

THE SANDYBEACH STORY

Written by Miranda Turner in collaboration With Bruce & Rose Morey

WHERE IT ALL BEGAN

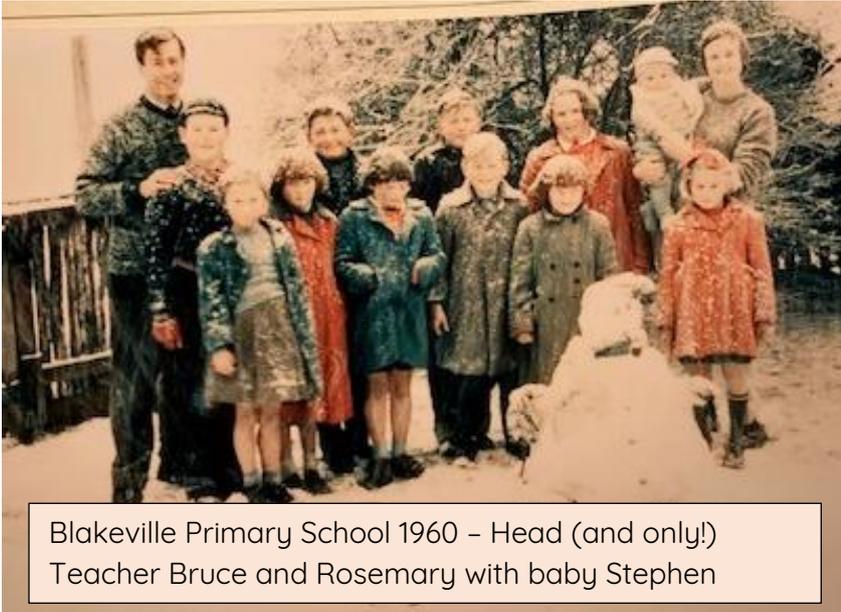
The story of Sandybeach began long before the purchase of the building, the development of a plan and way before the idea was even partially formed. It started with the meeting of a couple of equally driven people with similar interests and with a meeting of minds.

Bruce Morey and Rosemary Watson met in 1956 at the respective ages of 21 and 18 while they were both attending a church camp and sharing a sneaky fag! They quickly discovered a shared love for music, with Rosemary singing in choirs and Bruce involved in producing Reviews at Scotch College. The names chosen for two of these Reviews is an indication of the fun they were having – “Scotch and Sober” and “Cardinal Follies”. They were both rebellious and fun-loving and also shared a sense of community. Rosemary was nursing at the Alfred Hospital while Bruce was preparing to start his teaching career, studying at Toorak Teachers College on a scholarship.



Shortly after marrying in January 1959, Bruce was posted to Blakeville School, a one teacher, twelve pupil school in the middle of the Blackwood Forest, 8 miles from Ballan. The school consisted of one classroom (attached to their residence) and was shared by students ranging in age from 5 to 16. They lived in a small cottage with no

running water or power (at a weekly rental of 7 shillings and thruppence), and it was here that they started their family with the arrival of their son Stephen in November 1959. The duties of a head teacher in this small school went beyond the classroom. Bruce’s other “titles” included “Night Man” (emptying the “dunnies” for the school), and “Handyman” to name a couple. They both found themselves embraced by, and heavily involved in their small community. Needless to say, this first posting came as a bit of a culture shock to two newlyweds from conservative middle class families. Their Austin A40 and their “wet cell battery” radio provided welcome links to the closest town (Ballan) and the outside world. They stayed here for the next three years and left with their second child, Jo, on the way.



Blakeville Primary School 1960 - Head (and only!) Teacher Bruce and Rosemary with baby Stephen

The years following their departure from Blakeville involved a number of different postings for Bruce in his teaching career. One of his greatest challenges was as principal of Richmond West Primary School which he helped to establish. The school was one of the first to adopt a

policy of open plan classrooms and the student body was made up from many different cultural backgrounds, largely Turkish and Vietnamese, many of whom spoke little English. The school quickly grew with the student body changing from one year to the next in size and becoming very multicultural with the influx of a large number of refugees to Australia.

In the meantime, taking a break from nursing, Rose returned to study at Deakin University. Completing a Diploma in Welfare Studies, she was supported on the home front by their son Stephen who had just finished his schooling. Their “houseboy” ably kept the household ticking along while his increasingly busy parents continued on their chosen paths.



Weekend guests at Blakeville 1961 in the front garden of the cottage

A SHARED PASSION

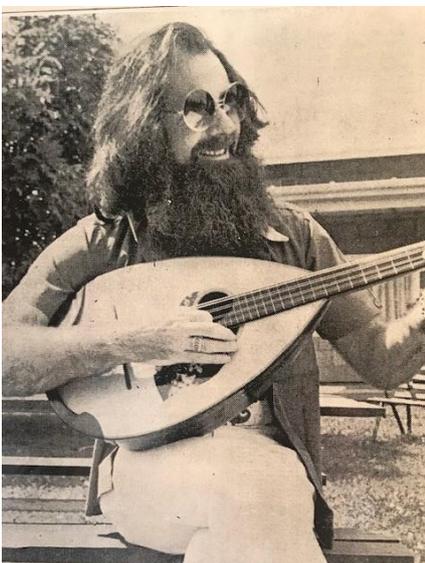
All the while, their shared love of music saw them continuing to participate in their chosen musical genres. Bruce was an accomplished pianist while Rosemary was further developing her interest in choral singing. Their first joint musical venture came about when, together they joined the Melbourne Mandolin Orchestra in the early 70's where they remained members for over 15 years. Their son, Stephen was also later to join the orchestra, which he led for some years.



Melbourne Mandolin Orchestra (Bruce (part of him!) and Rose 4th & 5th from left)

In 1980 the opportunity arose for them to travel overseas with The Australian Mandolin Orchestra to Germany. While

they were there, they travelled around the country performing concerts with the AMO and staying in the homes of other Mandolin playing families. They decided to take extended leave from their jobs and spent the next 6 months travelling around, making music, new friends and musical associations. Their travels took them to Spain, France, the UK and home to Australia via the USA and Mexico. During this prolonged break, they had plenty of time to talk about their mutual passion for starting a community centre back in Australia.



Bruce with his Mandocello (a larger baritone Mandolin) - Bruce was described in the Sunday Observer in 1982 as "a cross between an ageing hippie and an inner city social worker"

GETTING THE BALL ROLLING..

Upon their return, they very quickly embarked on the search for a site and a place to “create something with emphasis on community and music”. At the time, nothing similar existed in the suburbs and with very little in the way of a blueprint, they set to work creating a vision and a plan for what would eventually become the very first version of Sandybeach Centre.



Ringing the changes - **1.** Detroit Motors c.1934 **2.** All Souls Church Parish 1982
3. Getting a facelift in 1984 with a donation of all paint from Walpamur Paints

The first challenge they faced was finding a building. Their first choice was the old Semco site in Black Rock but the huge site of the old textile firm was beyond their limited budget. A fortuitous meeting on the train one morning found Bruce in discussion with the then Mayor of Sandringham, Michael Harwood who mentioned a building he knew of on the corner of Sims St and Beach Road Sandringham. He suggested this may be suitable for their needs. At the time the building was owned by the All Souls Anglican Church, who had previously used it as their Parish Centre and Sunday school. A meeting was arranged with Robert Allan from the church. On a rainy night, they met to scope out the site and it quickly became apparent that the building was a “doer upper” As they walked around, it was obvious from the many leaks and general state of disrepair that there would be some work to be done! Luckily, Bruce and Rose saw the potential and bought the building for the grand sum of \$116,000. In order to secure the property, they visited a money lender, sold their house and car and moved in on the upper floor with their two children Stephen and Jo. Bruce and Rose still live there today.

The first order of business was to make the upstairs habitable for their family and the building fit for purpose as a community centre. They engaged the services of a builder who was also one of Rose's clients. He was given a limited budget and agreed to work until the funds ran out. Basic renovations were done upstairs providing the bare necessities for family life. (It would be another 5 years before curtains and carpet were installed). Meanwhile, downstairs was undergoing a very basic upgrade in preparation for the opening of the centre to the public. At this time, there was already a regular market being held on the first Saturday of each month and Bruce and Rose were determined that this continue.

OFF WE GO!



Sandybeach Community Centre was officially opened by the Minister for the Arts, Race Mathews in 1983. The first event to take place was a concert in the big hall (now known as Morey Hall). Prior to the opening of the doors, Rose had been busy arranging a series of concerts. The first few were very lightly attended and actually made a loss. Family and friends were recruited to boost the numbers. However, after the Yarra Yarra Jazz Band filled the hall, word spread around the community and numbers started to grow.

As well as the concerts, another room was set up – ‘Players Coffee Room’ which opened every Sunday night and provided simple food, games and musical performances on a small stage. Players Room was a space for established and amateur performers to grow their craft and gain a local following. This was a family affair, with cooking taking place upstairs every Saturday. Great quantities of soups were made and baking done in preparation for the next day and Stephen and Jo were recruited to serve as waiters in ‘Players’ as well as other miscellaneous tasks. Many kind friends supported the venture by baking homemade bread and “Gran’s Famous Cheesecake” for sale to the lucky patrons. Stephen and Jo’s talents were also employed as cleaners and ‘crowd management’ for the many concerts that were to follow in the big hall.

LET THE MUSIC PLAY!

The concerts became the cornerstone of the centre in the early years and the talent that Bruce and Rose were able to recruit through their musical connections were many and varied! One of the earliest concerts was by a Russian Balalaika Band, Sadko, of which son

Stephen was a member. The band was coerced into performing with the promise of food and vodka, giving rise to the idea of themed food or drink



Sadko Balalaika Band



**Hugh de Rosario & Maurie Garbutt
(leader) of the Yarra Yarra Jazz Band**

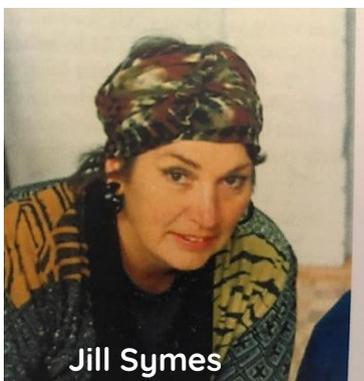
to accompany an act. A few notable acts included Klezmania, a Yiddish folk music group accompanied by delicious Ponckas (Jewish pancakes), The Chow Feng Chinese orchestra (with Dim Sum on the side!) George Dreyfus conducting a Digeridoo

ensemble, an evening of Mozart (complete with Strudel) and Uncle Dave’s Riverside Ramblers to name a few! The entertainers who performed at the centre over the 15 years of concerts are too many to name but numbered close to a hundred, many of them performing on a regular basis including the Yarra Yarra Jazz Band and the Melbourne Mandolin Orchestra of which Bruce, Rose and Stephen were members.

The centre was also host to Flowers of the Desert - a Middle Eastern dance group, The Welsh Male choir, Ala Camera Flute Ensemble, the Gilbert & Sullivan Society, The Australian Boys Choir and many others. While the reaction of the neighbours to all this activity was mostly positive, there were a few events that were not met with as much enthusiasm. A disco held one evening for the local youth resulted in a call to the police, who arrived and announced their presence by riding on horseback into Morey Hall!

DIVERSIFICATION

Another regular and very popular event was the “Authors Voice”, held on a Sunday evening after the concerts. Here, new and established authors could spruik and sell their newly published books. Among the many authors to launch a book here was the well-known Australian author, Bryce Courtenay. Other well-known names to present at the Authors Voice were, Dr Jim Cairns, Rev Tim Costello, Julian Birnside, Mirka Mora, Waleed Aly, Stephanie Alexander, Sheila Scotter and Tony Barber. These evenings were often fully subscribed and people sometimes had to be turned away.



Also of note was the ‘Makers Gallery’ co-founded by Jill Symes in what is now known as “Sims Room” off the main hall. Makers Gallery was an exhibition space where established and upcoming artists could display their works. Well-known Melbourne artist Polly Boyd (daughter of Arthur Boyd) was one of the exhibitors. ‘Makers’ was another very successful and

highly popular venture for the centre, with the exhibitions often spilling out into the hall. Jill is one of the artists who co-created the large mural in the hall.

Melbourne artist Catherine Van Wilgenburg co-ordinated the group of artists involved in creating the mural - Annie Cumtell (textile artist), Beryl Farr (Fibres), and Jill Symes (ceramicist).



Weekly sessions were run to which members of the public were invited to come and work on various aspects of the wall under the guidance of these established artists. Upon completion, after a period of about 9 months, Qantas CEO, James Strong visited Sandybeach to “launch” the wall.

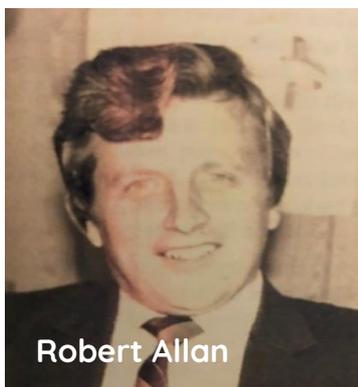
Around this time, Rose was also organising a drama course for people with a disability. To boost the finances, she was continuing her work in the Ministry of Education as an advocate for parents of children with moderate to profound physical and intellectual disabilities. This was and is to this day an issue she is passionate about.

BRINGING IN SOME HELP!

During the first year of operation, Bruce formed a board of management, including Robert Allan from All Souls Church who had an accounting background and who had been instrumental in negotiating the purchase of the building. Lesley Falloon was also very supportive of the venture in her capacity as Mayor of Sandringham.

There were 10 groups using the centre including various church groups, dance schools and other community groups. With a substantial donation from Norman James Lamont Chesterfield, the Sandybeach Community Foundation was formed and five trustees appointed. The function of the trust was to attract funds for the community centre and distribute these. Among the first grants received was a donation from Mrs Marjorie McKay which enabled the purchase of 200 chairs and 20 tables – the same ones

used to this day! A grant from the Sandringham Council was given for the commission of five large paintings by artist Christine Carr for the main hall.



Robert Allan



Lesley Falloon OAM



Open day in the hall 1990



Centre Manager, Mary Walsh receives a cheque for \$9000 from Mayor John Moller from the Sandringham Council (1991)

The centre was becoming well known in the wider community but up until March 1984 was coordinated by Bruce, assisted by one voluntary full time administrator, Mary Walsh, who had started as a volunteer in 'Players'. There were also several part time volunteers. Mary Walsh would go on to become the first CEO of Sandybeach.



By the end of this year, a decision was made for the Sims St Neighbourhood Group (then called Neighbourhood House) to become part of the co-operative, sharing some resources and administrative functions while maintaining their autonomy. Jo Storm arranged the activities run by the Neighbourhood House program. These included arranging food parcels for the needy, which were distributed by Southern Family life, and sourcing clothes for young people to wear while attending job interviews.

There were also casual counselling sessions available on a walk in basis for those struggling with the pressures placed upon them in a time of recession. Jo remained a large part of Sandybeach for many years.

The following three years (1985-1987) was a period of consolidation, with the centre becoming well established and achieving a measure of financial stability. The programs provided by The Neighbourhood House were incorporated under the Sandybeach Umbrella and the services offered continued to grow. Bruce was often approached by members of the public either offering a service or looking for a particular course. The program expanded as Bruce and Mary Walsh deftly matched supply with demand. Among the more unconventional groups to find a home at Sandybeach were a Lapidary club (for those with an interest in working with minerals and gemstones), Upholstery lessons, Microwave cookery, Belly Dancing, Juggling, Leadlighting, Spanish Flamenco Dancing and Tap dancing which sadly destroyed the existing parquet floor!

VIPS, AWARDS AND RECOGNITION

Over the years, there have been many important occasions held with visits from VIP's and notable public figures. In 1984 Bill Hayden, the then Foreign Minister in Bob Hawke's cabinet used the centre to endorse the application for the local candidate. In 1992, the Governor of Victoria, Dick McGarvie



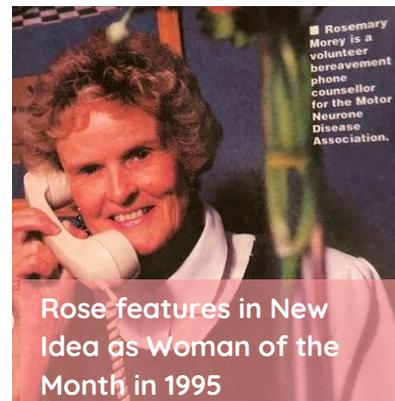
Governor Dick McGarvie honours Sandybeach on its 10th Anniversary

attended the Centre to present special awards to mark the 10th anniversary of the opening of Sandybeach. He was joined by his wife, Lesley who became the Chief Patron of Sandybeach. The same year, Dick Hamer, Chairman of the Victorian State Opera and former Premier of Victoria

opened the 10th anniversary concert series along with his wife April. Rose was nominated in 1995 for New Idea "Woman of the Month" and won \$1000 which went towards the purchase of the first Sandybeach bus.

In 2003 Bruce was awarded an OAM in the Queen's Birthday honours list for service to the Community. In 2007 Kevin Rudd used the hall to launch the election campaign for the local Labor member. George Fairfax, founder of the Victorian Arts Centre complex, filled the hall

when he spoke at one of the AGMs.



Rose features in New Idea as Woman of the Month in 1995



Receiving an award from the Governor of Victoria Dick McGarvie



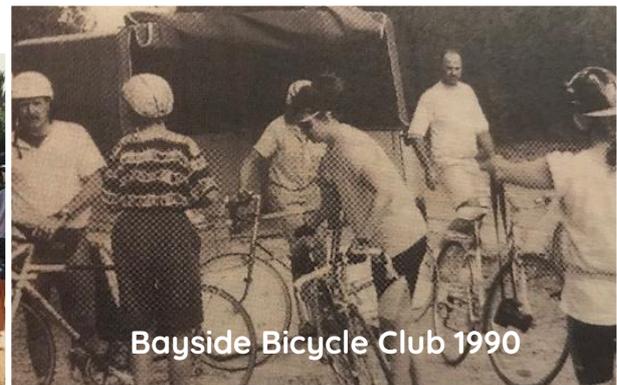
Sandybeach received an award in 1994 in recognition of their management of volunteers

CONTINUED GROWTH

In the words of Rose, “like Topsy it just grew” and during its’ initial growth period, was catering for up to 2000 people per week. It has continued to develop and grow over the years. Two current staff members have also been witness to many of the changes that have taken place over the years. Angel Parker has been at Sandybeach for 26 years and Elana Pedersen for 19 years. Today, the centre delivers 97,672 hours a year in education, volunteering, leisure, community support and assistance. Our team of drivers, drive 1,850km each year enabling people to get where they want to go and create freedom and social opportunities for those wanting to stay in touch with the community. Volunteers remain a vital part of the centre. In 2019 alone, regular volunteers accounted for 288 hours of support per week. Numerous donations and grants are received each year allowing Sandybeach to continue to meet the needs of the local community.



Walking group 1994



Bayside Bicycle Club 1990



Residential writers workshop weekend



Bruce & Rose celebrate at the 20th Anniversary of Sandybeach (Virginia Mort to the left of Bruce)

THANK YOU, BRUCE AND ROSE!!

In 2000, Bruce and Rose “handed over the mantle” but continue to be involved with the Sandybeach community and now attend weekly exercise classes with Angel. Their great grandson attended Childcare, making it four generations of Moreys involved at Sandybeach! Bruce and Rose also enjoy weekly Bridge with Joy (the third generation in her family to run Bridge at Sandybeach!), in the hall aptly bearing their name, Morey Hall.

Bruce and Rose have both said there were many times over the years they looked at each other and said “We must be mad!” We can all be very glad that they were! Sandybeach Centre is not just a place to come for knowledge or a certificate. For many, it has become a second home, a place to gather with friends, to expand the mind and to engage with the wider community. Their shared vision has been of benefit to us all and we sincerely thank them!! ❤️❤️



**Bruce and
Rose in
'Players' room
May 2020**



Stephen and Jo

Sandybeach Centre, an empowering Bayside community hub, that encourages personal and professional development through its wide open doors, friendly team and enthusiastic participants.