

Mum's

Fleur
WOOD

Frances
HANSEN



PRECIOUS LEGACY

PHOTOGRAPHY by ALANA LANDSBURY • STYLING by MAYA WYSZYNSKI

When Lorraine Wood died she left the most important thing in her world to her daughters' care. Fleur Wood and Frances Hansen tell **Juliet Rieden** why they feel privileged to keep their mother's spirit burning bright.

Less than a month after Lorraine Wood turned 80 she hired a cruise ship to sail her family and close friends around the Fijian Islands. It was a celebration and a goodbye, and as her daughters Fleur Wood and Frances Hansen talk about those joyous four days, they are laughing and wiping away tears simultaneously.

"In true Mum style she flew 70 people over. She was quite unwell but

she pushed through it and we really had the most incredible week together as a family with lifelong friends," says Fleur. "It was called the Fijian Princess and it was just us. There were 35 cabins and we took over the whole ship," says Frances smiling.

The photos are jubilant, showing generations of a family partying together in a tropical paradise. They're a complicated, blended band but surprisingly close. Fleur, best

known as one of Sydney's most successful fashion designers and creative entrepreneurs who, these days, lives in New York with her husband and children and is the founder of refugee charity Ads-Up, is the only child of Lorraine and Bill Wood. Respected artist Frances and her three sisters are from Lorraine's first marriage. There are also three other sisters from Bill's first marriage. "It's like the Brady Bunch, only →

Fleur (left) and Frances, the co-directors of the clinic. Opposite: Lorraine with her five daughters on her 80th birthday.

"It's an honour and a privilege to continue her work."



HAIR BY BRAD MULLINS. MAKE-UP BY NICOLA JOHNSON. FAMILY PHOTOGRAPH SUPPLIED AND USED WITH PERMISSION. FLEUR WEARS LEE MATHEWS DRESS. FRANCES WEARS IRIS & INK DRESS.

Family

we're eight girls," laughs Frances, who is sixth in the line-up.

Lorraine and Bill met and married in New Zealand and moved to Sydney when Fleur was four. "There was a lot of coming and going growing up. But there's definitely a closeness between us all," says Frances, who admits that gaining sisters following her mum's divorce was a bonus. Then when baby Fleur was born, she was over the moon. "That was very exciting for me, age 12, to have a little baby sister to look after."

As the youngest, Fleur was pretty much on her own with her parents from age seven, although grown-up sisters would drop by and stay for periods. "They lived such different lives from me because there was such a big age gap, but we had lovely bonds and I have lovely memories of special times like holidays," she says.

The cruise was reminiscent of those family get-togethers, only this one was tinged with sadness. In February 2017 Lorraine had been diagnosed with stage four breast cancer. "The prognosis was eight months," says Frances. But typically, their mother took control of her illness, aiming for what Frances calls "radical remission" and in doing so bought herself more meaningful time. "She did do chemotherapy for a while but she felt so sick and miserable on it that she decided at her age she wanted to go for quality over quantity," continues Fleur. "After that she did the opposite of what the doctors told her to do. She went to America and pursued an alternative treatment. For her that was a great option and she felt really good on those treatments."

Lorraine was battling cancer, but she was doing it her way. She was also preparing herself, her family and her business for her next journey. "The cruise was a really fun, very special time," recalls Fleur. "I think that was Mum's gift to us all. This tremendous



Above: Lorraine (centre) with some of the 70 family and close friends on the Fijian trip. Below: Lorraine and Bill in the early '70s, before their life-changing trip to The Meadows. Left: Lorraine opening a new wing in 2016.



farewell. Mum had lots of close friends through all different stages and ages of her life. It was a time for us all to bond. She even invited all the grandchildren one day to have breakfast with her."

Lorraine died in August 2019. "It was quite a slow decline," Fleur says, quietly looking to her sister. It's obvious both are still coming to terms with the loss. "In the end I think she was really ready to go. She was excited to be reunited with Dad. She had really strong spiritual beliefs and really believed that he would be waiting for her."

"The gift of cancer – sometimes – is that you've got that time to process, say farewell and prepare yourself. Mum was incredibly brave and faced it with her normal determination and strength of character and grace. It was

a difficult journey, but in many ways she made it easier for us with her courage and being very upfront about what was going to happen."

The most important thing that was going to happen was that Lorraine's girls – Fleur and Frances – would take over what had become the most important focus in their mother's life. This was about the precious legacy Lorraine and husband Bill wanted to leave behind in this world, an inspirational clinic they had built from scratch to treat people struggling with addictions. South Pacific Private

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ALANA LANDSBERY. OTHER PHOTOGRAPHS SUPPLIED AND USED WITH PERMISSION.



"People in the 1980s didn't talk about these things."

really embracing health and wellbeing."

Fleur agrees. "Dad was fun. He had a great sense of humour. Yes, we had kelp instead of salt on the dinner table and it did get a bit pedantic, but I loved all that because my nature was always really health conscious. He was also the life of the party and he used to sing and dance and torment us all. He was a big teaser."

When Fleur was four the family moved from New Zealand to Sydney's north shore, where Bill and Lorraine forged a successful career in real estate. "Mum and Dad worked very hard, particularly when they came to Australia to start this new life. They moved here, having been through two divorces, and they really wanted

to make a go of things."

was Lorraine and Bill's passion project and since it opened in 1993, their world. So, for Fleur and Frances, stepping into their parents' shoes was a given. "Mum had a succession plan," says Frances, smiling.

Facing demons

When Lorraine met Bill he was a recovering alcoholic. "Bill was a year sober," recalls Frances, who says in the beginning she had no idea of her stepfather's addiction issues. "I was about 10 when Bill came into our lives and knew nothing then, but as the years unfolded,

we were very much aware that Bill would go to Alcoholics Anonymous." There was no tension around the topic of alcohol in their home; in fact Bill was really popular with everyone. "He was an interesting guy. I got on really well with my stepdad, because we seemed to have a lot in common," says Frances. "He loved the book by Paul Bragg, *The Miracle of Fasting*. He used to fast every Sunday and I used to go swimming with him a lot. He always had this mantra, 'health, strength, vitality' and even today, when I swim, I'm still doing it ... So he turned the drinking and smoking into

to make a go of things."

But while Lorraine understood alcoholism, having grown up with alcoholic parents, she said Bill was "a dry drunk" dependent on his AA meetings, which was not easy to deal with, and this coupled with intergenerational trauma she suffered plunged her into periods of depression.

As Fleur entered her teens it was obvious her parents were struggling. "I knew they weren't happy. I knew they were struggling with issues. Did I know exactly what it was? Not really. But I certainly knew →

there were problems, there were things going on. People in the 1980s didn't talk about these things. It was really taboo."

Fleur was proud of her parents' courage seeking help. "They found a therapist, an American woman called Shirley Smith, who they started seeing. It was unusual for people to reach out and get help in those days."

It was Shirley Smith who made a suggestion that was to change Bill and Lorraine's lives forever. "She said to Dad, 'Why don't you go to The Meadows and do some trauma work and look at your childhood, at all the things that happened and process that?'"

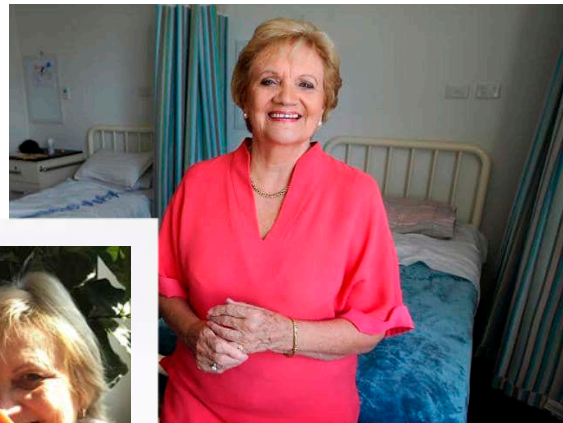
The Meadows is an addiction clinic in Arizona founded in 1975 by former Air Force navigator Pia Mellody, and at the time its work was groundbreaking. It uses a trauma-informed framework to treat all sorts of addictions, from eating disorders to substance abuse, and today is the go-to rehab centre for Hollywood's A-list. There was nothing like it in Australia and it was here that Bill and Lorraine had their epiphany.

"I remember Dad going off and one of the foundations of The Meadows – and what makes it unique and special – is that they have a family program. The client will check in and then their entire family is invited to come and do a week's group work with them in the treatment centre. So Mum went over for Dad's family week. She was so impacted by it and saw so much of her own family story that she decided to stay on as a client. And then I went over to her family week."

Fleur says that visit "had a significant impact on me" and her life ahead. "I loved it. It totally made sense to me. It gave me a whole lot of information and perspective on how our childhood impacts us now and it's definitely something I've carried through and I've been on the journey of recovery, on a therapeutic process myself ever since."

"I think the work they did at The Meadows was really ahead of its time. Back then it was considered

Right: Lorraine at South Pacific Private on Sydney's Northern Beaches.
Below: Lorraine with her granddaughter Wren.



quite out there, but now there's a whole lot of scientific data and research that validates all their work. You go through a therapeutic process of sharing your reality with your other family members and making amends with them. It is confronting but it's very, very healing at the same time. It's always facilitated by senior therapists who are extremely experienced and keep the space very safe for people."

New horizons

When they returned to Australia, Bill and Lorraine had a dream. "They had this crazy idea that they were going to set up a Meadows in Australia. Everybody thought they were mad," says Fleur, laughing. Frances is nodding. "I was going back to New Zealand to study and I remember thinking, 'thank God I'm out of here because I don't know about this, they're off their heads'."

But Bill and Lorraine had seen the light and in a way found their calling. They sought approval from Pia to implement The Meadows program in Australia and poured all their assets,

including mortgaging their home, into building South Pacific Private, an inspirational facility on Sydney's Curl Curl beach, which opened in 1993.

"Naivety is a wonderful thing when you're starting a new venture. They ended up having to sell the family home and rented for a while," says Fleur. "I think I'd moved out by then. I went overseas and was off on my own. But they really went through a difficult time setting up and their persistence and resilience is incredibly admirable. Fran and I have talked



"Mum was a real pioneer. She was a force."

about that a lot now and here we are, 26 years later, in awe of what they created and how much they gave to it."

Through those early days Fleur and Fran were off forging their own careers but their parents' work influenced them. "I think I very much got started on a spiritual journey through my parents and the introduction to The Meadows," says Fleur. "I ended up living in India for a little while and probably that's what sparked my interest in human rights and the world of activism. I worked for the Tibetan exiled government and their exiled community in Dharamsala. I always had a love of

fashion and I started importing things from India into Australia."

In India Fleur met her husband, BBC correspondent Nick Bryant. The couple moved to Sydney, had two children, then moved to New York, and Fleur is currently expecting a baby girl. "I got pregnant shortly after Mum died. It was a lovely surprise and we're super-excited."

Meanwhile, Lorraine and Bill were working hard establishing the clinic, and when Bill was diagnosed with bowel cancer in 2000 it was devastating. "He died in six weeks. It was really fast. He was only 69. It was really shocking, especially for Mum. She was 62 and they were still

very much in love and each other's best friends."

After his death Lorraine discovered their finances were in a bad way. "Financially, they'd never really recovered from their investment in South Pacific and so she found herself in a really tricky position," says Fleur. Lorraine could have sold up and used the proceeds for a comfortable retirement, but unsurprisingly she forged on. "Full credit to her, she's done an amazing job, working incredibly hard."

Frances says their mum was also an advocate for women in the workplace. "She loved to employ working mums because she always thought they would do more. If you're a working mum you know how to multi-task, you know how to get things done."

"She was a real pioneer," adds Fleur. "She was very strong, very determined. She was a force. And now, that force has passed to her daughters. Together the girls are now co-directors of South Pacific Private, a 53-bed treatment centre boasting impressive results. When I visit the clinic I sense the clients feel nurtured but also empowered that they are in a place where they can challenge their problems in an impactful way and really get to the root cause of their trauma. There are no quick fixes here; this is about embarking on a powerful journey to change your life and those around you, one day at a time."

Frances moved her family nearby and works full-time at the clinic while Fleur controls marketing and business strategy from New York, with a plan to move back to Australia in the future. "It's a magical place," says Fleur. "It's an honour and a privilege to continue her work."

But while they feel their mum's spirit throughout the building, they also know this is their place now. "Mum's gone. She's passed it on to us and she's got other stuff to do now. She's on to the next big adventure," says Frances.

"A psychic told her that there was a big, important project for her and Dad when she got to the other side," laughs Fleur. "Bloody hell! ..." **AWW**

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