

Eulogy for Isabelle Mary Fenton

13 April 2021

Corrimal Girl

Isabelle Mary Fenton was born on 10th May 1933 in a candlelit room at 36 Railway Street Corrimal. She was the second child of Euphemia and Alexander Kerr who were both from Hamilton in Scotland. This was during the Depression years so times were tough; water was outside and you paid your electricity bill at the Coke works. They hadn't paid the bill. There was no refrigeration, only a meat safe and if you were lucky, you had an ice chest.

Isabelle was a tiny child but this did not curb her enthusiasm or curiosity. She loved outdoors and was not afraid of many things. By all accounts she liked to tease her sister Nancy by locking the toilet door and throwing a chicken inside. Her father supplemented their income by working as a 'Cockatoo' or lookout for the local bookmaker. Nan and her friends, Alma and Ruby also liked to have a wager so mum would be given a slip of paper and told to go to the bookmaker to place the bets. She also did the weekly run to Ziem's Butchers to collect meat orders for their neighbours. She earned some money for this but she never told us what she spent it on. Times were hard but there was a great deal of freedom for kids to explore. In summer she would walk with her sister Nancy and her mother down the track to Blue Divers for a swim. Nanna Kerr didn't swim but she did like to paddle. Isabelle attended Corrimal Primary School and did very well. She was put into the year ahead but wanted to be with her friends. All of her school pictures show a tiny girl holding a doll. Mum's health was not the best so she spent some time at a relatives farm out Mudgee way because it was thought that fresh country air and fresh milk from the cow would build up her strength. It didn't work. She was very homesick for her family and didn't stay very long.

Her father had the job of greenkeeper at Corrimal Bowling Club and the position came with a house so they moved into Francis Street. He always had a green thumb so they were well stocked in home grown vegetables.

We didn't know that Mum lived in Woonona for a short time. This was revealed recently when we looked at the wedding certificate. However, the family moved to Wilga Street and that is where they stayed.

Work

Isabelle left school when she was 15 and worked as a machinist at the Crystals factory. She had a good academic record but the desire for freedom and some cash won her over. She regretted this later in life but there were very few opportunities for women in those days. She didn't like the job but her sewing training came in very handy later in life.

She later enjoyed working for Mr. & Mrs. Davis in Mangerton and this gave her a glimpse into the finer things in life.

She decided when she was 42 that she would go to TAFE and do horticulture. She loved this and we would hear all about what she was studying and her teacher Arnold Vink and the lazy boys in her class. Her life was now spent learning the Latin names and classifications for plants. This was something that stayed with her for the rest of her life. For some reason mum could also recite the alphabet backwards and had memorized sections from the Merchant of Venice. She worked at Paul's Nursery at Fairy Meadow and later at Woolworths at Corrimal when they had a gardening section.

Dressups

David and Fiona and all the grandkids -if you ever wanted to know where you received the gene for dress up look no further than Nanna Belle. The ladies at Bellambi Bowling Club loved to put on a show every year and they really went to a lot of effort. Your nan has been everything from a Parisian Can Can dancer, a 1920's Flapper, My Fair Lady, Village People, Cheer squad, Louie the Fly, The Gobbledock monster, a Tap dancer, Bananas in Pyjamas, a bush band and Cows with Guns. She made a dress completely out of ties and a wedding dress out of plastic bags. That's why we always called her the "Show Girl". Mum and Dad also continued to love dancing and they always looked very sophisticated when they went out for anything special.

Bowls

Mum also loved Lawn Bowls and this is where her competitive nature was able to shine. After complaining about dad going to bowls, she decided to join him. Oh boy that changed everything. Mum was very good at bowls and she enjoyed the atmosphere and the friendship. She became very good friends with Lilly Nixon, Lilah Raft, Joan Vickery and many more. She has a cabinet full of trophies and became involved in the running of the club as a director. I

remember typing the letter for her where she wanted the ladies to be able to wear pants if they wanted and not have to freeze in dresses. Of course, there were some who wanted it to stay the same but mum's strong sense of social justice and the desire for equality made her even more determined. She was made a life member of the club and it was only ill health that stopped her playing in her 80's. Mum had to forfeit a final because of the pain she was in and never played again. She was diagnosed with Multiple Myeloma and struggled for the remainder of her life.

Grandchildren

Mum loved becoming Nanna Belle to all of her grandchildren. When Fiona was born, she was a fabulous help to me as I went back to work. Fiona was a very happy child but I think David exhausted her, mainly because he never slept in the daytime. Of course, Mum did crazy things like wrapping them in a sheet attached to the clothes line and swinging them around. As a grandmother she also had lolly jars and lots of ice cream. Mum was from an era where food was very important so I don't think you were ever hungry. She took them on many great holidays up to Gwandu but also Queensland and Victoria. By the time she had great grandchildren she was taking them to musicals. She loved all of her grandchildren and she was very proud of everything they achieved. I can see little hints of her in each of them, tenacity, love for family, desire to learn new things and the ability to stand up for yourself. The creative flair is also there with drama lessons, knitting and gardening. She was so proud of all of you.