

## **Manly Warringah Choir: Some personal histories**

During the suspension of normal activities in 2020, the Choir President asked members to write a few lines about themselves and their lives before joining the Choir. Some contributions were brief, some more fulsome. All proved most interesting.

### **Margaret Duncan:**

I've worked in academia, radio and television, natural therapies, and music. Most of my television years were at SBS, mainly making promos for documentaries (really good ones in those days), and videos about the network for conferences etc.

I was lured away to Ovation, which was all opera, classical music and the arts... but not for very long, as it was taken over by bogans! It was the same story 10 years later under new management – we were plunged quite suddenly from being paid to watch operas from the New York Met, to wall-to-wall Andre Rieu.

There followed some lovely work at National Geographic and the ABC, but eventually I dropped out into natural therapies for five years while living in Avalon, and am now happily semi-retired and teaching piano!

### **Rhian Mirgis:**

I was born in a small coal-mining village in Wales and did my nurse's training in Wales. Then I decided to travel and came to Sydney as a ten pound Pom. I did not intend to stay for ever: only for the required two years .

But oh the power of love !!! So here I am, 62 years later and no regrets.

### **Naomi Roseth:**

I am a retired social researcher. Trained as a psychologist, I spent my entire working life in the public service; the last twelve in Sydney Water where I led a small team exploring people's views on the service they receive. In particular my work supported Sydney Water in developing strategies for water conservation and recycled water based on people's perceptions and acceptance.

Before that I worked in the Department of Education, mainly engaged in the evaluation of various programs. I also had a short stint in the Independent Commission Against Corruption where I established a small unit exploring community perception on what constitutes 'corruption'.

### **Marj Binns:**

So, even in 1951, what do you do with an arts degree majoring in History and French? I worked for the Commonwealth Public Service - initially as a researcher working in French for L'Union Postale Universelle, then as a historian researching the history of the Australian Post Office.

Compulsory retirement from the Service on marriage meant a move to Sydney, leaving that work incomplete, and subsequently, on and off over many years, teaching. And finally I returned to writing and have published three histories.

**Kerry Foster:**

I trained as a high school English teacher, but also studied science so that has contributed to other opportunities. I have worked in both public and private high schools, initially in Western Australia and later in NSW. It is a long story, but the short version is I also owned and ran a non-ferrous castings manufacturing and wholesale business for 22 years. I enjoyed the science involved in metallurgy and working with people from very diverse backgrounds.

I balanced this work with casual teaching, but I never expected to be still teaching several decades after I started! However I enjoy working with young people and interacting with so many different age groups. (In my senior years, I limit myself to Year 11 and 12 classes!)

**Roger Pratt:**

I grew up in the fenland marshes on the east coast of England, in a tiny hamlet called Black Hole Drove. The name said it all. The best thing about it was that it gave me the incentive to work hard and get out of there.

After university I joined a large engineering company (Rolls-Royce) as a corporate lawyer, very soon realised I didn't want to spend the rest of my life doing that, so switched into commercial management. At age 29 I was moved to the USA and worked for five years in New York and then for a while in Montreal. I returned to UK, still working in commercial and marketing, mainly in aerospace and defence operations all over the world. It was an exciting time, dealing with some very dubious governments in some very exotic places, but somehow getting contracts signed and keeping the business coming in.

I was moved to Sydney in 1992 to head up the Australasian operations of the company, and in 2000 to Japan for my final posting. Tokyo was fun, but not good for one's health, so I retired early in 2003 and chose to settle in Palm Beach rather than return to the UK, a decision I have never once regretted.

Throughout my life I have loved music, getting hooked on Wagner in my teens, playing in a jazz band at university, singing in various choirs and going to concerts whenever I could. My other passion has always been sailing, so my retirement has been in paradise - sailing on Pittwater and singing with the Manly-Warringah Choir. Who could ask for more?

**Richard Griffiths:**

How to describe 38 years of working for a living? Like many Maths graduates of my generation, early in my working life I fell into computing almost by accident. That move determined the remainder of my career, spent largely on the fringes of computing itself. My roles involved assisting all levels of company staff and management to make the most of the facilities which ITC could bring to their businesses, and to help them implement the many changes involved.

It was on my retirement that Anne and I considered moving to Sydney. Here, contrary to the supposition of several acquaintances in the UK, I was fortunate to be able continue my life-long love of choral singing by joining the MW Choir. And I could write a lot more about a lifetime of singing than about working for a living!

**Helen Kealy:**

My love of music is from as young as I can remember. My mother and father sang as did my sisters. As a child I joined the Australian Children's Choir and as a young adult went on to join the Opera and Music Theatre school at the Victorian College of the Arts and at the same time completed a Bachelor of Education.

I decided not to progress with singing or teaching as a career and instead completed a Bachelor of Business in Marketing and have had a wonderful and exciting career working for companies including Telstra, Star City, EnergyAustralia, UTS, and now as Head of Marketing - Brand, PR and Community for IGA which I just love.

I have only recently come back to singing, knowing for a long time it was something I truly missed but life just got too busy working and raising my two boys. Then something prompted me to seek out and apply to join the MW choir this year. While work has been keeping me incredibly busy since March, I was disappointed not being able to keep our weekly rehearsals going and performing at my first concert with the choir.

I look forward to whenever the day is that we get back together. Meanwhile I'm planning a week skiing, my Mum's 90th and looking forward to catching a movie next week for the first time in ages with a girlfriend. Things are slowly getting back to normal. Glad I don't live in Melbourne anymore. See you soon everyone. (Elbow Bump)

**Marianne Short:**

Re singing experiences - I joined my first choir at age 12 at our local church - very small - in Normanhurst where I spent many happy Sundays singing with a small group of about 12 choristers. Next came choir at Hornsby Girls High School, and later choral studies at Kuringgai CAE where I attended as a Matured Aged Student to gain my teaching qualifications.

This led me to further studies in Music Education as a post graduate student. My music teacher also happened to be the musical director of the Sydney Welsh choir, so upon invitation I sang and travelled with this group for 14 years until my retirement in 2007 and also by then had joined Manly Warringah Choir.

Other things: I have travelled extensively in Nepal and other Himalayan countries - many treks - Annapurna base camp, Gokyo lakes, Mustang, Bhutan, Tibet. I now have many close friends in Nepal, and have sponsored several adult children for many years. One is now an Australian citizen and another has married, has a beautiful daughter, and has just gained permanent residency. Another is working towards a Ph.D. in Cancer research at John Hunter Research Institute in Newcastle.

I now live with my husband Rob in a retirement village at Warriewood and we will continue to travel as soon as we can. We have managed to travel to many countries, to both the Arctic and the Antarctic, and many in between. We are fortunate to have two children living fairly close by and two lovely grandchildren.

**Gina Cottee:**

My 32 yrs as a Dermatologist were very happy and fulfilling in having the privilege of the professional relationship with my patients; in being a VMO at the Mater and Royal North Shore hospital where I loved teaching the medical students for 20 years; and in being the third generation practicing in the family home. Indeed when my shingle went up ,Father counted the number of letters in my three degrees, found I had one more than he, and so amended his to include more.

This best decision of my life was made one Saturday morning, when, as a second year resident I unexpectedly worked in the hospital's staff medical centre. Here I discovered that patients with skin problems, because they could see them, were the more worried and motivated to get better. I also realised that I could get control of medicine in doing a specialty and here I would essentially escape the "I am on the little white and the blue tablet". Dermatology cuts across Surgery Medicine and Psychology.

In looking back I see the stepping stones, all relating to the "gifts" of remarkable people.

My Head Mistress , who had lost both father and husband in the world wars, had handpicked teachers like herself who would be able to give their all to teaching and who hence the fostered of my love of learning and discovery.

My Father, active both in his dental surgery and in the community, would bring people in through to the kitchen completely unannounced.

My aunt, the Matron of the Milton Ulladulla Hospital, was acknowledged for her life's service to the community by the naming of the Matron Porter Drive and Reserve along Narrawally Beach, the one before Mollymook Beach. I remember seeing my first appendicectomy in its operating theatre, which was reached via either the kitchen or her bedroom. She was an extraordinary nurse and personality with a deep understanding of people, which even included sorting out shot-gun weddings.

My mentor, a Dermatologist with also an Arts degree in Law and a PhD in immunology from Cambridge University, one afternoon for fun encapsulated all Dermatology pathology on just one piece of paper, thus focusing the diagnosis of patients. His statement of "Patients bring the world to you" was, I discovered, oh so true.

Finally, the two eminent Dermatologists in whose rooms I initially worked; two such different personalities with different fortes.

With retirement came the joy of looking at the clock at 6am and saying "I can stay in bed." And now MY TIME. I found music took over, tap dancing again, our choir with its magnificent repertoire, music lectures and concert subscriptions. But also gardening, reading (especially history) , and art. There is so much to learn and to explore. Rewardingly new and important friendships have been formed. Cooking however retains no interest. I would still rather pull out weeds.

**Angelika Acock:**

A Bachelor of Science from Sydney Uni led to positions as an analytical chemist/biochemist with pharmaceutical companies, particularly Roche at Dee Why. While bringing up three children, my work was mainly part-time as an interviewer with Australian Bureau of Statistics and as a researcher with the Dept of Education.

Wishing to return to full-time work and now needing computing skills, interest from a basic course led to me completing a Diploma in IT, and a new career. My first position was in telephone computer support with Compaq when IT was the world of young men and I was old enough to be their mother. The last seven years before retirement was as an IT teacher with TAFE, mainly in computer hardware, operating systems and networking.

Over the years I've also had a great variety of short term jobs, the worst being in Germany as a headwasher in a salon for men with toupees!

**Maria Alfaro:**

After all those very accomplished biographies mine is very mild indeed. I grew up in Chile, only descendent of a disappearing old family with all the old concepts hammered into my head by my grandmother.

Fortunately my father was a wise, intelligent man and my mother a pretty, laughing, sociable person, so I developed into a semi normal human being. I had plenty of boyfriends, in those times innocent relationships, and was lucky to meet my husband and start together a forty odd year relationship, in love to the last. We produced three, in my opinion, extraordinary human beings, two boys and a girl. They in turn produced my eight grandchildren. Ed, my husband died of cancer many years ago but the family is still very much together.

I never went to uni but worked as bi-lingual secretary in New York and here. Australia is my home now and I love it.