



University of the Third Age

SUNSHINE COAST | AUGUST 2020



Mara Miller - Life Member

A life that's not just 'sun, surf and sand'

When it comes to U3A personalities, Mara Miller, now 96 years young, is in the top echelon, having served as a founding member of U3A, a vice president, office volunteer, and notably a lecturer in history and later in creative writing.

Mara has made a significant contribution to U3A on the Sunshine Coast, from small beginnings with six people lead by Frayda Cooper discussing its beginning with a series of participatory classes to the present day with more than 2200 members and a broad range of educational and lifestyle offerings.

"We started out at an afternoon tea meeting at Moffatt Beach 34 years ago. Frayda had come across U3A in Melbourne, and I thought this sounds interesting," Mara said. "I was missing things I'd been involved in and there was just nothing here, just 'sun, surf and sand', as my husband Fred used to say."

"Most of those we met that day joined up straight away and at a later, and larger, meeting at Caloundra we thrashed out how you did U3A."

Initially, the new U3A group just wanted to get together to continue to learn. "We thought it a good idea for people of tertiary education to get together, and if anyone wanted

to learn anything different through lecturers, then we were there."

"I taught History, and John Cooper taught 'Tripping Through the Dictionary'; we were trying to work it out, what people wanted. There were three languages: Indonesian, Japanese and Esperanto, which wasn't very popular, and we had about twelve in each class."

As a university graduate majoring in Medieval and Ancient History, Mara took to her task with great enthusiasm teaching people who showed an interest in history.

However, family matters interrupted Mara's progress with U3A when her daughter needed help to look after her two-year-old son in Sydney. "I thought, 'this is a bit silly; she is down there having problems, and I'm up here, and I'm not really that important in the scheme of things', so I joined her in Sydney so she didn't have to put her little boy into care," Mara said.

During the 1960s, after a stint in Canberra while her daughter completed her law degree, they moved back to Sydney before a great adventure in France, living in Paris; then back to Western Australia.

Mara again called the Sunshine

I think the enthusiasm of people and the variety of courses offered have been key to the success of U3A, and those courses have been offered by highly qualified people.

Coast home 20 years ago, when she saw great changes in U3A-SC. "They had an office by then, the membership had grown, as had the range of lectures and classes. I think the enthusiasm of people and the variety of courses offered have been key to the success of U3A, and those courses have been offered by highly qualified people. For example, I remember a course in biology offered by a gentleman, Bunny Austin, who was previously a professor at Cambridge University in England."

"For my lectures, I asked the students what country they wanted to learn about. We did Hungary, Russia, France, England, all sorts of places."

Mara also volunteered to help out in the office, which she enjoyed. "That was good fun, until it went digital, which certainly wasn't fun at all."

Mara has also turned her talents to becoming an author. Her first book, titled 'Not Always Paradise' chronicles her upbringing in Fiji.

"Three of my grandparents travelled to Australia to look for gold, but the gold rush had petered out. Then in Melbourne, the three brothers met a German man who said they should go to Fiji and start a business there. Two brothers, Fred and William, travelled to Fiji and started an import/export business that grew into quite a large business. William financed cotton planters in Fiji when the Civil War in America created a cotton rush. There was no cotton being exported from America and they could grow three crops per year in Fiji. However, after the war production in America resumed and the market for Fijian cotton died off. Grandfather was bankrupted, as he financed the growers.

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WHAT'S HAPPENING

PRESIDENT GLYNI CUMMING'S AUGUST MESSAGE TO U3A-SC MEMBERS



After months' postponement owing to Covid 19, our AGM held on Saturday August 8th at the North Shore Community Centre went off without a hitch.

The new venue proved to be very pleasant, and fairly easily accessible, despite the enthusiastic footy parents parked at the sports grounds.

We received much positive feedback, sweetest of all was our newest Life Member Mara Miller's comment "What a lovely meeting it was, all so friendly and jolly - so delightful".

We were able to safely seat socially-distanced up to 51 members in the hall space, and had about 44 attend, with 15 apologies.

Our new Life Members were awarded their badges and certificates. Liz Dawe, widow of poet Bruce Dawe, (who would have

been our 7th) was given a bouquet of flowers, and many thanks, for her role as secretary to Bruce over his many years of running English classes for our members. She delivered a most beautiful and touching speech saying how much U3A had meant to Bruce, and his warm relationship with his students.

We were pleased to hear speeches from Caitlyn Hockam, now in her second year of a Bachelor of Primary Education, and one of our 3 annual bursary awardees, as well as Russell Ousley, the Director of Development at USC, where U3A Sunshine Coast has their home base.

Delicious refreshments provided in the long foyer area enabled members to relax and chat after the AGM.

Glyni Cumming

MARA MILLER LIFE MEMBER U3A-SC

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"The family then began growing coconuts for export, but hurricanes destroyed the crops and bankruptcy soon followed. Grandfather used to say 'no one should go into farming unless they have a private income'."

Mara's book about her early life highlights that it's not always paradise in the Fijian Islands. "Growing up in Fiji was rather unusual, and in the book I wanted to demonstrate that British colonialism in those days was really rather good. I was born there, my father was born there, as was my grandmother.

"I was schooled via correspondence classes before going to boarding school in New Zealand. Then in 1939 my father said, 'there's going to be a war so you had better stay close to home, so I did and completed my Leaving Certificate in Suva.'"

Mara attended the University of Western Australia, at the same time as did her children. "In those days, the other students were amused that I was attending university at my age."

Mara is very happy with how U3A here has evolved, with the expanded educational and lifestyle pursuits. "I think it's wonderful there's so much to do and it's very good for older people to engage in these activities," she said. "I have been so happy with my time with U3A, and everyone has been wonderfully kind to me.

"Yoga and activities that are less taxing on older bodies, plus the social aspects, are wonderful.

"My classes were a joy for me. My students were enthusiastic; I also taught Creative Writing for a number of years and stopped only last year. "I always enjoyed teaching, learning and writing - being given a topic and producing, say, a thousand words on a subject.

They say that people who talk a lot, like me, tend to write easily. My mother used to say, 'do you think you could walk from here to that tree without saying anything?' and of course I couldn't."

LIFE MEMBERS HONOURED AT AGM

Life Members were awarded their badges and certificates at the AGM.



Clockwise from Top: Mara Miller, Patricia Barry, Myra Timmerman, Liz Dawe (centre) with Dawne Clark and Glyni Cumming, and John D. Cooper.





USC GRATEFUL FOR U3A-SC \$2000 BURSARY DONATION

Russell Ousley, Director of USC's Development Office has officially thanked U3A-SC for the \$2000 donation to the USC Study Support Bursary at USC. As guest speaker at this year's AGM, Mr Ousley thanked U3A for funding the bursaries.

"Thanks to you, students with financial need are receiving assistance so they can continue their studies," Mr Ousley said.

"Importantly, you are also enabling bursary recipients to achieve their best, which is critical for their future success and for our community. I am confident that these individuals will forever remember the difference that was made for them and consider how they too can make a difference for someone one day."

The university faces difficult times ahead financially, with the loss of international students during the COVID-19 emergency.

Mr Ousley said the drop in international student numbers had accounted for around \$17 million in lost revenue for the university, which has campuses on the Sunshine Coast, Gympie, Hervey Bay and Petrie.

Academic and administrative staff have been notified of difficult decisions over the coming months, as USC plans to counteract the multi-million-dollar shortfall.

Mr Ousley said the situation was serious financially and it would mean significant cuts in expenditure and staff numbers, and that their was little expectation that the international student market would return any time soon.

He said that lot of students would have enrolled in the first semester and second semester this year but did not. The University is hoping for better enrolments in the first semester for 2021.

Mr Ousley also congratulated U3A Sunshine Coast on the valuable work it does in supporting older Australians in the community, which he said has the full support of the University.

VACANCIES IN THE DEVIL'S PLAYGROUND DISCUSSION GROUP

The Devils' Playground discussion group has several vacancies at present, as they transition from an e-class online group to real attendance meetings, finally.



The Devils love taboo, impolite and radical discussion. Each week they have a set topic, and every person gets to present their ideas. Here are some topics they haven't got to yet:

- Did humans need slavery to get civilised?
- If selective breeding improves cattle, dogs and corn, what's wrong with eugenic breeding for humans?
- What's our problem with nudity?

Meetings are held each Thursday at 1.30pm. Interested? Then please enrol on the U3A website.



U3A SUNSHINE COAST NEEDS AN OFFICE VOLUNTEER

If you are able to volunteer some time once per fortnight to work in our U3A office on the USC campus at Sippy Downs, we would like to hear from you.

If you have basic office skills and could devote three hours each fortnight on a Wednesday, Karen Martin would appreciate your working with her answering U3A member enquiries.

For more information please contact:
Karen Martin kmar2062@bigpond.net.au



BURSARY WINNERS SAY ‘THANKS’

Our three students who received this years Student Bursary Awards were thankful for the financial assistance that U3A provided them through the bursaries. Caitlyn Hockam attended the Annual General Meeting and spoke eloquently about her studies, her ambitions.

Caitlyn is completing her second year of full-time study in the Bachelor of Primary Education.

“I am passionate about the education of young people and believe that the gift of education is priceless,” Caitlyn said.

“I cannot wait to graduate in two-year’s time and inspire inclusion, engagement and participation within my classroom, to empower students to achieve their future aspirations.”

Samantha Vollmer, a 29 year-old widowed single parent said she wanted to attend the AGM as “I wanted to shake each and every one of your hands in gratitude for being awarded this scholarship.

“I am currently in my final year of

a Bachelor of Nursing Science, with only final placements left to undertake. My ultimate goal though is to work in some capacity whether as a doctor or nurse practitioner in geriatric medicine with a focus on holistic primary care and education. Sam Turnbull is a third-year student completing a bachelor of business/ commerce at USC. “The ongoing pandemic has presented unique economic and social problems that have impacted my education and home life,” Sam said.

“The increased reliance on travel and university resources arose from issues with my computer, forcing me to rely on university machines which meant more time away from my family and late nights in USC computer labs. “The social isolation proved challenging: reduced access to lecturers and days where I see any friends or family. This experience, however, forced me to become more independent both as a student and in general.”



HAND CHIMES CLASS OPEN

Wendy Turton is now tutoring a class in Handchimes at Mapleton Community Hall on Tuesdays from 10.00am to 11.30am., and they would like more members.

Handchimes and music are supplied and you can enrol online through the U3A website at www.u3asunshine.org.au. Course Code is 20MAT310.

If you are concerned about travelling to Mapleton please contact Wendy or Gaynor on 0421068851, as help with a car pool may be arranged.

ANNUAL REPORT RELEASED

The U3A Sunshine Coast Annual Report for 2019/2020 has now been tabled and approved at the AGM. The Report is available for download on the U3A website.

Anyone wanting a printed copy of the Report mailed to them, please contact the office volunteers on 07 5430 1123 to arrange postage.

AGM ENJOYED BY ATTENDEES

About 40 members attended this year’s AGM at the North Shore Community Centre at Mudjimba. This was the AGM postponed from April.

Members were pleased to hear about how U3A Sunshine Coast has continued with activities, classes and events during COVID-19 restrictions on gatherings.

Photos taken at the AGM may be viewed on the U3A website. Here are few of the smiling faces at this year’s AGM.



President Gyni Cumming with Liz Dawe.



Peter and Jill Campbell with Bev Schouten.



Henk Timmerman with Life Member Myra Timmerman.



Wayne Curran, Rosemary Solomons, Lynda Saunders.



Grant Matthews with Life Member Jim Hales.



John Saint-Smith with guest speaker Russell Ousley.