

Speech given by Bev at Happy Wanderers 25th Birthday Celebration

The idea for the Happy Wanderers was born even more than 25 years ago.

It was at an interest meeting DRMC hosted in 1990 at Lilydale to see if there was interest in starting a choir. The Yarra Valley Singers began on that night, a gospel interest group began and one solitary lady called Elsie remained who wanted to start an entertainment group to visit nursing homes. The other groups took off but there was no interest from the Lilydale area for Elsie's group.

DRMC tried very hard to stimulate interest and in desperation suggested that we should advertise an interest meeting here at DRMC in the hills in July 1991.

The five original members still with the group are Deirdre, Rosemary, Joan, Sam and Win. Over the years in excess of 2000 performing visits have been made, giving the aged and frail aged enjoyable and engaging musical experiences.

The Happy Wanderers is much more than just a singing group. They have a range of programs with songs specially chosen for the residents. Particular themes are used depending on the seasons, special events or cultural interests. It is a joy to observe the group in action.

Each performer engages in some way with the audience members, perhaps a dance with a gentleman who once loved to waltz, a gentle swaying with an arm chair bound lady remembering dances of long ago.

Always a cheery greeting to each one, perhaps a folk song for a former migrant from Italy or Holland. As well as the gift of music that Happy Wanderers have given willingly for 25 years to the community, the special qualities of each member have shone through both sad, tough and happy times. Each one of them has supported one another with friendship and compassion as well as hilarity.

This is what the academics call community cohesion, engagement and cultural identity. Happy Wanderers are masters at this!

There are always natural leaders in groups. In happy Wanderers Win takes the bookings and communicates with everyone, Deirdre collects the money, Rosemary helps when Win is away, Joan used to do the driving and Deirdre helps with that now. Some of the Happy Wanderers also joined forces to deliver music workshops weekly to profoundly disabled people at Rosine in Mt Evelyn and now at the community residential units. BRAVO.

Happy Wanderers have also been major players in the Attitude performances and more recently in the ATTITUDE pantomimes and dance party.

So the community has a lot to be grateful for the 25 years of musical service provided by the Happy Wanderers.

I too am grateful as they actually almost adopted my aunt who told me she felt like a VIP when the Happy Wanderers came to Willowbrooke. Some even visited her when she was moved to Drouin.

SO..... Let's salute this amazing group and say thank you. Let's cut the cake and sing happy birthday. A toast to Happy Wanderers.

