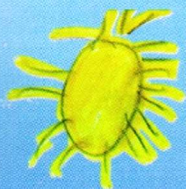


# GET YOUR BUM WET AGAIN

## SAILING FOR EVERYONE



foreword by  
Sir William  
Deane



# GET YOUR BUM WET AGAIN

SAILING FOR EVERYONE

ACCESS DINGY FOUNDATION



# GET YOUR BUM WET AGAIN

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Access Dingy Foundation is an organisation that facilitates sailing for people of all abilities, at all levels. For more information contact:

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**GET YOUR BUM  
WET AGAIN**

## Foreword by Sir William Deane

I am delighted to write this Forward for *Get Your Bum Wet Again*. I am well acquainted with the wonderful work of the Access Dinghy Foundation and am privileged to have personally met many of the contributors to this little book.

Australia has always been a country where we help our neighbours and open our hearts to those in need. At the Australian Access Dinghy Championships in Canberra, I have witnessed the skill, excitement and pride of the sailors, the enthusiasm and dedication of the hundreds of volunteers and the admiration of the spectators. The Access Dinghy Foundation and Sailability improves the lives of many people throughout Australia and, indeed, the world.

The short stories contained in this book are written by the sailors, their carers, families and volunteers. They are motivating and thought provoking, often poignant, yet always with a large measure of humour. *Get Your Bum Wet Again* reminds us of some of the important things in life — of generosity, of courage, of friendship, of true achievement, of the sheer enjoyment of life even in circumstances of often profound disadvantage.

I hope you, the reader, obtain both pleasure and inspiration from *Get Your Bum Wet Again*.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "William Deane". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

Sir William Deane

## Access Dinghy Foundation Trustees



*back left to right: Chris Mitchell, Sir William Deane, Neil Anderson  
front left to right: Jackie Kay, Zoltan Pegan*

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# Chris Mitchell

## Designer of Access Dinghies

### Chris Mitchell



*Chris Mitchell*

Chris Mitchell, designer of Access Dinghies, is a visionary when it comes to promoting the concept of sailing for everyone. When Chris talks about it being possible for anyone to sail — he means just that — ANYONE can sail an Access Dinghy.

As a youngster growing up on the shores of Port Phillip Bay in Melbourne, Chris' mother, Peg, recounts many tales of his escapades. Hilarious as they are now, no doubt they would have been extremely testing and frustrating for any mother to cope with. Even as a pre-schooler Chris had an extraordinary passion for building sailing craft. As he

matured from childhood to adolescence and then manhood, his boats developed from simple rafts to sailing vessels of various shapes and sizes.

Peg, laughing now, tells of the time her back fence was turned into a raft, and of numerous occasions her broom handles disappeared to be used for a higher purpose — as masts. Perhaps the funniest tale is the time Peg was driving home from work. In the distance she saw a small sailing boat with a brightly coloured sail out on the Bay. As she got closer her interest turned to horror when she realised that the bright little sail was in fact her brand new orange floral bed sheet. Chris had struck again!

*Chris Mitchell*



At the age of eight Chris built an 8ft catamaran; at 15 he half built a half scale version of a famous turn of the century trans-Atlantic sailer (luckily this vessel was never completed), and at 23 built a seven metre cruising yacht and sailed off to South East Asia. This little ship was eventually wrecked on the Indian Ocean coast of Java. If he had been one more mile to the East it would have been Nusa Kambangan, Indonesia's notorious prison island — where he probably belonged anyway! Chris lived in South East Asia on and off for 20 years, much of that time was spent developing the perfect sailing tender that is the predecessor of the Access Dinghy.

Chris' concept is to simplify sailing so that non-sailors find the ease, comfort and fun of Access Dinghies irresistible. The boats are not designed specifically for people with disabilities — they are designed to appeal to every non-sailor, regardless of ability. Chris believes that people need to be encouraged into any new activity, not feeling threatened with confusing rules and jargon, then rewarded with a dunking.

Chris' concept for Access Dinghies is to keep sailing fun, safe and inexpensive. The motivation comes from seeing people of all abilities and backgrounds sailing Access Dinghies together, whether they are learning to sail, competing or having a social sail — just as long as they are having fun.

Jackie Kay

Update (December 2002) by Chris Mitchell

I wonder why people think Access Dinghies are specially designed for people with disabilities when we are repeatedly telling them they aren't. Let me explain it here so at least our "Get your bum wet" readers can get it right.

Universal design is designing things so everyone can use them, like large paddle light switches, wider than usual doors, and ramps instead of steps. These minor changes can make life a lot easier not only for disabled people but for everyone, from small children through to their grandparents, and what about mothers with prams, they aren't disabled are they, but how are they supposed to negotiate steps? It can even be argued that many people are made disabled by the thoughtlessness of architects who designed narrow doors and put those steps in the way.

Universal design is just sensible design which doesn't discriminate against anybody, and Access Dinghies are a terrific example of universal design. And so is Sailability a great example of universal design as its a program which is accessible by everyone.

Actually, Access Dinghies are designed to appeal particularly to non sailors, that huge majority of the population who would love to have a go at sailing but perceive it to be too athletic, complicated and too expensive. We are out to make sailing accessible to everyone, and to me its very simple, because when little boats like Access Dinghies are used more universally as entry level craft we will bring a lot of new people into sailing and it wont be declining in popularity as it is today. And not only will we turn around the decline in sailing, but, because our boats can be sailed by everyone, we will be providing a totally integrated recreational opportunity that includes people with any sort of disability. Now that would be something, and isn't it what disabled people want, to be able to participate alongside everyone else?

That is such an elegant solution you'd think it was obvious to everyone, but for some reason it isn't and you'd be surprised at the number of sailors who cant see it, come to think of it, its usually sailors who say Access Dinghies are designed specially for disabled people. I wonder why?



# Barbara Anderson

## Volunteer: Sailability Dobroyd

### Barbara Anderson's story

From December 1994 to April 1995, my husband Neil Anderson (I call him Andy) and I were doing a personal development course called 'Self Expression and Leadership'. As part of the course, we took on projects in our communities. While I was organising events and fund-raising for the Hunger Project, with the goal to end hunger on the planet, Andy was organising a day to take people with disabilities sailing.

We supported each other in our projects. Andy came to the Hunger Project sessions, and of course I was a part of the first 'Come

and Try' sailing day at Dobroyd Aquatic Club in late April 1995. Not being a past sailor as Andy was, I'm not sure how useful I was around the boats and the wind on that first day. But I remember cooking the sausages, and setting up a picnic blanket and making sausage sandwiches for our guests.

I met and chatted with lots of wonderful people, assisted some in getting to the toilets (we had Port-a-Loo's that day), helped getting people in and out of boats, and whatever else was needed.

Jokingly to friends, I say Andy's project is the project that went horribly wrong! It was supposed to be a one-day sailing, and of course it's become a regular event and a club with over 50 members, among 11 other clubs across NSW! We're involved nearly every other



*Barbara and Neil Anderson*

Sunday for seven or eight months of the year at Dobroyd. My role now is varied, from helping to get the boats out of the shed (and putting them away later), rigging them up (I've nearly got all the bits right), driving the rescue boat (after doing a course and getting my license the second summer), taking new sailors sailing or helping at the registration table as required.

I'm not on the committee due to work and study commitments, but I was the Membership Secretary for some time and assisted with setting up the first database. Andy is amazing with his continued commitment to Sailability and I support him while he spends endless hours on the phone or attending meetings. I'm sort of a Sailability secretary when people phone while I'm at home working.

Some of my great memories are while driving the rescue boat and generally, all the huge smiles on people's faces as they enjoy the freedom on the water. And one day, following Bluey and telling him not to go to the shallows, and then he does a perfect turn around a pole — I'm sure just to remind me that he does know what he's doing! And there's Kate's jokes, and Rhonda's laugh and sailing with Rhonda in the National Championships and winning our division. And the shiver that so often goes through my body when I see things like vision impaired Justin sailing solo with headphones on getting some tips from Wayne in his wheel chair on the bank.

Sometimes on Sunday mornings I don't like it when the alarm goes off. But then I'm up and into my Dobroyd T-shirt and off and always have the best day, coming home exhausted and knowing I'm making a difference in other's lives.

Update (December 2002)

Since writing my original story for *Get Your Bum Wet*, a lot has happened. I'd like to share two of the highlights and achievements over the past 4 years that I have been involved in.

One major area is the growth of sailing for women with disabilities. In 1999/2000 Jackie Kay and I took on a joint project to increase the number of female sailors who sailed competitively. Jackie did lots

of work around policy and I was fortunate to go to Cadiz, Spain and meet and learn from 6 international female sailors who were competing in the World Disabled Sailing competition there. I also spoke at the Sailors Forum to 100 people.

Over the next 12 months Jackie and I implemented several initiatives including a special female only racing workshop and generally encouraged more women to enter into competitions. In February 2000, a major sailing event was conducted at the Access Dinghy Championships in Canberra. 3 world records were broken including the highest number of disabled female sailors ever competing in a regatta. The number of women sailing and competing continues to increase with more Aussie women than men in Japan just last month. Go the girls!

The second area that I am passionate about is sailing for the Vision Impaired (ie. Blind). In Spain we met an Italian man who had developed a “beeping buoy” system so blind people can sail on their own by listening to the sounds of the buoys. We met again in Sydney in 2000 and the Italians demonstrated the system on Sydney Harbour. 2 blind sailors, Wayne Thomson and Don Scott got interested and in September 2001, Neil and I took them to Italy to compete in the Homerus competition. To everyone’s surprise they won the gold! Again in 2002 we returned to Italy with Wayne and Don, as well as Paul Borg from Victoria, and Mikel Oko from Japan, to compete again. The blind sailors say it is the best thing they have ever experienced. It is amazing and very inspiring to be a part of this project. Also during 2002 we were able to purchase the beeping system and begin to set up autonomous blind sailing in Australia. We expect this to really grow over the coming years.

I continue to be absolutely passionate about Sailability, Access Dinghies, and all that comes with this part of my life. I know how much I have grown as a person through my involvement over the past 7 years, and I continue to be totally inspired by the people I meet and what they are up to in their lives.



# Neil Anderson

## President: Sailability NSW

### Neil Anderson's Story

I have been asked to write about how I became involved with Sailability. In December 1994 I was participating in a personal development course. The course was based around each participant undertaking a project in the community that would have them stretch themselves.

I read an article about 'Sailors with Disabilities' and their planned participation in the Sydney to Hobart race. I decided that my project would be to arrange to take some people with disabilities sailing for a day. I had been a sailor when I was younger but had never really had much contact with people with disabilities. I decided organising a day out on the harbour would be a challenge for me.

When I discussed my idea at the course, a fellow participant, Michael Beck, suggested that I contact a Dr. Phil Vardy, as he was a sailor with a disability who might be able to give me 'some assistance'.

Little did I know what I was in for when I phoned this Dr. Vardy to discuss my idea. Anyway, in May'95, after many meetings with Phil, we organised a 'Come and Try' sailing day at the Dobroyd Aquatic Club. We had three Access Dinghies brought up by Chris Mitchell from Melbourne and Phil brought his Trailer Sailer also. To see Phil rig his own boat by himself was the start of many amazing sights for me that day.

I had contacted Gill Brown from the Northcott Society and organised for her to bring along some of the young people that she worked with to try sailing. Phil told me he had contact with a lady by the name of Jackie Kay at the Ryde Rehabilitation Centre and that she had people that she would like to bring along as well if that was O.K. I learnt later that it was lucky I didn't say no!

I had only seen a picture of an Access Dinghy before that day and was surprised by the size of them when Chris arrived. I had a friend helping me on the day, Paul Taylor, and Paul said "We're not going to put people with disabilities in those little boats are we?" I said "Apparently we are."

Gill was also a little sceptical at first, but Jackie had seen the boats before and was very excited about getting her people out on the water. We weren't rushed by people wanting to get into the dinghies at first, but once we had the first three people out on the water we had a

queue of people wanting to try.

As I have said I had not really had any contact with people with disabilities at that time and had no idea on how to lift or even socialise with people with disabilities. Gill and Jackie were great and I soon realised that all I had to do was say “Hi!” and things would progress naturally from there.

It was a long day of lifting people in and out of boats, raising centreboard after centreboard, but I will never forget the smiles on the faces of the sailors as they came back into shore. The excitement they expressed at being able to sail was just fantastic to see. The day was a great success and the first question asked by Jackie and Gill was “when are we going to have the next one?”

Well it is now three years later and Jackie, Phil and I have helped organise many ‘next times’ over that time. I still get a tear in my eye when I think back to that first day and remember the smiles — heck, I still get a tear in my eye when I see the smiles each sailing day I attend now.

I have met so many great people and made so many great friends since becoming a part of Sailability, that I wonder what my life would be like had I not read that article back in December ’94! My wife, Barbara, and both sets of parents are involved, along with other friends from time to time, at the Dobroyd branch, and they also say what a difference it makes in their lives. If anyone is reading this and they’re wondering whether they could get something out of being associated with Sailability, then all I can say is ‘give it a try’. It may be life altering for you as it has been for me.

Happy sailing. Maybe I’ll see you on the water one day.

Update (December 2002)

I was re-reading “Get Your Bum Wet” volume 1 when I saw Dorothy Dobson’s story titled “Peace, Perfect Peace”. Dorothy started this story off with “Am I dreaming?”

Dorothy's question brought a smile to my face straight away as I thought to myself "maybe I am dreaming"!! At times I think I must be dreaming when I think about what has happened with Sailability over the last 7 years.

When I think back 7 years to that first "Come and Try" day and look at the way Sailability has grown since then I smile, shake my head and say to myself "I must be dreaming".

As President of Sailability NSW for the last 6 years I have been able to watch the growth of Sailability throughout Australia and the world. It has been a real privilege to be involved with this organization over the last 7 years.

Sailability is more than "getting your bum wet". It is about human growth and allowing people to express themselves in ways that they may not have been able to do otherwise. I know how much Sailability has allowed me to grow and I never cease to be amazed at the development I see within people through their involvement with Sailability. This happens both on and off the water and often has nothing to do with the actual sailing aspect of our organization.

I know my life has changed dramatically as a result of my involvement with Sailability. I have met so many great and inspiring people over the last few years that I can hardly believe how lucky I have been to be called a friend by so many of them.

I wish to thank everyone that has helped make Sailability what it is today and what it will grow to become in the future - whatever that may be. Everyone that has participated in a Sailability event has contributed to the growth of our organization.

Let's keep "Dreaming" about what is going to happen over the next few years and then laugh about it as our "dreams" come true.

Happy dreaming - see you on the water some time!!! Neil.



# Louise Bannister

## Sailability ACT

### Spirit of Lisa

My best friend, Lisa, passed away on the 2nd of November 1997, after losing her eight-month battle with infection. Lisa was just three weeks off her 37th birthday. She had multiple disabilities (including cerebral palsy) – none of which managed to



*Louise Bannister*

dampen her spirit to enjoy life to its fullest. Her life philosophy was that you could excel in anything you set your mind to.

I discovered Sailability at the ARATA (Australian Rehabilitation and Assistive Technology Association) Conference three weeks later. Here, two very nice and highly persuasive people (Deborah and Sally) convinced me to come along to the YMCA Sailing Club on the following Saturday to have a go in an Access 2.3 Dinghy. I did turn up on Saturday morning, met a great group of very enthusiastic people, and had my first sailing lesson — I was hooked! Eight weeks later I found myself competing in the National Championships for Access 2.3 Dinghies. *I think Lisa would definitely approve!*

I'd better introduce myself. My name is Louise, I am a 34 (and a half) year old mother, married with one child, and I too have mild cerebral palsy. My husband, Bob, and three year old daughter (*nearly four now*, she tells me!) have been very supportive of my newfound sailing exploits. Bob and Sarah have spent many hours patiently waiting on the shore of Lake Burley Griffin while I practice hard and just recently

they have both been ‘brave’ enough to allow me to take them out on the lake for a ‘spin’. It may sound funny but I never dreamt that it would be possible for me to partake in a *sporting* activity with Sarah, I thought that I would always remain the cheering spectator, and Bob would have to be the one to take on the sporting instructor’s role. However, Sarah now draws pictures of ‘Mummy and her boat’ and proudly tells her Pre-school teachers that “Mummy takes me sailing in her boat”!

Sailing was always something on my ‘If only I could... maybe one day’ list. I didn’t really believe I would ever really do it. Sailing is such a buzz! It is not possible to put into words the exhilaration you get from the feeling of total freedom of being out on the water: just you, the boat, the water and the breeze. The challenge of trying to accurately read the winds so you can complete a designated course; the satisfaction of being able to get out of ‘trouble’ when you misjudge the wind direction; and the sudden realisation that you are actually beginning to understand and absorb a little of the sailing knowledge that those in the know have been trying to impart to you, is a great feeling. I’ve still got an awful long way to go but I’ve begun the journey... and I’m loving it!

*Sarah, Bob  
and Louise*



# Ame Barnbrook

## Narooma Aquatic Club

### Ame's Story

*Ame Barnbrook  
and Governor  
General, Sir Wil-  
liam Deane*



Ame was born with no arms and only half a leg. She uses her three toes for eating, writing and fulfilling her passion for sailing. Ame won a silver medal at the 1997 National Access Dinghy Championships held in Canberra.

Ame listened to Chris and won Gold at the National Access Dinghy Championships, Canberra 1998, and the Aspect Access Dinghy Australian National Championship, Canberra 1999.

*Ame Barnbrook*



I am writing to tell you how I felt  
When I first went sailing.

It was on the waranga Basin  
there wasn't much wind and  
Mum and Dad were close by and I  
just floated around.

The National Championships in  
Canberra was way different, I was racing  
and the wind was much stronger.  
I was scared at first but got  
braver. Mum and Dad were far away

I didn't mind, I felt safe. The boat was  
really easy to steer. Twice the boat  
tipped and the sail touched the  
water. Once I learn all the tricks to  
sailing and I listen to what Chris  
says, I'd like to go in the next Olympics.  
I can sail better than Kate and Robert.  
I was very happy when I received  
my Silver medal from Kay  
Cotte. Just think if I listen  
to Chris next time I might win  
Gold.



# **Garry Brotherton**

## **Principal, Anson Street School, Orange - Australia**

### **Sailing inspirational for students**

“Inspiring” is the word Principal Garry Brotherton uses to describe a sailing program which offers students with disabilities a chance to feel the exhilaration of life on the water.

The students at Anson Street School, located in Orange in NSW central west began sailing last year and the program has become a roaring success. Anson Street School caters for 50 students with intellectual and physical disabilities and all the students have been involved in the sailing program.

“I’ve been teaching 25 years and this is one of the best initiatives I’ve seen for kids with disabilities,” Mr Brotherton said. “It is totally inclusive. Any student who attends our school, even those students with high support needs, can be involved and I can’t find another recreational activity that is so inclusive. Most of the other sports and recreational activities are amended to such a point that they don’t resemble the same game.”

The key to the program’s success is the use of the Access Dinghies, craft designed especially to enable people with disabilities to become fully functioning sailors. During the summer months the school sails every Friday at Carcoar Dam which is south of Orange. The program enables all students at the school several opportunities to sail each month.

Under the careful guidance of sailing instructor Timothy Hone and school staff, many of the students have become proficient sailors. A highlight for some of the students was attending the Australian Access Championships in March 2002 at Lake Tuggeranong in Canberra. The students sailed against other teams from Japan, New Zealand, Singapore and Canada. More than 70 craft took part in the regatta, ranging from top international crews to fledgling competitors. At the end of the five race series, Anson Street student Nicholas Sherlock-Jones and sailing instructor Timothy Hone, emerged as novice division champions.

Mr Brotherton believes the success of the program extends well beyond competition and physical activity. “The motion of the boat across

the water, the sound of the waves and wind through the sails has great therapeutic value.” Mr Brotherton said. “Sailing also allows the students to develop a variety of skills from learning to rig the boat to the development of teamwork and communication.”

The school played a role in establishing a branch of Sailability. This local branch of Sailability has now grown and offers adults and children from other centres such as Cowra and Bathurst week-end sailing opportunities. Community members who have a disability can now pursue a sport that previously they could not have taken part in.

As with any successful program a number of individuals and organizations have contributed to the sailing program at the school. These include, the staff at Anson Street School, the parents and school community, Timothy Hone and Sailability Orange, Carcoar Dam Sailing Club and many other service clubs and community members who have supported the program. Their initiative and support has provided a wonderful opportunity for children at Anson Street School.

Comments about sailing from some of the students at Anson Street:

“I like sailing because it’s cool.” *Leigh (13)*

“I like feeling the wind in my hair.” *Jean (17)*

“I like trailing my hand in the water.” *Gavin (8)*



*Students Jean Field with Louise Jones at Carcoar Dam*



*Orange team at 2001 Nationals*



# David Burrell

## Lilydale Lake

### Cloud Nine

I was born with a rare condition called arthrogryposis, also known as ‘brittle bones’. I am confined to an electric wheelchair all the time. At least I thought I would be, until I discovered Sailability and Access Dinghies. I went along to a ‘Come and Try’ day at Lilydale Lake in Melbourne and there I met Chris Mitchell who had designed the dinghies. I was a bit nervous about having a go but once I got into the electric dinghy all my nerves vanished. I felt a marvellous sense of freedom that I had never experienced before. For once I was out of my wheelchair and I never wanted to get back into it.



*David Burrell*

I was hooked on sailing! Of course I had a lot to learn but the motivation was there. Chris asked me whether I’d like to compete in the National Championships in Canberra on Lake Burley Griffin and I thought I’d have a go to gain experience. The first heats were held on the Saturday. You can imagine how excited I was when I even managed to win a race, especially when the electric boat enabled me to compete against able-bodied as well as disabled sailors, something which I didn’t think I’d ever be able to do. The next day I couldn’t believe it when I found out that I had won a gold medal for the servo assisted boats. Also it was such an honour to have Kay Cottee present the medal — and if that wasn’t enough I also won the Greg Mott perpetual trophy. This award meant a great deal to me as I had been inspired by Greg after seeing the video that featured him. I left Canberra on cloud nine knowing there is no way I will ever give up sailing and that I will always be grateful to Chris for designing such a great little boat which has opened up a whole new life for me.



## Kevin Buxton

### President: Sailability Belmont 16's

#### Sailability Comes to Belmont



*Kevin Buxton instructing*

It was in February 1997 when I first heard of Sailability when I was volunteered (or shanghaied) to organise and give instructions to people with disabilities. The only disability that I am aware I have is deafness, because whenever someone calls “Volunteers take one step forward” all but me take one step back and I have volunteered again!

All that was required of me was to arrange rescue boats, life jackets, and to give sailing instruction on the water — not much different to what I do most days of the week.

The ‘Come and Try’ day arrived, rescue boats launched, life jackets ready, barbecue ready for whoever would turn up. About 9.30am the buses and cars turned up (and turned up) and as they disembarked I beheld what I did not suspect; most of the passengers were in wheelchairs, some para’s — some quads, some being pushed in chairs, others with electric controls, some with walking aids, others physically assisted.

Good Lord K.B.! What have you let yourself in for...this is mission impossible! But then the three Access Dinghies from Pittwater turned up, and after they were rigged and the simplicity of their rigs was explained to me ...well, my second thoughts were...maybe it could be possible!

Then participants were transferred from their chairs or whatever to the boats, given basic instruction — “Go right — go left” or “Pull rope on — let rope off” and the participants became sailors — out on their very own for the first time in their lives. Away from their chairs — their Carers — doing their own thing – and loving the new sense of freedom for the first time in their lives. And loving it! By now I had decided, “Yes this is possible.” Oh what a day it was — 28 participants enjoyed their first sail and it was decided to have a second day the following month to cater for those that missed out, and 38 more were lucky enough to have their first sail.



*The first of many buses*

I have been sailing for over 50 years, instructed and coached sailing for more than 28 years, but these would have been my hardest days on the water — just imagine doing this instructing with a tear in my eye and a big lump in my throat — but to see the looks on the faces of these newcomers made it more than worthwhile to all that attended, whether they sailed or just looked on.

The morning after Day 1 I was approached by the Club’s ever-observant neighbour wanting to find out what crazy sailing I was involved in the day before. He was so impressed he offered to sponsor a boat. An

hour later a benevolent Director offered to sponsor a second and the Club a third — enough to start Sailability at Belmont. Our first three boats were christened on 25th June, our Sailability Club was formed and we started a regular sailing program with about 160 participating in our first year. We sailed 107 days and our fleet increased to seven boats and we hope to have a fleet of ten by the coming summer. All this fun sailing was made possible by a great group of volunteers who turned up regularly and enjoyed the experience as much as the participants.

Their motto or philosophy is — ‘Nothing is impossible — we just have to think of different ways of doing it.’

## Sailing Lizards!

The Upper Hunter Peer Link from the Scone and Muswellbrook area would have to be the most enthusiastic sailing group in Australia. Their ages range from six years to whatever and they have a two hour bus trip from the Valley to Belmont for a day’s sailing with Belmont Sailability. Two of the youngest participants had to be coached in a twin-seater for their first sail and this is how the instruction went...

**Instructor:** “We steer the boat with the joystick. If you push right the boat turns to the right — push to the left and boat goes left. Do you understand that?”



*The two Marks*

**Sailors:** They nodded their heads.

**Instructor:** “Show me — turn right” They were obviously confused and turned both ways. *Oh! I had a problem.* “Put up your right hand.” They put up both hands. *I had a problem!* Solution maybe to put tape on their hands. So I put yellow electric tape on their right wrist and red on their left wrist. “Now turn red hand.” Would you believe it – they turned right then left? “What colour is red — put up red hand.” Confusion again – they did not know colours. *What could I do? Easy ...* Pointing to a young sailor on the right hand side, “What is your name?”

**Sailor:** “Mark.”

**Instructor:** “Great – now when I want you to turn right push the joystick to Mark — O.K — now if I want you to turn left.” pointing to the left hand side sailor, “What’s your name?”

**Sailor:** “Mark.”

I could not believe it — I had struck the daily double. There just had to be a way. Well, I had noticed that Mark 1 had a plastic lizard toy that he treated as a pet and wanted to take it sailing. (He would not trust anyone to mind it — not even his mother.) I taped the lizard to the right hand sailor’s knee.

**Instructor:** “Now let’s try to sail. Turn towards the lizard, now turn away from the lizard.” Success at last — the youngsters were actually sailing. The spectators within earshot on shore must have thought that the instructor was crazy giving instructions “Go towards lizard — go away from lizard.”

Hence our motto at Belmont, ‘Nothing is impossible — Sometimes we do it a different way.’

## **James Would Love to go Sailing**

Among the regular sailors at Belmont is 10 year old James Sidebottom of Waratah’s Hunter Orthopaedic School. James was critically injured in an accident when he was seven years old. It left him a quadriplegic, reliant on life support equipment. At first he would just sit in his life supporting chair and look longingly at his young mates sailing and just wish he could do just that as well.

One day his dad approached me and said “James would love to go sailing!!!” His grandmother also supported the request by saying it was something he just dreamt about constantly. James just looked at me with pleading eyes that made it hard to say no, even though it seemed an impossible task. So, we had a long think tank as to how it could be done — it may be possible and there has to be another way.

The access dinghy could not hold all his equipment and chair, but maybe if the boat could become his support — Maybe... Well, we launched the two seater with his chair next to it, while his nurse sat in the boat. James was transferred onto his nurse’s lap with the aid of manual support equipment, and his dad transferred the more sophisticated equipment from chair to boat and then took his spot on the second seat, and off they went for their first sail. What a day it was for young James, out sailing at last, having the same fun as his mates without a care in the world and the biggest smile on his face said everything that made it a most satisfying experience for all concerned.

That was his first sail and now it is a regular weekly event for him. We look forward to him turning up each Wednesday to enjoy his sail with his mates.



*James  
Sidebottom*



# Annette Ciardi

## Secretary/Treasurer, Volunteer: Dobroyd Sailability

### The Right Attitude



*Hans Hill*

**I**t was January 1996; my brother rang and asked me if I would like to watch him sail in a race. I thought to myself, ‘Hans sail! Well, this I have to see!’ So I phoned my friend Mary, and asked if she would like to go to Canberra in February. I didn’t see my brother as often as I would like as he lived in Melbourne and I lived in Sydney. We got together as often as we could and this was just another excuse to see my brother.

What Hans neglected to tell me at the time was that he was sailing in the Inaugural Access Dinghy National Championships for Sailability. I thought I was going to see my brother get really disappointed in a sailing race. I didn’t think he could race — let alone have any chance of coming anywhere in the first three. Anyway, I went down to Canberra with Mary. Hans was nowhere to be seen and there were disabled people everywhere. I didn’t know what was going on. I saw this disabled man being helped in from the boat — he had the biggest smile I had ever seen!

He had just won his race. His name was Steve Reidy-Crofts. Mary took a photo, we thought it was just amazing! I finally found Hans who had competed in the same race as Steve. I think he came third. That didn't matter at the time, I just wanted to know what was going on. I had tears in my eyes and I was just so thrilled that I could be there. My brother came third in his division and his team won the competition. Steve won all sorts of medals and it was just the best thing I've ever been involved with.

That afternoon Hans asked us to go for a sail and we sailed around until dusk and I was just so happy. I have a photo from that day which is displayed in my wall unit for everyone to see. Hans was a diabetic and had some major complications. He had kidney failure and by the second regatta he had lost his left eye. He had been deaf in his left ear since he was very little. He found it very difficult to dodge people in the boats.

I told Hans I would race in the second regatta and I was really looking forward to it. I wanted to get involved in Sailability in a bigger way, but living in Wollongong at the time it was hard to get to the events. I went to a few at Dobroyd, but not many. By the time the second regatta was on I was pregnant and didn't feel comfortable sailing, let alone racing. So I watched. Hans finally got me in a boat but I didn't race. I said "Next year Hans I promise." We hoped he'd get first overall the next year.

22nd November 1997 and the diabetes finally beat Hans. He went to a better place and I miss him dearly. I have been involved with Sailability Dobroyd for a while now. I had decided when I had my son that I would move back to Sydney and be more involved. Matthew and I really enjoyed the Sundays at Sailability.

February 1998 and the regatta was on again. I made a promise the year before and I intended to keep it. I enrolled in the races and off I went to Canberra. Hans had donated a boat to Sailability called *Attitude Software* and I decided that I would sail in 'his' boat on the first day — it was a two-seater. Well, the first race I went nowhere. I was so distraught. I thought 'I am just no good at this'. In the afternoon we had another race and it was soooo windy, but I thought 'I want to do this.' So I got into the Attitude boat and out I went. The hooter went and we were off!

It was so windy and I was so scared. I held onto the ropes for grim life. Little did I know that was the wrong thing to do — I should have let the ropes out. As a result the boat tipped and it started filling with water. And it kept on filling and kept on filling, until my sunscreen was floating off into oblivion and I was swimming in my boat! The rescue boat gave me a bucket to scoop out the water and they asked if I wanted to stay but I decided to call it a quits for the day. I had lost all my confidence and I was soaked to the core. I came in and all I could do was laugh. It was then that I realised what Sailability was all about. It wasn't sailing to win — it was sailing for fun. FOR EVERYONE.

So on the Sunday off I went again, but this time in a single seater. I came seventh in the first race, fourth in the second and second in the last race. I had a few tips and the wind was up and I wasn't holding on any more — I was sailing. I came seventh overall in my division but I had the time of my life.

Chris Mitchell, Jackie Kay and Steve Curry from Access Dinghies decided not to give flowers for Hans' funeral. Instead, they donated a perpetual trophy for the regatta for volunteers. Bruce Colby won the trophy for the first year. Since Hans' death I have thrown myself into Sailability and will continue to do so. I am currently the Secretary and Treasurer of Dobroyd and I am helping with the procedures and the consolidation of branches within NSW.

Hans taught me that no matter what cards you are dealt with in life you have to play them to the best of your ability. Don't give up and don't give in. Enjoy your life. Hans worked hard for what he achieved and in the end it wasn't for him but for everyone else. He knew he didn't have long to live. He set up the database for Sailability and just days after he died was awarded the 'Victorian Disabled Businessman of the Year.' He didn't give up and he didn't give in, he enjoyed his life and he loved. I want to be just like him. Sailability helps me to achieve that.



## Lindsay & Maria Dalmon

### Sailability Pittwater

Who would have thought I'd be sailing.



*Lindsay and Maria Dalmon*

**M**y husband, Lindsay, came home from work one day and promptly announced we were going sailing. My immediate reply was “Oh yes, darling, that will be nice”, thinking he will be sailing and I will be sitting on the shore under a shady tree. How wrong I was!

Hi, my name is Maria Dalmon. Lindsay and I both were born with Cerebral Palsy. We were married in 1986 and despite our disabilities we are able to live very independently in our own home. Lindsay is able to drive a car. Independence is very important to us both.

Many years ago, Lindsay owned a powerboat and was the first person with a disability in NSW to hold a powerboat licence. He was excited and eager to get back on the water, but as for me, the closest I had come to boats was riding on the Manly ferry.

The day came to go sailing. Arriving at Narrabeen Lakes I saw many people with various disabilities enjoying them, sailing in quite small

boats on the lake. I was amazed to see they didn't seem to have any fear of falling in the water. I found this hard to believe. Allan Jones, the then Commodore of Bayview Yacht Racing Association and Commodore of a newly formed club for sailors with disabilities, "Sailability Pittwater", met us.

Allan explained that these newly designed boats, the Access 2.3, were specially made for disabled people. Allan invited Lindsay to sail with him in a double. It wasn't long before Lindsay was transferred to a single 2.3 and sailing. Allan then asked me to come for a sail with him. I was very reluctant to go and told Allan I knew nothing at all about sailing. Allan's reply was "I'll teach you".

After being lifted into the boat, with Allan sitting beside me, I was pleased to find a joystick to steer the boat with; it was so easy. Allan taught me about the different parts of the boat, how the main can control the sails, about wind direction and how to tack.

Before long Allan gave me the control of the boat and I WAS SAILING BY MYSELF. Allan then took me back to shore, put me in a single boat, and with Allan giving me instructions from the rescue boat, I was sailing. It was a wonderful feeling to be on the water on my own. Knowing I was in control. I will never forget that day.

We joined Sailability Pittwater in 1996 and have been sailing regularly at Rowland Reserve, Bayview since. Today play an active role on Sailability Pittwater's committee.

In 1997 we were asked to sail in our first National Championships on Lake Burley Griffin, Canberra. We decided to team up for this and entered in the 2.3 doubles division. We had a fantastic time and despite getting a wet bum after being swamped, got our first taste of competition racing. The following year, we once again teamed up for the 2.3 double divisions, but this time came first. It will always be one of my cherished memories, being presented with our medal (and kissed on the cheek) by Sir William Dean, Governor General of Australia.

In September 1997, we were invited to sail with the members

of Bayview Yacht Racing Association. This was a chance for us, sailors with a disability, to be integrated. We joined in weekly competition and sailed with the novices. The other members are wonderful, always willing to give us a hand. We sailed in “Wattle”, a double 2.3, but found it hard to control in the more open waters. We quite often found ourselves “in irons”, being swamped, or sailing backwards, and never really finished the course.

We had heard that Chris Mitchell had designed a new boat, the 303. We thought this might be more suitable for us and arranged for Chris to let us try one. We loved it. So much faster, and easier to control. In September 1998, we purchased our beloved ‘WEE TWO’ a yellow 303. We have since joined the Bayview Racing Yacht Association and sailed with the Mirrors every Sunday during the sailing season. Recently Sailability Pittwater purchased two more 303’s, and now we can compete against our own class within the Club’s racing fleet.

Since joining Sailability Pittwater in 1996, we have participated in many Inter-Club, State, National and International competitions. We have also lost! It’s fun! It is great to meet with friends and share the comradeship with other sailors, especially on the water. We have met so many people and are grateful to the many wonderful volunteers who help us.

In October this year (2002) we are joining a team of disabled sailors who will be representing Australia in an International regatta in Osaka, Japan.

Who would have thought I would be sailing, let alone competing at any level. Sailability has given Lindsay and me a sport we can enjoy together, a sport where disabilities are forgotten, and it’s your sailing expertise that counts.



# Robert Digby

## Sailability ACT

### I Think Sailing is a Gas!

**Hi!** I am Rob Digby. This is my story which has been put together by my Mum and Dad for me. I am 25 years old and I have a form of cerebral palsy. I am also deaf. I enjoy sailing with Sailability in Access dinghies on Lake Burley Griffin. Mum and Dad discovered this form of sailing at the 1998 ARATA Conference. They were invited to ‘Come and Try’ with me one Saturday morning. When we arrived we met Debbie who had been the lady minding the conference display stall. At this stage I was mystified at what was going on. I had never been for a ride in such a small boat and never in one that had a sail. I had only seen them in books, not close up. Dad was told that he was taking me out in the boat.



*Robert Digby*

He knew as much about sailing as I did. Anyway, after putting on our PFDs, (Personal Flotation Devices) Dad got in first and then some volunteers lifted me into the boat. I was a bit nervous. Off we went. Mum went in the safety boat and took some photos. Dad was getting instructions from someone in the safety boat. Anyway, after an hour or so we found ourselves back at the pontoon where we started. It was a real gas. This was something new. I liked it. I wanted more. Since that first day I have been out in the boat with Amber, Terry, Chris and Bill. I took part in the ACT Championships with Terry. (I think Terry may have upset the balance of the boat.) Once again I found it to be a gas. During the sailing off-season, we attended some theory classes that were run by Terry. Mum and Dad have tried to pass this information on to me using other methods such as signing and symbols. Dad has been working on some ‘Compics’ symbol charts to help others to communicate with me in sailing terms. At the same time, Bill and others have been looking at alternative seating for me. I have not gone solo yet but I hope this will happen one day. I think that sailing is a gas.



## Dorothy Dobson

### Sailability Pittwater

#### Canberra, Me and the Access Dinghy Championships



*Dorothy Dobson*

I was unsure about competing in the Access Dinghy Championships in Canberra as my control was still not working properly. But I knew Brian wanted to go and so did I, despite his broken arm still getting used to being out of plaster. There were forms still waiting to be filled out and sent, so I did that very quickly! Now to get an attendant to come with us as well as Vince. I found one, Raeleen!

Brian and I couldn't have much training. Firstly, because of Brian's broken arm and secondly my control still wasn't right, but at last we were set to go, thanks to a lot of work and perseverance from Allan Jones and Vince Formosa.

At last the day arrived and we set off to Canberra. We settled at the Motel and went to register for the two days of competitive sailing.

On Saturday morning Vince picked us up and we headed off to the clubhouse at Lake Burley Griffin for breakfast. I was too nervous to eat, as all I could hear whirling around in my head were the words of Chris Mott. After we had paid our respects to his brother, Greg, he said, "I know you will win one in Canberra for Greg, Dot!" These words were to stay with me throughout my four heats that day.

I did badly and was very upset. Later Allan and Vince told me that everybody had a bad day as the wind had been changing direction all day.

Sunday was a beautiful day. The wind was just right. After our briefing, John Gordon took me out in a boat with him to show me how to stay on the starting line. This helped me a lot and made me realise that even if I didn't get anywhere, I was competing and it was FUN!

Back on the shore there was another surprise waiting for me. I was placed in the green boat that Greg used to use instead of my blue one. Surely they had made a mistake, but NO! Chris Mitchell who had made a new control for Greg walked over to me and asked me if I would like to try it for my four heats? My feelings changed and I used the control with pride. In my mind Greg was there, helping me!

At the end of the day when everyone was waiting for prizes to be given out by Kay Cottee, my name was called for third place in the electric boat division. As Vince wheeled me up to receive my medal I couldn't help thinking that it WAS THE CONTROL that had helped me come third in my division because it had a special meaning for me.



*Dorothy Dobson*

## **Peace, Perfect Peace**

Am I dreaming? Looking back at the shoreline I can see a black object becoming smaller. MY WHEELCHAIR!!

It is hard for me to believe I am really sailing a 2.3m long and 1.2m wide electric Access Dinghy alone. My reason for finding it hard to believe it was me actually sailing and not a dream, is the fact that I have cerebral palsy and only have very limited use of my right hand, making this sport yet another challenge for me. I know I can do better, but who cares? NOT ME! I am alone and doing something like other people.

I had sailed one of these dinghies before. That was different! I knew I was only having a bit of fun and to see if this was something that I could really put my mind to. Not only for fun but also to compete in competitions with other disabled and non-disabled people.

Early 1996 saw people with disabilities in the Pittwater area wanting their own club, so with the help of a lot of dedicated people, the club is now up and running. Up and running because of people such as Vince Formosa, Recreation Officer, Alan Jones, Commodore of Sailability Pittwater Club, and every other equally important person involved with the club.

I can't stop talking about sailing and how the control, which was made for my own special needs, is so wonderful. Nobody can understand the wonderful, exciting and fulfilling feeling I get when people lift me out of my wheelchair and into the dinghy,

**I AM IN CONTROL!** The wind, the dinghy and me ...Sailing!



# Tom Dow

## Sailability Belmont 16s

**Thank You: by Barbara Dow**



*Tom Dow*

As the parent of a child who has been fortunate enough to participate in the Sailability programme since its inception at Belmont I would like to thank you and your volunteers for providing this wonderful experience for my son and others.

I must admit that when I first heard about the idea I could not conceive of how it could be done and done safely. I was so impressed and excited when I saw how it was possible. Although my son has had the opportunity to go sailing, as his father has sailed for many years, it has always been more as a passenger. The fantastic experience of skippering your own boat and being truly independent is a dream for many people with severe disabilities. The volunteers do a great job of guiding, encouraging and supervising the sailors. I gratefully appreciate their generosity of spirit and time.

I hope there will be an opportunity to expand the programme and possibly make it a weekend summer sport in the future.



# David Dowling

## Sailability ACT

### David's Challenge



*David Dowling*

About two and a half years ago Claire and I spent a couple of weeks here in Canberra and were ready to return home to Queensland when I collapsed with a stroke. My right side closed down, which meant I was unable to carry on a normal life from a wheel chair. Being right-handed, my whole life depended on right hand activities. After an eight month stay in hospital I found that there was a new life out there for me, and I began to learn about the many people who were willing to step forward and quietly help me to get back into life again and how to face it.

One day a few months ago, my Carer asked me if I would like to go sailing, and the next day I had my first time on the water. This was a new experience. Here I was in a small two-passenger sailboat wondering what it was all about. From this first attempt I was led along to that point where, on the 18th April 1998, I was put into a boat on a simulator and shown how to use the electric controls. Then I was dropped into a small one-person boat and pulled away from the jetty. There I was

on my lonesome, attempting to put into practice all the advice given to me on how to sail from point A to point B.

Fortunately with all those wonderful people about I was not left alone. There beside me was a second boat, with a chap giving me directions. I went the distance and turned back to the jetty without mishap. I just sat and thought about what I had achieved in that short sail. I did something I had not done before, with the help and encouragement of people I never knew until a few weeks ago. This whole exercise was a learning experience, and looking back I feel that I was gently led, not pushed into something new and not wanted. In one day under normal circumstances I could have gone down to the jetty, got into a boat, and ventured out onto the water and learnt the basics of sailing in a morning. I achieved something I could not do on my own, help was given that was vital to my achievement and that help was important in getting there. Just think what those people under the Sailability Tree do.

I was told that when I left hospital it would take a long time to get back to normal. Now I can see that walking is not impossible after all, no one said I could not walk and I know that I will one day.



*David Dowling — A dry run*



# Wendy Evans

## Sailability Belmont 16's

### I Am Sailing, I Am Sailing



*Wendy Evans*

For as long as I can remember I have always loved going anywhere where there is water, that is the beach, lake or river. Just because I have cerebral palsy and use an electric wheelchair for mobility, in the 39 years of my life, this has never stopped me from getting to the water. When I was young my parents owned an outboard motor boat and I used to love taking control and going round in circles.

In February 1997 I saw a notice at the Spastic Centre in Newcastle, it was a 'Come and Try' day for Sailability at Belmont. I thought to myself at the time 'Sailing, I might just go and see what's it all about.' So I did. I asked

my Dad to drop me at Belmont 16fters. Unfortunately he had to go somewhere else and couldn't stay, so I organised a lift home. It was one day I'll never forget and the start of something fantastic in my life. I had no idea about sailing, there were these small sailing boats out in the water and I thought 'Wow, that looks like fun'. Then someone asked me if I wanted to have a go in a double boat, but before I could answer I heard someone else yell out "She can go by herself." Before I knew what was happening I was being lifted out of my wheelchair and into a single boat. With a few instructions on what to do, I was pushed away from the shore and I was FREE! Now I really look forward to going sailing each week. When I am out there on the water I seem to forget that I even have a disability, for all I can think about is how much I love life and being able to do things nature's way. Sailing is teaching me how to appreciate what the world is all about. After being lifted out of the boat and back into my wheelchair, I always have this feeling that is hard to



## Chris Fisher

### Volunteer: Sailability ACT

#### Curiosity

I first noticed the Access dinghies when I came to the YMCA on Saturday mornings to help my lad rig his boat for the mid-get races.

As we worked on his mast and sail on the ground near the boat shed, I would sometimes look up to see a beefy man with a beard and a fierce look on his face pulling a



*Chris Fisher*

trolley with a funny-looking bathtub sort of boat on top of it.

After a couple of weeks of sitting around watching the midgets I also noticed a group of people sitting near the clubhouse, some of them in wheelchairs.

They seemed to have some connection with the trolley man.

Then, a bit later on — some people notice things a bit more quickly than others — I noticed Peter Thompson and a group of people working on another unusual boat.

Being quick on the uptake, I reached the conclusion that something was going on. After a new pontoon appeared at the club, I had a bit of a walk around and a think and decided that something was definitely going on. Having reached this point over some weeks by what was clearly the exercise of brilliant powers of intuition, observation and deduction, I

approached one of the officials of the Y, pointed at the pontoon and asked “What’s going on, then?”

I am not sure what happened next or why. Curiosity, I think, got the better of me. I went to have a look at the dinghies and give them a bit of a prod and a poke. I found out about the reefing system on the sails, the joysticks, the special centreboards and the stability of the boats in strong winds; I seem to recall being very favourably impressed by the dinghies and wondering why someone hadn’t come up with an idea like that a long time ago.

Somehow I found myself volunteering to help with the trolley, which I started pulling about, with a fierce look on my bearded face, just missing the tops of other people’s masts and asserting right of way over assorted dogs, swans, ducks, trailers and small persons in wetsuits. Then it was only a short step to having a sail in an Access myself and taking other people out in a two seater.

It’s easy to be enthusiastic about the boats. They are serious sailing boats; you need skill to sail them well. More importantly, they give obvious pleasure to the people for whom they are designed. Last season, we had a few ‘Come and Triers’ with special needs, for whom the Saturday morning sailing became important and whose lives were the happier and more interesting for a couple of hours plugging about on the lake. With a bit of luck and a bit of politicking maybe we’ll have those people back again.

I enjoy my Saturdays. I get some exercise, get in a bit of sailing and do some work which helps other people. I’m not too sure about this power boat business, though. Debbie made a couple of us line up for the TL3 course. I can now tell you what a green cone means if you are travelling upstream and how to tell the direction of movement of a vehicular ferry at night. I know how to say “Y1, Y1 this is Y2, over”. But power boats are such nasty, smelly, noisy things. maybe we can make Sally do all the power boat stuff and I can stick to the dinghies. I reckon that once Andrew and I have a bit more local knowledge about the holes near the



# Bill Gabriel

## Sailability ACT

### I Muck About in Little Boats



*Pat Gabriel*

And it's all Debbie's Pfitzners fault! One Thursday last year, while playing Bridge (if you can call the way I play it, Bridge) Debbie asked me if I would like to come sailing in these boats she called 2.3 Access Dinghies. I said yes. It sounded as if it might be fun. Come in sucker! I fell for it hook, line, and sinker! I am an apprentice senior (63) and have never sailed before — but I'm learning! I now know the blunt end from the sharp end, and port and starboard, (sometimes). I have competed creditably in the 1998 National Access 2.3 Dinghy Championships in Canberra, and at the Annual Wallagoot Lake Regatta in March 1998. In November 1998 I competed at the First Asia Pacific Masters Games at Southport in Queensland and won a silver medal.

But best of all I'm enjoying myself, I've made some new friends, and I've found an activity that suits me. That's not bad for an old codger who has never before been interested in a sport.

Note from Bill's wife, Pat: I'm married to a man who mucks about in little boats, and sometimes I do too. But mostly I just enjoy watching, talking to the interesting people who come to Sailability, and — collecting their stories.



# Pat Gabriel

## Volunteer: Sailability ACT

### Swans, Trees, Sails and Tea



*Pat Gabriel (behind the camera)*

I sort of drifted into being a volunteer for Sailability ACT. When Bill told me that he had been invited to go sailing by one of the MS Bridge players, Debbie, I agreed to go along with him. Mainly because we were going to lunch at our daughter's and knowing Bill, I knew that if I wasn't there he would get so involved that we would be late.

It was late November 1997 and Sailability ACT had not yet been formed. Debbie Pfitzner had arranged the 'Come and Try' morning largely as an activity for the MS Society 'Out and About' group. It was a beautiful early summer morning, warm with a slight breeze, and after being introduced to the half dozen other people present, I sat and talked with them for awhile. Then, while most of them were on the water, I went for a walk and took some photographs of the boats, the lake and the swans.

I didn't know that for the next five months the Sailability Tree would become our second home! Bill went sailing each Saturday for the rest of 1997 and I tagged along most days. I wasn't interested in sailing *per se*, but was happy to be able to help occasionally and to socialise with the people who congregated under the tree. At first I sat and talked to whoever was not sailing but gradually I began to help move the boats to and from the shed, helped to rig them, hold them while people were transferred from jetty to boat, dispensed cups of tea, looked after bags and cameras, and reminded people about hats, sun screen, and water bottles.

In January, things became a little more serious as our little group of sailors trained for the National Access 2.3 Championships to be held at the YMCA Sailing Club in February. There was more than training involved. Terry Peek found some sponsorship for T Shirts and Bill, Anna (our daughter) and I screen-printed 100 shirts for participants in the races. The championships behind us, we held our first public meeting in late February and Sailability ACT was launched. Some intensive training followed this for the Annual Wallagoot Lake Regatta later in the month — our first away from home competition! We finished our first season with a promotion for Sailability ACT at the Active Australia Fun Day at Tuggeranong Park the day after the sailing season finished. In between moving boats, holding chairs, making sure that people had life jackets, sun-screen and water bottles, cleaning boats and dispensing tea, and checking the progress of our resident swans and their cygnets, I began to write short pieces for David Hale. These found their way into the YMCA Sailing Club newsletter, *Mains 'L*, onto the Internet, into the *MS Monthly Swag*, *Sailability News*, and eventually into our own newsletter, *Telltales*.

I find the time I spend with Sailability both rewarding and satisfying. For those of us not yet disabled it is a window into what it is like not to have the mobility we take for granted. I have met many interesting people that I might not otherwise have had the opportunity to meet, and I have made so many new friends. So thank you, Allister, Amber, Debbie, Terry, Deborah, Janne, Sally, Sandra, the Davids, Andrew, Luke, Claire, Tony, Margaret, Louise, Bill, Sarah, Aaron, Chris,



## Nava George Sailability Dobroyd

**What an experience.**



*Nava George*

**A**s a result of a car accident when I was four I was left to be a ventilated dependant quadriplegic, which led me to have twenty-four hour care and totally dependant on other people.

I had never thought sailing possible, not until 1999, when I was on holidays in Narooma. That's when I met up with Ame Barnbrook and her family. Ame's father had mentioned how Ame was sailing and that somehow there could be a way that I could also sail.

It wasn't long after that when we were in contact with Chris and he built this great pink boat with pink sails, with a chin control so I can sail, plus a special compartment at the back for the ventilator. It was because of the bright colour that the boat was called "Pantha", like the Pink Panther.

The "Pantha" and I entered waters for the first time in October 2000. The nurse followed behind in case I needed anything. To begin with I was a little scared, but as I slowly moved away from the pontoon

I thought, “it’s too late now”. It was fantastic! I loved the little splashes of water on my face, the wind in my hair and the feeling of complete freedom.

Sailing, for me, is not just a great activity; it has opened my eyes to a whole new world. I am able to meet people from all walks of life. It has also introduced me to travel in Australia and America. I have been astounded at the people’s generosity, not only financially, but also in time to help me achieve my goals.



Nava at Dobroyd Aquatic Club, Five Dock



## Judith A. Geppert

### Sailability Pittwater

**Ahoy There! Look! No Hands...**



*Judith A. Geppert*

**Y**ou can't do that! You might hurt yourself, or even drown. Of course all boats sink. Just look at what happened to the *Titanic*, even that sank. These were just a few of the comments that were made to me when I decided to take up sailing in 1997.

I have a form of cerebral palsy, which means that I have no controllable movements from my neck down. I drive an electric wheelchair with my left foot and I use a headpointer strapped to my head, enabling me to operate a computer, work, and whatever else I wish to do.

In the summer of '97, I decided to try my head at sailing. So I joined Sailability Pittwater. After some figuring out, a lot of perseverance and assistance from volunteers I learnt to use the electrical controls on the Access 2.3. Dinghy by using my chin. I am now able to point the rudder and steer the dinghy in the right direction. Once I had mastered

these controls I was able to take to the high seas on my OWN.

As I am only a social sailor, I enjoy the sailing experience. I have had excitement, fun and that sense of exhilarating something that sailing has given to me (which I once thought could never be).

I participated in State Sailability Finals held at Chipping Norton in December 1997. I came third and received a Bronze Medal. (Something, which I had never even dreamt of doing.)

In February 1998 I entered the National Access Dinghy Championships held in Canberra. This was a great couple of days. Here I was able to share stories, ideas and meet sailors from other states. My aunt came up to Canberra from Eden to share my weekend with me. At the end of the second day, the Governor General of Australia, Sir William Deane, awarded me the Silver Medal. That was a great honour.

I hope to continue with Sailability for many years to come, enjoying the fun and friendships I have encountered along the way, not only with sailors with disabilities, but also with the numerous volunteers. Without their support and encouragement I would be sitting in my wheelchair thinking about what I could be doing, not participating and knowing what I can do.



# Janne Graham

## Vice Chairperson: Sailability ACT

### Janne's Story



*Janne Grahme and Lady Deane*

I watched Marg, moving slowly with pain and stiffness, come into a meeting and lower herself with difficulty into a chair and dispose of her crutches. I remembered my years of experience of severe pain and my concern must have shown. She noticed me watching

and with her infectious grin breaking out across her face asked

“Coming sailing with me on Saturday?”

Always one to enjoy a joke and a bit of irony I answered without hesitation “Sure Marg, if you go sailing so will I.”

The joke was on me. She was serious. I have been a conscientious objector to unnecessary physical activity all my life. It goes without saying that organised sport was anathema to me. It was the one consolation during seven years of pain and consequent limited mobility that I was sedentary by nature. When the pain had gone and I had no further reason to be pushed around in a wheelchair, I thought back to it longingly as the only way to go Christmas shopping.

So I met Marg and the rest of the Sailability crowd under the tree the following Saturday. Amber took me for my first sail. I knew her and the hair-raising experiences she has sought out, like para gliding, but even so I felt no fear. The experience on the water and the picnic atmosphere worked on me like a well cast lure to a lazy trout. I was hooked. So here I am at 60 participating willingly in a sport: one where I am challenged, where I can learn, where I can have fun — and where I can sit down.



# David Hale

## Sailability ACT

### David's Story



*David Hale*

**I** was diagnosed with MS in October 1997. While checking out the MS Society services later that month, I became aware of their Out and About group and one of the very active members, Debbie Pfitzner. The group's informal motto seemed to be 'I might have MS, but MS doesn't have me' and that matched my own feelings.

One of the activities that Debbie was promoting was sailing. Strictly speaking, I can't say I had never been sailing, having gone out on a 'sail boat' with a friend a couple of times some 15 to 20 years ago.

But I was more a passenger than crew. I thought that since I was still fairly active, sailing was something worth trying. I had my first sail in an Access dinghy one Saturday morning in November 1997, and took to it like a duck to water (all calm on top and a mad flurry underneath).

I decided that if I could sail, anybody could. Over the last ten years, I have been involved in the use of computer technology to assist people with disabilities and see the Access dinghy allowing similar

independence for people in recreation. While facilities for sailors with disabilities have existed at the YMCA Sailing Club for some time, in November 1997 a group of us set up an interim committee to formally establish Sailability ACT. Since then, my 'sailing time' has been split between administrative activities of the fledgling Sailability ACT, and getting out on the water myself. A major highlight was sailing in the 1998 National Access 2.3 Championships in February 1998 and actually achieving a fourth in division 2. November 1998 found me competing at the First Asia Pacific Masters Games at Southport Queensland where I won a gold medal.

In addition to the enjoyment I get from sailing, I get the immense satisfaction from exposing other people to freedom on the water. It is a great feeling to take someone for their first tentative sail and then to be able to give over the controls and allow them to be sailing themselves,



# Peter Hammond

## Colne Valley Special Sailors UK

**A miracle!!**



*Michaela, having fun*

September 2000. Sailability? Never heard of it. What is it?

Michaela, 12, hasn't been in a boat. Cerebral Palsy restricts the use of her hands and legs...sailing? You must be joking!

Two minutes later.....maybe.

Five minutes later.....probably.

Thirty minutes or was it only ten?... ..definitely!

February 2001. Colne Valley Special Sailors is born. (Michaela is the first member). They're at Rickmansworth - NW corner of Great London. They have two Access 2.3's and the local Council are giving them a third. They are called "Maybe", "Probably" and "Definitely".

September 2001. First Season just finished. 56 disabled people, mainly children, have been introduced for the first time to boating, freedom, excitement, joy... and the astonishment on their parents/

carers faces!!! 27 of these have been identified as capable of racing.

June 2002. "Likely" has joined the fleet and we have two Access 303's on order. These will be "Might" and "Can". Seven weeks into the second season, organised racing has taken place every Saturday and there are musings about the National Championships. Meanwhile, Hilary embarks with loaf of bread; casts off and sails straight into the bushes and feeds the ducks. Jamie enjoys the helicopter ride (otherwise known as hoist transfer) almost as much as the sail. Edward, blind with brain damage, beams from his father's lap. There's something for everyone!

### **FANTASTIC!**

But the miracle has been a series of happenings. Funding from a whole range of well-wishers for a hoist/pontoon, six boats, a wheelchair walkway, a rescue boat, training courses, and publicity. A link with a lively sailing school providing premises and water, lifejackets and other rescue services. Perhaps best of all, some amazing characters that are continuing to appear from nowhere to join as volunteers. Twelve are qualified powerboat drivers and there are twice as many as these in other roles so it isn't reasonable to name them all, or fair to name a few.

Suffice to say that Colne Valley Special Sailors are here to stay. Anybody reading this will have a warm welcome if they pay a visit on Wednesday or Saturday between May and September. Otherwise say hello to Secretary Sylvia Anderson on 0208 866 7655.



## Dennis E. Hannon

### Footloose – Seattle, USA

#### Two little happenings



*finding the famous bobbin*

I was helping Chris to get his trailer ready after we unloaded it from the cargotainer. One of the steps to licence it was to weigh it, so in Seattle we stopped on 4th Avenue at a public truck scale.

Chris jumped out of my pick up and exclaimed, “Look at all the bowsers!”

I headed back into the cab. I figured there were a great many dogs hot on our trail. Chris came around to my side of the truck with a quizzical look and saw no dogs anywhere in sight. Jumping back out I asked Chris “What on earth do you mean by a bowser?”

It turns out that we were at a large gas station and ‘down under’ a bowser is a gas pump, and there were several evident.

A few months later, I had ordered a 303, and taking delivery of it. Elizabeth Riggs and I were in the process of rigging it up and trying to figure out where all the strings go. While we did have instructions we were stumped on one item.

It asked to install on the main mast a “bobbin”. Now I have been sailing quite a while, and Elizabeth has been around at least a few

days so we sat there still not knowing what a bobbin was. Rummaging through the goodies box we found a pulley-looking thing and figured that was it. Good enough. It appeared to work and the first mystery of the bobbin was solved. It was not the last.

Later the same summer, Liz and I were again rigging up the boat. The bobbin always gets forgotten, but no worries we are able now to put it in place without much extra drama anymore. However we got the boat all put together that day and the bobbin was missing. So we looked in the bottom of the boat. Then we looked in the bag. Then we looked in the car. Then we looked in Elizabeth's car. Then we looked in the San Juan. Then we looked at each other and then we looked overboard.



As Winnie the Pooh might say... Bobbins Don't Float! Sitting on the reasonable shallow lake bottom was a white lump that we thought might be the famous bobbin. Sure enough. With a boat hook, first she then I, then both of us fished the silly thing out. Liz got a picture of only me at the at-tempt however. We keep rather close track

*Dennis Hannon —  
How does it go  
together?*



## Timothy Hone

### Sailability Orange NSW

#### Mad dogs and I'm an Englishman too!

I recently returned to Australia having taken my eleven-year-old daughter to visit her grandparents in the UK. While there, we visited my old haunt, South Staffs Sailing Club in the Midlands, where a Sailability project is underway. They have two Access Dinghies, a 2.3 and a 303, plus a T-shaped pontoon and hoist which runs off a static jetty.

They meet on Wednesday, Friday and some weekends the whole year round - I asked what did they do in winter (snow/ice/rain etc) with less mobile participants and was fascinated to hear that they are put in a sleeping bag then zipped inside a survival blanket!! How keen is that?

Also, the more able bodied are taught the basics of sailing first on a land yacht; they have two single and one double seater which they made themselves. The land yachting takes place on a huge car park next to a racetrack, they are set up like an Access with a joystick and one forward mainsheet. There is a course to sail around which teaches sail control and steering with a catch cry 'if in doubt sheet out'. Apparently this transfers really well to the water, however, the big difference is speed, and these land yachts were clocked at 55kph!



*Landyachts clocked at 55 km/hr*



*Andy Morris, Sailability Co-ordinator  
and Phil Warne, RYA coach*

The project is run by a very enthusiastic and dedicated fellow called Andrew Morris, assisted by an equally enthusiastic 84-year-old called Peter Waine (a fellow who could stand up in a rig-less dinghy, open his jacket and still win a race!).



# The Hunter Orthopaedic School

## Waratah NSW

### We Like to Sail



*Debbie*

I love sailing on Wednesday afternoons. A man usually sits in the boat to help me. I like the feeling of the wind in my face.

By Ben Hellyer

Every Wednesday afternoon I go sailing at Belmont 16ft Sailing Club. I love sailing because I can do it myself and no one has to help me. I really like it when the water is rough because it's fun going over the waves. I loved sailing because I did it all by my self and it was fun to get away from school. Next time I would like to race the others and WIN.

By Thomas Dow



*Michael Bainbridge*

On Wednesday I went sailing with dad, grandma and grandad and my nurse Kevin. We were out for about half an hour. It would have been longer but a storm came over. Grandma went out in the rescue boat which was a bad idea because she never shut up the whole time. The guy in the rescue boat kept yelling ‘stay away from the other kids!’ but I ignored him (typically). It was a great day!!

By James Sidebottom

I went sailing yesterday.  
I like how the boat tips  
and goes faster.

By Steven Shadlow

Sensational  
Alone  
Independent  
Love it  
Incredible  
Nifty  
Great

By Ashleigh



*Steve*



## Ian Ryan — ‘Bluey’ Commodore: Dobroyd Sailability

### Bluey can Sail!!!



*Chris Mitchell and Bluey*

**M**y friend Bluey is 49 years old. He was born with cerebral palsy and is classed as spastic quadriplegic, which means that he cannot use his arms or legs. Bluey also cannot talk at all. I worked, for four years, at the institution where he has lived in Sydney for the past 35 years. We have become good friends.

Just to put you in the picture, Bluey can’t do anything for himself. He sits in his wheelchair, needs someone to push him about, feed him, and take him to the toilet – he can’t ask for help. Bluey communicates by sounds and facial expressions, sometimes people understand him — often they do not.

Imagine then, in April 1995, putting Bluey into a little sailing boat, just seven foot long, on his own. Chris Mitchell, the designer and manufacturer of the Access 2.3 sailing dinghy, strapped an electric toggle under Bluey’s chin, and described to him the concept of sailing and how Bluey could steer the boat by pushing the toggle from side to side with his chin. We knew Bluey was intelligent, but we didn’t know to what

level his cognitive skills reached. The boat was put into the water and Bluey was sailing — Chris followed closely in another dinghy, giving instructions and ensuring that he was safe. No one with such severe physical disabilities had ever sailed solo before. Those of us on shore watched with tears in our eyes and joy in our hearts — Bluey was sailing!

Imagine again, one month later, that we go through the same process. This time Bluey's parents are there to watch. Bluey's boat was launched into the bay at Drummoyne. We call out to him "sail over here into deep water" — Bluey laughs, shakes his head and turns in the opposite direction. For the first time in his life he can decide where he wants to go, and get there on his own, he can make decisions on which direction to go, to stay out sailing a bit longer or come back to shore. Bluey had freedom! His Mum and Dad stood on the shore; their tears were flowing.

We decided to form a sailing club for people with disabilities at Drummoyne. We formed Sailability Dobroyd. Bluey is the Commodore and attends every meeting. He now interacts in groups, is very verbal (in his fashion) on issues he feels strongly about and offers suggestions about the running of events. He was on the committee to organise the 1997 State Titles for Access Sailing Dinghies at Drummoyne in January. Being involved with the Access dinghies has meant a lot more than sailing to Bluey — as monumental as that is to him. He has a whole new life, new attitude, and new friends. Bluey is given the opportunity to socialise, interact with both other disabled people and with able bods. Bluey has confidence in his ability to speak his mind, his self-esteem has rocketed, and his motivation is on an ever-increasing spiral upwards. Bluey is proud of his achievements.

Jackie Kay



# Jackie Kay

## Secretary/Volunteer: Sailability NSW

### Jackie's Story

My original involvement with Sailability was through my work. From the very beginning I was enthralled by the potential for the enrichment of lives for people with disabilities. In April 1995, after observing a presentation by Phil Vardy and Chris Mitchell, at which Access Dinghies were profiled, I was convinced that this was a means where disabled people would be capable of achieving previously unthought of goals. When Phil and Chris tell this part of the story they would have you believe that I 'demanded' a day be organised for my charges to have a go at sailing. I don't remember being demanding, although I was certainly very excited and determined to see what it was all about.



*Jackie Kay*

We went sailing three days later. I was captivated then and there — a bit of magic had occurred. Occasionally we can identify a monumental event that alters our path in life — this was one of mine. Looking back, that was the first day of the rest of my life.

Back in 1995, Sailability was a fledgling organisation; Phil had recently been appointed Chairman of Sailability Australia. Sailability Gosford, the first Sailability group in NSW, was just getting organised. A series of 'Come and Try' days were organised at Drummoyne — this is where I had the honour of first meeting and working with Neil Anderson. Following the success of these days Sailability Dobroyd (the first branch in Sydney) was formed. Since then, we have assisted many other groups

to set up their own local Sailability branches.

Originally my career was that of a secretary, which later expanded into running a secretarial business, specialising in small business administration. This experience had been invaluable in assisting to build the infrastructure of Sailability NSW. In 1990, I trained as a swimming teacher, specialising in groups of disabled people and in 1991 began working as recreation officer at a Sydney institution catering to 130 moderate to severely disabled adults.

This work alerted me to the plight of many disabled people in our community — lack of sporting and recreational opportunities, lack of socialisation, lack of control over their lives and lack of understanding of their needs. Having multiple sclerosis for the past sixteen years (becoming more seriously affected in the last three years), I am well aware of the many problems associated with disability. This insight has helped to ensure that Sailability in NSW grows into an organisation looking after the needs of its members and whenever possible, being run by members and not developing into a ‘disability sailing service’.

On several occasions I have been asked why I choose to work so hard for Sailability — the answer is very simple really. I consider that personally I have gained much more than I have contributed. Through Sailability I have the opportunity to make a real and positive difference to the lives of people — people with disabilities, their families and friends. I have met many people whose determination and courage is inspirational; I have made wonderful supportive friends for whom I have absolute admiration and respect.

The time and energy is worthwhile when you see the pleasure and pride on the face of a disabled sailor after sailing solo for the first time; the tears of joy on the faces of his family. Sailability is all about people — the sailors, their families and friends, the volunteers, the sponsors. I consider it a privilege to be a part of this positive wave of community enrichment.

Update (December 2002)

Margaret Meade wrote, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world, indeed it is the only thing that ever has.” Sailability epitomizes this quotation – we are making a difference, all over the world. Looking back at our progress since the first edition of *Get Your Bum Wet*, it is quite breathtaking what has been achieved. Personally, I have been involved in many, many projects – most have been very exciting and rewarding, while others have been somewhat frustrating. With the assistance of a lot of friends, Sailability has become a truly international organization and we have addressed the social issues of gender equity, recreation for the aged and youth at risk, to mention just a few. Also the concept of “sailing for everyone” has been introduced, embracing whole communities and welcoming sailors with any sort of disability.

The Access Dinghy Foundation has been formed with all the Trustees being dedicated to spreading the Sailability philosophy throughout the world. Just recently, Access Dinghy Foundation and Sailability was won the 2002 Prime Minister’s Award for Excellence in Community Business Partnerships. This national award recognises contributions made to society in Australia – and is an award of which everyone in Sailability can be proud.

I am extremely fortunate to have hundreds friends throughout the world who are the most generous, caring and dedicated folk imaginable. Our international family is constantly growing. Wherever we are heading in the future, let’s keep making a difference.



**Access Dinghy Foundation Trustees  
with the Prime Minister of Australia**



*Back Row L-R: Neil Anderson, Grahme Rayner,  
Prime Minister John Howard, Chris Mitchell,  
Front Row L-R Jackie Kay, Zoltan Pegan*

# Diane and Russell Kemp

## Australia

### Volunteer race starters



*Diane and Russell Kemp*

I have been sailing since I was three years old. Raced heavyweight sharpies with my father back in the early 60's and have cruised and raced keelboats for the past ten years. Seven years ago I first met Russell, I introduced him to sailing off-the-beach dinghies and keelboats with Bateman's Bay Sailing Club. During that time we have sailed up and down the coast of NSW, married three years ago and now live in Mount Martha Victoria. We have our own keel boat, a Mottle 820 called Quasar, sailed her from Yamba to Bateman's Bay February 97, then December 2001 Bateman's Bay to Mornington Yacht Club. In the photo we are having fun trying out a new spinnaker on Quasar.

Three years ago, when I did a CAD course I contacted Barney Barnbrook and met Ame and family from Narooma NSW and discovered Access Dinghies. Barney being the colourful persuasive character he is, knowing that we assisted Bateman's Bay Sailing Club with club races and State and National regattas both on the committee boat and as qualified rescue boat operators, asked us to be race officers for a regatta being held at Narooma. We were very nervous but thoroughly enjoyed

the new experience. Russell and I had never had never met so many incredible sailors with varying disabilities, although they had one thing in common, they were very competitive. Everyone wanted to have fun and experience a sense of freedom and exhilaration sailing in these fantastic little brightly coloured boats.

While I was at Lake Eppalock in March of 2000 teaching Parade College students to sail Jackie Kay rang me. Barney had mentioned my name, and Jackie asked me if we were available to do the Nationals in Canberra in 2001. I said we weren't qualified, so guess what? Russ and I went off to Port Maquarie and did the AYP Race Officials course and the rest is history. We went to the factory in Dandenong and met Chis Mitchell and saw how the boats were made and listened intently while Chris and Jackie told us about the development of Access Dinghies and their rapid growth.

We were the race starters for 2001 National Championships. Lots of fun on and off the water, especially at the dinner dance on Saturday night. We love dancing (almost as much as sailing) I'm sure a lot of you will remember me rock and rolling with the one legged sailor from Japan. Did you know that the Japanese remove their caps and bow from the waist after they cross the finish line and that some Aussie competitors wear undies to match the stripe on their sail for good luck!

It was fantastic to return to Lake Tuggeranong in March of 2002, renew friendships; it only seemed like yesterday, not twelve months since we had seen everyone. Staring and finishing 35 races over the day and a half is exhausting. We have a fantastic team with Jeff and Kim assisting us on the committee boat. We are exhausted when the weekend is finished, but drive home floating on air. The energy that we put in comes back to us threefold in hugs, thanks and smiles all round and knowing that we have helped the fantastic team of volunteers to achieve another successful National titles for the competitors.



## Aaron Kirchner

### Volunteer: Sailability ACT



*Aaron Kirchner*

#### Aaron Helps Out

My name is Aaron and I'm 14 years old. My Grandma phoned me up one morning and said "If you can get over here in half an hour then you can go with Grandpa to the YMCA Sailing Club and help out with their open day and if you're lucky, you might even get to go sailing." I jumped at the chance. My Grandpa has MS and he goes sailing with Sailability. I'd been to see him sail a few times and it looked like he was having fun. I got over to Grandma's house and we went to the sailing club and just after I got there Grandpa took off in the rescue boat and I was left to help David. Later David took me out for a sail in an Access Dinghy.

It was a bit windy but I thought it was real cool. It was the first time I had been for a sail. Now I go and help as a volunteer nearly every week of the sailing season. I help to get the boats from the shed and rig them. I can sail an Access (sort of). Sometimes I am allowed to go out on the rescue boat. I have joined the sailing club and Sailability and soon I will do a training course so that I can learn to sail other kinds of boats. I like helping at Sailability. I meet some really nice people and after a while you don't notice that they have



## **Sophie Marmont (Sprintz)**

### **Sailability Pittwater & Cronulla**

#### **A love story**

It feels as though I've been involved with Sailability forever, in fact it was about 1997 when a work colleague told me about Sailability. Sailing was not a sport I was "dying" to try, but seeing it was on offer I thought I'd give it a go.

I loved sailability, not only the experience, but also the whole ideology of it, "Freedom on the water, regardless of ability" and really embraced the concept of what I think sport and recreation should be.

At the time when I became involved with sailability, I worked for The Spastic Centre and helped to support clients access this unreal new program. Sailability has been a big part of my life since then. I have competed, meet some great people, been president of my club, taken people with disabilities sailing for their first time, raised money, meet, recruited and supported some fabulous volunteers. Yet I did not ever expect to meet and marry, Anthony my husband.

We met through two friends, Steven and Loueze Churm. Steve and Loueze were just setting up a new branch at Cronulla. One of their first sailors was Anthony. I think right from the first time Anthony attended Sailability, Loueze's match making skills went into action, unbeknown to me, Loueze tried to tell Anthony about this girl who sailed at the Pittwater branch, it took Loueze three months of nagging and Anthony finally agreed to give me a call. Besides Anthony joined the club to sail and have fun, not to meet a woman!

One day Loueze rang me and asked for permission to give my number out to a lovely man called Anthony who was anxious to meet me, I agreed. 15 minutes later he rang.

Anthony and I met in Manly just before Christmas 99. We were meant to be together, we have so much we can share. Our experience living with a disability, Cerebral Palsy, our friendship, our love of sailing, but most importantly our love for each other.

Anthony and I were married on the 14th September, 2002. It was such a happy day. I know I have married my best friend and I suppose I now have a sailing partner !

The big question on everyone's lip's is who will we sail for, Pittwater or Cronulla Sailability ?



*Sophie and Anthony's wedding*



# Maurice

## La Voile Ensemble, France

### Testimony after being on an access dinghy

Ten years ago my life totally changed when I was told about the rare and terrible disease I had caught. Of course I have gone through all kinds of steps that such a situation implies:

It's only thanks to medicines, relatives and friends that I could slowly overcome such a state and avoid the worst decision.

Nevertheless I had to learn how "to live", to be part of a society which is not really ready yet to accept handicapped people.

It's in such a context that I could meet people belonging to the group "La Voile, Ensemble"; they help me with different steps, they help me meet people!

Thanks to this group, I found myself one day on a boat. The boat Access Dinghy floating on the water, following the wind.....

How could I have been able to imagine such a thing some months ago!!!

It was such a wonderful moment for me! How delightful it was to escape, alone! How could I describe in which state of mind you are when you have the feeling of taking risks, and being safe!

After such an adventure, I can only advise those who dare not to hesitate anymore as far as the pleasure is so unbelievable.

Of course, a lot of things have to be done but the group works into improving the conditions. Moreover what pleasure and a reward it is to be able to admire the bright look of the children who have been able to turn all around in a boat...

That's why I say; Thanks La Voile, Ensemble! Cheers! Go on like that!!



# Merewether High School

## Support Unit for Students with Disabilities

### From the Students



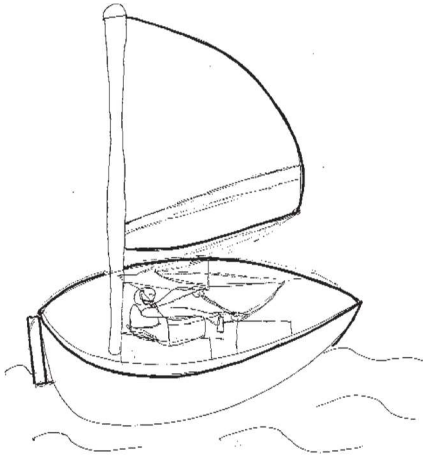
*Students from Merewether High School*

**Whoopsie!** I fell in the water. I sail in a sailing boat by myself. I go really fast. I am feeling a little bit frightened because there might be sharks in the water beside me and they might eat me. We stay on the lake for a long time because we play follow the leader with Kevin. The way we play is that we move the boats tiller to turn it around until we make our main sail look like Kevin's until lunchtime. Lunch is always a barbecue. Vernon cooks sausages and onions and leaves the bread buttered for us to put the stuff on. When I leave school I will go sailing round the world with Dad.

By Laura Hamonet

Yesterday I went sailing. We went in the Newcastle S.S.P. bus. I went in the sailboat with Mr Mitchell. Everyone helped me to climb in to the boat. We sailed all around in the lake. I steered the boat with a stick. For lunch the man gave us a sausage sizzle. I enjoyed myself heaps and I can't wait to go back again.

By Stephen Paton



### Sailing checklist

Hat Sun that stays on  
 Hair brush and comb  
 Plastic bag for wet clothes  
 Water bottle  
 Woollen jumper  
 Shower Towel  
 Spray jacket  
 Sunscreen  
 Swimmers  
 T Shirt  
 Tights  
 Old joggers  
 By Emma-Jane Henderson

On Tuesday 12th May I went sailing for the first time. I went with Mrs Eggleton. There was no wind and Mrs Eggleton and I got stuck out in the water and the rescue boat gave us a tow. It was fun. Then we had a B.B.Q. We came back to school at 2.00. I can't wait to go back again.  
 By Melanie St John

On Tuesday 12th May I went sailing for the first time. I went sailing and it was great fun. I was steering and sailing and how could I do this? I wonder why can I sail by myself?

Now I want to do sailing for a sport and give up bowling and go sailing instead. I think that I would do sailing better than bowling. I can do bowling at home. I would like to thank all the people for yesterday for helping.

By Jeremy Dalwood

On Tuesday we went to Belmont 16ft Sailing Club we went sailing. It was a yellow boat and it had sails. I had a life jacket on so that I would not drown. We had a barbecue. I had a sausage sandwich. I had my own apple drink. I travelled by a mini bus we got back to school at 1.30 pm.

Mark Gersbach

## Sailing Tips

1. Always wear a life jacket because if you fall out of the boat you will be safe.
2. Work the mainsheet to catch the power of the wind.
3. To turn to port or starboard, use the joystick to move the rudder.
4. Use the main sheet to trim the sail.
5. ***If in doubt, let it out!***

By Belinda Prince

Every second Thursday we go sailing out at Belmont on Lake Macquarie. We help Kevin, Wally and Bert rig the boat ready for sailing. We fit the main mast into the boat. If the wind is very strong, we roll the sail in a bit. Then the fellows put the boats in the water, push them out to Kevin (in his wetsuit) then we sail out to sea.

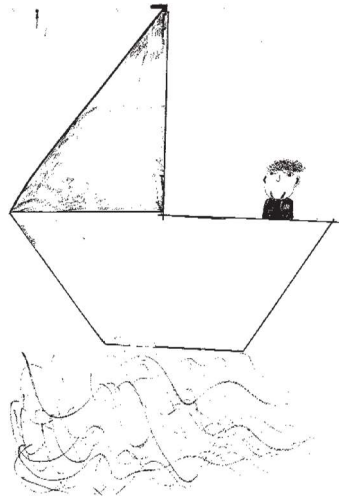
I used to get a wet bottom when I shared a boat with my friend who had a skinny bottom. The boat tipped sideways. I didn't like that at all. It was not fun.

I get excited when I sail. I get scared when the boat tips over. Last week when the wind was strong, I nearly fell out. It was embarrassing! I hope I do better next week when I sail at Belmont again.

“Be careful! There is a boat ahead!” Nick called out from his rescue boat. “Do not hit him or you will fall out.”

I said, “No, I won't fall out.” But I just fell out.... And a pelican picked me up and put me on shore and then he went and got my yellow banana boat. Just as I am drying off, someone gives me a scrumptious and yummy sausage sandwich. The sausage fell out with a plop. I went back to school on the fast and speedy bus.

By Jessica Storey





## Merewether High School

"Support Unit for Students with Disabilities (SUD)"

Clifton Street, Broadmeadow

PO Box 308, Hamilton Delivery Centre, N.S.W. 1502

Phone (049) 412225

Fax (049) 412246

E mail

[merewether@aphs.nsw.edu.au](mailto:merewether@aphs.nsw.edu.au)

Dear Kevin

We are looking forward to seeing  
with you, Con, and your friends on  
Thursday 7th May. We think not be able  
to attend again until June 19th  
because we have our Athletics carnival  
on May 21 and we are going to  
Stewart House on 1st June for 3 days.

I think seeing is great for

from Belinda.



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Love Belinda



## Herb Meyer Chairman, Sailability USA

### One sunny day in San Francisco



*Herb Meyer*

**I** was enjoying a sail on San Francisco Bay in July 1993. The boat was a Rhodes 50. I was handling the Genoa sheet when I was pulled forward suddenly and I struck my head on a bench causing a spinal cord injury in the C—5—6 area. I instantly became a quadriplegic.

In the spring of 1994, I was invited to attend a meeting of the Bay Area Association for Disabled Sailors. Immediately after the meeting, I was invited to go for sail on an Erickson 27. What a wonderful experience it was to be sailing again as I did not think it was a possibility because of my paralysis. I progressed in my recovery and found out that there were nationwide and worldwide organizations providing opportunities to sail and to compete in sailboat racing.

The first time that I had a chance to see the Access Dinghies was at the Mobility Cup in Toronto, Canada. Chris Mitchell and Jackie Kay were making a trip throughout the Northwest USA and Canada introducing the boats to various organizations. I was quite intrigued with the capabilities of these boats to both introduce new people to sailing whether they be disabled or able-bodied.

I competed in the first North American Championships for the Access Dinghies in Miami, Florida. I sailed a 2.3 Access Dinghy which was equipped with a servo — electric system to aid my handling of the main sheet. It was truly a wonderful feeling to be able to sail totally independently again.

I was presented the opportunity of sailing in the International Access Dinghy Regatta in Canberra, Australia in February of 2001. This was a marvellous event with over 135 competitors sailing in 84 Access Dinghies. Sailors and their families competed and enjoyed the opportunity of sharing their experiences.

The concept advanced by The Access Dinghy Foundation in Australia of “sailing for everyone” was truly brought home at this event. I hope to spread the message of “sailing for everyone” through my efforts as Chairman of the board of directors of Sailability, U.S.A. and through my other affiliations such as U.S. Sailing Association, Treasure Island Sailing Center, BAADS, and other groups.



# Greg Mott

## Pittwater

### Me, the Wind and the Water

On the day, I caught a modified cab to Narrabeen Lake where I was going to try to conquer the boat and the elements.

After approximately an hour of trying to get me comfortable and the control in the right position, it was time to go sailing.

It took a bit of time for me to get used to the breeze and which way to go. Once I had worked all that out I was on my own; there was another boat close by, just in case of any difficulties (which there weren't).

The feeling I had out there steering a sailing boat was indescribable. My adrenalin was pumping because for the first time in my life I had full control of everything — it was me, the wind and the water. It was like there was nothing or nobody around, just me. There were people singing out to me from the shore but they were oblivious to me because all my concentration was going into sailing into the wind.

I have never had this feeling before. My concentration was broken only because the person in the other boat came over and said it was time to go back to shore.

When I reached shore, Phil said he thought that was the first time a person with a disability such as mine had ever sailed a boat by themselves. This gave me a thrill, but nothing will ever beat the thrill I received out of sailing that boat on my own.

I would like to thank everyone involved for allowing me to have the greatest experience of my life.

### My Memories of Greg

What can I say about someone who never gave up? No matter how many times he was told that it was impossible. That was Greg Mott.

I knew Greg from when we were in nursery school at the Spastic Centre. He was a fighter. Doctors and his family didn't think he would be able to lead a normal life — boy, were they wrong!

Even though Greg was very disabled, he would try anything. He went to Bathurst University to do a course and joined the Disability Council thus making his mark on the world, as well as being a member

of Warringah Council and making the members aware of accessibility to all buildings and pathways.

In his late forties, Greg surprised everyone when he married Ann and they moved into their own house in the community, hiring and organising their own staff.

In 1994, Greg found out about Sailability. He was told it would be too hard for him to sail as he could only use one finger. However, Greg was determined — this was going to happen. Chris Mitchell designed a special boat for Greg enabling him to compete in many races and win lots of medals.

Anyone who knew Greg, or who knew of Greg, would know of his wicked sense of humour. Even after he got married he had an eye for blonde haired girls. He is still missed by his friends and will always be remembered.

Greg died in January 1997.

Dorothy Dobson



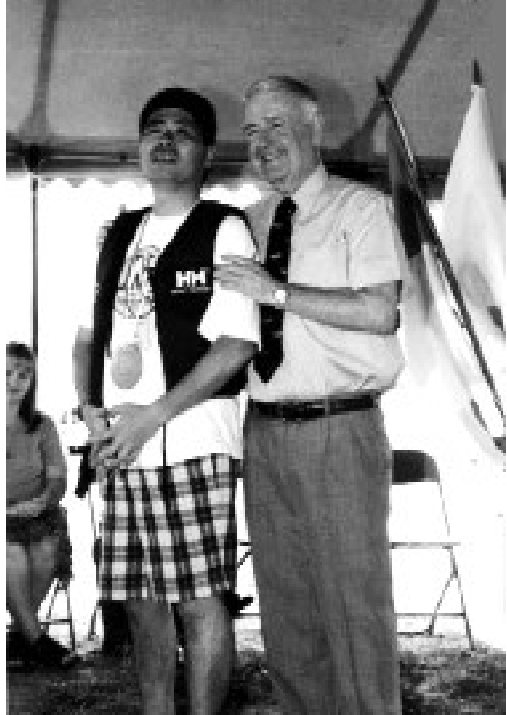
# Michinobu Oka

## Hokkou Yacht Harbour – Osaka, Japan

### Breaking down the walls

**M**y name is Mickel and I am blind. My uncle introduced me to Osaka Hokkou Yacht Harbor for the first time four and a half years ago when volunteers put me on cruiser and I sailed.

..... And then there was a yacht race crossed from Melbourne to Osaka, Mr. Grahme and Vinny sailed the whole distance in May four years ago. I was very surprised by the mental, corporal, and economical issues rather than surprised at them having sailed the whole distance. For me, this was the important issue.



*Michinobu Oka and Sir William Deane*

Why am I passionate about Access Dinghy like this? Sailing an Access Dinghy breaks the wall of language, the wall of culture, a racial wall, a handicap wall, and all walls, and sets all men's heart and flesh to one. The way which that wall disappears may come from the generous Australian national traits that are spreading in the whole world.

Although spread of sailboat is also important, I think that the thought of Sailability should just spread in the whole world. I have been to Australia every year and have participated in the regatta. The first year, I participated in the welcome party in a Japanese Embassy, and the

party in a Governor-General's house. Although I only came to watch, we suddenly decided that I would participate. I was very confused.

The second year, I was impressed by Ame's trumpet performance. I sailed by myself and a person helped by radio. On the way, radio broke down. So again I was very confused. The third year, I was invited to the race in Italy by Barbara Anderson. So I travelled with the Australian team to Italy.

I obtained nickname in Australia, it is "International Breast Tester Mickel." I cannot refer to this shameful nickname in Japan.

**Footnote from Nobi Nishii, President of Sailability Japan.**

Mickle has designed special Japanese noodle for disabled people. It is difficult to eat Japanese noodles for disabled person because they are long and smooth, difficult for holding with chopsticks. Mickle's noodles taste delicious and make it easy for disabled people to manage.



# Allister Peek

## Sailability ACT

### Allister's Journey

**H**i. My name is Allister and I am a 24-year-old invalid pensioner with a learning disability. I have trouble in counting and reading and other things but not in sailing. I've been lucky because I come from a family that has sailors in it. The first time I went



*Allister Peek*

sailing was in America around New York and Florida when I was in primary school there. That was in small boats and yachts. In Australia, I sailed with my Dad and his army mates, from Southport in Queensland to Sydney. In 1994 I was lucky and got a berth on a *Young Endeavour* ten-day voyage. That was great fun but I had to climb the yards and I don't like high things. It was scary but I did it.

One of the best things was that I steered a 39-foot yacht, *Blue Lady* through Sydney Heads in January 1997 on the way back from Coffs Harbour. My Dad and I are building a small wooden boat that I am going to sail. I don't know when that will be because it is only half finished and it has taken four years so far. I saw the Access 2.3s on Lake Ginninderra while on work experience at Hungry Jack's. I told my Dad and we went to the YMCA Sailing Club the next Saturday and sailed the 2.3. We have been going there a lot and sailing every Saturday. We have also been to Tathra sailing with the boats. I enjoy taking new people out and showing them how easy it is to sail. I think I'm pretty good at it. It's great fun but the best thing about the little boats is that in the other big boats, people always tell me what to do and where to go, but in the Access dinghies, I can do it myself.



# Terry Peek

## Chairman: Sailability ACT

### How the Hell did that Happen?

A Chairman's story of confuse and conquer...



*Terry Peek*

**I** came to Sailability mainly by default and with the urging of my son Allister, who is intellectually or learning disabled, or as he would rather put it, he likes to chew on things before thinking about them.

All my life I have been 'muckin' around in boats', learning to sail as a boy on Wallagoot Lake near Tathra NSW and sailing for other people who owned boats. The first boat that I owned was a very heavy old style VJ that I purchased with my life savings at the age of ten. This was the first step in the long road to maturity, having to accept responsibility for my own decisions, having to co-ordinate and develop teamwork with others as crew and for'ard hands. (I think I'm starting to get the hang of it now). This led to the purchase at 15, of *Sabrina*, a 14' darkie dinghy in 1960 in which I came third in the NSW State Titles and last in the National Titles that year in Perth.

Ever since that time, I've sailed here and overseas but more lately, with the bloom and suppleness of youth fading and a personal 'inbuilt' PFD developing around the waist, the experience and adventure has been in keel boats and bluewater. Over the past 10 years or so, as an instructor in the AYF's Yacht Cruising Scheme or as it is more commonly known, TL 4, I have been returning the debt I feel I owe to sailing by teaching others and hopefully, opening to them, the opportunity for the fun and joy that I have experienced.

Allister has accompanied me on a number of long distance voyages and has developed the same love of sailing that I have. On one Friday in late October 1997, after finishing his shift at Hungry Jack's overlooking Lake Ginninderra here in Canberra, he said to me "On Saturday, Dad, we're going sailing. I've just seen some great little boats and I reckon I can sail them". I confess I was not that enthusiastic, as at that time, I was heavily involved with backyard renovations which my wife had indicated were long overdue (I had spent the previous 4 years driving to Sydney every second weekend to instruct at the Army Sailing Club where I was the Senior Instructor and there was a long list of domestic projects in hand). Filial duty being what it is took precedence and dictated that I take my son to investigate.

On arrival at the YMCA Sailing Club where the 'Come and Try' was being held, I saw what perfect boats these little dinghies were for the lineup of people waiting to go for a sail. The major problem I detected however, was that although the organisers were enthusiastic and exceptionally willing, sailing experience and know-how appeared to be in short supply. One woman who obviously was intellectually challenged, was more concerned with removing the wrapping around a sweet she held, rather than listening to the instructions given her, and the helpers were more interested in getting her away solo, than ensuring that she was competent to handle the craft. Luckily, after being pushed out from the pontoon with the helm over, the boat went about and headed back to shore just as a small gust heeled the boat, accelerating it and forcing it aground in the reeds, all this to the accompaniment of piercing screams and shrill yells. The sweet I recall was temporarily forgotten.

In my blind ignorance of the way things seem to be done, I guilelessly offered my assistance in coaching and teaching sailing. The next thing I found that I was elected Chairman of Sailability ACT, and I am still experiencing this air of perpetual bewilderment as to how that happened. I do confess that despite the work and time involved, I have derived great delight and have found the involvement rather humbling. Teaching soldiers, sailors and service civilians to sail is one thing. It is rewarding especially when you see your instruction and efforts all fall into place and to see the individual take command of a 36' yacht with competence, skill and understanding. In seeing the individuals involved in Sailability meet and overcome the challenge...in seeing it all fall into place for them and to see the looks of trepidation and fear turn into beams of sheer joy after rounding that first buoy on the first solo sail in command of a 2.3 dinghy, is by far, the most rewarding feeling I have experienced.

One of the challenges I've set myself to overcome is young Rob. I thought as I got older I was inheriting problems with gout, arthritis, weight, etc. but as my old Granny said — everytime you look around there's always somebody worse off. Young Rob suffers from severe cerebral palsy, add to that deafness, add to that he is also mute and I haven't got a problem only a challenge to get him sailing solo in a servo-assisted dinghy within 18 months.

By the way, the backyard renovations are still proceeding.



## Zoltan Pegan

### When I sit in a Sailboat I'm no Longer Wheelchair-bound

A young woman whose father raced Solings in Nova Scotia introduced me to sailing in 1978. I was 20 years old, a rookie pilot in the Canadian Forces. The Base sailing club had a number of 420's available and we often went out after work for a sunset sail amongst the otters and seals in the sheltered waters of Vancouver Island, British Columbia.

Weekends were reserved for a more adrenalin-charged activity: skydiving. Much to the displeasure of my Commanding Officer, I was the only pilot on the Base who routinely jumped from flying aircraft. Skydiving, besides being the biggest thrill you can experience without drugs (if you don't count the adrenalin pounding through your body), demanded concentration to a degree that allowed me to forget about rush-hour traffic, bills to pay, household chores and all other worldly cares. It was a cleansing of the mind and spirit. It also challenged me to learn to control my body and to use my knowledge and skill to deflect the wind to propel me to where I wanted to go.

But on 14th August 1983, while climbing out the door to make a formation jump with four others, I caught part of my equipment on the aeroplane door. My emergency parachute was inadvertently activated, and I was violently pulled up and over the wing. I hit the wing with tremendous force as the parachute opened. Floating to earth from 8500 feet gave me a little over eight minutes to think about the unfairness of



*Zoltan Pegan and Sir William Deane*

dying at the age of 25. I hadn't received any fatal injuries, though. My spinal cord was damaged and I had suffered a number of cuts and bruises. The cuts and bruises healed to leave nothing but scars. The damage to my spinal cord was permanent. I am a paraplegic.

My days in the military were numbered. My flying career was over. After finishing rehab I sold my downhill skis. I gave away my ice-skates, my ten-speed bicycle and my unicycle. Eventually I gave away my parachuting equipment and my sailing life jacket.

I stayed in Canada for another three years, then moved to Virginia where my family have been since 1979. We often spoke of returning to Sydney, where my sister and I were born. Sydney had much appeal, particularly weather-wise, as wheelchairs don't get around very well in snow. But the family business kept us all in Virginia. Then one day, the daughter of long-time friends came to visit my parents. Judy was travelling back to Sydney after spending a year in Europe and I was her tour guide around Virginia and Washington DC. We spent a month together, pretty much every day, and eventually decided that we were meant for each other. As Judy was reluctant to live in the US, and I had been looking for a good excuse to return to the city of my childhood days, we agreed that Sydney was the right choice for both of us.

So I sold my furniture, put my house on the market and bought a one-way ticket to Australia. After living together for a year we agreed to get married, which we did in a very low-key double ceremony with Judy's sister Elizabeth and her long-time partner Peter. We got married early on a Friday morning, barefoot on the beach, in Noosa, Queensland, in November of 1995.

Renovations to our house kept us both busy for a while. I spent many idle hours reading, and wishing that I could afford to go flying, just an hour a week. But flying is an expensive pastime.

Then, just before Christmas of 1996, Judy went looking on the Internet for some new activity we could do together. She came across the web-site for Sailability.

But it wasn't until May of 1997 that I decided to try sailing again. I contacted the Wheelchair Sports Association and they directed me to Phil Vardy, National Coordinator for Sailability Australia. He suggested

that I attend the next Sailability NSW meeting. This happened to be their AGM. By the end of the meeting I was their new Minutes Secretary.

It was the off-season for sailing, but there was a demonstration planned for May 31st at Harrington Park, in the western suburbs of Sydney. This was where I met Chris Mitchell and saw the Access 2.3 Dinghy for the first time. I watched a number of people sail around the little lake, listening to Chris' comments about what they were doing right or wrong. Then it was my turn.

Neil Anderson and Chris helped me into the Access dinghy and pushed me away from the pontoon. They immediately started yelling, "OUTHHAUL! OUTHHAUL!" To my surprise, I remembered what that meant and adjusted the outhaul to their satisfaction. They stopped yelling.

Within minutes I was scooting all over the lake in this clever little dinghy and I was compelled to quickly adjust my thinking. On first impression I had thought of the Access dinghy as a bathtub with a sail, as it's shape is very much bathtubish. But once I realised how responsive and easy to sail it was, I decided it was more like a bumper-car on water. It was great fun.

There was another dinghy out in the middle of the lake with two novices stuck 'in irons'. So, about ten minutes into my first sail in 14 years I found myself sailing over to them and instructing them on how to get out of irons and trim the boat to be able to sail back to shore. This impressed me no end. The people watching from the shore may have thought I knew exactly what I was doing, but I knew I was just dusting off long-forgotten knowledge. I sailed three times that first week. A month later I met Wayne Teagle, another paraplegic and, as state champion, best Access dinghy sailor in town. Two weeks after that I met Peter Thompson and Mik Terren at the launch of the newly refurbished fleet of 2.4Mr boats at Prince Alfred Yacht Club on Pittwater. By the end of July I was sailing two or three times a week, every week. We did short practice races, four of five, occasionally as many as seven in a day. Of the first 80 practice races I won forty.

Within a year I'd won silver at the Australian Masters Games and the NSW Access Dinghy Championship. At the 1998 Nationals in Canberra I just barely stayed ahead of Wayne and won the gold medal in

the open division. Suddenly I'm the national champion in the country's only regular disabled sailing competition!

With Sydney hosting the 2000 Paralympics Games it became imperative that disabled Australian sailors gain some international experience. National competitions were held in three-person crew and single person disciplines. I entered both. Although my crew only finished fifth out of eight entries in the three-person competition, and I finished a disappointed fourth in the Sailability Cup '98, the national coach saw enough potential in me to select me for the team to represent Australia at the '98 World Disabled Sailing Championship in Newport, Rhode Island.

Competing in a world championship was a marvellous experience, and I hope there will be many more such competitions in my sailing career. I get a tremendous kick out of racing, and find it most satisfying when I win, but there is also much to be said for a casual sail around the bay with Judy, or seeing a new world of fun open up for someone when I take them out in a sailboat for the first time.

Sailability offers many levels of participation and enjoyment. From my first sail in an Access dinghy, where I experienced anew the forgotten satisfaction of wind-powered locomotion, clean, quiet and relaxing; to fighting for a good starting position in a world championship race, sails flapping, people yelling; or the hours spent sanding a keel for repainting; or coordinating boats and volunteers for a weekend 'Come and Try' sailing day; or attending meetings to conduct the business of running the organisation that is Sailability — it's all very satisfying, because it's all about putting people into boats and giving them a taste of freedom on the water.

When I sit in a sailboat I'm no longer wheelchair-bound. I use my knowledge and skill to deflect the wind to propel me where I want to go. I can forget about rush-hour traffic, bills to pay, household chores and all other worldly cares. There is a rhythm to the wind and the waves that stays with me for hours after I return my craft to its berth and my body to the wheelchair.

Thank you to all those people who helped me to this point in my life, from Gwyneth, who introduced me to sailing more than 20 years ago, to Judy who prompted me to try it again, and to all those people



# Debbie Pfitzner

## Sailability ACT

### My Introduction to Sailing

My very first introduction to sailing was in the 1970's. My husband bought an unfinished hull and furbished it from scratch. We were living in Melbourne at the time and our children were quite small (three and 18 months). Anyway, we went for the first sail with the Bita Association (a type of trailer sailer), a weekend down to Phillip Island. When we had set anchor for the night, my husband and some other folk went ashore for a few beers. He was picked up by some people in a nearby boat that had a dinghy. The dinghy only had a small amount of freeboard by the time there were six or so not very small bodies in this tiny little boat!

Well, guess what? It began to blow and we started to drag anchor, and me becoming quite frightened. I could not swim at the time. Somehow, I managed to pacify my two small children and get them to sleep. Then I became quite angry — I was so terrified and wondered what on earth to do. You will never guess in a million years! I sat on the deck, opened every can of beer in the icebox and tipped the contents into Port Phillip Bay. I finally went to bed at 11 minutes to midnight.

The next day we were having a very pleasant sail home and The Master, who should be obeyed, said, "I feel like a beer."

I had said nothing about my very satisfying evening, as no doubt he too was satisfied, at least judging by the hour at which every one returned to their boats!

He then asked, "Do you know where the beer is? I thought that



*Debbie Pfitzner*

I had put it in the ice box.”

I replied “Yes.” and pointed to the bag of rubbish at his feet. You should have seen the look when he opened the bag and spotted two dozen empty cans at his feet!

“What did you do that for?”

“We have two small children, I cannot swim and I thought we were dragging the anchor. I was terrified!”

You might ask what I did to stop the situation occurring again. Well, I enrolled in some swimming and lifesaving classes. As it turned out, I feel that it was the best thing I could have done. It led to my return to the work force while still being at home for the children in the years that followed. I had a career in this field for some 20 years.

The best years of my life, prior to being diagnosed with multiple sclerosis.

After having spent some time in a walking frame, I found it difficult to participate in the outdoor activities that I enjoy.

My son made me aware that the YMCA Sailing Club had a small number of Access 2.3 Dinghies. Investigating further, I felt that this was a possible activity for me. Having a little sailing experience with the family, I decided to take up the challenge. Introducing a number of my friends with disabilities to sailing, we embarked on this new activity. Little did any of us know at that point, that we would be sailing in the National Championships within three months. We all did well for our first regatta, with good placings in our divisions. **Look out Australia** next year!

We have all made a lot of new and wonderful friends with varied disabilities and many others of the so-called ‘norm’ category. Many thanks to my son and family, and to the few club members who are always willing to lend a hand.

We often have ‘Come and Try’ days and I think that taking people out for their first sail and seeing their faces when they are able to manoeuvre a boat for the first time has been one of the most rewarding times in my life. **The Faces Say it All!**



## Sally Ramspott

### Volunteer: Sailability ACT

#### Spirit of the Wind



*Sally Ramspott*

**M**y name is Sally and for me, the love of boats has brought me full circle. I began sailing on the Auckland Harbour in New Zealand as a teenager (sailing a dinghy), many a time to be blown down the Rangitoto Channel by an offshore wind from St Heliers Bay. Next came the Corsairs Class at Balmoral Beach in the 60s and 70s. In 1988 I became part of the crew of the tall ship *The Leeuwin* on her return voyage to her home in Port Fremantle. The tall ship *Lady Nelson* from Hobart gave me a chance to join the crew, this time in Eden, NSW, in 1994. I became ‘Mum’ on board for two months while she did charter work up to Keppel Island.

I left the ship on the Sunshine Coast, Queensland, as work was calling me back to the Australian National University — you can’t play all the time! Now as a grandmother I am being blown around Lake Burley Griffin in a sailing dinghy belonging to the Canberra YMCA Sailing Club. This came about by the encouragement of a very caring lady called Debbie Pfitzner.

I had a disability, and at the same time I had the experience of knowing how to sail little boats. Debbie needed some help to get Sailability up and running through the summer months. I had the time but not the confidence to come into the Canberra scene again.

I left Canberra in 1994 due to the unforgettable experience of being held hostage in my own home, knowing I was about to have my life taken from me by a demented man holding a loaded 303 gun at my head in the middle of the night. I survived, with the help of a friend who overpowered him, but my life was turned completely upside down. I went into hiding. Then I suffered a nervous breakdown caused by my fear.

In 1996 I came back to Canberra and slowly I came out from under the rock with the help of my friends, both old and new, and my constant companion, Dobie Dog, who has been with me through it all.

Sailability has helped to heal me, so now it is my turn to give others the chance to smile, laugh and have the wind and sun on their bodies. I enjoy the friendships shared by those who sail in these little Access sailing dinghies. This, may I say, is the greatest way to recharge the batteries of life. Come sailing!



## Steve Reidy-Crofts

### Albert Sailing Club

#### Messing About in Boats



*Steve Reidy-Crofts*

Prior to being born, aged four months, my sister and I had our first ‘baptism’ to sailing, when mother, still wanting to be an ‘active’ crew member, was swept overboard. Our folks had been instructing friends on the finer points of sailing aboard their yacht *Jessy*, an old leaky Jubilee! Mother originally gained her sea legs by sailing up and down the Thames River (U.K.), however, falling overboard when four months pregnant had never entered into her training!

A week after my birthing, I suffered cerebral palsy haemorrhage and have striven to master its effects ever since. For me this meant teaching the motor side of my brain every movement all over again step by step. Developing the family’s sense of humour has gone a long way in breaking down the false “no touch” zone with strangers on their first encounter with me.

My next big venture with sailing vessels was eight years later when my family acquired a 12ft Sparrow. We mainly sailed *Feather* either down on the Mornington Peninsular at Shorham, or up on the Snowy Mountains collection pond, just outside of Khancoban, NSW. The latter was where I tried my first attempt to change sides during tacking, that

led to our first true capsizes. Hysterical from not being able to climb back in to escape from the icy waters, I endured a slow tow back to shore, where a mother's instinct took over. My face was slapped, kind words were offered and I was made to do it again. This time I remained on one side and mother played counterweight. Having a crew as counterweight remained the only way I could master sailing small boats for the next 20 years. Until recently, sailing single-handed was out of the question. Our family sailing didn't stop with the humble Sparrow. When I was aged 14, my father bought a four-berth trailer sailer cabin cruiser and for the best part of the next five to seven years, all four of us sailed with fearless friends and explored the Gippsland Lakes. These days were full of adventure while we learned the skills of living aboard ship. For me, I had the challenge of sailing up and down the winding Tambo River, while father concentrated on the quickest way to sail, usually by motor, to the Metung Pub. Here, as with the Sparrow, was where the inner thrill of being set free came alive. Whatever the weather, whether the crafts were 12ft or 20ft long, folk hardly queried my disability. Rather, crews from other craft just took me as another able member.

Sailing was my release. Loosing its freeing power, while I began my eight year wait for a kidney transplant, was bearable for one reason — there was no option. There was no alternative sailing club either. With two and a half years still to wait, the Youth Hostels Association ran a couple of leisure days, which ended up by sailing on Melbourne's Albert Park Yacht Club Lake. From then until now, messing about in boats has been my lot.

My involvement with Sailability began in 1991 and has been a natural progression. From learning to race weekly with a crew, I'm now able to manage to sail single-handed; competing in the Sabre Class at Albert Park Yacht Club. However, most folk with a disability — who begin with Sailability are given the challenge of conquering the Access 2.3 small keelboat. With its ballasted centreboard and furling mainsail, there is no reason for anyone, no matter the ailment, not to be captured by the freeing power of sail. Freeing people from their restrictive land abilities and empowering them with equal skill in sailing, speed and respect is well worth striving for. It's worth going overboard for!



**John Rogers**  
**Co-ordinator of Sailability, Camanche Lake, Calif.**  
**USA**

**Sailability Camanche Lake**

**W**e have completed some very successful Sailability days at Lake Camanche. I want to let you know how much I appreciate what Access Dinghies do for people, particularly those who have never sailed before.

It is wonderful to share in the surprise and joy felt by everyone who sails.

The Access Dinghies are amazing craft that have a tendency to really grow on you.

This is so much fun! I am a true supporter! Thanks again!



*“Come and try” at Camanche Lake*



# Martin Waller

## Sailing for Everyone, Lilydale

### Sailing for Everyone: by Barry Ring

Sailing for Everyone Incorporated Lilydale, was established in 1997 on a man-made, very picturesque lake just behind the Lilydale shopping area. The lake was constructed to control water flow in a small creek known as Olinda Creek and now provides an attractive recreational area for picnickers, and a whole range of fitness activities from walking to bicycle riding around its perimeter. It is also a haven for a wide variety of water birds and fish.

It is an extremely safe lake to teach people to sail. Sailability, a sailing program for disabled people grew into a community sailing club where both categories of people mix freely under the banner of Sailing for Everyone. Our disabled program is conducted on Thursdays where people with a wide range of disabilities are catered for and sometimes individuals or groups book in for Sunday afternoons. Some people choose to sail with a companion or carer, while others, like Martin, have progressed to sailing very capably by themselves. We have many people who, like Martin, were at a loss at what to do after an unfortunate experience which changed their lives so dramatically.

Martin's story is typical of many of our members, so I will let Martin tell it his way.

My name is Martin Waller. My doctor describes me as a spastic-quadruplegic with cerebral palsy. This is the result of a criminal assault ten years ago. After spending six months in a coma, I awoke to find my body twisted, and I was unable to move, speak, eat, or hardly breathe. I have worked very hard at a rehabilitation program with the help of many volunteers.

This year we heard about sailing for the disabled at Lilydale Lake called Sailing for Everyone. The first few times I went sailing with an experienced person, but now I am able to go out on my own.

Sailing is really great. It has given me such freedom to go where I like when I like. I especially enjoy sailing when it is a bit windy, but then the 'wise' ones trim my sail a little for safety, for which I reward them with a frown. I love sailing days. It has shown me that I can actually do something for myself, and for this opportunity I am truly thankful.



# Sadie Ryan

## Volunteer/Carer: Sailability Dobroyd

### A Life

Our son, Ian, Bluey, was born with severe cerebral palsy and has lived at an institution in Sydney for close on 40 years now. Ian has been in-volved with Sailability since Sailability Dobroyd began in 1995. It is unbelievable



*Some Sailability Dobroyd members*

what a difference this organisation has made to our son's life. As an ex-nurse, I know the importance of nurturing the emotional needs of those who have physical disabilities. Sailability does just that. Ian has made many friends and enjoys attending the committee meetings as well as the sailing days. Sailing is the only sport, that allows Ian to actively participate. For the last two years he has held the position of Commodore and even though Ian is unable to talk, he has participated in a public speaking course and now feels more comfortable taking an active role in various Sailability presentations.

My husband and I attend each sailing day with Ian, and are continually over-whelmed by the dedication and care provided by the volunteers to the disabled sailors. Sailability has not 'just' made a difference to our son's life. It has provided a purpose for living and has 'given' him a life. Ian is only one of hundreds. We would like to take this opportunity to give our heart-felt thanks to everyone in Sailability. Keep up the good work.



## **Bill Salmon**

### **Sailability Dobroyd, NSW**

#### **Life after a tragic incident.**



*Bill Salmon*

Throughout the life of every human, the experience of joy and sadness affects us all. With that, each person has to endure a new path of direction, in living a life that has been changed forever. Whether the new course is up or down in relation to personal moods and acceptance, the new path or direction stays solely with the individual. Whichever the case, Life must go on being lived.

It was unfortunately for me to suffer a nasty incident. One of my favourite past-times ended suddenly. I was put in the position of choosing a new road to live my life on and quite frankly I didn't like it. However, I was alive and knew throughout some time, that my condition would improve. Recovery from events takes some getting used to, but at the end of the day a smile is achievable - regardless of how it comes to be on ones face.

During my own recovery in rehabilitation hospital, I met another patient, Mr Vic Saragozza, who introduced me to Sailability sailing for the disabled.

I have now met some wonderful people who enjoy this sport either actively or supportively as volunteers. With the help of these wonderful people, I learned to sail within my current limits and I was encouraged to compete in racing. I am still in a state of disbelief that I have had some success. I had no idea my new road went through water.

There aren't enough words to describe the thanks I would like to give Vic for the introduction to "Sailability" and what this has done for me. If you are able to see the smiles on the faces of the people who participate, or hear their laughter, and put that into words, I would use them in my thanks for the introduction.



## **Kathy Simkus**

### **Sailability Belmont 16's**

#### **Anything is Possible**

**M**y interest in sailing began around 20 years ago when my husband and I bought a trailer sailer. We enjoyed many good times aboard our sailing boat, including a holiday on the Hawkesbury, Pittwater, Middle Harbour, with our two year old son. We also ventured to sail Sydney Harbour on a Sunday. It was an experience we will never forget! Then we moved back to Newcastle where I knew the family would continue to enjoy sailing on Lake Macquarie, and where my two sons enjoy sailing their 14 foot Laser every Saturday. My husband loves to take part in the Friday twilight races with family and other crew on our Alien trailer sailer.

I have multiple sclerosis and have gone from being active on board to a passive participator who still enjoys being involved in my own way! Now, thanks to Sailability starting in Belmont, I can still continue sailing in a boat on my own. These dinghies enable me to enjoy the sport I love to be involved in. The necessary assistance given to me to get into the dinghy is greatly appreciated. My family likes to see the pleasure it gives me as a person with a disability.

So in my words 'Anything is possible.'



# Len Snowden

## Sailability Illawarra

### Friends and sailing

I started sailing back in 1998. I was invited to have a go at sailing, at the Illawarra Yacht Club with Neil Anderson. The day was so good I joined Sailability that day.

My first race was at the IYC Club (Wollongong) NSW State Champions 1998 Div 4. I Came 1st in all my races. My First Australian Championships was in 1999, I sailed a new 303 Sailing Boat with a man called Enio Okkonen. We only had 5 minutes to get used to sailing a 303 before the first race. We came 1st in the first ever 303 Australian Championships and my first international race was in Miami, USA. I sailed with a gentleman named Eric from New York. We Sailed in the 2.3 Doubles and came 3rd.

The best thing about sailing is the people. I love to meet new friends and meet up with old ones. Some of my closest friends have come from sailing events around the world.

I am so lucky to have so many nice and kind friends, but the one person that means so much to me is my wife Carol. We have been married for 17 years and we have two beautiful girls, Emma 7 and Amy 14 weeks old.

So if you see a good looking 40 year old man with one leg and one arm with a big smile, say Hi as I sail by.

*Len Snowden  
with his wife  
Carol and  
daughters  
Emma and  
Amy*



# Amber Stewart

## Sailability ACT

### Amber's Story



*Amber Stewart and Andrew Warburton*

Let me introduce myself. My name is Amber Stewart, I am 33 years old, I have spina bifida and I am confined to a wheelchair.

Being in a wheelchair hasn't stopped me from enjoying life to the full. I am a person who likes to experience new things, so when a friend told me about Sailability and asked me if I would like to have a go, I was delighted. My friend, Helen, knew I had done a tandem parachute jump and said that this would be much safer! She was right, as the dinghies we use can't sink even when filled with water as we eventually found out!

When I first saw the dinghies I thought they were really cute. They were small, brightly coloured and had a nice sail. Everyone I met was so friendly and always willing to help with advice on how to sail. I loved the feel of sailing straight away and I knew this was something I was going to enjoy. I must admit though, it was a bit nerve racking trying to remember everything I was told. There is a lot to learn, but it is so much fun.

As the weeks went by I became more used to the terminology and how to make the dinghy move. I kept getting into ‘irons’ more than I liked, but looked forward to my Saturday sessions anyway.

One day Terry, our instructor and Chairman of Sailability, told us about the 1998 National Access 2.3 Championships and we started practising on Tuesday evenings as well as Saturday mornings. As the time for the Nationals drew nearer, the more I started to panic. I was really looking forward to the Nationals; but I didn’t think I was ready for competition sailing. I wanted to practice more before I thought about entering into something like that. I had a bad days sailing just before they started and couldn’t seem to get things together at all, so I said I would practice hard for the Nationals in 1999. Terry just laughed and the others kept telling me I should participate this year. I did, and I even won a race. I was so excited, especially since my parents were there to watch. I was just so nervous that when I got into the dinghy on the first day of the Nationals I thought I was going to be sick, until the race started.

The Nationals were great and I thoroughly enjoyed myself, am glad now that I had the experience, which is what people told me I would feel once they were over!



# Chris Syme

## Teacher: The Hunter Orthopaedic School

### I Will Never Forget That First Day...



*Chris Syme*

I am currently a teacher in a school for students with physical disabilities in Newcastle, NSW, whose ages range from five to 21 years. One of our main objectives is for our students to become as independent as possible. As most of them are limited to wheelchairs, both manual and electric, there are few sports and activities that they can truly do independently. Our students have a number of physical disabilities, ranging from spina bifida, leighs disease to muscular dystrophy. Most require assistance with feeding, toileting and transfers. Whether it is horseriding, swimming or cricket, the students require support of some kind and in all cases are directed by adults. This was all to change in March 1997. After whetting the students' appetites with a preview video of Sailability, I managed to persuade a small number of students who thought 'Well why not. Might as well give it a go!' Little did I know what I had started! As a sailing enthusiast myself I thought that this could be a real winner.

I will never forget the FIRST day at the foreshore of beautiful Lake Macquarie. The colourful sails of those little boats, the beaming

smiles of the volunteers and the excited but rather nervous looks on the children's faces. After a short introduction the sailors meandered their way across the smooth waters. They looked so professional as the boats turned, tacked and even did a slight tip or two. They were hooked and so was I. It didn't take much convincing for me to follow them as I took roll after roll of film. Success, Day one. It wasn't till a few days later that I realised what an impact this first day had on the students. Initially six children turned up on that day, by the end of the week this number had doubled. Transport in our small school bus was going to be a problem.

Of all the enthusiasts to have turned up to the water's edge and enjoyed the freedom of being really independent, it would have to be James. James is a ventilated quadriplegic due to an accident five years ago. He recently attended our school full-time and was showing signs of wanting to do what the rest did. When I heard of his desire to learn, or at least observe the sailing abilities of his friends, I thought Oh, no way. How could he possibly, of all people be able to participate. Next day, there he was with his father and full-time nurse, at the boat ramp, life support machine attached. With a few heart-stopping moments (for the onlookers) James was transferred to the middle of the seat with Dad and nurse flanking him. He was off. Of course there was no room for such machinery as a battery operated breathing system — so — out come the hand pump with nurse counting the seconds whilst James and Dad took control at the helm. What a sight. For the first time since his accident, James was truly independent. Even when the weather looks a bit iffy, there is James with Dad and nurse, checking the conditions and eager to get out in that little boat of his. Every student has a story to tell, like Tom who needs to be almost towed home because of his excitement and his Mum close to tears with pride as she watches her son confidently navigate his way around the course. Kate, who being almost blind, still sails around in circles but still enjoys the freedom, independence and the feel of the breeze in her hair. Ben, who was distraught to tears because the sailing day was called off due to inclement weather. Needless to



# Peter Thompson

## Canberra Yacht Club, YMCA Sailing Club of Canberra

### In Pursuit of Gold



*Peter Thompson*

**I**n 1998 Peter Thompson won the open and disabled divisions at the Australian 2.4Mr National Championships. He then went onto the World Championships in Finland placing tenth overall against 104 competitors in the open competition, which also resulted in a second placing amongst the disabled competitors. These results have made Peter one of the highest ranked disabled sailors in the world and a strong medal prospect for the Sydney 2000 Paralympic Games.

This is his story.

In 1982 at the age of 31, Peter was in the back of a car which skidded on ice then rolled over the side of Mount Hotham, Victoria. As a result of this accident he became a paraplegic T9/10 complete. The random slap of fate. It is a tired but true cliché: life would never be the same. An active sailor at the time he did not sail again for 14 years. He says you can divide your life into before accident (BA) and after accident

(AA).

B.A.

Just prior to the accident, Peter lived in the Snowy Mountains of NSW in an old stone cottage on 40 acres with his girlfriend, two dogs and assorted farmyard animals. He ran a cross-country ski shop in the winter and had a building business in the summer. In the winter most days would find him skiing at some point in the day in between running the shop. He was very active in cross-country skiing competition and had represented Australia at the World Cross-Country Skiing Championships in Finland in 1978 (an interesting coincidence to return to Finland for sailing, 20 years later). Competitive cross-country skiing requires a very high level of fitness. This fitness level was to save Peter's life. In the accident, among other injuries, his lungs and ribs were damaged to a point that would normally be fatal. However, because of this high altitude training, his blood oxygen remained normal and he survived.

Summer would find Peter sailing his Hobie 16 on Lake Jindabyne every weekend. This was a continuation of a long involvement in the sport. He started sailing in Canberra at the age of 12. Over the next 20 years he was active in the local sailing scene, competing in several World Championships in the 505 class and an Olympic selection campaign in the 470 class. Highlights for Peter were a third in the 505 Nationals and fourth in the 505 Worlds held at Lake Macquarie in 1976 sailing with the late Rod Dagleish.

AA

Peter doesn't like to think too much about those early days, weeks and months after his accident. When pushed he says: in hospital for six months it was hell. I was on my back for three months and when they finally rolled me onto my stomach I could not even lift my arm onto the bed. There were a lot of really bad days when I wished I had not survived the accident. That's changed now of course, but I couldn't do it again.

Peter spent the next years as he puts it 'reinventing himself' and coming to terms with his disability. He believes superficially he adapted very well to his disability but on a deeper emotional level struggled with it for a long time. He is not sure but thinks this is part of the reason it

took so long to start sailing again.

He was unable to go back to his previous jobs or environment because of his disability. He returned to Canberra, his home town, to seek the support of family and friends. He had to find a new career direction. In 1983 he undertook an accounting course. He completed this course and became an accountant for the next ten years. During this time he invested in a rural property near Canberra. This rekindled a lifelong interest in farming and rural life. He now has a property that runs 1200 fine wool merinos and 200 deer. He finds he can do a lot of the work on the farm and gets around the property on a four wheel motor bike. This includes stock-work, maintenance, spraying, mowing and wool classing. Of course there are many things he can't do and has outside help when necessary.

## SAILING AGAIN

Peter always thought he would get back to sailing eventually. Even after 14 years he was in no hurry. He was busy enough with work; farm and family not to be too concerned about finding the energy and innovation he thought would be required to start sailing again. However, when Chris Mitchell (the designer of the Access Dinghy) who knew him from his skiing days and Geoff Perry, from ACT Wheel Chair Sport, encouraged him to sail in the first Access 2.3 National Titles held at the YMCA Sailing Club in 1996 he decided to give it a try. Peter found he really enjoyed being on the water again and realised what he had been missing all those years; the regatta scene had not changed the competition, the camaraderie etc. Fellow competitors then encouraged him to compete in the National Hobie 16 Trapeze championships a few weeks later. After this event he definitely had 'the bug' again and felt the momentum was there to return to sailing. He then looked around for a class of boat to sail locally. He wanted a boat that had a large local fleet and strong competition. The International Flying 15 class proved to be ideal. An old boat was purchased and modified to enable Peter to sail. The modification involved cutting the side decks to make a seat that provides the back support he needs. With this set up he can change

sides while tacking. He holds onto the traveller for balance and support with one hand and steers with the other hand. The crew works the main sheet. Along with old friend, Ian Ruff, (Olympic bronze medallist, sailing 1976), they began sailing regularly in local competition in the summer of 1996/97.

During the summer of 1996/97 Peter was consolidating his return to sailing. With Ian as crew he was proving to be very competitive in local open competition in the Flying 15. He then returned to the Access Dinghy for the Nationals in February 1997 and won. As a result people kept asking if he was going to try for the Paralympics. On 1 March 1997, (Peter's wedding night) with Ian Ruff as ringleader and some of Peter's old sailing friends it was decided with great merriment to undertake a Paralympic campaign. Naturally with Ian's experience, it was going to be done well! The first major step in the campaign was the trip to Sweden by Peter and Ian in July 1997, to compete in the European Spinalis Cup. The main aim of this trip was to find out about the new 2.4Mr boats that had been selected as the single-handed boat for Paralympic competition. Peter came ninth in the Spinalis cup which was very encouraging given that he had hardly sailed these boats before and was competing in a borrowed boat. He then came tenth in the Swedish Open Championships and was the leading disabled sailor, beating many of the sailors from the week before. Peter and Ian came back with the information they needed to plan the campaign and the confidence that they could do well.

A management committee was formed, sponsorship and fundraising activities commenced. Within six months they had secured sponsorship from the Canberra Southern Cross Club and the 'Feel the Power Campaign'. Two boats were purchased and practice and training for the 1998 World Championships commenced. While this 2.4Mr activity was being undertaken Peter and Ian were still sailing the Flying 15. In November 1997 they won a bronze medal in the Masters Games in the Flying 15 in open competition. This was followed by an equal first place in the Paralympic team selection trials in the 2.4Mr. The campaign then suffered a set back in March 1998 when they were in the ACT Flying 15 Championships (open competition). Peter broke his leg. However, three weeks later he won the open 2.4Mr National Championships held

in Pittwater, Sydney. This saw him as the first selected for the World Championships.

The World Championships have just been held in Tampere Finland. Peter managed a tenth placing in a field of 107 competitors (approximately 80 able-bodied and 27 disabled from 28 countries) and second amongst disabled competitors. The sailing community now regards Peter as a strong medal prospect in the 2000 Paralympics and one of the highest rated disabled sailors in the world.

Peter's training regime for the 2000 Paralympic Games is a gruelling one. As part of the national training squad for the games, specialised training and competition at the relevant pre-Paralympics sailing regattas have been organised. The basic aim of the program is to gain as much sailing practice and high level competition as possible while at the same time working on fitness levels, psychological and motivational aspects of the sport. Peter uses a racing wheelchair as the basis of his fitness training combined with some gym work for strength. He tries to sail three to four times a week throughout the summer for between two and four hours per session.

During this time Peter became chairman of Sailability ACT, although at the time he was the only active member. With total support from Kim Williams the then Commodore of the YMCA Sailing Club, they pressed on confident that there was a huge untapped need for disabled sailing in the Canberra community. Over the next 18 months the Club purchased another three Access Dinghies and provided a new access-friendly jetty. They held 'Come and Try' days and generally tried to raise community awareness of Sailability. Suddenly it seemed, the faith was justified. At the beginning of the 1997/98 season there was a big increase in membership and participation largely inspired by Deb Pfitzner. A keen and active Sailability group now exists in the ACT

Peter is still active with this group. He was the Race Secretary for the Access Dinghy Nationals in 1998 and 1999. Peter, as role model and mentor, freely shares his sailing experience and offers advice to the

fledgling members of Sailability ACT who all aspire to one day sailing a 2.4Mr., just like Peter!



*Peter rounding the top mark in 1st ACT  
2.4 Mr Championships, which he won.*



**Phil Vardy**  
**Executive Member, International Foundation for**  
**Disabled Sailing, Editor, *World Disabled Sailor***  
**Former National Coordinator, Sailability Australia**

**Cold Origins**



*Dr. Phil Vardy*

**W**hen we first arrived at Davis Base, Antarctica, in the summer of 1971, we were too busy to think much about the ice yacht hauled onto rocks above the high water mark. For we were meteorologists, balloons had to be sent aloft and atmospheric observations made. While the sea froze and the long dark winter set in, the ice yacht remained half buried in a snowdrift. But in early spring as the days lengthened beyond a few hours of sunlight, we had more time. We dug the yacht from the drift and hauled it down onto the grey-green sea-ice.

The yacht had been built several years earlier from scrap. The frame consisted of two lengths of rolled steel joist welded to form a T; runners were pieces of sharpened angle-iron; spars were sections of water pipe; stays were wires normally used to secure buildings to the ground against blizzards. Salt-filled summer air had rusted the untreated steel; ice-filled winter wind had polished the exposed surfaces. The result was an incongruous combination of tone — windward surfaces were polished

and leeward surfaces were matt.

None of us knew how to sail. The base boasted no literature on sailing apart from *Bristow's Book of Yachts*. Reading that publication encouraged us to dream of returning to tropical waters aboard luxurious displacement craft, but it did not prepare us for actually sheeting sail to the wind. We therefore asked the base boffin about sailing. Keith, an electronic engineer, drew a vector diagram on a piece of paper and nonchalantly explained the theory. "When you're going downwind, you set your sail in this position to maximise drag", he said. "And when you're going upwind, you set your sail in this position to maximise lift."

I memorised the positions of the sail relative to the direction of the wind and proceeded to the yacht with Ian, another met man. It was a cloudless day; an offshore breeze of 20 knots was blowing. We bent the sail to the spars and climbed aboard. I pulled in the mainsheet (a handy-billy used for extracting sleds from crevasses) and Ian pointed the tiller (a section of pipe welded to a pivoting runner). Nothing happened. We climbed off, pushed the yacht forward and jumped on. The acceleration was alarming!

There was a lot we should have known about sailing before we set out for what was to come. Firstly, it is possible to sail faster than the wind. On a three-quarter run, some craft can go down wind almost as fast as the wind, and across the wind with almost equal speed. This raises the possibility of travelling at 35 knots in a 20 knot wind. It should be emphasised however that few craft actually achieve this performance. Those that do experience little resistance to forward movement. Secondly, one can stop a sailboat by turning to windward. With the bow pointing into the breeze, the backward force of the wind soon overcomes the forward momentum of the boat, and the vessel comes to a halt. Thirdly, a degree of lateral resistance is needed to turn a boat into the wind. Lateral resistance prevents the boat from being pushed sideways by the wind. On a dinghy, lateral resistance is provided by a centreboard; on a yacht, it is provided by a keel.

It is also worth emphasising here that the coefficient of friction of steel on ice is relatively low. It is easy therefore to push forward the steel runners of an ice-yacht. It is also worth emphasising that the runners

should be sharp. If the runners are not sharp, lateral resistance is reduced.

At Davis in 1971, there were few transport options: one walked in the summer and rode motorised toboggans in winter. These toboggans were our only means of over-snow transport. We drove them carefully and slowly. For eight months therefore, we had not experienced anything faster than jogging.

For two fools in Antarctica that day, the first few seconds on an ice yacht were exhilarating. Runners rattled over a hard glossy surface. Shallow white drifts flashed by in a blur of grey-green. Soon, the reassuring rhythmic thump of the base diesels faded into the background; the only sound was the whistle of the wind in our beards.

Out of the lee of the base, the wind was stronger. Soon, the windward runner was lifting from the ice. I climbed further outboard and yelled to Ian to point into the wind. Ian pushed away the helm but there was no change in direction: either the angled steering runner skidded uselessly over the ice, or the whole yacht slewed sideways. It refused to point in any direction closer to the wind than a broad reach. Ian yelled at me to ease the sail. I did so until the boom was hard against the stay. However, the stays were set well back; easing sail on that course had little effect. The yacht continued to hurtle across the ice at a speed, which was, to us, terrifying. We did not know what a vang was; we therefore did not have the presence of mind to release it.

At about four miles from the base, we ran into a snowdrift accumulated in the lee of a tide crack off an offshore island and came to a stop. We turned, furled the sail and walked into the wind back to Davis.

With sharpened runners, the yacht later gave us many hours of pleasure. More importantly, it whetted our appetite for sailing. Upon our return to Australia, I joined the University of Queensland Sailing Club and crewed in Gwens and Lightweight Sharpies at local, state and national levels. Ian built his own trimaran while with the Bureau of Meteorology in Alice Springs.

My days sailing dinghies however were numbered. One Friday evening in the late summer of 1974, I finished a game of squash and started out on my motorcycle for Union College where I was to shower

and change for a sailing club Ides of March party. I never made it. No one knows why. A short distance from the campus squash courts, my bike failed to negotiate a turn; hit the curb and I was thrown into the base of a tree, face first. I broke my back. I was 24. It was 15 years before I would sail again.

A short personal view the early history of Sailability in Australia

This is Dr Phil Vardy' said Bob Sydes, the Rotary International District Governor of Tasmania. 'Phil was the man who started Sailability in Australia.'

I shook hands with the semicircle of Rotarians pressing round my wheelchair, and explained that Bob exaggerated: I had certainly been involved with sailing for people with disabilities in Australia, but I had not started Sailability. The genesis of disabled sailing in Australia is falsely attributed to me, and no amount of protest on my part seems to dispel the myth. The truth is that many people were involved in the development of Sailability in Australia.

As the Rotary meeting progressed, I remembered that Jackie Kay had long ago invited me to write a contribution for a new *Get Your Bum Wet*. Typically, I was late in complying with Jackie's request. It then occurred to me that I could use the contribution to give credit where credit is due. So here is a shortened version of events ....

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When I was in my early 20s, I sailed Gwen 12's and Lightweight Sharpies. I was never a good sailor, but I loved getting wet. After I broke my back in a motorcycle accident (1974), I gave up all thought of the water. Instead, I finished my studies, moved to Sydney and focussed on the terrestrial fundamentals that fill most of our lives – career, relationship, reproduction, and a house in the suburbs. But something was missing. The sparkling inaccessible water of Sydney harbour was eternally attractive.

The original Sailability was British. It was established by Ian Harrison and Hugh Campbell in the 1980s as a racing counterpart of the Royal Yachting Association's recreationally focussed Seamanship



Phil Vardy and Jackie Kay

Foundation. Ian had coined the term ‘Sailability’ after Motorbility, a British organisation concerned with automobiles and disability.

Sailability in Australia started with a conversation between Paul Kill and Campbell Rose in March 1991. The identity of Paul Kill remains a mystery to me; I know him only as a name in the archives (I hope that a reader will enlighten me).

Sailability as a national disabled sailing network was conceived at a national conference auspiced by the AYF, the VYC and the Australian Sports Commission in Melbourne in May 1994. To me, the conference was significant for two reasons. It was the first time since my accident that I had sailed by myself (in a Sunbird on Albert Park lake), and it was the first time that I met Chris Mitchell.

But it was around this time, Denis Critchley, John Woodward and I promoted the concept of Sailability in NSW. The result was that Sailability NSW was formed in March 1995 as a committee of the Yachting Association of NSW (YANSW). Denis Critchley was the committee’s first chairman. Initially, Sailability activity in NSW was centred around Gosford on the NSW central coast.

In April 1995, Chris and I presented a paper at Tadsem (Technical Aids for the Disabled Seminar). In the coming years, we presented

several well-received papers; however, the paper at Tadsem was the first in which Chris demonstrated the servo electric motors and switches that control the sails and rudder that he had developed for the Access dinghy. Servo assistance enabled profoundly disabled people to experience freedom on the water. It was revolutionary. Predictably, the Tadsem paper was received enthusiastically by attendees including a woman with an explosive smile and the unlikely name (created by marriage) of Jackie Jacka. With my encouragement, Jackie Jacka later changed her name to Jackie Kay.

I perceived Jackie's excitement at Tadsem to be caused entirely by the topic of our paper. I also perceived Chris' rare volubility to be a response to Jackie's interest. Little did I know that I was observing some extraordinary personal chemistry that would lead to a great collaborative relationship. Only much later did I realise had Jackie had MS.

Then, one day, I received a phone call from Neil Anderson, a stranger enrolled in a personal development course that required him to attempt an 'impossible' project. Neil took up the challenge, but instead of the one off sailing day his course required, the 'impossible' project



*Neil Anderson, Phil Vardy and Barbara Anderson*

developed into a life long commitment to Sailability. With Jackie Kay, he formed Sailability Dobroyd, the first sailing group in Australia to embrace Access dinghies. He later became president of Sailability NSW. Neil, and his wife Barbara, are one of the most empowering couples that I have ever met. Under Neil's leadership, Sailability NSW flourished.

I was National Coordinator of Sailability Australia from December 1995 until July 2000. During that time, Sailability Australia grew to be the biggest *per capita* disabled sailing organisation in the world. Space restrictions force me to end the story here; I therefore cannot acknowledge the many people who have contributed to the development of Sailability, nevertheless, I am sure that others who contribute to this *Get your Bum Wet* will give credit where it is due.



*Laurine Doherty and Allister Peek (story opposite)*

# Andrew Warburton

## Sailability ACT

### Aquatically Challenged

**M**y name is Andrew Warburton. I am 25 years old and I have spina bifida. I am also on dialysis for chronic renal failure. In the early years of my life I had an on again — off again relationship with boats. I was first introduced to the concept of sailing when I went on a friend's father's yacht to sail the Heads off Sydney, along with my family, friend's family and sometimes other relatives. There was many a time when I could swear blind that I had seen the top end of the North Island of New Zealand! At times our 'skipper' was the real macho type. On one occasion he climbed the mainsail (all 20 stone of him), there was a quick hard to starboard turn by an unsympathetic helmsman, (my father). After that, at least for a time, I never saw him so quiet!

That experience was back in the early '80's, and that was that until Amber asked me if I would join Sailability ACT. GREAT! There was just one problem. I had to convince the bureaucracy of the self-dialysis centre (Satelite) to give me a seasons worth of weekends off. Well, I have that for now, but all parties concerned are still 'in the ring' as it were, over this.

As most people who know me would say I'm not one to exude confidence. It is true that if most people think they couldn't, they usually can. I didn't. The first three or four times I went sailing with somebody like Bill, David, Allister, Sally or Amber, which was great. But there was no wind, ever! So, random breath time. Blow into the sail please sir, at least that seemed to be the only thing that worked! Then there was the awards night on the 18th May 1998. That was a great night but the last thing I expected was to receive a trophy, let alone two! Thank you to Sailability ACT for this experience, and especially to Allister Peek for persuading my Aquatically Challenged Grandmother to go anywhere within cooee of water let alone any kind of boat!



## Dale Williams

### Volunteer Co-ordinator: Sailability Dobroyd

#### Just Being Involved...



I have been a member of Sailability Dobroyd since it started in December 1995. I am a bi-lateral above knee amputee who has only been sailing for two years and I am enjoying it immensely. There are so many aspects of our sailing days that give me great pleasure.

Firstly, there is the feeling when sailing the single 2.3 Access Dinghy of independence, freedom and being in control. I have progressed from single sailing to often taking a new sailor out in the wide-seater — not to teach them, as I have not had enough experience. I am still learning myself, but hopefully I will give them enough confidence to go out on their own the next time they

come. It is amazing to see people who are severely disabled getting so much pleasure out of being out there on the water and in control of their boat.

Then, there is the pleasure of seeing a couple of our members, who are very keen and very capable sailors, being considered for selection for a squad to be trained for the Paralympics. Last, but not least, there is the social aspect of the day. I have met some really great people, some disabled, some able-bodied, sailors and volunteers.

Just being involved in Sailability has also given me confidence, which I have applied to different areas of my life. For instance having

the confidence to drive again after not having driven for 24 years. Having my own car has made such a difference to my life that is very hard to put into words.

I have been involved with the Sailability Dobroyd Committee since it started and have done various tasks, but at the start of the 1997/98 sailing season I have taken on the role of Volunteer Co-ordinator. As I

had never done anything like this before, I did a three-day course on Volunteer Management. I am also learning to use a computer, which will help me in this role, but unfortunately this is a very slow process for me.

It was a great honour to attend a dinner on the 20th October, 1998 and be presented with a Rotary Community Service Award in recognition of my work as Volunteer Coordinator at Sailability Dobroyd and volunteer work at the Hydrotherapy pool at Royal North Shore Hospital.

To finish off, all I can say is that I would like to encourage other people with disabilities to give Sailability a go, as you will not only get a great amount of pleasure out of sailing, but it can also help you expand your life in other directions.



*Dale Williams*



# **Kim Williams**

## **YMCA Sailing Club of Canberra**

### **In Search of a Hero**

An idea spawned of one man's dream to sell yacht tenders that were easy to set up and sail. A friendship, as I understand it and a skill in both design and boat building. But the story of Chris Mitchell is another's story to tell. My story is one of the search for a hero. In 1993, two guys in Canberra (John Statton and Boyd Kelly) thought it would be a good idea to have sailing for the disabled included in the YMCA Sailing Club's training program. This was the first time I was to meet Phil Vardy and be introduced to the concept of Sailability.

I was asked by the then fledgling Yachting Association of the ACT to manage a program run through the YMCA SC for sailors of all levels of ability. The concept grew as one requiring integration and not simply a call for more programs. This fitted well with the YMCA SC's family philosophy. We staged the first National Regatta for Chris Mitchell's Access 2.3m class in February of 1996. We had 17 disabled sailors racing against 15 able-bodied sailors.

Ame was there; she has no arms and uses what there is of her left foot to sail a servo-assisted boat. She had only just begun to sail, but was picking it up fast. At the top mark in her last race she turned to her shadow (Chris) and asked if that was the top mark. Upon the reply, Chris was politely told to bugger off. Greg Mott, who had severe cerebral palsy and who died only nine months later aged 54, was there and after the grading race ended up sailing in Division 1. Talk about heroes!

Kay Cottee came down to do the presentations and after a fun filled weekend the results were being assessed in the race office where four or five of us, including Kay, were working. There was a knock on the door. Now most of the able bodied competitors were juniors from the Y. Behind the door was one of our senior club members who was the father of one such junior. He said he represented three of the sailors who wished to withdraw from the regatta. The motive was that they had had such a wonderful time making such fantastic friends that they didn't want to take anything away from their new mates' abilities. Moved to tears, we stuck to our guns of integration. Utilising the scoring system in the sailing instructions of count back, this fine gesture by young men

from our club was not necessary and Steve Reidy-Crofts became the first National Champion.

The following year we had the privilege to run the Access Nationals again. Sailability ACT had not blossomed as we had hoped. There seemed to be a willingness by Club members to be involved at the Nationals but the 'Come and Try' days were poorly attended and only a few sailors ever came down more than once or twice. One of these sailors was Peter Thompson. Sir William and Lady Deane came to do the presentations and we had 35 disabled sailors and four able bods. What a weekend! There was the boarding of a rowing eight incident, eight burly young men not knowing what to do with SOMEONE FROM DOBROYD, on their foredeck apologising, a sinking that was safely sailed home full of water and at least one sailor losing his joy stick. Dot seemed to continually have problems with her servo assisted boat and was seen on two occasions doing rapid 360 turns until we were able to time a boarding and rectify it. Well, Peter won the Nationals against fairly stiff opposition. He was a local, with obviously good sailing skills and now a rekindled love of sailing. His accident in 1982 took him from the Australian Cross-Country Ski team and I think you will find in his story mention of his sailing history. Here was the hero I thought we needed.

Peter agreed to take over as Chair of Sailability ACT. There was one stipulation, that as his sailing skills increased and his involvement in the sport took up more time, the role would need to be taken over by others. My aim was quite simple, to have an attraction to sailing that could convince people that sailing was available to them as a sport, despite their disability. The Access Dinghies gave us the assets necessary to fulfil this aim and Peter gave it the credibility.

My hero began a comeback that I am sure will go down in history as one of the most courageous. Pete had not sat in a wheel chair! He had gone back to school and got his degree in accountancy. He had purchased 1000 acres of sheep and deer farm one hour's drive north of Canberra and was running a successful business in greeting cards, the photography for which he does himself. On top of this he has the most incredible list of friends. One such friend, Ian (Ruffy) Ruff, won a Bronze

Medal in the 1976 Olympics. Ruffy knew Peter's potential and wanted to give his old mate the opportunity to compete at the highest level in our sport, sailing. Thus began ACT Parayachting, but that's another story. The first chapter of this incredible hero story will be completed late in 2000 on a dais in Sydney. Stand by for Chapter 2!



*Kim Williams at back of boat*



# Chiyo and Hirotaka Yano

## Hokkou Yacht Harbour – Osaka, Japan

### The love boat



*Chiyo and Hirotaka Yano*

One day my friend who goes to skiing with me said, “Do you want to go to a “Come and Try” with me. There is a sailboat which seems to be fun?”. This is how I got to know Access Dinghy.

At that time, I had recently been disappointed in love by a girl who had promised marriage. Although I did not want to do anything, I wanted to know new experiences and went to the Hokkou Yacht Harbor.

At the sailing I found my dear girl. The fun of Access Dinghy and my growing interest in her, meant I came to participate in sailing of Access Dinghy repeatedly. (Easy sailing for a beginner got me in.)

If a man is pleasant and happy, the man’s face will turn into a wonderful face, and character will also become good.

At a certain onboard party, I meet my present wife and began to associate with her. Although I am a disabled person, I am a sport lover and she is also. Therefore, at the time of dating, we did outdoor sports often, and sailing by Access Dinghy gradually became a part of our dates.

I was invited to compete in the Access Dinghy Japan Championship in July, 2000. Up until then I had sailed only two or three times by Access Dinghy. It cannot be said that that experience is enough. But

my interest smashed my uneasiness. I participated in the division of the doubles of a disabled person and a healthy person. We won the division because it was blessed with my partner, who of course helped me. We got married on the end of that year.

The Access Dinghy Japanese Championship was held also in the summer of 2001. I decided to participate. I sailed again in the doubles division and this time, my partner was my wife.

We became nervous and practised three times before the race. Once in the practice when my wife did a great movement, water entered into the boat and we both became uneasy. However, we were able to win the races. There was a baby in my wife's belly - not only two of us sailing but three. Baby is four months old now. I want to sail with my wife and baby in two years time.

I hope Access Dinghy increases all over the world, and many people can experience sailing of Access Dinghy.

Editor's Note:

Chiyo and Hirotaka (both with CP), have a healthy baby boy named Tomohiro.



This collection of stories is written by, and about sailors with disabilities. The authors have spent most of their lives overcoming obstacles, whilst we, the not yet disabled, spend most of our lives creating obstacles. From novice to olympic standard, they show immense courage and a sense of humour. Their stories are an inspiration and a challenge to the rest of us.

Sailing is an activity in which people with a disability can participate on equal terms with able bodied people. It offers a freedom not available to them by any other means.



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photograph David Hale