

#52 Ancestors 2020 - Week 39 - Should Be a Movie

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#52 Ancestors 2020

Week 39 Should Be a Movie

In 2014 my family made a movie.

The movie was conceived as a way of showcasing and celebrating my mother's 90 years, and it had its premiere at the party held for her birthday in December, 2014.

The idea was that, in the early months of 2014, we would take Mum to all of the significant places in her life and film her there, talking about people and events that had made an impression on her. Various family members would attend each place and hold the camera and ask the questions, although it was never difficult to get Mum to tell a story.

A large crowd of family and friends came together for the party. A huge screen was set up across the courtyard.

Then a surprise beginning. The familiar strains of the ABC's "7.30 Report" and the familiar face of its presenter, Quentin Dempster, who announced that tonight's 7.30 was showcasing the story of a remarkable woman – Gwynn Gleeson.

(My brother, Michael, had been an ABC reporter and had arranged this – it was an impressive - and very professional - start.)

From there the camera went back to scenes of Mum packing, and then taking off in the car with my sister and her husband to the sound of Willie Nelson's "On the Road Again". Off to where it all began, in Quirindi, NSW where Mum was born and grew up, and where she married in 1943.

A map of NSW showing

Mum's places

Here there were stills from her childhood and a voiceover from Michael, and then the highlight of the Quirindi section – a visit to the local picture theatre.

All of us knew the story but Mum told it again in situ. Aged about 13, she was sitting with her young sister and sniffing through “Captains Courageous” – the scene where Spencer Tracy says goodbye to the young Freddie Bartholemew - when there was a tap on her shoulder from the man seated behind her. “Is that you, Gwynne Whitten?” he asked.

“Yes, Mr Gleeson” (her new English teacher!)

“Haven’t you got a handkerchief?”

“No”

“Here, have mine”

Mum took it home and washed it and ironed it and returned it at school.

Reader, she married him.

(Six years later, after he had left town and she had left school)

Together my parents moved to Young, NSW where the first four of their six children were born. At Young, we filmed their old house and the High School where Dad had taught, and Mum talked about their neighbours and the friends of their early marriage.

On to Glen Innes, where the family moved in 1953. Here the filming was at the school where Dad taught, the school we children attended, the local swimming pool, and “the house that Bill built”

It was in Glen Innes that Margie was born in 1956.

The swimming pool featured because all of us children were keen swimmers and we knew our mother had been a swimmer but Glen Innes did not have a pool until 1955. The day it opened was a red letter day for the community and everyone turned up, eager to take the plunge. The pool was not heated, and it was October. Mum said she dived in and completely lost her breath, it was so cold! She swam to the other side, got out, and never swam in Glen Innes again.



Directing in Glen Innes

The next stage of the journey was a side trip to Brunswick Heads, where Mum and Dad had honeymooned in 1943. Then a sleepy little seaside fishing village, it is now a busy tourist town. Nevertheless, there were elements that were unchanged and she sat by the Brunswick River, opposite the famous Brunswick Hotel, and reminisced about their honeymoon and the many times she and Dad had returned here with their small children.



In 1960. Mum and Dad moved to Dubbo in the Central West of NSW where they were to live for the rest of their lives. Their youngest child, Michael, was born here in 1965. All of us grew up here and eventually left.

There were a lot of Dubbo stories.

Skilfully edited throughout the movie were video clips from my parent's 40th and 50th wedding anniversary celebrations and other short clips which indicated some of the social changes that Mum had lived through in her 90 years.

And at the end, Quentin Dempster again, wrapping up this special edition of the 7.30 Report and wishing Mum a happy birthday.

It was quite a movie.

***Mum enjoying the movie.
Gwynneth Joyce Gleeson 1924 -2018***

