

I can't get it out of my head

by Lloyd Borrett, VSAG

I fell in love with the sea in my early childhood down at the Whyalla foreshore on the edge of Spencer Gulf, blinded by the light sparkling off the water. I remember rushing to check each new edition of the “Whyalla News” for the tide times, cutting them out and sticking them on the fridge door in the kitchen. Then pestering my parents to take me down to the beach when the tide would be in so we could go for a swim.

For many, the beach was simply a place to lie on the sand in a place where the air was cooler. For me, it was always about being in the salty sea water.

Hours spent swimming out to the raised platforms at Whyalla beach, climbing up on them and diving back into the water. Trying to swim between the two platforms underwater, holding my breath until it felt like my lungs would burst. Or, just lying on the top of a pontoon with my back a map of dried salt and peeling sunburn, peering down into the mottled water looking for blue swimmer crabs, fish and stingrays.

The sea is completely consuming — a threat with one hand and a gift with the other, but above all, neutral. While on holiday in Adelaide I was riding with Robert, an older cousin, as he paddled his

surf ski at Henly Beach South. A wave hit us and I was washed off. I drifted down to the sandy bottom. I felt a calm come over me.



Lloyd at Henly Beach, Adelaide, South Australia

I pushed off the bottom with my legs and rose back to the surface, took a breath and drifted back down again. As I went up and down, so did my cousin, frantically looking for me, but out of cycle. My father and uncle caught Robert's attention and told him to wait on the surface for me. And so I was “saved”. Ever since that day I've consoled myself with the thought that if the sea drowned me, then at least there was no ill-will involved.

In my primary school years, I'd pedal my bicycle down to the beach for a swim if the tide was in. If it was out, I might go hunting for crabs, armed with a broom stick with two nails on the end, and a plastic bucket. On a few occasions I'd fish for King George Whiting, wading in

the shallows as the tide was coming back in, using one of dad's plastic hand line reels with three hooks on the end of the line.

In my early teenage years I helped my father build a Heron sailing dinghy in the backyard shed. Then dad taught me to sail it as I crewed for him in the races out from the Whyalla Yacht Club on Sunday afternoons. This gave me a very different appreciation of the sea. I learnt to study the waves, tides and currents, plus where to look for the wind shifts and how to make use of them.

A few years later my cousin Grant would crew for me and I'd skipper the Heron as we raced against the adults. Together we thrilled in the raw excitement of riding the big waves on fast reaches, or downwind runs, when the wind was up and the horizon looked like a ripsaw.

During the high school week, when bored in the mornings I'd gaze out of my classroom window and judge the wind strength and estimate the sea conditions from the movements of the nearby trees. In the afternoons, I would smell the sea change coming in across the treetops and feel the rush of cooler air on my skin. I felt I was more in touch with the environment about me than the majority of my classmates who just didn't seem to experience the sea as I did.

On Saturdays in summer my mother would drive me out to the yacht club

towing the Heron and I'd rig, launch down the metal boat ramp into The Basin, and go sailing solo. Sometimes two of my school mates would be there with their boats. We'd head off together, each sailing solo, exploring False Bay, oblivious to the lifecycle of the giant Australian cuttlefish occurring in the waters around us.

We might venture north over to the Point Lowly Lighthouse and around into Fitzgerald Bay. Or head south of the town and up inlets into the mangroves, with just the tips of the sails above the treetops, feeling like we were in the movie "The African Queen". We'd delight in the pleasures of the marine environment that surrounded us.



Sailing in False Bay, Whyalla, South Australia

Some weekends a mate and I would drive down the coast and seek out magnificent, deserted, beaches with awesome surf breaks. We'd stand on the white sandy veranda of Eyre Peninsula, with the sand dunes forming the house behind us, and gaze out onto an unspoilt vista. He'd take to the water on his homemade surf boards. I preferred to body surf as that way I felt more at one with the waves.



Lloyd sailing his Laser at Black Rock, Victoria.

Not long after coming to Melbourne in 1976, I purchased a Laser and sailed from Black Rock Yacht Club. But sailing on Port Phillip Bay simply wasn't nearly as adventurous and exciting. Soon enough the boat was sold and I'd just go down to the beach at Elwood for a night swim on those rare really hot and sweltering summer nights.

I took up gliding, soaring on solar air currents out of Waikerie, making my way in the sky over the wheat fields, sheep paddocks and mulga country of South Australia and Victoria. Utilising the power of the sun as the air sighs past the sleek fuselage and Perspex cockpit of the glider. Learning about the air and the land, instead of the sea.

Soaring around billowing cumulus clouds at 12,000 feet, or rocketing cross country at speeds of up to 270 km/h. Taking a high tow at sunset, then tumbling, looping, spinning and twisting down from a golden sky, entwined in a freeform aerobatics run in the still and smooth air as the sun slowly disappeared over the hori-



Lloyd in a Hornet at Benalla, Victoria (July 1982)

zon, finally touching back down upon the earth as night approached.

The spiritual experience of hooking into a thermal and being joined by a wedge tailed eagle which is looking curiously at the big white bird with a 15 metre wingspan circling in the rising air that the eagle's ancestors had been using for thousands of years. Its sharp piercing eyes met mine and we connected for a divine moment in time, together in the summer sky above the vast brown land.

Later I moved inland to live in a stunning 'paradise of privacy' in the Australian bush, nestled in the Great Dividing Range north of Kilmore, amongst vast expanses of tall, magnificent gums and wattles. It was a haven for the native flora and fauna, with delightful walking and horse trails. It was also further away from the sea than I'd ever lived. And I missed the sea. The large fresh-water dam in the front paddock just wasn't quite the same.

Not until nearly 50 years of my life had passed was I introduced to scuba diving. My life hasn't been the same since. I fell in love with the sea all over again. I've been profoundly changed. Phrases from



Water sports in the dam isn't quite the same.

the song, "I can't get it out of my head," by Electric Light Orchestra stick in my head.

Midnight on the water

I saw the ocean's daughter

Walkin' on a wave she came

Staring as she called my name

And I can't get it out of my head

No, I can't get it out of my head

Now my old world is gone for dead

'Cos I can't get it out of my head

- Electric Light Orchestra

Most people, just like me, come into diving pretty unaware. Blank slates, if you will. We know little about the equipment we will be using, are certainly unfamiliar with the skills and knowledge. Few starting in Melbourne would have ever heard of Lonsdale Wall and the magical delights it holds. From the minute we decide to have a go, scuba diving becomes a total learning experience.

The education goes past the bookwork and the skills acquired in the water, to way beyond what we think diving will be. Divers willing to do so are soon to find out more than they know about the world's history, geography and its people. They will learn some oceanography, plus lots about marine life and diving's environments.

But when we swim with something alive and inquisitive like a friendly cuttlefish or playful seal, or we venture along an underwater wall that stretches out before

us and descends down beyond unlimited visibility, we learn even more about ourselves.

Prior personal experience and our very familiar world expand way past anything that we have imagined, to discover that it's more. Much, much more. For many divers the observance and appreciation of nature on the scale where divers are privileged to be will become deeply personal.

But more than this, what keeps bringing me back for dive after dive is that which is still coming in the way of new learnings. Sometimes, quite unexpected.

These days I head out from Sorrento with the outboard motor purring. There's the open-ocean shiver that goes through me



Lloyd with jellyfish at Blairgowrie Pier, 2006

every time we cross The Rip and head outside Port Phillip Bay. Then I get to dive down from the surface to where the water is cooler. As I drift down the sea rings and clicks in my ears. Then I venture deeper where the pressure of the water hugs my whole body. I am gliding, flying, but this time with the ocean unfolding below.

I am in the sea, where I do not belong. I am in the sea, but not of it. It's a spiritual feeling I get to experience on borrowed time, for sooner or later I have the surface to return to.

***“Now my old world is gone for dead,
‘Cos I can’t get it out of my head.”***

P.S.

On Friday 10th June, John Lawler and I attended the Melbourne Boat Show 2011. While heading out from “Jeff’s shed” to partake of some lunch, we passed by the entrance to the Mind Body Spirit Festival. This appeared to be just a tad more touchy feely than the boat show.

We joked to each other about the stark contrast. Should we take a look inside and learn how to better get in touch with our inner diver? Later, this conversation did get me to thinking about aspects of diving we rarely discuss. So I thought I’d have a go at putting some of my journey and thoughts down on paper. Feel free to have a go at it yourself for a future edition of Fathoms. ❖