

Jennifer Felicia Antoinette Bowker – Jenny to most and Grungy to her family is 80 years down and still letting the world know how it should be operating. She has shown by her life's work that she stands for the building of a more humane, just, compassionate, and democratic society across the world.

Born on the 11th January, 1944 in Madras, India. The youngest daughter of 4 with 2 younger brothers, Mum was born into a family of prodigious athletic prowess. Competing in Hockey up to Olympic level, she was told by her parents to complete school rather than pursue her Olympic dream – sorry, that was her sister. Mum somehow missed the sporting talent gene and the highlight of her sporting career was to end up on the pointy end of one of her sister's javelins during a training session.

With a father who was a Major in the British Army, the whole family travelled around India on a train with all of the troops at the back and the family in its own carriage at the front. Spending time with troops, particularly with rifle practice, gave mum a very accurate aim – a skill that was to prove useful later in life when dealing with drunk fox shooters who refused to leave the property when accosted by a rifle wielding mad woman in a nightie, but packed up very quickly with a couple of well-aimed 22 rounds at their feet.

Following the end of British rule in India, the family emigrated to England in 1961 and mum began a nursing career at Kings College Hospital, meeting many other women who have to this day remained good friends. No doubt they all perfected ways of avoiding the matrons in the boarding houses to sneak out for romantic interludes with young doctors – something that obviously worked for mum as she was able to meet a young Australian doctor, John Harley – fall in love and in marry him on the 25th November 1967. Tragedy struck only three months later when John was involved in car accident and was killed, leaving mum a widow at the age of 24. With her indomitable spirit she decided to travel overland to Australia with her good friend, Jenny Burt and headed off on the hippy trail through Europe, Afghanistan and eventually to Melbourne just before Christmas in 1969 where she stayed with John's sister, Liz.

A group headed off to Carols by Candlelight at the music bowl where a simple young country lad, Bill Bowker, was completely awestruck by this exotic Anglo – Indian older woman and fell madly in love with her. Mum wasn't that impressed. Dad must have weaved some magic and the rest, as they say, is history – well

nearly. Mum still had a world to see and fully planned on seeing it – dad obviously had different ideas. The night before Mum and her friends were due to head off, they wrestled (it has never been reported to me whether it was clothed or not) and Dad broke her arm and stopped her from leaving. His cunning plan worked, she stayed and the rest, as they say, is history.

Married at Lord Somers Camp in March 1971, two children by 1974 that they tried to bring up well adjusted (not everything she does is successful). The social mores at the time were a little rocked for some of the older White Australians, particularly when it came to the offspring – for a bit of fun, a description of me was sent around when I was born to the concerned oldies as having black skin, blue eyes and red hair.

Mum and dad were asked by my grandparents to head back to the farm in the late 70's – it was fairly run down and agriculture was terrible so the entrepreneurial spirit that they were to show from then to now kicked in. Giving students an opportunity to stay on a farm and learn a little bit about agriculture was the idea behind Kangarooobie and I think we can all agree, 45 years later, it was brilliant foresight. The impact on the roughly 250000 students that have been through the camp is immeasurable. Mum's insistence that the buildings be designed and built for wheelchair access in the late 70's was well ahead of the times. For years mum ran the farm and the camp with Kez and I strapped to the front of the tractor (or somewhere) while dad continued to lecture at Marcus Oldham to ensure the money kept coming in while the camp got on its feet. There are countless stories of calf pulling in the middle of the night in freezing rain, rescuing sheep stranded on ever decreasing parcels of land in flood waters, bogged vehicles, dead animals, sick animals, missing animals and broken fences and gates leading to all three.

Very roughly, her work life has gone something like this – mum started out as a teacher, nursing, eventually running the outpatients department at the Alfred, founder of a children's house in Deer Park, Lab assistant for dad's unfinished PHD, Farmer, camp founder and manager, initiator of the Host Farms Association and long term President, Inaugural committee member of the Camping Association of Victoria, School council President, Hospital board member, mother to many Kangarooobie kids over school holidays, chairman of the Local tourism association, Red Cross disaster coordinator, Store owner, caravan park owner, Great Ocean

Walk instigator, Lighthouse owner and for six years she was the President of the World – well the international Camping Fellowship anyway.

Despite all those roles, or possibly because of them she has managed to travel to most corners of the globe and her spirit of adventure outshines that of people many years younger than her – volunteering in African villages, drinking hash laced yoghurt drinks watching the sunrise over the Taj Mahal (apparently by accident) sitting on the mudguard of a truck up the isolated west coast of Africa, travelling from Cairo to Cape Town in a self-drive four wheel drive, trekking in Vietnam, taking a group of kids through pre Perestroika Russia, South America and visiting Antarctica are just a few of the many thousands of experiences that many only dream of.

Dad dying in 2000 left a huge hole for all of us and mum felt justifiably ripped off. The plan was for them to enjoy their grandkids together, travel and do the things they had always enjoyed. Mind you, it didn't slow her down for long and her complete revamp of this property is an incredible testament to her determination and drive to see projects through to the end. Jenny is someone who will call a spade a shovel and that spade will know damn well that it is a shovel.

Grungy's love of her grandchildren is unending and they all know that whatever they ask for they get – her love is returned in bucket loads and the kids really enjoy spending time with her – even if it is because of the loads of cash she gives them for birthdays and Christmas.

If the world is a better place because you are in it then you are a success – the number of people that mum has impacted on in a positive way in her 70 years is simply not possible to count and the number of programs she has instituted to improve local, national and international conditions is truly awe inspiring. Entrepreneurial, religious (her heathen children are a constant source of disappointment), clear thinking, an outstanding cook of curries, outspoken, loving, giving, socially aware and by all measures, incredibly successful, we love you very much and I would like to propose a toast to this incredible woman, Jenny, Grungy and my mum.