



TOURISM

by Bill Nehmy

I am pleased to introduce Avril Thomas, owner and resident artist from Magpie Springs at Hope Forest which is home to a diverse range of experiences including an art gallery, vineyard and cellar door which is part of the Adelaide Hills Wine Region.

BN: Welcome Avril, please can we start with your early years, where you were born, went to school, your early plans and aspirations?

AT: I was born in Malaysia, my siblings and I went to boarding school in Scotland until my family came to Australia. At that time I was the only international boarder at PGC now Seymour College.

I had always wanted to go to art school but went nursing instead. Training at the RAH in those days meant living in, which suited me. Marrying at 29 I moved to the Fleurieu. We headed back to Adelaide for the boys' schooling.

I finally found my tribe at art school - people who use imagination and make things. I was 40. I'm so glad to be back in the Fleurieu, home at last. There is something very settling about being here. Others have found it so too.

BN: Please can you elaborate on the range of experiences at Magpie Springs?

AT: There are a variety of activities and happenings at Magpie Springs. Firstly the vineyard has its own momentum and cycle, our restoration program started 2013.

We grow seven different varietals of grapes here which can be tasted

and purchased at the cellar door. It is an unusually rustic place which is still a work in progress. Attached to the cellar door is a gallery in which we show original artists' work, it has wonderful acoustics.

Musicians play from time to time there or in the large garden, weather permitting. Quite a lot of couples have chosen our garden in which to be married. Another unusual feature on the property is our climbing wall. We have held the state climbing championships here at Magpie Springs.

BN: What do you think is the most significant tourism opportunity waiting to be realised in the Adelaide Hills?

AT: We have it all, this is not an understatement. It's right here! People over the world are coming to South Australia not only to make this their home but are bringing friends and family for visits.

For some experiencing country life this is a first... can you imagine! Many are craving simplicity. We have the most extraordinarily talented artists of every genre who want to show what they can do and be appreciated locally. To be able to get the word out for them as a small business - that is the trick.

BN: Please share any other key interests/activities that might surprise us!

AT: I adore imagination and art, our place is a blank canvas for weddings held here. Yesterday we became a finalist in the Brides Choice Award.

Because of its natural nature this property is used by photographers

and film makers. For four years we held the Magpie Springs Photographic Competition. Last year literally busloads of photographers come to participate and Leon Bignell opened the show to a crowded front lawn.

Personally I am a painter and portrait artist with works in national and international corporate collections around Australia, Hong Kong and USA. We of course sell wine but my heart is art.

We have had visual artists from around the world or nationally visiting from time to time. Also musicians and recorded artists... it's a box of chocolates.

BN: What advice would you give a young person in respect to finding the right career and to have an enriching life?

AT: Life is a journey and never a straight road. There are many twists and turns like a roller coaster. Find the thing that's in your heart and hold on to it - it will never go away.

Don't despair... find ways you can be better at it. School or perhaps uni has given you the tools to learn but learning never stops - it's lifelong. Above all, be very patient, it will come. If that's what you were meant to do your moment to shine will come.

One hears too often "overnight success" but you can bet there are many years under the belt before that moment happened. Choose your path and work on it.

Thanks Avril for giving us the opportunity to get to know you and Magpie Springs better.



Avril Thomas, Steve Thomas and dog Benny