



AT THE COUNTER — FIONA WITH SHELLEY BUCHANAN

A century of service

Fiona Putra Jaya tells the story

MY GREAT-GRANDPARENTS Edward Norman Mutton and Polly Mutton started the business in 1913. Edward was in his forties when they moved from Strathfield where they'd had a background in retail. They'd heard there were good

opportunities in Braidwood and he came here and joined the Dowells in a partnership. He purchased the business outright in 1913 and it became Muttons Cut-price Groceries. Weabys were the main competitor in town, further down the street, special-

ising in women's wear. There was a gentlemen's agreement between them that my grandfather would specialise in home wares, groceries and men's wear. That kept the town happy and the businesses prospered.

Edward and Polly had two boys, Len and Ron and it was Len who took over the business from his father in the 1940s. Before that Len had been sent away to school at Cooma Grammar, a horse and cart trip over the Badger where he boarded and came home for the holidays. When Len left school he helped his father in the business, taking over the running of it in his mid thirties. Len ran the business until his death in 1976.

While Len ran the business he was helped ably by his wife, Isobel Mutton, Jill Burke (who still works in the office to this day) and Gordon Shorrock. They were the main players but there were several part-time ladies such as Lyn Parker, Dot Grant and Zelma McKay. Many ladies who were married with children used to come in and work on a part-time basis and help out during the busy periods.

Len and Isobel had two children,

Brian and Jan. My parents are Brian Mutton and Ann Marie Wilson. My father died sixteen years ago and that's when we decided to come to Braidwood. My mother lives in Sydney.

When Brian Mutton died, Gordon Shorrock and Jill Burke, who had intended to retire, agreed to stay on for a year while the family sorted out who would run the business. It was so lovely that they stayed around to help us.

I'd worked with Grace Brothers and Coles/Myer, where I'd done an internship and so I understood retail — what it was about — and I loved it. So it was a good opportunity to come to Braidwood and see what we could make of it.

I'd met Ling while I was in Bali and we were married shortly after my father's death. I'd just found out I was pregnant with our first child and our life was good but we thought it would be a good opportunity to come to Braidwood to see if country life was for us.

We found that it suited us, so we spoke to my mother and my aunt and told them, "Yes, this is for us ... and we'd love to carry it on". So here we are 15 years on.

To make a go of it here in Braidwood we specialise in quality and difference — we don't sell the same stuff you can get in the other shops. We source stock directly from China, Indonesia, Thailand and Viet Nam. We get beautiful handicrafts from those countries, we have a growing following for our ladies fashion because we supply good quality at competitive prices and it's different to what everyone else is offering.

A big part of our business is customer service — if we don't have it we'll try very hard to get it in for you. Our business is not just about what we sell, but also about how we service our customers. And I think that was shown at our 100th birthday party last month where we had so many people here. We had 250 glasses and we used them all! It was so great to see local people showing the same affection for Muttons as we do.

One of the revellers, John Hockey, came into the store



(ABOVE) LEONARD NORMAN MUTTON IN THE 1930s, PHOTOGRAPHED WITH UNKNOWN GYPSY TRAVELLER, AT THE BOTTOM OF THE CLYDE MOUNTAIN. (BELOW) BRAIDWOOD'S MAIN STREET IN THE EARLY 1900s.

