

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE4819

Galvin, Carmel

(1937 -)

Born 28 September, 1937, Sydney New South Wales

Occupation Business owner

Details

Carmel Galvin was born in 1937, the only daughter of Jessica Dodd and Ted Mabbut, a New South Wales detective. Her mother refused his offer of marriage and courageously decided to raise her daughter herself. Her family disowned her – this was normal for the time. She was not abandoned by Mabbut, who remained a friend and confidant until his death.

She was brought up by her mother and attended St Josephs School in Sydney. Her mother supported them both, at a time when there was no Centrelink. Although trained as a concert pianist, there was little work of this type available here in Australia, and she did orchestrations for other musicians, some work as a pianist with the A.B.C. and between times washed dishes in a cafe. In those days, everyone at the ABC dressed formally, and even though she was unseen, she still had to dress grandly as she performed – sometimes the cheque was less than the cost of the dress.

Carmel started at Dyecraft at the age of sixteen, this was a section of Prestege, the stocking people and was in the laboratory where they tested colours and selected the ones that would be popular for that season. She married Frederick Galvin three years later, and they had one daughter. Frederick died suddenly of a heart attack ten years later.

Six years further on, Carmel met Walter, and it was as if they had known each other forever. They dabbled in real estate, and at one time bought a boat hire business in North Queensland. Having sold that, they retired to the Gold Coast. Walter died in 1991, and after his death, Carmel, who was feeling very depressed, went to her doctor, and said “I think my hormones need adjusting”. Her doctor told her, ‘There’s nothing the matter with your hormones, get out and DO something with your life’. So, Carmel got all the newspapers with the businesses for sale, but found the only ones that looked interesting had the words, ‘has potential,’ which means they are not making any money.

A few weeks later, she got an anonymous letter with a cutting from the Australasian Post, that said that Marlene, one of the Madams in Kalgoorlie, wanted to sell her galvanised iron brothel. And the rest is history.

She began her career during the containment policy for brothels in Western Australia and has seen many changes in the sex industry. The brothel building remains true to its original design, as Carmel has a commitment to the history of the institution and its function in Kalgoorlie society.

Carmel continues to work as the brothel madam of the Questa Casa while also conducting tours of the premises for visitors to Kalgoorlie.

Published resources

Resource

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Site Exhibition

Karlkurla Gold: A History of the Women of Kalgoorlie-Boulder, Crieda Fitzgerald and National Foundation for Australian Women, 2012,

<http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/wikb/wikb-home.html>

Archival resources

National Library of Australia, Oral History and Folklore Collection

Carmel Galvin, interviewed by Crienda Fitzgerald [sound recording]

Author Details

Crienda Fitzgerald

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Digital resources



Title: Brothel Madam Carmel Galvin outside Questa Casa, Hay Street, K

Type: Image

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