

Vale Peter

Mark Campbell

Peter was there, along with Dave Bodell and Ross Ullo and one or two others, the first night I paddled past on my surf-ski one night in winter 1985. I had decided that I would be unable to continue rowing at any level due to career developments and restrictions on my time, and would just paddle a surfski when I could. I paddled into the pontoon, and after their initial surprise at someone pulling in from the darkness, they realised I was not completely crazy and we started talking. Peter was a very large and strong guy, it turned out he was playing rugby for the Drummoyne Reds so we chatted about rugby as well as rowing.

They were all so friendly, and the club, which was totally dilapidated of course, just seemed very welcoming in the dark - they were rowing with kerosene lamps attached to triangular plates fitted over the sneak on the bow of each boat. They had just finished a night row, which looked like a great idea in itself; Iron Cove looks great and it was often well lit at night by the lights of Balmain Oval in particular - of course the Bridge and street lights helped too, a far cry from the darkness on Lane Cove which makes it difficult and dangerous to row at night. I told the guys I didn't think I could keep rowing at Sydney University as it was too far out of my way, I had started my first job and so forth. They suggested I come back the next afternoon when Mick Lowrey, who was the Club's coach, would be there.

Leichhardt only had a few retired/social rowers at the time (the few I met were a large proportion of the membership). Masters rowing didn't really exist and the club's state made it pretty difficult to attract any young rowers - it literally looked like it might topple into the Bay at any minute. Mick I knew from time I spent as a student working at the bar at Drummoyne RC, and he had also selected me into a NSW Youth Eight in 1978, so I thought why not? I turned up the next afternoon to see him, he showed me around and again I got the clear impression that this was a special place, full of welcoming people with their hearts in rowing and ready to welcome and share what they had with anyone who wanted to be a part of it. We talked for about five minutes and I decided that I could row from LRC; Mick said to bring my old single across from Sydney University.

I went to leave and Mick said "You'll need a key" - and gave me one right there. At that point, I had been a member of Sydney University RC for seven years, had won quite a few races and been a member of several representative crews while wearing their colours - but due to the \$200 security deposit, which might as well have been \$2million, it represented eight weeks' rent as a student - I had never had a key. I will never forget the trust implicit in the gesture and how it confirmed everything I had sensed from the moment I pulled into the pontoon to chat with Peter and the others. I raced home and told Gill, who had been rowing occasionally from Haberfield with her friend Jane Poole, that we had a new rowing club. She was smart enough to say she was happy to give it a try - initially to shut me up, but soon with great enthusiasm and of course great ability. Jane couldn't row very often and soon Gill was rowing in a single with the rest of Mick's growing squad, and the rest as they say is history.

I just thought it might be nice for people to know a little about Peter's long association with the Club, especially how he and a VERY few others kept it going at a time it would almost certainly have folded without their input.

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Regards, Mark