

Happy 100th Birthday Evie

24 December 2009



***Congratulations on your special birthday from
all at Housing for the Aged Action Group.***



EVIE WALLACE: A HEART STILL STRONG

With others long ago I drove to Moe in a thought to meet a loving national treasure.
Evie, I was told is a treasure living whose deeds still flow from a caring heart.
Wayne this is Evie- Evie spoke in a voice of the love of a life given to purpose.
A face, a portrait of love and struggle framed her eyes that still tell of a desire to put it right.

In conversation I sat in awe of the spirit for social justice carved from her story and subtle intellect.

I saw a heart and mind still caring, a heart that still full of flames beats to a tune of compassion after years of a tireless fight for social justice.

Tireless deeds spoke of constant struggles born of the ancient truth of the worth of all peoples.

Through a smile, her graceful face, a living tapestry tells of stories of struggle born out of love, mirror her written stories and collected thoughts that lay thoughtfully scattered around her.

The world celebrates through Evie the timeless truth that people are equal.

Evie's mind still nurtures people's rights.

Her heart still beats of a love for people.

Evie's heart still with a beat of the warriors drum echoes across valleys of injustice bringing hope to those who still struggle.

Evie whose wisdom is truly earned,

Lets us all immerse in Evie's love, intellect, wisdom and rejoice for this tireless suffragette is now a 100 years.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY HAPPY BIRTHDAY

Wayne. December 2009

It is very important to bring about benefits and positive change in today's society, not only for the elderly of today, but for the next wave of older people (Evie Wallace 2009)



Evie Wallace (on right of photo) in discussion with (from left to right) Margaret O'Callaghan, Molly Hadfield and Carmel Mc Mennemin in Moe 2007.

This project commenced through the involvement and commitment to Housing for the Aged Action Group by centenarian Evie Wallace. Evie will celebrate her special birthday – 100 years of age – on Christmas Eve 2009. As an outstanding community focused activist she remains dedicated to highlighting issues which impact negatively on people in the community, in particular the vulnerable. Evie has been on the campaign trail for the rights of all with an emphasis on the needs of older people since the early 1960'; is a passionate, committed, clear thinking and focused activist who remains an older person's advocate in 2009.

Evie came to Australia in 1922 with her family. She was then twelve years of age and had been home schooled in Scotland due to the distance from the local school. A gifted poet and artist Evie has many poems and included here is one written in 1966 during the change over to decimal currency.

Growing Old Disgracefully

I am growing old disgracefully and enjoying every minute of it.

I stay in bed, lick my plate,

Do my crosswords, get up late,

Eating every food I like,

And enjoying every minute of it.

Growing old disgracefully and doing my very own thing.

I read the paper, stay up late,

Time to dream, consider my fate,

Time to think and not be pushed,

Enjoying every minute of it.

I am growing old disgracefully and still enjoy each day,

As ears grow weak and eyes grow dim,

Bodies sore and heads swim.

For others too, understanding looms,

Experience shared, after many moons,

But I still enjoy every minute of it.

When we were young and pretend we were old,

We don our parents' shoes and hats.

And when we're old and pretend we're young, we frizz our hair and we ignore the flats.

We totter around and break our hips,

Travel on buses, go sound asleep.

Snore and grunt, give youth the pip.

Well there's no use pretending, just do it like me.

Enjoy every minute of it, and grow old disgracefully.

Written by Evie Wallace 2000

Too Blooming Honest

*It hit me between the eyes last night
As the cares of the day bid me rest
His only "fault", my friend had said
"Why he can't get on and he can't get ahead
Is the fact that he's too blooming honest"*

*The old generation admired the rich
From whom they took their cue
They grovelled and strove as inferior beings
Too honest to doubt any heinous doings
But gradually woke to the fact that was brewing
"Honesty did not pay"*

*We hear today and we hope still tomorrow
"Too honest to lie-too honest to borrow"
So we face the world the brim with pride
That you know a man whom others deride
"Can't get on because he's too blooming honest."*

(Wallace, 1966).

Evie also took part in the La Trobe Valley Festival quest for a song about Moe in 1969. In it she wrote of how Moe got its name and of the settlers from many lands that came to the Valley.

Moe in the Valley

*With fortunes made from gold dust,
Not many years ago;
The dusty swearing teamsters,
Gamely struggled thro'.*

Chorus

*Moe in the valley – mid her wavy, hazy hills,
That echo with the sounds of many skills;
They hover as she parts with her clinging swampy robe –
Moe in the valley – the valley of Latrobe.*

Verse 2

*With jingles as of music,
The tongues of many lands:
A happiness and laughter.
That freedom understands.*

Verse 3

*A city with a future,
We pray for minds to guide,
With selflessness and foresight,
The ones who will decide.*

Evie received very commendable recommendation for her music.

(Shoemaker, 1969)

Artistic Works

The artistic works includes a plaque of her children on the wall of her room, fashioned when they were young from enamelled aluminium. She created this work using nail scissors. The three children were photographed in Frankston in silhouette and Evie then cut out the shapes using aluminium. Unable to find red ribbon she used red felt instead.

As an artist Evie's work includes two sculptures fashion from an upside down root of a rose bush. One piece represents Agony and Ecstasy. It is of a horse and a figure riding on it. One smaller design is the god Neptune coming out of the water.



notification that she was to go again but she did not do so for social justice reasons, as the trip would have been at the tax payers' expense.

This Commonwealth award follows on from many acknowledgments of her outstanding volunteering by:

- Ian Maxfield MP member for Narracan congratulating Evie on receiving the Centenary Medal in 2003
- Christian Zahra MP Federal Member for McMillan congratulated her on receiving the Centenary Medal in special recognition of her advocacy for senior citizens 2003
- Frankston City Council acknowledged her achievements in the year of the Older Person in 1999
- The Commonwealth Senior Australian Achiever award in 1999 for her ongoing commitment to developing better facilities for elderly people in the Frankston area. Evie travelled to Canberra to receive the award from Prime Minister Mr. John Howard. ("Committed to helping the elderly," 1999).
- Norman Geschke Ombudsman in the Office of the Ombudsman Victoria in 1994
- Norman Geschke in 1980 when in the Ministry of Consumer Affairs acknowledging the contributions made by Evie in consumer protection particularly in Gippsland by stating he did not know anyone else in the consumer movement in Victoria who has done so much, so consistently for such a long time. Evie had resigned from her position in the Consumers group which saddened many people.
- Moe Social Planning & Co-ordinating committee in 1981 expressed their appreciation of the years of hard work and service Evie had given as one of its longest serving members. Also the committee thanked Evie for her tremendous community service in setting up and running the Consumer Advice Centre.

Activism

The State of Victoria has a history of activism by community focused, concerned women documented in detail since the time of the Second World War. These activists campaigned to improve the lot of women and children through focusing on issues such as the rights of women to work; equal pay for equal work; crèches and kindergartens and childcare for children (Susan Fabian & Morag Loh, 2000).

Many groups set up and met regularly such as the Housewives Association, Older Persons Action Centre (OPAC) and housing support groups such as Housing for the Aged Action Group (HAAG) which convened in 1983 to lobby for more public housing. Evie remembers activists became involved in nursing home standards. Also in the 1980's SRS were substandard accommodation and people were shuttled around when inspectors came. Food was very bad at the time, "whereas, it is the quality of food that matters not quantity". Older people need good quality food not quantity, not high fat – high salty stuff Evie says. She has at various times been a member of the Older Women's Network, the Day View Club (Voice, Interests and Education of Women) and FEPWO (Frankston Elderly Persons Welfare Organisation) (Hunter, 1999).

Decimal Currency 1966

At the time of change to decimal currency in 1966 some grocers were found to be charging inflated prices and cheating their customers. Galvanised by concern for others in the community Evie commenced the Consumers Group in Moe in 1966 for the Gippsland district and the many surrounding townships such as Warragul, Trafalgar, Traralgon and Morwell. For 14 years consumers were educated and informed about the changes to the metric system which impacted on weights of foods, deceptive advertising, labelling of the ingredients of foods and fruit drinks and expiry dates on milk bottles. In 1971 as the Honorary Secretary of Latrobe Valley Living Standards Association Evie wrote letters by the hundreds to editors, business and anyone about anything that had an affect on consumers. The focus of the group was the questionable policy of the

government of 'profits before people' and private enterprise; Government's reduction of the drinking age; low nutritional standards of food in 1976. In 1973 the group campaigned on a variety of issues such as sweets in the school tuckshop; to milk in bottles rather than cartons – because housewives knew the freshness of the milk because of the code on the bottle cap but there was no expiry date on the milk cartons; to youth and alcohol and driving cars, to improved quality of fresh food and vegetables (Shoemaker, 1973).

In the 1970's conferences were held by consumer groups around the world and Evie went to the Sydney and London conferences. She had hoped to attend one in India but unable to do so due to ill health in the family. Evie also went to Japan and developed good friendships. She remembers representatives from all over the world attending these conferences where she made many friends.

They were a unique group and Evie's untiring efforts, forceful advocacy and the qualities of leadership in organising and developing the consumer groups in the region were acknowledged in a letter from the chair Ms. Suzanne M. Russell of the Australian Federation of Consumer organisations Inc. in Canberra on Evie's retirement from the Consumers Group in 1980.

Retirement in 1980

Evie retired after 14 years of tireless and persistent advocacy for the Gippsland community – 'they (the Consumers Group) had done their job by then' she felt. Having always enjoyed delving for information – 'had to do that in the Consumers in Gippsland'. However, in 1996 Evie set up the over 65's Frankston Think Tank. The commencement of this group came about following a serendipitous meeting between Evie and Delys Sergeant, the then president of the Council on the Ageing (COTA) at a Seminar in Mornington. Evie in discussion stated there were a lot of retired older people in Frankston and it would be good to have something for them. Delys told her to get on with it and she would assist her. Delys assisted

her at the age of 88 years to get the Frankston over 65's Think Tank up and running.

Evie's group took on several issues over three years, including a drop in – centre for older people, better bathroom facilities in nursing homes and issues of public noise. The most important issue the group tackled was the inadequate food from the funding for Meals on Wheels program ("Committed to helping the elderly," 1999). Evie went to Canberra at the age of 90 years to receive a Commonwealth senior Australian achiever award in 1999 – the Year of Older Persons.

Evie remembers Delys Sergeant BSc (Hons), Med (La Trobe) as an educator in the Lincoln Institute before it became part of Melbourne University Social Work Department. (Lincoln Institute was then a Tertiary Education Institute for the disciplines of Allied Health such as Physiotherapy, Social Work, Occupational Therapy and Speech Pathology). She remembers that Delys Sergeant delved into sexuality when others did not. In an ABC interview Delys discussed her lifelong work, which has been about challenging taboos – taboos about sexuality, mental health, abortion, disability, pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), and much more (ABC, 2000). Her pioneering efforts as a community health educator and advisor have earned her international recognition (ABC, 2000).

Evie feels Lincoln Institute lost momentum due to funding and Delys went to COTA where she became the Victorian President and then the National President. (Note: Lincoln Institute became part of La Trobe University, although some sections of the former Institute merged with Melbourne University). Delys Sergeant taught at Melbourne University from 1973 – 1992 where she directed the remarkably successful Social Biology Resources Centre.

In 2009

Evie is a passionate, committed, clear thinking and focused activist who remains an older person's advocate in 2009. She is aware of the benefits of universal design houses for older people as these homes include easy access; wide corridors with grab rails; doorways accessible to wheelchairs; bathrooms must be wheelchair accessible with grab rails installed, and with non slip floors in both wet and dry conditions. The non slip flooring is included in the kitchen and laundry area. "These ideas come from America" Evie feels "where Delys Sergeant, the then President of COTA, went to America and found a lot of homes being built there (of this design) were for older people".

Evie still researches varied issues which include youth, alcohol consumption and its impact on a growing brain, which worried her Consumers Group in the 1970's. The brain development of young people is incomplete until in their mid 20's Evie argues. She wants to go "back to 21 years of age for driving, drinking and drugging". Evie cites Professor Michael Carr – Gregg a psychologist, (Evie felt he was a paediatrician) who has said a teenager does not have a fully developed brain until after 21 years of age. However she feels no one taking any notice. "I have tried to put letters in the paper about the kids losing their lives in traffic accidents" Evie states.

Her focus remains on the needs of old and young and the right to continued independence of people as they age. Many years ago Evie worried about the nutrition needs of people and still worries about this today and is adamant there should be a Food Minister – as in Britain – with powers to subsidise basic foods so that everyone would be able to have enough nutrition.

Obesity is a very big worry in society and her theory is that it is to do with uncooked salt. "Uncooked salt is bad for you because it leads to obesity" Evie states adamantly. She has had salt all her life and objects to food without it. "You cannot make a child eat bland food" she feels. She has been trying to get in touch with Stephanie Alexander and other cooks because they cook the salt in

their food. Iodine is missing in the food which Evie feels it is because people are not getting cooked salt in their food.

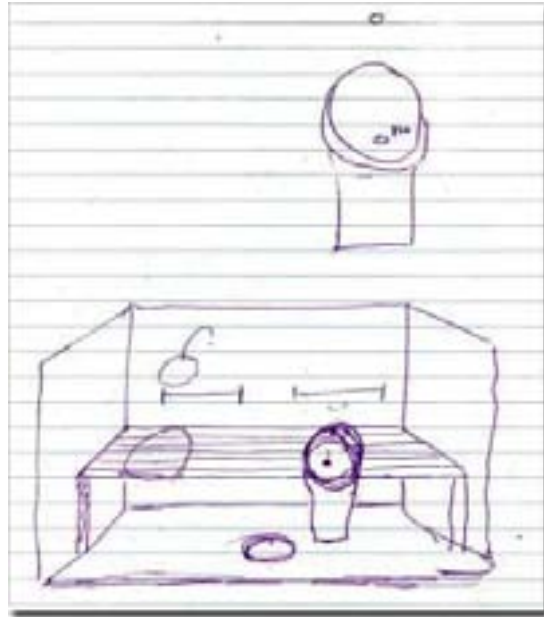
During the time Evie lived in a retirement village called Village Life she noticed, when she was collecting her lunch, that there was always salt on the table. Evie worried about this as there were people there with dementia and salt “is not good for you – sends you silly”.

The continued independence of people as they age

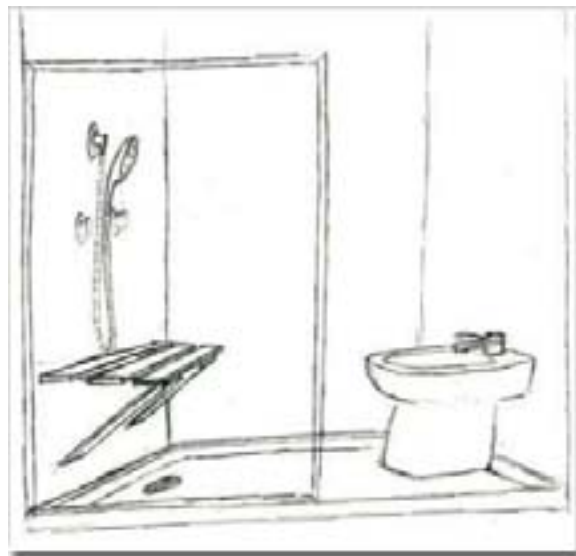
Evie is seeking solutions to the independence of older people in their hygiene needs of which one is that older people should have a bidet in their bathroom to they can attend to own ablutions independently of carers for as long as they wish and is possible. Her particular attention is on the right of older people to care for themselves and remain independent for as long as possible; in particular independent in hygiene needs. With this in mind Evie feels she has the perfect solution – “a special bidet like an extra toilet seat which is attached to the toilet plumbing - is one system which reduces the cost of renovations to pensioners”.

Most letters written to government about plumbing for older people were written in 1990s. Included here are two drawings which demonstrate Evie’s ideas at the time of how a well set out bathroom would meet the needs of an older person. The toilet in this drawing could be converted to a bidet.

- She feels the bidets should be cheap enough to install in the homes of older people and pensioners.
- If structures of the home are of universal design it maintains an older person independently.
- An older person must be given the opportunity to articulate hygiene needs and time.
- An older person does not need to shower daily Evie feels “as it is difficult to maintain body warmth”. Evie has experienced difficulties just wanting to have her hair washed and not shower whilst having this attended to.



An early sketch by Evie of bathroom design



A later sketch of a bathroom design

The Australian Association of Gerontology has identified there must be research into the care and support needed for the old-old and on the health status of this group. Currently 80% need assistance in domestic care; 30% require personal care (bathing, dressing, toileting); 70% are mobility impaired (high falls risk) and 80% are cognitively impaired (High delirium risk).(Australian Association of Gerontology)

Bidets

A bidet is a hygiene system that is in use world wide. It washes a user's bottom and also dries it. It is normally an extra piece of plumbing in a bathroom which sits beside the toilet. Now there is a system available in Australia that can convert a toilet to a bidet without any extra plumbing. The company that produces and markets this product includes personnel such as an Occupational Therapist, a Medical Practitioner and a plumber to give advice people on this equipment which is incorporated into the toilet system.

It is a very appropriate piece of equipment to have in any bathroom in particular if the user is frail or is disabled. The elderly can again enjoy dignity, independence and self-confidence with minimal or no assistance, required for their toileting (Australianbidet.).The user does not require assistance from carers with ablutions and can manage toileting independently of carers.

The function of this bidet means a disabled or elderly person can use the equipment via remote control and an elderly person can be independent using the toilet as the equipment washes and dries their derrières.

The owner of this company will be meeting Evie to discuss her equipment design plans and will meet with her before Christmas 2009.

Evie has also organised a formal meeting with the Nursing Home management where she lives in Moe, to discuss making this equipment available to all residents so that they can enjoy maintaining their independence for longer.

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A design currently available that simply meets the requirements that Evie believes are necessary for hygiene independence for the elderly.

Acknowledgement

Informal discussions between Evie Wallace, Molly Hadfield OAM, Margaret O'Callaghan, Jeff Fiedler and the scribe Ena Ahern at Evie's accommodation in the nursing home in Moe have led to the documenting of this amazing centenarian's volunteering life. There is a long time connection between Molly, Margaret and Evie and this warm relationship was very evident when we visited.

Thank you to Molly and Margaret for their enthusiastic assistance in this matter. Margaret copied many of the original documents belonging to Evie and gave them to me so that the valuable source of information was available.

My thanks to Molly for highlighting the historical changes occurring in Victoria through the input of women in this society from the late 1940's onwards. The marvellous book: "*Left-Wing Ladies*" *The Union of Australian Women in Victoria 1950 -1998*" by Suzane Fabian and Morag Loh written in 2000 details the social history of Victoria of the time and has assisted in understanding a society that produced these committed community focused women.

Thank you to all HAAG workers April Bragg, Kaye Trainor and Melanie Mills for their great support throughout this process. A special thank you to Jenny Dale for her editing support, and to Jeff for his provision of the photographs and his special journey to Moe with Molly Hadfield and Margaret O'Callaghan.

Ena Ahern

Housing for the Aged Action Group 2009

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Housing for the Aged Action Group

ABN: 80 348 538 001 Reg: A0017107L
2nd Floor, Ross House
247-251 Flinders Lane, Melbourne 3000
Phone 9654 7389 Country 1800 637389 Fax 9654 3407
Email haag@oldertenants.org.au
website www.oldertenants.org.au

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