

Champions of the Dragon

S. Davis and Sharon Rhodes

When was your first introduction to the Dragon Run?

I was an early teen when Jimmy Morgan took our Explorer Post for a campout on Big Island. Other times he took our post on canoe trips from Mascot and paddled up to Big Island. We would campout on Big Island then paddle back to Mascot. Jimmy was the Post Advisor. I knew Jimmy really well because he hired me as a “gofer” to ferry drugs from the pharmacy to another pharmacy or doctors’ offices. I was also the stock boy in the pharmacy. This was around 1959- 1961. I always thought the Dragon was a wonderful place. I assisted Jimmy after College with the Explorer Post and had many trips on the Dragon with him.

What is it about being a Champion of the Dragon that is important to you?

When Jimmy decided to start the Friends of Dragon Run in 1985, I said sign me up. The camaraderie and friendship that I was able to make were important to me. The common bond and interest we all have, striving to preserve this wonderful place. I enjoy going to the Dragon. It is important to me that the organization and the Dragon live on. I enjoyed bringing my son Christopher to the Dragon and “hoofing around”. I enjoy attending events run by FODR.

What was your Biggest Challenge?

The times I served as treasurer challenged me. It wasn’t easy tracking the money received and paying the bills. It was consuming. And as President it was always a challenge making sure communications were good. We didn’t have monthly meetings like we do now. We met by phone or in the drug store or we went to the Dragon to do some tasks and then talked about the things that needed to get done.

Favorite Memory?

It was awe inspiring the first time I paddled downstream from Mascot and came across the canal. Its human created but the trees have grown up along the banks and make it feel as if you are paddling through a tunnel. It is such a peaceful and magnificent place. There are so many wonderful places on the Dragon but the canal is a special place for me.

Funny Stories?

It was a bit funny (looking back) when we moved the memorial stone for Jimmy Morgan to Big Island. We lashed two canoes together, set a piece of plywood in the middle and then placed the stone on top of the plywood. We were very cautious and worried we would lose the stone to the bottom of the Dragon. All went well till we beached on Big Island. The rock fell on the ground and started sliding into the mud. We stopped it from sliding with our legs (hoping it wouldn’t break the legs). Then we used two-by-fours to pry it out of the mud so we could tie a rope around it and pull it out. We all agreed that this was craziness; but, in the end what we

did was very meaningful and worthwhile. David Clements single handedly built a bridge across the Dragon so that Jimmy's mother could attend the ceremony. It was very nice.

Ideas for Future Protection?

Spread the word and enlighten people so that they are aware of the importance of conservation of special places. I love that we have programs for school students and college students. Let's get even more active in public relations. Spread the word through presentations for church groups, community groups, and schools. Let's present the importance of conservation and our successes to anyone who will listen.

You had a big role in establishing the FODR logistics program, how did that come about?

I was the only one with a truck and hitch who could pull the kayak trailer so I was elected. No other skills necessary. As part of that I took care of fixing and cleaning up the equipment. All my life I have been interested in the mechanics of things and enjoy coming up with ideas to solve problems. Woodworking and constructing things have always been a hobby and sometime a necessity. As they say: "Necessity is the mother of all inventions". When the Board decided they wanted to have kiosks they said let's ask Davis. When they wanted to store kayaks and paddles in the Conex box they said let's ask Davis. I enjoyed those tasks. The Conex was an educational experience for me and took me a while to figure out how to make secure racks without drilling into the metal container.

How does Sharon feel about you spending so much of your life helping FODR and the Dragon?

Sharon is the love of my life and I don't know what I would do without here. She has always been supportive of me going to the Dragon and helping FODR. She and our daughter Amanda would rather spend their time near the city; while, I am still a country boy. My ancestors are from Gloucester and I spent my youth, often helping out on my grandfather's farm. Though my work took me to Williamsburg and then Portsmouth / Chesapeake where we live, Gloucester and the Dragon will always be special to me.