

Carol Hebron

Priest, 70, Springwood

Interview **TONYA TURNER**

It was unusual for women to be priests 30 years ago. I copped a lot of flak back then. Even got reported for not wearing stockings in the sanctuary. When I was the parish priest in Goondiwindi, I'll be honest – some of the women on the parish council had their knives out for me. I was the first woman priest out there.

When I moved to Blue Care's Yurana Retirement Village a few years ago they really welcomed me as a priest. I do services there and I truly love it, but I don't step on anybody's toes.

My childhood growing up in New Guinea with my siblings Janice, 73, Lynette, 71, and Ken, 64, were the best years of my life. One of the houses we lived in had a huge bomb hole in the backyard. It was overgrown with thick vines that were really springy, so we used it as a trampoline. God knows what was underneath it.

We were pretty daring. We'd dive between the moored boats on the jetty that would hit each other as the waves came in, hold our breath until we heard the clunk again, then come back up.

My husband Philip and I got married in Madang when I was 19. We went to primary school together and when I saw him again as an adult, it was love at first sight. I was working in a bank at the time and he walked through the door wearing a

black shirt, black jeans and black shoes. Oh god, he was gorgeous.

Soon after, we came to Australia and moved around a bit. We were living in Darwin when Cyclone Tracy hit and we lost almost everything. We loved travelling too and went to Israel and Europe before I got pregnant in Scotland. We'd been trying for a baby for six years. It must've been the Ayrshire potatoes I reckon. After that we came back to Australia and had two children: Gareth, 43, and Travis, 41. Philip was a projectionist at different cinemas and

drive-ins over the years. We spent many nights watching movies in the back of the station wagon.

Eventually we settled in Brisbane and I got accepted into a Bachelor of Arts degree. It was one of the happiest moments of my life. I'd always wanted to be a teacher and I went on to work at a few high schools. I loved watching the light bulbs come over the students' heads. While I was teaching I felt called to the priesthood, so I did a Bachelor of Theology to become an Anglican priest. I was raised Roman Catholic and wanted to be a nun when I was a kid, but mum wouldn't let

me. I was so angry, but then I met Philip, so thank god I didn't become a nun!

Philip was killed in a motorbike accident when he was 44 years old. I had a nervous breakdown and took some time out. Eventually I went back to teaching and later became a priest at St Mark's in Daisy Hill. I got my masters, then my doctorate and started lecturing at Charles Sturt University.

I'm retired now and I feel fully bloomed. Before Covid I travelled a lot and guided tours in Europe. This year we're having a family gathering in Sri Lanka. What a charmed life I've had.

Then I met Philip, so thank god I didn't become a nun!



PICTURE: DAVID KELLY