

Back in 2012, Wilma and Geoff Fagan celebrated their golden wedding anniversary. After growing up in the Cobden area, they have some great memories of the town and its people. Here, we follow their lives through to present day as they reflect on their own achievements and experiences . . .

PAINTING A FINE COMMUNITY COUPLE

The beginnings:

Wilma (Horan) was born at Colac Hospital. Her parents were Carpendeit farmers who cleared 124 acres of bushland with firewood being sold to the butter factories and charcoal sold for gas producers. The Horans raised eight children on that land before buying a second farm on Bungador Rd in 1959.

Town lad, Geoff was born on July 24th 1938 at the Cobden Hospital, now Heytesbury House B and B. Dad (Eric) was a builder and Mum (Alice) worked for Dr A H Barrett.

Schooling:

Wilma: I really loved Carpendeit State School 1500. I did well but was not sent to secondary school – I had to work on the farm from age 14 until I got married. This governed my prospects for future employment. The only not-so-fun part about school was walking through the water which flowed over the gravel road before there was adequate drainage.

Mum was very involved with our school and was mothers' club secretary for years – she played piano and made costumes for school concerts.



Wilma: the talented watercolour artist and volunteer

Geoff: Wonderful times at school. At Cobden State School 864, the girls and boys played sports together at recess, before and after school. From 8am, we played rounders or cricket until 9am. Wonderful memories of great teachers like Miss Morrison, Mr Elliott and Mr Gomacil.

I attended Camperdown High for four years. In hindsight, I should have stayed longer but the incentive of getting into the workforce proved greater. Wonderful sporting memories included representing the school in football against Melbourne University and opening the batting with Graham Hunter against Terang High.

Growing up:

Wilma: Our home was always busy and filled with people and music. Mum played three instruments and Dad had a great tenor voice, mum being part of Camperdown Choral Society mixed choirs. My wonderful Mum was a great cook who could make meals from very few ingredients as women of the time had to do, not being near the shops.

Geoff: Our family home was at 33 (now 29A) Silvester St. Graeme and I were home until we married while Lawrie went off to Monash Uni. He taught his whole career at Mooroopna High School before retiring as deputy principal.

Silvester St was one of the few sealed streets in town mainly because the Heytesbury Shire assisted the fire brigade to make a new running track. It was a wide bitumen street, ideal for a cricket pitch across the road – about 30 kids would be playing some summer nights.

We had some wonderful neighbours when we were young – the Gauts, the Scotts, the McCabes, the Taberners . . . some of whom are still lifelong friends. I think that, after our good and disciplined upbringing, our parents would have wanted us to be worthy community citizens.

Work from go to whoa:

Wilma: I worked on the farms, milking and doing outdoor work. We had no electricity until 1961 so it was very physical work in all seasons and temperatures. After marrying Geoff in 1962 and having three children, I did some part-time work – first at the TAB and then homecare for the Heytesbury Shire.

In 1973 we bought a very rundown milk-bar in Curdie Street (where Hampden Veterinary Clinic now sits). After much hard work and long hours, it turned out to be a good, profitable business but, with three school-age kids, it was a huge juggling feat. After selling the shop, I worked at the Cobden Newsagency before taking a secretarial position in Simpson for six years. I met some nice people from that area who I still connect with today.

Geoff: Built with Dad and Angus Peter (seven years); machine operator at Cobden Butter Factory (ten years); our mixed business (two years); E & RA Parlour and Martins' Hardware (about 40 years). I really enjoyed the years in the hardware game with wonderful employers. Overall, I feel really satisfied with my working life – I was never without a job.

Interests and hobbies:

Wilma: I enjoyed playing tennis before scoring for Cobden Cricket Club while Geoff played. I have always enjoyed music and theatre, sewing and gardening. After retiring, I took up painting, mainly watercolours. My love of this hobby has become a large part of my life. I have also painted three murals in Simpson.

Geoff: I have always been keen on having my own vegetable garden. Obviously very sports-minded from an early age, we formed a Sunday afternoon junior football competition with four teams – Tigers, Parrots, Railway Rovers and the Warriors. It was probably the first junior competition of any sort played in Cobden. The season always ended with a big finale – the Southerners versus the Northerners. My other hobbies have included fishing and table tennis.

Bringing up family:

Wilma and Geoff are justifiably proud of their three children. Born at Cobden Bush Nursing Hospital, they are living locally and proving to be much like their parents – hard-working and highly-respected citizens.

Oldest son Ashley and Debbie (Mathieson) have children Josh and Lucy, Neil married Margaret (Hose) and Kerryn and Glen Cain's children are Mia, Louis and Ruby. "We are very proud of our five grandchildren aged from 11 to 21, all making their way in the world," Wilma said.

Both agreed a taxing time was when Geoff did relieving shift work at the butter factory for ten years. He praised his wife for holding the fort during that time while Wilma was just thankful when Geoff could finally resume more 'normal' working and sleeping hours.

Both Geoff and Wilma are convinced that Cobden is an ideal place to bring up a family.

Community:

As well as volunteering on Cobden's kindergarten committee, the scouts' catering group and meals on wheels, Wilma also put in 28 years on the fire brigade ladies' committee. As co-ordinator of the Cobden Art Group for 11 years, she contributed her skills to the recent public art project selection panel.

Geoff's involvement in the CFA has been a fulfilling part of his life. "I have received much satisfaction and pride from being a volunteer for this worthy organisation and the local brigade – more than 60 years' service, 20 years as secretary," he said.



Geoff: the decorated CFA volunteer and junior coach

"The local fire brigade has been capably led over the years by my father, the late Eric Fagan, the late Bob Andrews, and the current captain Bill Nelson. I'm proud to have received top CFA awards including the Outstanding Service Award, the Queen's Medal and the National Medal . . .



Wilma and Geoff celebrated their golden wedding anniversary in 2012

"Perhaps one of the proudest and personal achievements happened when I was asked to form the Cobden Junior Fire Brigade many years ago – boys and girls from 11 to under 17. Our competition team has produced state champions and also interstate champions and our senior team won the state B-class championship at Swan Hill in 1981.

"The greatest winner out of these groups of youngsters over many years has been the community because many have become great Cobden ambassadors. Now in their adult years, some are holding notable positions – like the current Corangamite Shire mayor and senior football coach.

"Cricket-wise, I was fortunate to captain a Cobden B grade premierships team and two A grade teams into grand finals.

Also a meals on wheels volunteer, Geoff is very keen to make Lake Cobden an even better tourist attraction for the town.

Challenges:

Wilma: My greatest challenge was coping with the sudden deaths of my mother and brother Brian in a car accident in 1963. My 13 year-old sister Mary was severely injured and her recovery in hospital was slow. I was pregnant with Neil, and my time was shared between hospital visits and helping and supporting Dad and the family, the youngest being just eight. Mum was only 46 and Brian, only 20.

Geoff: Currently, my challenge is to maintain a good healthy lifestyle. As I get older, probably more exercise and careful eating habits. I'd like to keep volunteering in the community as long as possible, particularly in the fire brigade.

Recreation:

Wilma: My time spent painting and gardening is a source of satisfaction, as is following our grandchildren's progress through education and reaching their vocational and sporting goals. We both love that.

My best holiday was a 3½ week self-drive around the Apple Isle after crossing Bass Strait on the Spirit of Tasmania. I hope to return one day. I am enjoying the freedom of retirement and our annual Queensland holiday.

Geoff: I am enjoying more time in the vegetable garden, having a coffee break when I feel like it and also our longer annual holidays in Queensland during the winter months.

Not forgetting our weekends at Halls Gap, and an eight-day fire brigade trip to Western Australia in 1982 and three other fire brigade trips to Tasmania. I hope one day to enjoy a river cruise down the Rhine in Europe.

The future:

Wilma: Continue painting, being part of local art projects and keeping fit by gardening and walking.

Geoff: We both need to be ready for the process of downsizing to a smaller unit.

Cobden:

Wilma: My hopes are for our town to remain a safe and caring place to live and enjoy. It has a lot to offer with three schools, a kindergarten, many sporting opportunities, the miniature railway and our beautiful lake area. I wish for more residents to shop locally to enable the levels of employment to be stable. Our retail is vital to remain a viable community. It would also please me to see our local roads receive more funding.

Geoff: Finish the Lake Cobden project and get more to working bees. Encourage more people to shop in Cobden and keep retailers in business. Keep supporting the bus service to Camperdown. Keep pressure on politicians for better and safer roads.

COBDEN CALENDAR

- Saturday 2nd July:** 7pm Dad's Army Relay for Life Trivia Night, Miniature Railway Park. \$10 per person, tables of six. Bookings 0455 748 985.
- Monday 4th July:** 7.30pm Progressing Cobden, Heytesbury Room.
- Saturday 16th July:** 11am-3pm Cobden Kindergarten's "General Living Expo" at Cobden Uniting Church hall. Gold coin entry. Twenty party plan/stall holders.
- Monday 18th July:** 7.30pm CopRice Spring Festival committee, Heytesbury Room.
- Sunday 31st July:** 7.30am Melbourne Craft and Quilt Fair bus trip fundraiser for 1st Cobden Scout Group. Bus drop off at Exhibition Centre door. \$40 coach only. Pick up Cobden 7.30am, Camperdown 7.40am, Colac 8.05am. Leave Melbourne at 4pm. Phone Jodie 0447 943 064 for info and bookings.