



The Barrenjoey Boatshed will be reborn in the coming weeks; here we recount how seaplanes became part of the fabric of this iconic venue.

Story by Rosamund Burton

Life Stories

Plane sailing

Eighty-seven-year-old Carmel Walton sits on the bench near the Barrenjoey Boatshed, recalling how this place became her home for 30 years. Her husband, aircraft pilot Vic Walton, and she began renting the boatshed in 1975.

“Vic had just started working for Nationwide Air Services as a demonstration pilot for the Government Aircraft Factory’s Nomad – a twin-turbo prop,” she explains. “While waiting for his first demonstration aircraft he was asked to fly a Cessna on amphibious floats up to Cairns for a prospective customer, and I went with him.

“By the time we reach Cairns Vic is quite keen on seaplanes. The prospective buyer takes us to Kurumba on the western side of Cape York to look at a dilapidated old

Cessna on floats at the back of a fisherman’s cottage. When we return to Sydney, Vic goes to the bank manager, gets a loan for \$10,000, and buys this aeroplane.”

Vic and the other man patched up the plane; the Waltons gradually limped back to Sydney and the plane was taken out to Bankstown to be totally renovated. Vic thought that the Palm Beach end of Pittwater was the best place for seaplanes, and his father knew Aub Allen, who owned the lease of the boatshed. On a handshake, Vic and Carmel rented the boatshed, which included a takeaway shop, and an upstairs apartment.

Carmel said that by the end of October 1975 the Cessna 185 seaplane had been restored and was in Pittwater, ready to start joy-ride flights. Vic moved it from its mooring

near the boatshed to Careel Bay because of strong winds, but a storm overturned the seaplane and it had to be taken back to Bankstown for extensive repairs. However, by Christmas it was up and running, and despite opposition from some locals, concerned about the safety of other users of the Pittwater waterway and also aircraft noise, Aquatic Airways was operating its first joy flights over Pittwater.

Vic, Carmel and their children – Lynne, Russell and Joanne – relocated for the summer from their home in Baulkham Hills to the small flat above the boatshed. Russell helped his father with the planes and Lynette and Joanne ran the takeaway shop with Carmel. No-one wanted to return home at the end of January. So six months later, when the Waltons had the

opportunity to buy the lease of the boatshed, the vote was unanimous that they sell up and move here permanently, and the kids aged 17, 15, and 13, started at Barrenjoey High.

Vic had begun taking flying lessons in England aged 21, while staying with relatives over there. Back in Australia in 1951 he was accepted for the Qantas Cadet Pilot Scheme, but Qantas had a surplus of pilots, so instead gave him a job as a flight steward.

Carmel and Vic met when she was 17 and he was 22. Vic was working towards his commercial pilot’s licence, training at the Royal Aero Club in Bankstown.

“Our first date was in a Tiger Moth,” says Carmel. They married in 1957 and lived in a flat at Clareville before moving to a beach cottage on the Serpentine at Bilgola, which

pittwater **life** The Local Voice Since 1991

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they rented for five pounds, one shilling and threepence a week, and where their three children were born. By 1962, Vic had his commercial pilot's licence, and his first job was as a sales demonstration pilot for Victa, the lawnmower company, which in the 1960s diversified into light aircraft.

When the Walton family made the permanent move to the boatshed in 1976, Vic left Nationwide Air Services to work full-time on Aquatic Airways. However, later that year the Nomad had a fatal crash and the test pilot was killed, so Vic offered to do test flights again, explains Carmel.

"Often during the week he would do test flights, then operate the seaplane at the weekends. He also did demonstration tours and flew at the Paris

Air Show and the Farnborough Air Show in the UK. Vic had an interesting career. I was very proud of him."

While demonstrating the Nomad in Sweden he spotted a Cessna in a snowdrift. He reported it to air traffic control - to be told that its existence was known and that the owner was keen to sell it. Vic agreed to buy it. He was interested in recovering the engine - but with some help, despite its isolation, he managed to recover the whole aircraft. So he now had a second Cessna - this one on skis - which having had transported back to Australia, he transferred to floats.

By 1978, as well as operating its scenic flights, Aquatic Airways was flying what Vic Walton believed was the world's shortest air route:

from Palm Beach to Gosford, a journey time of only eight minutes. The boatshed had fuel facilities for planes, boats and cars, Hobie Cats and fishing boats were available for hire, and there was also the takeaway food shop.

The next additions to the Aquatic Airways fleet were two Beavers and a Cessna 206 to make the documentary, Pelican's Progress, in which three seaplanes flew around Australia.

"Vic left Palm Beach and kept Australia on the left," says Carmel. Paul Hamlyn also published a book about it called *'Australia - the Greatest Island'* (published 1980).

In the early 1980s, Vic and Carmel's marriage fell apart. They still had the boatshed lease, so Vic continued to

operate the seaplane business, and Carmel stayed living in the flat and ran the takeaway business. Until then she had been busy in the office organising flight bookings, so she had rented out the takeaway businesses at weekends, and only operated it herself during the week. Now she turned her attention to making the food outlet more of a going concern.

"A friend had a t-shirt from Carmel-by-the-Sea in California, and said, 'It's a good name for your business', so I called it Carmel's by the Sea." It went from just being takeaway to having a bigger deck with tables, with a greater range of good basic food and drinks, and was loved by both locals and visitors. "Gradually I

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CLOCKWISE FROM OPPOSITE: Carmel at the newly renovated Barrenjoey Boatshed; the modest structure in the early 1970s; an aerial showing the arrival of seaplanes; *Pittwater Life* promoted Carmel's By The Sea; a cartoon reflecting the early mood of locals; a pic from *'Australia - the Greatest Island'*; local media picked up on Vic's ambitions; Aquatic Airways' early days; Carmel on the beach in the 1980s.

entertainment

CARMEL'S PLACE

Nestled on the edge of Pittwater, among the bobbing boats, colorful windstuffers and endless miles of blue water is a hideaway carefully guarded by the locals.

The treasured but humble getaway is the Barrenjoey Boatshed which houses Carmel's Cafe by the Sea - home and workplace to Carmel Walton.

Situated inside an old bunched and spilling out onto a jetty, the cafe has a lengthy and colorful history.



Carmel enjoys the sun and view on the deck at Carmel's Cafe By The Sea.

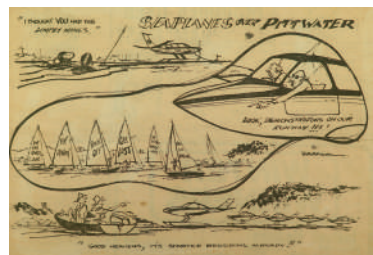
Carmel has never taken her enviable lifestyle for granted, fully aware that she works and lives in a location with one of the most commanding views of magnificent Pittwater.

The Cafe was birthed after Carmel's first husband, Vic Walton, began operating Aquatic Airways from the boatshed in 1975.

The boatshed owner, who passed away, found the Walton

scenes and biscuits, to around the boatshed gain a reputation among locals, surfers and the occasional celebrity.

company filmed a television commercial there



Airman's vision for seaplanes

One of the pioneers of the general aviation industry in Australia, and a man who has spent most of his life in the air, Vic Walton was a true seaplane enthusiast. He was the first to introduce seaplanes to the Sydney area, and his vision for the future of the industry was to make them a viable mode of transport for the masses.



Life Stories

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ABOVE: Vic was accepted into the Qantas Cadet Pilot scheme and dreamed of flying Constellations. BELOW: Expanded outdoors dining in the 1980s.

CARMEL'S BY THE SEA

Imagine a place where you can relax with your friends or associates with a glass of your favourite wine, partake of your pre-selected menu in your own private dining room with Pittwater's most sensational views.

Carmel's By The Sea new Upper Deck Dining Room offers you this and more for lunch and dinner bookings.

You can stroll out onto your own private upper deck and watch the guests arrive by sea plane or watch the sun set while you sip champagne.

The view is, by far, one of the best in Pittwater stretching from Lion Island and Brisbane Waters, West Head and south to Scotland Island.

Carmel's is a little like a home away from home. Carmel will put out the candles, dim the lights, polish the silver and create a meal your guests will remember you for, even organise a limo to get you home.

The Upper Deck Dining Room is limited to a minimum of 8 people and a maximum of 12, you will have to book in advance.



The view from Carmel's stretching from Lion Island to Scotland Island is hard to beat.

The menu is tailored to your own taste in cuisine and budget, just talk to Carmel about your preferences.

Carmel's is located at the Barrenjoey Boat House in Governor Phillip Park, Palm Beach.

Downstairs the friendly cafe still operates, humming with visitor activity away from the relaxed atmosphere of the upstairs dining room.

If you would like to find out more ring 9974 4374 and talk to Carmel.

The Barrenjoey Boat House is also home for Atlantis Divers, South Pacific Scaphlates and Barrenjoey Boating Services. more about them in coming issues.

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Continued from page 29 improved it, but it never had table service. It was always low key."

It was only when living alone at the boatshed that she realised how isolated it was.

"Fortunately, Russell was working with the water police in Bayview then. The water police were wonderful. They knew I was on my own and kept an eye on the place."

Vic's last flight, says Carmel, was in 1993 when he flew their youngest daughter, Joanne, and her bridesmaids in the seaplane to her wedding at the boatshed.

"We had carpet down the wharf and a big silk marquee on the deck. It was wonderful."

Vic went out of business in 1993, and died of cancer a year later, but Carmel continued to run the café. There were book launches at the boatshed, several water police Christmas parties, weddings, and formal dinner parties in the upper deck dining room. And from the time *Home and Away* started in the late 1980s scenes were filmed here.

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THE YOUNG COUPLE: Carmel and Vic (right) in the 1950s.

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"In 1998 between Christmas and New Year it was stinking hot, I was short staffed, people were 10-deep at the counter, and I thought I don't want to do this anymore." Carmel sold the café business to Jackie Burns, who worked with her. By this time Carmel owned the lease of the boatshed with Russell and Joanne, and she continued to live there until 2006 when they sold it. Jackie still had two years to go on the café

lease, and when that finished Andrew Goldsmith and his wife Pip Robb moved in, and the Barrenjoey Boatshed became the first of The Boat-house venues.

Carmel bought a house in Avalon, where she now lives, but this place just a few kilometres north will always hold special memories.

"I loved being here. I had my 40th, 50th, 60th and 70th birthday parties here," she says, "and saw many a good sunset".

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