



HERITAGE DAY 2003. (FROM THIRD ON LEFT TO RIGHT) KATE MITCHELL, RUTH STEEL, RICHARD STONE AND TINA COROWA. PHOTO: PARIS SILVESTER

that but he was always interested in something that he thought would be a goer. That sort of thing.

BWD: Okay. Just before we move on to the next stage of your story, we'll hear Gilly's story. How did you get here?

Jill: By 'plane wasn't it?

Gilly: There are people who plan their lives and might say, I am going to emigrate to Australia. But I ended up in Australia by chance. I ended up in Braidwood simply because it was between Canberra and the coast by chance.

BWD: So Australia was just on the way to Antarctica or ...?

Gilly: Well, it was handy for South-East Asia, where I'd been working as a consultant. I'd got in the habit of coming here for a bit of R and R as it were.

Like Jill, I've never actually had a plan.

I was working in Canberra and like the whole of Canberra does, I went to the coast for the weekend.

At the time I was head of one of the halls of residence at ANU. It was a moderately stressful job so I had got in the habit of going once a week to a class in surface design at the Watson CIT. Screen printing, silk painting, what have you — a kind of therapy.

And I thought, "Aha. I can do this. I will become a textile artist."

I needed to find somewhere to do it. And of course, Braidwood is very handily located for people who need to get to Canberra occasionally. Coming through one time I was pottering around down near Torpys there was this building with a sign in the window saying, 'to let shop and flat'. So I thought, this is the thing. It turned out that Margaret Royds was the landlady and so I rented that.

That was in July '97 and I lived at 200 Wallace Street where I opened the Silken Tent. I lived upstairs. Beautiful, it is, that building. I do wish it was mine.

Then Howard and Costello brought in the GST which would be charged on rent and rates and I thought, bugger that. So I looked around for somewhere else, and started renting a shed from Mr Hockey down by Vision Concrete.

Another reason for moving out to Mr. Hockey's shed was that having a shop, as indeed you know, is that you have to be there all the time. Whereas I thought, if I did fabric screen printing rather than having a shop, other people could do the printing and I could have a cup of coffee. And so Natalie and Deb came and worked for me.

One morning Natalie was late because she'd been talking to Tina Evans whose husband Ken had got a job in National Parks in Northern New South Wales. She was wondering about who would have their chooks.

GET DOWN

As Natalie explained all this, a light went on in my head.

So if they were moving, what were they doing with their property? Which of course is number 7 to 9 Clyde Street, with the great big shed. I rushed round and asked, "What about it? How much do you want?"

They said to come back at tea-time and they'd work it out. As luck would have it, I had just sold my house in Cornwall in the UK. After I'd become an Australian citizen I had finally decided that there was no point in having a house in Britain. So I actually had cash and I bought it there and then.

Anyway, I ended up with the Silken Tent in Clyde Street, printing fabrics, natural dyeing, silk painting and all of that.

BWD: So, on the subject of fabrics Jill, tell us how the quilt event came about.

Jill: I hadn't been a quilter before I moved to Braidwood. It started when I teamed up with June [Weatherstone]. That relationship started through textiles. She had a fabric shop. Anybody interested in 100% cotton fabrics would grab it there. People would come from all over Australia because they'd heard of her shop.

We didn't click immediately because she's very shy. She's lovely, but she's not outgoing. I can't place a time when we did become really good friends — but of course I had my gallery next door to her shop.

We just clicked — and the Braidwood Quilters came about. I was one of the very early ones that took on a position. We were trailblazers.

Those early days; that's where the memories dull off when I have to think of the really nitty gritty things.

But, it just all seemed to flow on really. I fell into something that I really, really enjoyed. I think when you leave your comfort zone, something that you've been involved with for a while, and then you have to find your feet again somewhere else, you're darn lucky when you find something you really enjoy.

Gilly: Yes. A lot of the motive behind it, like when we started BRAG, was economic development for Braidwood.

Jill: Absolutely.

WITH QUILTS

Gilly: We didn't say, oh we like quilting and so the world might like quilting. It was to bring people into Braidwood to help its economy. With BRAG, certainly the hope was that it would increase earnings for local arts and crafts-people.

Jill: Yes. It was definitely in our brains. We were looking at the economics of it. And certainly Braidwood was quite dull for periods. I remember it being very quiet at different times.

We felt Braidwood needed a bit of a kick up the you know where — and to have something that might excite more people to be involved.

Certainly from my point of view having the gallery I was really lucky because people came from far and wide via the art. I had done some advertising, but artists would tell other artists. And while it wasn't an enormous radius, it certainly was north, south, east and west. A nice circle.

Gilly: Do you remember Kirsty gave a talk? In the '70s, early '80s it began to get a lot of art and craft people moving here because property was so cheap. Ha, that's changed.

Then the Braidwood group, which was Judith Wright, Solvig Baas Becking, Richard Murray, Christoph Altenburg, Allen Geier (the woodworker) who used to have joint exhibitions and things. Margaret Royds not only owned 200 Wallace Street, a shop on the corner, but the mill building behind and they used to meet there. And she had that as a gallery. So Braidwood was beginning to get a reputation as an art place.

Jill: We had a heritage festival.

Gilly: There's a wonderful photo of a young, red-headed, ebullient Natalie Densley at one of these processions. And there was one when they rode up the street as troopers and several prostitutes were on the balcony of the Royal. This was all before my time. But it was beginning to shape up that way. I don't know whether it's peaked or nobody can afford to move here now.

BWD: How did BRAG come into existence? Are you one of the founders?

Gilly: Indeed. We both are — and I'm trying to remember what actually triggered it. We had a lunch, that's what triggered it. Yes.

There was this amazing moment when Tallaganda Council, as it was then, mentored I think is the best word, a completely ad hoc, non-elected, non-accountable group called the Economic Development Working Party — or working group. That was around '99-2000. Anybody who was interested could turn up.

There was a Chamber of Commerce here in those days and they auspiced a grant application for some consultants to come and talk to groups and whatever to draft an economic development plan. Their recommendations were great fun, because one of the things that came over loud and clear was that people were pissed off with Tallaganda Council. Oh boy, did we feel that was a useless body. Which of course, meant that when the report was presented to Council it went down like a lead balloon.

But their main recommendation was that steps should be taken towards these economic goals. One, that we could become a hub for the developing, as it was then, electronic

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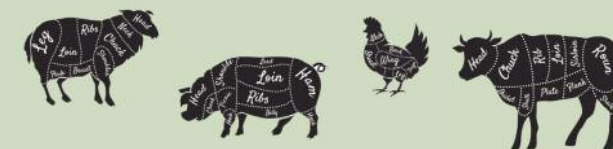


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