

# THE BERKSHIRE RECORD

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GREAT BARRINGTON, MASSACHUSETTS

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Photo by Paul Kakley

For the Housatonic Floatilla, The Berkshire Record saluted the great river journalist, Samuel Ciemens, a.k.a Mark Twain. "Huck Finn" a.k.a Lex Prisendorf, on left, designed the raft and along with Tom Sawyer, a.k.a. Christine Burns, right, poled the craft down the river. More pictures throughout the paper and a first-person report on B6.

# In the Housatilla's Mainstream

By Roxanne Jacoby  
Special to The Record

**GREAT BARRINGTON** - August 3, 1991, 10:00 a.m.—It is raining on our parade! Buckets of rain pour from the darkened sky. I call the Great Barrington Land Conservancy to find out about the Housatilla Float. A prerecorded tape lets me know that, despite the rain, the parade is on and all participants are expected to be at the meeting place by 12 noon.

"So, that's it!" I say to myself. I take a deep breath, and resolve to test my mettle and, for two hours, float down the Housatonic in a driving rain. "Actually, for you, Floating Bubble, the rain will not make much difference," remarks my husband with faultless logic. "You'll be soaked anyway, just being in the dingy rubber boat. It will be harder than for those in the canoes, who normally don't get soaked floating down the river...." His reasoning makes sense. I already feel much better.

At 12:15 p.m., with my boat inflated to burst, we arrive at the meeting place, the Searles Middle School on Bridge Street. From the first moment, I am impressed by the perfect organization of the event, the efficiency and cheerfulness of the many volunteers helping us to get on the water.

I gasp when I see the imaginatively decorated canoes. The Viking Women's Valhalla, the Garden of Eden, and Greed—Hinsdale seem to me the greatest. I do not know where to look first. "The judges will have a hard time choosing the best among them," I say to my husband. My little yellow rubber boat seems completely lost and out of place in such company.

After a tasty hero sandwich luncheon for the participants, in the school's youth building, we all proceed to our lined-up boats. 2 p.m. is rapidly approaching. The rain has stopped for a while. We take our positions. I am fortunate to be between the Viking Women, four vivacious ladies making last-minute adjustments to their more than generous papier mache bosoms and helmets, and M. I. N. E. (Money Is Not Everything) in which a pretty and perfectly poised young lady, the picture of purity, sits among the lilies.



Roxanne Jacoby waves on her way down the river in the rain.

I do not know what to admire first: the Robin Hood party, Mr. Mallard, or the snake's head, a green painted football on the Garden of Eden. I am so thrilled just to be here among these wonderful boats that I forget for a moment the humble state of my entry.

2:00 p.m.: Accompanied by the majestic sounds of bagpipes, warmly cheered by the spectators on the bridge, we start, one by one, our slow procession past the judges, parading down the river. When my turn comes, my paddle gets entangled with the balloons tied to the boat and I am zigzagging pitifully all over the place. Flower petals and soap bubbles shower us from the bridge. People cheer us warmly. I feel much better.

We leave the bridge behind. The rain starts again. I paddle hard, trying to keep up with the much faster canoes. Volunteers meet us at shallow and dangerous spots down the river. With a

smile, a word of encouragement or advice, they push and drag our boats, help us navigate, making sure we don't create huge traffic jams.

At one particularly tricky spot, there are no helpers. The Floating Duck Blind Hunter gets stuck between the low branches of the trees above and the shallow river bottom. The Viking Women, also stuck on the other side of the narrows, come to the rescue. I come along, bobbing and turning helplessly on the shallow bottom, heading directly into the Duck Blind. The Viking Women guide my boat to safety and manage to free the Duck Blind.

We continue to float along, admiring each other's boats, exchanging pleasantries and encouragements as we go. The Viking Women pass me by, in the triumphal sounds of Wagner's Valkyries music. Quite a sight. Right in front of the fairgrounds reviewing stand, where about one hundred people cheer us, the water is shallow again. I have to get out of the boat and decide to drag it behind me. When I want to get back in, I lose my balance, the boat flips over my head, throwing me into the river and providing an unexpectedly funny moment for the

By 3:30 p.m., most of us reach our destination, the Eisner campgrounds. Volunteers help us get the boats out of the water. The music plays, a wonderful picnic table beckons us from under a canopy. Rachel and Genie meet us with praises and warm smiles. My husband is relieved I made it. I change into warm, clean clothes and join in the fun.

The speeches start. First the Indian representatives, disappointed by the state of the river, and, I guess, everything else. I feel a little disappointed with them myself. I expected at least a small gesture of acknowledgement for all the hard work that these ecology- and environment-minded organizers and volunteers are continuously putting in, in order to clean the river bank and heighten awareness of how to make it safe again and enjoyable for all of us.

It was a great way to celebrate the river, meet environmentally conscious neighbors,

and spend a Saturday afternoon. The rain just tested our resilience and resolve.

Rachel, Genie, and all volunteers, congratulations! Let's do it again next year! Who knows, by then I might even get a canoe.

## Paddlers Organize Clean-Up of River

**GREAT BARRINGTON**—The South County Paddlers will hold a cleanup of the Housatonic River bottom in the vicinity of Bridge Street on Saturday, August 10, from 9:00 to 1:00 pm.

With the river so low and awareness of its condition heightened by last Saturday's Housatonic River Flotilla, the organization feels that it is a good time to remove discarded shopping carts, tires, and debris from the river bottom, some of which was seen during last Saturday's parade course.

Anyone interested in participating should call Bernard Kirchner or Philip Jones-May at 229-2541.

## Summer Pleasures '91



'Garden of Eden' designed by Barbara Bockbrader and Pamela Hardcastle for the Housatilla .

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Photo by Paul Kakley.

One of the Housatonic Flotilla's entries this past weekend was entitled M.I.N.E.--Money Is Not Everything-- emphasizing the river's natural if somewhat despoiled beauty.