



# MERCY COLLEGE ALUMNI

## Where are they now?

<p><i>Introducing:</i></p>	<p><i>Karen Ostenreid</i> <i>Class of 1978 Form 4</i></p>
<p><i>Dear Karen</i></p> <p><i>Thank you for sharing your remarkable story!</i></p> <p><i>A story of attitude, resilience and leadership</i></p>	
<p><b><i>What do you recall about your time as a Mercy College student?</i></b></p> <p>I felt like a stranger at first in year 7 as we had moved from a small interstate country town just 5 months earlier so I didn't have any old friends from primary school. I also felt a little alienated, as Mercy had a very high percentage of Italian students and our only language choice was Italian at that time but I soon grew to have some amazing Italian friends whose delectable culinary skills left me spoilt for choice!</p> <p>I had lived in many places by the time I went to Mercy so was used to being the "new person". This gave me a definite advantage in geography, empathy and tolerance. I became a people watcher and I would have loved to have done psychology and forensics.</p> <p>My favourite subjects were sport, science, art and maths.</p> <p>I thought it was good in general that Mercy was a girls' College. It's where I met my life long school friend Helen Broderick nee Kennedy. There were lots of experiences and funny times like the girls being silly, particularly those it seemed, who didn't have brothers, for when boys rode or walked past the gates at lunch times the girls took on a whole new persona.</p> <p>I was proud of my sporting and academic accomplishments and was looking forward to a career in those areas. I didn't think I would go into medical research though. Plus, it was only from the encouragement from my older cousins that I started singing professionally before I finished school. These two careers took me overseas and were a source of great fulfilment.</p>	



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### ***Did you set out with a career plan?***

My passion was to follow a career in the arts as I was singing professionally by the age of 15, but my working-class parents said I should get a REAL JOB. Initially, I wanted to get into Physical Education specialising in rehabilitation or sports therapy or even physiotherapy, however, I missed 3 months of school because of ill health, so I needed to rethink my Uni preferences. A mistake, I found out, as my first preference would have landed me in Physical Education with special consideration.

The second preference was physiotherapy with an opportunity to transfer 4 years later as I achieved high results for my Applied Science. However, part time applicants were frowned upon, so I stayed in science. I'm so glad I did. By the age of 36 I worked my way up to Chief Operations Officer at a highly specialised International biotech company in Perth that I was instrumental in establishing.

I worked as a lab tech straight out of school at the WEHI, Walter and Eliza Hall Institute, Australia's oldest medical research institute, and studied a certificate in Applied Science part time purely on the basis that I liked learning about biology and blood, and how the body works. I had fantastic mentors, leaders and colleagues and landed in Germany where my father was born for a year and can boast that I was the first person to do so without a degree.

I travelled to several countries during my stay there and on my way home I went through Canada and the west coast of the USA. I loved experiencing the food and culture and always tried to learn at least the basics of the language as I was a guest in their country.

### ***What is your focus nowadays?***



Today, life is vastly different. In science, I developed creative thinking and resilience. In pure research you'll have many failures before achieving success. My qualifications extend to outdoor education, agriculture and teaching singing and performance, public speaking and media coaching. I enjoy musical theatre and when I can, I do art.

I now have a small business, developing essential life and business skills using horse intellect. It's the best job!

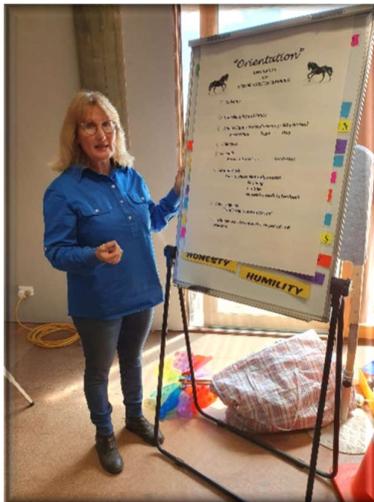


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I was influenced by the religious ethos of helping others which was strong throughout my Catholic schooling, and have volunteered all my life. This stops me from being blindly naïve and appreciative of everything I have. Black Saturday, nearly destroyed me. We lost almost everything and my beloved horses, all but two, gone. Even though we didn't have anything I volunteered after the Black Saturday bushfires in community recovery for 3 years. In January 2020, I was a guest speaker on *Channel 10 – The Project*, to offer valuable advice to recent bushfire victims as the shock can interfere with your normally adept mind.

**My focus is to help develop individuals, teams and leaders and further develop leadership programs for companies as well as assist life skills for those in recovery and with disabilities. My business, The Matanya Effect exists so that the leaders of the future are not just profit driven. We promote a bottom line of Purpose, People, Potential, Planet, Performance, Profit and Philanthropy.**



Attitude, is everything. Life can change very quickly and it's not always in your control, but how you react to it is. There was a reason why I didn't die in 2009. We all need to have a tool kit of resilience to maintain our attitude and hope. Here is the link to my blog on leadership, teamwork, recovery and other programs. [www.TheMatanyaEffect.com.au](http://www.TheMatanyaEffect.com.au) E: [Admin@TheMatanyaEffect.com.au](mailto:Admin@TheMatanyaEffect.com.au)

### ***You have significant milestones!***

Many, many proud milestones.... but first ...

***I owe my success to my parents always saying you can achieve anything as long as you are prepared to put in the work for it. They both worked extremely hard all my life, and have influenced my love of learning and being open to trying new things.***



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## Where are they now?

- 3 world firsts in science in genetics.
- Setting up an international biotech company as COO.
- Singing in many Melbourne venues including the Arts Centre, Myer Music Bowl and Geelong Performing Arts centre.
- Busking in Germany.
- Stage managing local events,
- Being head hunted to set up a biotech company.
- Being recognised for my science achievements by complete strangers who were also directors, and leaders in their field.
- Doing respite care for Foster Children.
- Developing students in outdoor education and now in my Equine Assisted Learning business.
- I am super proud of my past singing students many of whom became School captains and leaders in their own right.
- Being the only person to get an exit interview by the director of the Austin Research Institute because he said I was the only person in the department head meetings that gave my honest opinion.
- My role in moving one step closer to finding cures to genetic disorders.
- I am a survivor of the Black Saturday Fires and getting stronger every day.



### ***Have you maintained any school friendships?***

Yes, my best friend from Mercy is still my best friend – Helen Broderick nee Kennedy. I never had a lot of friends but certainly had quality over quantity. We were bridesmaids, and have been a critical part of each other's life recovering from traumatic episodes along the way.

In recent years I have reconnected with many of my old school friends which is so lovely after all this time particularly learning about how life has turned out for them. I find at large re-unions I don't get to seriously chat with people but love the casual get togethers now.

The network you have from school is just as powerful as those you create after school, as I think we are all here to help each other.



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### ***What words of encouragement would you like to pass on to current students and community of Mercy College?***

When I was in science, I learned that pieces of paper didn't mean you were smarter than anyone else, you had just spent more time learning stuff to get to where you want to go. I learned that attitude, is everything. That life can change very quickly and is not always in your control.

When bad stuff happens, you have two ways to react to it. One is to wallow in self-pity which can lead to serious debilitating consequences or two, you can accept that it has happened, look for purpose and start moving forward carefully.

*I know that what has got you here today may not get you any further.*

*I know that as individuals we can't be successful by ourselves.*

*I know that there are many ways of being creative and moving mountains and that we need to care for others, our country and the planet.*

*I know that every resource is finite and that change is speeding up faster than we can predict.*

*I know that when you have nothing,*

*look within to draw on something that makes your heart sing.*

*Failures are to learn from, not beat yourself up with.*

*Others often see the potential within us before we see it.*

*There was a reason why I was not killed in 2009.*

*We all need to have a tool kit of resilience to maintain our attitude and hope.*

*I was born to serve and help others and I am worth it. .... **Karen Ostenreid***

My website has a blog on leadership, teamwork and recovery and you can find details of our Women's Empowerment Retreat and other programs that we run.

[www.TheMatanyaEffect.com.au](http://www.TheMatanyaEffect.com.au)

E: [Admin@TheMatanyaEffect.com.au](mailto:Admin@TheMatanyaEffect.com.au)

