An entertaining interlude

A country girl from South Australia, Norma Murdock moved to Melbourne to follow her dream of becoming a singing sensation. When she tired of the spotlight she returned to SA, but found herself following her heart to the big city once more. Now she's Norma Spalding and a member of the Probus Club of Langwarrin.

BY JESSICA GOULBURN



Norma was a very protected 19-year-old country girl, who in 1944 was happily working in the Customs Department Office in Port Pirie, South Australia.

Norma's mother was a pianist. Friends would often gather around the piano to hear Norma's heavenly voice and, despite her shyness, Norma eventually came out of her shell and, with encouragement from her friends, would often sing at the local dances.

The war was on.

It was important to keep spirits up so a Concert Party was formed to raise money and entertain the locals and more importantly the Air Force boys stationed in Pirie.

Norma was a soloist, singing bluesy numbers and along with other artists delighted the packed Town Hall audiences night after night.

Eventually, Norma was noticed by a producer, who encouraged her to audition for J. C. Williamson's, hoping that she would be good enough to join the Musical Comedy chorus in Melbourne.

After a successful first audition in Adelaide, Norma's parents gave her permission to travel to Melbourne where accommodation in a private boarding house in Burnley was arranged. "Moving to Melbourne was scary," Norma says. "But because the accommodation was pre-arranged and the landlady was an aunt of a friend, I always felt welcomed."

After another audition at the theatre in Melbourne, Norma was in.

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She went immediately into rehearsals for the chorus of *Rio Rita* with Gladys Moncrieff, John McCallum and other principals.

Norma soon found that her newfound employment was exhausting. She worked six nights a week plus two matinees.

Homesickness didn't help but Norma loved every moment of every show in which she performed, including *Rio Rita, The Merry Widow, Maid of the Mountains, Victoria and her Hussar* and *Rose Marie*.

Performing the totem dance from *Rose Marie* in the

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Despite never singing professionally again after her return to SA, Norma remembers her days as an entertainer fondly and with pride.

heat of summer, right over the footlights and with several encores, took its toll.

Following the end of the war when peace was declared, artists were asked to perform extra matinees. “My weight was down to barely over a stone and I was utterly exhausted,” Norma explains. “It eventually forced my retirement.”

By Norma’s 21st birthday, she was home and back into office work.

Of course, she missed the wonderful company of the girls she had befriended but realised that there was one person she missed more than anyone else.

“I met Harold on his return from New Guinea where he’d been fighting,” says Norma. “He was my landlady’s son.”

Harold and Norma kept in contact upon her return to South Australia. But before long, Norma was back in Melbourne and back with Harold.

In 1947 Norma Murdock became Norma Spalding.

After spending a number of years in Colac, the couple settled back in Melbourne.

As their golfing days came to an end a few years ago, a friend recommended Probus to fill the void. Harold and Norma missed the social interactivity that golf had always provided. So, five years ago, they joined the Probus Club of Langwarrin.

Harold and Norma are now in their 66th year of married bliss.

Although Norma didn't sing professionally again, if you’re lucky, you may just catch a tune. ••

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