

Obituary for Cynthia Fraser

Cynthia Fraser, a dynamic mother, grandmother, great grandmother, aunt, sister and friend passed away in the early hours of Sunday, 14 June 2020.

Born on the 7th of December 1934 in Elsies River, Western Cape, to Mabel and Joseph Pinto, Cynthia was the eldest of eleven children who knew her as Cynthy. Very early on, she took on motherly responsibilities in assisting her parents in the Klipfontein home with the caring and raising of many of her younger siblings. She and Aunty Stella had to work as childminders at a tender age looking after children at St Johns road and Arthur road in Sea Point Cape Town. This was when their Dad, Joseph Pinto fell ill. In the words of Aunty Stella, "Cynthy reared everyone. She prepared their clothes and made sure that they were ready for school." This was when she "was at home with Daddy and she cooked for everyone under his watchful eye." As one of the grandchildren remarked "there is a gap in Granny's life, she did not have a childhood." Granny's rebuttal was, "that had to be done, and Aunty Stella and I did not realise that we were just children." The three older sisters Cynthia, Stella and Shirley went to school in turns in order to look after the younger children because "Mummy was working."

From a young age Ma Fraser or Cynthia began her political activism alongside her brother Mervyn, handing out pamphlets and newspapers like the *Clarion*, *the Guardian*, *the New Age*, *The Spark* and subsequent successor newspapers, which changed names to beat the banning order. They distributed the newspaper--with the 'Christmas stamps', the latter of which they sold in the Klipfontein community on behalf of her trade unionist mother, Mabel Pinto or Aunty Mabel as she was fondly known.

Cynthia found a lifelong companion in Arthur Fraser whom she met when accompanying her cousin, Hennie (Henry Overmeyer) to the rugby matches in Elsiesriver. Our father (Arthur), played as scrumhalf for Meltons (RFC) rugby club and the flyhalf was Milin Petersen. They were both teachers at the School of Industry Ottery. Millin made the introductions and they got married in 1960 under the state of emergency.

Their life together as husband and wife from 1960 to 1997 was busy. They had six children spread over 12 years. Raising six children in the sixties, seventies and eighties, as a socially active family that meant social and political activity was ever present in the one household. The children were raised to see themselves as part of a South African society that needed to change. In the family it was understood that this change would not happen by itself but needed to be brought about by challenging and changing the status quo. This was evident in their community work and especially their work in the Kleinvlei Methodist church. Cynthia was the President of the Women's Association in Kleinvlei and served on the District Leadership whilst Arthur was both a Society Steward and local preacher.

As a mother, Cynthia had accepted that this meant her children would be part of a struggle that put them in harm's way. Her belief in the righteousness of the cause, her faith in God, and confidence in her children meant she did not question why the family was confronted with so much adversity. Rather the challenge was to figure out how to do what was necessary to fight an apparently invincible foe. While her husband Arthur was a teacher and local preacher, Cynthia was a factory worker, a trader of clothes, fabric and foodstuff. Anything that could secure additional income.

One of Ma Fraser's entrepreneurial ventures was to make glazed 'konfyt' and every member of the family, and their fortunate or unfortunate friends were put to work to "prick" the watermelon before it was soaked in lime water. Barry, Erica and Envir came up with an invention to have a multi spiked device that could cover a larger area of a piece of watermelon. Home-based industry was just a part of the Fraser household.

Their family, like so many, was not the neat suburban nuclear family but rather a bit of a mixed bag. There was aunt Molly who was part of the family from 1968, and other family friends who stayed for months. The household generally consisted of at least 10 people. Despite the broader social, political and economic pressures their home was filled with mischief, fun and activity. Watching the Wimbledon tennis final and the FA Cup final were fixtures where family would be invited over.

The period from 1980 to 1991 was a period of intense anguish, struggle, adversity and joy for the family. This period saw the family torn apart with Geraldine going into exile in 1980 to be followed by Debbie, and her other children being involved in political activity during the State of Emergencies of the 1980's. As a mother she did everything she could to try to keep them safe and she was always there for them and the many other children. Eventually 4 of her 6 children would end up in exile. Finally in 1990 the unbanning of political organisations saw things begin to change.

She was always grateful that all her children managed to survive the vicious fight with the Apartheid system. She always reflected and especially so in recent times that "Arthur (our father, grandfather) was always measured and considered in dealing with a situation. For example, when a cache of arms had to be moved quickly and she wanted to move it in the day seeing 'Envir, struggling to move it' he said 'wait until dark'" Also when Geraldine left due to the inherent danger he quietly went to "Boesak" to enquire whether he could establish that she was safe."

She was ever the nurturer. She always ensured that there was food even when things were difficult, and money was short, in the words of one member of the African National Congress (ANC) underground in the eighties " Before we left for Zimbabwe, we had to hide for three days in the house of the Fraser family in Glenhaven. The day we left, Mrs Fraser, also known as 'Mother' packed in chicken, homemade rolls and luxuries for the road. Three of the unit members left early morning for Zimbabwe."

Mummy would also be remembered for the many Christmas cakes she baked and sent to every family member and fortunate close friends. These would last well into the year. The large bowls of pickled fish over Easter and the sumptuous meals.

She later became affectionately known by many as Ma Fraser or "Granny", a title that was not reserved for only her family and friends. This title and her matriarchal role reflected her innate warmth, caring nature and strong affliction to do what is right, not what is easy. As a family we knew her for her tough love. She would give that bit of advice that you did not always want to hear or accept at the time. The tough love was extended to everybody and even the grandchildren can recollect anecdotes of such. Mummy was a confidante to us.

The added role of mother and wife Ma Fraser solidified her political involvement in the fight against the injustices facing all South Africans, where she was an active participant in underground structures of the ANC prior to its unbanning in 1990.

She was also a well-known face within communities across Cape Town because of her involvement in initiatives targeting marginalized communities such as Mannenberg, Mitchell's Plain, Grassy Park, Langa and Parkwood. These initiatives included the rehabilitation and upliftment programmes at Pollsmoor prison as well as practical skills-development classes. Over the past decade plus Ma Fraser was actively involved with Cape Town Child Welfare in addition to other welfare and community organisations.

Granny Fraser, never the idle body, was also active in the Methodist Church of South Africa including the Women's Association. Arthur and Cynthia were involved in 'Helping Hands' and the Heatherdale Children's Home under the Athlone Methodist Circuit. Cynthia and Arthur Fraser were also instrumental in building the Kleinvlei Methodist church both in the physical building of the church and expanding the congregation. At this time Arthur Fraser was the principal of the State Children's Home in Faure and they were active members of the Kleinvlei congregation and Community.

As reflective as Ma Fraser could be, the joy she drew from being surrounded by people was palpable. Her family and friends knew that her longstanding weekly games nights on Fridays were a calendar event tracing back to dancing at the rugby club in Klipfontein. For years, many a grandchild beneath the table heard her strong domino hand with "Milo!" ringing throughout her home. Knowing how stubborn she was, there was little doubt that you'd play late into the night, until she could finally give you a 'varkie'. These social engagements were many a times accompanied by heated discussions on political and social issues as she avidly read newspapers and books. Granny had strong views on all the issues of the day much as she always prefaced it with a disclaimer, "this is just what I think, I may be wrong...!"

Ma Fraser's perseverance, determination, patience and inquiring mind created the foundation for her position as matriarch. Known to one and all as just "granny," she

was an entrepreneur (always buying and selling) and a political activist determined to work and contribute to the community whether through the church or otherwise.

Constantly checking up on the siblings aunty Stella, aunty Shirley, uncle Mervin, aunty Thelma and aunty Jenny. Protective of her children, grandchildren and great grandchildren. Her commitment to her family (both biological and chosen) was unwavering and has informed the lives of every one of us.

She will be remembered as a sister, cousin, aunty, a mother of Geraldine, Debbie, Arthur, Barry, Erica and Envir; granny to grandchildren, great-grandchildren and the extended Pinto, Braaf and Fraser families.

We all will continue her memory through generations to come.

Rest easy Cynthia, mummy, granny, ma Fraser, you will be forever missed.