

CHAPTER 7

The Legend from Rivervale

LYNETTE MAY YOUNG WAS TOUGH, resilient and hard-working. She had to be: she was the youngest and only daughter of May and Les Young, entering the world on 5 March 1957, and gender was never an obstacle in the roughhousing of her two brothers Les (jnr) and Steve.

You never met your nana's parents – they passed away before you were born – but May would have been your Great Nana and Les (snr) would have been your Great Grampie. The family was as blue-collar as they come, growing up on Acton Avenue in Rivervale, with your Great Grampie Les a train driver who would regularly make “tuckerbox” trips that took him away from home for two days at a time along the regional railways. It required him to pack a large metal box each time, from which the nickname of the trips was derived.

Your Great Nana May was a devoted and loving mother to her three children. Money was tight and, when your great uncles Steve and Les and your nana had moved into high school, your great nana took up work for retailer David Jones during the day, but always ensured she was home in time to greet the children once the school day was done.

Your great grampie was an authoritative and imposing figure, who could at times be oppressive, but he was balanced in the household by your Great Nana May, who was a kind, caring and beautiful example to follow. Her stoicism and independence was later shown after the children graduated high school and she put herself through art school to explore her passion and extraordinary talent of drawing and painting.

The Youngs, like the majority of households in the area, kept chickens in order to source their own eggs and supply the centrepiece for the Sunday Roast, with the self-sufficiency

helping to save money on food. A large rooster named Ginger was trained by your great grampie to be wild and aggressive, mostly in order to protect the chickens. Mostly.

The ageing of Ginger and his eventual demise was the only time the Sunday Roast was not eaten by the three children, who instead wept as their rooster disappeared, one forkful at a time. The tuckerbox trips would also yield rabbit, which your great grampie would shoot once the train had made its regional stop, bringing it home to be skinned and cooked, although it was an unacceptable dinner for your young nana at the time, who instead chose to go hungry, having not been able to shake the images of Bugs Bunny from her mind.

Both meals were prepared by your great nana over a wood stove that was fired up, regardless of how hot the summer was. Washing was a similar experience, with the absence of supplied hot water to the wash house requiring a wood fire to bring to boil the liquid held in a large copper vessel, which the clothes would then be washed in. The regime changed very little even when the Youngs replaced the copper with a washing machine, as there was still no hot water piping to the wash house, requiring your great nana to manually heat the water.

An electric hot water system at least provided hot showers in the main house, but the financial situation meant your great grampie strictly monitored usage. And it was not to be used for washing dishes – that was a job for the kettle.

Sunday was the most dreaded day for your nana and her brothers, as it was bath day and the running of fresh, hot water for each person was not allowed; the water was to be reused for all and, given their father always had the luxury of bathing first, it was not an enjoyable experience. In fact, you would have to question the point of the exercise at all, given the state of the water being used for the purpose of cleaning.

Your nana has never slept well and her light-sleeping as a child meant she often laid awake, listening for the clip-clop of the Clydesdale-drawn milk cart that wound its way through the streets for the early-morning delivery. And while luxuries such

as a refrigerator and television came along later, they were not always a part of the household. People in those times had to keep perishables from spoiling by buying blocks of ice to bring home.

It was the only life the family knew and they were never left wanting, because, as your nana recalled: “We didn’t know we were missing out, because we never had it to begin with. You don’t know what you don’t know.”



The Young children made their own fun, building tents and cubbies in the backyard as they launched tree nuts at each other in war games that often resulted in the only girl having to play the “bad guy” and being hung from the back fence. Hanged, might be more accurate because that was the nature of some of the more vicious games. The brave “allies” would quickly scatter, though, when their father arrived home from work.

The two Young brothers were polar-opposites: your Great Uncle Les was the introvert, quiet and unassuming; your Great Uncle Steve was the extrovert, four years older, a lover of sport and ready to tackle any challenge. It meant Les was often the one dragged into “playing schools” or with dolls when his little sister had enough of being the fielder or bowler in backyard cricket.

There was never a thought to ask for a lift to school and your nana used to make the short march to Tranby Primary School from six-years-old. A lengthier trek came later in the day, as she made her way to Kooyong Road to see best friend Viv Uren, before the pair headed to the swings at the nearby Wilson Park.

It was an active childhood for your nana and her teenage years were no different, as she filled in the spare time of the summer holidays by working for a dry cleaner. The pay of 20c an hour was minimal, even by 1970s standards, but your nana was too respectful to ever question it. Money was to be earned, not questioned, and it was twice the rate of her 10c a week pocket money.

She had learnt the hard way the importance of treating money with respect, having earlier in life made the poor choice of

exchanging her entire weekly allowance for a bag of lollies, attracting an “absolute belting” from your great grampie, before she was forced to share the lollies with the family. The dry cleaning job was exchanged for a role with Myer in the Better Jewellery section and all pay cheques were usually spent on buying Christmas presents for the other members of the family.

If you go to the front door of our house, Charlotte, you’ll see the beautifully crafted, German-made wooden temperature, barometer and hygrometer instrument that adorns the entry wall. That was a present from your nana to her father – your great grampie – and was paid for with her first pay cheque from Myer as a 15-year-old. It sits on the wall because the house we live in used to be your great nana and grampie’s house after they had moved out of Rivervale.

Family always remain connected in one way or another.



Your nana’s family was far from poverty-stricken, but life was certainly devoid of some of the luxuries of the wealthier communities and it meant there was little that the children could truly take ownership of.

The status of working-class had forged your nana into a strong character, but she longed to belong to something. Something that was hers. That opportunity arrived when she was 12-years-old and her Uncle Arthur phoned to advise he was looking after the local Canning Districts Athletics Club in the regular coach’s absence and invited your nana to attend the sessions at McCallum Park, Victoria Park.

It was exactly what your nana was looking for, despite the club members being far from welcoming. The cliques ensured any newcomer was made to feel isolated, but they underestimated your nana’s tenacity. She vowed to always embrace new faces to ensure they were never made to feel as she had. Your nana continued her involvement with Canning Districts, but had not invested in it as a dream until six years later.

She had begun working full-time as a clerk with the Community Recreation Council, now known as the Department of Sport and Recreation, as a 16-year-old, having left high school after her fourth year. Your nana was a much-loved employee. Her role as clerk, among other tasks, involved putting together the afternoon tea cart. The staff were required to chip-in money for biscuits, but regularly consumed more than the funds covered, leading to the young clerk selflessly using her own money to buy more biscuits for the office, unbeknown to anyone.

The sporting body had changed its name to Youth Sport and Recreation within a couple of years and moved from its James Street base in the city to Perry Lakes Stadium, when your nana found herself among other women of the organisation being handed a project. They were asked by the secretary of the director to write down one goal: their life's ambition.

Your stunned nana had never thought about the issue, so she felt possessed as her hand took on a life of its own and began scribbling words on the paper in front of her. She watched the ink with intrigue before digesting the message: "I want to run for Australia".

It was a lofty goal. To that point, the then-18-year-old was in Division 14 and "ran like a bag of spuds". Genetics was also against her: she did not know it at the time, but her body consisted of 75 per cent slow-twitch fibres, meaning talent alone would never have her run fast.

However, your nana never considered "talent alone" as an answer for anything. She was raised on hard work. So, having committed herself to running for her country, she set about overcoming her lack of natural talent and worked harder than ever before. The dividends were immediate and in 1975, the same year she jotted down her goal, she won her first national title, streaming home in 60.7sec – almost a second ahead of second place – to capture the 400m hurdles at Lang Park in Brisbane.

It was the first time she had travelled for athletics and, of course, she paid for it herself. In fact, your nana paid the costs to attend every one of the eight national championships she competed and was even advised in a letter to "make your way to Sydney" when

she was selected in her first Australia team.

The hard training continued and focus was shifted towards specialising in the 400m hurdles. Your nana was taken under the wing of three-time Olympic champion Shirley Strickland, training alongside the likes of Beth Nail and Raelene Boyle and finished second in the following two national titles, before she began to emerge as a potential world-beater.

The cheapest national championships that your nana ever attended came in 1978-79, simply because she did not have to travel far: Perry Lakes Stadium, Perth, Western Australia. Having won the 1975 titles with a 60.7sec run, the sprinter had gradually clawed back her times and in late March, she blitzed her rivals to set a personal best of 57.56sec and claim the crown in front of her home crowd.

It was a performance that had the country talking, with the 1980 World Championships on the horizon. Your nana achieved her goal of running for Australia within four years of setting herself the task when she was selected for the World Cup in Montreal, Canada. The achievement even had the local media buzzing. Your nana was busy working away at her desk a few days later in the Youth Sport and Recreation offices at Perry Lakes Stadium when she received a phone call.

On the other end of the line was an ABC journalist named Wally Foreman.



Your grandad used to say he thought he would do your nana a favour and marry her, that way she could change her name from Lyn Young so it no longer sounded “like something off a Chinese Takeaway menu”. The irony was that your nana cringed when the Youth Sport and Recreation secretary advised that someone named “Wally” was on the phone for her.

Your grandad had been assigned her story and needed an interview. He told your nana he intended to come to her office at Perry Lakes Stadium.

“I usually do my interviews over the telephone, but let’s just say the telephone was out of order when it came to the interview with Lyn,” your grandad later told *WA Newspapers* in 1980.

Your nana was embarrassed: she was only a 22-year-old clerk and was not high enough up the pecking order to allow a journalist to interrupt the office. She also was – and forever remained – too modest to believe the attention was warranted. Your grandad was persistent, though, and while she relented, she took the dogmatic broadcaster out to the carpark to do the interview.

The pair had met briefly once before. Your nana had dated a footballer named Wayne Nicholson, who had several connections to your grandad: Nicholson’s boss was your Great Grandad Eric; he had played football for Bruce Rock; and your grandad had even coached him in cricket at one stage. So, when Nicholson took his then-girlfriend to a hotel for a drink and saw your grandad perched at the bar, the pair was introduced.

It made for easy conversation and, once the interview was complete, your grandad continued the questioning: “Are you still going out with Nicko?”

No, she was not, he was informed, before he followed up with an invitation to lunch. Despite some initial resistance, a lunch date was secured. However, your nana was preparing to go on a month-long holiday overseas with a friend, so told him it would either have to be before she left, or he would have to wait. Anyone who knew your grandad would tell you how little he enjoyed waiting.

“He said he’d come and pick me up for lunch, but I wouldn’t let him do that, so we planned to meet outside London Court,” your nana said when explaining her first date with your grandad.

“I got there early and I couldn’t see him, so I ducked into the shoe shop that was on the corner and kept a lookout for him, because there was a pair of shoes I was interested in. I came out and he was waiting, but I thought, ‘I can’t yell out Wally’, because I couldn’t quite come to terms with his name, so I went ‘psst’.

“I was so green. I didn’t know anything about the airs-and-graces; I was just dragged up through life. Between the interview

and meeting him there, though, I'd had my hair permed and it was not good. I hadn't gone out for three days and I had a big blind pimple that I couldn't cover up. It was April and my hair was stuck under a beanie and he didn't recognise me.

"Anyway, he liked the shoes, so I bought the shoes and we went to a fine-dining hotel."

The Perry Lakes interview – or, interrogation, as it seemed to your nana at the time – resumed at the hotel.

"He was asking me about my boyfriends and stuff like that, so I asked him: 'What about you, are you going out with anyone?' and he just goes: 'Oh, I live with someone,'" your nana said. "I almost spat my food out. He'd given me the third degree and here he was living with someone."

Your nana had an easy escape from the awkward moment: she was flying out two days later for the holiday and would not return for a month, in which time she felt confident the situation would dissipate. It did not.

She instead returned to an angry father, who insisted she immediately return the calls of a very persistent Wally Foreman, who had not stopped phoning for weeks. It left your nana frustrated: she had clearly told the keen suitor that she would be out of the country and those frustrations only grew as she placed a call to the ABC Sports Department on the hour, every hour, from 9am to 12pm before finally reaching your grandad.

"Gee, that's a good job you've got," she exclaimed.

Your grandad had a favour to ask: the Bruce Rock Lions Club had invited him to present the inaugural Sportstar of the Year Award at his childhood town and the previously arranged special guest, 1968 Olympic 100m butterfly gold medallist Lyn McClements, had cancelled, as she was stuck on a plane returning from America.

"I've just got back myself," your nana argued, initially refusing. However, she was quickly realising how futile denying your grandad was and relented, again, and joined him on the trip to Bruce Rock. The three to four hour drive each way created ample opportunity for conversation and the pair began to grow closer.

The event itself was enjoyable. Your grandad interviewed your nana on stage, before the latter took the opportunity to catch up with friends she had met through Nicholson, hitting the dance floor with your grandad's childhood friend Ray Williams. Williams and your nana often sat in the car, watching the football as rain pelted the players, with the former's playing days cut short after a car accident required him to use a wheelchair for the rest of his life.

The night wound down and your grandad drove his guest to the motel, before cheekily advising of where his room was and saying, "I hope your electric blanket doesn't work". And he was not far away when your nana woke the next morning.

Your nana could see only a silhouette pacing up and down the front of the motel, as its movement caused the stream of morning sunlight to flicker. Your grandad was the opposite of your nana: he fell asleep as soon as his head hit the pillow and he was an early riser. By the time your nana awoke that morning, he had already done a lap around the town and was eager to again spend time with the girl he was falling in love with.

The pair loaded the car and began the return to Perth, stopping in via Beverley to visit your grandad's sister – Great Aunty Sandy – whose offer of eggs was politely accepted from your inwardly-cringing nana, as she was then introduced to the featherless chickens that had laid them. The journey home resumed, but not before your grandad got lost.

"Well, he said he got lost," your nana said. "He was a hard man to say 'no' to," your nana said.



The relationship had begun to take hold for your nana, but it had gripped your grandad from the moment he was sent by George Grljusich to do that interview at Perry Lakes. And that moment was vividly recalled by Sports Department secretary Jillian Mellet.

"I remember like it was yesterday when your dad was sent down to the Perry Lakes track in Floreat Park to interview a

young lady who was being touted as the next great track and field athlete. Her name was Lyn Young,” Mellet said.

“Heading out for an interview was nothing out of the ordinary, but the change in this young man when he returned to the office was remarkable. He was smitten and I do believe he knew from that moment that Lyn was going to be with him on his life journey.

“I do think it was love at first sight and I remember so well that he made a comment that Lyn ‘had a fabulous backside’.”

Mellet was not the only colleague to recall the change in your grandad. Dennis Cometti said at his friend’s memorial service, “Wal the romantic; Leigh Matthews becoming a Wiggle would have surprised me less”. But, away from the audience, he remembered fondly the same moment.

“He liked the girls – and they liked him – but none as much as your mum,” Cometti said. “He was a smitten kid when he came back. Suddenly, he put the brakes on and he was a different fellow. He wasn’t worse or better, he was just more subdued.”

Your grandad had made no secret of the new love in his life, remarking to close mate Sam Gannon: “Gee, mate, I think I’ve found something pretty good”. And Morey Grafton, the former private who served under your grandad in the army, equally noted a change in his former housemate’s behaviour.

“It was tiring, living with Wally and I did at one stage suggest he put a ‘Welcome’ mat outside his bedroom window, but as far as I’m concerned, your old man was different when he met Lyn,” Grafton said. “That was the first time he was smitten and you could tell his attitude to her was different”.

However, it was his comment to Gannon that was most poignant. The two were living just streets away from each other, after your grandad had moved out of the City Beach house he shared with Grafton and in with his girlfriend in Karrinyup. It was a reminder to your grandad that he was not currently in a position to pursue your nana. And the latter made it very clear she would not be pursued.

“After Bruce Rock, he asked me out, but it was then that I asked if he was still living with his girlfriend,” your nana said. “I

told him I wasn't going to go out with him, because I wouldn't like that to happen to me."

Your grandad moved out of the Karrinyup house and returned to the family home on Glenties Road, Floreat, and began the pursuit of his new love interest with trademark vigour. Your grandad's trait of demanding something be done right if it was to be done at all meant he was fully invested in chasing your nana and the pair saw each other on an almost daily basis.

Your nana's life as an athlete meant she was usually too tired at the end of a work day to go out, yet her lunch breaks had to be devoted to training and the placement of the Youth Sport and Recreation offices at Perry Lakes made for ideal access to the stadium. Your grandad overcame that challenge by attending the stadium during lunch and laying the hurdles around the track, much to amusement of coach Shirley Strickland.

It was a new and welcomed level of interest for your nana, too, although she recalled: "He was so happy when I switched from hurdles to 800m".

The devotion even extended to weekends. The underfunding of track and field resulted in the sport having to place caveats on athletes competing at carnivals, one of which required a club to provide a certain number of officials for allocation to events over the course of the day for that club's athletes to be eligible to compete.

That caveat resulted in your grandad rushing to Perry Lakes and manning the stopwatch for your nana's races, hunched on the steps of the timing stand adjacent to the finish line. Your nana then climbed the steps and took his place once she had finished her race so he could return to work.



It was a whirlwind love that had been sweeping up their lives for eight months when on 5 January 1980 the pair sat at El Sombreros Restaurant, overlooking Matilda Bay to celebrate your grandad's 32nd birthday.

Well, they *bad* sat together. Then, your nana was left on her own. Waiting. Your grandad had gone to the bathroom, but had taken so long that your nana began contemplating where the relationship was going. He finally returned and your nana's question was answered as he produced a Georg Jensen ring that she had commented on during a previous date.

"Is it now? Is this happening now?" your nana stammered in disbelief, before saying yes. Several times.

The ring box had bulged from your grandad's coat to the extent that he was not able to keep it on him and had to store it in the car while he built the courage to ask the biggest question of his life, hence the long wait while he retrieved it. There was one more surprise, as your grandad asked his new bride-to-be to dance.

"But you don't dance," she replied.

Such was the devotion to the girl of his dreams that your grandad had secretly taken dance lessons at Arthur Murray Dance Studios during the lunchbreaks when he was not on hurdles duty. The discretion of the lessons was tested when he ran into long-time friend George Young – no relation to your nana – during one of those breaks and the latter insisted they go to lunch together, oblivious to his mate's actual plans. Your grandad apologised and said he couldn't as he was meeting his father.

"Oh, I haven't seen Eccles (Eric Foreman) in ages. I'll come along," George Young said, before being rebuffed for a second time and sent on his way. It was a beautiful gesture and a small symbol of the love your nana and grandad shared.

Lyn Young became Lyn Foreman on 20 April 1980 at St Nicholas' Anglican Church in Floreat Park – just 11 months after properly meeting the relentless journalist from the ABC, who was impossible to say "no" to. The venue was, of course, your grandad's family church throughout his childhood, but St Nicholas' Church, when consecrated, was also dedicated to sportsmen and women.

The current of sport flowed throughout the day: Rev Keith Wheeler, a friend of your nana's and a national middle distance champion from the 1960s, presided over the ceremony; Sam

Gannon was the best man, with army mate Morey Grafton completing the bridal party; and Subiaco footballer Brian Doogue provided the music, strumming “Never Ending Song of Love”, by Delaney & Bonnie.

The service was completed and the group left the church, returning to El Sombrero Restaurant for a reception that featured two speeches – the best man’s and the groom’s – but might as well have heard from every attendee.

“Wally made the longest speech of all time,” friend Steve Heal said.

In fact, it went for 45 minutes. Someone timed it. And when it finally ended, Fred Miller yelled out, “Half time”, before everyone bolted out of their seats for the nearest bathroom. Such was the duration of the groom’s address that the run-sheet was thrown into chaos and the cutting of the cake was completely overlooked, despite the pre-prepared and staged photos suggesting otherwise.

“The days after that, he would wake up in a panic and say he’d had a dream that his speech went for too long,” your nana said. “He’d ask me and I’d say, ‘Everyone thought it was great’, which it was; it’s just that it went for 45 minutes.”

If something is going to be done, it must be done thoroughly. That 45-minute speech was aptly timed: it was a preamble to the 26 years of unconditional love your nana and grandad went on to spend together. Your Uncle Mark and I were fortunate enough to be raised in a household that was emotionally as solid as a rock, built on a foundation of mutual love and respect from our parents towards each other.

There were challenges, of course, but that respect was never lost. It was also never hidden and came across regularly in later life when your grandad was on air and recounted stories that inevitably ended with him as the punchline, while describing the advice from your nana that he had chosen to ignore. It came across as he recounted passionately the stories about your nana and her running career.

And his devotion to your nana and our family was exemplified through such times as our Easter holiday, when we would take