

# Local indigenous identity

## Maureen Williams turns 90

PATRICIA LIESCHKE

WELL known local Aboriginal identity Maureen Williams celebrated her 90<sup>th</sup> birthday with family and friends at the Recreation Room, Leinster Place on Saturday.

Maureen has had a long and eventful life in the past 90 years.

She was born in Rockhampton on March 13, 1929 but lived in and around Eidsvold with her grandparents Alick and Fanny Little.

Maureen is a descendant of the Wakka Wakka; her grandfather Alick was the first of her tribe to see white people.

It was while living with her grandparents that she developed a strong affinity for learning which was encouraged by her grandparents, however her mother took her back at 10 years of age to Rockhampton to help look after her five brothers and sisters.

Sadly, that was the end of her education.

At 15 years of age, she commenced work at the Bluebird Cafe which was situated on the corner of Bolsover and Wil-



IT'S A CELEBRATION: The family of Maureen Williams gathers together to help celebrate her 90th birthday in style over the weekend.

Photo: David Williams

liam Sts where she made a number of lifelong friends and even named her daughter Patricia after her best friend.

About three years later, she

went to work as a domestic on Alroy Station in western Queensland where she met her future husband, Aboriginal roustabout George Williams,

who was working on the property at the time.

They moved to the outskirts of the property and lived in a tent while George undertook

fencing work.

Two children, Peter and Patricia, were born in the bush while Maureen and George moved around to various prop-

erties such as Patricia Downs, Lockhern and Vergmont as George continued to undertake fencing work.

When they moved to No Go

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# leaves her mark on region

station they had the luxury of living in the workers quarters while George did contract stock work and fencing.

Kevin was born here and Maureen and George continued working for the Avery family who owned No Go station.

Because of the importance they placed on education, Maureen and George moved to Longreach so that Peter, Patricia and Kevin could get a good education.

In 1956, George built a one-room "house" on the edge of town which he continued building on over the next several years.

He secured a position on the Longreach Shire Council and became the caretaker of the local showgrounds.

Four more children were born after they settled in Longreach – Pam, James, Traci and Sue-Ann.

Maureen and George were well respected in Longreach as they and the children became involved in many community activities through sport.

George was a very good cricketer who had offers to go to Brisbane to play but he didn't want to leave at the time because he and Maureen thought it more important for the older children to be settled in school.

However, with the help of friends in Longreach and with contacts in Rockhampton, George and Maureen moved to Rockhampton in 1971 after Peter, Patricia and Kevin finished high school.

The four younger children attended The Range Convent, Christian Brothers College and Emmaus College in Rockhampton.

They became involved in the Rockhampton community, George with the Country and Western Music Association with the youngest children James, Sue-Ann and Traci singing at functions around the Rockhampton district and Maureen with the dancing community as Sue-Ann was a talented ballerina who went on to dance professionally.

She won many eisteddfods during her school years before moving to Melbourne and studying at the Victorian College of The Arts' School of Dance.

Maureen also became heavily involved in the local Aboriginal community and both Maureen and George are still spoken highly of by the indigenous community in and around the Rockhampton area.

Despite being indigenous in a time when there were few opportunities for them, Maureen and George gave their all to ensure their children had a better future than they could ever attain.

All the children would go on to achieve highly in the educational field.

Some have several degrees, both Traci and Kevin have Masters degrees and some are studying or completed PhDs.

They also developed a strong work ethic as it was always instilled in the children to work hard and achieve at the highest level.

All the children worked in high level jobs in universities, government and the private



**FAMILY'S EVERYTHING:** George and Maureen had seven children Peter, Patricia, Kevin, Pam, James, Traci and Sue-Ann. **INSET:** George and Maureen Williams. Photo: David Williams

sector.

Patricia worked at Central Queensland University as a manager of various departments for 37 years before retiring in 2012.

Kevin was the first male indigenous degree graduate from CQU and after obtaining an undergraduate law degree at UNSW and a Master of Laws from SCU became the first indigenous law lecturer in a mainstream position in Australia.

He also lectured in Canada, England and Germany.

He recently retired after several years at the University of Newcastle law school, specialising in Administrative and Property law.

Traci trained as a journalist and worked for the ABC before moving onto the Department of Foreign Affairs as a diplomat, having worked as second under-secretary at the London Embassy for a number of years.

James studied Information Technology and works as a manager of IT systems at a private school in Melbourne as well as living his dream as a professional singer around venues in Melbourne.

Peter worked in government departments and gave up eventually to follow his dream of working as a landscape gardener – he is also retired.

Sue-Ann is a classically trained ballet dancer who worked as principal dancer with Bangarra Dance Theatre Company in her earlier career.

She is currently studying Interior Design at RMIT, Melbourne.

George obtained a job as a wardman at the Rockhampton Base Hospital and Maureen continued to work as a domestic and housekeeper in some of the most beautiful homes on The Range until she eventually gave up work to look after George when he had a stroke in 1990.

Sadly, George died in 1997 and Maureen had 11 years of

solitary bliss doing what she loved until she had the beginnings of dementia in 2008 and moved into the low-care facility (Murphy House) at Leinster Place.

Maureen always gave to the community in which she lived. She became involved with Meals on Wheels and joined a Quilting Club where she designed some beautiful items that she gave to all of her children.

Lovely memories for them.

Sadly, Maureen has advanced dementia but is still a bright, happy person and continues to sing all her favourite songs and her beautiful singing voice is enjoyed by all.

Several of her grandchildren and great-grandchildren have continued on with this musical aspect of her personality.

She is adoringly loved by her large extended family.

Happy 90th birthday, Maureen.



**At 15, Maureen started work at the Bluebird Cafe on the corner of Bolsover and William Sts.** Photo: Contributed



**A young George Williams.**

Photo: Contributed



**A young Maureen Williams.**

Photo: Contributed