseball, so I had a sense for board meetings and chaos. My first board meeting was eye opening, it had a real agenda, it was organized, but oh, it could get a little testy with all those engineers. I learned the reason they had pizza was because sometimes it was well past bedtime when we left the boathouse. But what stood out to me was the love of the sport of rowing, the investment of time, talent and money in the building, grounds, and children. My first year on the board involved lots of learning and listening, understanding the key players in the BHRA community; the movers, the shakers and the slackers. Then came the, "We don't have anybody to run for president, it has to be a parent of a rower" and so began the hardest job I ever had that I didn't get paid for, including parenting.

The next 8 years were eventful and saw many changes. But through every story there is a common thread and this story's thread is what makes crew unique.

Initially there was no modified program so 7-12 graders were one team together all the time. As any parent can tell you there is a huge difference in maturity levels between 7th and 12th grade. When I started the 7th graders were far more mature in their behavior than the seniors. As a mom I saw the problems. Like the day my son came home and said "Hey Sammons and I going to the movies with the guys" "Who are you going with?" "Oh you know the guys on the team" "Who and how are you getting there?" "Oh, Casey and Benji and Casey is picking us up." "mStop! No you are not they are in 12th grade." Check off my first unpopular parenting decision related to crew in the books. I would make many more that involved more than my own kids. As one of my kids said to a friend, "If she's yelling it's ok, you're not really in trouble. If she looks at you sternly and speaks quietly then you know you are in so much trouble."

Shortly after that incident in my house, Lou Baish proposed a modified program for middle school and so began a journey with an expanded relationship with BH-BL

Central school. Bob McGuire was the Athletic Director and he saw value in crew, while many of his staff did not. Bob had clear rules some his own and some NYS Education Dept. rules. The school provided insurance and transportation during the spring scholastic season and part of the coaching salary. It was a line item in the school budget. We didn't cost the school much compared to other sports at the time as we were mostly self-funded. So now we were recruiting in the middle school and of course 6th graders wanted to join. That was a "no-no" for school sports, but they could be a club, but they couldn't ride the school bus. Oh we did try to sneak them on but we got caught and so crew taxi was born. One more logistical nightmare that required willing parents to drive. There were days parents had to make 3 and 4 trips to get everyone here but they did it. And our program flourished with the Pied Piper Lou leading the way. With the addition of the modified program we needed boats, and Lou found them from all over the east coast, Old well-used but not well-taken-care of boats. Shoes, smelly old shoes. But Lou could sell ice to eskimos and we were able to acquire boats to row and boats for parts to make the program go. Lou found a great helper in Garth Johnston, Zeb's Dad who lovingly repaired and maintained the fleet.

In 2006 Eric Burgoyne took on the largest Eagle Project, he decided we needed a pavilion. He made an excellent presentation to the board and it moved forward. To watch it happen was amazing. The conversations at my kitchen table made me nervous but knowing Eric if there was a will there would be a way. I knew Eric too well, so I just prayed no one would get hurt. It was truly a labor of love that was completed in and dedicated to Eric's lovely grandma Kay Messitt.

In September of 2006 Patrick Breslin, a newly graduated rower, died unexpectedly; a young man loved by all his teammates, a difficult time for them at best. The entire BHRA team and their families showed their love for Patrick by showing up in great numbers to pay condolences. Again as a mom I was moved by the sense of team and belonging. But the story doesn't end there. The Breslin family decided that to honor the memory of Patrick they wanted to build an indoor training facility, because Patrick absolutely hated winter crew, which took place in the basement of the Ballston Town Hall, the former Hostetter building, anywhere that was mildly and cold and would allow us to practice there. Together with Turner construction and hundreds of volunteers from within BHRA and the community a state of the art facility was built; complete with ergs, weight training equipment, real locker rooms, running hot and cold water, flushing toilets and a place to hang all those championship banners. The envy of many larger clubs and colleges too. Another labor of love.

I was fortunate to see the dedication of numerous boats during my tenure. Ones in memory of Chrs Goodey, the younger brother of former rower Brian Goodey and Cousin to Kate, Patrick, and Brandon Fogg. Mike Mahoney a tireless volunteer and dad of Jeff, Katie, and Dan. One in loving memory of Raghad Schroeder; mom to Matt, Amanda and Kate, a board member, a tireless volunteer and my partner in keeping the crew team safe from themselves during memorable spring break trips to Camp Bob Cooper.

In 2011 hurricane Irene wrecked havoc on our docks, our launches and the grounds. It required a capital campaign, another major undertaking. We were reaching out to people who had spent major amounts of money for their kids to participate in a sport and asking for money, again. This time there were many families of kids were no longer rowers. We were asking those kids too, many who were gainfully employed. In true crew fashion, they came through. We were able to meet our needs. We were able to practice even though the river was not usable through the generous offer of the Krupa family to use their front lawn to launch into Ballston Lake for practice. The Esperti family owners of Mohawk Valley Marine were instrumental in helping us put our docks in every year and especially getting ourselves in working order following Irene.

We started our own regatta The Spartan Sweeps, if Toga could run regattas well we could too! Another chance to show them we were worthy. It took a crew team village;, parents, master rowers, and alumni and it was successful .

Somewhere along the way we acquired a food trailer. That was a spirited board meeting. "What's wrong with coolers in cars?"

I would be remiss if I didn't talk about coaches and parents.

When Chris Stockton could no longer stand the politics of teaching and went to pursue his current job, we lost a wonderful coach and the school lost a bright talent. Today, I want to set the record straight. Contrary to rumor it was not the Varsity girls who drove Chris away, he loved them, they helped him propose to Kate.

Coaches for BHRA have come from within, and I know I will miss someone so please forgive me. In no particular order: Weisman, Meier, Gauthier, Willoughby, Frank, Baish, Baish, Demler, Palitsch, Ives, Kemp, Nalbert (and Anderson by association. Boy, did we win on that one), Catherine, Kislowksi, Pape, Rowland, Rois, Flacke and Sayles. A love for their team that certainly transcended money; giving back so others could gain what they knew was invaluable. Girl drama, oh the girl drama, boys' antics, herding cats, and they did/do it all for the love of the sport of rowing. What a joy it has been to watch this group mature, get jobs, get married, and start families (there'll be some rowers in those I am sure). So to all the coaches, "Thank you."

Parents. They are the backbone of this organization. Sometimes it was frustrating, but in retrospect the complainers, the, “ I can’t do that,” and the drunk and/or angry phone calls I fielded at 11:00PM about coaching were truly few when compared to those who said, “Sure I can do that” or, “What do you need me to do?” or my favorites, the ones who saw the need and just did it: the early morning cooks and all the pasta party parents, the crew taxi parents, the ones who sorted and washed the lost and found piles of clothes and found their rightful owners, porta-potty and bathroom cleaners. They keep it all going, in the rain, the mud, the snow, the sleet, the wind, the heat, in the cars filled with smelly wet clothes and even smellier rowers. The parents who had the vision to start this team and build a boathouse, the guys who started it all and are still working hard to make BHRA be the best it can be, the Harry Darlings and the Jim Rulisons and the Larry Smiths.

Finally, what would a speech by me about my time as BHRA president be without some highlights that stick with me and make me know that saying yes to Chris Stockton was one of the best decisions I have ever made?

-But first my one regret, I don’t think we ever got Coach Bynon in a boat

Highlights:

-Being asked how much our endowment was by the woman running what was the Maritime Center when they wanted far more lease money than we could afford and trying to keep a straight face while I said, “ We don’t have an endowment, we have amazing families who keep us going day by day”

- SC trips were epic and definitely what happened at Camp Bob Stayed at Camp Bob things like

-“Where’s Will?”

-The bus rides

-Getting my knee buckled by Jenny Ives

-Gator hunting

-Laundry

-Lou giving the team a tour of where the adults stayed and letting them all eat the Elder Hostel’s fresh strawberries

-Trips to the ER

-Tim Zablewski on a tricycle

-Ian O’Connor running and screaming that the boys had broken a water pipe in the dorm and Tom Burgoyne, Terry Bodenstab and Scott Hyde laughing and going to take care of it

- Mr Zadrozny’s team building activities

-Check-ins in Charleston

-Knife confiscations after being in Charleston shopping

- late night rides to Sonic
- Casey Leahy running naked holding a ficus tree in front of him through the girls lounge
- Docking a pair with Larry Smith with all the kids watching and the wind blowing, and hoping that we didn't go over or we'd never hear the end of it. The snake in the water made our exit quick and smooth.

- The Canadian Henley

- no tattoos even if the Canadians say you can have them at 16

- Tim Hortons

- watching our little guys stand next to the Penn Athletic Club team while lining up for the sprints and seeing them take a not so nice razzing from the far bigger and relatively much older guys, until they asked where they were from and realizing that BHRA was where one of their own, Brian Goodey, came from, and then wishing them well and telling them to have fun. First though they told our guys, "We've taken poops bigger than you."

- The Charles

- having the boat trailer get hit by a sports car on the highway with Matt and James in the back of Mike's truck yelling "He's gonna hit us" and having to pull off the highway into the narrow streets of Framingham to get insurance info

- Looking across the river and seeing Matt Sammons shimmying up a lamp post to grab a banner with Eric Burgoyne holding him up calling James' cell phone and saying, "Tell him to get down, NOW!"

Somehow several of those banners made it into our house a few years later.

- Pasta parties before and sleepovers after races

- 4:30 wake ups on a weekend

- Having a football player who joined the team and quit say to me, "I will never make fun of rowers again"

- Being told that after the football team moved a grand piano in a local church they told the music director, "Next time ask the crew team, they are much stronger."

- Having to clearly mark food in my refrigerator if there was something special so that the varsity boys didn't scarf it down before practice.

- Standing in the rain every Mother's Day except for 2

- Watching the nailbiting finishes and crying with the best of them at the hard lost battles

- Handing a bag of donuts in to a tent full of rowers who had just lost by a fraction of a second.

- Watching quiet, skinny Matt Kochem from BHRA become an Olympic rower, what a journey.

-Getting to spend almost every weekend with my own kids having a great time and getting to be “Mama Flacke” to a whole bunch of the best kids in BH-BL.  
-And now watching as my son sits on the board and a son of my heart, is the Director of Rowing.

So there it is the story thread again, crew is more than a bunch of rowers on a team. It is a close knit community building strong minds and bodies and the leaders of tomorrow. Here's to 30 more.