

## Lyn Jamieson, olive grower and processor, Fish Creek

My name is Lyn Jamieson. I was born in post-war Liverpool in northern England. I'm the fourth of five children born into a happy (and very noisy) family with Dorothy and Eric Fulstow at the helm. (No one ever spelt our surname correctly; I was destined to change it quickly!) Being fourth meant my older siblings and the brother born after me often distracted my parents.

I'd often get away with sitting quietly, hiding behind the couch after my bed time, absorbed in watching the television until the transmission finished – that's before 24-hour television came into being (the only thing 'cable' then was the stitching in my jumper).

I never dreamt that watching the Australian television series *Ten Town* was to prepare me for my future life!

It was 44 years ago and I was a 12-year-old mouse of a girl standing on a dock in Southampton carrying a small bag which contained a doll, a *Girls' Own* adventure book and a black and white spotted-dog pyjama case. My other hand was clasped by my mother as I gingerly walked up a steep gangplank onto the cruise ship *Fairstar* and embarked on an incredible adventure.

We were to emigrate to Adelaide, Australia. To start a new beginning, we were to spend five weeks of living on a ship built for entertainment, smorgasbords of foods from all nations and oh what joy, duty-free Mars Bars too!

Jersey faded away on the horizon and the world became very big as I marked our journey on a map. We cruised on the Atlantic Ocean, over the Mediterranean Sea with blue skies, sunshine, swimming in a pool and playing deck games with other emigrant children, I was in 'blue' team.

For the first time; I felt sticky heat and smelt foreign spices as we headed from Port Said along the Suez Canal and saw camels filing past on the sands only 100 yards from the canal edge.

The Red Sea wasn't red by the way, and we couldn't dock at Aden as a war was in the making.

We hit the tail-end of a hurricane on the Arabian Sea – boy that was something! Thankfully, I didn't know we weren't supposed to see the ship's stabilisers as it bucked and rolled about. Blue team won free lemonades at a dress-up pirate's party as we crossed over the equator on the Indian Ocean.

We had only an overnight stop at Fremantle aboard the ship, with sounds of a foreign city drifting in through the porthole. When we approached the dock at Port Adelaide I was so excited, asking "Where are the kangaroos?" Why aren't people riding horses? Are we in the Outback yet?" Australia – It was love at first sight.

We went to a migrant hostel in Glenelg because of the two businessmen who'd sponsored my father to work for them had done a runner while we were in transit, we'd become homeless.

Six months living through a hot summer in a Nissen hut at the tail-end of the Adelaide airport runway followed by five months at the Preston Migrant Hostel in Melbourne was a hardening experience, but a great opportunity to enjoy food made by other migrants living there, increasing my awareness of Mediterranean cooking.

Eventually Dad found steady work in Melbourne and life settled down in the south-eastern suburbs.

I soon transitioned from being a mouse of a girl attending girls-only Waterloo Park Grammar school in England to mixing it with the students at co-ed high schools in Glenelg and later Preston and Mordialloc – boy, that was a steep learning curve! Does anyone remember when computers were in computer rooms, not on desks? After leaving high school in 1970, I attended night school studying computer programming while working as a comptometist, falling for a charming musician to whom I became pregnant and married in 1972 – my name became Lyn Kneale (No one ever spelt that surname correctly either; I was destined to change it again!).

In 1976, with computing and business courses finished and two sons later, I caught and rode the wave of business computers— a world of big electronic machines, flashing lights, reading binary code and computer programming. It was fun! I had a knack for programming languages and interpreting what people needed into computer processes.

Further on, I taught programming on evenings and weekends while being the family bread-winner as a senior analyst-programmer; my husband had chosen to stay at home.

After a marriage breakdown and subsequent divorce in 1986, I immersed myself in bringing up our two sons and managing an IT department.

I'd always enjoyed cooking and living in West Footscray, had neighbours from all parts of the world, we'd swap recipes and share meals, my Italian neighbour Mrs Masese taught me all about Italian cooking.

My husband Andrew was born in Melbourne, raised in Vanuatu for his first 12 years and then boarded at Scotch College. He's very bright, gaining a BSc before going on to further study medicine and become a very busy and successful general surgeon. He and his wife Liz had raised two sons to teenage years in Surrey Hills before Liz's life was tragically cut short by cancer.

In June 1990, serendipity led me to meeting my Andrew - mix two very busy, single people, a weekend CAE course on massage and what do you have? It was love at first sight! We married in the November and blended our busy careers, families, travel and enjoyment of foods, especially Mediterranean style.

I consulted as a business analyst and was immersed in high-level management meetings until the late 1990's – by then the whirlwind life of computers was becoming faster and ever-changing, I'd had enough of IT.

At that time also, Andrew was recognised internationally as a leader in his field of surgery, and was feeling he needed to hand the reins over to a younger 'up-and-coming' general surgeon and step back.

In 1999, with our adult sons building their own lives, we felt we could be enlivened by a 'new life' and embarked on a new journey.

We had the chance to do something different – olive trees were so very different, Australian-made olive oil was becoming known; we could combine our energy, business skills, love of all-things Mediterranean and get out to the country, 10 to 20 acres would be enough! Yes, we wanted to be tree-changers!

Another passion we've shared is sailboarding, especially slalom (fast flat-water) sailboarding at Shallow Inlet (it's one of the three top spots for the sport in the world). We'd frequently stayed at Sandy Point and had become familiar with the beauty of the South Gippsland region. The region makes great wine, it should be suitable for olives! We made weekend trips to real estate agencies and tours of small farms over quite a few weeks.

One weekend, the estate agent sent us to Fish Creek to look at the view from a ridge on a slightly larger block than we'd specified.

"It's worth it!" he said.

We inspected a smallholding of 100 acres, with its gate-way in a lovely valley, gullies, gentle green rolling hills taking us up to a ridge poised at the end of the Strzeleki ranges, with views of the majestic Wilsons Promontory. It was again, love at first sight.

We bought the property without hesitation, with a mind to planting olive trees, building a new home (the existing one was only habitable by feral bees with hives in the brickwork of the chimney and walls) and producing great oil.

We took possession of 100 acres of gentle golden rolling hills in the October. We soon learnt that locals called our place Ragwort Flats! We learnt a lot that first year as every day the farm threw something new at us.

Over the next five years on a part-time basis, we learnt about and experienced all the (shocking) aspects of electric fencing, chain-sawing fallen trees and branches off of

fences for firewood and from over tracks and the driveway. Water-pipes to cattle troughs and the vegetable garden – kilometres of the stuff, all gravity-fed from a natural spring on the property – a god-send!

We had more ragwort, thistle and blackberry weeds to spray, hoe and root rake than we ever thought possible; another steep learning curve, especially on the slopes! I remember for example, we gathered over 30 grain-bags full of ragwort flowers in 2000, cutting off flower heads, hoeing out the roots. Last summer (2010) we filled three grain-bags – and are pretty sure we didn't miss any!

We learnt about soil and growing healthy olive trees to produce premium-quality varietal extra-virgin olive oils by reading, touring groves, attending workshops and expos, listening to locals, talking with experts.

Our passion was to be able to offer our customers a selection of premium-quality boutique extra-virgin olive oils, with distinctive flavours and aromas that different varieties can produce when unirrigated, grown naturally and available at its freshest! Our business Golden Creek Olives was born!

In 2000, we fenced and prepared soil in a small area and planted a trial plot of six varieties of olive trees. We monitored their growth; virtually every centimetre of height and canopy growth was recorded for the year. We deduced that most varieties did pretty well in our region and guided by an Australian expert in olive growing, we prepared the soil and fenced two acres and then planted our first 204 trees of three Italian varieties being Frantoio, Leccino and as a pollinator, Pendolino.

The following year, we planted 281 trees predominantly of the Spanish Picual variety. We took possession of a wonderful red Valpadana 4WD tractor and progressed from brush-cutting and hand-mowing around the 500 trees to using a ride-on bike with an out-front mower.

We learnt how to drive the tractor – this was also a steep learning curve, thankfully, very safely!

We also learnt that the wind we love so well at Shallow Inlet for sailboarding whips around Fish Creek and we needed to use strong stakes to support the trees. From the start, we chose to not use herbicide around the olive trees or harsh chemicals on them, it's more work but much healthier for us, the trees and subsequently, better oil.

We chip all our tree prunings and hand-weed and mulch our trees until they're five years old. We also choose to not irrigate the olive trees; the intense flavours of our oils tell us this is a good strategy. Mowing the groves and mulching the young trees minimises evaporation in summer and aids good soil health, this promotes healthy trees.

We've continued planting olive trees of oil-making varieties so can also offer the Italian Coratina, Spanish Arbequina and Greek Koroneiki varieties of oils. We are boutique olive growers producing varietal oils of intense flavour characteristics. We have more than 900 trees in the ground so far, and are still planting.

In 2002, we purchased from an Italian company called TEM, some state-of-the-art stainless-steel olive processing equipment for producing extra-virgin olive oil. We were privileged to learn how to process olives in Melbourne from an Italian-born processing expert – Gianni. He was so patient, stepping us through all the nuances (and problems!) of processing olives with his 500kg per hour machine and giving us experience with small batches of fruit with our unit. Our Olio Mio is capable of processing 100kg of olives per hour; maintaining a processing temperature of less than 30°C, with no water added in the mixing.

There is no refinement in our extraction and the meticulous cleaning of equipment after each batch we process ensures there are no 'faults' introduced. This criteria, when we combine it with hand-picking healthy fruit at their optimal point of maturation and processed as soon as possible after picking, enables us to achieve a truly extra-virgin olive oil product.

On farm, we process olives for about 20 other growers within 100km from us; we've a loyal group of growers who like what we do for them. All the waste from processing is taken to a nearby farm and mixed in with the feed to dairy cows. We bottle our own oil and apply the labels manually – boutique in every sense of the word!

We submit some of our oils to the Australian Olive Association for Australian Certification – it offers us a high level chemical analysis and proves it's the genuine material. We won a bronze medal for the first oil we submitted to the annual Australian EVOO competition last year.

We strive to produce a premium product. We've harvested three tonnes of fruit from our trees this year – they're maturing in age and flavours. We believe we capture the essence of our region – it's what's in the bottles that tell our story!

We also committed to fencing our gullies from cattle and now have three areas preserved, enabling remnant vegetation to emerge and planting indigenous trees and shrubs to improve the water catchments of Battery Creek Reservoir and develop bird, butterfly, frog and native-animal habitats on the farm. The resident wombats seem to approve!

Three years ago, we took on an apprentice, a young Fish Creek boy, encouraging him to complete a three-year traineeship in horticulture and learn all the skills of grove management and olive processing. He's been a great source of energy for us, possibly an equal amount of amusement for him.

We've designed and had built by local builders, a very comfortable house that's a welcoming home to us and our family when they visit. Our sons and their families compliment our lifestyle (they don't always see the hard work put in to achieve it!). We savour the time we enjoy with the grandchildren both on-farm and at their homes as a treat away.

Our kelpie Richie (a Lost Dogs' Home rescue) is a delightful companion. He's very brave with the steers on our place, as long as they're on the other side of the fence! We still sailboard, of course, and find the time to use the rail trail for my cycling and race-walking training for Andrew (on a world masters' athletics champion level).

Our sense of community has broadened considerably since we moved into Fish Creek. We've been fortunate to have made great friendships, been active in the local community choir and amateur drama association, Landcare, bird observers club, fund-raising community projects.

Andrew operates three mornings per month in two local hospitals – locals appreciate being able to have procedures done close to home. We feel we belong here.

We're happy city slickers converted to protecting remnant vegetation and planting indigenous trees, making olive oil and becoming members of a vibrant, stimulating and healthy community.

**So who am I?** I'm a product of my background – a mouse of a child on an incredible adventure.

A daughter, wife, mother and grandmother, an early- retired computer business woman; an olive grower and processor.