

SQUADRON SAILING FAMILIES – THE BORG FAMILY

By David Borg

My grandfather Olaf John (known as Jack at the Squadron) was born in Helsingborg, Sweden on 22 April 1891. He went to sea at 16 and as far as we can ascertain never returned to his native homeland.

He came to South Australia in 1910, supposedly jumping ship, but there are various versions on how or where. His naturalization application in 1939 states that he landed from the ship *Sirius* but his youngest son John once told me that his papers were conveniently all destroyed in a fire on the ketch *Capella* in the Port Canal in 1913, and that he jumped ship in Port Augusta onto a ketch heading south.

When I knew my grandfather he worked on the ketches on the South Australian coast. This gives some credence to the 'jumping ship' story, which was quite a common occurrence in those early years. My grandmother came from Clinton on Yorke Peninsula, where her family name Reubenicht was well-known in shipping and farming circles.

I know from newspaper reports that my grandfather worked on the *Capella* in 1913, and that she was owned by William Russell at the time. William was a long-time RSAYS member but I don't know whether that had any bearing on my grandfather's employment at RSAYS as Caretaker in March 1929.

My grandparents were married in 1920 and were prolific breeders. My mother Marjorie was the youngest of seven (three other sisters and three brothers). They all lived in the Caretaker's cottage next to the Club sheds at Outer Harbor. The cottage had only two bedrooms and a sleepout. It had no running water inside except in the bathroom, and had a wood stove. Goodness knows how they all fitted.

In those days my grandfather's duties as Caretaker also included doing small repair jobs on members' yachts. His time was charged at five shillings an hour – the Squadron got three shillings and he got two. He was an extremely talented ship's carpenter and was always in demand. Being a seaman, he was also good at splicing rope and wire and looking after rigging etc. In my younger days I can remember him doing a quick splicing job on a Saturday morning so a member could go racing. He taught me my knots and splices, but unfortunately he died before I ever mastered wire splicing.

Most of my mother's siblings had something to do with sailing or the sea at one time or another. I know that she sailed in the cadet dinghies before the Second World War, her brother Bob worked in the ketches and was about to head up the east coast to work as a deckhand as part of the navy's involvement in the Pacific War but he was unfortunately



The slip circa 1959 with the Caretaker's house and workshop in the background

killed in a motor bike accident the night before he was due to leave. It's probably why I was never allowed to have a motor bike.

My mother's middle brother, Peter (a member of the Squadron), was a keen sailor as well. He crewed with a number of members and was part of Margaret and Helen Thiem's crew in the Tumblaren *Venture* in the fifties. Uncle John, mum's youngest brother, worked for the South Australian Harbors Board all of his life, starting as a deckhand at fifteen in the mooring launches and retiring at about seventy-plus, finishing as their Senior Coxswain running the pilot boats out of the Squadron. For years he skippered the *Sir Wallace Bruce* and other vessels as the Squadron's official boat on Opening Days.

My grandfather was held in very high esteem by many of the more senior members of the Squadron hierarchy, and when he was naturalized in 1939 it was members Arthur Rymill and Dr Tostevin who vouched for his character on his naturalization application. When my grandfather died suddenly in 1959 (after 30 years of service to the Squadron) Henry Rymill loaned *Nyroca* to a young Mark Tostevin to take his ashes to the sea. His son Peter rescinded his membership and took over the role of Caretaker until he resigned in 1962.

Apart from my mother's early sailing in cadet dinghies the rest of our family never did a lot of sailing. Dad built a Heron for my younger brother, Greg, to help a friend at the Port River Club who was endeavouring to get a fleet together there. Greg sailed it for a number of seasons but gave it away after a while. My youngest sister and my father were active in the Port River Club for a few years for sail spotting and race starting. In recent years Greg has been involved in race management and support at the CYCSA, and is currently their PRO. My grandmother passed away in 1970.

My Early Life

My earliest memories of the RSAYS go back to the late 1940s when my mother would take me to visit my grandparents on a weekly basis. In those days the moorings were all fore and aft and the original pool finished not much further east of what was the caretaker's cottage and the original slipway. I can remember the upheaval and chaos when all the boats were moved out to dredge the extension of the pool in about 1949-1950. All the moorings were removed and spread out in the car park behind the cottage. The Harbors Board's grab dredge was a coal-fired, noisy, smoke-belching fascination for a young boy.

The sand flats opposite the pool and all the old barges along the bank were my playground. Gathering cockles out on the River's edge, trying to scoop up little fish with a tin from the pontoons, and checking out the mullet under the pontoons through a gap in the bridging piece, kept me interested in what went on in the water.

The cottage's backyard in those days was quite large and had a little tin shed which doubled as a laundry and workshop for my grandparents. There was another very small shed in the corner known as the battery shed. Evidently, back in the heyday of the Hydroplane racing, members could leave their batteries during the week to be charged. I can just remember the battery charger which was a very early Vacuum tube rectifier that glowed purple when it was running.

As I grew older my direction changed and I found it was a lot more fun to be on the water rather than being kept out of it. Once I learnt to swim I was taught to row (in the club dinghies) and life became more interesting. By the time I was a young teenager I had got to the stage of helping

my Uncle Peter and grandfather each Saturday morning. The club dinghies had to be lifted out of the water, squirted out, and returned to the water. This was done on the Hydroplane wharf in front of the Clubhouse, using the metal davit which now stands as a memorial to the east of the Quarterdeck. There was lots of winching by hand in those days! After that job was completed to my grandfather's satisfaction Peter would take me out to bring *Venture* in to the pontoon to rig up ready for racing. Here I learnt the requirements of sheets, sails and everything pertaining to racing boats. I even got taken out for a sail in the River a few times and thus my love of sailing started.

Bob Stevens gave me my first chance at crewing in *Zefir* in about 1957 or 1958. I got to learn a lot, especially scrubbing the bottom pre-race and setting the boat up for the race. The Tums were great fun, very wet and sometimes wild. At that time there were about six boats in the fleet racing as a class in 2nd division. The other member of *Zefir's* crew left so a new guy called Barry Allison joined us. We have been good friends ever since. Good memories Barry!

In 1959 I sailed my first offshore race, to Neptune Island with Colin Haselgrove on *Cooroyba*. It was a big learning curve, having never done any night sailing or ocean sailing before. Colin was an excellent skipper and very patient with a young greenhorn. His theory was that you had to learn once and now was as good a time as ever. "Here's the tiller, there's the compass, the course is 230°, see how you go. Up a bit, down a bit, nice and gentle. Don't waggle it like a bloody tennis racquet!"

The death of my grandfather resulted in me suddenly needing to become a member, so I applied for Cadet membership in 1959 and was duly elected on 1 November 1959. I continued racing in Tums for a few more years with Rex and Ivan Godfrey and then later on *Kirribilli* a 5.5 metre class. It was very fast and very wet, but a lot of fun. We won the Inkster Memorial Trophy at the Centenary Regatta in 1969. I continued doing offshore races with anyone who was looking for crew, or who wanted someone to join them on a cruise. I made many friends among the more senior members like Colin Haselgrove, Mock Sarah, Fred Brinkworth, Roy Hambour, and Chappy Charlesworth, just to name a few. I cruised or raced with them all at various times. These members all contributed to my 'Yacht Squadron' upbringing.

In about 1963 I met Lorraine and in between working and sailing I eventually convinced her that we should marry, and in 1966 we started our lifetime partnership of being involved at the RSAYS. Our daughter Samantha was born in 1969 and our son Michael in 1972, but both grew up to be not overly interested in sailing. They both



Lorraine and David Borg – keen members of the Archive and History Group

had other pursuits in their younger days – Samantha with her dancing and Mike with his fishing and working. Samantha has three boys all of whom are mad keen basketballers and footballers. Mike has two girls. He and his family live in Darwin and are all into Barra fishing with a fast boat and fishing village where they escape to most weekends.

I worked away from Adelaide for a few years in the early 1970s and on my return Rick Halliday invited me to be on the foredeck of *Morning Mischief*. We sailed her for a few years for Dick Cavill, including the 1973 Sydney to Hobart race. Rick, Ray Cauchi and I also did the 1975 Sydney to Hobart on *Windward Passage*, a large and fast American maxi that Rick chartered in the name of RSAYS for a couple of bottles of Coopers Ale.

Family life, work, house renovations, raising kids, and sailing whenever possible, filled our lives. We shifted to Largs Bay as it was closer to the Club and lived next door to Howard Trotter. He became Chair of the House and Social Committee and convinced me to stand for election. I then started a very long association with the social side of the Squadron and after several stints under various Chairs I eventually became Chairman myself when the Club was recovering from a very serious position. Lorraine was a great support to me in this period as she loved to organise, decorate and generally do what's needed to make something work. With no budget, and a lot of membership indifference to what sort of function you could get for very little outlay, we soldiered on. It is good to see members once more filling our Club.

In this period I also did some sailing in Dragons with Ivan Godfrey, Howard Trotter,

and Brian Mellors, including two Prince Philip Cups and in a WA state championship series, while attempting to do any offshores that presented an opportunity. It was all good fun.

In sixty years of membership I have always endeavoured to attend every working bee and help with many projects. This has allowed me to meet and enjoy the company of a vast number of members over the years. Robert Henshall invited me to join the Seaweed Gardening group more than twenty years ago. "Of course," I said, "but to get me you get Lorraine as well." "The more the merrier," was his answer. Lorraine is the 'plant manager' and is responsible for making the grounds look colourful and attractive.

Another aspect of my involvement has been in the history of the Squadron. The late Dr Peter Last was my mentor and about ten years ago he encouraged me to become involved in the Squadron's historical collection and written archives. This is an ongoing task and I am currently a member of the Archive and History Group, together with Peter Kelly, Chris Henshall, Barry Allison and Lorraine.

I have so many memories of what the Squadron looked like and the changes that have occurred from the early 1950s until today. I have seen so much change in my long tenure that it is very hard to write it all down in so few words.

Editor's Note:

David was made a Life Member in 2010 for his contributions to the Squadron.

