

## Speech given by Diana Hampshire at the Naming of the Laurie White Archives Room



Looking around to-day, there are so many familiar faces, we could easily be at a family reunion. In a way, I guess we are because we are all members of the Kambala Old Girls' family. Every family has a Family Tree, a central, rooted anchor that links the past with the present, bonds the current and creates pathways to the future.

Laurie White is Kambala Old Girls' Family Tree.

She is the trunk around which the circles of connection radiate, she is the branches linking us together, the keeper of the collective memory bank, our living Archive. A bit like the Brunsfelsia tree, Laurie White symbolises Kambala Old Girls' Union's yesterday, to-day and to-morrow.

Laurie was a special lady who looked back in order to respect and keep alive the memory of those whose contributions created the soul of Kambala. She learned that love of Kambala's past under the formative influence of Fifi Hawthorne, who was her Principal when she came to Kambala as little Laurie Nyman at the age of 5, until she left in 1948, as a Prefect, Head Boarder and Gurney House Captain.

Those were the war and post-war years, when student numbers were down and the boarding house was truly like a family, and Laurie and Fifi became good friends, sharing a devotion they maintained throughout their lives. In Miss Hawthorne's own words from her 1972 history, 'Kambala', 'In the boarding house Laurie Nyman won the respect and affection of girls and staff. As Prefect she combined quiet control with sympathetic understanding'.

Laurie learned much from Miss Hawthorne: order, reliability and that the blinds should always be level! Archivist Roberta Carew once received a note from Laurie, politely but firmly telling her "the Archives Room blinds aren't level; you might need to fix them." You could see Fifi's work in so much of Laurie's meticulousness and order.

Laurie knew the relevance of social connection long before Facebook was even a word and the Old Girls' Union would not have become the symbol of Kambala connectivity it is to-day without her extraordinary binding influence.

She was an organiser, a list maker, a proof reader, a date rememberer, a walking database, a networker years before networking became the thing to do. Armed with her tin trunk, she knew everyone's maiden name, their mother's name, what house they were in, whom they married, where they lived and which years their daughters came to Kambala.

Anyone who wanted to know anything about anyone connected with Kambala would always be told, "just ring Laurie".

Across more than four decades from 1959 Laurie held every position in the KOGU other than President, and that was because she wasn't one for the limelight. From 1965 to 1971 she was an Old Girls' Union representative on the School Council, where she was, to quote Miss Hawthorne again, "a most invaluable member". She was a member of the Kambala Association, the Development Office, a volunteer at Ashfield Infants' Home and a regular worker in the Archives Room. She was always ready to step in and lend a hand wherever and whenever it was needed. Janet Macfarlane remembers when she was 8 years old, being taught nature study by Laurie because Miss Calman, the much-loved infants' teacher, was away for 2 years with rheumatic fever. I don't recall Laurie ever mentioning going to Teachers' College! Or for that matter knowing much about the life cycle of a frog!

She was the Old Girls' Division Chairman on the 1964 Building Fund Appeal and largely drove the initiative that resulted in the construction of the 1967 Assembly Hall, the Senior Library and classrooms in what we know as the Alexander Building. Laurie knew the value in preserving the past but equally she realised the importance of planning and building for the future.

She was instrumental in the concept and editing of Miss Hawthorne's history of the school, "Kambala", and Alanna Nobbs' 1987 account of the school's development over its first hundred years. Laurie's meticulous proofing ensured that both became indisputable, ubiquitous bibles for generations of Kambala girls, although knowing both the authors, I doubt that there were too many spelling or punctuation mistakes for Laurie to put the red pencil through in either book!

As an Old Girls' committee member she was the heart of the Old Girls family and there are many "not so old" Old Girls here to-day who have spent countless, newsy, and at times, noisy, nights in Laurie's headquarters, the lounge room at 468, Old South Head Road, folding circulars, licking stamps and writing personal messages on the top of correspondence to Old Girls spread around the world. Along the way friendships formed across many age groups, all sealed at the end of the night with those famous Dobinson's cakes, Laurie's equally famous egg sandwiches and just a little cask white wine- as Prue Weaver so well described in her recent tribute to Laurie in the Old Girls' Magazine. Those friendships extended outside the committee meetings and Laurie's nurturing nature meant she became a friend as well as carer for so many Kambala Old Girls, particularly in their senior years. Yesterday, to-day and to-morrow, through rough and smooth, Laurie was always there for her Kambala family.

Just as Kambala was her family, so too her own family became part of Kambala. She and husband Jim chose to send their two daughters, Lindy and Julie, to Kambala and her second husband Ted's

daughter Pele was also a Kambala girl. Laurie was caring and devoted to them and her grandchildren and she only moved away from Rose Bay and Kambala in her final years to be closer to them. It is appropriate that so many of her family are here to-day to see and feel the respect and the love that Laurie's Kambala family feel for her and to see that her legacy lives on in this place.

Laurie and I were not related, but our shared love of Kambala gave us a special connection and ultimately a unique friendship. We worked together on many committees and shared the desire to preserve the school's heritage through its written histories and its archival collection; we were both devoted to Miss Hawthorne; one-eyed about Gurney being the best house and passionate about the history and future success of Kambala. Our families became friends. To me, she was a caring, wise counsel; a mentor; a loyal ally; a fun, quietly-spoken lady, always perfectly groomed with an appointment with the hair-dresser booked for every Saturday morning! She was a special friend whom I loved dearly. Our friendship began a long time ago here at Kambala and I am honoured that I am able to be part of to-day's tribute to Laurie in such an appropriate and lasting dedication.

The proposal to associate Laurie's name with the Archives Room was initially suggested by Gabrielle Briger and Prue Weaver, supported by Elaine Budd and the Old Girls' Union and approved by the School Council and is indicative of the esteem and admiration felt for her by the whole Kambala family. She is certainly at the heart of that Kambala Family Tree - yesterday, today and tomorrow.