

All Roads Lead to Pymont

I was born in the heart of the upper North Shore. As a child I roamed with my cousins the orchards and bushland of Pymble and Wahroonga, both about to become upmarket suburbia. It was a privileged existence of tennis, horse riding and swimming lessons, private school education (actually non-education), socialising at dancing classes, leading to marriage at 20, unaware of the realities of adult life. Unfortunately, my husband was even less equipped for responsibilities like bills and mortgage. After months as a kept woman - like my mother and all my friends' mothers - I went back to work as a secretary until the children came along.

Before my first child was born, we moved from our miniscule unit in North Sydney to a project home in Thornleigh, on the edge of the bush. After 3 years, we decided to build a house designed by my architect husband, in the bushland of Beecroft. I was coping with my husband's alcoholism, 3 children and social isolation. I was saved by my aunts, strong supporters of nature conservation, who lured me into the campaign to save the Kanangra-Boyd Wilderness. I met our first prominent conservationist, Milo Dunphy, published my first letter to the Herald, and joined the Colong Committee set up to change the NSW Government's determination to establish a limestone mine and pipeline through the wilderness.

I was hooked, learning to fight inside the tent, rather than outside. I made my first nervous call to my MP, Max Ruddock, joined the local Liberal Party branch, was elected to the Federal Electorate Council, then the Liberal State Council where we put up motions on the wilderness and won support for the cause. Following a packed Sydney Town Hall meeting addressed by 3 senior ministers, we won the day. The wilderness is now part of the Blue Mountains World Heritage Park. Feeling ill-equipped to lecture on conservation, having left school at 15, I tackled the Adult HSC and was accepted at Macquarie University, studying Earth Sciences and Political Science - thanks to the Whitlam Government making higher education free.

I graduated in 1979 in Earth Sciences and worked for the NSW Nature Conservation Council, coordinating the campaign that saved the Terania Creek rainforest from logging. This sub-tropical rainforest is also now protected by its World Heritage status.

Following the breakdown of my marriage, I departed with my 3 children for Brisbane with another partner. Again, I expected to be a kept woman while I studied for a Masters degree, but I'd have to support myself and my children and found a new career as a university administrator. I learned a lot about myself in this seven-year relationship. Fortunately, I could return to Sydney, buy a renovator's delight in Newtown and take up a position as administrator at Macquarie University. I was a square peg in a round hole in the School of Education, so I moved to the new Optical Fibre Technology Centre at the University of Sydney. I enjoyed my independence and loved the job which morphed into Communications Manager for the Australian Photonics CRC at the new Australian Technology Centre at Eveleigh. But my singledom did not last.

Mark Sceats was on my interview panel and became the CEO of the CRC. I established a strong friendship with Mark and we became partners. After 3 months in my little terrace, we moved into a terrace house in Lilyfield. As the CRC flourished, Mark looked for an investment property. We inspected the display apartment at Jacksons Landing and put down the deposit on a 2-bedder in Regatta Wharf, the first development completed. We kidded ourselves that we would rent it out, but as we gazed at the ships coming and going we decided that our children would have to find other accommodation. We moved in June 2000, then upgraded to a 3-bedder in evolve* in 2008.

When funding for the CRC dried up, we retired. After a year, Mark was presented with a new idea for processing minerals to separate CO₂ from the final product. After a year of proving the principle, he set up a company, Calix, as CEO, then taking the post of Chief Scientist and Executive Director. Calix is now ASC listed and Mark continues to work 24/7.

So, what was I to do with myself?

We realised that some developments could damage Pymont's physical and social amenity, and the community we had fallen in love with. After we persuaded Lend Lease to provide more than a dial-up internet service, my new colleagues and I set up a Pymont Precinct Committee under the auspices of the City of Sydney. Mayor Lucy Turnbull pulled the plug on that idea, but the momentum enabled us to establish Pymont Action in 2003.

Together with Pymont Community Group, we persuaded Lend Lease to redesign Waterfront Park and we worked with Lend Lease to redesign Antias to comply with the Jacksons Landing Master Plan. We also persuaded Council to install the pedestrian crossing in Harris Street at John Street. I have never had to wonder what to do with my time and I use much of the knowledge gained with my degree, as well as my early lobbying. My efforts were recognised by our local MP, Alex Greenwich, who nominated me as the 2021 Sydney Local Woman of the Year, an award which should be shared with all my friends and colleagues who provide such support and encouragement.

My 21 years in Pymont have given me much more than work. I am part of the most extraordinary and integrated community of people from disparate backgrounds to work and play for the common good.

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