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## Elizabeth "Betsy" Gelenitis Alison



March 25, 1960 -

Birthplace: Bayonne, New Jersey

## "I've never been afraid to ask questions."

Betsy Alison started sailing at age 7 because her father insisted. Grumpy at first, soon Betsy was singing with her pals as they slipped happily over Barnegat Bay. She was successful as a local sailor, but turning it into a life dream, or a profession, never occurred to her. Then in 1977 she found herself at Tufts University, which just happened to have the best sailing team in the country. When her father died during her freshman year, a friend persuaded her to go sailing on Upper Mystic Lake. For the first time Alison realized her natural aptitude for the sport.

A self-described seat-of-the-pants sailor, she learned the technical side from talented Tuft's teammates. She credits numerous mentors, like Dave Perry who told her to buy a Laser, then

told her how to sail it in heavy air: "pull everything tight and hike" (she did, winning her first, full-rig Laser regatta); her coach Joe Duplin, who pushed her to do more than she thought possible; and fellow collegians like Ken Read, Tommy Lihan, Morgan Riser, and Lynn Jewell Shore.

An Honorable Mention for All-American at Tufts in 1981, Alison has a unique ability to quickly apply what she learns. Ken Read told her how to sail a J-24 over lunch, after which she won the first of her five Women's Keel Boat Championships.

Voted Rolex Yachtswoman of the Year a record five times, Alison says she never felt discriminated against on the water: "You have to prove yourself. When you get the job done on the race course, you develop respect."

In 1998, Allison was asked to coach the USA team in the World Disabled Sailing Championship. Today she is the US Sailing Team AlphaGraphics Paralympic Coach.

- Roger Vaughan

## Links of Interest:

YouTube Video - Paralympic Sports Military Camp with Betsy Alison

August 2003 Interview - Scuttlebutt.com

Betsy Alison page on Barnegat Bay Sailing Hall of Fame

Interview - Sailing Anarchy

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