

Patricia O'Donnell, has lived an interesting and fortunate life. She grew up in Australia's post World War 2 "lucky generation" as the middle daughter in a family of three girls. Her Italian mother's heritage led to an interest in restaurants and hospitality. One of Melbourne's most famous Italian restaurants Mietta's, was named after Patricia's younger sister. The relationship between Trish and her sister was very significant as Trish partnered with her older sister in her career as a restaurateur, and offered help and her advice as well as running her own hotel and restaurant hotel business called the Queenscliff Hotel for 20 years. Trish never hesitated to help people, as well as making a name for herself in many different ways. Trish's story began with a loving family and a cosy beginning.

Patricia Maria O'Donnell was born on the 27th November 1945, in the Mercy Hospital in East Melbourne. Her father, Donald O'Donnell, was an



A portrait of Maria with her brothers and her pet greyhound



Trish's grandparents, Maria Teresa and Mario Vigano

industrial chemist who went on to start a business with my great grandfather Bon Seaforth, making surface coatings. Patricia's mother, the late Maria Fernanda O'Donnell, was mainly a restaurant manager throughout her working life. Trish had two sisters, Mietta and Robyn, and was the middle child in her family. Trish's family originated in Italy, where Maria and her family were born. Maria and her family were sponsored to come to Australia in 1928, and have happily lived here ever since. The Vigano family were not allowed to bring any money to Australia. Maria never hesitated to illustrate what life was like in Italy to Trish, although they have never both been in Italy at the same time. Maria also always put her children's needs before her own, as is clearly evident in Trish's childhood.

One of Trish's earliest memories was located in

Kerferd Road, Glen Iris, which was the first house where she lived just after she was born. At this stage, the O'Donnell family had moved in with Don's parents, as Don himself had gone to Britain to fight in the second World War. Trish was riding around on the steepish driveway creeping down to the road on her tricycle, dressed in a pleated tartan skirt, a calico bodice, and a navy blue jumper on top, which was apparently the trend in the early 1950's. She was pretending that she was Biggles, an old cartoon war-plane fighter, navigating the perilous airspace above Europe.

Trish attended Sacre Couer College in Glen Iris right through from when she was four years old in first grade. With her mother being Catholic, Trish's father Don had to promise to raise Catholic children, and so sent their daughters to the international school of the sacred heart. She described her schooling as "...very lucky, I thoroughly enjoyed my schooling. I went quite young, I started first grade at four and therefore finished quite early... I felt very well looked after." Her school was a much smaller school at that stage, but Trish has enjoyed watching its development into becoming one of the biggest schools in Melbourne.



The cathedral at the school Trish attended, Sacre Couer.

Trish can remember being dropped off by her mother at the front gate of the primary school, before becoming independent and catching the tram to Burke Road in senior school. The teachers' utensils mainly consisted of a black board and chalk, which is a far cry from the interactive whiteboards and bluetooth that are used regularly in my

classroom. She never really had a favourite teacher in particular, although her favourite subjects were probably English and History, or the “humanities line” as it used to be known, as she thoroughly enjoyed reading and writing as a child.

She can remember being awarded a general exhibition for being in the top 20% of the state, and also the Julia Flynn Prize, for being the top Catholic student in the whole of Victoria. Trish can remember all the pride when she was elected as a senior prefect in her year, and the amount of times she lost the blue sash that you wore across your body when elected a prefect. She can remember getting bored up the back of the classroom and just reading a book, but never being overly disruptive.

She had so much fun at school as a child, as is clearly evident when she often went exploring through her historic campus, often trying somewhat unsuccessfully to enter the nun’s quarters. Trish felt very well looked after all through her schooling, which set her up well for the next stage of her life. When asked about the biggest change in schooling now to when she attended, Trish believes that one of the biggest things that has changed in education would be, “that teachers now look a lot more about the social wellbeing of each individual student. Having electives is also a big change, and having a wider range of subjects to choose from.” She believes technology is, “still a tool in schools. Most textbooks are now stored on the laptop, meaning that you don’t have to lug around heavy textbooks. You also now have access to a much wider range of resources.”

Patricia started school a little early as a four year old and therefore finished quite early as a 16 year old. Trish then went travelling to Italy between school and university. She attended Melbourne University and studied arts and history honours for four years. Soon after she went travelling again, taking four years off to explore various parts of Europe, Greece, Africa and Turkey. Her first job was teaching Year 8 boys at the Marist Brothers School in North Fitzroy. She taught grammar and parsing and analysis, which included the history of words. There were 40 boys in the class, and Trish remembers it being very old fashioned in its teaching methods. She was quite lucky as she was not a qualified teacher at this stage, and so she left and had professional teacher training before returning to the school to teach creative writing and group discussions.

As a child, Trish had a loving and caring upbringing. Her favourite toy was a little white wooden horse , which looked like her mother Maria’s favourite hunting horse called Una. She can remember competing for the toy with her

older sister, and also when she was getting her tonsils out, Maria brought Una to help comfort her through her stay in hospital, igniting another fight between Trish and Robyn over the wooden horse. At home, she probably enjoyed reading the most as a child, although she can remember enjoying some knitting with her grandmother Flodie as well.

She used to love going to the theatre. Maria was actually friends with the owners of His (now Her) Majesty's theatre, and so she used to be invited to all the opening nights. Her family saw a lot more theatre than movies because her little sister often used to get sick from the moving pictures, although this was not much of a disappointment as Trish probably did tend to enjoy movies a little bit more. She can remember going to the cinemas a lot with her friend on a Saturday morning, where they had a program to show you what would be screened on that day. Patricia enjoyed a very fortunate childhood, with many privileges going her way.

Pat's family enjoyed many luxuries including one of the first dishwashers in Australia, a fridge, radio and radiogram, and a vacuum cleaner. She particularly loved the radio, as at dinner time the family used to sit down in the dining room and listen to "...serials which were like shows about detectives and things, which I thought were completely fantastic." Her parents were marginally strict with her, particularly around table manners and just general politeness.

Her family had a general rule when having someone for dinner, which was that: "...all the children had to stay in the breakfast room...to hone our manners to an acceptable standard, and we weren't allowed through this door into the dining room until our manners were impeccable, we could greet guests properly, and we could conduct a conversation... with a handshake, and a curtsy for the women." Trish can also remember the dish washer in her kitchen, and one of her jobs was to stack the dishwasher, which she said you "really had to clean before you put it in." Trish thoroughly disliked doing that particular chore.

The house in which Trish was born in was in Kerferd Road, Glen Iris, although she spent most of her childhood growing up in Merriwee Crescent in Toorak. She can recall the house having very good lighting, and having both a fireplace and gas heating. They relied mostly on the fireplace, and she remembers the routine around taking out the wood and sweeping the floor of the fireplace.

In terms of technology, Trish's house had a modern dishwasher and a vacuum cleaner, although her father did not want a television to be in their house until, "we had all finished our secondary schooling." Although, the O'Donnel's neighbour did have a TV, and so Trish



The house Trish used to live in at Kerferd Road

can recall jumping the side fence to watch some of her favourite shows. Technology did not have a huge effect on the Italian family's restaurant business, as Technology "...never really changed the types of kitchen appliances that they used, more just upgraded them." It was not until there were computerised tills and you could order your meal over the phone, where technology did make a noticeable effect. The biggest change in technology over the course of Patricia's life would be that "...nowadays, people are contactable and photographable 24 hours a day, and your location is now accessible for anyone to track anywhere at any time." Technology may not have had a huge effect on restauranteering until the late 2000s, but one thing that it has affected would have to be transport.

Transport definitely played a very important role in Trish's life. Her mother and father both owned a car, her mother a Hillman and father a Ford Falcon. She can remember being driven to primary school by her mother, before taking the tram later in secondary school. Before she owned a car, Trish would take the tram everywhere, before inheriting her mother's car after she got her drivers licence. She can recall her first car as, "very good for a first driver like myself." The biggest change in all types of transport would be that, "no-

one really drives geared cars anymore, as they are all automatic.... There are so many more protection features on a car now,... cars today would have to be at least 500 times safer than my first car.”

Another crucial part in Trish’s life revolved around clothing. She can recall wearing overalls and gumboots when going outside, and for just normal clothing she wore some embroidered dresses which her grandma made up for her when she was about four or five. She can also remember wearing a little woollen dress with Peter Pan collars which her grandma embroidered, as well as kilts with calico tops and jumpers. She wore Catenlither shoes, which were the Mary Janes of back then, although she mostly wore gumboots or normal brown shoes. How clothing has changed would be, “The big difference now would be all the stretchy fabrics ... until the 60s everyone dressed like gypsies... people don’t wear uncomfortable clothes anymore, because of the stretchy fabrics.” Clothes have certainly changed a lot from Trish’s generation to now, but another thing that has changed a lot in many areas would be food.

Throughout her childhood, Trish enjoyed a huge range of food that she consumed, both from the Italian side of the family and just plain Australian foods. For breakfast, Trish remembers enjoying some cottled eggs with lots of butter, or some porridge with stewed rhubarb. For lunches at school, Trish can remember usually having a packed lunch consisting of fruits and vegetables and also a sandwich, or going to get some tucker from the tuck-shop on special occasions. For dinner, Trish can remember having lots of liver, brains and chops. Her grandmother, Flodie, did most of the cooking, and was an excellent plain Australian cook. Flodie left an entire box full of her recipes, which Trish will use as a reference when cooking something in the kitchen. Although Maria owned and ran multiple restaurants, she was actually not a very good cook herself, and neither was Trish. “... no-one really taught me how to cook, and I’ve never really had any interest in it to be honest... I know how to cook Anzac biscuits and maybe toffee, but that would probably be my only repertoire.”

For special occasions, Trish can always remember going to her Italian grandparent’s house to enjoy some traditional Italian food. She also always used to spend Christmas at the same house, and she can recall her Aunty Rona always cooking the Italian plum pudding, or “Pannetonne”. Trish remembers a tradition associated with the plum pudding, and that was to cook the plum pudding with some coin inside them. “... because before we they changed the material that the coins were made out of, the coins were not poisinous, and so we used to cut a slice of plum pudding and it was

always so much fun seeing who could get the most coins in their one slice... some families used to keep their silver coins just to put in the plum pudding". For her birthday, her favourite cake was an Italian and French cake called Mille fois, which means 1000 leaves in French and Italian. It included custard cream and chocolate between pastry layers. She didn't have many sweets, although her favourite lollies included Fantails and Minties, as she loved reading the stories about movie stars on the covers the fantails. When asked about the biggest difference in preparing a meal now than when she was a child, Trish had no hesitation in answering with the microwave and the convection oven, because, "as well as temperature and heat, you also have lots of air swirling around, which makes the cooking a little bit easier."



Trish's whole Italian family gathered at the farm in South Morang. Trish is on the bottom row, second from the right.

When on holidays, Trish can always remember spending her's at her grandparent's farm located in South Morang. Her grandparents bought the farm and recreated a "...more genuinely Italian world than the restaurant itself." They planted vegetables and flowers, and housed chickens, dairy cows, horses and pigs. They all spent school holidays at the farm, and Trish can also recall

being evacuated out to the farm because of the polio epidemic occuring. She can also recall once being rushed out of school when it snowed to enjoy the traditional Italian treat where you mixed a bowl of snow with red wine sugar. Trish has very fond memories of her frequent stays at the farm, although for Christmas and over summer holidays the family used to go to Long Island in Frankston, where they hired houses with summer huts on the beach, which enabled you to spend entire days on the beach.

One of Trish's family's many claims to fame would have to be their restaurant business. The Viganos arrived in Melbourne in the winter of 1928, before the post World War 2 mass migration expanded the Italian population in Melbourne and the amount of Italian restaurants that emerged in the city mainly located in Spring, Bourke, Lonsdale and Exhibition Streets. The Italian restaurateurs were all mainly located in this area, and so they helped each other build their amateur restaurants to become some of the most successful businesses in Melbourne. Trish's family were heavily involved in this, and started many of their own restaurants such as Mario's, The Queenscliff Hotel, The North Fitzroy Star, and Mietta's. Mario's, owned by Trish's grandfather Mario Viganos, started as quoted from Mietta's book: "Mietta's Italian Daily Recipes": ... Mario's started in a small dining room in the Melbourne Club Hotel on the corner of Little Bourke and Exhibition streets, opposite the His (now Her) Majesty's Theatre. The food was simple Italian, with a daily three course menu... Chefs were all Italian and waiters were European... Good food, good service, singing waiters and my grandparents social skills saw Mario's become a famous cultural haunt..."

Tony Knox, Mietta O'Donnel's partner, and Mietta opened Mietta's in North Fitzroy with a BYO permit and a menu containing dishes from all different parts of the world. The menu changed weekly, which was extremely different to what most restaurants were offering at the time. Mietta: "... refused to listen to my mother's advice and was determined not to copy anything or anyone else. We wanted to be a different restaurant and certainly different to my grandparents's restaurant."

The restaurants that Trish was mainly involved with were The North Fitzroy Star Hotel and the Queenscliff Hotel. She ran the Queenscliff Hotel for 20 years which included a restaurant, Mietta's. She then bought the North Fitzroy Star Hotel, which was an excellent representation of how good she was at restoring old pubs and hotels into modern restaurants. Trish also was on the board of the State Library, and also the Abbotsford Convent near the Collingwood Children's farm, where she saved the beautiful building from developers planning to build a block of apartments.

Trish's life has been very significant because of all her achievements and everything she has contributed towards society. Patricia never hesitated to stand up for whatever she thought was right, while still being happy to play second fiddle in order to help others succeed. She made an important contribution to the development of notable restaurants in Victoria, as well as

cultural institutions. The thriving State Library and the precinct at Abbotsford Convent are valuable legacies. Trish was a bee to utilise her Italian heritage in her working career in restaurants. Trish is admired by many people, especially for the care she gave to her mother, Maria O'Donnell, who benefited from being involved in Trish's restaurant, until the North Fitzroy Star was sold in 2010.

Maria very sadly passed away just before this project in April 2017, aged 99.

The Biography of Patricia O'Donnell



*Written by Lachie Tulloch
in year 8, 2017*



