

VALE CARMEL CHALMERS 1945 – 2019



My over inflated ego tells me I can write anything... charm a crowd... sell ice to eskimos... inspire young minds... the reality is I can do all these things because of Carmel. Those of you who know her will nod, but to actually write about my Mum, to do her justice on a page of a magazine, of Pedals especially, well, that's a challenge.

Where do I start? What do I tell you? Do I tell you that I had a school room by the time I turned three? It was in the Simpson Desert, miles from anywhere, and it had a blackboard for a door. Every morning when I woke up I would run to that door, and slide in my socks on the brown-painted concrete veranda, skidding anxiously to see what awaited me. You see, it was a magic black board. It changed every night. I would rush to see new pictures, new words, new letters or numbers, in rainbow coloured chalk, waiting for me. They just appeared out of nowhere.

Carmel would do that. She would have an idea overnight, and it would materialise out of nowhere. She got things done, drew plans, planted gardens, drafted motions (the fax paper – I remember fax paper curled up on our floor like snow), she fought battles and won. The RTC Centre in Dirranbandi is testimony to her dedication towards a cause, to her ability to thoroughly plan things from every angle and leave no stone unturned.

Mum didn't finish high school. After boarding at Clarendon in Ballarat she went back to help her Dad on the farm in Year 11. She left the sleepy little town of St Arnaud in 1965 to take up a position as a House Mistress in the boarding house at St Philips College in Alice Springs. It was there she met Dad, Cameron Chalmers. While they lived on the Plenty Highway I came along and then my brother, before our family moved to Queensland in 1982. We spend seven years in North Queensland at Maxwelton, then moved to Toowoomba briefly before choosing Dirranbandi as their

home for fifteen years.

Full circle is the way it worked, with Mum and Dad returning to the Plenty Highway in 2006, when they bought a rustic, outback tourist park, Gemtree. After a lifetime of being all for the bush, when mum got cancer we all suffered a confronting realisation. The bush is fine, until

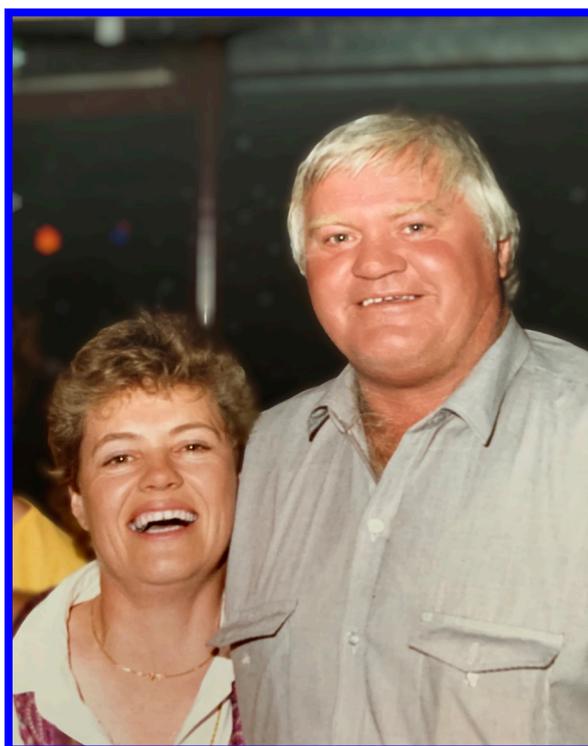
you get sick. Mum's lymphoma treatment was 1400km away, in Darwin. We all moved up here to care for her, and still we remain, proper desert rats in a tropical suburban mecca!

There was a common thread at each location in Carmel's life as a mum, and it was always ICPA. She had a passion for the bush and for its people. She embraced a challenge head on. ICPA was a vessel for instant acceptance in any community and it still is. In recent months my Dad's mailbox has been overflowing with names that I recognised instantly... from memories of conferences past and long phone calls late into the night. ICPA connections run deep and strong and the words you have all penned to us since the passing of Carmel have been a warm comfort during a sad and numbing time.

Mum was a life member (thanks to Richmond ICPA) and loved her

long stint as Federal Publicity Officer then Editor of Pedals. It's not the big roles of ICPA that moulded mum. It was the small things, the lessons learned – the peers who could word a motion that had impact and clarity and could stand and present their case to any dignitaries or parliamentarians with passion and finesse. Each year she became more confident and more well-read, meticulously versed in the issues of rural and remote families.

As a family we had our issues too, and the Special Education section was a proud feature that she introduced to Pedals in her time. She was a devoted Grandma to Will and travelled with me to even more conferences in his early years as we learned together to negotiate his needs. For



Carmel and husband Cameron at Charleville Conference in the 80's

Tom and Mac (now 14 and 11) living with Grandma has been the only life they knew. We've all been together as a family ever since they were born. Tom joked at Mum's memorial service that Mac would get a second breakfast by strolling over to Grandma's house and insisting that we hadn't fed him. They followed her journey right to the very end, and when we finally realised it was a battle that she would not win it was very difficult to comprehend. She was just so stoic. She spoke her mind, she stood solid, and for a disease to consume her slowly and relentlessly just felt so cruel and surreal.

So now that I live in a city I have stepped away from ICPA circles, but I am very familiar with your hashtag slogan... one thing I can write with absolute certainty is, #shewasICPA ... that she was. Thank you all for being there for her over the years.

Kate McMaster

From the Editor:

When Carmel passed away, I received several emails to ask if someone would write a tribute to her in Pedals.

One of those who contacted me was Helen Miller, also a former editor of Pedals. In her email Helen said,

"Carmel, Mac McClymont and I both joined Qld ICPA State Council in 1986 at Mackay. Carmel and I served on Federal and State Councils and Mac was State President, so we were a good intake. It was a great time with Carmel and I working closely together to produce the ICPA magazine Pedals with 24 issues over 6 years. Carmel and I remained firm friends and I will miss her dearly."

I had the pleasure of talking/emailing with Carmel when I was compiling the 150th issue of Pedals in December 2018. Carmel was in Darwin undergoing treatment but hoping to be home with her family for Christmas. It was wonderful to hear the ICPA story from someone so involved in the early years. It has been a privilege to follow in Carmel's footsteps as editor of and publisher of Pedals.

Raelene Hall



The late Carmel Chalmers with Jan Heaslip OAM