

EILEEN SMITH

“On the recommendation of the Committee any member who has given outstanding service...and is endorsed by two thirds of any General Meeting” may be elected a Life Member. When Eileen Smith’s name was put forward in 1995 the vote surely would have been just a formality. After all, she was a founding member of the Club, had served on the Ladies Committee for 25 years and was Club Champion 11 times. In this time she served as Secretary, Treasurer, Captain and Handicapper. In short she was one of those people whose efforts made the club.

Eileen was introduced to golf by her husband, Lindsay, when they were living in Yea. Lindsay, incidentally, was a very good golfer becoming our very first Club Champion in 1955 and he also devoted many hours to the development of the Club particularly in delving into the history of the place. When the couple arrived in Drouin in 1954 it would not have been a hard decision to become involved in the fledgling club although Eileen’s election to the position of Secretary without even being present at the meeting was interesting. Usually those foolish enough to be in the rooms when nominations are called for end up automatically elected. But not even to be there? That was unorthodox. No doubt it was with Eileen’s consent though.

Eileen and Lindsay joined not only for the pleasures that golf brings. We all know that there is nothing better than beating a little white ball, the elements and our own temperament even if this happens only once in a blue moon. Joining the Club though was an instant way of connecting with the town. Today we belong to a much more mobile society where it is not unusual for us to travel in search of work. This has meant less of an attachment to place because often where we live and where we work are not the same. 1950’s Australia was not like that. Country towns, especially small ones, were tightly knit. The old saying that newcomers never really belonged until they were buried in the local cemetery has a degree of truth. So, if you were new and you wanted to belong then you got involved. If you did this you were accepted. And if you chose to be involved in the recreation of the Golf Club which for many was a dream, this was particularly so. For the Smiths this was certainly true. Eileen still lives in Drouin, Lindsay is buried here and through all of this time their attachment to the Club has been strong.

The first of Eileen’s 12 Club Championship was in 1960 and the last in 1985. In between she won in 1963, 1965, 1967, 1973, 1974, 1976, 1977, 1978, 1979 and 1982. For longevity alone it was a mighty achievement. Then you need to consider the format of play: stroke elimination rounds followed by match play. Each time she won she would have to confront the boss at the drapery where she worked to ask for yet another morning off to play the next round. And of course you needed to consider the opposition. During this time Alma Pepperell won 5 times and Kath Dwyer (mother of Shane) won 7 times. Victory didn’t come easy.

As an aside the mention of these names highlights an interesting fact. Although not in the same year, Eileen and husband, Lindsay, both won Championships. Alma went one better winning in the same year (1970) with her son, Stuart. Kath did even better still. In 1966 husband, Jack, and she both won and in 1968 Kath won with son, Shane. Given other sons, Marcus and Chris won Junior and B grade championships we can probably say that the Dwyers are a Drouin dynasty. All we need now is for Liam to step up and the picture will be complete.

Apart from Club Championships, Eileen enjoyed plenty of other success. She was twice Club Champion at Warragul. With Lorraine Burke she won the Gippsland Foursome Championship at Lang Lang. She was selected to represent West Gippsland in Country Week. To do this you had to be noticed by people outside the Club. She believes there may have been a Pennant victory too but records are not clear. Certainly the team of Kath Dwyer, Alice Cuthbertson, Alma Pepperell, Shirley Wadham and Eileen was good enough. There were many individual Club awards and particularly with mixed foursomes wins with Shane which extended to the Gippsland area. She

remembers one particularly memorable win when, paired with Shane, they defeated Kath and Jack. This included a birdie on the 24th when her ball clipped a tree but still landed on the green just a few inches from the hole while Jack, whose ball also hit the same tree, was way off course. Shane must have inherited his equable temperament from his mother because on this occasion Jack had a great deal to say and not all of it was complementary to Eileen. No doubt Shane quietly smiled at the spectacle.

At the time mixed foursomes were much more popular than they are today which is unfortunate but does reflect different times. If it was husband and wife it was referred to as “mixed gruesomes” which strikes me as delightful. There must be good reasons while there aren’t more opportunities to play mixed foursomes but if it provides the opportunity to bring back the “mixed gruesomes” bring it on.

Eileen also had success at Warragul. After the war and without a club at Drouin many joined Warragul. This continued even after the Club was resurrected in 1955 because it wasn’t a full course and had sand scrapes. It was this that was most important for Eileen. When Drouin was admitted to the West Gippsland Pennant she recognised the importance of experience playing on grass greens and joined Warragul as well. Drouin players weren’t always made to feel welcome. She remembers one snooty Warragul member complaining, “You have a course of your own. Why don’t you stay there?” Eileen’s reply was immediate, “Because I like coming up here and annoying you lot.” It didn’t stop Shirley Wadham, Alice Cuthbertson, Dorothy Wilson and Eileen performing at the Warragul Tournament’s concert.

It got a bit nastier than this. One year Kath Dwyer swears Warragul officials stood and watched her play off the wrong markers and then penalised her. It only made her more determined and she went on to win their Club Championship. There were moments of fun though. One year 1965/6 Eileen won the Club Championships of both clubs. Prior to accepting her Warragul trophy, their President sidled up to her and said that he was thinking of introducing her as, “the intercourse champion.” Technically correct of course but even though convulsed with laughter, Eileen thought otherwise and threatened to leave.

Eileen was a left hander who at her best had a handicap of 8. She had a slice so there is hope for the many of us who have that problem – the slice, that is, not the left handedness. However, according to Shane she was, “very accurate, very steady” and here is the killer, “a very good putter.” Her attitude to the game is interesting saying that it is a thinking person’s sport. Blasting away is no good if you end up in the wrong position. Of course we all know this but unlike Eileen most of us can’t place the ball where we would like.

She also has very definite opinions about our overall approach to the game. After Lindsay’s death she spent some time as a bowler. She revelled in the competition even if she was bored by the lack of variety in the scenery – no matter how many times you walk up and down it still looks the same. However, what really struck her was the quite unrealistic attitude of many of the women inexperienced in other sports. They got annoyed when their performance didn’t meet their expectations. Golf taught her to be pleased when things went right, not to be surprised when things went wrong but above all to enjoy herself.

If you are a committee member for 29 years then you do a lot of unheralded work. In the very early days with a Saturday field of about 30 men and maybe a dozen women it was clear that if you wanted to play golf then you had to pitch in. For the men this meant Sunday working bees where the virgin bush and the swamp was gradually transformed into ... well less swampy, less virginal... wait a minute that can’t be right.. whatever, it was hard work. The women did their bit as caterers. During Pennant and tournaments, presumably because the men didn’t know how to make sandwiches, they provided afternoon tea. Sundays their role was really important. Financially the Club always struggled and relied heavily on the Melbourne traffic to keep its head above water.

Green fees were part of it but it was also the food provided by the women that made a difference. When Sunday numbers were about 50 it was manageable; above this it became a real problem.

The catering extended to the many social functions conducted by the Club and also outside groups such as birthday parties. If food was provided at the dinner dances, balls, formal dinners and just card nights it was by the "Associates." There was a lot of hard work. In the middle of this was Eileen Smith

Whereas from the advantage of today we might be critical of the sexism in all of this the two divisions of the club were united. When Eileen was elected as the first lady representative on the Course management Committee, Gerald Treasure could only admit defeat when after he discovered he couldn't bend her to his will suggested that perhaps he could buy her a wooden spoon. She replied, "No thanks, I can stir without one." Alan Rogers fared no better when he fumed against women playing on Saturday. Eileen replied, "Well there is nothing to stop the men playing Tuesday." She did find it judicious, though, to allow men exclusive access on "Diggers Day." The name probably says it all. There were niggles; there are today; but together a club was formed.

She particularly wanted some more recognition to be given to Maurie Kilmartin, a great mate of Hughie Mapleson. Maurie could be blunt (ask the Race Club) but he got things done. In 1967 the new club house was nearly complete with opening day to coincide with the Tournament. Alma Pepperell, Eva Pratt and Eileen had gone to Melbourne to purchase the furnishings and carpet with delivery promised before the big day. When they didn't arrive and with time running out, Maurie solved the problem. He hopped in the Ute, got himself to Melbourne and did the job himself.

When you meet Eileen today she is a lady of .. well.. mature years but with vitality and definitely a twinkle in her eyes. She may not still play but meeting her in the Club rooms it was obviously still her Club and the stories and memories flowed. John Harris was a Melbourne pro who offered lessons. Eve, one of our hackers of the time, followed through gracefully even though her briefs fell down. Quick as a flash she said to John, "You're the first pro I've dropped my drawers to." What would he have thought about the country maidens? Eileen, of course found it hugely funny.

She also found it easy to laugh when she partnered Norm Myers to victory in a scratch and handicap Foursomes event at Trafalgar. The prize was 2 sets of sets of hair brushes. So what you say? Norm was nearly bald. Fortunately he had sense of humour.

She absolutely delighted in recounting this story of Don Piner, father of current players John, Rob and Tony. Don was a painter and his battered old panel van reflected his trade. One tournament he parked next to a very flash car and as luck would have it found its owner, a very, very English gentleman, part of his playing group. After talking nonstop to recount his life history The Gentleman eventually paused to draw breath to ask what Don did for a living. Dead pan, Don replied, "Actually, I'm the proprietor of the Drouin Art Gallery"

That's Drouin.

There is no doubt much else to be said about Eileen. It is worth concluding with a poem supplied by Eileen herself. It is not about her but about the game that is important to her. It is about the game that is important to us all.

*Now I lay me down to sleep,
I pray thee Lord this dream to keep,
May I step upon the tee and hit balls like pros I see.
Pars, birdies eagles too and putts that roll both straight and true.
Should you grant this before I wake –
Don't let me die for Heaven's sake.*

Written by George Shand