



SONIA BROWN AND CATH HARRISON IN THE BRAIDWOOD LIBRARY.

# Cath Harrison

One of the pioneering Araluen families tells her story and of how the family's connection to the region bore fruit

We had a whole lot of freedom living in Araluen in the seventies. It was great and I have many fond memories of my childhood. We'd go up the mountains, take our lunch with us, not returning until the end of the day. Mum and Dad knew we'd always return safely. We always had plenty of fun exploring the bush.

Up the mountain was a huge Moreton Bay tree and you climb all the way to the top, a magical place with breathtaking views of the Valley. We were always outside; busy climbing trees, trapping rabbits or on the tractor helping to collect wood, tend to animals, crops and other farm jobs. Dad used to kill a beast when it was time to put some steak in the freezer. I always had

poddy lambs and was expected to eat them after I'd fattened them up — I never really liked that, but I knew that was life. My family was pretty much self-sufficient, everything we ate — our meat, our milk, our fruit and vegies all came off the farm. We all learnt how to work and make that connection from the farm to our dinner plate.

My grandmother was amazed that I could hammer a nail at three years old. The fruit used to be put into wooden boxes that I would nail together. It was packed with white paper, a wooden lid and finally I'd stick the labels on the end of the box that said Grown & Packed by Harrison & Sons, Araluen. I remember making the glue, I used to taste test it — it was only flour and water.

## HISTORY

The Araluen School closed at the end of 1972 and in 1973 I started school here in Braidwood. I remember coming up the Araluen Mountain when the road was dirt. The council tarred parts of it in the late 70s - it was a steep and scary drive both up and back down into the Valley. Our school bus was a Holden HQ station wagon. We used to sit in the back on these little wooden planks. I can't believe we did that. I remember it being really smelly and uncomfortable.

I was always a very sporty kid and participated in many inter school and regional team competitions. I loved to run, play netball and softball.

I left school in 1983 and you couldn't see me for dust, although I didn't go far.

I moved to Moruya where I worked for the local newspaper. I was their darkroom person. I worked there for about two years and it was great. I was a bit of a roving reporter/photographer covering local sporting events and entertainment. I used to see all the local live music gigs, and got paid for it.

My work was mainly in the darkroom processing film, no digital, all done in the dark with trays and tanks of chemicals, then print them out and hang them up to dry, I would write up stories and captions and prepare for the next edition. Taking photos has always been a hobby of mine and just recently I have had one of my pictures go through to the finals in the Bureau of Meteorology's annual calendar competition.

I moved to Canberra in 1986 and worked at the new Parliament House when it was under construction. I only went there because my partner worked there as a carpenter and I was keen to

THEY LEARN TO DRIVE EARLY IN THE VALLEY. CATH'S FIRST TRUCK.



try something different. They said that there were jobs there to be had so I used to hang around until they gave me one. With over one thousand men on site it was a rather daunting experience, but over time I was accepted as a member of the team.

I was employed by Canberra Ceramics to finish off the tiling as there were 300-odd bathrooms in that place, the blokes would always leave a real mess. So we'd get in there, detail the rooms, finish them off and fix anything that was broken. I did two years of post-construction there, fixing things, and getting ready for handover.

The men on site were pretty awful to us girls, there were three female tiler/labourers, one carpenter and one electrician. So you could image it was a big thing breaking into a totally male dominated industry. I had to work hard in a very challenging and demanding occupation.

Once Parliament House had been handed over I started working out in the industry and learnt how to tile properly with the guidance of some of the best tilers around. I worked on many large commercial projects in the ACT such as the Park Royal, the Convention Centre and the Quadrant site. Tuggeranong was only just being built then and we tiled streets and streets of houses. I was out on my own by then, contracting my services to developers. I became very content working in the building industry and spent the next 4 years toiling away. I keep my skills up to this day.

In the early 90s I returned to the Valley with a beautiful baby, my son Jacob. Having a child certainly halted my career in the building industry for the time being. I worked the fruit and did a lot of manual farm work back home. I worked for Peter Gillespie at the hardware shop for about a year when it was down where the Boiled Lolly now is.

When Peter's shop closed I went on and worked for Jeremy and was there for an accumulated thirteen years at the IGA. I had the opportunity to go and live in Fremantle in 2010, my partner was working in a gold mine out in the desert so I had a bit of a working holiday and spent some time at the famous Freo Markets working at the Moonlight Photography studio; it was fantastic. I then came back home and wanted to change — and now I'm here at the library, surrounded by books and loving it.

I do a lot of voluntary work in the community. I've been on the Upper Deua Catchment Landcare Executive for twenty-one years. I was one of the

## AND HER STORY



CATH IN KINDY. QUITE A FEW OF THESE CHEERY URCHINS ARE STILL ABOUT. BWD WILL PAY FOR A DINNER FOR TWO AT ZACS FOR THE NEATEST ENTRY THAT IDENTIFIES CATH AND THE MOST NUMBER OF 1973 JUNIOR BRAIDWOODIANS.

founding members. In that time we've re-generated many parts of the Araluen Creek constructing log sills and installing stabilisation structures in the riparian zones where the gold miners just turned it all upside down. I think we've utilised probably about \$400,000 over those years, and being in charge of that sort of money is pretty full-on. You've got to dot your i's and cross your t's and get everything right.

I'm a third generation of Harrison to be a trustee of both the Araluen Recreation Ground and the Araluen Federal Hall. I've found lots of information about what my grandfather and the committee were signing, buying and doing for the Rec Ground in the '40s and '50s. His name was on

many documents. Peter did a lot of community work — he was very passionate about it; like I am, as with my father Charlie. I like seeing things happen — creating positive and worthy community projects and outcomes.

I live on 160 acres in the upper reaches of the Deua River catchment with my partner. We've built a life here and have owned the place for about 30 years. Author Alex Miller owned this property prior to us and he mentions it regularly in his writings. It was special to him, as it is to us.

### The early Harrisons

In the late 1840s the Harrisons walked from Sydney all the way to Araluen. It is thought that Henry, the original

WORKING A CLAIM.

