

HUMBUG



Greenwich Flying Squadron

November 2022

<https://gfs.org.au/>



GFS members setting off for a Twilight race in perfect conditions



Welcome to **Humbug**

Dear GFS Members,

I'm pleased to have been appointed the new editor of Humbug. It was actually some time ago that I stepped into the role and I apologise to everyone for the long delay in publishing this first edition. As my background is in print journalism I had thought I'd be able to deliver this quite quickly but it's clearly taken longer than expected!

But I have certainly enjoyed interviewing some of our amazing club members for this edition. I've started by profiling two of our oldest members, then we have the incredible story of club member Christian Charalambous who won a global seamanship award for his bravery at sea and we finish with some winning news from our junior sailors. So hopefully I've covered the full spectrum of GFS members!

As my husband Simon and I are relatively new members to the club, I look forward to meeting more of you and to learning your stories so I can include them in future editions of Humbug. I'll also be keen for any story tips or ideas so please feel free to send contributions to this email: janeractliffe@gmail.com

I trust you all enjoy this edition of Humbug,

Happy reading (when not sailing!)

Jane Ractliffe

Sparkling GFS Stalwart Harvey Porter

Awarded two QEII Trophies for Service to the GFS



Harvey Porter Outside 'Harvey's Office' at the GFS

FOR many at the Greenwich Flying Squadron, the club's corner office will forever be known as 'Harvey's Office' given the amount of time spent there by 80-year-old club stalwart Harvey Porter, one of the club's most jovial and long-serving members.

Having served variously as the club's membership secretary, its handicapper and the twilight course setter, Harvey has twice been awarded the club's QEII trophy in recognition of his enormous contribution.

But Harvey says it has always a pleasure to help the club as he finds the people there to be so friendly. In fact, he believes the acronym GFS should instead stand for "Great Fun Squadron" or 'Great Family Sailing'.

"I have had a lot of ups and downs in my life, and one of the big ups of my life has been the Greenwich Flying Squadron," he says.

As anyone who has met Harvey will attest, he is always keen for a chat and enjoys a joke. But he also has a fascinating life story in which sailing and watercraft are intertwined throughout.

Harvey first became involved in the GFS around 1987-88 after one of his friends at the Tambourine Bay Sea Scouts – where he was volunteering as a Scout Leader having recently retired from the Royal Australian Navy – invited him to sail with him out of GFS on his J24 called *Grott*.

Around that time, after some differences and discussions, the Skipper of *Grott* (Geoff R Otewill) suggested the club needed a starter for the Saturday morning races so Harvey agreed to take on the role, was paid \$50 every week and became a member of the GFS committee. The club handicapper also invited him to takeover,

“As we didn’t have a computer at the club I got them to buy a PC and then I started doing the yacht race handicapping. But it’s one of the most thankless jobs – it’s like being in the tax office!” he says.

Back then the club only had two or three divisions, and Harvey says that in the late 80s the Wednesday night races were “pretty small in yacht numbers”.

But over the years the club’s growth saw Harvey grow the number of divisions to six. He says the key to successful handicapping is to try and get as many boats of the same abilities into the same division.

“Generally it could be done by length, but that’s not always true. But each time I thought we needed a new division I had to get committee approval for it and had to put a good case forward. Sometimes I would question the motives of some of the people against the idea!”

But Harvey is clear that his focus was always to ensure that everyone had a good competitive race and enjoyed themselves.

“If you are going to be last every week you are not going to enjoy sailing with us, so the objective is to keep the membership happy with their sailing. That was my whole premise, and it also gave me a lot of things to think about and kept my mind active,” he says.

Harvey also spent many years setting the course for the Wednesday twilights, often assisted by Keith Tierney and the sailing secretary Phil Hare whom he says is “very disciplined. He keeps us to the rules!” Phil also set the Saturday courses and Harvey would assist if he was not sailing.

“(For the twilights) I had a formula for the start where we tried to start everyone before 6pm as they had to finish before 8.15pm. The difficulty was in setting a course for each division so that they would finish the course with the available wind and tides before we ran out of daylight as we always aimed to finish before official sunset,” he says.

“The twilights broke your week up beautifully. When I was still working I always used to ask to get off early on a Wednesday so I could sail and then I would stay back (at work) on a Friday.”

Born in Stanmore (or ‘Saint Ann Moore’ as he prefers to pronounce the suburb) Harvey’s family moved to Balgowlah Heights above Forty Buckets Beach when he was five.

“My father had a small yacht – a Bluebird 22-footer – and he made a special stand for me to be his forehead lookout through the front hatch when he was sailing and I went out every second weekend with Dad,” he said.

“But if I was not sailing we were swimming in the baths or I was paddling around in a dinghy – I loved the water but back then I had red hair so I always had to wear long shirts to keep out of the sun. I have three sisters and no brothers so I was isolated and would wander around the bush with my dog.”

Harvey’s family has a long history of military service with his two grandfathers serving in the Royal Australian Army and his father in the Royal Australia Air Force where his accountancy training saw him initially become a pay corporal in the Citizens AF out at the Richmond air base.

When WW2 started his father became the RAF’s liaison for the De Havilland Aircraft Company (which made and repaired aircraft at Bankstown) but his father was promoted to Flight Lieutenant RAAF Liaison Officer at De Havilland Bankstown.

“He was responsible for making sure aircraft that came in to get repaired did so, and he had to send spares to squadrons around Australia and the Pacific. Then after the war they promoted him to Squadron Leader as they wanted to keep him to look after the stores coming back,” Harvey says.

His father left the Air Force in 1947 and joined Peters Ice Cream as their purchasing manager, but three years later the family’s world would change when his father landed a role in Geneva as a medical supply officer for the World Health Organisation.

This was the catalyst for an incredible three-year adventure for the then nine-year-old Harvey.

“At the time there were ships returning to Europe virtually empty so our family was able to get a ship to Marseille, then a train to Paris and another train to Geneva and then I was placed in the Geneva International School and I remember it all very clearly,” Harvey says.

“In 1953 we flew from Geneva to London for the Queen’s Coronation. We went around the route the day before as a family and we saw all the bunting and flags. But dad decided the weather report for the Coronation wasn’t that good so we stayed at the hotel as they had a projector TV set up and the people in their ballroom and the hotel guests got the best seats so we watched the whole of the Coronation as it happened in black and white. And the next day we went into town and saw it in colour at a theatrette.”

The headquarters for his father’s department then moved to Delhi and then to Alexandria in Egypt so the family moved and lived in Egypt for a year where Harvey attended the British Boys School of Alexandria during a time of great upheaval. But he and his school friend still had ‘boys fun’ as they visited many cinemas and Harvey also managed to do some sailing in the traditional Arab dhow boats.

Then at the end of 1953 Harvey’s family left for a six week holiday which took them to New York City, then to Toronto where they saw the Niagara Falls, then to Calgary where they travelled across the Rockies in the middle of winter to Banff and then to Vancouver and then to Hawaii, Fiji and Auckland.

“And then we flew by seaplane to Sydney and landed in Rose Bay. We stayed in Sydney as it was the time of the Queen’s visit and there was a lot of decorations. But then we flew out of Sydney to Darwin, then Singapore, then to Calcutta and stayed a week in Delhi and visited the Taj Mahal and the Red Fort. Then we went to Karachi then Basra and then Cairo and we went to see the Sphinx and the pyramids and we rode camels and then flew back to Alexandria.”

But with all the upheaval in Egypt the family decided to return to Australia in the middle of 1955 when Harvey was 13.5 years old. He was enrolled at Manly Boys High School and joined the Manly Sea Scouts in North Harbour.

He also bought himself his first boat - a VJ, or a 12-foot Vaucluse Junior.

“Having three sisters I wanted to be with the boys and we met every Saturday afternoon and did a lot of sailing, rowing, hiking and camping,” Harvey says.

But just before he was about to turn 16, Harvey Joined the navy and embarked on a five-year apprenticeship to become an electrical artificer, a job he describes as being like “the step between a tradesman/mechanic and an engineer”.

“We were taught how to keep the ship afloat and make things to keep the ship working in a war time situation. We had to do maths and science to first year university standard and after 3.5 years we were sent to Flinders in the south of Victoria for six months where we learned to be electricians.”

At the end of his apprenticeship, Harvey volunteered to transfer to the Fleet Air Arm where he trained in avionics to maintain the aircraft that flew onto what was then the Navy’s main aircraft carrier - the HMAS Melbourne. Just after WW2 the Curtin/Chifley Government purchased two carriers – HMAS Sydney and Vengeance. The Vengeance was replaced by Melbourne in the mid 50s.

Harvey went to Malaysia and Vietnam in 1964 and 1965 where he saw some active service. Harvey obtained the rank of Chief Petty Officer on HMAS Melbourne.

“When we went to Vietnam we escorted the HMAS Sydney which was full of soldiers, tanks and trucks and we had to fly anti-submarine patrols the whole way,” he says.

Returning to Australia in the middle of June 1965, the Navy asked for volunteers to move to radio and radar (higher level electronics) and when Harvey put up his hand he was sent back to Flinders to do more training to become a Chief Radio Electrical Artificer after which in 1966 he got married, was sent accompanies to San Diego for 18 months where he learnt Tracker ASW aircraft, Skyhawk fighter/bomber and Seaking helicopter avionics. He qualified as an instructor and taught US Navy technicians and his first daughter was born in California.

Harvey’s life then took a sad turn with a marriage breakdown which affected him deeply, and he was eventually declared unfit for sea duties.

“I was in hospital for a while in Balmoral and one of the people looking after me was involved in the Scouts and when I came good he said they needed a leader at Tambourine Bay in Lane Cove and all through my career I’d been working with different Scout groups so I volunteered again,” Harvey says.

He’d also moved off the HMAS Kuttabul base and started renting a room in Austin St in Lane Cove.

It was also at the Tambourine Bay Sea Scouts that Harvey met his future wife Janet, having been asked to recruit a Female Venturer Leader. Janet so impressed Harvey not just as a Venturer Leader that they were unofficially engaged within a week. They were married in 1977 and have now been married for more than 40 years.

“I was being sent to England on HMAS Melbourne for the Queen’s Silver Jubilee and I said it would be best to be married before I left so we married two weeks before I left and I returned home five months later to my bride,” he says.

But then in January 1978 Harvey decided to leave the navy and joined the Commonwealth Public Service where he worked with the School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine located at the University of Sydney.

“I had done my 20 years and didn’t feel like doing more and it (the navy) had helped ruin one marriage and I thought I didn’t want to do that again.”

At the School of Public Health he worked on some international biomedical experiments including helping service men and women to acclimatize to heat and cold.

He was later headhunted by the Department of Defence in North Sydney where he worked in the avionics field, doing the same thing he did in the RAN but now as a civilian.

Harvey eventually finished his career working at the Australian Tax Office in Chatswood, where he was recruited due to his skill with electronics. Here he worked on some of the first computer networks in the ATO before eventually retiring in 1999.

During this time Harvey and Janet had two daughters who attended the Lane Cove Public and Harvey was also very active in the school’s P&C.

He was also still sailing, as his friend Bob Wilson who owned the hardware store in Lane Cove had a 26 foot Thunderbird and needed crew so Harvey used to sail with him every Saturday out of the Sydney Amateurs Sailing Club in Mosman Bay.

But then one of the other scout leaders – Geoff Ottewill - asked him to sail with him on *Grott* and that was Harvey’s first connection with the GFS. He sailed with Geoff out of GFS for two to three years before he became a member.

“Bill Carney had been the Mayor of Parramatta and he had a Hood 23 boat called *Carriad* (Welsh for darling) and he came to me one year and said he was getting a new boat called All Sorts and he was selling *Carriad* – so I bought it and that was my first boat and I started racing Wednesday night twilights in 1993 and I loved it,” Harvey says.

Then when Harvey started to become the handicapper he was given access to the office in the club.

“But it had white ants and virtually all the vertical timber in the club had white ants and we had to rebuild the club from the inside. And when we did that we changed the design so the sailing office is where it is now and we built a store room and it opened up the whole floor. That was all done by Don Ridley, Rhodesy and Ray Vaughan.”

In 1996 Harvey bought a Dunkensen 29 which he called *Haliastur* which is the name of a bird genus (a fast sea hawk).

It was also at GFS that Harvey experienced his first heart attack in 1994.

“My youngest daughter was rigging her sabot on a Sunday morning and I felt this heart attack come on but within three minutes I was at Royal North Shore Hospital,” he says.

But then Harvey had another heart attack in 1999.

“My heart specialist had been sailing on *Haliastur* a couple of times and I told him I’d have to give up sailing because the boat had a one hand tiller and when I stretched my arm it hurt a lot. So I sold *Haliastur* and bought *Out of Africa* as it had a wheel.”

Harvey’s heart specialist also told him not to sit at home watching TV or he would die young,”so that’s when I rejoined the RSL in about 2000 just after my second heart attack”.

He had first joined the RSL in 1965 when he returned from Vietnam but had not regularly attended as it took some time for Vietnam Vets to be embraced by the RSL.

“But when I went back to the Lane Cove sub-branch they knew me because I used to take the Sea Scouts to the service each year and I wore my medals. So they asked me to join and then they said ‘how would you like to be the Vice President’ and then ‘how about being the delegate to the northern district? So I said I would be his understudy and then a year later I was President as the President died so it was an automatic promotion.”

Harvey was the Lane Cove RSL’s President for 17 years, and also the District President of the Northern Metropolitan District (which covers from Mosman to Hornsby and up to Brooklyn) for 7 to 8 years but is now its junior vice president.

The Lane Cove RSL has responsibility for managing the ANZAC Day and Remembrance Day services, and every second month they host a talk in the library.

“I started that some years back together with the Lane Cove Council. The Council is one of the best in NSW in getting involved in community organisations as there’s painting groups, theatre groups, old people’s groups. They’re really very good,” he says.

Meantime, Harvey was also sailing twilights and the Saturday races on *Out of Africa* from 2002 to 2018.

“I’m famous in the club as when I got *Out of Africa* in 2002 I had an all-male crew but in 2006 a lady came down who was living in Chisholm St and was renting the top half of a house from one of our members. She wanted to sail and she became one of my most consistent crew members. One day she bought all her girlfriends down and I had seven women on board and no other men and they sailed the boat very well. And they bought dips and wines and that became a regular thing with our races,” he says.

“After the races I used to go to the office and put the results on the Internet and one day I was sitting in my office and one of the ladies came to get a table out and I heard one of the Etchell sailors ask ‘How does Harvey get all you girls sailing with him?’ and she said ‘He’s the only one who doesn’t shout at us’...I just used to think ahead and told them what was going to happen instead.”

But Harvey says there was a downside to sailing with him: “They did have to suffer my jokes as we sailed around the harbour.”

The Sailing Adventures of Long-term GFS Member **John Wood**



*John Wood photographed at his
Northwood home, with GFS in the background*

AS one of the oldest members of Greenwich Flying Squadron it's not unsurprising that John Wood may have had some adventures on the sea, but few would have had such close encounters with sharks and whales.

As a member of the winning Sydney to Hobart crew on Even during the 1955 event, John's team arguably experienced one of the more unusual sailing conundrums during the race when a grey nurse shark came on board.

"The shark got caught on a logline which was a piece of cord with a spinner on the end to register your speed and mileage and the six-foot shark got it caught in its mouth," he said.

"We got it on board and wrestled him on the deck and he knocked a chunk out of the rudder. Most of the crew moved from one side of the boat to the other pretty quickly!"

Before that, when sailing in the Montague Island Race run by the Royal Prince Alfred Yacht Club (which was the precursor to the Sydney to Hobart) the crew chanced upon a whale.

"The whale had come alongside on the weather side of the boat and was sounding so it blew (water) and we got all the stinking weed and bits of fish in the sail as the wind was blowing that way," he said.

“I tell you it smelled, and the whale was longer than the boat.”

Apart from winning the Hobart race, John and his crew also competed in four or five of Montague races and their crew secured the record time for the event.

Back in the 50s, John said they took 11 crew to Hobart and usually had two to three helmsmen, two to three forehand hands and then deckhands in between “but there was also a few of us that could sail the boat and observe what was happening so you could anticipate anything that was about to happen”.

Despite their success, John said “one time to Hobart was enough” and he’s happy Even’s record is etched in one of the pavers on Constitution Dock.

A keen sailor since at least the age of 15, John had sailed for more than 40 years out of the Middle Harbour Yacht Club before joining GFS some eight or so years after moving to Northwood in 1964.

“I had a sailing canoe in Mosman Bay where I grew up and I learned to sail on different boats – VS’s and some 18 footers owned by Harry Prince who kept them in a shed in Mosman Bay – and I built a sailing dinghy at one stage when I was a young guy.”

Sailing ran in the family as John’s father was a good sailor and was working in the Naval Reserve at the time the ferry Kuttabul was torpedoed and sunk in Sydney Harbour in 1942 by a Japanese submarine.

“He’d had three days of working 14 to 15 hours straight and so that day he’d said he’s going home at 4pm and that’s the night the Japs got in. So he was lucky to be alive,” he said.

John started racing out of the Balmoral Sailing Club for a few years with great success but then joined the Middle Harbour Yacht Club where he started on a Swanson 27 built by Ron Swanson and later sailed a Phantom 32, both of which were called Sinbad.

Later, John and his wife Rosemary had a 34-foot yacht they’d take to Pittwater with their three girls – one of whom remains a keen sailor out of Brisbane – and he says the cruising yachts remain his favourite simply because they need fewer crew.

Their Northwood home has a direct line-of-sight across the bay to the GFS but John’s first contact with the club came a few years after the home’s purchase when he sailed with a few GFS members.

“I’d had a few sails at the club and then they found out I had a slipway and marina so they used to come to my house to get their boats slipped and get them clean before a race,” he said.

As his involvement with GFS grew he raced a Force Four with Tim Kannegieter’s father Hans for more than 20 years but when Hans passed away John decided to give up racing.

“But we did all right and we’d won a few races,” he said.

However, his GFS involvement did not end as he was then asked to assist Harvey Porter and Keith Tierney in setting the courses for the twilight events.

“It’s not easy to set a course as you have to take into account the tide, the wind and the shipping out of Gore Bay and then you have to get the boats home before dark,” he says,

John was also GFS’s representative on the Neighbourhood Marine Watch committee which was set up in 1989 after people began stealing from boats, and kept that position for more than eight years.

And for more than ten years John was also the club’s representative at what was then the Maritime Services Board managing the waterway. Key issues for that group were managing housing developments that might protrude into the river and ensuring that new moorings did not become sailing obstacles.

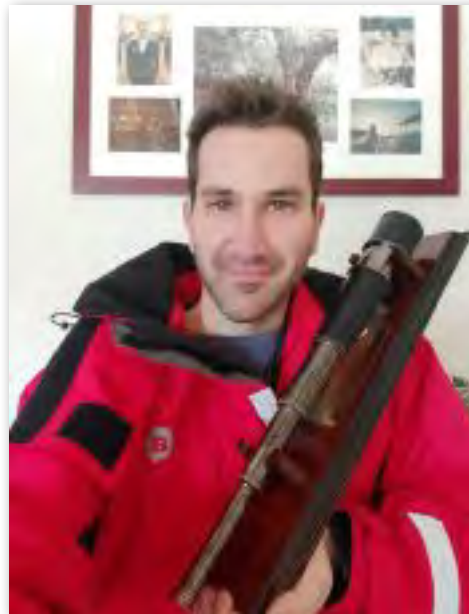
And today he still manages the club’s spare mooring – a job he’s performed for 25 years – with the mooring a service to GFS members who are either waiting for a mooring or for those whom may have two boats and need a spare mooring as they wait for a boat to be sold.

While no longer an active sailor, John maintains a close connection with GFS and joins what he calls the ‘Deck of Knowledge’ lunch on the club’s deck most Thursdays where a few of the older members socialise.

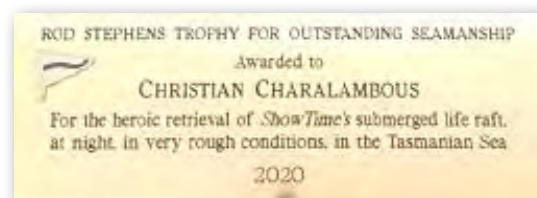
“The friendships and the twilight sailing has been fantastic because you sail and race and have a tonne of fun and everyone who comes back after the race enjoys themselves,” he said.

“And if you are lucky enough you may get yourself a prize.”

Hero GFS Member Honoured Wins Global Seamanship Award



*Christian Charalambous with the Rod Stephens
Trophy for Outstanding Seamanship*



Plaque on the Rod Stephens Trophy

GREENWICH Flying Squadron blue division sailor Christian Charalambous has been honoured with one of world sailing's most significant awards for his role in rescuing his seven crew members following a potentially fatal incident in the Bass Strait in January 2020.

Having decided to challenge himself with his first trans-Tasman crossing, Charalambous found himself in a terrifying life-or-death situation after volunteering as a return crew member for the Ker40 boat Showtime which had just completed the 2019 Sydney to Hobart Race.

But at 2.30am on January 5 the journey turned took a dangerous turn when the boat suddenly lost its keel and inverted. Christian risked his life to save the other crew by removing his life jacket so he could dive under the upturned boat in a three metre swell to try and cut away the tightly secured life raft. Having cut it free, Christian then helped the other sailors into the raft in a move which saved all their lives. They were then all rescued at 5.30am.

The Cruising Club of America (CCA) annually awards the Rod Stephens Trophy for Outstanding Seamanship to a sailor(s) “for an act of seamanship which significantly contributes to the safety of a yacht, or one or more individuals at sea” and in March this year this award was presented to Charalambous for his selfless and heroic acts the previous year.

Charalambous, 36, who works as an implementation consultant at a software firm, received the award from the famous club whose members include the world’s most accomplished ocean sailors.

Normally Christian and his wife Holly – who is also well known at the GFS due to her role as the social secretary – would have been flown to New York for the presentation at the Club’s annual gala, but due to COVID restrictions it was awarded last year via an online ceremony.

Pam Joy, who was the GFS Commodore at the time Christian won the award, congratulated Christian on the plaudit, saying it was a huge honour for one of the club’s members to have received such a globally-recognised award.

“Congratulations to Christian for his heroic efforts to assist his crewmates in very challenging and dangerous conditions. His remarkable actions and bravery make him a very worthy recipient of the prestigious The Rod Stephens Seamanship trophy,” she said.

“We are very proud to have a member of GFS receive this international recognition for his bravery and seamanship.”

Describing himself as a mostly self-taught sailor whose family had always sailed but never raced, Charalambous’ experience of participating in a GFS race season as a crew member made him realise how much he enjoyed racing.

Charalambous’ father, who was born in Greece, had sailed a Southerly 23 also called *AETOS* (named for the Greek word ‘eagle’) and it was on that boat that Christian first learned to sail. But about eight years ago he decided to improve his sailing skills so he joined EastSail in Rushcutters Bay.

And then a few years later he then decided to buy his own yacht - a Northshore 38 called *AETOS* - and he officially joined the GFS.

Having acquired this greater sailing knowledge, Charalambous also pondered the idea of participating in the nation’s greatest sailing event – the Rolex Sydney Hobart Yacht Race.

“I thought one day I would like to do a Sydney to Hobart Race and I was told a good way to get into it was to do a return trip from Hobart as everyone wants to do the race but not everyone wants to bring the boats back. And my wife was pregnant at the time so I thought if I don’t do it now I never will.”

Charalambous jumped on the MySail app and quickly found the crew spot on *Showtime*.

“I hadn’t done a big sea voyage like that before so I had no expectations – I just wanted to see what it was like,” he said.

Charalambous packed well for the journey, including taking his own life jacket which would eventually prove fortuitous as it had his personal locator beacon attached.

“Little did I know the clothes you put on the boat is what you wear for the entire trip – you don’t get to change at all – and I found that difficult.”

Arriving in Hobart, Charalambous was the last of the crew to arrive and he remembers immediately thinking that all the other crew seemed to have so much more sailing experience.

“So I was hoping I was good enough to do this trip as I didn’t want to let anyone else down,” he said.

Of the seven members in the return crew, two had completed the race from Sydney. The crew were divided into a group of three and a group of four so they could work in shifts to sail the boat.

Christian said it was a beautiful day when they left Hobart and everything seemed fine, but once they got into Bass St it started to get windy and became “like a washing machine”. There were also problems emerging with the boat.

“On the third day I came off my shift and saw the skipper down below...he had a big spanner in his hand and said the keel bolts were coming out and he was having trouble tightening them up as they were faulty. But I didn’t give it too much thought as I didn’t really know what was normal. I had a lot of trust and it wasn’t my decision if we were to turn around,” he said.

“But there was a general feeling on board the boat that it was falling apart as the auto pilot had also failed.”

Fortunately during that time the skipper had tasked Christian with securing some jerry cans that had been bouncing around on deck due to the high seas.

“So the skipper asked me to tie them back up which was a stroke of luck as I took them down below to secure them and put them near the life raft and tied them all together. But then I knew where the life raft was and little did I know then that would help save our lives,” he said.

But as they progressed the sailing conditions continued to worsen and Christian says that by January 4 they had passed Bass St and were getting closer to Batemans Bay when they experienced the consequences of the huge fires burning along the Australian east coast.

“Australia was on fire and there was so much ash in the air that you couldn’t see or breathe so the skipper said only three people were allowed to sail the boat – me and two others with the skipper as the navigator. I was quite honoured that he thought I was up to the challenge but it was hard work as we had sails that were too big and every now and then we would do a crash jibe and the boat would lay on its sail so to get back in the right direction we had to put the head sail out and work the winches under water. It was both terrifying and exciting at the same time.”

“By 2.30 in the afternoon it seemed like the middle of the night because of the ash and smoke so we would look at the instruments to see the bearing we needed to go. We tried to go in a straight direction but it was very hard to keep my eyes opened so I used one (eye) at a time so I could see something.”

After a long period of sailing, it was eventually Christian’s turn for a rest below where he lay down on his wet bunk. At this point *Showtime* was ten to 20 nautical miles off the NSW coast.

“For the first five minutes it feels like heaven (in the bunk) because you are so tired but then I started to feel that my pants were wet and I couldn’t sleep. Then at 2.30am on the morning of the 5th I heard a bang and that was the sound of my hands slapping on the bulkhead next to me so I didn’t roll out of my bunk,” he said.

“The person next to me didn’t have anything next to him so he flew to the bottom of the boat. I was on the side that was in the air. We thought the boat would come back up but a moment later the boat went all the way over and I was trapped. I was wedged under this bunk and I couldn’t get out. But I managed to twist around and my head was forward and I shot out of that crawl space and then half a second later it flooded and it was all filling up very quickly.

“I was in the very back of the cabin and the boat was upside down and water was coming in through the main hatch. We were shouting around to see where we were and if we were all there, but we didn’t know about the people on the outside,” he said.

Luckily Christian had done a ‘Survival at Sea’ training course which he said contributed to saving his life as that taught him to stay with the boat no matter what.

“We were upside down and the air was trapped in there but then the waves started picking up the boat and turned it into a washing machine and there were all these projectiles in there such as sails and knives. I turned to the skipper and said to do a mayday call which he started to do but then he stopped as the radio wouldn’t work because the aerials were under water.

“So I said to activate the ePerb (location device) and while he was doing that just then my bag floated in front of my face and my life jacket was in there so I put it on and it was so lucky as I could then activate my personal locater beacon,” Christian said.

At that point Christian’s mother received a phone call at 3 in the morning with someone asking ‘where is your son’. Christian is not sure if any of the other signals were activated so the beacon was a lifeline.

At this point one of the crew members with Christian said he thought the boat maybe sinking and Christian agreed.

“With every wave there was more and more water being pushed in so I said we should think about getting out of here,” he said.

By now the perilous nature of the situation was fully apparent to Christian.

“I thought I might not make it out of here alive, and in a way that was good because then I said ‘anything is better than dying’ so anything I try I’m improving my chance of living. I thought if I stayed in this boat there’s a 100% chance I’d die but if I swim out it would be 50/50 so I’m going to go.

“No one wanted to go first but I thought I’d put my head into the water but straight away I came back because of the cold of the water. I couldn’t breathe for a bit but then I thought ‘here I go’ so I plunged back in.

“I have no memory of travelling in the water – I don’t think it was because it was so cold but more that it was so traumatic. My next memory is popping out of the side of the boat and then being slammed into the side of the boat.”

Christian emerged from below to find waves that he estimated had a height of two to three metres. The boat then disappeared again and next thing he saw was a silhouette of the boat about 1.5m above him.

“I managed to get hold of a rope attached to the boat and held onto that because I was too scared to get close. Someone yelled out ‘who are you’ and ‘who’s left alive’? The crew (on top) had put their feet into the life lines so when the boat went up they went up with it as they were all clipped in on the safety straps.”

Once he had made it outside, Christian banged on the hull to signal to the others below he had made it and they all eventually followed him to the surface.

“So we were all reunited on the top and everyone seemed OK and I thought we were looking good. We were still not safe but it was much better than we were before.” he said.

They then looked to get the life raft but Christian said “it seemed impossible” as it was too far under the boat, and the raft had been tied strongly into the cockpit with the jerry cans around it to stop it all from shifting.

“The boat was thrashing around like a wild animal,” Christian said, “So we thought ‘let’s try and get over the boat onto the hull’ so I started trying to climb up the boat but every wave pushed me to the side so that didn’t work.”

Despite the desperate situation Christian says the crew members were working very well together to try and find a solution.

“Through this whole ordeal no one lost their cool and everyone was calm,” he said. “Everyone was constantly working the problem. Everyone was thinking and talking logically and making good decisions.”

But after failing to make it onto the hull, Christian said they were “back at square one” and it was becoming obvious it was getting harder to hang onto the boat.

“Then I started shivering quite a lot and a psychiatrist later said it might have been the adrenalin. So I was thinking I’m not going to survive in the water so we need to do something so I said to the skipper ‘I’m going to get the life raft’.”

The skipper Rob Buchanan handed to Christian his knife so he could cut away the ties around the raft and said to him ‘do not drop this’.

“And I thought to myself that if I drop this (knife) we all have no hope so I grabbed onto the knife and then took my life jacket off (so he could get under the boat).”

Christian was also the only crew member not in his wet weather gear, having taken it off before getting into his bunk.

“So I went to the back of the boat and waited for the timing to be right as the boat was thrashing about so I had to wait for it to lift up with the waves. And then I swam through some of the lines and grabbed hold of the jerry cans that I had tied next to the life raft in the cockpit of the boat.

“The boat was plonked straight back into the water but I held on as I had a grip of the life raft and then we were plucked again right out of the water. So I grabbed the knife and started cutting the ties when I was in the air. At first I was trying to be precise but every time I was put back into the water I would be thrown off balance and when I came back out of the water I had to reorient myself and start cutting again.

“But it still wouldn’t come out so then I started to cut any line that I could find,” he said.

“I didn’t think I would be able to go much longer as I was at the point of exhaustion but then someone yelled out that the life raft had moved so I gave it a big yank and it came out of its cradle. So I managed to swim it out from under the boat and gave it to the skipper. He gave me my lifejacket back and then inflated the raft so then I swam to it quickly and was the first onto it.

“I hauled myself in and there was a rope supposed to be connected to the main life raft and the boat and one by one me and another guy got everyone in. The skipper was the last person to come onto the raft.”

Christian says it was an hour between the capsizing and getting into the life raft and they were in the life raft for two hours before being rescued by the NSW Water Police.

“My PLB must have ripped off so I thought no one would find us after this miraculous escape but someone had another lifejacket with another tracking device. And it was so cold in life raft. Everyone else had their proper lifejackets on but I didn’t so I was frozen and the crew huddled around me to keep me warm.”

Unbeknownst to the sailors the rescue party had mobilized seven vessels to search for Showtime, three of which were navy ships.

“We were all so thankful,” Christian said. “We saw lights from the life raft and someone lifted the curtain and we saw a boat heading our way which was the best thing I could have imagined. Up until that point I was fine, but as soon as I was on the boat I started breaking down and crying and probably didn’t stop for two weeks.”

“When I used to tell it (the story) I would burst into tears multiple times – now I might tell it and get a bit emotional but it’s a good feeling and not one of distress and dismay. I saw a psychiatrist afterwards and he said every time you tell the story you relive it a bit which makes it a bit easier to live with so retelling the story is a good step for my mental health.”

Christian has also since become great friends with two of the Showtime crew members – Chris Astill and Jazz Dingley – who now crew with him each week at GFS on Aetos.

“Like everyone on the boat that night they were cool, calm and collected and everyone on the boat was a hero and I just got the spotlight because the skipper said a nice thing about me in the Financial Review,” a humble Christian says.

“If I hadn’t got the life raft someone else would have – it was just that I did it first.”

Skipper Rob Buchanan said Christian’s decision to throw off his life jacket and dive under Showtime to release the life raft was “one of the bravest things I’ve ever seen”. He said it was a desperate situation as “the boat trying to kill everybody as it was banging around and we were holding onto it.”

Christian says he was also strongly motivated to stay alive given Holly was pregnant.

“That was one of the first things I thought about when I thought I was going to die as I thought my son would grow up without a father. So I said to myself that I don’t want to die so anything I try will be better than nothing.”

Fortunately it wasn’t long before Christian returned to the water, having taken advice to return to sailing as soon as possible so a few days after the incident he joined Charles and Rachel Daniels on their boat *Eureka* for a twilight sail at GFS.

Christian continues to enjoy sailing at GFS - “It’s a really nice club and everyone is so friendly” – but there’s very little chance of Christian competing in any future Sydney to Hobart races.

“I wouldn’t rule it out but I don’t think it’s something I would enjoy and that’s why I did the trip – to find that out,” he said.

Junior Sailors Are Flying Again at GFS

And Compete at NSW State Sabot Championships



Olivia Kannegieter races Chicken Hunter

By the Rear Commodore Junior Sailing, Tim Kannegieter

The junior sailing program at Greenwich Flying Squadron is incredibly proud to have three sailors compete in the first round of the NSW State Sabot Championships on Lake Macquarie last weekend 5-6 November 2022.

Eva Pyburn, Theo Anderson and Olivia Kannegieter are inaugural members of the Juniors training program initiated a little over two years ago. The furthest any of our sailors had previously ventured from the sheltered waters in front of the GFS clubhouse was the occasional foray towards Cockatoo Island.

In the second half of last season, we had been setting small triangle courses to develop the skills needed for racing and in the last few weeks providing instruction on racing rules and start procedures.



Theo Anderson manoeuvring before the start of the first race

When the call went out for interest in travelling to the state championships, there was much trepidation and flip-flopping before Eva, Theo and Oliva put their hands up to go.

To say it was a huge leap forward to venture forth onto the wide-open waters of Lake Macquarie and compete in a fleet of over 30 boats is an understatement. The first start with lots of boats milling around was daunting to our racing novices who kept well clear of pre-race manoeuvres.

Starting last our newcomers trailed the fleet but enjoyed a good tussle with a few other boats at the back end. Olivia just completed the first course while the other two ran out of time before the cutoff for the second race.

After mild conditions, a big nor-east sea breeze kicked in and grew rapidly, making conditions quite choppy and our juniors decided zooming around on our rescue boat was more fun and withdrew to watch and learn from the last race. Theo and Eva then had to return to Sydney but were inspired to continue racing.



Eva Pyburn crossing the start line

Overnight the racing committee instigated a new rule, whereby the back fleet was separated into separate division racing one less leg, with their placements in the fleet to be recorded after the last boat completing the full course. With this new arrangement, Olivia was able to complete all three races on Sunday in brisk but less challenging conditions from the day before.

The 2nd round of the State Championships will be held at Vaucluse next February. To build the racing confidence of our juniors, GFS has organised some interclub races with both Drummoyne and Lane Cove 12ft Skiff Clubs before then.

This is a small but important step towards rebuilding the rich racing heritage of our juniors program.



<https://gfs.org.au/>