

I was born in Scotland, and have many happy memories of my childhood there. We initially lived at Crammond, an old Roman fishing port near Edinburgh, where boats still tied up to great iron rings which had been set into the stone wharf over a thousand years earlier. After Patrick, my brother, was born we moved to a larger house near the Pentland Hills. This house had an extensive wooded garden enclosed by a high stone wall and provided the opportunity for me, as a small child, to indulge my passion for collecting any animal which happened to stray onto the property, and adding it to an already extensive menagerie of pets.

I had two budgerigars, 'Prickle and Parkin', rabbits, a tortoise, pet mice, a lamb and a pet snake of the non-poisonous variety. I must have driven my parents mad because my idea of an outing, involved either a trip to the zoo, or the local petshop where I would spend as much time as possible, 'talking' to the animals. Patrick and I had an idyllic childhood in many ways, even after our parents separated in 1960 and we came to live in Tasmania permanently. Our grandparents had a house at Orford and in those days nobody worried if children went off on their own for hours on end and we had many adventures exploring the foreshore and surrounding bushland. At weekends and during holidays, Grandfather taught us how to manage his large wooden dinghy and we were shown how to catch and clean fish.

The lifestyle certainly suited my temperament and I was able to indulge an already existing love of animals. I became quite a tomboy, building tree-houses, chicken yards and cages for the various small animals that seemed to make their way (or encouraged into) the garden. I learned many practical skills, largely at the expense of school work. Patrick and I were brought up in a way that encouraged us to think before speaking; natural reticence being considered an attribute in children of an English background. Growing up, as we did, in a divided world, emotional reserve was also thought to be a favourable character trait; a sign of 'good character', and considered a virtue. Yet half a century later, this very characteristic, was hailed by my trial judge as a sign of *calculating, cold behaviour, in a person 'well capable of planning the murder of her partner over a long period of time'*.

## **LIFE WITH HORSES:**

I decided very early that I wanted to work with horses. So, after finishing school, I returned to the UK to enrol in the British Horse Society Instructor's Certificate, spending the first year at a training facility in Ireland. Dublin was an exciting place to be in the early 1970's. Sinn Fein, the left-wing party most closely connected to the Provisional IRA, was 'active', and it was not uncommon to hear gunshots or even explosions just outside Foxrock, where I lived. My parents became worried about safety issues so I finished the course and successfully completed the BHS exam in England.

I was homesick for the bush, and my grandparents, so I 'came home' and took up a position assisting the owners of a Tasmanian horse stud near Oatlands where I spent a wonderful year enjoying the lifestyle on a 'real' farm, learning about fine wool merino sheep, cattle and the finer points of stud management. I decided that if I worked hard and saved, one day I too would be able to buy land. After my mother returned from the U.K. we decided to look for a small property where I would be able to teach horse riding and managed to buy a small cottage with seven acres in the picturesque town of New Norfolk in the Derwent Valley. Mum moved in and together we gradually renovated it, while I taught horse-riding and retrained horses for other people. After several years, with expanding numbers of horses, we realised that more land was required.

In 1975 we bought a 600 acre property at Bagdad. We named it 'Moat House' after one of the properties I had ridden horses on in the UK. On it was large brick house, a substantial shearing shed and a large shed suitable for stables. The land was partly bush with tracks ideal for trail riding. We moved in and established a successful residential horse riding school. The first years were difficult and we lived very frugally. The farm had been purchased with money borrowed at a high interest rate, so initially we had a struggle just to meet mortgage payments. Gradually building up the business, we eventually managed to repay the principle. I worked long hours, often exercising horses after dark with the aid of floodlights. I was rarely in the house during daylight hours in the first few years, being either in the stables or on the tractor, feeding out or harrowing paddocks.



I returned to the UK several times to ride horses, visit my father and gain further qualifications. Ever since I could remember, the spirit of travel had been an integral part of our lives, instilled early by parents who thought nothing of hopping on a plane and travelling long distances to places they were interested in or to visit relatives. I was reminded, following the recent unspeakable tragedy where nearly three hundred people lost their lives after being shot out of the skies above the Ukraine, of an incident when Mum, Patrick and I were returning to Australia after a trip to the UK. We had flown into Karachi late in the day. Not long after our plane landed, the crew were told hostilities had broken out between rival Pakistani factions and we would probably be grounded for the foreseeable future.

In those days, many airlines employed ex-fighter pilots on commercial flights, and our pilot, having swiftly sized up the situation, made the decision to fly. We were hustled back on the plane and I still remember the cabin crew slamming the outer doors and dispensing with the usual 'how to put your life-jackets on before we crash into the sea' routine, as we hurtled down the runway. After take off, the engines really roared and the plane climbed at such a steep angle there were toys and other items rolling down the aisle towards the back. we climbed at after take-off. No-one seemed too concerned until we saw the mushroom-blossom of anti-aircraft flak, bursting around the plane. It was a bit like flying though a thunder storm. In hindsight, we were very lucky.

## MARRIAGE AND CHILDREN:

In 1980 I met Brett Meeker, an American, who had trained to be a blacksmith in the U.S. Predictably we met through matters relating to horses. After we married, Brett and I lived in the converted wool-shed at 'Moat House', and our two daughters, Emma and Sarah were born in the years that followed. As children, they had their own ponies 'Caesar' and 'Charlie' and were able to ride with friends in the surrounding hills. Brett's parents had emigrated to Australia in the 1960's. Art, his father, a well known and respected equine veterinary surgeon, had been entrusted with setting up 'Neptune Stud' a top class breeding and training complex at Colebrook, in the heart of midland Tasmania. His mother Sydne, welcomed me into their family sharing her considerable wisdom on a wide range of subjects, including how to make a proper pumpkin pie. To this day we remain good friends. Brett and I divorced some years later. The separation was amicable and Brett remarried several years after. Despite rumours to the contrary, he is still *alive and well*, and living in the Channel area. He continues to be, very supportive, sitting through my entire trial with other family members. Sydne visits me regularly in prison and keeps me up to date with their news.

I had always been keen on boating, but apart from sailing with relatives in Scotland, I hadn't had much opportunity to get out on the water. Although I could already sail, I was often working when invitations were extended. Then, in the mid-80's, a small yacht came on the market at a reasonable price, and we bought it. It was a 'Roberts 28', a solid, safe design and so forgiving of my lack of expertise, it virtually taught us to sail. Although I would not have ventured out into blue water without someone who really knew what they were doing, we had many enjoyable trips away in the Channel area with friends and family.

One of my closest friends had children about the same age as mine, so we often set off for Bruny Island with our little 'unsinkable' orange dinghy trailing behind. Depending on the weather, we would either head for Dennes Point on Bruny Island, drop anchor and go ashore for a picnic on the beach. Or sail down the channel for the day, setting a net on the way, in the hope of catching an 'escaped' salmon. There were lots of sheltered bays and the children would row ashore to explore little hidden beaches, while we followed their progress through binoculars. On the way home, if we were lucky with the net, we would take the fish back and eat it for dinner. Looking back, I see that these were indeed golden days.



I had been living on my own at 'Moat House' for several years before I met Bob. I and a small group of old friends had been spending school holidays together, bush-walking, sailing and camping with our young children. In 1989 a friend asked whether I would like to spend a couple of days at the ski lodge she belonged to on Ben Lomond. Although I hadn't skied for many years, I thought it might be fun to try it again, so we picked a weekend and drove up. Bob was in the lodge cooking roast lamb for everyone. He had been divorced for some years when we met and over the ensuing months we developed a friendship. Sharing many similar interests we often went away with our usual group, either on the boat, camping or skiing.

Our relationship was further cemented after Bob began spending weekends at the farm, helping with lamb-marking and other activities associated with rural life. Being an excellent and dedicated cook, he observed my disorganised and vague habits when cooking, prone to wander off, telephone in hand, unmindful of a pot about to boil over. Eyes narrowed, he swiftly took control of the kitchen to my delight and relief. At Bob's suggestion, I and my daughters moved into his house in West Hobart, as travelling to and from the Royal Hobart Hospital (RHH) to the farm, morning and night, was, for Bob, quite exhausting. Bob was then suddenly confronted with having to co-exist with a small menagerie; 'Charlie', the West Highland Terrier, and 'Wretched' Sarah's much loved cat, who kept Bob company when I and the children were away.

On the home front Bob did not insist on giving advice, but offered it generously when asked, and was generally a wonderful mentor. Both of us were avid readers and books were a regular topic of conversation. A family joke was that if the relationship ever ended, Bob's main irritation would be having to return my library card, confiscated at an early stage to enable him to order extra books. Bob was the main organiser of trips overseas; he had lists for everything. I was the opposite and would start packing only hours before take-off. A copy of 'Lonely Planet' was never far from the dinner table and friends would joke about never needing to ask where we were off to next, as they could *read* about it. Being a fairly gregarious soul, I was quite talkative, and casual acquaintances often made the mistake of assuming I made most of the decisions; when in actual fact, Bob, with his quiet intelligence, would sit listening and then decide what was to happen. This suited us both. Over the years Emma and Sarah, came to feel that Bob was like a father. They consulted him for advice on most important decisions; the discussions often taking place whilst Bob prepared one of his wonderful curry's.

Sailing was restricted to the Channel and Bruny Island area, as neither of us were experts. We were, however, very compatible when it came to practicalities, with Bob doing the cooking and any required charting (navigation), and I made sure the yacht sailed where we wanted it to. We realised very early on that we each had different, complimentary skills. This was brought home to us in many ways. On one occasion, we were returning to North West Bay after a trip to South Bruny, and Bob suddenly informed me that I'd just sailed over the top of the Zuidpool Rock. This rock was a particularly nasty jagged outcrop which lurked just under the surface at low tide and was capable of punching a hole in the hull. I didn't know about it and consulted our chart. *No rock visible*. Bob pointed out, through gritted teeth, that because I had the *very bad habit* of folding my charts, there was now *a hole in the paper, just where the hazard would have been marked*. Oh dear!

From that moment on, Bob was in charge of navigation. New charts were purchased and lovingly rolled away when not in use. Nobody else was allowed to touch them. On the other hand, he wasn't always good in an emergency. One day I was up the mast freeing a snagged sheet (rope). We were sailing gently along, main down, genoa up, hardly any breeze, when I spotted a squall coming in fast. I shouted down to Bob to drop sail, pointing to the black cloud bearing down on us, and he sprang to life; but not quite in the way I meant. - he did the opposite of what was required and after we got knocked down, I ended up hanging off a rope over the side - wet and cross. Luckily, the wind carried away my expletives as I dragged myself back on board. Bob had a brilliant mind but his coordination wasn't always the best under stress.



My father had moved to Jersey in the Channel Islands, some years before, after reconnecting with an old flame from Edinburgh days. So in 1995 Emma, Sarah and I set off to visit. As we waited at the airport for Dad to pick us up, I realised Sarah and I had somehow ended up passing through customs with each other's passports and *no one had noticed*. We did look very alike, but *still!* It certainly wouldn't happen today. Dad was fighting fit. He played tennis with the girls, took them horse-riding and we learnt quite a lot about the island's history, by just exploring around St Helier.

In the Channel Islands, very little was as it seemed. We had come across an ancient-looking church, perched on a grassy knoll, not far from a concealed underground bunker (Jersey was occupied by the Germans during the second world war). As we climbed the slope, another opening appeared in the side of the hill, with a passage leading down into the earth. We went back and read the sign properly. The site was known as La Hougue Bie and it transpired there were *three* ceremonial sites, all built on top of each other. At the very bottom of the mound, a neolithic tomb, known as a 'passage grave' had been discovered, and archaeologists were busily excavating as we crawled through. Then there were two C12<sup>th</sup> and C16<sup>th</sup> medieval chapels, each being worked on to preserve their individual integrity. It was an eerie feeling to enter underground chambers and reflect that someone had purposely hollowed them out three and a half thousand years earlier.

During the first five years we were together, Bob and I experienced the usual ups and downs normal in any new relationship. I think on two occasions I walked out and went back to the farm for a week or so. However the bond held and gradually we became inseparable. If we didn't agree on an issue, would sit down and discuss a solution. A few terse words were the extent of our arguments and neither of us had ever resorted to violence to settle a dispute. We were a familiar sight, walking down the 'hill' from West Hobart, to the Holman Clinic on the mornings I didn't have to be at the farm. We were keen travellers and visited a number of countries overseas. The UK was often a primary destination, as we both had relatives living there. After my father died, we spent more time in France and Spain if we were overseas. \*

## BOAT SEARCH:

Bob and I also took several extended trips within Australia. These trips served not only as holidays but were opportunities to look for another boat. The smaller yacht had been sold some years earlier but we had always planned to buy another larger one and go cruising, when time and money allowed. Our preferred method of travel involved loading up the Falcon station-wagon with camping equipment, and taking the ferry to mainland Australia, where we would set off. In 2004 we drove to Darwin via Uluru, Litchfield and Kakadu National Parks. Over many years, we perfected this mode of travel, increasingly avoiding the high rise coastal areas and travelling instead into the hinterland to explore National Parks and small country towns. Emma and Sarah both married in 2007, and as Bob planned to retire in 2009, we decided it was time for a serious boat search.

Identification of a suitable vessel had involved extensive research. A pilothouse was a non negotiable prerequisite. Helming outside for hours in Tasmanian conditions on the previous yacht had cured us of any traditional romantic seafaring ideas. A blue nose and frozen fingers glued to the tiller had long ago lost its charm. The previous 28' yacht had been solid fibreglass and easily maintained; this material was a first choice, however eventually, as the idea of extended cruising holidays became more attractive, steel took precedence. The size discussed initially was between 40' and 45', however, realising we would need help to crew on extended trips, we decided before leaving Tasmania, that a sensible size would be closer to 50', the thought of a separate aft cabin becoming more attractive daily. Between us we had five adult children and seven grandchildren and hoped the whole family would join us for cruising holidays.

In mid 2008 we drove off the ferry, in Melbourne and set off up the coast on a serious boat buying trip. We eventually drove as far up the coast as Cairns, staying in small towns, speaking to brokers in marinas, searching for the right boat. We also had a wonderful holiday, camping and exploring the hinterland in a more leisurely way than had been possible on previous occasions.



Driving between Maryborough and Brisbane, a small add in a Newport Yacht Brokers office window caught our eye. A steel ketch, a Roberts 53', steel with a pilothouse was for sale in Scarborough Marina. Roberts' designed boats are renowned for their safety and seaworthiness and having already owned one of this design, which we had sailed comfortably, it seemed sensible to look at this one. Yvette Rowe, the brokers wife, kindly offered to show us the boat, even though her husband was away on business and the yacht was berthed a considerable distance from the office, right out where the protecting breakwater jutted into the open waters of Moreton Bay.

We had already looked at many boats, but at first sight, 'Four Winds' stopped us dead in our tracks. It fitted most of our requirements; proven design, two steering stations, one in the cockpit, the other in a large pilothouse, excellent layout with plenty of flexible accommodation, two 'heads', a dedicated engine room and 7 watertight bulkheads. After spending many hours aboard, over two days, both of us were beginning to feel that this was 'the' boat. It was a beautiful yacht, slightly old-fashioned, which made it all the more appealing. The seven solid steel bulkheads were a particularly attractive feature. Even if we were 'holed' at sea, the boat was virtually unsinkable as long as the doors were shut.

After negotiating a price, subject to a mechanical and marine survey, we signed a contract and drove back to Tasmania, as Bob had work commitments. Arriving home, we made extensive enquiries to establish the provenance of the yacht. I spoke to the New Zealand builder twice. He confirmed that the information we already had was accurate, explaining that the friend who had helped him build it also built fishing trawlers for a living; hence the safety consciousness with the bulkheads. This man was able to confirm that the original Roberts design had not been varied; an important point, as the integrity of any hull designed for blue water stability, could be compromised by even minor variations. He had personally sailed the yacht for some years, around New Zealand and offshore. He described how, during a storm, they had suffered a complete knock-down. The yacht had 'recovered' swiftly and performed outstandingly in heavy conditions.

We spoke with the Marine Architect who had recently done a survey on the yacht and he was able to confirm the yacht's soundness. After also speaking with previous owners who now had no pecuniary interest, we were confident that a full mechanical inspection was warranted. Jeff Rowe, the yacht broker, had been extremely helpful and organised Jim McKinnon, a marine mechanic he knew, to examine the engine. We flew up to be present for the inspection. Although financially comfortable, we were not rich and the yacht was a major investment; similar to buying a shack. We wanted to be absolutely sure it was sound.

Arriving before the broker, early in the morning at Scarborough Marina, another yacht owner who we had spoken to the day before, let us through the locked gate and onto the pier. Walking along chatting about the boat and how excited we were about it, he told us that he and his wife were about our age and had sold their house and also bought a larger boat to go cruising. Some of the places they had already visited sounded very interesting. It turned out that they had also bought a 'Roberts 53', the same design as the one we were interested in. They too had done extensive research before buying and had also reached the conclusion that it was one of the safest cruising yachts. We were invited aboard and although the internal fit-out was magnificent, Bob later pointed out to me that because it was open plan inside, there were no watertight bulkheads. The reality was, with a yacht like that, if badly holed, down you went, because no bilge-pump could have kept up with the influx.

The mechanic completed his inspection of the motor and told us he suspected there may be a problem with the head gasket on the main motor. The other problems were minor. We also obtained a survey, and were delighted to see it contained no nasty surprises. Jeff introduced us to two professional delivery crew, 'Russ' and 'Peter' who would be able to take charge of the trip to Hobart. They examined the sails, tested various systems and said they 'would be happy to take this boat anywhere'. Considering *their* safety depended on its seaworthiness during delivery, we felt comfortable with the purchase. Bob had work commitments, so we left them to it and flew home.

Work on the motor, in Queensland was expected to take several months to complete. It all seemed to be



going well. I rang the mechanic every week for a progress report and he assured me that the engine work would be finished by late October. In November, we flew back to Brisbane, and stayed in the local caravan park as the mechanic hadn't quite finished. We moved onto the yacht after a week to familiarise ourselves with the different systems and prepare it for the trip to Tasmania.

We were aware that the yacht would need work for the trip down. It had to be stocked with provisions, the rigging and electrics had to be checked, gas-lines had to be pressure tested, sails, sheets and rigging gone over. In short, it took us two weeks, working hard each day, to get it ready. The crew very kindly turned up to help, and guided us through negotiations with local tradesmen. They all knew each other, which helped expedite things. We hired a diver to go down and clean the hull. Weed and barnacles create drag and slow you down. The rigging was re-tensioned, spreader lights replaced, and we bought three new small fire-extinguishers. There was already a large red one in the main saloon, but it was heavy and out of date.

Bob didn't like the heat and suffered headaches. He began taking large quantities of Aspirin to deal with the problem. I knew he was buying it but thought at that stage it was for the medicine kit. And because the medication worked, he appeared to have acclimatised.

### THE TRIP SOUTH:

Early on 7<sup>th</sup> December, 2008, 'Four Winds' slipped quietly from its berth on a high tide and sailed out of Newport Marina into Moreton Bay. On board were Bob and I, and two professional delivery crew, Peter and David. Hoping to reach the 'Seaway' by motoring down the 'Inside Passage' to Southport, it was some hours before the 'tower' confirmed by radio that the route chosen was too shallow to allow us through. Turning around and motoring around the top of Moreton Island, we punched into an unfavourable sea.

At this point several things happened at once. Bob had a nose bleed and the motor stopped. We didn't think the nose-bleed was a serious issue. It was only a slow drip and stopped after a few minutes. Bob then made lunch for the crew while they checked filters in the engine room. While this was happening, I sailed the boat on a reefed jib. Shortly after, mournful voices from the engine room informed us that we had the 'Black Death', and would have to stop at Southport to have the fuel 'cleaned'. We learned that Black Death was the name given to a fungal infestation which can grow in diesel fuel. As soon as the boat encounters a decent wave, clumps of fungus detach from the bottom and sides of the fuel tank and block the filters, starving the motor of diesel. In itself this was not a serious problem. We knew the boat had been sitting idle for some months and expected a few 'teething problems' along the way. The crew fitted clean filters and off we went again.

As we approached the Southport Seaway, later in the day, the filters again blocked, and we were towed into the yacht club. The crew organised for the problem to be fixed and then we all went off together for dinner at the local yacht club. Our first adventure safely behind us, or so we thought.

Next morning, Bob and I went shopping in town for extra filters, arriving back at the boat around midday. He disappeared into the engine room to make sure they were the right size, and a few minutes later, came out with another nose-bleed. Lifting a half-full can of oil had apparently set it off again. We decided to go to a local clinic to have it looked at but the GP we saw didn't seem to think it was too serious. He gave us some wadding and told Bob not to exert himself. That night was very warm, and Bob found it more comfortable to sleep on deck. I slept within arm's reach in the pilot house, just in case, but by morning it was obvious we would have to go back to the doctor.

We saw another GP who sent us straight to an ENT specialist. After consultation, he said Bob's nose-bleeds were probably caused by excessive use of Aspirin during the previous weeks, and provided he stopped using it, there would be no further episodes. He wanted Bob admitted to hospital for several days as a precaution and to run eliminative tests just to ensure his diagnosis was correct (it was). Bob asked me to stay with the boat for the next leg to Sydney, two days sailing. He said he would fly down and join us for the longer trip to Hobart. He was in good spirits.