The Australian
Women's Register

Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE4004

De Franceschi, Barbara

(1940 -)

Born	19400101, Broken Hill New South Wales Australia
Occupation	Community advocate, Poet

Summary

Barbara De Franceschi was awarded the OAM for services to the Broken Hill migrant community. She has two published poetry anthologies.

Details

Like both of her parents, Barbara was born in Broken Hill. Her father, Keith, was chief clerk at the Broken Hill and District Hospital. Until she was seven, Barbara and her parents lived in South Broken Hill next door to her grandparents, and Keith commuted to work by bicycle. Barbara attended the Alma School and, when the family moved north, the North Public School. With a Methodist father and a Catholic mother, there was some dispute over her secondary schooling. It was eventually agreed that she would attend St Joseph's Convent. On leaving school, Barbara worked as a secretary for Czech medical practitioner Dr. Ronai. A kind-hearted but stern man, on his hospital rounds 'he'd stomp down the passageways puffing his cigar', Barbara remembers, 'and the nurses would tremble'.

By the late 1950s Barbara was a regular attendee at Broken Hill's Italian Club dances. There she met Giacomo (Jack) De Franceschi, and she married him in February 1960. Though Broken Hill had a well-established migrant population incorporating Yugoslav, Italian, Greek and Maltese communities, Barbara's father was somewhat wary of this 'new Australian', but he quickly warmed to Jack and came to see him as the 'golden head boy'. As young men, the De Franceschi brothers – Jack, John, Cesare, and later Dino – had taken daily English lessons and established a business in Thomas Lane, Broken Hill, doing joinery, carpentry and cement work. In 1965 they were awarded the contract to build railway bridges along the Adelaide Road and Barbara accompanied her husband along with her first two children, Anthony and Liam. For eighteen months, living first in a converted bus and then in an isolated hut, Barbara managed to cook regular meals for her own family and up to seventeen men. Back in Broken Hill, she and Jack were spending weekends making bricks and building a family home. They worked on the house for seven years before finally moving into it in 1968.

Jack had been one of nine children, while Barbara was an only child and was keen to have a large family of her own. They had five children in all: Anthony, Liam, Dienna, Kristen and Sheridan. In 1971 the family made the journey to Italy to revisit Jack's family and birthplace. The De Franceschi brothers in Broken Hill remained in business together until 1987. Jack and Barbara subsequently bought an earth-moving business which they named Piave Sand and Earthmoving after the river that flowed through Jack's home town in Italy. From the time of her marriage, Barbara was involved with the Italian Community Club (later the Italo-International Club) and surrounded by the stories of the Broken Hill migrant community: 'it's their history, and it's Broken Hill's history', she says. In 2000, she instigated the formation of a group to help preserve these stories and the Migrant Heritage Committee was born. With the help of her committee, Barbara conducted a five year campaign for funding and found support from the Community Relations Commission, the Migrant Heritage Centre of New South Wales, and the Broken Hill City Council. Local historian Christine Adams was employed to research and produce her book, *Sharing the Lode*, and a migrant heritage museum was installed in Blende Street as part of the Railway Museum.

In recognition of her work Barbara received an Australia Day Citizenship Award in 2001 presented by Broken Hill City Council and subsequently on the Queen's Birthday in 2002 she was awarded an OAM for her services to the community particularly in the area of multiculturalism.

From the year 2000, Barbara also began to take more seriously her lifelong love of literature and writing. A number of poems were published in a local anthology, and she received a call from Adelaide editor Geoff Sanders to join his writers' group. With guidance from Geoff, Barbara went on to perform and publish her poetry in many different forums. Today she has two published anthologies – *Lavender Blood* and *Strands* – and her readings have been broadcast on ABC Radio National's *Poetica* program. Her work has appeared in literary journals, newspapers, anthologies and e-zines in five different countries. With Geoff Sanders and Alan Duffy, Barbara belongs to the poetry performance group, the Silver-Tongued Ferals.

Published resources

Book
Lavender Blood, De Franceschi, Barbara, 2004

Sharing the Lode: The Broken Hill Migrant Story, Adams, Christine, 2004

Strands, De Franceschi, Barbara, 2009

Site Exhibition
Unbroken Spirit: Women in Broken Hill, Australian Women's Archives Project, 2009,
http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/bh/bh-home.html

Resource
Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Archival resources

Private Hands (these records may not be readily available)
Interview with Barbara De Franceschi

Author Details
Barbara Lemon

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