

-The Becky Mason Interview-



April 2013

The Canadian Canoe Foundation was very fortunate to recently interview one of our Canadian canoeing heroes, Becky Mason. Becky comes by her love of paddling and painting honestly. She is the highly accomplished daughter of Bill Mason, Canada's most beloved canoeist, who also achieved great success as a commercial artist, animator, filmmaker, author and painter. Becky lives in Chelsea Quebec, and her lifestyle and art are steeped in the singular beauty of that area. We asked Becky a few questions about her art, her love of the canoe, and her thoughts on what the Canadian Canoe Foundation is doing to educate youth about the importance of our Canadian Watersheds.

CCF- You are seen as a modern ambassador for canoeing, and your passion for classic solo canoeing has taken you far and wide for speaking engagements and paddling workshops. Tell us about your exciting Spring Tour of 2010, and where it took you.

Becky- Our 2010 UK Tour took my husband Reid and I to Scotland, Ireland and England for 5 weeks with a final week in Sweden. It was a fabulous experience and we spent our time teaching, doing demonstrations and giving talks on canoeing. This trip really made us aware of how international "Canadian" canoeing has become and that we have the same passion for paddling as our friends across the ocean and can share our knowledge with them and vice versa. We were so enthralled with our trip that the next year, as soon as I had finished editing my Advanced Classic Solo Canoeing DVD we went back, this time to continental Europe, and did a tour of the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy and then England again. The one thing that was constantly reaffirmed during our adventures is that canoeists are the kindest and most generous people in the world! But I probably don't have to tell you that.

CCF- Your art seems to be heavily informed by your love of the outdoors. How would you say your passion for canoeing is reflected in your art? Do you find yourself switching focus back and forth from a canoeing mindset to a painting mindset often while paddling?

Becky- Yes my love for the wilderness is echoed in my painting. In fact I find it almost impossible to segregate one aspect of my life from another, they all combine and blend to form, well, me. And creativity is really nothing more than a way to express your thoughts and feelings and although there are times when I try to switch it off (like this week, when I needed to write a proposal) usually I just keep myself open to seeing and feeling and remembering and then, sometimes when I feel compelled, I record in images, words or actions, my responses. Most of the time when I am paddling or in the bush I am experiencing, and it is not until later, after I have distilled these sensations that I will put them down in paint on paper.

CCF- How big a role did canoeing play in your childhood?

Becky- It is almost impossible for me to imagine myself growing up without canoeing. It would be like thinking of your childhood without school. My time spent in the woods as a kid really was a formative time and taught me so many important lessons I still carry with me to this day.

CCF- How has that early exposure to the beauty of the Canadian wilderness impacted your stance on environmental issues we face today as Canadians?

Becky- I guess the big one would be that canoeing and camping with my family indelibly burned into my soul a love and respect for the land and a reverence for all that lives on it. When I was small I was taught to try to leave things better than when I found it, not to leave little bits of garbage around and not to unnecessarily cut twigs and saplings. It wasn't until I was older that I started to see the bigger picture and the political machinations involved in the preservation/development dialogue. My Dad and I talked a lot about this and he had some great advice. He shared with me that it was important to write letters to help protect our environment but equally important was to pick your battles and to really focus your energy on them.

CCF- What benefits do you feel the Canadian Canoe Foundation's Watershed Education Programs will have on the youth of today?

Becky- The youth of today really are our future. This really struck home for me this spring when I had the honour and pleasure of meeting and talking with many of the young Nishiyuu walkers who had walked from Hudson Bay to Ottawa to support and raise awareness for the 'Idle No More' movement. Seeing these kids gave me such a sense of pride and hope for their future and for the future of Canada. If we can make the youth of this country aware of the environmental issues we all face, especially around our most important resource of water, then they will feel a responsibility to preserve, conserve and protect it. As my friend Kirk Wipper used to say "Becky, you youngsters are the future, we're counting on you".

CCF- Do you have any big plans for 2013?

Becky- Other than teaching my canoeing classes here in Chelsea, I will be doing a few clinics on the road in Maine and New Brunswick as well as Bon Echo Provincial Park. I really try not to travel a lot, especially long distances by plane as I try to maintain a small carbon footprint, but sometimes it's hard to say no. So this year Reid and I are joining our friend Ray Mears on a 2 week trip he is planning in northern Ontario in August. I am really looking forward to that as Ray is a bushcraft expert and I am sure that I will learn a lot traveling with him and I will be able to share my knowledge with his clients.

CCF- Do you have any advice for this years Canadian Canoe Foundation's Future Leaders before their upcoming adventures across Canada? Any inside paddling tips?

Becky- I'd like to say "stay calm, be brave, wait for the signs" but that is a cultural reference that only old CBC junkies like me would get! Seriously though I can only offer my hope that their experiences on the water are eye-opening, enlightening and life-changing. My one paddling tip for them is to go slow and take the time to let all your senses learn what their journey through the wilderness can teach them, look and smell and listen and feel.

CCF- Thank you so much for taking the time to answer our questions and provide some 'water-wisdom' for our Future Leaders. Enjoy the Spring and have an awesome Paddling season!

Becky- Well, thank you for all of your wonderful work and my hopes and best wishes go with your kids in their canoes!

Below are links to follow Becky's Blog, and her other social media links.

<http://twitter.com/redcanoe166>

http://www.facebook.com/redcanoes?ref=tn_tnmn

<http://redcanoes.blogspot.com/>

<http://ca.linkedin.com/pub/dir/Becky/Mason>

<http://www.youtube.com/user/redcanoess>