

Clint Eastwood



Clint Eastwood, kneeling third from right, demonstrating artificial respiration with other instructors"- King County Archives

When Clint Came to Town

Ever hear that Clint Eastwood taught lifeguard training classes at the National Red Cross Aquatic School held at Beaver Lake one summer? It's true, and a little research not only adds details to the story but provides pictures of a young Eastwood at Beaver Lake just before his leap from obscurity to celebrity.

Eastwood was born in San Francisco in 1930. He graduated from Oakland Technical High School in 1949, about the same time his parents moved to Seattle. He opted not to follow, instead working various jobs up and down the West Coast, including working as a lifeguard and later teaching lifeguard training classes.

But he did spend some time in Seattle. He was a lifeguard at Renton's Kennydale Beach in the summer of 1949 or 1950, and even then had no trouble attracting women. George Wyse, the athletic supervisor for King County who hired Eastwood for the Kennydale gig, explained years later in an interview: "He was a nice-looking young kid, well-built. He drew quite a gang of young ladies around him" (McGilligan).

Eastwood was drafted into the Army some months after the Korean War broke out in the summer of 1950. But he stayed stateside during the war, and by the summer of 1953 was back in Seattle and living with his parents at 1917 33rd Avenue S, near Colman Park. In June 1953 he taught lifeguard training at the Red Cross Aquatic School at Beaver Lake.

The Red Cross Aquatic Schools offered training in first aid, life saving, small craft handling, and water safety techniques, but the schools were limited to participants who either planned to teach these skills or work as lifeguards. It was quite a coup in 1939 when Gus and Lulu Bartels, owners of Beaver Lake's Four Seasons Resort, successfully negotiated with the Red Cross to select Beaver Lake as its permanent Northwest location for its aquatic school. (In 1954, the year after Eastwood's stint at Beaver Lake, the Issaquah Press reported that there were only five such schools in the country.) Ten-day classes were held at Beaver Lake in mid-to-late June for many years between 1939 and 1956, though it's not clear if they were held there every single year.

The 1953 aquatic school began on June 16 and ended on June 26. Thirty-nine trainees from as far away as Utah participated, representing police departments, Northwest industries, and youth groups. Participants plunked down \$45 (\$375 in 2011 dollars) for the course. This also covered room and board at the resort, which had been purchased in 1950 by Dick and Ruth Anderson and renamed Andy's Beaver Lake Resort (usually just called Andy's). Trainees could choose to specialize in first aid or water safety work.

Eastwood evidently taught both classes, and two pictures of him at work appear in the Seattle Times on June 27, 1953. One shows him demonstrating artificial respiration with a group of other instructors, while the other is a pleasing close-up of Eastwood demonstrating a pair of "water wings," wet knotted pants with its legs filled with air, that serve as an effective flotation device in the absence of a life vest. Water safety instruction at the school also included survival techniques using a dishpan, and using heavy boots.

The weather was cool and rainy for nearly the entire course. And the classes weren't easy. The instructors were "lifebuoys" and the trainees "scum," and the lifebuoys kept the scum on their toes, for example delighting in keeping them out in a cold wind and rain for almost two hours while drilling them on the intricacies of canoe instruction.

But it wasn't all work and no play. A couple of evenings both lifebuoys and scum joined together for costume parties, and meals were occasions for joking and singing. Another evening near the end of the course the lifebuoys initiated the scum, officiated by a freshwater King Neptune. The school may have also put on a public demonstration of water safety and first aid techniques on Sunday, June 21. Press accounts describe such Sunday public demonstrations during other years, including 1954, but don't mention it in 1953.

Eastwood returned to Kenneydale Beach after the aquatic school ended and worked as a lifeguard there for at least some part of the summer of 1953. But his life soon changed. By the end of 1953 he was married and living in Los Angeles -- and you know the rest of the story.

And what otherwise would be a long-forgotten Red Cross training course at Beaver Lake instead became a singular thread in the tapestry of Sammamish history.

-Phil Dougherty, April 6, 2011

Sources: Marc Eliot, *American Rebel: The Life of Clint Eastwood* (New York: Harmony Books, 2009), 18, 19, 26, 27, 28, 29; Patrick McGilligan, *Clint: The Life and the Legend* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2002), 43, 54; Richard Schickel, *Clint Eastwood: A Biography* (New York: Knopf, 1996), 45, 58; "Beaver Lake Will Be Scene of Red Cross Activities June 18 to 28," *Issaquah Press*, February 9, 1939, p. 1; "National Red Cross Aquatic School at Andy's," *Ibid.*, June 24, 1954, p. 1; Mrs. Neal Fraker, "Beaver Lake News," *Ibid.*, June 21, 1956, p. 4; Hill Williams, "Beaver Lake School Trains Lifeguards, Teachers," *The Seattle Times*, June 27, 1953, p. 16; HistoryLink.org Online Encyclopedia of Washington State History, "Beaver Lake on the Sammamish Plateau" (by Phil Dougherty), "Sammamish Plateau: Andy's Beaver Lake Resort" (by Phil Dougherty) <http://www.historylink.org> (accessed March 26, 2011); "Inflation Calculator," Bureau of Labor Statistics website accessed April 1, 2011 (<http://www.bls.com>); "Celebrity Lifeguards!" King County Archives website accessed March 26, 2011.

(http: <http://www.kingcounty.gov/operations/archives/exhibits/athome12.a>
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