

The Olympics

Vilma Ryan and Judith Lewis

Riverstone resident Vilma Ryan was an Olympic Torchbearer and her grandchildren Ben and Reannon were dancers in the 'Awakening' section of the Opening Ceremony. Vilma and Reannon shared some of their memories with Judith Lewis at the 'Olympics Revisited' display at the Blacktown Bicentennial Museum one year after the Olympics. (Editor)

I ran with the Olympic Flame along the Great Western Highway at Eastern Creek. I was in the same group as Schofields' Melissa Bushby and was about two runners later than Melissa.

It was a bitterly cold morning and on the bus I was rugged up in a coat to keep warm. Being an aboriginal Australian I was determined to run barefooted. When I took off my coat and shoes I was absolutely freezing, but the moment I saw the Olympic Flame the cold completely left my body and I felt really comfortable.

My family and friends were lining the road cheering and waving the aboriginal flag and it was an exhilarating feeling being part of something so special. I had been determined to run with the aboriginal flag as well as the torch. On the bus I had hidden the small flag in my bloomers and I had to sit up very straight so that the stick wouldn't poke into me! When I saw the Flame I managed to extricate the flag from its hiding place and carry both the flag and the torch at the beginning of run but an official soon took it from me.

I work at Evans High School and was able to organise eleven students from Evans High, including my grandchildren, Reannon and Ben Gimbert, to be part of the dancers in the 'Awakening' section of the Opening Ceremony. The other Evans' students were Millicent and Cheryl Dodds, Ben and Rebecca Nelson, Linda and Michelle Smith, Venus Murphy, Lila Rogers and Lisa McGuinness. Reannon's mother, Joanne, coordinated getting the students to the Ceremony. Reannon said the dancers had to attend about 30 rehearsals, at Bankstown, Schofields in the airship's hangar, and at Homebush. Reannon recalls the Opening Ceremony as a great experience.

I have very fond memories of my part in the Olympic Torch Relay, such a special event, which united the country in a manner it has not witnessed before in peacetime and which set the standard for the days that were to come, when Australia staged the

greatest ever Olympic Games.