

# A woman before



Catherine (middle) back in Broken Hill last week with children Oliver and Annika.  
PICTURE: Emily Roberts

## Home and away

**Annette Northey**

THIS week's column pays tribute to former Broken Hill woman, Elizabeth Riedel (nee Crowe), and explores the uncanny connection between her family and me.

My recent school holidays were spent happily hosting my dear friend from Newcastle, Catherine, who journeyed with her two children, Oliver and Annika, to explore her roots in the red earth and endless azure skies of Broken Hill.

Catherine's mother, Elizabeth Riedel, was born in Broken Hill on February 26, 1930, to Imelda (Molly) Casey and Francis Felix Crowe, and died at Marananga, Barossa Valley, on August 29, 2013.



Elizabeth's mother, Molly, was from Victoria and her father, Francis, was born in an old shack out south on Morish Street. That house still stands; on the dirt at the golf course-end of the street.

At around the age of 16, Francis secured employment at the Zinc Corporation and worked there in a HR position. When he and Molly married they purchased the house at 102 Kaolin Street - the house in which Elizabeth was born - directly opposite the olive grove at Broken Hill High School.

Francis and Molly later purchased the general store at 189 Buck Street, now a private residence, and moved the family there to live. Molly managed the store while Francis worked at ZC. When they sold the store some years later they moved into a house on Chapple Street.

While there, Elizabeth and her younger sister, Patricia, attended St John's Primary School and then St Joseph's Convent High School in Lane Street until Elizabeth was 15. Unimpressed with the nuns' approach to an intelligent and assertive female student of the day, Francis and Molly sent their two daughters off to Loreto College, a day and boarding school for girls in Adelaide.

Elizabeth flourished in her new environment and went on to attend Adelaide University from age 18-20, where she gained a Bachelor's Degree in English and Latin. At the age of 21, she attained a Dip. Ed. and took a teaching position at Peterborough High School from age 22-23. She taught English and French there. Powering on, she made the move to Mt Barker High School in the Adelaide Hills and continued to study while working as a teacher, gaining yet another postgrad qualification, this time in Library Services.

Elizabeth's independent spirit and enquiring mind gave rise to a desire to see the world - practically unheard of for a 26-year-old female in the 1950s - and so returned to Broken Hill, intent on earning as much as she could in a year or so to save for a working holiday in Europe. She moved back in with her parents and gained a position at the ZC as Technical Librarian and Research Officer.

True to her plan, in 1958 at the age of 28, money in hand, she set off for the Continent and told the family, "I might as well be going to Mars", as no one did that from Broken Hill.

She worked as a teacher in a London high school and so began her incredible adventure. I can vividly recall her telling me how when she was living in London there was a clarinettist who lived in the apartment above her and would practise all day long - the same bit over and over. That clarinettist turned out to be Reginald Kell, Principal Clarinettist in leading British orchestras, including the London Philharmonic. I can only imagine how exciting it would have been to live in a metropolis where your neighbours could have been so interesting.

A very daring Elizabeth soon purchased a Lambretta (motor scooter) in Naples and rode around Europe with her friend, Ron, a teaching colleague from Australia who could not pass up the opportunity of such an exotic adventure.

Elizabeth returned to Broken Hill late in 1959 for her sister Patricia's wedding in February of 1960.

She apparently worked back on the mines for a time and, while the history is not quite clear, reconnected with an acquaintance from her Adelaide Uni days, William Riedel. The two were eventually married at Cambridge, England, in 1963.

Bill was born in Tanunda, SA and launched an illustrious academic and research career in marine micropaleontology at Adelaide University.

His initial studious efforts gained him a Traveling Studentship in Oceanography, which in 1951 took him to the Scripps Institution of Oceanography in La Jolla (pron. "La Hoya"), California - a beachside suburb of San Diego. This led to various important research projects that included deep-sea expeditions and international research fellowships, and his ground-breaking research and publications eventually advanced him to Senior Lecturer at Scripps, where he remained until retirement in 2000.

Their first child, Catherine, was born in Broken Hill in June, 1964, and at three months

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# her time



The story published in the BDT on September 1, 1980. Catherine, second from left.

of age made the journey with her parents to the United States to be raised in La Jolla. Catherine’s two younger brothers, Philip and David, were born there, but now live in Seattle and San Francisco, respectively, with their own families.

During their many years in La Holla, Elizabeth worked at Bishop’s Private School (Years 7-12), as a teacher/librarian and then Head Teacher for 20 years.

The Riedels’ adventures were not limited to La Jolla however.

In 1977, the family moved to Lyon, France, where Bill had taken up a lecturing position at a university. Elizabeth would play a very crucial role in that career move - translating Bill’s lectures for him into French. The three children were enrolled in an ordinary French school and totally immersed in the language and culture. While based in France, the family travelled around Europe for three months in a caravan - I can think of no better education for any child.

In August 1980, Elizabeth brought the three children back to Broken Hill for their summer vacation and the BDT ran a story on Elizabeth’s visit - the town obviously proud of its daughter who had made such a wonderfully interesting and successful life for herself overseas.

A photo was taken of them on the steps of the Council Administration building. Ron Adams, pictured with them, was a friend and neighbour of the Crowes when they lived in Chapple Street.

Ironically, Catherine, at that time, was around the same age as her mother was when she left Broken Hill for boarding school.

After graduating from high school in La Jolla, Catherine gained a science degree at the University of California, Davis (UCD), and later moved back to Australia to study medicine at Flinders University, SA. She undertook her residency at various major hospitals in Newcastle, and later moved into private general practice in the same city. Philip went on to become an architect, and David, a expert financial advisor and independent researcher in emerging Asian markets, whose articles have appeared in respected financial and business magazines such as Forbes and he also worked on Wall Street for several years. The Riedels certainly do not do anything by halves.

Catherine, now a GP, and I met in Newcastle in 2000 when I came to work as a receptionist at the surgery she was working in. In the same year, Elizabeth and Bill retired and moved back to the Barossa to live in a unique architect-son-designed home.

After four years at the surgery, I left full-time

employment to take up full-time study in education at Newcastle University. Upon graduation I moved to the outback to teach at Menindee Central School. Returning to Newcastle to pursue postgraduate study myself, I rented a house that Catherine owned. Needless to say our friendship continued, but three years later I moved back to Broken Hill to work - I missed the red earth and the endless azure skies.

Since Elizabeth passed away in 2013, all three children have made the journey to Broken Hill, curious about the humble working class town that cradled their most worldly mother.

Catherine’s visit took us to Adelaide and the Barossa to visit Bill, who at 88 years of age continues to research all and sundry, and lives life to the full - not least tending the grounds and gardens that he and Elizabeth had the foresight to establish on the land they’d purchased ten years before moving back to Australia.

It’s just down the road from Seppeltsfield, and right next to the vineyard of my new favourite wine label - Greenock Creek.

Catherine, Oliver, Annika and I revelled in the drive back up to Broken Hill, taking in Elizabeth’s earliest landscapes and vistas and trying to imagine what life would have been like for her and her family back then.

We made the short detour into Peterborough and surveyed the first school that Elizabeth had taught in - Catherine on site, making a phone call to her Auntie Patricia

in Perth for some valuable commentary on her mother’s time there. It was an almost tangible journey into the past; you could hear in your mind the sounds of children laughing and the old school bell ringing its sweet, clear chime. I had a lump in my throat as we drove out of Peterborough.

That I met Catherine around the same time her parents returned to Australia; that I later moved to Broken Hill to teach in the school opposite the house in which Elizabeth was born; that I have now taken Elizabeth’s three children and six grandchildren to see the places of her childhood; that I am currently working as a teacher/librarian in Broken Hill, is simply incredible to me. The world works in mysterious ways.

R.I.P. Elizabeth Riedel - woman of substance.

*\* If any locals have memories or knowledge of the Crowe family and/or places, please contact me, as I’m sure Elizabeth’s family would appreciate any snippets.*

*Drop me a line at annettenorthey@hotmail.com or PO Box 181, Broken Hill, 2880, or call me on 0439 889 973.*

## BRIEFS

### Bottle of life

Next time you dye your hair blonde, you may just be holding a key to life on Earth in your bleach bottle.

University mathematicians believe hydrogen peroxide, the common ingredient in hair bleach, may have provided the energy source for the development of life on earth.

“Hydrogen peroxide has just enough oxidising power to cause mutations every now and then, which would drive evolution,” Australian National University associate professor Rowena Ball said in a statement.

### Drone drag

Drone owners in New Zealand will need to request permission to take-off every time they want to fly them outside their own property under strict rules unveiled by the Civil Aviation Authority.

Unmanned aerial vehicles will not be permitted to take to the sky without owner permission of the land they will fly over, and the people in that area.

This means if an aerial enthusiast wanted to fly their UAV in a local park, they’d need the permission of the council and every person at the park before taking off.

### Where you been?

Google has begun letting smartphone users automatically map where they have been.

A “Your Timeline” feature being added to Google Maps lets users see histories of trips taken and, if they also use Google Photos, see where they took images on any given days.

“We’re rolling out Your Timeline, a useful way to remember and view the places you’ve been on a given day, month or year,” Google product manager Gerard Sanz said.

“Your Timeline allows you to visualise your real-world routines, easily see the trips you’ve taken and get a glimpse of the places where you spend your time.”



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