

Fay Austin – A Tribute by Jill Easterbrook

Fay and I were great pals and I've missed her immensely.

We were neighbours from 1978 but I did not know her well while her husband, John, was alive. I really got to know her well when she was going out with Ernie and they seemed to have fun every day. When he died, the loss was great and she was advised to make sure she spoke to someone every day – and that someone was me. We had morning coffee every day from then on. I called Fay “unique”. There was no grey in her character only black and white, although she always wore really colourful clothes and could look extremely glamorous. We miss Fay – particularly her sudden soaring singing coming across the road to us and her calling to the kookaburras and magpies. She was well organised with a routine that ran like clockwork and consequently her running of the Dunes was so successful. I have been asked to talk about this aspect of Fay's life.

I gleaned this story from **Carole Saint** on how she first became involved: “On a walk from her home to the shop to buy the Sunday papers, Fay encountered Wanda and Denys Garnsey, long time Pearl Beach residents and, as it turned out, the first dune carers. Fay wasted no time in speaking with them to inquire what they were about. Ever an enthusiastic advocate for the environment, Fay gave no further thought to purchasing the Sunday papers and poor John waiting for them. She joined up straight away, stayed to help for three hours, and 30 years later was still energetically leading the Dunecare group.



In 2002 there were only three Dunecare volunteers (Fay, Dorothy Supracynski and Carole), but Fay's enthusiasm for the Dunes never wavered; she happily laboured on whether there were three or 30 – regaled anyone she met with stories of the dunes, their importance and anyone who wished to volunteer would be welcome – and over time many came (Roger Murray, Libby and Richard Stewart, me, Muriel, Bill Abbot, Jenny Hughes and others). When Greg and Linda McPhee and Keith Rachow joined Dunecare and offered to manage the dunes at the northern end of the beach, Fay was overjoyed.”

The support and interest of Gosford Council's environment officers, Anna Deegan and Michael Smith was invaluable – they offered training, signs, information, and plants for the dunes.

Fay also had her contacts at the council depot – those she called when a fence post needed fixing or a fallen tree taken away or cut up. **In November 2009, Pearl Beach was declared the Central Coast regional winner of the NSW Keep Australia Beautiful Clean Beach Challenge while also taking home a highly commended award in the Environmental Protection category. Pearl Beach was then nominated again in 2011 and 2012, all thanks to Fay.**

Carole: “She was jubilant when Pearl Beach won, particularly so, as many Pearl Beach Groups and members of the Progress Association rallied round on the judging day to lend support to Dunecare's entry.

Fay was not reluctant to express her views and at times there were verbal altercations with those who did not value the dunes or wanted to cut down its trees. (I, personally, was constantly in trouble for getting ‘the wrong end of the stick’ or ‘not listening’ and when she used her favourite phrases of ‘what I am getting at’ or ‘what I am trying to get at’ and I finished the sentence for her, well, that did not go down well at all!) And yet, she was an understanding supervisor. Greg called her “our fearless leader” – she was, but never took offence if a volunteer could not attend or stayed briefly –her response was always ‘we are all volunteers and any time you give is appreciated’.”

Fay was a “**spitfire**”. One of the most amusing anecdotes was when she was out to lunch with some girlfriends and a young couple came and sat near them with their backs to them. The young girl was wearing the fashionable low slung pants which revealed far too much cheek and underduds. Fay said “We can't eat our lunch looking at **that!**” When the young man started to remonstrate, Fay said, “Don't you say a word. Come round here and see what we have to look at!” The young couple soon left.



From Michael Smith, Landcare – Central Coast Council:

I first met Fay in 2011. New to the Bushcare program I'd gone out to see the beachfront dune site at Pearl Beach. Fay met me outside the restaurant and before we even started our walk she gave me a history of the *Ficus hillii* growing there, talking about its importance as a food and habitat tree and running off a long list of all the birds and animals that she had seen in it over the years. We went for a walk along Pearl Parade, across the footbridge (where evidently water dragons nested) to Coral Crescent, looking at the beach front dune systems along the way. It seemed that Fay knew every plant along the way and had a story to tell about each. She was particularly proud to point out the burrawangs (cycads) growing in the dunes – she had scattered the seeds throughout the site many years before. Immediately with Fay I knew that I was meeting someone who had a genuine love for her community, cared very deeply for the environment which she saw as such an integral part of making Pearl Beach the special place that she thought it to be. I also knew that I was with someone who loved to share her passion and to teach other people about the importance of the environment and helping to protect it. This impression never changed, every time I met Fay over the following years she always expressed the same energy and passion.

Fay officially registered to join the then Gosford City Bushcare Program in 2011. Unofficially though Fay was carrying out dune restoration work at Pearl Beach well before Council started its program in the late 1990's. In reality, probably for over 30 years Fay cared about all things environmental and took every opportunity to educate anyone that she came across. People like Fay are rare and she is a great loss to our program and the community at large. She will be missed very much.

Our Bushcare Officer Anna Deegan worked directly with Fay and the other volunteers at Pearl Beach. I'm sure she would have felt very honoured to have been here today to pay tribute to Fay but unfortunately she is at home recovering from a medical procedure. Anna asked me to put together a tribute to send through and it's been my pleasure to think back about the Fay that I knew.

We send our condolences to Fay's family, friends and community and share in your grief.

With fond memories. **Michael Smith (Central Coast Council Landcare Program)**

Carole again: Fay's passion for the dunes was never in doubt and her conviction that the dunes were the first line of defence for the beach and beachfront houses proved correct on many occasions. In staying true to her understanding of the importance of the dunes Fay has left a lasting legacy to Pearl Beach and she would be proud to know there are so many who share her vision and will carry on her good work. She was thrilled to hear that a large group of volunteers had turned up to do just that.

Fay – R. I. P.

Jill Easterbrook-Hill

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A poem for Fay by Aidan Lawson

Fay

*her ancient, lively eyes regarded the calm, enduring dunes
and her bare feet mixed with the alchemy of salt and sand
her body was a vessel for spontaneous bursts of song
her heart was fractured, and yet wholly part of this land*

*her tongue, sharpened by the hungry winds of time
could not distract for the sweetness that overflowed
when the rainbow congregation of birds came to visit
and from behind her tough exterior, something glowed*

*she was a wanderer, she loved to grace the water's edge
and tell us of the wildflowers, of their scents and names
for there was a wildness within her, unbelonging to our world
that craved the lake's heart, and halls of untamed waves*

*maybe these are the things we should remember her by
the simpler things, removed from the cares of human minds
ducks racing for tossed bread and unhindered oscillations
reflections of a truer nature, that all of us seek to find*

*saltwater has earthly sweetness, and sand is soft to touch
the cures of nature, to heal the bitterness and the strain
that plagues our kind when we hold on too tightly
when we forget that life is defined by constant change*

*this wisdom was within her, and took her to the shores
lifted her hand to feed the birds, and eyes to see the dunes
it is a deeper knowing, hidden away much of the time
yet always here, just as sun's light is always with the moon*

*these are the things we should remember Fay by
and in doing so, remind ourselves of what we often miss
wildflowers in bloom, grand palaces of grass and sand
the bickering lorikeets, sweet sunshine and songs of bliss*

Name: Aidan Lawson

Website: cosmellowed.com.au

Facebook: @Cosmellowed

Instagram: @cosmellowed