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the community voice of Mayne Island



Mary Cooper Mayne Islander of the Year

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Mary Cooper Mayne Islander of the Year

Those Mayne Islanders who filled the Mayne Island School Gymnasium for Lions Charter Night on November 7th will recall not merely the unforgettable meal, and the welcome by 1st Vice District Governor Alan Guy, but also the moment when Neil Howard took the microphone and introduced the Mayne Islander of the Year: Mary Cooper. I have the script for Neil Howard's citation before me as I write. Mary (I quote Neil) has been "an ardent advocate" of water conservation. "Our winner's contribution", Neil went on to say, "has been the creation and development of an integrated water system" on Mayne Island. She was also present at the birth of the Mayne Island Boaters' Association and was its founding chair. For relaxation – for of late her health has forced her to relax -- she paints and plays bridge. She is, Neil reported, a "ruthless" bridge player, though I think that the adjective "ruthless" was a rueful last-minute interpolation by a bridge aficionado who is no mean player himself. The adjective is not to be found in the script which Neil gave me.

I went to interview Mary at her home on Club Crescent, and she met me at the door supporting herself with a walker. She had returned to Mayne Island only a few days before from VGH, where she saw at first hand the B.C. Health System under pressure.

We sat down at her kitchen table and Mary told me about herself. She began her life in Chatham, Ontario, and there she met her husband Jim, a stationary engineer who died only about a month and a half before we had our conversation. Jim and Mary moved from place to place, to wherever Jim's career called him, though they found time and energy to build a cabin retreat in northern Ontario not far from North Bay. Finally they made Georgetown their home for eleven years and spent summer vacations in their cottage. But Jim and Mary needed more sun, and so they purchased a twenty-six foot boat and sailed for a year in the Bahamas. Then the twenty-six foot boat gave way to a thirty-one footer and finally a forty-footer, but all of them were called "Nanda. Winters they spent on their succession of boats, and summers in their northland cottage. Their wanderings ended twenty-three years ago with their arrival on Mayne Island. Mary and Jim's life story since then is nothing less than the history of the Mayne Island Integrated Water System Society. Try searching for Mayne Island Integrated Water System on Google and Mary's name will come up.

Mary told me that she was not in at the creation of the Mayne Island Integrated Water System, as it was originally an organization of folks who thought that one big system could serve all Mayne Island and it had been gob smacked by reality. Mary arrived in time to help guide the system through its mid-life crisis and make it work. She has been a tireless missionary for water conservation, and it has not been an easy job.



Mary was also a founder and guiding spirit of the Association of Mayne Island Boaters, though she was careful to give credit to the many boaters of Mayne Island who wanted a boaters association that would stand up to bureaucracy on behalf of our Island's boat owners. The Association started about 2002 when it looked as if the boat ramp at Village Bay was going to be closed down. The boaters are now a fast-growing group, deeply involved in the building of a new harbor facility in Horton Bay.

Mary also paints. She started painting in 1963 while she was still living in Georgetown and she is now a member of the Mayne Island Monday Painters Group; all of them watercolorists, though Mary uses oils. And let us not forget bridge. Jim and Mary were formidable players – three-time trophy winners.

She has also been our chief Electoral Officer for fourteen years and has organized three referenda for the new Fire Hall. One of the referenda was canceled, but only after all the organization was done, and so we can count it among the three. The last carried the day and it was with some satisfaction, I think, that Mary attended the opening of the new Fire Hall on November 28th. Physical frailty is not holding Mary back. At the moment a hip needs repair, but once it is sound again Mary will return to Mayne Island life as vigorous as ever. The robust defender of the Mayne Island aquifer will don her armor again.

James Allan Evans

The Mayneliner would like to acknowledge the thoughtful and emotional decision by Mary of memorializing her husband Jim's death in the December 2015 issue and approving the celebration of her award in the January issue.