



## Profile: Max Hardy – Unstoppable at 82

by Julie Podmore

The day I visit Max Hardy, I come to the back entrance, and pass *Nanna Hardy*, sitting up on the back lawn, almost ready to be launched. He says that this will be his last boat – that at his age and with the state of his back, he needs a boat he can stand up in. Wife Rhona is not so sure that this is the real reason, and reckons he really wants a boat he can go out in when the weather is rougher than his current 6-metre boat, *Garry Michael*, can handle. She doesn't sound too keen on the idea of her 82-year-old husband, with his bad back and dodgy heart ('After 5 bypasses, I'm a proper member of the Zipper Club,' he says as he whips up his shirt and shows me his scars) going out in rough weather – but knows that any attempt to dissuade him is a lost cause. Max still goes out most days and usually comes home with a feed of fish, but if he doesn't, 'I'm pretty happy to just go out and have a sleep. Sometimes I turn on the radio, sometimes I don't,' he says. 'You've got to die somewhere,' he adds, and I guess that Max Hardy would like to die on his boat.

We sit in the kitchen of his house, which overlooks Godfrey's Beach in Stanley, enjoying the ever-changing view of the Nut, Green Hills Bluff and moody Bass Strait, the sea that provided his livelihood

for 50 years – 'A sea to be treated with respect,' says Max. 'Despite all the modern equipment, small boats must still take care in these waters – the elements still have to be fought with. Very often, boats can get quite a dusting coming to port'.

Max was born in Stanley – one of 9 children and the second youngest of his parents' 'second family,' started after his father returned from World War 1. His father died when he was only 7, and Max is full of admiration for his mother, who was left to rear the family on her own. The family's main income came from their seven cows that roamed the streets of the town. Max helped out after school by looking for these cows – 'often hidden in the most out of the way places,' milking them and turning the butter churn. He also helped out with deliveries in the local butcher shop, sold the trevally he caught at the local wharf 'for a shilling a fish,' and went rabbiting with brother Ray to supplement the family's food supplies. 'As children, we thought we did a lot of work, but I realise now that Mother would have done 90 per cent of it.'

He left school at 13 and started work at a 'man's job' – clearing and ploughing with a team of 12 bullocks for 'Old Ma Nichols' on Three Hummock Island. A

year and a half later, he returned to Stanley and got a job as a tallyman at the local sawmill, but 'deep down inside me, I always knew I wanted to go fishing.' After a pretty severe bout of pneumonia ('I tell you, I was a write off – they gave me up for dead!'), Max left the mill and started fishing for shark, cuta and crayfish with his brother Vic. 'He was much older than me,' says Max. 'And he taught me everything.'

At 17, he bought his own boat and named it *Rhona* after his future wife whom he had met at Stanley Primary School. 'She was lovely then – and she still is,' says Max of the love of his life. Mind you, nowadays Rhona reckons that Max thinks more of his boats than he does of his wife – but I reckon the evidence that surfaced during our four-hour chat suggests not. Max sold his first car, an Austin 7, to buy an engagement ring, and he and Rhona were married in Stanley in 1947.

In the early days, Rhona used to help Max cleaning and packing his catch. 'Nowadays I can't even get her to look over the bloody wharf,' he laughs. 'But she has always looked after everything business-wise. All I've ever worried about is keeping my boat in good order and getting ready for sea.' I ask Max about the highlights of these early days and he tells me about the time he caught five ton of cuta in one day. 'Jeez, I remember it as well as anything,' he says. 'Duke [Haverson] and I landed them on the jig stick – and we were still cleaning the bloody things when they were going out fishing the next day!'

When the kids came along, Max was a doting Dad – and a great storyteller. 'I loved reading them stories – and I'd read them so that they would have tears coming out of their eyes they'd be so frightened,' says Max. Max and Rhona are proud of their close-knit family. Both his sons, Garry and Michael, fished with Max before buying their own boats. 'I missed my two boys when they took on their own boats – as well as being my mates, they were reliable.' Garry now fishes out of Temma on the *Jasmine Hardy*; Michael and his wife Jan run T.O.P. Fish at Stanley, and have established a successful octopus export business. Their

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eldest child, Jennifer, works in Hobart, and daughter Cindy lives with her family in Smithton. Max now has 'bloody hundreds' of grandchildren and even one great grandchild – and takes a tablespoon of mutton-bird oil every day to keep up with them all!

The second great love of his life is of course his boats.

His first boats were punts made out of the plywood from tea chests, kerosene cans (both collected from the local store), and jugs of pitch from the dunny man – 'What fun we boys had, poling around the lagoon behind our house.' The boys also made yachts, gaff-rigged with sails made by Mum from oatmeal bags – 'Boy, could we make them sail and point across the lagoon, and then back again!' remembers Max.

Around 1950, the young Hardys sold Max's first fishing boat, *Rhona*, and borrowed 4,000 pounds to buy a bigger boat, which they named *Rhona H*. 'It seemed to us to be all the money in the world then. It was a battle, but we worked away at our goal, and ended up having her for 26 years,' says Max. 'She was a beautiful boat, and what made it good for Rhona and me was that we were the first to fish at Sandy Cape with a decent boat. We learnt to catch crayfish there before they ever knew there was a crayfish off the continental shelf. And we discovered a gold mine. But I was getting that many beltings coming back from Sandy Cape to Stanley, that I decided to set up a proper slipway and fishing shack at Temma, and then built the *Jennifer Hardy* especially to fit into the harbour. He reckons that the yachties who say: 'The rougher it is the better they like it' are 'bloody idiots' – they've never seen it rough!

But while he was fishing out of Temma, his beloved *Rhona H* was lying idle at Stanley, so he sold *Jennifer Hardy* to son Garry for \$1. 'Everything worked out real good for us [on the *Rhona H*] – plenty of fish and good prices. We ended up owning her for 26 years, and she's now working in the Tamar as a charter boat for tourists,' says Max.

Max loves all his boats, but I guess, from the way he talks, that his next boat was *the boat*. In 1963 he launched the *Cindy*

*Hardy*, an 80ft, 150-ton vessel designed to take advantage of the cray fishing off the continental shelf west of Marrawah. And what a labour of love to build it! 'It took two and a half years getting all the timber together, and Syddy Brooks and I had to walk the bush to find the perfect tree for the keel.' The 'mighty tree' Max found produced a log 76ft long and 7ft in diameter.

'I was ahead of my time. She was so big, everyone reckoned she was a failure,' says Max. 'I had her designed with a raised poop deck so I had good accommodation fore and aft, and good visibility for work gear from the bridge – I got the idea from the Bass Strait traders. But people wanted to know whether I was building a Spanish galleon!' Despite the skepticism of critics, *Cindy Hardy* worked successfully for years, getting 34 – 36 tons of crays every year and taking him on three trips to the Barrier Reef, before his sons started telling him he was too old, and he'd better get out and sell it. So he did. The *Cindy Hardy* is now oyster fishing in Foveaux Strait, south of the South Island of New Zealand. She catches her quota in a month and spends the rest of the year taking tourists around the fiords.

'So I came home and started doing all these bloody jobs for Rhona,' continues Max. 'But I thought, "This is no good, I have to get back to fishing", so I had another boat built and named her *Ada Harvey*, after my mother. We lived in a camper van at Triabunna for two years while she was being built. She cost me all my money, but I had a good boat, knew where to catch fish, got a couple of good men – and it didn't take me long to catch up.'

'Then I had a real setback – open heart surgery. I had to sell; I had no choice. It really quietened me down.' But Max didn't 'quieten down' for long. After a bit of time at home, tending the veggie patch and tripping around in the campervan, Rhona told him he'd have to do something to keep himself amused. That was enough for Max! He got out *Cindy Hardy's* old tender, which had been in storage for twenty years, fitted it out as a retirement boat, and named it *Garry Michael* after



Max Hardy on Garry Michael, the refurbished tender boat from the *Cindy Hardy* – built as his retirement boat

his sons. And now there's the *Nanna Hardy* on the back lawn!

Max hasn't got much time for what he sees as over-regulation in today's fishing industry. 'There's too much regulation today. You have to be a fully-fledged lawyer to fill in all the forms. The government is always cooking up something – administration has got to do something to make themselves a job,' says Max. 'All we had to have in my day was a boat that would float, five pound for a licence and a compass. I've even heard that some bright spark is trying to stop the use of stainless steel hooks!'

Max was encouraged by Rhona to write down his memories, and these have been recently compiled by Mary Kay and published in book form – *Lost the Spring in my Step*.

The book ends with the following words from Max:

'I have a little proverb that was told to me when I was young, and it goes like this: "When your mind makes a contract your body can't fill, you're over the hill brother, you're over the hill."'

'I reckon I'm over the other side of the hill, but you know I still dream of what I'd like to do. However they are just dreams now. I think I have done all those things that I wanted to achieve in my life. I am a fortunate man. Aren't I?'