

Paying tribute to an extraordinary life: Beryl Evans (1923 – 2017)

How fortunate for the dietetic Profession to have Beryl Evans as an enthusiastic member.

Beryl was DAA's first Research Dietitian, in the 1980s.

Beryl was multitalented and highly skilled. She was passionate about multicultural matters & world peace through better understanding of different food customs and habits. She wrote a chapter in Bev Wood's book "Tucker in Australia" (1977) edited and produced for the International Dietetics Conference in Sydney.

Beryl had a challenging, dutiful and hard working childhood. She was the elder child when her Dad was in and out of work. Later her mother's ill health forced her to take on many of her mother's duties while attending school. Her dad wanted her to leave school early to get a job; but the principal and the Country Women's Association (CWA), recognising Beryl's talents with music and fast learning, found a CWA Bursary for Beryl to continue at school. Beryl continued her duties at home; cycling miles to and from school and studying until late at night.

The government of the day offered university scholarships for a quota of people in the sciences.

At the same time, Beryl's mum saw an article in the paper about a local Wollongong High School Teacher studying dietetics & paid 2 pounds 15 shillings/week.

Beryl enrolled to do chemistry, physics, botany & zoology; later physiology. She obtained her Science Degree in 1945. Beryl had had to sign a bond agreement with the government that she would work wherever directed.

Dietetics was then a comparatively new profession. Beryl joined the Dietetics Certificate Course at Royal PA Hospital in Sydney in 1946. There were 9 in Beryl's class. References were sought from 3 adults for each student before they could start work.

Working in the Hospital they were regimented & given a seniority ranking with the Nurses; starting on a par with Charge Sisters. They were under a bond to finish the course and work another year. They were not allowed to marry.

Beryl found the course very interesting & was paid 3 pounds/week.

Beryl met her future husband, Cyril through the 7th Day Adventist Church. Cyril had studied Medicine and after discharge from the Army he was allowed to do a 6 month Diploma of Tropical Medicine at Sydney University. Cyril had been a Missionary Doctor in the Solomon Islands. Beryl and Cyril married in 1949, then travelled to London where Cyril completed his Physicians Speciality Training.

First child, Bronwyn, was born in London in 1950; then David in 1952. Next the family travelled to the USA. Cyril worked in the Tuberculosis Ward at a North Carolina Hospital. Both were very disturbed by the racism there. Sue was born in the USA in 1955.

Before marriage, Beryl worked as the Dietitian in Charge of the Prince Alfred Hospital's Nurses Dining Room which fed 600 Nurses. She also ran a Therapeutic Clinic in the afternoons.

In 1956, Cyril took a position as Deputy Director of TB in Brisbane. 3rd daughter, Annette, was born in Brisbane in 1958. Beryl was kept busy. She was also involved with a Church Women's Group & with the CWA.

Coming out of 'retirement' in 1968, Beryl started part-time at the Brisbane Hospital working with Jane Harris.

In 1969 the family moved to Adelaide where Cyril was Director of TB Services there. Beryl worked part-time at the Royal Adelaide Hospital -reportedly a very busy Department.

Sadly in 1970, Beryl suffered severe injuries in a car accident; fiercely independent she 'pulled herself through'.

In 1974, the family moved again, this time to Canberra where Cyril was appointed Deputy Director General of Health for the Commonwealth.

Beryl taught overseas students 'Nutrition' at the Canberra TAFE College. She taught the post graduate overseas students who were studying Health Promotion especially. Many came from the Asia / Pacific region. Her local knowledge of their countries and her keenness to learn from them about their food customs and habits made her a popular teacher and some kept in touch after returning to their countries. She also taught 'Nutrition' to nurses at Royal Canberra Hospital.

From 1985 – 1988, Beryl was the first research dietitian at the DAA Office. "Beryl was one of the early DAA members and very supportive of the Association in its infancy. At the DAA Office, Beryl responded to Food Standard's requests, requests from the Department of Health and answered questions from members and the general public on dietetic issues. She accomplished so much" (stated Jan Finlay -then the CEO of DAA.) Jan also said, "Beryl was a valued member of a small dedicated team at the DAA Office - very caring of Staff needs. An inspiration to all."

Wendy Gray first met Beryl at a local Dietitians Meeting in Canberra (1975). These meetings were held monthly on a Monday evening. They were both informative and social.

Four dietitians lived in the Belconnen area so they organised a 'car pool'. Beryl, Wendy, Narelle Hore and Jane Harris. During the trips they loved to hear about Beryl's overseas experiences . But mostly they talked about nutrition and dietetics. DAA Members were very supportive of each other in those days and shared information willingly.

Beryl and Jane had worked together in Brisbane.

Beryl and Narelle had been elected representatives from DAA to the National Council of Women. A few years later, Wendy took Narelle's place. "What a joy to do voluntary work with Beryl," Wendy said. "Beryl had so many ideas and much enthusiasm & wisdom."

Beryl and Wendy worked together voluntarily as Nutrition Advisors to the National Council of Women of Australia for 40 years. Only a few days before her passing, they discussed their latest project.

(The first dietitian to represent DAA on the National Council of Women of Australia was Dr. Joan Woodhill in the 1960s.)

Wendy & Beryl initiated a number of high profile nutrition education projects on behalf of the NCW and the DAA. They used a Community Development approach; consulting other Community Health Professionals and Non-Government Agencies and involving them. Other Members of NCW would join us on organising committees. E.g. June Hicks (Advisor to NCW from the Home Economics Association was always a valued advisor & helper.)

In 2006, Beryl & Wendy presented some of their NCW / DAA Rep's projects in poster form to the National Dietitians Annual Conference in Sydney. The title was, 'For Community Dietetics - try skills learnt through voluntary work'. The main purpose of the presentation was to encourage more Dietitians to join their local National Council of Women Groups as Nutrition Advisors -and to work in a multidisciplinary way as Beryl & Wendy did in a voluntary capacity.

Some of the Projects are as follows:-

The Recipes for Peace Book: In 1986, the International Year of Peace; the NCW (ACT Branch) were given a Grant to print a "Recipes for Peace" book. Members would send in their favourite tested recipes and our Committee of 6 would arrange them into chapters. The Committee included an ex-army matron; a bishop's wife; a Jewish lady; an home economist (June) and 2 dietitians (Beryl & Wendy). The committee also decided to include wise 'sayings' on the subject of peace. Some examples here:

"Even an ordinary event like a dinner can be carried out in such a way as to show friendship and brotherhood with other men." Epictatus – Philosopher (c. AD 55-135)

"After a good dinner one may forgive anyone, even one's relatives." - Oscar Wilde

June and Beryl wrote an excellent chapter on, *"How to change your favourite recipes to make them more healthy."*

But it wasn't a peaceful project for its journey! However, the printed book is here today. It has had several reprints including in America for 'The International Year of Peace & Culture'.

The Food Iron Project: This Project attracted a grant from ACT Health to print posters and pamphlets. The poster said: *'Feeling ironed out? Collect your food iron fact sheet and discuss this with your Doctor.'* This came after a survey of all the Doctors working in Community Health (Government & Private) were asked "What do you think about first when a woman comes to you saying she is very tired?" All the female GPs and 1 Male GP said they first thought about 'anaemia'; the remaining GPs said "I thought she was fed up with the children" or, "she wasn't looking after herself - due to anxiety." It became obvious that Doctors needed educating about food / iron matters! Then, on the radio came a request for more blood donors in the ACT. A large number of middle-aged women volunteered but >50% were declined as their haemoglobin levels were low - this was also reported on the radio. We, (Beryl, Wendy, June and Narelle) knew we must act. We enlisted the NCW ACT Members to assist. After discussions with the Blood Bank Staff, they offered 2 Nurses to do 'finger-prick' haemoglobin checks on high school students. Busloads of school children came to the City Health Centre (organised by June, an Home Economics teacher). All results were reported again on the radio. This project was written up and later presented at a women's health conference in Adelaide in 1980 to mark the end of the International Decade for Women. More pamphlets were printed and posters stayed up in health centres for years.

The Foods/Medicines Interactions promotion had another successful poster to educate the public. It was titled *'Know how foods and alcohol affect your medication. Ask your Pharmacist or Doctor for advice.'* After this we noted that more Pharmacists were listing foods interactions on medicines boxes etc. Yvonne Coleman was invited to be a Lecturer on this subject to all staff working in community health.

The Budget for Health Seminar (1991) funded by ACT Health Promotion Fund was a 1 day Seminar with expert speakers on 'eating better for less' was very successful and fully reported in the media.

Another Seminar (2000) “Food Biz” on genetically modified foods ; again with expert speakers was a success. This was another NCW ACT initiative with teacher, Julia Biles, Dietitian, Beryl and Lawyer, June Lazlow on the planning committee.

Beryl, Narelle & Wendy (as DAA Representatives) were able to educate NCW Members about the Australian Dietary Guide to Healthy Eating and to answer their many ‘member’ questions in a professional way - quoting evidence based research. All meetings had a ‘Nutrition’ report with a Q&A. For special weeks (e.g. Diabetes Week or Heart Week etc) Beryl & Wendy organised Guest Speakers from those organisations & helped distribute ‘up-to-date’ materials to members (extra copies also for them to take back to the groups they represented).

Margaret Findlater-Smith (ex-President of NCWA) said, “Beryl came to the NCW firstly as a Delegate from the Australian Federation of University Women in the 1970s. Later, with Narelle Hore she also represented the Dietitians Association of Australia. Margaret said, “I always admired Beryl’s energy and enthusiasm and willingness to be involved in all of the NCW Activities. Beryl always had something of value to contribute to a discussion. For many years, Beryl was the Co-ordinator of Standing Committees for NCW ACT and held many meetings at her home, where we would all make our reports, which Beryl would carefully record and summarise for forwarding to our National Advisors. She had a great sense of humour and was genuinely interested in people.” Beryl was also a very good cook & with Jenny Jarvis started the “Healthy Lunches” at NCW ACT Assembly Meetings. Those lunches continue today – a roster of members and proceeds to charity. Beryl was awarded Life Membership of the National Council of Women of Australia.

Beryl lived a full life of 94 years. She immersed herself in the news of the day, history, her profession of Dietetics & her family & friends. She had an incredible memory of people, dates and occurrences.

Daughter, Annette Evans said “ She will live on in our hearts”

Beryl’s enthusiasm for nutrition education; for world peace and for justice & equality for all women and their families is legendary. A wise leader and mentor to many.

Written by Wendy Gray