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Elizabeth “Betsy” Clifford

Born: 1953

Upon her retirement, Betsy Clifford was presented with the John Semmelink Award. This award is presented annually, in the event of there being a candidate, by the Canadian Ski Association to the skier who through sportsmanship, conduct and ability, best represents Canada in international competition. This award is achieved in the name of and in the memory of H. John Semmelink who lost his life while representing the Association in the Arlberg-Kandahar on February 7, 1959, at Garmish-Partenkirchen, West Germany.

Born on October 15, 1953 in Ottawa, Betsy was raised on the slopes of Camp Fortune in the Gatineau Hills near Ottawa where her father was the area manager. At 14, she was the youngest girl to be named to the National and Olympic ski team.

In her first year of international racing, she placed 23rd in the 1958 Olympic Downhill event at Grenoble, France. Following the Olympics, she was 9th in the giant slalom at Oslo, Norway. Two weeks later, she came in 6th at the slalom in the Du Maurier International (World Cup) at Rossland, B.C.

With a 5th in the downhill at Grindelwald in 1969, she became the talk of the Canadian team. This came only one weekend after her 10th place in the Oberstaufen Slalom. A 10th in the Schruns, Austria, Downhill one week later, and Betsy became a new Canadian ski star. The fire was soon put out with a fall at Ste. Gervais, where she sprained her ankle. Three weeks later, Betsy was in action again on the North American Circuit at Vail, Colorado. A 4th place giant slalom run and a 2nd fastest first run in the slalom, showed new hope for Canada. Two weeks later, she was 4th in the final World Cup event at Waterville Valley.

In 1970, Betsy surprised the world with her gold medal giant slalom run at the World Championships in Val Gardena, Italy, and at the age of 16, setting a new record as the youngest person ever to win a world championship medal.

Betsy continued her success in international competitions with World Cup wins in slalom in 1971 at Val d’Isere and Schruns and tied for 1st overall in the World Cup Slalom standings.

In 1972, Betsy had several good results early in the year, but a freak accident in the World Cup Downhill at Grindelwald resulted in a hairline fracture to both heels, and eliminated her from the Olympics.

January 1973 saw the return of Betsy to the racing scene in North America. In her efforts to rebuild to World Cup caliber, she dominated the Can-Am series winning five races and the title – the first time a Canadian girl won this honor. In the same year, she rejoined the World Cup Team and also won the Canadian Championships at Thunder Bay, Ontario.

Once again in 1974, Betsy showed that she had talent in all three events by winning a silver medal at the World Championships at St. Moritz, Switzerland, with a second place finish – this time in downhill. Betsy’s silver was the only medal at the championships won by a North American. In that same year, Betsy was the giant slalom champion at both the Canadian Championships and the Chilean National Championships in Portillo, Chile.

In 1975 she was Canadian Giant Slalom champion, and placed 12 times in the top ten in World Cup races, placing 4th in the World Cup Giant Slalom at Whistler Mt., B.C.

Betsy was the top Canadian in World Cup competition in 1976. A 5th in the World Cup Slalom at Berchtesgaden, West Germany, and also a Canadian Championship Slalom title were added to her long list that season.

A very frank, determined and strong person, Betsy was talented in all three skiing disciplines. Throughout her skiing career, many other awards were bestowed upon her in recognition of her accomplishments.

From 1968-1976 she was voted Ottawa’s Outstanding Skier and in 1970 and 1971 was voted Athlete of the Year for the City of Ottawa.

After the Innsbruck Olympics, Betsy announced her decision to retire. Since her retirement she has remained in the ski business working at her father’s ski resort, Mount Cascades in Cantley, Quebec, near Ottawa.

Elizabeth Clifford was elected to the U.S. National Ski Hall of Fame in 1978.