

# Mia Fantasia-Copley



## EARLY LIFE

Mia was born in Caserta Italy, and migrated to Australia with her family when she was about nine. She has vivid memories of her early years in Italy with her family. Mia has two brothers, one born in Australia and her father sponsored his sister and family, so she grew up surrounded by her extended family. On arrival, the family first stayed with another family in Magill before buying a home in Norwood. Her parents eventually moved to Rostrevor and other family members have moved nearby so this extended community has continued. Mia attended St Mary's School on Beulah Road, but as she had no English on arrival, she found school challenging and left at the end of year 8.

Mia's mother was a major influence on her life and her model of kindness, acceptance and putting others first is something she has tried to emulate in her own life. Her growing up was a difficult time in Mia's life, as she felt isolated and after an early marriage experienced domestic violence so by 17 escaped this situation and lived with her family for several years. Mia believes that this experience has made her more aware of others and understanding the difficult situations' life can bring.

## WORKING LIFE

Mia started work in a box factory while attending night school to learn typing and shorthand. From this she found a job as Girl Friday at a babywear place which enabled her to learn all about the business. This led Mia to open her own babywear shop at Unley.

Through a work friend, Mia met her now husband Ivan Copley, a respected Kaurna elder. Ivan was studying religion at the time and was a member of the High Church of England, Mia had been brought up in the Catholic Church and given her experiences and trust issues wouldn't commit to this relationship until several years after they first met.

Integrating Ivan into the family took time due to their different cultural backgrounds. However, Mia sees Ivan as her other half. They had had a similar childhood, with Ivan leaving school early to support his father, then working in a number of small jobs before undertaking self-education to improve himself. Both of them had personal drive and have given each other support, encouragement and self-belief.

Mia and Ivan had one son Vittorio and Ivan and Mia have been married 34 years.

Mia worked part time during the early years of their son's life at Flinders Medical Centre, driving an old Ford Prefect there that she said she could run faster than!

Initially the couple lived in Broadview before moving into Athelstone in the early 1990s, and recently have moved into Rostrevor. Mia has supported Ivan through the years and together they have achieved much. Ivan worked with the Salvation Army for 12 years with a focus on Aboriginal employment and training before joining the Uniting Church.

From small beginnings working with Aboriginal groups to raise awareness, host events and run interest group meetings in lunch hours, the couple now have a proud legacy

to look back on. In particular it has been their work with the Turkindi organisation that they established in 2000. Turkindi is an entirely volunteer-based community information service operated by and for South Australian Aboriginal people in a partnership with non-Aboriginal Australians. The network assists Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to find meaningful employment, training or information. *Turkindi* is a Kurna word that means coming together and sharing information. The service has a majority Aboriginal board and provides a daily email service, as well as networking opportunities for Aboriginal people or those who work with Aboriginal people. Mia as Office Manager sends out daily emails to around 3,000 email addresses and is the key contact person for the group. Turkindi helps fund Aboriginal people to attend family events and have provided a small grant to encourage young artists. Mia helps to coordinate networking and events and in finding sponsorship, funding and community support. Although a naturally shy person, when Mia is on a mission, she is unstoppable!

### **COMMUNITY SUPPORT**

From around 2005 to 2019, Mia set up a Travel to Funerals Fund and raised money herself to assist Aboriginal people and their Families to travel to their family member's funerals. Over this time, she raised more than \$10,000 dollars and distributed it to families that applied for travel assistance( normally petrol money between \$50 to \$150).

Together Mia and Ivan have been organisers of the first Sorry Day event in Adelaide and the 2002 National Journey of healing meeting held in the Campbelltown area. They were also key in organising the SA Apology Event in Elder Park on a very limited budget of \$2000 assisted by many volunteers and contributors corralled by Mia.

As a non-Aboriginal person, Mia has always included and respected the elders and was asked to join an Aboriginal Women's group to the north of Adelaide, where they met weekly for about 6 months to learn language, dance, songs and culture. At an Inma ceremony, Mia was accepted into the Aboriginal community as a member and adopted into an Anangu family line.

Mia is actively involved in cultural events and takes great joy in seeing her granddaughter leading welcome to country at community events and take pride in her cultural heritage.

### **CAMPBELLTOWN CONNECTIONS**

As active Campbelltown community members, Mia and Ivan appreciate the strong community spirit, the supportive and approachable council leadership and proactive strategies like the Reconciliation Advisory Committee and support for reconciliation events. Mia appreciates the Campbelltown Council's willingness to address issues, include multicultural groups and embrace the diversity of the community.

### **REFLECTIONS**

Mia feels that when the people around her are happy and content she feels successful, wanting the best for others has been a constant in her life. She believes that if we all did one or two small acts of kindness every day the world would be a better place.

Her advice to younger women is to live in the moment, don't think too far ahead and be kind. Her advice to her younger self would be to believe in yourself, trust your own judgements and instincts rather than listening to others with negative advice.

***"Activate the best in others' hearts"***