

Elaine West

Retiree, 73,
Alexandra Hills

Interview LEANNE EDMISTONE

If you follow numerology, I'm a number five, which means to keep the past alive. I'm a real history buff and love writing. I like personal history, when you read and marvel at how people did things so many years ago. I'm a firm believer in writing these stories down, because if you don't, it's gone forever. I've done my family history, Pullen Pioneers, a 300-page book on 12 lines of the family and 150 years on Australian soil. I've got husband Mike's, 75, family history to do yet. There are so many books to write and not much time.

I worked with Blue Care for 23 years in various roles, including eight to 10 years here at Blue Care Nandeebie, mainly in financial roles. As a staff member I went to quite a few funerals and would hear eulogies of all the wonderful things our residents did or places they went. I always thought, "I wish I knew that, I could have talked to them about it".

That's where the idea for my book, Nandeebians of Note, a collection of about 150 residents' stories, as well as some of the history of Blue Care, released in 2000, came from.

This year we released a collection of real-life short stories from residents, memories of funny incidents or places they've been or memories of younger life.

I grew up in Clifton, on the Darling Downs, with three older brothers, Stan, 80, Bud, 78, and Kevin, 76. Mum Olga was a home-keeper while dad Stan drove trucks for the council. I was directed towards becoming a teacher and won a scholarship to study in Brisbane but I turned it down to start nursing training at Warwick Hospital. I never finished because Mike and I met on a blind date and got married. We have three children – Sandra, 53, Rod, 51, and Steve, 50 – and six

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grandchildren, aged between 20 and 30.

I went back to work when my youngest was about a year old. Having a young family and a husband working shifts in the brewing industry meant it wasn't

practical to go back to nursing, so I went into administrative roles.

I was always pretty shy and, eventually, a big part of my job was needing to chair large meetings. I wanted to be more confident so my friend Pam introduced me to Forum Communicators, a group started during WWII to give women confidence speaking in public, chairing meetings and finding their voice. I've been a member for nearly 20 years, am a

qualified speech and procedural assessor, have served as state president and now am state treasurer. It's just so interesting. You're continually learning from people's speeches. It's a philosophy of life really – never stop learning.

Mike and I have lived at Nandeebie for eight years now. There are so many positives to living in the village. There's always somebody around or something going on, and there's always involvement in looking after others. It is part of my nature – I like to help people and make sure they're doing the best they can. I'm chairwoman of the residents' committee, organise social functions and write a monthly newsletter. I'm also a member of the village craft group, mainly knitting and crocheting baby clothes for our

regular stalls or to send to Redland Hospital.

We love to travel and are big collectors. Mike's got coins and stamps, while I'm a deltiologist – someone who collects postcards. The original objective was to collect one or two postcards from every part of Australia but friends and family were travelling and sending me postcards from around the world. I've probably got about 8000.

When I get time I'd like to put them in proper display books, though I'll probably have to sell some of them. Still, everywhere we go, I try to pick up something to add to the collection. Every time we travel, I also take lots of photos and do up a photobook. That's the best way to remember where you've been.



PICTURE: DAVID KELLY