



City of Port Phillip Living Heritage Project

Edited transcript – Roger Backway

Interviewee: Roger Backway [RB]

Interviewer: Sarah Rood, Way Back When Consulting Historians [SR]

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On the water

SR: Were you close to your father?

RB: Yes, especially later on, especially when we started going to the football and I grew up a bit. And there was only nineteen years difference in our age. Later on when I purchased a motorcycle, and he'd known about motorcycles in his early days, we became very close then. And through fishing, we both fished together. A lot of people used to say it was more like brothers than father and son.

SR: Where did you fish?

RB: In Port Phillip Bay. My father in his early days - soon after he shifted they came to Elwood - he joined the Elwood Sailing Club and made lifelong friends there. So, I was introduced to the beach in very early times - and consequently paying for it now.

SR: In what way?

RB: Cancers. Skin cancers. So, we grew up on the beach. Next to the Elwood Sailing Club was the Elwood Angling Club so we used to see the fishermen coming ashore with fish, and we got in on that act too. One of Father's very close friends who became the Commodore of the Sailing Club, Bill Owens, who was the proprietor of a big firm called Andrew Gaddes - who consequently introduced contact lenses into Australia - they became very close friends. Bill Owens had a car which then enabled Father and I to go rabbiting with him rather than go through the whole train lot. Bill would often take us up to Maryborough to the family farm where we were able to go rabbiting up there and mix with the family; he became a very close friend of our family.

09:42

SR: Did he live nearby?

RB: He lived half a kilometre away. But they used to see one another a lot at the Sailing Club so they bonded very well.

SR: Did you tell me last time that Elwood Sailing Club used to be called Elwood Canoe Club?

RB: Yes, it was a canoe club that went from paddling to somebody putting a mast on it and putting a sail on their canoe; the club evolved from that and got better and better.

SR: And your father's involvement in the club, was he sailing competitively?

RB: Yes, they used to have races every Saturday afternoon. Father never owned a yacht, we weren't in that class, but he was a crewman and then taught me to be a crewman for a couple of years when I was a bit younger.

SR: **And then later you - ?**

RB: Later on I went to go sailing with the Royal Brighton Yacht Club in a class called Dragons, and that was good fun on Saturday afternoons. Dragons were a one-design boat and it was very competitive and very close racing, which led to all sorts of problems between people that are competitive. *[Laughs]*.

SR: **Your sons were involved in sailing too weren't they?**

RB: Yes. I started both sons at Royal Melbourne Yacht Club, which is at St Kilda, in the Junior Division, and they were sailing Cadet dinghies which is a very, very old design from 1927. They've never allowed any design improvements so they've remained the same as their original design which some people would say is backward thinking, but they were a class that taught the kids that they had to sail properly. If they tipped over - bottling as we called it - they were in dire straits, they couldn't win the race if they bottled. Both boys sailed for the state in State Championships, they won their places as state members. My elder son, Lee, when he reached 18 he went into keel boats, go faster boats in the club, and became a very competent yachtsman. He progressed, as the boats got better his skills got better. He sailed in several Sydney-Hobarts, some Melbourne-Hobarts and a lot of other races, then competed in Buenos Aries I can remember at one regatta, and another regatta somewhere near New York with different classes, so he had some skills.

13:00

And, of course, through him I was reintroduced to sailing at a much later age and went back to weekend sailing and Wednesday evening sailing during the summer, doing all the jobs on these boats that nobody else wanted to do like cleaning this and cleaning that. The last boat that we sailed on was a 60-footer which had a huge headsail and I was in charge of the - what they call a sewerman which is doing all the rubbishy - we're pulling the sail down into the bowels of the boat and getting it ready to be repacked to go up on the next spinnaker run. Nobody ever wanted to do that but I was quite happy to do that just to be there, to earn my place on the boat. I was never allowed to do any of the hard, manual work on the grinders or anything like that because I was a bit slow. It was good fun.

SR: **What club was that with?**

RB: That was sailing with Royal Melbourne Yacht Club, Yacht Squadron I think it's called.

SR: **In the early days at Elwood with your dad were most of the people at the club local?**

RB: Yes, very much so.

SR: **And did that stay the same as you went through the clubs?**

RB: No, that changed. Once I went to Brighton, Brighton was a --- Elwood Sailing Club was just a small off the beach boat club with small boats up to 19-20 foot long. It was when you got over to Royal Brighton you got into the bigger boats and mainly keel boats. In those days there was no marina as we know it today, they were all on swing

moorings, so it meant that you had to have a little pram dinghy that you kept in your locker in the clubhouse. The three of us would then have to get into this pram dinghy and row out - which is only about a 10 foot little dinghy - we'd have to row out to the boat on the swing moorings. And guess who'd have to do the rowing.

SR : I'm guessing you, Roger.

RB: Yes. [*Laughs.*]

15:24

SR: You said 'the three of us' so who did you mean?

RB: There'd my father plus the owner of the yacht. I was coerced into going there on Saturdays because they'd usually find me down at Elwood Sailing Club on Saturday mornings, and they'd come and get me and coerce me with a lobster salad lunch. [*Laughs.*] You've got to remember in those days lobsters weren't like they are today. They were very nice but they were not in the cost level that they are today. That was standard lunch at Royal Brighton Yacht Club in those days. [*Laughs.*]