

Brenda Lyon

I was born in Paddington in 1947 and Centennial Park was my playground. Dad had grown up there after arriving from England in 1925 as a two year old. Bondi beach was also my playground. We could hop on a tram and go down to the beach. It was a nice sort of city living and I still know my way around there.



We moved out west when housing opened up out near Parramatta. I spent about six years there until I went nursing when I was 17 at Parramatta Hospital. I met my husband Garry at high school, had my eye on him, and we met up again when I was about 17 and a half and started going out together and making plans.

We had a vision to buy a farm. Our parents encouraged us to build a house, so we bought a block of land and built a house just north of Parramatta, near Carlingford, and had two boys, Russell and Warwick. But we still had this vision of a farm.

We spent a couple of years looking at farms up north, down south and also out west. I rang a girlfriend who lived at Black Springs, Sandra Hillsdon, and she said to come up and she'd show us around. One day Bill Dawson rang and said, "I think I've got what you are looking for." As we drove into Oberon we looked up at a hill and my husband said, "If it's anything like that we'll buy it." We drove into town and Bill Dawson took us to the top of that same hill and Garry said, "I'll have it." That was the start of Falkirk. My husband's family are Scottish so it was named after Falkirk in Scotland which was the only battle the Scots had won against the Poms.

We moved up in 1972/1973 and rented for a few years. We started with the farming, buying Herefords and then we started to build our house. It took us nine years as we built it ourselves. The only thing we got in was the bricklayer.

My husband had been an electrical engineer at Parramatta and when we came up here Southern Mitchell County Council employed him. He used to read the meters on all the farms and asked me to go with him to open the gates so I got to see all the gardens at every property in the Oberon District.

When we came to Oberon we had the two boys and then Katherine and Phillip were born here. The children got more involved on the farm as they got older. They could milk a cow at a very young age.



In 1974/75 there was a by-election and I ran for a seat on Council. I hadn't been here that long, but I got elected and found it very interesting. I look at that "Living Treasures" book and the men that had been in council in those days and what they had achieved and it was a real pleasure to work with those people. I can't say I really did anything significant. I was the second female elected to Oberon Council and I was quite young and learning the ropes as I went along. The first female was Hilary Rodwell and she was in the 1950s I think.

After that I concentrated on building the house and establishing a garden. I built a 700 metre stone wall to keep the cattle out. Garry's idea was to let cattle graze right up to the house and my idea was to have a garden and it's the only time I ever yelled at him!

Then, I began to look at cold climate plants. When we rented I noticed daffodils over a neighbour's fence and the sheep just grazed around them so I said to myself "Here's something that grows well in Oberon," and that started my research into the daffodil flower.

Around this time I went to a flower show at the Anglican Flower Show. There were lovely ladies who ran this show - May McMaugh, Olive Cunynghame and Yvonne Gorman, and I went into this show and nobody came. I said to Auntie Ollie, "What if I organize a festival and get visitors to come to this beautiful flower show?" She was in her nineties at the time and she said, "You invite the visitors and I'll cook the scones." So, I went to Bowral and met the organizer of the Tulip Festival and asked her how she did it. Then, I went back to Oberon and approached all the town organizations asking for money to have a daffodil festival. They gave me \$58 and I spent the whole lot on daffodils and planted them around town and started the Daffodil Festival and it grew and grew and so did the daffodils.

I also went to some of the old farmhouses and was able to get some historic bulbs. I got the original jonquil, Odonis and Van Sion from a site out at Rockley that didn't have a house. The original site where I'd seen these historic bulbs belongs to Penny Colley now. Then we started up the garden club, the Oberon Garden Club. That was probably around the 80s and I remember going to beautiful gardens like the Hammonds' garden and Turners' out at Black Springs and I thought it would be a good idea to open these gardens and give the money to the Hospital Auxiliary. I'm not sure if that was my idea or May McMaugh's. May worked with me for years as we built up the open gardens and then gardening became more popular.

I was on the board of directors at the hospital at some stage, and I took Ray Mawhood and Mervyn Dwyer down to Sydney as a delegation to the Minister for Health. That meeting instigated the new hospital. While we were there I whipped Mervyn and Ray into the Mandarin Club and I think that was Mervyn's first taste of Chinese food.

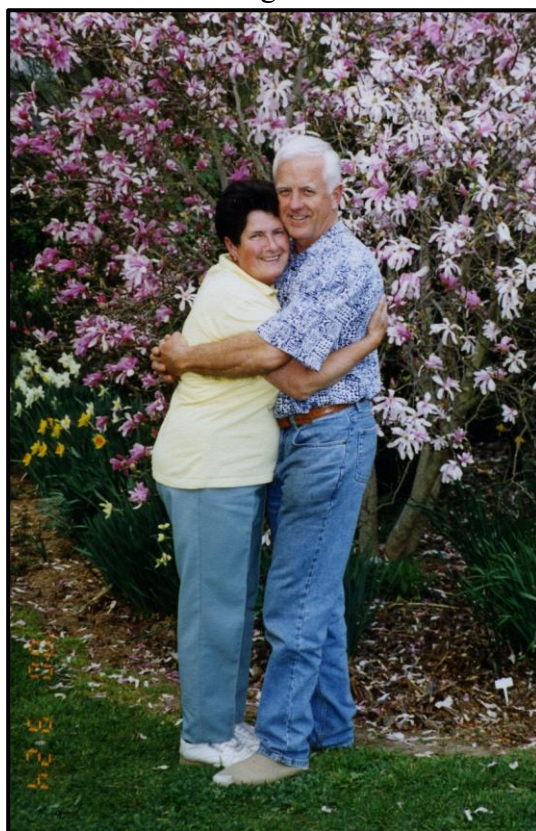
After the Garden Club we started getting parks, because we didn't have any parks here in Oberon. Apex built Apex Park. I was also involved in Rotary, and the Rotary Lookout. A lot of failures up there, but we've got it established now. And we've got lots of parks.

Once I established my garden at Falkirk I started collecting daffodils and ended up with 2500 different varieties. At the same time I was also linking up with the best daffodil growers in Australia as well as growers overseas and I went over to America and got involved with the Daffodil Association over there.

I'm still involved with the Daffodil Association in America, as well as New Zealand, Ireland, Russia and Holland - everybody who's growing daffodils, and it's lovely to keep involved and see how they're improving the daffodil flower, strengthening the stems, and also extending the flowering times. I've learned a lot from beautiful world growers, and it's been a lovely journey.

Falkirk became quite well known and Mary Moody brought up the ABC and they did a beautiful thing on the garden and it was also featured on the front of a magazine, and in Don Bourke's Garden show.

In 2001 Garry passed away during a triathlon race where he was competing to raise funds for a fully enclosed heated swimming pool open all year for Oberon. My heart was no longer in Falkirk. It was a lovely dream and we accomplished it. I sold in 2012.



Brenda & Garry

So I moved over to here, with new partner John Lythollous, to Brydie Park, and I went from a 2 1/2 acre garden to a 3 acre garden that was basically pretty bare. It had established border trees and some fruit trees. John built a lot of the structures, like the gazebo. I established another permaculture garden where I used a lot of mulch. I would purchase mulch from anywhere and everywhere, and I hand-shovelled 15 semi-trailer loads to establish this garden to make it an easy-care garden because I really am a lazy gardener. I call myself a lazy gardener because I want the plants to do the work.

I now have a massive collection of bulbs and cool climate plants. I also love roses, particularly old fashioned roses. I've got one called Lordly Oberon which has a magnificent smell but what I most like about it is that it grew from a cutting I took from Falkirk. I'm set up here now. Chook shed, chook poo and I've got the vegetable patch.

My nursing career started at Parramatta Hospital, and I then went to Grafton Hospital. Then I came back to Sydney and worked at Auburn Hospital. When we came to Oberon I took a job at Bathurst Hospital to just get through our time because we were building a house. I also worked for Parramatta City Council as a district nurse. I loved that, going to the homes, and I would see 17 patients a day, travelling around between Blacktown, Granville, Chatswood. I took a job at Oberon Hospital in about 1985 or 1986 at the Daycare Centre where the elderly came in and it was my job to do activities with them. In 1989 we did the pottery streetscape of Oberon's main street in the 1930s, which is now housed at the Oberon Museum. And that was lovely, researching, interviewing the ladies and gentlemen about what Oberon was like back in that time. Well, there was all those snakes around, so they made snakes and every house had an outhouse so we had to have a lesson in outhouses. The teacher used to come out from Bathurst. But we

also had outings and we did a little bit of fundraising, and they would knit rugs. I worked there, with offsider Lisa Bailey, three days a week, and that was another privilege.

The Oberon Bi-Centennial Tapestries came about when Council held a public meeting looking for ideas for a bicentennial project. There were lots of ideas and I suggested a tapestry as it would still be around in two or three hundred years' time. So it took me off to Canberra to look at that big tapestry curtain in Parliament House. When I came back, I asked Kim Rabbige Woods to be the artist and I found a professional sewer, Mary Clancy, and then I pitched the plan to Council and asked for \$2000 and they agreed. We had to get the wool from England, Appleton's wool, which has 400 different colours. The tapestries took two years out of my life. I tapestried just about every day.

And the people who helped were lovely. I just asked anybody who would like to do it. Aunty Ollie Cunynghame, in her late nineties, did the verandah post on the first Post Office in Oberon. She could hardly see at the time. My husband did the red star on the NAB bank and Garry also made all the frames. I set a date and time for the opening and Aunty Ollie was to unveil them. It was a rush in the final few days as one tapestry wasn't finished. The opening took place at the Golf Club.

I was invited to join Rotary by Hans Gulberg, who was President at the time. Garry, my husband, was in Rotary as well. Once again, it was just such a pleasure to work with people like Hans and Isabelle Gulberg because we were involved in the parks and gardens and we were also involved in the Malachi.

I worked with these beautiful people and I went to conventions in America and met the world family of Rotarians and saw the programs that they have running and it gave me the privilege of working in Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu. We brought children from Vanuatu to have operations. One boy spent nine months here rotating between Oberon and Blayney while he recuperated.

I think I was the first female President of Rotary, which had been operating in Oberon for 20 or 30 years. Peter Dale was one of the original founders. During my Presidency we supported a medical team that went to the Philippines and we also raised money to buy a car for a man with a degenerative disease. There was no NDIS in those days.

Nine years ago I made a foray back into politics and I wanted to establish a plan for the Common. John Warden and Marcia Armstrong were involved in establishing the Common and lots of groups had ideas for what should go in and I said you need to have an established plan and we have got that now. It's a big area, a lot of people are using it, and it's lovely. We've got a gazebo with the tapestries, the wall where the Treasures are but there's still one third undeveloped. I would like to see an Aboriginal Cultural Centre built there along with a Nature walk including edible native plants.



Oberon Councillors 2017 - 2021 L to R: Mick McKechnie, Don Capel, Andrew McKibbin, Kerry Gibbons, Kathy Sajowitz, Ian Doney, Brenda, Mark Kellam, Clive McCarthy

I have four children – Russell, Warwick, Katherine and Phillip, and 10 grandchildren ranging from 7 to 21. I keep in touch with most of them - I love the new technology which allows me to chat with them.

My advice to my grandchildren is it really doesn't matter what you do so long as you love doing it!

Oberon's a small community and everybody is so friendly – it's like a big family and that's what I love about it.

(March, 2025)