

Introduction: About the Author

Marjorie Quinn was born in Darlinghurst Sydney, in 1889, the only child of Patrick Edward and Julia Quinn (nee Bourke). She was a child used to being in the company of adults while sharing her ideas and giving her opinion freely in their presence. Marjorie grew up in Sydney in an atmosphere drenched in literature, poetry and politics. Her father was a writer and Member of Parliament. Her uncle, Roderic Quinn, was also a well-known writer at that time. Exposure to these professions brought the young Marjorie into contact with a plethora of interesting characters at a time when Australia was emerging as a nation. She loved her hometown of Sydney, the harbour and the surrounding beaches. She describes it in her memoirs “. where in early 1912 I walked up Pitt Street one day from the Quay with my father who, it seemed to me, doffed his hat to almost every other passer-by. The city where I had been born, the friendly, unhurrying city that I loved ”

Marjorie's exposure to all things literary had a profound effect on her. Her first piece of writing was written at age 11. Entitled *Pinksie and the White Kangaroo – A Fairy Tale*, it was published in 1903 in *Young Australia: An Illustrated Monthly Paper for Boys and Girls*. Marjorie's love of writing and the world of literature was a lifelong passion. She was very active in the Australian literary community from the 1920s through to the 1940s and was one of the founding members and honorary secretary of the Fellowship of Australian Writers (FAW) which was formed in 1928. Her work with the FAW brought her into contact with many interesting and famous people which she enjoyed. Later Marjorie became hostess-secretary and took over the role of organising events hosted by the FAW. The FAW is still active and is Australia's oldest writing organisation, offering support and encouragement to fledgling writers. She was also active in helping to establish other organisations such as the Australian Branch of the PEN Club, a body of international writers. She counted many famous writers of the period, among them Dame Mary Gilmore, as close friends.

Marjorie wrote short stories and poetry for a number of publications including the *A Woman's Letter*, the women's section of *The Bulletin*, *The Star*, and *The Australian Woman's Mirror*. Marjorie was very devoted to her parents. She travelled with them to New York, Canada and San Francisco when her father was Deputy Trade Commissioner for New South Wales in the United States. In 1915 she attended the Panama-Pacific Exposition in San Francisco where she and her mother Julia were popular in society circles. Much later she travelled with her mother to Hollywood to try her luck scriptwriting for the movies. She reported for *The Sydney Morning Herald* while in San Francisco and Hollywood.

After the early death of her father in 1926, Marjorie lived with her mother Julia and cared for her. Marjorie referred to Julia as “my mother and comrade.” Their lives had changed greatly since her father's death. They struggled financially, barely making a living during the Depression years. Finally, through illness they were separated, Julia in a rest home and Marjorie in hospital suffering from acute rheumatoid arthritis. Marjorie's condition persisted and worsened, so finally she had to give up her writing.

Marjorie never married, so was close to her extended family. By the 1960s she was an elderly lady. As children we visited 'Cousin Marjorie' in the Nursing Home in Croydon and she was always happy to see us. Marjorie remained in close contact with the extended family, sending birthday and Christmas cards to all of us until her condition deteriorated and she was unable to write. The birthday cards she sent always had a personal poem for the recipient, written in the spidery, arthritic handwriting that appears on the front cover. These poems were very difficult for her to pen but her desire to do this herself indicated to all of us the two most important elements of her life: family and the written word.

In 1963, Marjorie received two grants from the Commonwealth Literary Fund to write her memoirs. The Board requested that she “. . . . give special attention to the literary, artistic and musical celebrities you have known.” It was a mammoth task, especially for someone who was bedridden and without the benefits of technology that we take for granted today. The memoirs were written from Marjorie's bed dictating to her cousin Noreen Quinn (our aunt) who acted as secretary to Marjorie, typing and putting the manuscript into order. It was a precious project to Marjorie.

Now, it is a precious project to us. Our mother, Eileen Berman, is the youngest and last living member from that generation of Irish Australians. She is 88 years old and we had often been told as children some of the stories that have come alive in Marjorie's manuscript. It is all the more important to us because the manuscript was found accidentally and rescued from a pile of boxes earmarked 'For the Tip,' when the house of our aunts was being cleared out. The papers were stored at the back of the garage in old water-damaged cardboard boxes. This manuscript was begging to be published! Looking through her letters and papers, we realised that Marjorie made many attempts to have her memoirs published. The culture at the time (1960s) had no interest in the style of writing or content of the manuscript, as it was thought to be very outmoded and old-fashioned. As a result she received one refusal after another from publishers.

We feel the time has come to publish the manuscript. It is an important historical document, written by an author within the Australian literary community of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It provides a snapshot into the literary and political world of early Sydney which should be preserved, shared and enjoyed through publication.

Perhaps it could be said that the eventful eventual publication of Marjorie's memoirs in some way fulfils the prophecy to be found in Joel 2:25 – *I will repay you the years that the locusts hath eaten.*

*Deborah McMahon & Kathryn Berryman
Sydney 2011*

Editors' Note

What an opportunity for a mining engineer with a bee in his bonnet about an apparent declining interest in History as a discipline and a university academic with an Oxford Master's degree in English Literature. Editing the memoirs of Marjorie Quinn, who rubbed shoulders with virtually everybody who was anybody in Australian literature and the Arts from the 1890's on, was both an immense privilege and a consolidation of our understanding of that formative period of our nation.

Editing a manuscript can be just looking for typographical errors and ensuring consistency of font styles and punctuation. However, checking the accuracy of historical facts and dates, personal relationships and the career details of so many of our 'cultural parents' opened up new worlds in multitudinous directions. Many hours could have been (and were) spent in following leads all over Sydney and the world, after rediscovery of the manuscript by Marjorie's relatives Deborah McMahon and Kathryn Berryman. Marjorie Quinn's great service to the descendants of her times is the recording of the web of connections showing the breadth of her world.

The nature of Marjorie's manuscript also presented fascinating colours to the task. The mere fact that the majority, if not all of the work, had been dictated to a succession of at least four amanuenses required the drawing of distinctions between Marjorie's own individual style of expression and the various interpretations set down by the listeners. As we well know our verbal expression is invariably significantly different to our written expression of the same information or ideas.

It is very clear that Marjorie hero-worshipped her father, Patrick Quinn, and her Uncle Roderic, for obvious reasons. They would have to be fairly considered prime examples of Irish gentlemen with full measures of the poetic temperament implied in that term. They introduced her to that world of ideas and the expression of them that so enthral us today. It was also clear that some of the associations with people and events Marjorie held dear surfaced quite often in the text. Again this not a surprise as the process of dictation took place over quite a few years. It is unlikely that successive amanuenses would have had the opportunity of editing material during the process. Therefore some judicious editing to maintain the flow of the narrative has been undertaken.

The faithful committal to digital form of the whole text by Deborah McMahon and Kathryn Berryman has been a labour of love. How better could the years that the locust has eaten be rejuvenated? This also means that the editors' judgement can be critiqued. Nothing, however, will detract from the value of Marjorie Quinn's contribution to Australian history.

*Stephen & Jill Ireland
Bega Valley 2011*