

This is the first in a new series focusing on significant sailing families who have made their mark at the Squadron. Life member and Squadron Historian Dr Peter Last, together with his wife Jenny and their four children Robert, Katherine, Anne and William, cruised South Australian waters every chance they could get. Here is their story ...



Back l to r: Anne, Jenny, Peter, Rob, Front: Kate, Bill

PETER Last first came to the Squadron seventy years ago, on Christmas night 1948. In company with his cousin and nautical mentor, David Judell, he sailed in Norman Howard's *Nereid* to American River. She was a Derwent sloop, 24 feet overall, with a short bowsprit, and no fence, pulpit or lifelines. This was to become an annual event, as was racing to Port Vincent at Easter.

In 1949 Peter and David crewed for Doug Verco in *Nautilus* and then *Anyndah*, before returning to *Nereid*. They were at the launch of *Southern Myth* from Searles slip not long after dawn on a bleak August morning in 1953, and Peter and Jenny were aboard for her first Opening Day that year. Peter was responsible for the *Myth's* tilted head (toilet), for reasons he can explain.

Peter joined David's crew in *Jedda*, a Black Soo built by David Binks, and participated in most races. There was intense rivalry with John Muirhead's sister ship, *Enchantress*. Offshore fleets were larger then, and now defunct trophies were competed for. He says that the vessels and safety gear would be excluded today, for they didn't even have a radio transmitter, let alone safety harness, and nobody had life-rafts.

In classical SE conditions, *Jedda* broke the record in the 1963 race to Port Lincoln, followed by two weeks cruising home. Peter and Jenny were hooked. They introduced their children to the joy of sailing in their yachts *Kareelah*, and later *Satyricon*.

Annual summer family holidays in the late sixties and seventies were spent sailing to Spencer Gulf and Kangaroo Island. Other Squadron families were usually in company. These included the Taylors on *Gip* (renamed *Reprive*); the Ulletts on *Cooroyba*, *Achenar* and *Fine Romance*; the Attertons sailed *Spindrift*; the Smiths had *Cooinda*; and the Cotton family participated in *Wyrana*. Subsequently Peter and Jenny had a memorable cruise with the Cotton family on *Circus* through French Polynesia.

All six of the Last family, plus an occasional extra, crammed into *Kareelah*, which was only thirty feet overall. In blustery conditions they could not get ashore, but when they did there were exciting places to explore and activities to participate in.

Often the islands were deserted.

The Modra family, who owned Thistle Island, provided the keys of their modified VW Beetles, which were driven from Whalers Bay to Fossil Point. At Wedge Island, Norm Growden gave a welcome invitation to scramble up to the light, with the view to Peaked Rocks (nicknamed Cleopatra's Tits), and the precipitous south coast. He and Theo Modra commuted by plane. Building materials, machinery and stock were all transported on Theo's ketch *Hecla*, which used a windmill to pump water from the bilge and sank when there was an airless spell.

Cruising families celebrated New Year's Eve in Spalding Cove, under Boston Island or tied to the Town Jetty. They bought supplies in Port Lincoln and snorkeled in the pristine waters at Reevesby Lagoon, Wedge Island and Whaler's Bay. Marinas, widespread moorings and fish farms were in the future. Provision of fuel restricted motor launches, so the little fleet was almost entirely sailing craft and everyone knew everyone. Many yachts came together to celebrate Bill Jolly's birthday on 5 January.



Rob and Kate unpacking *Kareelah* after a Christmas cruise

A couple of vivid memories stand out. On an idyllic sunny day, south of Althorpe, a great pod of dozens of pilot whales, too many to count, converged on *Kareelah* and swam with them for over an hour. Some kept pace with the bow, four or five layers deep. Others breached by leaping into the air, to fall back with spectacular splashes. Standing below in the cabin, their navigational clicks were remarkably loud.

A contrast was 'The Sixty Knot Gale'. They had a challenging sail in steep seas before a screaming storm, in company with David Hardy's trimaran *Semele*, from Wedge Island to eventual shelter at Windmill Beach under Point Marsden. This included a scary jibe to escape when Emu Bay was impossible. The boom flew up to jam on the backstay, requiring repeated jibes. Mercifully the mast, sail and rigging held up. John Hardy was a schoolboy at the time and will remember that day!

Several fishing boats anchored with them and kept their motors running in case the yachts dragged their anchors and needed rescuing. Eric Altschwager ('Shwogger') took the *Britannia* to Kingscote, to return with a block of 'Dutch Treat' ice-cream for the children, a newspaper for their parents, and a crayfish for each vessel. A happy aspect of cruising was the friendship with Shwogger, Doug Hart and Morrie Burgess, the custodians of then pristine Snug Cove.



Port Vincent Easter 1967: far left *Tahuna*, far right *Gip (Reprive)* and *Kareelah*

On summer weekends the Last children played with contemporaries, including Peter Cooling, the Ullett sisters, David Cook, Annabel and Belinda Cotton, the Fidocks, Bryndon Wooding and the Taylors. There were no marinas, so everyone learnt to row dinghies at a young age. The view from the Squadron extended all the way to St Kilda, and voracious mosquitoes from the mangroves attacked at night.

After selling *Satyricon* in 1988, Peter and Jenny sailed a lot with Ion and Margaret Ullett in *Alpha Centauri* and *Fine Romance*. They went from Rabaul to Honiara; from Adelaide to Southport; to Ceduna and Nuyt's Archipelago; Darwin to Cairns; Sydney for the Bicentenary and return to Adelaide and more. They joined the Judells to cruise the Mediterranean.

Of the Last children, Rob is crew in offshore racing vessels at the CYC. Kate established Porter & Co Wine Merchants, which is a valued Squadron sponsor. (See Sponsor feature article in the Summer 2018 edition of the SQ.) Anne went by yacht to Fremantle and has remained in Western Australia ever since. Bill is a golfer. They share happy memories of some idyllic experiences while growing up at the Squadron.

A more recent connection is that Kate's daughter Elizabeth married James Biven, son of David and Angela (*Gomas* and *More Gomas*). They have four children to add to the next generation.



Satyricon (the first Duncanson 34)



Modified VW Beetle on Thistle Island