

NEVIS MARGERY TYLER WORBOYS

Heather Smith



Photo courtesy of the Worboys family.

When my sister Nevis Worboys, along with three other women, Joan Sookee, Dorothea Lamerton and Heather Gow, was elected as an Alderman to Blacktown Municipal Council in September 1974, the *Blacktown Advocate* ran a photograph of the women and labelled them “Pioneers” of the Blacktown District.

Born Nevis Margery Tyler Watson on 15th June 1938, Nevis was the second of three girls to Margery and George Watson. Our father was a butcher in Camden who took up dairy farming. At the outbreak of the War he and his two brothers joined the AIF, leaving our mother to run the farm and look after three small daughters. It was then that she decided to move to Riverstone where her parents, William and Mary Morgan, were Licensees of the Royal Hotel (now demolished).

We attended Riverstone Public School then continued our high school education as boarders at Claremont College, Randwick. Nevis became a Dental Nurse in Parramatta until she married Patrick Worboys in December 1958. She then attended Granville Technical College for three years and studied sewing and dressmaking, a skill she maintained all her life.

Strong females predominated in our family. Although we did not go out to work, we were always encouraged to pursue community work.

In an interview with a local paper after being elected Nevis paid tribute to her family’s influence. She stated, *I guess it’s because my family, who have been associated with the Riverstone district for over 30 years, have always been interested and involved in community affairs. My grandfather William Morgan was President of the Newcastle Branch of the Australian Labor Party for many years before moving to Riverstone. He was a member of NSW State Parliament in the ill-fated Jack Lang Government and later Chairman of the State Conciliation Committee. My uncle was President of the Postal Worker’s Union, my father George Watson is President of the Riverstone Bowling Club, my mother Marge Watson is the International officer of Riverstone CWA, my aunt Perth Morgan is President of the Original Old Age and Invalid Pensioners Association and my sister Heather Smith is President of the Riverstone Netball Club as well as President of the Mothers’ Club.*

Nevis was always keenly interested in local causes, being a Justice of the Peace, Treasurer, Coach and player with Riverstone Netball Club, a member of Riverstone Parks' Committee and the Riverstone Mothers' Club.

In 1974, with Blacktown Council in disarray due to rumours of corruption, the State Government threatened to bring in an Administrator to run it, so an election was hastily called. Nevis, at the age of 36 and mother of two small children, Matthew 10 and Luke 7, was approached to run as No.3 on a ticket of Independents for Ward 1 led by William "Bill" Smith, Marsden Park, and Alan Watton of Riverstone.

Nevis' campaign was strictly a family affair run by friends and relatives, mainly women. The general opinion was that a woman running as No.3 on an Independent ticket would have little or no chance of success. Money was short and most of it went on printing "How to Vote" leaflets so Ward 1 was inundated with women pushing strollers, accompanied by older children on bicycles, knocking on doors and handing out pamphlets. When I look back on our endeavours they were very amateurish compared to nowadays, but we got our message through with our "How to Vote" pamphlets.

Although Riverstone was a strong Labor orientated town, their loyalty to one of their own paid off. Voters in Ward 1 voted strictly to the ticket. Nevis' Primary Vote, plus the preferential votes handed down to her from Bill and Alan, was successful not only as a "long shot", but also a woman to boot being elected to Blacktown Municipal Council. It has always been a claim by our family that Nevis was the first woman elected to the Council. That night we waited on the lawn outside the Council chambers. When the Electoral Officer started reading out the successful campaigners Nevis' name was the first female name called out. Riverstone had been without representation on the Council for many years. Once Nevis was sworn in local residents beat a path to her door in Castlereagh Street, Riverstone.

Nevis' first term of three years was an experience. Her second term, commencing in 1977 was a much more difficult kettle of fish as Bill Smith and Alan Watton had decided not to contest a second term. This time she was an Independent woman battling a strong Labor push, especially in Ward 1 where Ken Roberts, whom she had beaten in the 1974 elections, decided to stand against her again. Her hard work over the past three years had made her very popular in Ward 1 and once again family and friends rallied around.

Her husband Patrick, sons Luke and Matthew and the rest of our family manned Polling Booths, acted as Scrutinizers and handed out "How to Vote Tickets" in the boiling sun. Once again she was successful with her Primary Vote. This time she was No.1 on her ticket. Again her supporters voted strictly to the ticket, but she was unable to bring home her running partners. Dorothea Lamerton in Ward 5 was the only other woman on the Council for this term.

In a large Council like Blacktown it is difficult to attribute any one success to a lone Independent woman. Following the 1977 elections Labor Aldermen, led by the Mayor John Aquilina, dominated the Council. Because she was an Independent she was looked to for advice from many of the newly elected Councillors. She formed a strong friendship with John Aquilina as well as State Member of Parliament Kevin Rozzoli and Federal Member Allan Cadman. She was appointed as representative on the Local Government Council and served on the Finance Committee.

Nevis never sought recognition for herself; she only wanted recognition for Riverstone. She declined to have Streets or Parks named after her. She was instrumental in having streets in Riverstone kerbed and guttered, and public tennis and netball courts constructed.

When she wanted to ban the selling of alcohol at football games where young people were playing, a group of protesters packed the Chambers at a fiery Council meeting and accused her of indulging in a worse habit, smoking. When she spoke she agreed to give up smoking and the Council banned the selling of alcohol at Junior Football games. She never touched another cigarette.

She also campaigned successfully against the abolition of Rural rating which would have added a greater financial burden on the large number of market gardeners in her Ward.

Not so successful was the campaign against the building of Parklea Prison. She and the residents of Ward 1 held a two week long vigil protesting about the prison. On the final Saturday, police were ordered to break up the protesters. As they moved in, Nevis, her youngest son Luke (11) and Quakers Hill Parish Priest Father Bartholomew Cullose jumped up on top of a shipping container, urging the protestors not to move. With that the police closed in on them, ordered them down for trespassing then placed them in the back of the 'paddy wagon'. As they were being driven to Blacktown Police Station Nevis pinned her Alderman's identification badge to her dress and Fr. Cullose placed his gold crosses on his shirt collar.

Twenty five years later her son Luke recalls them being unloaded at the rear of the Police Station and the consternation they caused. He was brought out first. The Sergeant looked at the Constable and asked, "What are you doing arresting kids?"

Next to come out was Nevis. The situation became even more strained when the Sergeant, very red in the face, exclaimed, "What on earth are you doing arresting the Lady Alderman?"

He could hardly speak when the next prisoner to appear was the local Parish priest. He spluttered, "My God you've arrested the local priest. What's going on down there?"

After much discussion it was decided that they would proceed by way of a Summons and the three of them were released, much to the cheers of the waiting spectators. They never were charged over this matter.

Nevis was a strikingly attractive woman with excellent features, dark curly hair and brown eyes. Her motto in life was "If you can't do something with a willing heart don't do it at all." She had the ability to analyse a complicated problem and then offer a simple solution. She was never too busy to listen to anybody's problem. If she could not solve it she would make sure that they would be put in touch with somebody who could.

In 1993 at the age of 56, Nevis was diagnosed with ovarian cancer. She passed away in January 1994 and was buried in Pine Grove Cemetery. She was survived by her husband Patrick and two sons Matthew and Luke.

This article was written by Heather Smith, Alderman Nevis Worboys' sister, for our Journal and a booklet called "Rediscovered: some notable women of the Blacktown district", published by Blacktown City Council for International Women's Day 2006.