

CPA Paddler Profile ~ Sue Byerly

Interview by Rick Wiebush

Name: Sue Byerly

Lives in: Chestertown, Maryland, on the lovely Eastern Shore

Real job: Marketing Coordinator for a manufacturing company

Member of a Piracy? Pirates of the Eastern Shore

Paddling Buddies: Melinda Bookwalter, Paula Hubbard, Lizzie O'Donoghue, Rich Pieper, Laura Ventura, and the KIPP-ers

Number years paddling: 10

How did you get involved in kayaking? I picked up a used rec boat in 2003 because I've always enjoyed being out on the water. I admit it, I was one of those oblivious rec paddlers – PFD on the deck, no training whatsoever, paddling mostly alone, and quite happy in my ignorance. After a capsized episode that could easily have been a lot worse, it became clear to me that it was time to either step up my game or find a new hobby.

How did you learn to sea kayak? In 2009, I started taking sea kayaking classes on the Western Shore and that fall, I bought my first sea kayak. In 2010, I signed up for the Kent Island Practice Paddle (KIPP) series. I had no idea what I was in for, but was hooked from the start. I was a sloppy paddler with six years worth of bad habits to unlearn, and somehow I was able to complete the KIPP circumnavigation on sheer willpower. Through KIPP, I also discovered there was a small group of women sea kayakers right in my backyard! With more instruction, patient mentors, and lots-lots-lots of practice, things really started to click in 2011. In 2012, I bought a second kayak and switched to a Greenland paddle. 2013 was my fourth year of KIPP, and I cannot say enough about the mentoring and skill building that is an integral part of this series.

Any formal training or ACA/BCU certifications: Various lessons with several instructors in Maryland, but no certifications yet.

Boat usually paddled: My favorite is a well-worn orange poly Valley Avocet (16') – it's not pretty, but it's my do anything kayak. I also have a boysenberry/gold/ivory fiberglass Impex Cat 3 (17') that's my go-to kayak for distance paddling.

Type paddle used: Lumpy Greenland paddle. I also have a carbon Werner Camano bent shaft, but it's usually on my deck for a spare.

Do you do any other type of paddling besides sea kayaking? Not regularly. **Do you regularly do any other outdoor activities?** No, but I would like to do more hiking and biking, or maybe try cross country skiing.

How often do you paddle in summer? At least once or twice a week from May through October, and maybe once or twice a month in the colder months. **Do any winter paddling?** Yes, as long as it's sunny and above 35°F. Winter paddling has a stark, serene beauty that's worth experiencing (on sunny days). **Go to pool sessions?** I've signed up for the Catonsville pool sessions this winter.

Favorite local paddling location: The lower Sassafras River – sandy bottom, nettle free, and relatively clear water through the entire summer. The possibilities are endless – bird watching, creek exploring, playing around, or heading out to the Bay. Moonlight paddling anywhere is just magical. **Favorite non-local location:** That's a tough one, but if I had to choose... see the next question.

Best paddling trip/experience ever and why: A last minute decision to join a kayak camping trip in the McCoy and Mink Islands, Georgian Bay, Ontario last August - five spectacular days of semi-remote island hopping bliss with wonderful friends, stunning scenery, crystal clear water, made-to-order weather, and moonlit nights. I don't own a lot of camping gear (yet), and I'm especially grateful to my paddling friends who loaned me their gear to use for the trip!

Scariest/most dangerous trip/experience and why: April 2012 – Cape Henlopen, full moon Tides & Currents Class with Adventure Crafters. It was definitely outside of my comfort zone and my first experience getting knocked over in rougher conditions. Can't wait to do it again.

Bucket list trips: Too many places, not enough time. The easy answer is to escape to a warmer climate in the winter and someplace cooler in the summer. **Three things you like most about paddling?** 1) It's fun! Paddlers are the most friendly, generous, and fun bunch of people I've had the pleasure of meeting. 2) It's my therapy. No matter what's bringing me down, getting out on the water sets me right again. 3) It's never boring. Each time I pick up a paddle is a unique experience, and there's always something more to learn. **What do you like about CPA?** The sense of community.

One thing other people find interesting about you: I like to collect Hull Brown Drip dishware.



Sue Byerly at Muddy Creek, Susquehanna River

Photograph by Laura Ventura

