

# Margaret Fraser - March 2018



Music and Gardening - Margaret's life-long preservation for body and mind.

I was brought up on a stud Merino property in the Avon Valley of Western Australia about 140 kms inland from Perth - a productive mixed farming area of which two of my great great grandfathers were pioneers.

The climate is similar to Strathalbyn in that it has a winter rainfall of around 16 inches and hot dry summers.

My parents were married at the time of the Great Depression. Money and creature comforts were in short supply in the 1930s and 1940s, with the Second World War succeeding the Depression.

Following the footsteps of my Grandfather who had run a successful Merino stud, my Father registered his own stud in 1933, but with the Bungaree blood line rather than the Peppin line.

This began a connection with South Australia which, to those in the west at that time, seemed a world away.

Over the years numbers of sires were purchased, firstly from Old Bungaree and subsequently from East Bungaree.

Elaborate plans were made for the rams to come by sea from Adelaide to Fremantle, and in later years they were flown over - to this day the stud is still being run by my brother.

Having survived the downturn in wool prices in the 1980s and 90s, wool is currently bringing high prices, and rams are once again in demand.

I have two siblings, a sister and a brother, and we enjoyed a carefree and happy childhood.

There were pets of all sorts including, in some years, orphaned lambs, which had to be nurtured at the house for several months.

Horses and ponies were used for mustering and going round the sheep and for riding boundary fences to make sure there were no plague rabbits digging their way in to greener pastures - we learnt to ride on a quiet but stubborn brumby called 'Darkie'.

Many hours were spent being led by my father from his horse as he rode around the farm inspecting various mobs of sheep.

It was a safe way to learn and we soon became independent of the lead rope - so began a life long love of horses and all things equestrian.

Despite financial constraints, and in the early years a shortage of water, we always had a garden - all waste water was bucketed out to thirsty plants.

Amongst roses, drought resistant shrubs, and flower beds, my father nurtured a favourite rose, 'Maman Cochet' which I think may have been brought from his childhood home.

My mother treasured what she always called the 'Moss Rose' later identified as 'Triginti Petala' or 'Kazanlik Rose'.

Family legend has it that the original of this bush had been brought from Wiltshire in England in the 1830s by her Great Grandparents.

All we descendants have bushes from this original in our own gardens - it is a Damask rose, very hardy and very prickly, but bearing highly scented flowers in Spring.

For centuries it has been grown commercially, particularly in Bulgaria, for Attar of Roses/rose oil.

As well my father kept a vegetable garden for which we had an inexhaustible supply of manure from under the shearing shed.

During the war years the vegetable garden was taken over by two Italian Prisoners of War who came to work on the farm.

They were not permitted to leave the property and in their time off from farm duties the vegetable garden became their main occupation and interest.

We were inundated with beautiful salad vegetables, tomatoes, water melons, rock melons, corn, onions etc - they also made a very sweet white wine from the Crystal grapes that formed a shady trellis along the back of the house.

At sampling time we 'bambinos' were offered a generous glassful each which was polished off with gusto, much to the consternation of our mother!

These were good men who were devastated at what had happened in their country and my

parents tried to make life as bearable as possible for them in the circumstances.

They played a valuable role in providing farm help at a time when so many local employees were away at the war.

My father, along with most farmers, was 'man powered' and could not join up, but he was an active member of the Voluntary Defence Corps which trained locally every weekend - some 'Dads Army' stories came out of these activities.

Primary schooling began at the kitchen table at home with my mother in charge.

There was no school bus in our part of the district at the time, and being war time petrol was rationed, so driving to the local school was not an option.

A year or so later a school bus (a converted army truck with rows of bench seats, open sides and canvas blinds), was allocated to our area, it passed our front gate at 7.45am and we either walked or rode our bikes the mile from the house.

It was a thirty mile round route and we were rarely home before 5pm.

From the local State School we went to boarding school in Perth for secondary education.

I loved the years at boarding school where we were able to expand our horizons and meet girls from all other parts of the state.

I still have close contact with the many friends made during that time and we have great reunions whenever I visit W.A.

After Year 12 I had intended going to Teachers' College, but was keen for a gap year before starting.

That gap year became four years, all of them spent helping my parents with the stud, learning to class wool and doing general farm work. I loved it all, especially that which could be done on horse back.

I was on the payroll and in addition made a substantial amount of money out of raising day old chickens in a big brooder.

These subsequently went to market and helped to fund an almost two year working holiday in England.

Having done a commercial course I found it easy to get temporary office work in London, as did most Australians in the early sixties.

There were no work visa requirements in those days and we would work for six to eight week stints and then go hitchhiking (a safe and common form of travel then) until our money ran out, then back to London - an amazing two years.

In 1963 I married Stewart, a Scot who was at that time lecturing in Geography at Auckland University in New Zealand - we lived in rented accommodation for two years during which time I had a job in the head branch of the ANZ Bank - then followed a two year stint in Perth

at the University of W.A., before moving to Adelaide in 1967.

Stewart joined the staff at Flinders University and lectured in the Geography Dept. until retirement.

We bought a lovely old Adelaide bungalow in Highgate where our three children grew up and went to school at Highgate Primary and Unley High School.

It was during this time that Stewart twice qualified for sabbatical leave overseas.

This involved letting our house for a year and living in both Aberdeen in Scotland and Wageningen in Holland in 1972/73 and again in 1978/79 - the first trip was a challenge with two boys aged five and three, and an eight month old crawling daughter!

The second time was easier and all three went to school - we all have precious memories of those two years and the unique experiences they gave us.

In 1994 the desire for a 'patch of dirt' overcame us and we bought a twenty acre block in the Meadows district where we ran a few steers, cut and sold meadow hay each year and accommodated our daughter's horses - said daughter always having had an interest in, and taken part in Eventing, Dressage, and Show Jumping, aided and abetted by her mother!

Gardening is in my genes, and at both Highgate and 'Cromarty' out near Kuitpo Forest, I filled the area round the house with roses and cottage garden type plants and of course a vegetable patch, and dotted the paddocks with new trees.

We made good use of the plentiful supply of horse, cow, and chook manure, which worked wonders on the somewhat deficient soil.

We owned that small property for seventeen years until health issues intervened and we regretfully sold up.

We now live in Meadows on an 820 sqm block and every square inch has something growing on it, we still have access to animal manure, thanks to the family horses, and by encouraging birds and frogs have very little problem with pests.

Along with gardening, music has been a life long interest, I learnt piano all through school and later on took up the cello as well as playing the full set of recorders.

I played in a Baroque group 'The Canzona Consort' for over twenty years and since then have played cello in other amateur groups.

I am currently playing with the Burnside Orchestra, the Flinders University Chamber Ensemble and a group called Cellos Only.

Life is busy and enjoyable and my abiding hope is that gardening will keep ageing joints from seizing up while music will help preserve remaining brain cells.