

Wendy Casey

My mother Barbara Greedy (Babs to everyone – *including me*) left school when she was 13 and worked as domestic help. She was a good seamstress. She married my father, Frank Bowlay, when she was 16 and he was 27. They lived at Wee Waa in the Northwest of New South Wales. I was born to them in 1941. Frank worked in the Post Office until he joined the army. He was sent to New Guinea and never returned to us, as happened with many of the traumatized young men at the time.

Babs opened a dressmaker's shop in the centre of the town. She and I lived in a room at the back of the shop and used the facilities of the café next door. I remember squares of toilet paper in which apples had been wrapped.



Overall it was the happiest of times. I had Babs to myself, I had lots of pretty dresses. We listened to the serials on the radio, especially "The Lawsons". She read to me every night and I thank her for my love of books.

When I was seven Babs married Oswald Field (Os) and we moved to his sheep and cattle property, Bentwood, between Pilliga and Wee Waa. As time went by Os involved me in all that was happening on the farm. I always regretted that he hadn't given me his name.

School was a problem. Correspondence didn't work, so it was off to Pilliga Public school. I was seven, eight and nine while I boarded with people who I didn't know.

For my tenth birthday I was given a young pony, Jimmy. I rode him to school for the next three years, about an hour each way, unless I stopped and picked quandongs, or simply sat in the shade and read. I used to tell Jimmy stories and sing to him all the way. There was a yard beside the school for the kids' horses. Those three years were special: I loved school and did well.

I boarded at MLC Burwood for my secondary schooling. I thought I would die of homesickness. I didn't fit in with the much more sophisticated city girls. I didn't do very well and left thinking I was quite the "dud." Only later in life did I realize the benefit of being an MLC girl in the city, which led to my love for music, art, live theatre and the knowledge that had seeped into my brain. I learned there was a world out there beyond the one I knew.

My first job was in the Commercial Bank in Narrabri. I enjoyed the work but after almost three years I wanted a change.

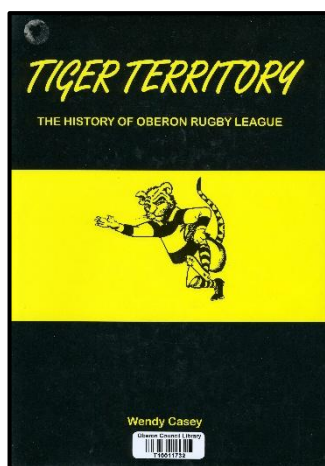
I bought a copy of *The Land*. Eve Armstrong of Gingkin had advertised for a governess for her three boys, Geoffrey, Eric and Kenny. I got the job. Driving through the Blue Mountains was amazing. I was amazed by the huge rows of timber that had been dozed into rows ready for burning, wonderful hardwood. Farmers were paid to clear timber and develop farmland in those days. I was treated well by the Armstrongs. The boys were good and interested in their lessons, and I was too. Nothing had prepared me for the magic of snow while I was there. I walked after school and it was up to my thighs. Magic.

Joe Casey was working on the farm next door. We met on the tennis courts at Edith. We were married in 1961. We eventually got our own home in Bligh Street. While I was busy having

babies (Matthew, Tony, Lisa and David), Joe was working in the Oberon Timber Mill and driving for John and Bill Brien.

Only days after David was born in 1969, I had an arterial nosebleed. It was horrific. I spent 11 days in Sydney before the bleeding stopped. The doctors said I survived only because Dr. Robey packed my nose so well. Blood transfusions replaced my body's blood supply four times. I am still traumatized by that experience.

At that stage Joe became a member of the Oberon Tigers Rugby League team that performed so brilliantly during the sixties. They were the golden years of the club, when records were created that haven't been broken. Much later in my life I succumbed to Pat Cook's insistence that someone should write about those famous years in the club's history. I took on the task of telling the story I knew little about, which is reflected in the book. The accuracy of programs and newspaper articles was wanting as well, and that didn't help. John Brien and John Harvey must have despaired, trying to explain everything to me. It took me three happy years to plough through newspaper clippings, programs and anything I could find about Oberon's game. I interviewed many fine young men (and old). I couldn't write about one spectacular feat on the field because three players believed they had made the incredible move! We travelled to Foster and listened to Tony Paskin's version of his years as coach in Oberon. I owe thanks to Kerry Gibbons, Margaret Harvey and Jane Rawlings for their help with the book. I dared to ask Craig Bellamy to write the forward to the book, which he did graciously. "Tiger Territory" was published in 2009.



Things changed dramatically and happily in 1970. Joe's brothers, Ron and Len, had formed a partnership with brother-in-law Claude Tolomeo. They purchased the well-known property Kamaringi on Lowes Mount Road. One of Claude's friends, Ermenegildo (Gil) Cocco, was interested in buying land too, and needed a manager. He bought Kanbara on Lowes Mount Road,

previously owned by the Buckleys. We were fortunate. Joe was employed by the Cocco family for 44 years. Gil was an excellent boss, respected by us and everyone who came to know him. Gil and Joe were novices and had some interesting experiences. The first mob of sheep they bought had Johne's disease. There were a few years of producing wool but eventually cattle became the main source of income. They purchased Poll Herefords and later Black Shorthorns. The drought in 1970 took a terrible toll on the stock and the pastures. I think the farms only survived because of Gil's work as a major builder in Sydney. Ray Cunynghame in his agriculture shop told me his business stayed viable because Gil was able to pay his bills. Joe acquired a good reputation as a commercial cattle breeder.

We spent 20 years in the big old house at Kanbara and 20 at Grande Vista on Mount Olive Road. Grande Vista was originally owned by Trevor Jarret and called Trevor Park. We never stopped admiring the view there.

There were some wonderful balls on Friday nights at the time, at the Malachi - lovely long evening gowns, good friends around the table waiting for midnight so the Catholics could eat meat. Sometimes we had to walk out through snow to get to the outside toilet. We used to go to the movies too. And at half time everyone crossed the road to buy delicious hot chips from George's café.

I helped the nuns at St Joesphs quite a lot, helping with reading programs, teaching art and arranging books. It was there that I decided I wanted to become a librarian. I spent seven long years studying at home. I attended residential schools at Wagga, made study visits to libraries in Melbourne, Sydney and Canberra, and did two month-long work experiences. I achieved a degree in Library Science. It was a life-changing event. I worked full-time in the Bathurst Library for almost a year until I gained work at Mitchell College Library. David was attending Stannies as a dayboy at the time, so we travelled together. On Thursdays I did the night shift. To fill my mornings I attended morning classes at TAFE, lots of cooking, calligraphy, flower arranging, cake decorating and more. I decorated Brian and Pam Dellow's wedding cake. Brian became a great friend of Joe's and mine. We had many happy talks over a cow's backside.



Joe and I enjoyed our best times playing tennis. Each of the churches in Oberon had courts and some private houses did too, but these gradually disappeared. The Council built two hard courts and soon the Oberon Tennis Club was inaugurated. Joe and I were very involved and, mainly because of Joe, two more courts and a club house were built, then finally the courts were enclosed by a huge shed. Having indoor tennis courts was quite a coup. Pat Cook, George and June Muir, Joyce Ballinger and Vonda Voytilla are just some of the people I remember who made the club a success. There were more who deserve mention.

When I was 50 I decided to become a full-time student and gain a diploma of education. I enjoyed having access to lecturers and working with students studying the same course: I had missed that while I was studying by correspondence. I passed the course (with distinction) and now held a degree in Librarianship and a Diploma of Education, which I had been told was the minimum requirement for a school librarian. However I wasn't meant to be a teacher, although I had enjoyed the students. Before long I was managing the new Oberon Library, an interesting challenge not many librarians would have experienced. Prior to that, Lithgow had a book depot in Oberon which was managed by Bev Evans. I enjoyed the work, especially the children's programs. I wrote a regular library column in the Oberon Review. I didn't enjoy working for the Council though. They knew very little about the value of libraries or librarians, for that matter. There was no respect. After seven and a half years I resigned. Jenny Hanson took over from me and sadly her experience with the Council wasn't any better.

I was the first female member of the Oberon Rotary Club. I was lucky to be there. One of the executives stressed he would leave if women were allowed in the club, and there was another executive who said he would leave if women were not allowed in the club!

Joe and I made several camping trips around various parts of Australia over the years. We travelled in convoy with Glennie, Anthony, Kevin and Stella McGrath. Joy and Francis Hogan accompanied us on a few other trips too before they became permanent grey nomads. We also travelled overseas. We toured England, Scotland and Wales and went on a 30 day tour around Europe. Joe got lost in the Louvre in Paris and three hours passed before I found him, which meant I missed out on all the treasures I had wanted to see *and* the French dinner on the Eiffel Tower! We took a cruise on the Mediterranean and visited some spectacular islands. The day before we were to berth at Hungary, a bomb killed one of the company's drivers and a passenger. The day our tour ended in London, the bomb went off in the Underground railway.

We purchased 80 acres at O'Connell. In about 2007, our son Tony built a lovely home there. We created a five-acre corridor through the edge of the property as a refuge for wildlife. We were proud of that. Tony and Karen lived there with their four little girls for ten years and, when Joe retired, we had eight happy years there in our very own "little piece of heaven on earth". Circumstances dictated we were to move to Kelso in 2017.

At this stage I remembered times I used to say, "When someone gets hurt in Oberon, Oberon hurts." When Joe and I got hurt at O'Connell over a terrible mental health abusive event, we received no less than 25 cards from caring people of the town.

My father *did* come into my life later. He turned up unannounced at MLC when I was 15. I didn't like him from the start. We had nothing in common. When he visited us on the farm he wondered how Joe managed to milk the almost 1000 Poll Hereford cows that were wandering around the paddocks! When he died a few years later, I went to his funeral and no one knew who I was.

I am happy living in suburbia now. I have made many friends through Bathurst U3A. I have attended several courses and facilitated a writing group for a few years. In 2025 I am in a Read and Share group, a Chair Tai Chi group and a Lunch and Scrabble group.

Matthew is teaching at Sanctuary Point on the South Coast, Tony is a builder in Bathurst, Lisa is working in a Private Hospital on the Gold Coast, and David is driving trucks. We have 15 grandchildren and 10 great-grandchildren: they bring us great joy.



Tony, Lisa and Matthew

Joe is being well cared for at St. Catherine's Aged Care Home. He has dementia, like many of his football friends. I was an innocent victim in a car accident on Good Friday 2025. I spent three and a half months in RPA and Bathurst hospitals with a shattered sternum, which was attacked by a staph infection. There were six operations before I was healed. It's amazing what you can survive. I still have places to go and people to see.

My philosophy in life is: "Don't waste this precious day by worrying about what happened in the past and what might happen in the future."

(November, 2025)



Wendy and Joe