

KILLALOE 1ST TRAINING SESSION

AN EXTRACT FROM OUR BOOK HERE BE DRAGONS

By Margaret Mulcahy

In order to convey what a madcap adventure the first helm course was, I need to give a bit of background. I had not long finished treatment when I attended Fiona's Open Day in Waterways Ireland Visitors' Centre. I had read a short piece about it by Charlotte Coleman Smyth in The Irish Times, and it came at just the right time for me. At the launch Fiona spoke so convincingly about the need to have our own helms that I put my name down on the spot for the helm course in July 2010 and everyone was too polite to question me.

To further emphasise how mad it all was, remember that most of us had never even seen a dragon boat before we went to that first training session on the only dragon boat in Ireland. The big thing that I hadn't realised until we arrived in Killaloe was that I was required to stand up at the back of the boat. Fiona had persuaded three others as well as Marian to do the helm course: Maria McNally, who participates in canoeing, Liz O'Ferrall, who also had a background in canoeing and kayaking, and Maureen Shelly, who was a rower. Only Marian and I had had breast cancer. I clearly remember Julie announcing to us that this was the first helm course ever held in Ireland. We were accompanied by Nicoline Greer, who was making a documentary, in the same boat, for RTÉ Radio 1, and this can all be heard on that documentary.

We did the helm course on the lake at the University of Limerick Sport Adventure Centre in Killaloe and my memory of it is that the weather was wet and blustery; we had to back paddle the boat out through a narrow gap on to the big wide lake. Not that I had a clue what 'back paddle' even meant. I don't remember any mention of passing or failing at that time, but I suspect I had a lot more learning and practice to do before I got my certificate. It was all a bit unreal anyway, as we didn't have any boats in Dublin!