



City of Sails

Barbershop Chorus

Stories from Chorus Members

April 2009

Ben Trollip (Chorus Musical Director)

Age 25, Actuarial Analyst

I sang in a school barbershop group. I joined City of Sails in my last year of school. Reason? I just love singing.

I love barbershop harmony. A cappella (unaccompanied) singing provides a unique experience to both the singer and the audience. And barbershop harmony provides a good access to this type of music - it is easy to pick up (even for non-musicians) but offers never-ending opportunities for improvement. The choice of songs can be as varied as you like - most music can be arranged to suit a barbershop quartet (I've even heard a quartet sing Mozart's Eine Klein Nachtmusik!) The fellowship is also fantastic, and as musical director I get a buzz out of the music that the chorus creates - there really is a good vibe. I'll be singing until I die.

Richard Hedley (Chorus President - Lead)

Age 56, Engineering Manager

I reached a time in my life when I was looking around for a hobby. Some years ago, I had heard a Barbershop Quartet, who sang with the City of Sails, and was very impressed by their sound and personality, so I went along to a practice to see if it was for me. It was, and here I am 9 years later. I enjoy being part of team that makes a great sound and I enjoy the common sense of purpose, fun and congeniality. By definition, it is an all male activity, and I think that it is good for a bunch a blokes to do things together. This is not to say that our wives and partners are left on the sidelines, for without their support and encouragement, we wouldn't be able to do what we do. I feel that the Chorus provides me with a sense of continuity in that it is always there, regardless of the other challenges in life that I am facing at the time. It is not that hard to start and I had no musical training beforehand, although it is true that the more you know about "the craft" as we call it, the more you realise that you don't know. I have always taken the point of view that I will continue to sing for as long as it remains fun, for without the fun, why would I give up every Monday evening to get together with other guys and practice for 2 ½ hours? And I love the saying that one my colleagues has emblazoned on his music folder: "If you are too busy to sing, you are too busy!"

Richard Archer (Lead)

Age 52, Engineer in the Materials Handling Industry

I joined COSBC after returning to NZ from the UK, where I'd first heard about and experienced barbershop, in 1992 I think. I'd been bitten by the bug, so much so that one criterion for selecting the city to which we would return to NZ (in 1997) was that it had to have a chorus!

In the chorus I'm known as Rick. This came about when I joined an established quartet (Voice Squad) shortly after coming to the chorus, in which the Bari was also called Richard. The Bass couldn't handle the potential confusion, hence the name change, and it's stuck.

What I get most out of being in the chorus is the thrill of ringing chords—especially in a quartet, adding to my repertoire of songs, the satisfaction of performing well in a show or competition, and witnessing the pleasant surprise of someone hearing barbershop live for the first time.

Peter Bond (Bass)

I became involved with COS as a result of helping on the door at the Orewa theatre venue. Their performances blew me away, I must say.

Being part of a dedicated team with the common purpose of producing the incredible magic of harmony from the human voice alone is so rewarding.

The pure enjoyment of giving pleasure to the audience and the satisfaction of performing is amazing.

The camaraderie of the chorus plays no small part in its success.

I believe the general good health of the COS members stems from participation in this great pastime.

Daniel Borrie (Bass)

Age 25, Support/Admin Officer, Government Department, North Shore, Auckland

I joined the City of Sails Chorus back in February 2001, but my taste of the Barbershop hobby began well before then. I remember fondly being blown away by this pleasant group of middle-aged men, who were of a smaller group than usual of about 25 men, at the Auditorium of my high school back in 1999. Among the beautifully crafted harmonies they churned out were the numbers 'Danny Boy' and 'California, Here I come!'. A year earlier I had joined the Macleans College Barbershop Chorus, slightly after the City of Sails current Musical Director, following the prompting of another classmate. I had seen the school chorus perform, albeit with only 10 members, at school assembly in late 1997 and had become fascinated with the style of music. I fully committed to the school chorus, affectionately named Pocket Edition and led by a former City of Sails baritone, right through till the end of my final school year in 2001. I knew my affiliation to barbershop wasn't going to stop there, so I rejoined the City of Sails chorus after a long break for much of the year. I entered the Men's group as a Bass singer, the part being a comfortable range for my voice. I went on to compete with the chorus at

National Conventions in 2003, 2004 & 2007, gaining one Gold Medal. I have also performed in a quartet since 2007.

To me, barbershop is like a drug, illegal or prescribed – take your pick. Over the last eight years, the more I involved myself with the Chorus, the more I wanted to better myself as a singer and as a performer. Many times over the years I have moved the Chorus aside to make way for another commitment, only to return again a few months later as if I needed a fix. I gained affinity with several of the members of the chorus and it's safe to say I have made many a barbershop friend. Depending on where my career or future family commitments take me, I hope to still be singing barbershop for many more years to come.

Roger Boud (Lead)

Age 69, Training Liaison Officer for Print NZ-Training.

My introduction to barbershop singing goes back to 1984 when I was fortunately invited by a friend to attend a Friday night rehearsal at Motat. The venue was downstairs in a theatrette, and as we approached we were welcomed by the most wonderful full sound of 4-part harmony filling the stairwell.

As an eight year old, my only prior introduction to any sort of musical appreciation had been learning to play the piano. This lasted only a year until the piano was sold. But I knew enough to appreciate the full sound of the chorus that night, and I was hooked and keen to join up.

The Motat Chorus in those days was quite small, but under Gary Taylor's musical directorship there was great enthusiasm to perform well, and invariably the chorus would win at convention and local singing competitions. As the chorus grew, a new look was required and we became The City of Sails Chorus.

High points, during those years, were the opportunity to travel to Barbershop Conventions in Australia, Hawaii, the USA and throughout New Zealand. At the 50th Anniversary Convention in Texas our small chorus received a standing ovation from the massive audience. We were the first New Zealand barbershop chorus to perform in the States, and the thrill it gave us will never be forgotten.

Work commitments meant that I needed a break from the chorus after 16 years as a member. Eight years later and I have recently rejoined.

Now with the exciting array of new songs to learn, and the 'disciplines' required to attain the standard for stage performance, I have a challenge.

The rewards of seeing an audience enjoy your performance – and being a part of such an enthusiastic group out to have fun, will make it all worth while.

Warwick Day (Baritone)

Age 60, Logistics Manager

They sang “You're As Welcome As The Flowers In May” when I finally ventured into a COS rehearsal -- I was hooked.

What a welcome. Everyone went out of their way to ensure I felt comfortable and surrounded by friends. I knew I would be back next week and now I'm a fully fledged member and travelling to Wellington to take part in the National Chorus and Quartet Competition

Why didn't I do it years ago?

In my childhood my Dad played the French Horn and he encouraged me to learn the Trombone. I joined a Brass Band and was a bugle boy at school. Banding was a big part of my life until I married and wanted a house and car so I switched to dance bands (you were paid). I also followed our children's interest in theatre assisting in many capacities.

It was through this interest in theatre that I discovered COS. There was an invite to attend a rehearsal in their newsletter. My wife encouraged me to go as I had shown an interest after hearing the Chorus at a shared concert (with a band of course).

So here I am, like the banding world, the chorus is great fun, dedication and good fellowship. The more proficient coach those not so sure. I'm so grateful for their kindness and encouragement

Don't wait for years like I did. Do it now come and see how talented you are.

John Denton (Baritone)

General Manager, Diabetes NZ Auckland

I joined the City of Sails in 1988 after I drew the short straw and did the baby-sitting one night whilst my wife went to a local gig in Titirangi at which the chorus performed. When she returned home, she said this Auckland singing group was looking for 'shower-singers' and that I should go along.

"Rubbish", I said! "I've never sung!". Nevertheless, the following week I arrived at a church hall in Mt Eden, met the President who happened to be my name-sake and never looked back.

Barbershop is a serious disease that gets under your skin. It's a worse craving than drugs (although I've never tried any) and I've been taking my weekly fix for over 20 years! As a way of seeing the world it is unparalleled. I've visited Barbershoppers in many countries and always found welcome and personal reward from singing. There is definitely something in close-harmony singing that stirs the soul. I'm sure one lives a happier life because of it!

Jim Fenton (Bass)

Age 59, Small Business Owner

Unlike a number of my contemporaries in The City of Sails Barbershop chorus my musical background was limited to living next door to a little pub in the back streets of Coronation Street style Manchester in the 50's and 60's. Here the local folk would sing most nights (usually after a certain hour and volume imbibed). Aint Misbehavin was a constant favourite.

Arriving in New Zealand and, in due course, starting a home based business meant that some form of inspirational social interaction became necessary for my own sanity. Why not join a choir? Two loves in the one environment – music and people. First up came a community choir which, whilst very nice and heartwarming, seemed to lack the commitment, discipline and expectation of a more 'professional' organization.

A chance evening out with some friends saw my wife and I watching a female barbershop chorus and also a male barbershop quartet. We enjoyed this evening so much that my wife suggested I check it out. Hence my initial contact with the City Of Sails Barbershop chorus.

Typical timidity on my first night was greatly eased by the members of the chorus. The structure and lead-up to my initial audition was very well managed and nursed along by the more experienced members who realised that I was totally out of my usual comfort zone.

Now being a full / junior member of the chorus enables me to enjoy all the great benefits that barbershop music has to offer whilst learning its wonderful craft. The City Of Sails Barbershop chorus is a very dynamic chorus that provides a great learning foundation for its members.

Within the chorus we are very blessed to have some very experienced and talented musicians who assist us all. We are a very well managed group and have a wonderful camaraderie that pervades the whole chorus.

Good people, good music – blessed indeed.

Bevin Fitzsimons (Bass)

Age 69, Business Coach & Social Enterprise promoter

I joined the City of Sails Chorus because:

- I love the rich blend of men's voices in close harmony and
- We sing an interesting range of styles: traditional, jazz, blues, religious, whacky upbeat, backbeat and some moving love songs and ballads.

What keeps me enjoying COS Barbershop more than I expected is:

- It is my ideal group for enjoying being with men. The teamwork is genuine and exciting – we make such wonderful sounds together and we need each other for this.
- The friendliness is impressive, warm, and genuine. There is plenty of wit, banter & jokes sure but there's no one-upmanship. Everyone supports each other. My wife kept telling all her women friends after our first national convention years ago "There were 300 men there and they were all so *nice* to each other".
- Because of this I feel I'm in touch with the real person in everyone there
- I've made some real friends because of the culture and the way everyone is
- I'm a section leader and I just love coaching the new basses. We all get such a lift and a laugh when they all get a new song right as they're learning.
- Our MD, Ben, is a superb motivator and highly skilled conductor.
- The health benefits of barbershop singing are enormous – good brain and breathing training has lifted my health hugely

City of Sails Chorus is part of a national movement of a dozen choruses round New Zealand. The national body organises superb training for the Musical directors- we have 4 in our chorus.

Vic Francis (Lead)

Age 79, Retired Training Manager

Singing since 1957 with various groups in UK-Kenya- SA and now N Z. i.e. Musical Operatic Societies- Folk Groups –Welsh choirs and Cabaret.

I discovered Barber shopping when a friend introduced me to the COS about 1998. As a lead singer, I soon realized that this required a craft, which is particular to Barbershop. Fortunately there are such experienced people in the society with the interest, time and patience, who are only too willing to spend unlimited time to teach one this craft.

This is not a one off process, as you never stop learning, but I have always believed that one really begins to learn when you sing with a quartet, and in this regard I was lucky to team up with three other like members. We were able to form a Quartet, and were lucky enough to win the N.Z. Senior Title for four consecutive years.

Barbershop singing is not just another club, it is a Fraternity of like minded people who meet weekly to exchange and rehearse songs in close harmony and enjoy each others company. Where else can you travel across continents and sing a polecat or two, or meet old friends at an annual convention and sing your heart out on or off stage?

I am convinced that our future lies in the induction of younger guys, and this is starting to happen, as there are several schools that now have teachers interested in B/shop singing and are willing to pass on their skills.

Reg Houlder (Tenor)

Age 70, retired cabinet maker, guitar maker, and boatbuilder

I have been with the City of Sails Chorus for about 21years. I joined the chorus in 1988 after having a major stroke. I always loved singing as a youngster, but never had the courage to get up there and do it, so after having the stroke and unable to work too much I joined the City of Sails, which helped me tremendously to get back on my feet.

I was as nervous as a kitten to start with but I met some great guys who gave me a lot of encouragement and learning my part kept my mind occupied. I still have problems with my health, but singing is a good way of expressing your feelings.'

I've sung with a few Quartets in my time and we have sung in retirement centers and to others who were worse than me. And that makes me feel good that I can give a bit of pleasure to others. Belonging to the City of Sails, I've met a lot of people from all walks of life, but their background is immaterial. The one thing we have in common is singing and doing it well.

Singing barbershop you can mix with and sing with anyone from many countries. I still love to learn and sing Barbershop.

David King (Bass)

Age 57, Director of Family Business

Raised in a Worcestershire village called Far Forest in the UK. My family was not musical but singing was common place in our little cottage when I was a wee lad. Every Sunday my family would get around the piano and bang out a few of the old tunes while enjoying a not so quiet tea. I have always had a love of singing and spent many hours with teenage friends secretly doing impressions of The Beatles or Dylan but never ever performing to a live audience. It was in New Zealand that I first started to actually get involved with a singing group and joined a Male voice choir in West Auckland. It was a good friend of mine who invited me to come along to the

City of Sails some 8 years ago and I was instantly mesmerized by the sound that the guys were making.

Men's Barbershop four part harmony singing is like no other and for me gives so much satisfaction and the camaraderie is second to none. Learning is easy even for a non musical sort like me as the chorus provides some great learning media and the leadership is very supportive. I now live in Puhoi village and I feel it is worth all the effort travelling down to Auckland to sing with the City of Sails. A very experienced singer once commented to me when I first joined the chorus "I feel really sad for those people who do not sing Barbershop harmony" and 8 years on I must agree.

Richard Lewis (Baritone)

Customer & Marketing Services, Building Supply Industry

I hadn't heard of Barbershop music as a musical style before, although on the very odd occasion I had seen on TV a quartet of guys singing unaccompanied – I recall how much I enjoyed the sound. It was the harmony they produced that was appealing.

15 years ago a friend of my wife's invited her to go to a concert with her. Last minute, my wife was not well and so she offered for me to go to this concert with this friend, in a big Secondary School hall. I went, and the hall was full and I discovered it was this harmony that I recall hearing and seeing on TV those years ago. To my surprise, there in the chorus was a guy I knew. I met him after the 'show' and Kelvin invited me to come along to a practice night. Even in practice the singing was great, and the guys all seemed to be really enjoying themselves and made me feel welcome too.

I had the benefit that I could read the music, but what amazed me was that most of the chorus members couldn't read music. I was impressed with that and how well they sang despite their "handicap"!!!! These days we have a 'learning CD' for every new song we learn which makes it easy for me and for those who don't read music.

15 years on and I am still loving it. It's the sounds of men's voices in close, unaccompanied harmonies that still appeal to me. I've sung and competed in quartets (I love that). We've sung in gigs for full scale public shows and for private functions. I've been in national chorus competitions, (and got gold medals). I've been to Hawaii, Melbourne, Salt Lake City USA) singing and taking part in the conventions. There really is a great camaraderie between us all.

I find that it's a great hobby and a real change from my work in the Timber, Building Materials and Hardware supply Industry.

Andrew Maher (Bass)

Age 66, Business Manager

That desire to make music which burnt away inside me for years is now well dampened down by the reality of learning to sing (and I mean in tune!! Singing in the shower standard doesn't cut it) and fear engendered by an upcoming audition.

I discovered COS by replying to an advertisement in the Sunday Herald for a ladies chorus – the Sweet Adelines - because years of hunting for a way to start singing with others had resulted in disappointments one after another so I figured that the ladies would surely know of a men's chorus. And indeed they did.

A quick search of the COS web site revealed that practice night is Monday and anyone is welcome. Now when they say welcome they mean it. I felt instantly that I had landed among friends. From the first night several other newbies and I were quickly assessed, assigned a “buddy”, given a folder containing music for the repertoire and given a talk on the history and methods of barber shop singing.

Then, believe it or not, we were invited onto the risers (a small grandstand for standing singers) to do the best we could with the songs that they were singing. At that moment I was hooked. To stand among forty men singing in four part harmony with volume, enthusiasm and above all great musicality was so inspiring that I determined, whatever the difficulties, to make the grade.

Of course determination is only one ingredient. I had not sung since school days (50 years before) and then not well but with help of my “buddy” Bevin, once a week singing lessons from former opera singer Elaine Dow and assiduous practice I am beginning to believe that all things are possible.

Each Monday night is a time to be looked forward to and despite the high standards required the assistance provided is overwhelmingly supportive.

For me, membership of COS is summed up at the conclusion of each practice when the entire chorus sing two old standards “Lets Get Together Again” and “Keep the World Singing” with such feeling that one floats into the night on a cloud of melody keenly anticipating a return at the same time next week.

Trevor Marinovich (Lead)

Age 58, Development Manager

I have always loved listening to the close harmonies that singers such as the Everly Brothers, Simon & Garfunkel and Crosby Stills & Nash have been able to produce. I was quite heavily involved with traditional Croatian folk music in my younger years, but had not done anything much musically since moving to Sydney in 1988.

I was stopped at traffic lights one evening in 2006, and noticed a banner on a pedestrian bridge which said something about men who love to sing in harmony, and listed the Sydney Harmony website. I was intrigued, and with my wife's encouragement decided to follow it up, and thus became exposed to the world of barbershop music. I moved back to Auckland in 2008, and being keen to keep up my involvement, I joined the City of Sails chorus, which is a similar size to Sydney Harmony.

The barbershop style of singing appeals to me, as the idea is to produce a blended sound, with no one voice standing out. This requires great teamwork, as not only must you blend seamlessly with the other members singing your part, you must also be fully aware of the other parts being sung around you.

It is not difficult to sing barbershop, it just requires a lot of practice. I learn my part by singing in my car, following the teaching CDs of our songs. I am sure that I get lots of strange looks at traffic lights, but I don't care, because I am enjoying myself. I find it takes my mind off any work issues that I might have, and I look forward to our Monday night practices, as it is a world away from what I am doing during the rest of the week. My wife is sure that it has made me a better person to live with, and I think she is right.

We have some great songs in our repertoire, and I particularly enjoy singing the ballads. They tend to be quite emotional songs, and when it all comes together in beautiful four part harmony, I can feel my eyes start to water, and I am not too proud to admit that I can quite often be singing with the odd tear or two running down my cheek. When we are performing it is great to look up and see similar reactions in the audience. It must be a good thing!

Peter Maxwell (Baritone)

Retired

I am now in my 21st year as a member of the City of Sails Chorus and have enjoyed every year. The Chorus numbers have fluctuated over the years with members leaving for various reasons, health, age, moving away from the city etc. For instance, in 1987-88 the Chorus had approximately 30 members which swelled in the late 90's to approx. 80 singers. This large chorus produced a lovely sound and many gold medals were won by the chorus.

Barbershop harmony is enjoyed in many countries around the world with good fellowship being one of the enjoyable aspects of this hobby; after the ringing of the chords of four part harmony.

I have travelled with other chorus members to barbershop singing conventions in the USA on several occasions. The chorus has performed at some of these events. City of Sails Chorus performed in Salt Lake City in 2005 and in 2008 the Chorus and quartets competed in the Pan Pacific Convention in Hawaii bringing home medals and new ideas to incorporate into our repertoire.

I have been a member of the "Baker Street" quartet from the City of Sails that was successful at several National Conventions winning gold medals in the Senior Division when the four members of the quartet's ages must total at least 240 years.

Ross McMillan (Baritone)

Age 55, Electronics Engineer

I joined the chorus in 1996, after learning about it from a work colleague of my wife. As a child I had listened to my father and his two brothers singing Mills Brothers songs a capella and I had always loved hearing unaccompanied singing. I now regret that I waited another 35 years before I did something about it.

I was never a terribly social person in that I never had a wide circle of friends, and it never occurred to me that belonging to the chorus might change that. I was just interested in singing. I figured I would go along, practice singing, and then go home. It never occurred to me I would make so many new friends. Some people don't go out because they don't feel so good. With Chorus, you go along because you don't

feel so good. The camaraderie I experienced backstage just before my first ever competition performance is something I will never forget.

Four years ago I developed lymphoma and spent a year in treatment. I received a ton of support from the chorus which included two members who had suffered the same condition.

I guess the thing I love about Chorus is that we are a bunch of guys, aged from 18 to 80-something, some of whom have nothing in common but a love of singing, but we all get along famously. I consider every one of them my friend.

James Middleditch (Lead)

Age 56, Locksmith

I was fortunate to join the chorus in 1995 unfortunately just a bit too late for the first Pan Pacific contest held here in Auckland in 1994. My joining the chorus was a bit of a happy coincidence as my wife and I had gone to her sisters for tea and in the course of the evening my brother-in-law told us that he had been invited to this “Buddy Evening” by his best mate whom we also knew. With the inquisitive request of what is the afore mentioned “buddy nite” he told us that it was a recruitment drive for this group that he sings with and as my brother-in-law was very keen on music he was invited to go along. Upon hearing this both my wife and sister-in-law said that I should go as well as they reckoned that I could hold a note or two so we duly went. It was not quite his cup of tea but I have enjoyed my time with this fine body of men for the past 14 years (scary when you think of that amount of time).

I think the best thing that you can get from the “Chorus” is the good fellowship and the close bonds that develop over time. Everyone has a tendency to look after you and your well being. When you are new you are taken under someone’s wing and guided along this musical path that we have chosen to walk.

The camaraderie that exist within our “Chorus” manifests itself around the New Zealand “Choruses” and indeed around the world with many many very good friendships developed around the globe. There are songs in our repertoire that are

sung the same way in every Chorus around the world and you can visit any of these choruses and be able to sing a song or two. We have groups visit NZ, and indeed we get to visit with them. I think this sort of friendship is by far the most rewarding thing about this hobby.

Ed Nichols (Bass)

Age 78

Just writing my age makes me realize that I am becoming an old man but I certainly don't feel old. I think that being a member of the City of Sails chorus has a lot to do with keeping me focused and feeling a part of something very creative. There is the comradeship, discipline and plain hard practice, that together produces a lovely four part harmony that is the basis of our craft. This is an a cappella art form that is demanding and can be enjoyed by the performer and the audience. It makes one proud to be part of such an accomplished group as the C.O.S. chorus.

I started singing Gilbert and Sullivan music while in High School in the U.S. and I continued singing in church choirs. Both were enjoyable but put on hold when I attended University, four years in the Navy, and entered the family baking business, in that order. When the business was sold our family moved to N.Z. for what was planned to be a two year stint in 1972. Somehow, we started a citrus orchard, Sharon started teaching and the children were enjoying N.Z. life. So, after building a 12 metre yacht and selling the orchard we moved to Auckland in 1986, after the children left the nest. We enjoyed sailing the yacht for 20 years.

Barbershop singing started for me in 1991 when I was 60 years old and has been a big part of our lives ever since. During my 18 years in the C.O.S chorus I was privileged to sing in two quartets as well. Both were tremendously enjoyable. Our senior quartet, "Baker Street", was fortunate enough to win National gold medals for four years. My most enduring memory has been when the City of Sails chorus went to Salt Lake City in 2005 to compete in the Internationals where we acquitted ourselves very well!

Charles Oram (Lead)

Age 45, Electronics Engineer

I started singing barbershop 6 years ago while living in Napier. I have always enjoyed singing, but hadn't done any real singing since I left school, and I was looking for a choir or something to get involved in. I'm not that religious, so didn't

want to join a church choir and I didn't really want to sing classical music, so that ruled out a more traditional choir. With those two options excluded that didn't leave much else, but then I came across an old notice in the window of the local music shop advertising Bay Harmony, the Hawkes Bay barbershop chorus. I went along one evening and was immediately hooked. I sang with Bay Harmony for 2 years and then when I moved up to Auckland for work I joined the City of Sails Chorus. The amazing thing about singing barbershop is that you can take four guys who are average singers and get them together to make a fantastic sound. You can also take a wide range of music and arrange it to be sung as barbershop, so we can sing songs that are fairly recent and were hits not that long ago as well as songs that are 100 years old. It is a lot of fun, you meet a great bunch of guys and it isn't that difficult. I couldn't read music when I started, but we learn most of our songs from tapes or CDs, so that didn't matter.

George Phillips (Tenor)

Age 80, retired Media Director

Why/how I joined the Chorus:

Like many of the City of Sails, I had always had a yen for Barbershop. It was in the early 1980's I first saw a notice (in the rear window of a car on Queen's Wharf) promoting the Chorus. But I did nothing about it!

About 6/7 years ago my wife and I were strolling in Orewa and chanced upon a Pizza Parlour, outside of which there was a charming, very attractive lady inviting passers-by to partake in a sample. "Why not", said I, not one to miss such an opportunity – for whatever reason!

So we sampled a delicious slice of Pizza and struck up a conversation. It transpired that Josy sang in the Pros 'n' Cons – a mixed quartet that sang Barbershop and other variations.

"Barbershop! I've always wanted to sing Barbershop", said I. "If you're serious" said Josy, "you will meet Ross McMillan at the City of Sails Chorus nest Monday. The rest is history. **Why, oh why, did I not respond to that notice in the car window?** Again, like all Barbershoppers, I wish I had taken it up years ago.

Funny Experiences:

At a concert prior to Christmas 2008 I was taken short just as the Chorus was taking the stage. The toilets were at the back of the hall, therefore I had to rejoin by walking down the centre aisle and taking my place on the first riser. The two guys who provided my window opened up to let me in – and didn't quite close the gap; I had a perfect window.

And the audience had an uninterrupted view of myself; all in my resplendent glory – **with my flies undone!** Thus it remained for the first half.

In February 2008 the Chorus performed at the Thames Heritage Festival. Between our performances – morning and afternoon – there was time to kill. A group I was with were quartetting and arrived at an old pub; and in we went. Of course, we had to sing.

I 'instructed' the barman to, "Turn off that racket" (loud, raucous music was being played). That didn't go down too well! I then stared down some guys who were playing pool; willing them to pipe down. It became similar to a shoot-out in a Gary Cooper western.

We sang one Polecat; and made a hasty retreat!

Dave King (Bass) has never allowed me to forget it.

What do I get out of the City of Sails Chorus?

Everyone of the chorus will provide the same answers. Camaraderie; Enjoyment; Satisfaction; Passion; A caring for the other guys; Music, of course; A tremendous sense of achievement when it all comes together; The thrill of performing with a great group of guys; And the opportunity to keep on learning.

Ron Rayner (Lead)

Age 69, retired Engineering Manager.

On retiring my wife and I joined the Howick East Combined Probus Club where we met Vic Francis who told us about his interest in Barbershop singing. My wife suggested that perhaps I might be interested in joining a chorus as in our younger days, before we came to New Zealand some forty four years ago, we had both been singers in the local Amateur Operatic Society and I had sung in our church choir for several years.

Vic informed us that the City of Sails Barbershop Chorus was holding a social evening to introduce interested singers to the art of barbershop singing and invited us to go along to see what it was all about. We attended the evening and listened to the chorus sing a few numbers and by the end of the evening I was smitten. I had never heard the four part unaccompanied harmony before and I was very impressed. My background was choral singing, where faces were hidden behind sheet music and everything was sung so seriously and here were men singing, unaccompanied, in beautiful harmony, without sheet music and they all appeared to be really enjoying themselves with bags of expression and movement.

I joined the chorus and by the end of my first year I had experienced the thrill of winning a gold medal at the National Convention in Christchurch which led to the Chorus being invited to the American National Convention in Salt Lake City where we sang in the Mormon Tabernacle Convention Centre. I shall never forget the experience when, prior to the Convention, we were invited to sing at a Show comprising overseas choruses. Our chorus sang the American Trilogy and the reaction of the audience which gave us a standing ovation will remain in my memory for ever.

Jay Smith (Tenor)

Age 38, Guidance Counselor at Rangitoto College

I come from Scotland. The barbershop tradition is not as strong there, however I happened to meet a small group of older men who were singing barbershop, and in hearing the unaccompanied harmony I was immediately hooked and wanted to sing with them. I soon joined and that was the beginning of barbershop singing for me. A few years later, when I arrived in New Zealand, on the other side of the world, with the intention of living and working permanently here, I was initially homesick and wondering if it was the right move I'd made. I was sitting chatting with some people I was living with on those first weeks, and I happened to mention I had sung barbershop in the past. They then told me that there was a very good barbershop chorus here in Auckland- The City of Sails Barbershop Chorus.

I went along to a practice a few days later, and it was great. The chorus was huge compared with the small group I sang with previously; there was a bigger age range; the musical directors were experienced, and the camaraderie among the men there was great. I felt at home at once. What is more I found that there were many songs I had learned in Scotland that are sung by barbershop groups all over the world- the Polecats, and it was especially good to be able to join in right away with the guys at COS on that first night.

I have been singing barbershop for quite a while now and I have never tired of it. I enjoy it today every bit as much as when I first started. At times it takes a lot of hard work to get your part accurate but when I do, and I hear a chord ringing out beautifully it still sends a shiver up my spine, and it's worth its weight in gold.

Peter Smith (Bass)

Age 64 years old, Factory Owner building and installing trellis, fencing, gates etc.

At the ripe young age of 62 I noticed an advertisement in the local paper inviting those interested to contact a chorus member with a view to joining.

This struck me as quite interesting as I had just had to give up playing Classical Guitar as my arthritis (particularly in the base of my left thumb) made this a painful exercise. I could, and can, so long as I am careful, still play the piano but no longer had guitar lessons to attend on Monday nights so the Chorus Monday night practice fitted in well.

I duly bowled along (very punny) to the Balmoral Bowling Club and was welcomed by the denizens of the CoS.

It was soon decided that the only place for my rusty voice was among the basses and I have happily stayed there ever since.

Probably a good time to note that in the preceding 62 and a bit years I had not sung a note other than at compulsory secondary school assemblies.

My progress with the chorus has been a series of fits and starts as when work gets busy I am liable to miss 2 or 3 practices in a row and then have my work cut out to catch up again. This is particularly true of choreo which you obviously cannot see on a CD or sheet music.

All in all, however, I enjoy the singing and the fellowship of the chorus members and have recently been invited to join a quartet which is turning out to be great fun and learning experience. Perhaps with this extra practice I may eventually pass my performance audition. Something else to look forward to!! It just gets better and better as you go along.

Steve Skinner (Bass)

I have always had music around me and was a staunch member of the church choir until my voice broke (in 1958). I became a terrible teenager, unable to do anything much let alone sing except with a painfully cracked voice. It wasn't until 1996 my

friend Ross McMillan tried to get me along to listen to Barbershop and join COS. I was reluctant. I didn't like the idea of an all male group. Some of the songs were really OLD. However, my defining moment was going to a COS show at the Maidment Theatre in Auckland. The Chorus sang a lot of good stuff but the one that got me was Danny Boy. I had never thought of it as an anti-war song. They sang it with great feeling – 'when is it right for a lad to go to war?' The harmony was terrific, the hair stood up on the back of my head and I was hooked.

The Barbershop movement is a great unifying network. It covers most continents and is very friendly and supportive. We have 4 part harmony songs not only in English but in Maori, Samoan, Swedish, Mandarin and probably more. It is wonderful to see all the young men and women drawn into this rewarding craft and have the opportunity to travel the world singing. Now I wish I'd started when I was 15.

Peter Thorpe (Lead)

Engineer

My interest in barbershop was kindled in the 3rd form at school when a quartet featured as part of French classes and I was very taken with the harmony sound. Nothing further until 2003 when I attended a birthday party for an elderly relative who was living in a rest home and a group from City of Sails sang for her. The show had been organised by my cousin who was a member and after talking to him I joined up in January 2004.

I enjoy the sound we make and gain personal satisfaction from singing my part correctly. The group is very inclusive, non judgmental and supportive which makes for good fellowship and company. I find the act of learning new songs by heart is great exercise for keeping my brain active and exercising my memory. The biggest thrill to date was attending the International Convention in Salt Lake City in 2005. I was still pretty green as a barbershopper and did not at the time fully appreciate what a big deal it was, but none the less it was a great experience. I also like the fact that age is no barrier to continuing singing for as long as one is physically able to stand on the risers.

Performing for the public and receiving positive feedback adds icing to the cake.

John Watkins (Lead)

Age 65

I've had an on again-off again relationship with music all my life. When I was 11 yrs old I started learning the cornet in the Kumeu Municipal Band. I was quite good at picking up the rudiments of music according to my instructor, Sergeant Whitlock of the RNZAF, but lost interest after about 18 months (silly me,) so dropped out. At high school (Henderson H.S.) I joined the school band and choir, in the 3rd. form as a drummer and a tenor, respectively. Because I was a big, healthy lad, I ended up being the bass-drummer in the band. What fun!

My mum always said that I had a great voice & sense of rhythm. Then, in 1982 I started learning acoustic folk-country guitar at Lynfield College night-classes. I guess I've been singing at folk clubs etc. ever since, (hopefully, improving my picking style over the years,) accompanying myself on my guitar, or sometimes, an auto-harp or omnichord. When we were living in Feilding, between 1995-2000, Virginia & I went to the Palmerston North folk-club, which met in a cafe in George St. on Friday nights. It was there, that we first met Junji Kawai. When we returned to live in Auckland, in 2000, we caught up with Junji again, as he was working at Massey campus in Albany. For a while, I belonged to the sea-shanty group, "Maritime Crew" up until we moved out of Auckland in 1995. In the early eighties, I was also, part of a folk-harmony trio, "Masherkins" made up of the members' surnames, Pam Mather, Gavin Asher & myself. That was fun too, but ended when Gavin pulled out of the group because of pressure of other commitments. When Junji told me about the CoS in January 08, it sounded like something I wanted to get into, as a lot of folk-singers have other musical interests as well. The discipline and hard work of belonging to a chorus won't do me any harm, and I believe this group has talent, class, style and the potential to go places, musically. I just hope I can fit singing commitments with CoS into my busy schedule, as I have other interests & responsibilities as well. I will give it my best shot, and hope my input is a plus for the group as a whole.

Roy Wilkins (Tenor)

I have always loved singing. On the 25th of April 1979 I heard of the visit to Auckland of the Merry Mac's a Barbershop quartet from Hawaii. I went to the first gathering fell in love with the four part harmony and have been singing ever since.

I have competed at National and International level with the City of Sails Chorus and as part of a quartet. I am a tenor and still have a good voice and range for this part. My wife and I have made many good friends through singing and have had numerous opportunities to travel within New Zealand and overseas. I have enjoyed the camaraderie and fun of the other Chorus members. The greatest buzz for me is to see the pleasure that my singing gives other folk.

One of the biggest highlights for a Barber-shopper singer is to perform and perhaps compete in the USA International Convention. In 2003 I was diagnosed with cancer. During treatment I was not able to take part in the chorus's activities but the men kept in touch. In 2004 at the New Zealand National convention the City of Sails Chorus won the Gold Medal. This entitled the Chorus to enter the International Competition in July 2005. This was to be held in Salt Lake City, Utah. This was a driving force for me to return to singing and to participate at the level of being able to travel to the States. I did manage to do this over the following nine months with the assistance of the other men who gave me so much encouragement.

I had been given a clearance by the Doctors to travel but with one hitch, a week before I left I need to have a drainage tube inserted into my kidney. This was a minor problem and with a good transfusion of blood I set off to enjoy myself with my wife and other friends from the chorus.

The visit to Salt Lake City was an experience never to be forgotten. To sing to an audience of 18 thousand lovers of barbershop harmony can do nothing but send a chill down one's spine or a tear from the eye. The chords sung were just heavenly and the friendship from everybody there was fantastic. Harmony in song and with other people, this is what makes my hobby of Barbershop singing such a wonderful experience.

‘Keep the whole world singing.’

Tony Winter (Lead)

Age 60, Sustainable Housing Consultant

I have always enjoyed harmonised singing especially from the first time I heard Lambert, Hendricks & Ross when I was getting into Jazz. Then after hearing and purchasing a 12" record of the 'The 4 Freshmen' decades ago followed with a

connection to Manhattan Transfer & The Swingle Singers who are just fantastic and sounded so unique and cool.

I was friendly with Bevin from Chorus and at one of his parties I was introduced to Barbershop singing, and was intrigued with the sound having heard about the setting up of the Chorus and remembering an ad for people to attend at Motat – but not following it through.

So I was asked to sing a few notes and come along to a practice which I did and was very impressed but thought how can I sing – let alone like these guys as I had never sung a note other than along with my records in the past.

Well after listening and then being asked to get amongst the guys on the risers I will never forget the sound around me and the shivers it sent down my vocal cords and spine. I was hooked and that's 9 years ago now and I haven't missed being part of the Chorus and the wonderful camaraderie that is Barbershop.

The other key thing I get is the chance to be with men and enjoy men's fun and laughter as well as making men friends which I haven't had through my life – which also is reflected in society as men have got lost themselves since the 60's social changes kicked in.

Daniel Wong (Bass)

Age 45, Secondary School Teacher

I joined the City of Sails chorus in 1995. I first heard the Chorus in late 1994. I met a girl who was singing with the Greater Auckland Chorus of the Sweet Adelines. She invited me to hear her chorus sing. I did not know, however, that the City of Sails Chorus would be singing at that concert as well. When I heard them, I was immediately captivated by the sound. I had sung with mixed Church choirs before and had sung Old English Madrigals, but this sound was so different.

I hesitated for a while, but the girl I was seeing kept prompting me to go along to a rehearsal of the Chorus. Eventually I went and was almost immediately “hooked”.

I have rarely missed a rehearsal from that point on and had the privilege of having a group from the Chorus sing at my Wedding in 2002.

In joining the Chorus I have gained fellowship with a grand and diverse group of individuals, all who are willing to help and support each other both within and outside the Chorus. Many friendships have been made and many good times have been experienced. Wives (and partners) have also been welcomed. I have also had the opportunity to travel with the Chorus to international meetings of barbershop singers (Barbershoppers) in Australia, Hawaii and The Continental United States. I have met Barbershoppers from all over the World and been able to sing with them as we all know some common songs.

The camaraderie among Barbershoppers worldwide is amazing. You can go anywhere in the world where there are barbershop singers and meet and sing with them and they can and will go out of their way to make you feel welcome.

Ron Woodley (Lead)

Age 73, Semi-retired - Maintenance of Property

I joined the City of Sails barbershop Chorus in February 1989. The practice venue at that time was the Lutheran Church Hall in Akiraho Street, Mt Eden. Gary Taylor was the Musical Director and Daryl Denton was President. I believe we had about 40 members at this time.

In response to an advert in the North Shore Times, I went along to see what the barbershop singing was all about. Fred McDonald was Membership VP. He made me feel so welcome, I really enjoyed the evening, and almost hooked on the fabulous sound the guys were making. I didn't know if I could do what they all seemed to do so easily, but I loved it. The clincher for me was that during the next week I received a letter from Fred, quite short and to the point, it said "You seemed to enjoy yourself on Monday evening, we are looking forward to you coming again".

In October 1989, the 1st competition was held in Wellington. I couldn't go, as I had a major operation pending. The City of Sails chorus won, but unfortunately in those first few years of competition no medals or ribbons were presented.

At one of the conventions (I believe it was in Auckland in 1991) we had an American judge, Doug Miller. He had a wonderful moustache (one of those waxed at the end jobbies). Whenever you saw him, he always looked immaculate, very military. After the competitions were over, he came to our practice night about a week later. We by this time had about 60 members. I went to a shop in Browns Bay (Ikes Emporium) and bartered with the owner for quite a large number of false moustaches, very similar to Doug's beautiful natural one – they just clipped on your

nose. As the guys came into the chorus venue, we gave them each a moustache, showed them how to attach it, and told them to hide it until given the signal. Doug Miller duly arrived, we did some practice for a while, and on some pretext Gary Taylor took Doug into the kitchen for a chat. I then told everyone to put the moustaches on, we only had about 40 or 50 seconds to do this. As he came from the kitchen into the hall he was still talking to Gary, so his reaction wasn't immediate. Suddenly he turned to face the chorus, everyone had a moustache on like his, he was so taken aback, he started to speak, but seemed lost for words, so he turned back to Gary, who was slightly behind him. By this time Gary had also put his moustache on. Doug was so amazed and thrilled at this, he apparently talked about it for years afterwards.