

# ❖ FRAYDA MYERS COOPER ❖

## BACKGROUND

Frayda was born in St Paul, Minnesota USA, in 1923 and grew up in Minneapolis. She started as a chemistry major at the University of Wisconsin, then served for six months in Pensacola, Florida with the WAVES, a division of the US Navy during World War II, before graduating as a social worker from the University of Minnesota in 1945. She was working as a social worker in Los Angeles when she met Melvin Cooper, a Harvard graduate from Brookline, Massachusetts. They married in 1948, and their son John was born in 1949. Both Frayda and Melvin returned to graduate studies at San Diego State University with teaching careers in mind. Frayda earned a BEd in 1954 and a MA Ed in 1967. She taught at primary schools in San Diego, Las Vegas and Minneapolis. Melvin taught in junior high schools and became a school guidance counsellor. Melvin died in 1964, seven years after a Hodgkin's Lymphoma diagnosis. Frayda moved to Boston in 1968 and worked as a maths textbook editor and religious school administrator.



## LIFE ON BUDERIM

In 1979, Frayda moved to Melbourne where her son John was working, and then to the Sunshine Coast (Caloundra) in 1986. She lived on Buderim from 1989 to 1995 and was a regular visitor to Buderim from 1996 to 2013 while she lived at the Rose Bay and Wahroonga B'nai B'rith Retirement Villages in Sydney.

Frayda was an enthusiastic tutor and participant in Melbourne's University of the Third Age (U3A) from its launch in 1984. When Frayda moved to the Sunshine Coast, she became the driving force for initiating Queensland's first U3A during the last quarter of 1986. She used the establishment of U3A Sunshine Coast as a springboard for fostering the establishment of U3As throughout Queensland and northern New South Wales. Frayda was particularly effective in garnering the support of potential U3A members and community organisations like the Council on the Ageing and the Country Women's Association to bring the U3A vision to reality. Her unique ability was to engender self-belief in others and encouragement for them to take on leadership roles which, combined with her infectious enthusiasm, ensured the take-up of U3As in Queensland communities starved of such lifelong learning opportunities.

Frayda saw herself and others of her age as elders, not elderly, and encouraged them to believe they still had something to offer – that they could use the experiences of their years, and perhaps wisdom, for the betterment of their community. She was early to recognise the challenge of the 'well-elderly' – that lifelong learning was a key to keeping them independent and well. There was so much more to life than 'beer, bowls and bingo'. Frayda was by nature an activist, and in her earlier years on the Sunshine Coast, a member of the Estuarine Research Group, Sunshine Coast Environment Council, and the Landsborough Shire Progress Association, and a prominent voice advocating the establishment of a university on the Sunshine Coast.

She was the Foundation President and an Honorary Life Member of U3A Sunshine Coast, taught creative writing and participated in play reading. She was an accredited croquet coach and member of the Nambour Croquet Club. She was a Reiki practitioner and taught a modified version of Tai Chi in the Sydney B'nai B'rith Retirement Villages until she was 89. She initiated and was editor for the village newsletters and continued writing for pleasure, entering (and occasionally winning) writing competitions during that time. Frayda received a Queensland Seniors Award in 2005 and was awarded Honorary Senior Fellow by the University of the Sunshine Coast in 2007 in recognition of her U3A work.

Frayda died in May 2014 just four months after moving back to the Sunshine Coast. She had helped build an important part of the fabric of Sunshine Coast community and saw Buderim's U3A membership continue to grow with levels now perhaps the highest per capita in the world.