

## Joy Patten - Live life to the full

If there is one thing that stands out about Joy Patten's life, it is that she has sought out action, seized every opportunity she could to do the things that were important to her and has never let 'no' stop her. She may have had her share of trouble, pain and heartache, but she perfectly suits her name - she is a joy-filled, fun loving personality.

Picture this: it's the late 1920s in suburban Pymble, and a girl, small for her age, is in a bit of trouble with her mother. Tomboy Joy Benjamin runs outside and straight up a large tree to avoid punishment. She's out of reach from her mother there, and so she sits to wait it out.

By the time night falls, her mum is getting frantic. Joy is an adventurer, a free spirit and she's not afraid of anything. She is very prepared to sleep all night in that tree. In the end, her Mumma, Elsie May, is standing at the bottom of the tree, begging: "Please Joy come down, I won't be cross at you! You won't be in trouble, I promise....".

If you are fortunate enough to meet Joy Patten, a MidCoast resident from Smiths Lake who has just turned 100 years of age, she will tell you many more stories just like this one.

What they reveal about this delightful lady is a strong, brave Australian woman - she may be diminutive in size, but she is a force to be reckoned with - an adventurous soul with a keen sense of humour and self-professed talent for mischief.

Her character may well have been inherited, her stories about her mother reveal a fun-loving woman, who steadfastly waited until she was 21 to marry the man the man her Methodist family disapproved of. Morris Samuel Benjamin was from a strict Jewish family, and his family were also not keen on the match. But Elsie May Carter married Morris Benjamin, newsagent, and they had

two daughters, followed by a son Cyril. Joy is born last, the baby, and she quickly has her father wrapped around her little finger.

When her Mumma would complain about Joy's escapades, Dadda would say: "She's just a baby, May".



Joy, aged around 21.



Joy and Norm on their wedding day in 1942.

"I think my older sisters just tolerated me," says Joy. It was Cyril who was her play mate, and the two of them got up to lots of mischief. When the older girls brought boyfriends home to sit on the front verandah, Cyril and Joy would spy on them through the bay windows at the front of the house.

Joy would 'dob', running to tell her parents when the girls kissed a boy. Cyril and Joy were so often seen together walking to the railway station in Pymble, holding hands, that some people thought they were sweethearts, not siblings.

Morris and Elsie May used to rent a small cottage at Long Jetty for two weeks each Easter and holiday there. That's where Joy met a boy called Norm Patten when she was 17, who was holidaying with three other young men. Norm's parents had both passed away.

There was some more mischief, when the young men knocked on the Benjamin's cottage door, pretending they couldn't cook their dinner. Mumma's maternal instinct took over, and she was soon cooking for all the holiday-makers – and they were getting to know the Benjamin girls!

"After that holiday, I didn't see Norm for maybe six months. I think he was busy saving his money so he could afford to ask me out for dinner," says Joy. But ask, he did. Soon, he would travel from his home at Granville, to stay weekends in Cyril's room at the Benjamin's home.

When World War Two came, Cyril joined the Air Force and after the war, married and had three children. They came to live with Elsie May and Morris Benjamin.

"War completely changed our lives, it was a cruel war. I don't think anyone in my generation would have been untouched by it" says Joy.

"Norm enlisted and wouldn't marry me, because he said if he was killed overseas, I'd be left a widow. Then, because he had flat feet, he wasn't allowed to enlist for active duty – lucky him. He thought he'd be left to do work here in Australia, so we were married."

Joy saved, begged and borrowed clothing coupons in order to have a beautiful wedding gown – it was blue and calf length and very stylish with a beautiful blue headpiece.

Luckily for her, her brother-in-law managed two Sydney hotels, so the wedding breakfast was held at Balfours, "and I don't think it cost Mumma and Dadda anything, because it was all in the family" she confides.

Just four months later, Norm was called up to go to New Guinea - in the permanent remounts. It was a stressful time for Joy, he contracted dengue fever and was lost for a few months. "He was lucky" is Joy's take on it.

While Norm was away, there was no stopping Joy. She worked during the war for an accountant and "loved it - I was good at maths. I became the senior in the office when the boys went to war".

Was it challenging - stepping up to do the jobs the men usually did?

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"We did everything the men used to do – but it wasn't a challenge!" Joy must have needed to have this attitude, along with thousands of Australian women, to hold up the country while the men were away at war.

Another distraction while Norm was away at war was her love of the water.

"I had no fear and decided to buy a cruising boat – a 24 footer. And I decided to go out deep sea fishing, we went where angels fear to tread, and we'd bring home big snappers – back then you wouldn't bother to bring home a bream."

She remembers when the Japanese submarines entered Sydney Harbour and shelled the city, just after midnight on 8 June 1942. Joy says one submarine came as far as Roseville, and she ran, with others, to try to see something from the park - "we didn't see much, however"!

Thank goodness, Norm was found, and he returned to Joy, invalidated out – his war was over. He and Joy continued to live with her parents for another 18 months, as housing was in short supply in Sydney then – today we would find the situation intolerable!

"To get a house after the war, we had to camp on the living room floor, with someone who we heard was moving out. That way, we were already there and under the law the landlord couldn't evict us," explains Joy. She and Norm lived in that house, renting at Double Bay.

"In the early 1960s we finally bought a home in Greenwich with some help from Mum and Dad."

After the war, Joy says that things didn't ever go back the way they were. "Some men came back and were difficult; luckily Norm was a 'laid back' character. We were all determined to just go out and enjoy ourselves. The boys just wanted to come back and have a damn good time. So we 'dolled up' and went out to the nightclubs."

Norm became sales director of an American food industry firm called LEVI and he and Joy travelled a lot as part of his work, going on many overseas trips.

They lived in Sydney until retirement, coming to Smiths Lake in 1978 or 1979 – where they built the house that Joy still lives in today, beside the Lake.

Joy has been very active in her 'retirement' years - playing tennis and golf into her eighties. She is a founding member of the Smiths Lake Bowls Club and a patron of the Club, where she played bowls until five years ago. Joy was a valued contributor to local service clubs as well.

How does Joy sum up 100 years?

"I've had a really wonderful, sheltered life. I've never been rich but I've always been able to do what I want."

## Going places....

Gaining a drivers' licence and learning to drive was taken up enthusiastically by Australian women of Joy's era, as more households managed to purchase cars.

"Norm and I were married and Mumma and Dadda gave us money to buy a Morris convertible. We wouldn't let anyone open the doors, they had to climb over and use the dicky seat.

I was married in 1942 and driving from about 1943. I've never had a fine. I almost had a fine for crossing the Harbour Bridge without paying a toll, but it wasn't me! My car was in the garage at home when they said I was crossing the bridge.

I was having dinner with a local doctor, and told them so, and got a very apologetic letter back – and no fine!

I used to drive to Pennant Hills, picking up girlfriends, and driving around. I used to stall the car on the steep hill where Ryde Road meets the Pacific Highway – I remember that very well!"