

Congratulations on being local and South Australian Active Citizen of the Year. What does that mean to you?

As this recognises my work with the Yankalilla Youth Theatre it's not only about me. I was chosen because of the wonderful young people I work with, and the supportive local community who have embraced their creative and imaginative energy. It celebrates that we were able to get established and keep going during the challenges of covid.

I am personally thrilled though at such significant recognition of my work. It was certainly fun receiving the award at Government House and giving a speech that made politicians and dignitaries laugh at my descriptions of the dramas the group has created. Positive feedback from the ceremony keeps coming.



Well done. Can you share some of those stories?

Young people have extraordinary minds, open, full of ideas and hilarious. Put young people together, give them creative control and results can be truly remarkable. Two story lines show their rich imaginations: characters like Granny Joe, a 98-year-old dairy farmer whose beloved milking cow Pattina is abducted by aliens; and the concept of a reality TV show called Couples Drama where you can either win one million dollars or a divorce sheet.

How has the community embraced these livewires?

Theatre and storytelling are powerful outlets for young people, especially when community members trust their young people and listen to their ideas.

Our business owners have said, "Yeah sure, you can play loud music and busk outside my shop, with your cardboard guitar."

Our newsagency owner said, "Yes, that's fine you can dress up as a TV News Crew, with your boom mics made out of paint rollers, and interview my customers."

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Our over 50's club said, "Yes, you can take over our Friday night happy hour with your murder mystery."

The head of our farmer's market said, "Yes please, I would love you to interrupt the entire market with your flash mob game show. In fact, do it twice!"

This award celebrates both the youth theatre group and this supportive community which believes in them.

You deserve personal credit for your leadership in establishing the Yankalilla Youth Theatre. From where did your theatre background come?

I've loved bringing my life experiences in community drama to Yankalilla. It all started at Barmera Primary School where tolerant teachers agreed to insistent requests to perform the plays we'd made up at lunch time.

In high school days in Glossop I excitedly studied drama and found like-minded friends. I excelled at English, creative writing and drama and they remain my passions. Drama was not just a school subject as my tribe often mucked around with performances at weekends. Our inspiring teacher Terri McCutcheon called us her best class ever.

I joined the school's rock eisteddfod productions, directed by exuberant teacher **Barbara Pettigrew**. She sparked our joy in performance and led us to win the state competition. Performing at the Festival Theatre, I was hooked.

And after school days?

Beginning as a trainee, I worked at Chaffey Theatre for seven years, in box office and as front of house manager. I was mentored by its manager, positive Margaret Marshall, who held strong beliefs in the value of theatre in community wellbeing. I loved the Riverland Youth Theatre (RYT) and spent four years tutoring drama workshops and programs in schools, then became administrator of all its programs. Working beside teachers I saw many different approaches to engaging children, and from Alison Howard, RYT's creative director, I learned innovative ways to work with young people and the community and rousing methods to direct theatre.

Later, living in Sellicks Beach, I worked at Hopgood Theatre Noarlunga as a front of house manager, and as Sellicks Community Development Officer I established the Sellicks Drama Group. My children were home schooled in their younger years, and for two days a week we came to the Annexe at Yankalilla Area School. An amazing educational facility and creative hub, its closing was a sad loss. It was one of a kind in South Australia and a recognised leader in alternative education.

What a wealth of experience you bring to Yankalilla. But besides being a theatre director, you're also a writer. Why?

I write, or I'd go mad. I feel I am bursting with stories. I've always loved storytelling and reading, escaping into other worlds and letting my imagination run wild.

At first, I wanted to do everything: dance, act, sing, write, direct, and make music. But realising I was too scattered and needed focus, I did a useful Professional Writing course at Adelaide college of Arts taught by the encouraging Jude Aquilina.

Do you have a writing space in your house?

Well yes, but I am currently tripping over costumes stored there for the next youth theatre production. (An aside, we need a shed and space to run this theatre group!) I write anywhere and everywhere, grabbing odd moments to get thoughts and inspirations recorded, often on scraps of paper. I am also plagued by keeping separate notebooks for projects and then rustling around to find where I wrote those thoughts I just had to get down.

What are you currently writing?

I am writing on three fronts:

- plays with young people and incorporating their ideas;
- a novel which is morphing into a screen play inspired by big cat mysteries in Australia;
- and travel articles which stopped with covid but will soon resurface in new directions.

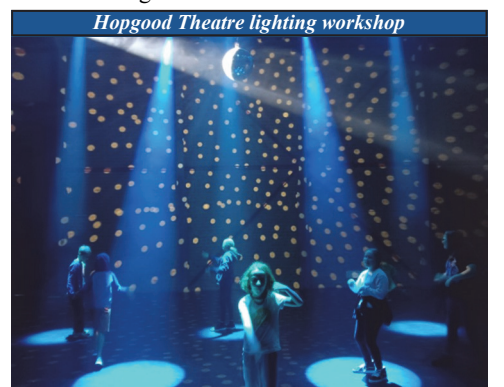
Why do you live here in Normanville?

We came here nine years ago and landed in heaven. With the hills behind us and in front a magnificent sea view down the coast, we sometimes sit on the deck and sing, "You and me in paradise". Our caring and inclusive neighbours help each other out. We love this supportive community and being involved with its activities at many levels.

There is no doubt about your commitment to your local area and its people of all ages. How do you juggle so many hats?

Well I am a wife, mother and stepmother, I am the honey lady at the market, I work as Murray's assistant at the newsagency. Sometimes I get into my writing space, though rather late at night, and I am often putting up the youth theatre flag outside the Ag Hall where we are about to get busier with more workshops in theatre, writing and visual art for ages 6 – 19.

I have many visions for developing the theatre group but often feel overwhelmed. I'll be calling a community meeting soon to discuss ideas and seek volunteers to assist with admin, fundraising and other tasks which take me away from enthusing youngsters to develop creatively and bloom on stage.



Good luck with your next performance WORLD'S WORST SCHOOL DAYS, touted as your funniest yet, at the Hopgood Theatre at Noarlunga Centre at 3.00 and 6.00pm Thursday 13 April.

Cover: Evette Wolf, writer and theatre director, with Her Excellency Governor Adamson