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LAURINE · DIGGINS · FINE · ART

Tribute to Lauraine Diggins by Ms Lin Oke Reflections Occupational Therapy



Back in 1965, 42 of us 17 and 18 year olds, from around Victoria started our journey into the Occupational therapy profession. Strong bonds of friendship developed amongst us. Lauraine stood out – vivacious, full of fun, elegant, tall – with those long legs that resulted in some of us calling her Lolly Legs.

Following Lauraine’s passing we shared our memories and smiled on our reflections. I’m pleased to share some of these reflections with you today.

One of our group summed up the closeness of Course 18 in this way:

“In 1965 the small campus of the OT School at 33 Lansell Road provided an intimate atmosphere favourable for the development of strong bonds. The lunchtime conversations were sometimes philosophical and at other times simply sharing personal experiences. Many of these women made remarkable achievements in the OT profession, others, who had gained their confidence and maturity via the course, went on to new endeavours. The bond has remained strong for 50 years and the intimacies formed many years ago remained constant. Over quarterly lunches at Kooyong disclosures were respected and empathy and support given when difficult life events intervened. Lauraine was a respected member of the group and, in the last few years, her final journey was shared with her OT colleagues. We will miss her.”

Lauraine’s skiing exploits were recalled:

“I have my strongest memories of our sophisticated friend Lauraine in the Falls Creek ski lodges and on the slopes. She seemed so at home and in charge in those exotic places - I was in awe. While she remained composed and

modelled for us, we novices fell about on the slopes, swilled alcohol in a new and unseemly attempt to keep up and fell for ski instructors too quickly!"

Another added: *"... we all had so much fun ... the après skiing was almost as memorable as the skiing itself ... a certain awesome (much loved by us) waitress - dancing on tables comes to mind."*

And another: *"I remember our time working for a few weeks at Diana Lodge Falls Creek in the September holidays of 2nd year. (I think we might have granted ourselves an extra week's holiday!!). As soon as the guests were fed and their rooms tidied, we were free to ski for the day. Needless to say, we did everything in our power to encourage the guests to eat then leave their rooms as quickly as possible - definitely no lingering over coffee!"*

Others remembered aspects of our student days, with some mirth:

"... trips with Lauraine in her bright green, verging on fluorescent, Cortina. On her approach to a clear intersection she would 'throw' the car into neutral, coast through with a languid expression, before double declutching into appropriate gear for a rapid lift off. Meanwhile I was still holding my breath."

Whilst another remembered: *"... piling into Lauraine's and other cars escaping from Lansell Road at lunch times to watch practices for Moomba water skiing and Bird Man events on the Yarra - great fun and then - always the tension of arriving back late for lectures, especially Miss McArthur-Campbell's."*

'Swot Vac' was remembered by one – as working with Lauraine at Peter Rowland's at Sorrento - instead of hitting the books.

Another reflection was: *"I got to know Lauraine a little more as we continued to meet at our regular OT lunches and she spoke of the challenges she was confronting. What stood out was that she stated honestly and bravely how things were for her and she continued to maintain a sense of humour. I really valued attending several openings of exhibitions at her gallery."*

And ... *"Lauraine certainly was an inspiration - we totally admired her courage and spirit and felt deeply for her family and friends for their loss."*

One of our group said: *"Since having a wonderful conversation with Lauraine at our last OT lunch, I have spent a lot of time reminiscing about special times we spent together back in the late sixties, as well as being reminded what a beautiful, kind, strong, brave, talented and fun loving woman Lauraine was."*

How lucky we all are to have had Lauraine in our lives. Lauraine was to me a beautiful role model. When visiting Lauraine just before she passed, Michael asked why she was called 'Lolly Legs', as her grandkids referred to her as 'Lol'. To me it was pretty obvious - in those muddy footy shorts way back in our student days to even just then, when she had swung those legs from under the covers and sat up - such strong, slender legs!

What a role model Lauraine was, in facing the last lap in life's journey.

And a final reflection from one of our group: *"When thinking of Lauraine the word 'charisma' comes to mind. Indeed she had charm, individuality, strength of character and a presence that was outstanding, whether on the snow fields or participating in student events. Recently I asked her if I could be praying for peace in her heart and healing that could only come from our faith. Lauraine turned to me with a reverence and warmth in her smile and replied "Yes, please do." It was a great comfort to hear that towards the end of her life she was peaceful, beautiful and at rest."*

In concluding, let me read our Course 18 Tribute to Lauraine which appeared in The Age:

We will miss Lauraine, our dynamic and much loved colleague. Your talent and forthrightness were evident from Day One. We will miss you at our quarterly reunions. We feel proud of your diverse and honourable achievements in the art world - and warmed that you also remained one of us. Our thoughts are with Michael, Nerida and family.