EVELYN HOVENGA nee VROOM: HEALTH PROFESSIONAL, PROFESSOR OF INFORMATICS

Immigration

Evelyn Johanna Sophia Vroom was born on 12 August 1945 and migrated with her sister and parents during the 1950s under the Netherlands Australian Assisted Passage Scheme. Her parents were Joahannes Vroom and Guurtje Koopman, and her sister was Catharina. They settled in Leonard Avenue, St Albans, not far from the High School. Australia had signed a migration agreement with the Netherlands government in 1951, and by the end of December 1957 about 37,000 Dutch migrants had settled in Australia. Many went through Bonegilla, Australia's first and largest migrant reception centre at the time, about 12 kilometres from Wodonga. The corrugated iron army huts along the shores of Lake Hume became the temporary home for over 300,000 people before they moved on to more permanent housing. The Dutch community were not one of the largest groups in St Albans; they started arriving in the mid-1950s and soon there were new names to be learnt: Keef Kropman, Tom Correlje, Andre van Kuyk, Jan and Tjitske de Vries, Thea van de Kuyt, Johannes van Liempd, and Henricus and Maria van der Kruys to name only a few.

St Albans High School

Anna Vennik remembers that Evelyn Vroom was a bright girl at school: *"When she came to St Albans High, she didn't speak much English so the teacher paired her with me because I could speak Dutch having arrived as a migrant in 1956. Evelyn picked up the language quite quickly and you could see she was going to succeed educationally."*

And she succeeded remarkably well, surely being one of the best examples of how one can progress through lifelong learning and knowledge acquisition. Anna and Evelyn became good friends and were bridesmaids at each other's weddings. Even when Evelyn moved interstate in later years they always kept in contact.

Evelyn had completed first year high school in the Netherlands, started in Form 1 at St Albans High upon arrival in September, but soon moved to Form 2B where she passed the final year exam held late November. She then completed Form 3A with an average grade of 73% and left school to contribute to the family's income. The form teacher (Doug Hill) noted that "Evelyn has made remarkable progress this term and should gain excellent results next year, if she remains at school". The headmaster (James Barker) tried to convince her to stay and told Evelyn that education was free to which she replied, "My family needs the extra income". She was surprised that he didn't appear to understand that. The High School's 1959 Alba magazine has a photo of her with classmates in Form 3A.

Form 3A, 1959. Evelyn Vroom is front row centre, holding the chalk board.

Starting Work

Anna Vennik had left school the previous year and was working in the same office in the textile manufacturing industry as her older sister Corrie. They were able to secure an office junior job at the same place for Evelyn. She stayed there for seven months, by then she had secured a better paying job at 'Rubbertex', a rubber manufacturing plant, as a costing clerk closer to home, thus saving the weekly train fare.

While working full time Evelyn went to night school, Taylor's College in the city, to complete her high school studies to enable her to begin nursing in 1963 at the Royal Children's hospital. Her appointment had to be approved by the Hospital Board as she hadn't completed six years of high school, which was that hospital's preference although the regulatory requirement was the completion of four years high school.

Marriage

Evelyn Vroom married Klaas "Ken" Hovenga in 1964. Ken was from another of the Dutch families who came to St Albans in the 1950s, and his three sisters, Ytje, Wentje and Tryntje all went to the high school. (Ytje, the oldest of the girls, started in 1956 which was the school's inaugural year.) Evelyn's marriage required her to leave her nurse training as in those days it was a requirement for all student nurses to live in the nurses' home. Evelyn and Ken had two daughters: Karen was born in 1968 and Helen in 1970. The marriage was dissolved in 1976.

Professional Career

Having successfully completed first year general nursing, Evelyn was able to continue her nursing career as an Enrolled Nurse, working in organ-imaging and as a ward clerk in a general surgical ward. She was able to obtain twelve month's credit at Western General Hospital ten years later, enabling her to complete her Registered Nurse training in 1977. Evelyn worked as an operating room nurse at the Queen Victoria Hospital and became the Charge Nurse of the private Jessie McPherson operation room suite from 1977 to 1980. In 1979 Evelyn obtained a Diploma of Applied Science of Hospital Nursing and Unit Management from Lincoln Institute (now Latrobe University) followed by a Bachelor's degree in Applied Science (advanced nursing) in 1982. The latter included computer science which set her on the path to become a health informatics expert.
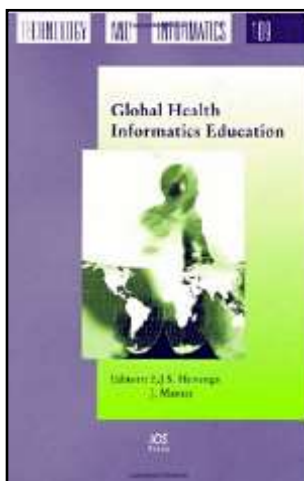

In 1980 Evelyn changed direction by taking up a position at the then Health Commission of Victoria, first as a Health Service Management consultant for the Department of Information Services.

"*That job advertisement was written in a manner that instantly engaged me as the 'job designed for me'. It required me to complete an intensive week four course in workstudy at Footscray Institute of Technology (Now Victoria University), that was later supplemented with an in-house professional course of instruction on Modular Arrangement of Predetermined Time Standards (MODAPTS) including office and transit modapts.*"

This position required Evelyn to undertake various productivity reviews and time studies in areas such as pathology, organ imaging and nursing. This resulted in the development of the Patient Assessment Information System (PAIS) that was first used as an aid to resolve nursing workload disputes. PAIS was later adopted within more than 100 hospitals around Australia; it was also used to form the basis of the first national study that determined the average nursing cost (nursing service weights) per hospital patient type known as Diagnosis Related Group (DRG), a methodology first introduced and trialed

in Victoria that was later adopted by the Australian government for hospital funding purposes. This plus a letter from Maureen Scholes, Director of Nursing Services at the Royal London Hospital in 1984 inviting Evelyn to take on a position of national nursing representative to the newly formed Nursing Working Group of the International Medical Informatics Association (IMIA), formed additional steppingstones for her future in informatics.

Evelyn transferred from the Management Services department to take up the position of senior nursing advisor in the nursing section of the hospitals division within the Victorian Health Commission in 1984-85 to manage all research required to support the Ministerial Enquiry into Nursing Victoria. During this period she undertook a short course in statistics for research workers at Melbourne University (1984) and she

computerised the nursing section. At that time Evelyn used the data she now had available and developed the argument to introduce new nursing policies, two were accepted and implemented in 1985, a first for Victoria. One was to extend the district nursing service to enable them to provide 24/7 services including palliative care, and the other provided funding for education to better prepare the nursing workforce to provide specialized nursing services such as critical care, aged care etc. She was a member of the State Government negotiating team during the 1984 Non Nursing Duties and 1986 Nursing Career Structure industrial disputes, and undertook development of cost estimates of positions adopted.

In 1986 the Victorian government funded her to fly around the world in 19 days to explore the likely impact of computing on the nursing profession. '*I was able to make use of the contacts acquired as a member of the IMIA nursing WG, I met a number of nurses who were leading this new discipline and visited hospitals in San Francisco, Los Angeles, Calgary, Washington DC, London, Leiden and Geneva.*'

At that time her working environment was extremely challenging due to numerous organisational changes, the transfer of student nurses from the workforce to University studies and a new Minister of Health (1985-89) who did not support Evelyn's nursing workload measurement system used by nurses to better manage the match between nursing availability and service demands. He introduced a policy that aimed to reduce the waiting list for elective surgery and considered Evelyn's solution to be incompatible with this policy, she was prevented from providing any further support to those making use of her system. Evelyn was regarded as politically unacceptable and transferred to work on a Nurse Costing research project at the Monash hospital in Clayton.

Evelyn used this opportunity to undertake a research Master's degree at the University of New South Wales making use of all the research already undertaken in the area of nursing resource usage and costs and the work then underway. This was completed in 1989. That year she also completed some courses within the Graduate Diploma Course in Applied Information Systems at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology following which she undertook courses in economics and mathematics for the social sciences at Melbourne University. In 1995 she was awarded a PhD for her thesis "Casemix, Hospital Nursing Usage and Costs." During this time Evelyn worked as an independent Consultant for numerous hospitals and undertook a major research project from which a Universal Nursing Career Evaluation System for the Private Hospitals Association in Victoria and Queensland was developed.

Professional Activities

Evelyn was accepted as Fellow of the College of Nursing in 1980 and engaged in professional activities associated with the College and a Nursing Research group. Her first presentation on computer use was to the Victorian Nursing Research Group (VNRG) in 1982. In 1984 she contributed to the production of the Royal Australian Nurses Federation (RANF) publication on 'Computerised Patient Data and Nursing Information Systems' and in 1985 she presented a paper at the College's annual conference on 'Managing resources using computer technology'. Many presentations for a variety of organisations in numerous locations around the globe have followed since.

In 1985 two nurses from the Women's hospital called a meeting of nurses interested in computers, around 70 nurses turned up including Evelyn who became a committee member of the Nursing Computer Group Victoria (NCGV). This group was very active. One of its members, Anita Griffin, a nurse academic from Bendigo initiated and edited the first Australian publication titled 'Nurses Using Computer', in 1989 to which many other members, including Evelyn contributed a chapter. Evelyn's work with the IMIA nursing WG alerted her to the possibility of hosting one of their international conferences. She convinced the NCGV committee to put in a proposal which was presented to the WG when she attended an international workshop in Stockholm in 1987 along with many other national representatives to participate in the development of the very first set of nursing informatics competencies. The proposal to host the 1991 International Nursing Informatics conference in Melbourne was successful. She chaired the organising committee and conference and prepared all papers presented in a camera-ready format for the proceedings as required by the publisher, Springer-Verlag. There were around 700 participants for a very successful conference despite the world instability caused by the 1990-91 Gulf War in the middle east. The profits funded the establishment of the Health Informatics Society of Australia (HISA), its Nursing Informatics Australia special interest group, and funded the associated secretariat.

"I contributed to the International Medical Informatics Association as Treasurer, secretary, Chaired the Nursing Informatics special interest group of which I'm now a life member, I was the Vice-President (Working and Special Interest Groups) and I chaired IMIA's education workgroup for several years during which time we published a text edited by myself and Prof John Mantas on Global Health Informatics Education (2004 IOS Press). I'm now recognised as a member of the IMIA Senior Officers Club."

Evelyn was a Board member for HISA on a couple of occasions, managed and chaired the first national annual Health Informatics conference (HIC) in Brisbane in 1993 and the International IMIA sponsored Medinfo2007 also held in Brisbane. She was also elected to be a foundation member of the Australasian College of Health Informatics in 2002 for which she served as President (2003-5) and treasurer (2007). She was awarded life membership of this College in 2015.

Evelyn was a founding member of the Standards Australia IT-14 committee established in 1992 responsible for the development of technical standards. In that capacity was a member of the National Health Data Standards Committee, the National Health Information Standards Advisory Committee and participated in international standards development activities for ISO-TC215. She was a member of a couple of technical sub committees. During this period she was also invited to participate in various workshops for the Australian Institute for Health and Welfare as well as the Australian Government.

"I was responsible for facilitating and managing all HL7 Australia educational activities for several years; was an invited expert to IMIA's Nursing Informatics group competency development workshop in 1987, the European Nightingale Nursing Informatics competency development project during the early 1990s, an invited member of the International Medical Informatics Association's education taskforce given the responsibility to develop and publish the medical (health) informatics education recommendations followed by the 2010 review and update of these curriculum guidelines."

Academic Career

Evelyn moved to Rockhampton in 1992 to take up an academic position with Central Queensland University, progressing from Senior Lecturer to Professor in Health Informatics. Her continuing international involvement and sharing of experiences with leaders from around the world provided her with invaluable knowledge that enabled her to progress professionally. She established and directed the Health Informatics Research Centre. During this period she also worked with health service management academics from around the country as a member of SHAPE and she became a Fellow of the Australian College for Health Service Executives. Evelyn's contribution to the informatics industry was rewarded by the Australian Computer Society who accepted her as a Fellow of that organisation in 2005.

Evelyn is widely published as editor and/or contributor to 48 books, numerous refereed and non-refereed journal publications and conference proceedings. She has been an invited keynote speaker and presenter to numerous conferences and workshops. Her official title when she retired from CQU was Evelyn J. S. Hovenga RN, PhD, FCHSE, FRCNA, FACHI, FACS; Professor, Health Informatics; Head, School of Management and Information Systems, Faculty of Business & Information. "Throughout my career I have been interested in and contributed to the promotion of health informatics education."

eHealth Education

Evelyn established an independent consulting and training organisation, eHealth Education Pty Ltd, with colleagues Heather Grain and Joan Edgecumbe, in 2008 for which she continues to work as the CEO Director, Company secretary, Professor, and Trainer: "*I completed a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment in 2010 and have been involved in the Vocational Education Sector since mid 2010 as RTO manager and trainer.*" She has recently been appointed as one of three Directors of a not-for-profit Trust, the Global eHealth Collaborative (GeHCo) that aims to work collaboratively with experts and organisations from around the world to enable a global health workforce to use data and information technologies in partnership with consumers in a manner that facilitates the delivery of safe, cost effective and sustainable healthcare services.

Evelyn Hovenga, 2015.
Reference: www.evelynhovenga.com

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Steve Kozlowski, Anna Frost (Vennik), Rob, Evelyn Hovenga (Vroom), 50th reunion, 2006.

Evelyn Hovenga and Joe Ribarow, 50th reunion, 2006.

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Reference list of Evelyn Hovenga's books and articles: www.evelynhovenga.com