

Thea Matto

“Be yourself because everyone else is taken”

Thea is the founder and organiser of the popular Moving to Music dance and movement program bringing joy, exercise and friendship to the more than 50 women of all ages and abilities who attend. She and her family have lived and worked in Campbelltown for more than eight years.

Thea and her parents and twin brothers arrived in Adelaide in 1958 from the Netherlands. The family settled in Kensington Park. She remembers that not being able to communicate fluently in English when she first arrived which made life difficult especially in the early days. Thea's father was a professional musician and had played the trumpet in a Dutch military band, touring all through Europe. He had worked for the Philips Phonographische Industrie" (PPI) and Thea's home was filled with music. The Strauss records he brought home were the catalyst for her love of dancing. She was not as fond of opera as her father was and she tells the story of how horrified he was when she started listening to popular music. In Australia, Thea's father played with the Burnside Symphony orchestra and played and conducted their church choir.

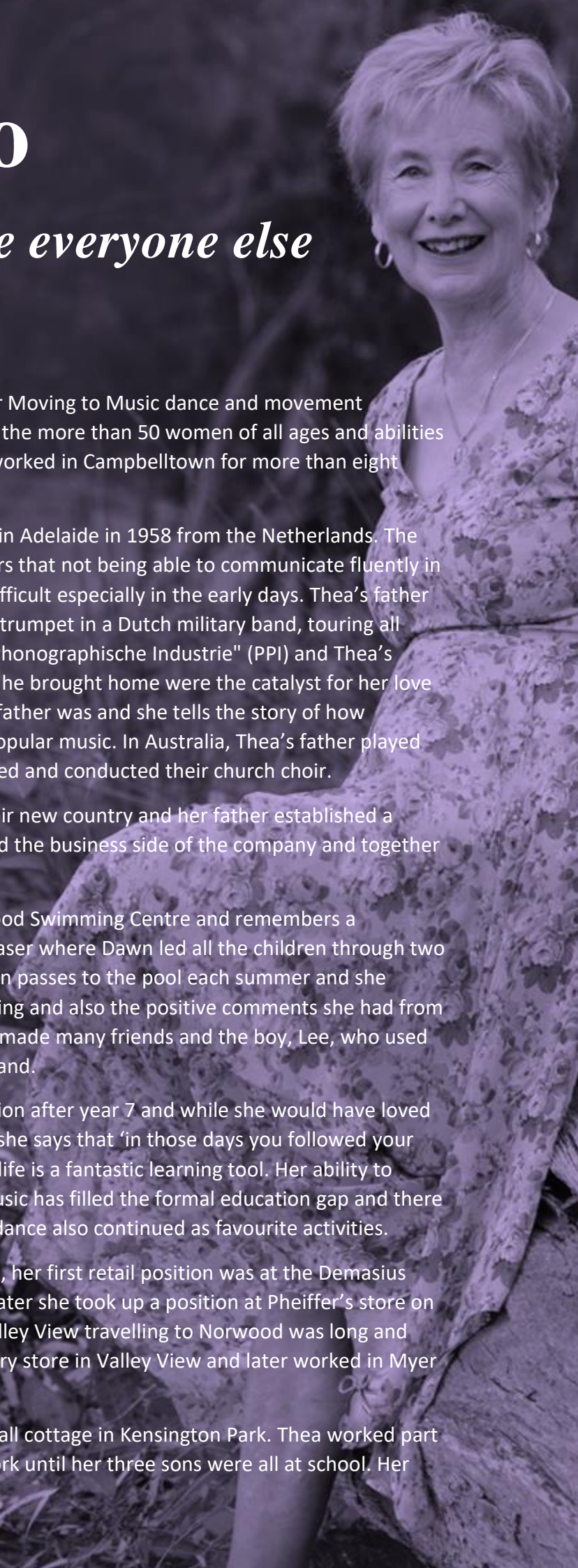
Thea's parents worked hard to make a life in their new country and her father established a window cleaning company. Her mother managed the business side of the company and together they established a successful business.

Thea learnt to swim at the newly opened Norwood Swimming Centre and remembers a swimming carnival that was opened by Dawn Fraser where Dawn led all the children through two laps of the pool. She and her brothers had season passes to the pool each summer and she remembers the enjoyment she got from swimming and also the positive comments she had from her coach, Don Redpath about her abilities. She made many friends and the boy, Lee, who used to walk her home was later to become her husband.

Thea wasn't encouraged to continue her education after year 7 and while she would have loved to continue to secondary school and university, she says that 'in those days you followed your parents' advice'. Looking back she believes that life is a fantastic learning tool. Her ability to teach herself through a love of literature and music has filled the formal education gap and there are still new opportunities every day. Yoga and dance also continued as favourite activities.

She had developed a love of fashion and in 1960, her first retail position was at the Demasius Store on Greenhill Road, Tusmore. Three years later she took up a position at Pfeiffer's store on Norwood Parade. When the family moved to Valley View travelling to Norwood was long and time consuming so Thea managed a haberdashery store in Valley View and later worked in Myer in the city.

Thea and Lee married in 1969, moving into a small cottage in Kensington Park. Thea worked part time at Pfeiffer's in Norwood again, stopping work until her three sons were all at school. Her



love of dance and movement were reflected in her position as a part time teacher of aerobics at Magill Primary School and at the Norwood Health and Fitness Centre. When the family moved to Modbury in 1989 she took up her retail career again at Myer, Tea Tree Plaza where she was appointed to a position assisting people with breast cancer, different ages and abilities to select their most appropriate intimate apparel. Thea remembers that clients would ask for her specifically and that it was one of the most rewarding positions that she held. She retired in 2015.

Community Involvement

Thea says that Campbelltown is 'a place to call home and where I belong 'and she loves being part of a close knit community where people stop and comment on her garden.

Thea's love of music and dance meant that she continued to take exercise and dance classes, remembering how she used to dance to her father's Strauss records. This was also the foundation for her Moving to Music classes. They began when she found that the St. Francis of Assisi hall was not being used and she was given permission to use the hall, as a volunteer, to organise mature age dance and movement classes for people with all levels of ability. What started as classes with just eight participants has grown to at least 50 women moving to all genres of music and dance, providing each other with joy and friendship. During COVID restrictions, the dancing didn't stop but continued outdoors at Thorndon Park.

Thea believes that you don't stop moving to the music when you get older, it's when you stop the music that you get older. She also encourages the girls to step up and do different dance routines. She has a support team, her WINGS, who have made tremendous contributions to the program.

In recognition of her contribution to the Campbelltown community, Thea was awarded by John Gardner MP, the Morialta Community Service Award in July 2023.

Health and Wellbeing

Thea's strategies to maintain a healthy lifestyle include not just dancing but regularly walking the new puppy at Kensington Park and gardening. Close family connections are very important for Thea and her husband. Thea believes that putting the needs of others before your own and being realistic about relationships are the secrets to a life fulfilled.

She would tell her younger self that life will put many challenges in the way but she should always believe in herself and she will learn and grow based the decisions she makes. She needs to remember that nothing is impossible and to be proud of who she is. Her journey will lead to a full and rewarding life.

“The rhythm of life has a powerful beat”

