

## Our Elders

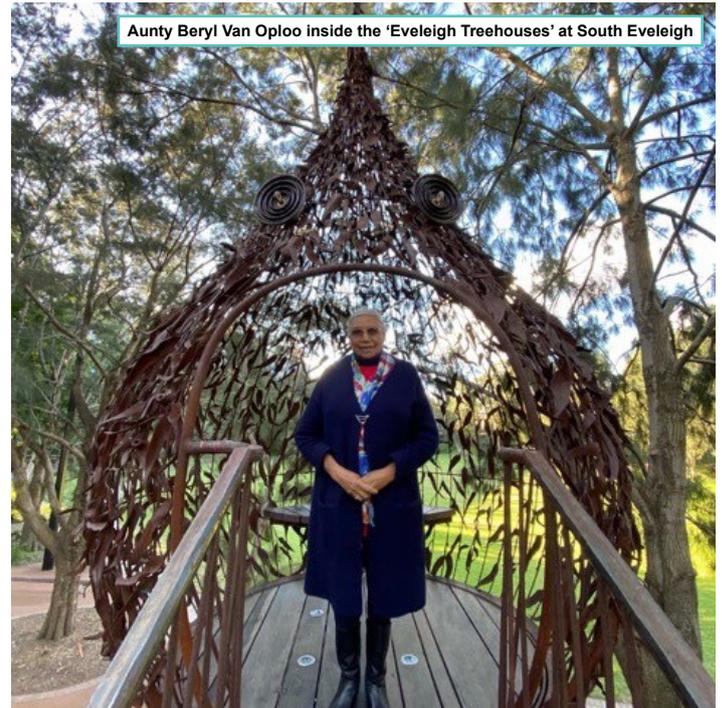
### *A Story from our Ambassador Kylie Kwong*

Being a 3rd-generation Australian and 29th-generation Kwong, I feel privileged to have grown up with a foot in both worlds. I spent my early years in the Sydney suburb of North Epping, with my two brothers, parents and grandmothers. Being of Chinese heritage, where food and family are central to our universe, we experienced an extended family set-up. At different times, my 'Pau-Pau' (Cantonese word for 'grandmother') and my Nanna lived with us and taught we children invaluable life lessons.

We were the only Asians in our primary school and in our neighbourhood for the first 13 years of my life. We never experienced any form of racism and in fact, were very popular. This all came down to my Mum's delicious cooking. All my school friends would always be hanging around our kitchen table because of 'Mrs Kwong's' flavoursome, home-style Cantonese food.'

I was the youngest child. Mum and Dad worked full-time and the boys were at school, so my Nanna looked after me. We had a very reassuring daily ritual. Every morning Nanna would cook me the exact same dish, year-in-year-out: 'Steamed egg and ginger custard'. She taught me to carefully crack several fresh eggs into a bowl, beat them well with a fork, add a splash of water, a sprinkle of sugar and a generous slice of ginger. Nanna would then place this bowl inside Mum's bamboo steamer basket and cook for 10 minutes. What resulted was a steaming hot, velvety, silky, wobbly, smooth, not-too-rich tasting custard with delicate, subtle hints of healing, cleansing ginger. Comfort food at its best. Looking back, my Nanna reminded me of one of those 'Cabbage Patch Kid' dolls; she was really cuddly, had the softest skin, a generous, warm, round face and was always wearing one of Mum's terry-towelling aprons over her dress. After we enjoyed our custard, she would switch on the TV, plonk me (and our Chihuahua dog 'Benji') on her lap, and enjoy her daily dose of 'Days of Our Lives'.

My maternal grandmother 'Pau Pau' (Cantonese for 'grandmother') whom we affectionately called 'Paupsie', came to live with us when I was about 9 years old. Nanna had sadly passed away the year before at the age of 77. I recall seeing my Dad grieving for his mother, he would sit in the living room every night before dinner, listening to her favourite Perry Como LP's, reminiscing and reflecting. Dad was the youngest of ten children, you can imagine how spoilt he was, he and Nanna were very, very close. I think it was so special that he was able to take care of his Mother in her later years. Nanna was so happy and comfortable living with us, she made significant contributions to we children's overall health and wellbeing and thus felt engaged, relevant, respected and loved.



I have many fond memories of dear Pau Pau. I can visualise her right now, sitting in the kitchen with Mum and I, as we prepared the evening meal. Pau Pau would watch me like a hawk, "do this, do that" she would say, finger pointing here and there, as she dished out her important daily lectures, "you kids all need to learn how to cook so you can help your Mother more!". Paupsie had this old, round-shaped, Quality Street chocolate tin under her bed in which she kept spare money, and she would always give me handfuls of 20c and 50c coins to buy lollies. I adored my Pau Pau. She had had a very challenging life, she bore and raised ten children with her husband, my Goong Goong (Cantonese for 'grandfather') in The Great Depression, and endured a series of health issues in her adult life. It was a very important lesson for my brothers and I to learn and witness how children take care of their parents later on, showing the deepest respect for our Elder folk. My Mother was exemplary in the way she cared for Pau Pau and Nanna, right up until the end of their lives, I will never forget her endless patience, kindness and compassion. They never, ever felt abandoned, insignificant or alone.

# Precinct Story

August 2020

# SOUTH EVELEIGH

As an adult I enjoy the company of older people. I was very much raised by the 'Elders' in my family and I do feel like something is missing, when I do not have regular contact with these often, wise souls. One of the most rewarding parts of my time spent around South Eveleigh is the regular connection I have with long time friend and mentor, local Elder Aunty Beryl Van Oploo. Aunty Beryl is a proud Kamilaroi woman who came to the city from the northern NSW country town of Walgett, as a young person in search of job opportunities. For much of this time she lived on The Block and fondly recalls the tight-knit community spirit and how "all of the Elders kept us safe, everyone's door was open to all of we young people that came from the country, all of the Elders looked after us."

Recently we spent a precious afternoon together, I picked her up from the National Centre for Indigenous Excellence (NCIE), where she works, running the inspired 'Job Ready Program' providing hospitality training and mentoring to young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. We had a bite to eat, then went for a stroll around the area. Much to my delight Aunty Beryl started relaying stories about how she spent much of her daily life around South Eveleigh; "Kylie I have been coming to this place since I was 16 years old. Many of my friends used to work in the Locomotive Workshop so I would meet them after they'd finished for the day. One of my friend's did his toolmaker apprenticeship here. There was a great cafe and juke box up in Regent Street where we used to hang out, and we also loved going to 'Snowy's Hamburger Shop'. The man who ran this shop had blonde-hair so we nicknamed him 'Snowy'. He was very kind, if we didn't have enough money that day to pay for our hamburger, he would let us pay when we received our next pay check. We also enjoyed old-fashioned milkshakes from 'Palms Milk Bar' in George Street".

Aunty Beryl has generously introduced me to so many people within her community, including the extraordinary staff of Wyanga Aboriginal Aged Care Services, which is located in nearby Cope Street. Wyanga is a NFP Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation providing individually tailored and culturally appropriate aged care services to Elders within their homes. The Elders Olympics event is an active Senior Mini Olympics that promotes active living and good health whilst providing an opportunity for Elders from Wyanga to explore social and kinship connections among the mobs. This event was one of this year's South Eveleigh Community Grant recipients. On a regular basis, Aunty Beryl meets with other local Elders for lunch and a catch up at Wyanga. At our 2020 International Women's Day event at South Eveleigh, I took great pride in introducing my Mother, Pauline, to Aunty Beryl and other local Elder, Aunty Ali Golding. As she continued her storytelling, Aunty Beryl said to me, "Kylie, the Elders are the backbone to the Community, we must always take care of them."



Pictured left to right: Rebecca Marchbank, KK, Geraldene Marr & Nita Lyons



Elders: Aunty Ali Golding, Pauline Kwong, Aunty Beryl Van Oploo