

WAVERLEY COUNCIL

WAVERLEY: A MANY SPLENDoured PLACE

By Merlyn Swan

Waverley Council held a Seniors' Storytelling Workshop at Waverley Library in 2009 to collect and celebrate the memories of Waverley's seniors.

It was February 1978 and there I was seated in the office of the Principal of the Waverley TAFE College. My heart was pounding and my whole being seemed alight with expectations for my future. I had been selected to work on a new course in Child Care. The Course was barely two years old in New South Wales and trained students to work with children in a professional capacity.

This was a first for the Eastern Suburbs, and Waverley Council had the honour to lead the way in this new direction. This also led to Waverley Council opening several child care centres where certified Early Childhood workers would be employed. Staff in existing centres were professionally upgraded through evening classes. This was a great boost for working parents as their

urgent needs would be met by professionally trained staff. This was not a baby sitting institution. It became a haven where children, through directed play, activities and story telling, would develop the various skills needed at this early age. The course also prepared children for primary school, as a start is made with the three R's of education. My duty was to organise and administer the entire course. This was my second year in Australia, and it was a great opportunity and honour.

As I waited for the Principal to arrive my thoughts bounced back to my own childhood. I was 10 years old and living in the exotic tropical island of Ceylon. Fridays were always special as we were allowed to take three library books home. One special Friday I had "Beyond the Blue Mountains,"



Images from top:

Playground of McNeil Child Care Centre, corner of Denison Street and Ebley Street, Bondi Junction, 1970s.

Waverley Day Care Centre, 13 October 1980. Image courtesy of the State Archives & Records and SLNSW.



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the story of a teenager's adventures in Australia. The author opened the magic door to allow me to peep at the wonders of life in this far off continent, a never, never land. It made me long to visit this country and experience all the magic of animals, birds and beaches like Bondi. Since then I have often wondered if this was some sort of a premonition. Here I need to digress as the story of my encounter with this book takes an amazing twist, many years later, when I was living in Australia.

I was visiting my niece in Wollongong and she was keen to show me the beauties of that area. We ended up doing a bush walk and I related my encounter with this book, "Beyond the Blue Mountains." Just then a woman came past us, took a few steps, then turned and came back to me and said "I heard you, you must be my vintage, as I too read that book in my child hood. In fact my sister was a teacher in Waverley and she most probably still has a copy of it." This was so unbelievable. Here

I was, out in the bush, and a complete stranger who knew the same book, came past at the very moment of my story telling. Furthermore she was part of the Waverley community. How unique is that? Unfortunately, she informed me later, her sister had given the book away.

The TAFE Principal arrived and led me through the college to meet the Head of the General Studies Unit, who was to be my boss. Twelve months later the course was in full swing. Channel Seven, much to TAFE's delight, came and composed a news feature, which included the students exhibition of their practical work used with the children. The Child Care course is still running all these years later.

I felt so energised that I joined the painting workshop of the Waverley/Woollahra Arts Centre in Bondi Road. In a few years I had a roomful of my work. I was encouraged by the artists who conducted the various workshops to hold my own exhibition. At the same time I intended to start a poetry

Images from top:

Waverley Woollahra School of Arts c.1959.

Waverley Woollahra School of Arts Library c. 1956.

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Images from top:

Ron Lander at the grave of Henry Kendall on the centenary of his death, August 1982. L-R: Peter Daly, Waverley Historical Society; unknown; Ron Lander, Waverley Chief Librarian; Rev. Terry Dicks, St Mary's C. of E. Waverley.

Denis Moore, Deputy Librarian when image was taken 29 July, 1980. Photo by John Reilly.

group, as I loved and wrote poetry and felt it would be great to bring poets together. And so the poetry group got started, in 1985. At first we met in my home. Soon numbers grew and I had to look for larger accommodation. I approached the Church in the Market Place in Bondi Junction. It was in its old quarters in Bondi Junction where Reverend Milligan was in charge. He gave us free use of the premises. We have since moved into their new quarters. Twenty four years later we now hire a room and still meet every first Friday of the month.

By this time I had my own book of poems published. Now armed with my paintings and copies of my poetry book I decided to hold an exhibition. I dauntingly approached the Waverley Library. Ron Lander was in charge. He was a very open minded manager who saw the value of bringing art and literature to the wider community. With the assistance of Denis Moore I was given the run of the library foyer for this dual exhibition in 1993. This was the old library with very limited accommodation. Ron

Lander opened the exhibition and said how happy Waverley Library was to have this dual exhibition, a first. Seventy five per cent of the paintings were sold that evening and many books too. All the profit went to the Cancer Relief Fund. Waverly Library had thus helped fund a very worthy cause.

This same year I had made a submission for Australia Day stating how the Eastern Suburbs Poetry Group was communicating with poetry. As a result it was the first time that a literary group won recognition. We were presented with an Australia Day Award by The Sydney Morning Herald. This had a wonderful repercussion as it stimulated me to really take poetry to the wider public. Once again I visited Denis Moore, who was now the Chief Librarian. Denis too had a great vision for the arts and the community at large and he agreed to hold a show. Poets would come together to read their poems and young musical artists would be given the opportunity to appear in public with the group. It was



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Images from top:

St Michael's Golf Course, Little Bay. Image courtesy of the Daily Telegraph.

Woollahra Golf Club, image courtesy of Woollahra Golf Club.

called "Words and Music." It is quite unique to recall how in the old library Denis would give us all the space in the back of the library. In between book shelves we would organise chairs for the audience. Our first show had a musical choir of 20 singers, alongside ten poets. It was a great success. One of these young talented singers, Charpa, is now singing in the opera houses of Europe. It was in Waverley Library that she made her debut.

This show is now an annual event known as "The Eastern Suburbs Poetry Group Festival." We now use the new premises in Bondi Junction. This year we will be presenting our 17th annual Festival and a special programme to honour the 150th birthday of Waverley Council with a historical overview in poetry of the Waverley area.

In 1994 the group published its first poetry book called "Kolareena." This was sponsored by the Waverley Library and was launched at the Festival by the Mayor of Waverley. In 2002 our second

book "Lighthouse" was also sponsored by Waverley Library. This was a unique collection as the book is in two parts. The second part is a historical overview of Australia in poetry. Waverley takes pride of place here too with poems about the landing of Captain Cook, Centennial Park, where Federation was proclaimed in 1901, the popular Randwick Race Course, Maroubra beach which was named Australia's 2nd Natural Surfing Reserve in 2006, and Aboriginal tribes from this area.

One of the most exhilarating places in the Waverley area for me is St Michael's golf range. I spent many a day here practising my golf shots. I have no doubt it was this that enabled me to score that wonderful hole in one, the first in five years, at my own golf club of Woollahra.

The other very fascinating place for me, especially in my early days in Australia, is the Eastern Suburbs Leagues Club in Bondi Junction. I made many friends here. A group of us used to lunch here on a regular

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Images from top:

Waverley Cemetery, graves in Section II, 1995.

Waverley Cemetery, October 2016. Photograph by Nic Bezzina, image courtesy of Mitchell Library, and the SLNSW.

basis and it is still my favourite meeting place.

I do wish to acknowledge once again Waverley Library, where two of my philosophical publications were launched, "Today's Believer" and "God Made Visible". The Mayor of Waverley introduced the launching of both books.

Above all I love walking through the historical Waverley Cemetery and pondering on man's mortality. I dedicate this poem to the cemetery.

The Waverley Cemetery

Here I can walk where monuments breathe tales of courage, where hate grows silent and a past outlived. No politics, no heartaches only the timeless ocean laps and flows, and trees and flowers shade and project death's equality. Here the golden and the reds of the sky, provide the backdrop to a glorious vision, where flaws are buried with noble deeds, and resplendent spring and summer's ecstasy, greet the silence of man's unity, bursting upon the living, like an epiphany of Light!