

By Barry Allison

It is not usual to write about husband and wife adventures at sea. However, Rick and Gill have an unusual situation in that they have sailed together for most of their lives. This is an account of the experiences and adventures of the Bakers' long association with the sea and the transition from dinghies to their self-built cruising yacht.



RICK first experienced the thrills of the sea when in 1950 his father Jeffrey purchased the 27 foot cutter *Tanami*, and began sailing at the Squadron with Rick as crew. In 1952 Jeff commenced building a motor launch *Erica* which was launched in 1965. Rick helped in the construction and learnt the many skills required in building boats, not realising how this knowledge would be very useful later in life.

His studies competed with his sailing when he commenced a science course at the University of Adelaide in 1957 and gained a Bachelor of Science (Hons) in 1961, then commenced a Doctor of Philosophy degree in Inorganic Chemistry in 1962. Meanwhile, Gill and her parents had emigrated from England and it was not long before Rick and Gill became great friends and eventually married in 1962.

The lure of the sea was always present, and the first boat they acquired was an International Cadet. This proved to be too small for both Rick and Gill, and led them to the Heavyweight Sharpie *Wyvern* which they sailed at the Brighton and Seaciff Yacht Club. This did provide some interesting sailing up and down the coast – including a capsize and the loss of the steel centre plate (but recovered the following day). In 1963, Rick joined the Squadron and with a friend purchased the Tumlar *Venture* from Helen Thiem. However, *Venture* was sold in 1964 and Rick was attracted to the new design of the traditional sharpie – the Lightweight Sharpie

being built at Glenelg from marine plywood by Alan 'Chippy' Barclay. He bought John Roberts' lightweight *Diavolo II* and continued his Sharpie racing at Glenelg.

In 1966, Rick was offered a Post-Doctoral Fellowship at the University of Toronto which necessitated the family, now with son Gregory, spending 15 months in Canada. The family of four – a daughter was born in Toronto – returned to Australia at the end of 1967 where Rick had been appointed the Senior Radiochemist in the Department of Nuclear Medicine at the Royal Adelaide Hospital. They turned to 'Chippy' Barclay for a new Lightweight Sharpie hull, while the deck and fittings were completed at the Bakers' home at West Beach. So *Trident* was launched, and



Goose

successfully sailed at Glenelg over the next few years. At this time, David Morphett had been a very successful yachtsman at Glenelg, and had moved from sailing Yvonne 20 and Tornado Catamarans to sailing Dragons very successfully at the Squadron. He managed to convince Rick and Gill that this was the only class to sail, and so in 1972 Rick purchased a Dragon named *Goose*. However, *Goose* required a considerable amount of repair and was not immediately competitive. This led to Rick purchasing *Sapristi*, the first fibreglass Dragon in Adelaide, and he successfully sailed her over the next two years with Ran Lelant and Kingsley 'Bones' Haskett as crew on occasions.

In 1978 Rick embarked on a sabbatical term with the Veterans Administration Hospital in Palo Alto in California and so the family, now with four children, spent a delightful six months familiarising themselves with the West Coast American culture. On returning to Australia, Rick had been considering the acquisition of a cruising yacht, so when a set of plans for a fibreglass Roberts 53 ketch were unexpectedly advertised, he bought them.

He sold *Sapristi* to a Western Australian buyer and commenced work on the ketch in 1980, with the hull being initially laid up at Black Forest. In 1983 it was transported to a vacant block of land near the Blue Line Drive-in at West Beach and much closer to home. Some readers may remember seeing this white hull sitting in the paddock.

Rick and his band of willing workers toiled for the next three years to lay the deck and fit the bulkheads, and in 1987 the hull was transported to Beswick's yard on the Port River where she was worked on over the next six years.



Sapristi



Margarita with staysail

In 1990, Rick had commenced a position as Senior Research Scientist at the Australian Nuclear Science Technical Organisation at Lucas Heights in Sydney, which meant travelling back to Adelaide during his holiday periods to continue the work on the yacht. After a year he changed his job, transferring to the Prince of Wales Hospital as the Senior Hospital Scientist in Nuclear Medicine. During this time, Gill had been working for the Commonwealth Ombudsman's Office in Sydney. Work continued at Beswick's yard and a launching date was set for December 1993. Although not completely finished, *Margarita* was launched on the Port River with much celebration after 13 years of hard work. Rick and Gill planned to sail her around to Sydney as soon as possible so that they could maintain their respective jobs, and finish the fit-out in Sydney.

Margarita, with Rick and Gill, Ran Lelant, Keith Cropley and Mike and Gaye Lewis, set off on 28 December 1993, taking nine days to sail to Sydney. The voyage was not without incident – off the southern coast on a windless night, the slatting sails came free from the mast track as the sail slides were not adequate so they called into Portland for some quick repairs. Then on towards Sydney with a welcome overnight stay at Refuge Cove before the long slog up the coast to a previously booked mooring at Cammeray Marina in Middle Harbour.

Over the next five years, Rick and Gill were able to continue with their work commitments and lived aboard *Margarita* while completing the fit-out, which included installing an auto pilot, an electric anchor winch, a headsail furler and a very welcome refrigerator. This time was taken up with familiarising themselves with the many idiosyncrasies that occur on a new yacht, and these were sorted out with many cruises on Sydney Harbour, north to the Hawkesbury, Pittwater and Port Stephens, and south to Port Hacking. So the first six years of *Margarita's* life were spent in New



Margarita with all sails set north of Airlie Beach

South Wales waters, and many friendships were established from the local and visiting overseas yachts.

With such an interesting life on board *Margarita*, it was not too long before both Rick and Gill decided that it was time to see more of the east coast, so both resigned their jobs in 1999. Plans were made to wander further afield, and in April 1999 they set sail for the Whitsundays in Queensland waters. Not too long into the cruise, they encountered a wild thunderstorm which provided some moments of doubt. However, they sailed on to Port Stephens, Coffs Harbour and into the Broadwater and Southport where they were joined by Keith Cropley and Ran Lelant for the next leg of the trip which included the Brisbane River. The boat was slipped at Scarborough before sailing onto Fraser Island over the notorious Wide Bay Bar and into Tin Can Bay where Ran and Keith left for home. After a week at delightful Garry's Anchorage, they sailed on to Bundaberg, Pancake Creek and Gladstone – spending a week at each anchorage. Finally, they reached the Whitsunday Islands via Cape Capricorn, Port Clinton, Island Head Creek, the Percy Islands and Airlie Beach, then spent the next three months cruising in the Whitsundays. They left *Margarita* at Laguna Quays Marina for the summer and flew back to Adelaide to catch up on some family affairs. From 2000 to 2007, the Bakers would either fly or drive up to Queensland from May to November for a delightful winter of cruising in the Whitsundays. They also sailed north to Townsville, Hinchinbrook Island, Cairns and Lizard Island, and were able to leave the boat at Laguna Keys over summer at a special rate.

The time came for a return to Adelaide waters, so in 2007 they left the Whitsundays and arrived back at Cammeray Marina in Sydney on 1 December, leaving *Margarita* so that they could be in Adelaide for Christmas. They returned to Cammeray

in 2008 and provisioned *Margarita* for the voyage back to Adelaide. With a crew of Ran Lelant, Tommy Riddell and Glen Dyer they departed at the end of February, calling into Port Hacking, Jervis Bay, Eden, Refuge Cove and Portland before arriving at the Squadron on 18 March 2008.

Margarita was moored at the Squadron in their marina berth for the next nine years. They cruised locally with many friends, across the gulf and to the popular anchorages on the north coast of Kangaroo Island. In 2010, Rick and Gill decided to explore more of the world and completed an overseas holiday to England, Belgium, Italy and Singapore. They repeated the adventure again in 2013 visiting Hong Kong, England and France. Meanwhile, *Margarita* was being sailed regularly but the skipper began to show signs of wear. So in 2017, after 23 years of enjoyable sailing, *Margarita* was offered for sale, and Sydneysider Ernest Jiminez decided that this was the ideal craft that he'd been looking for and made an acceptable offer. It was a sad day for Rick and Gill to see their *Margarita* depart from the Squadron after so many years of adventurous sailing around Australian waters. At present, she is back at Cammeray Marina.

Today, Rick and Gill have a busy time keeping up with their family commitments. They have maintained Squadron membership and are involved in many Squadron projects. Gill has been a Trustee and Secretary with the Squadron Foundation and is a valued member of the *Squadron Quarterly* team. Meanwhile, Rick is heavily involved with the West Beach Men's Probus Group. We wish them well in their continuing retirement.

