

Living at Millers Point

by John Blay

I moved to Kent St, Millers Point first when I was at University in the early sixties and kept my connections there. Round late 1983 or 84 I moved to 4/51 Lower Fort St while the area was still largely rooming houses managed by land-ladies as part of the tradition to keep workers nearby to work on the wharves. The Maritime Services managed the area then. My landlords, Bill and Sjaan Vann, were friendly and very quickly I was managing the place for them. Our arrangement was never like a boarding house. I had exclusive tenancy of the rooms. The area has been a rich resource for my writing and researches, and I've made long-time friendships and connections with other residents of the area. It's been my home. A place where I gave and found inspiration.

I'm a writer. I have been for very many years. For about ten or twelve years I held a position as the Bundian Way Project Officer for Eden Local Aboriginal Land Council, an honorary position, researching and managing an ancient pathway between Kosciuszko and the coast at Twofold Bay. A big NSW Heritage nomination has been listed as consequence, and I'm chair of the inter-agency management committee. I've now had numerous books published, mostly history and natural history that arose from my researches in State Archives and at the Mitchell Library, whilst based at my home nearby in Millers Point. But also I've written poetry and numerous plays. One, a bicentenary commission from the ABC called *The Fleet*, was focused on The Rocks / Millers Point district. The cultural side of the area has always been important, its raffishness, its bohemian, artistic atmosphere that passed down through Norman Lindsay, the Parker Galleries and the various art schools, not to mention the Rocks Markets.

The richness of the district has always been an inspiration, the world heritage quality of the architecture along with a community that had been in place since settlement. Millers Point has in my view always been relatively crime free as a result of the close community relations. The stability of our tenancies, especially during the Maritime Services Board helped the sense of belonging. We believed we were there for life. Community leaders like Shirley Ball and Sally Parslow helped create the sense of solidarity and peacefulness.

Sally and Shirley worked on numerous projects to help make it a special community. They were the sort of thing you supported in the understanding this would be your community for life, most notably the aged care facilities across the road were established in a derelict but heritage warehouse after community pressure. They are still going. We believed this was where we could spend our old age as we became decrepit, within our community. There was also numerous groups like the older women's network and connections with the historic Fort St school. And the ongoing archaeology of the area. These are the sorts of activities you support when you are part of the community for life, you support them as they support you. The solidarity produced stability and made it a rich place to live.

It nearly broke my heart when I was forced to leave Millers Point and the place that had been home to me for so many years in about 2011.

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