

## ‘She knows the younger version of me’: When two friends reunite after 50 years

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Workmates in the 1960s, centenarian Iris Palmington and Moira Scully, 95, reunited when they moved into the same aged-care home in Melbourne. Now they lunch together, happy to have a friend they knew before they were “old ladies”.



Iris Palmington (left) and Moira Scully. “I’m not a talker like Iris,” says Scully. “I’m more of a listener.” PETER TARASIUK

**Moira:** My husband, Frank, and I had a newsagency in Sandringham and Iris came to work with us in the 1960s. She was in circulation and TattsLotto; I was in books and stationery. Iris was always charming and got on well with the customers. *The Age* was huge, especially with the weekend classifieds, and we had to deliver it to people’s homes before seven in the morning. Some people would say, “Where’s my paper?” if it was just one minute past. Iris used to handle that. She always stood up for the paper boys.

She worked with us for six years, but I lost track of her after that. Then, in 2018, she turns up here [at Mercy Place Fernhill]. I was *so* pleased! We sit together at lunchtime. She tells me I eat anything and everything. I’ve always been big, whereas she’s tiny. I get hungry – I’m terrible!

We love the same films, which is important here. We want good, frothy musicals of our era – *South Pacific* and *High Society*. We do the grizzlies if there’s something on that’s on the more serious side. Iris chose *Waterloo Bridge*; it was so sad, I carried it around with me for a week. We love Friday night movies here; we’re like little kids, with an interval and our plates of lollies.

Iris still loves dressing up. If it’s a special day, she’ll have a tiara on. She always wears beads and a bit of lippie. She used to do ballet – I think she was on one of the trucks once at the Moomba Parade – and she’s always spotlessly clean. Not me, I dribble a bit. But if she does dribble, she knows about it. She has a standard and wants that kept up.

*‘It’s nice that she knows the younger version of me, that I haven’t always been an old lady.’*

Iris is a passionate Carlton supporter; I barrack for Richmond. I used to watch the games but now I've got so much reading to do – I like Irish and Australian history – and I didn't anticipate the macular degeneration. I just have the football on silent so I can see the results, but Iris can tell you every jolly kick in the game. She has a little Carlton garden gnome outside her room and if he's happy, he looks outwards with his little glasses on, but if Carlton has lost, he's turned with his nose to the wall in disgrace. Carlton hasn't been doing well lately, so Iris is very cross with them.

She's a goer, always ready to have fun. I'm not a talker like Iris; I'm more of a listener. We don't have the number of visitors we used to because a lot of them have gone to heaven if they're our age, and when they're gone, they're not replaced.

Frank died a short time after I moved here, which was a very, very big loss. When Iris arrived, I was just pleased to have a friend here, somebody from the past. And Iris sometimes has funny stories to tell me about Frank. It's nice that she knows the younger version of me, that I haven't always been an old lady.

I don't want to be a grizzly old lady, but sometimes I think I'm heading that way. She's taught me to just get on with life. Naturally, we think about [death], but we don't talk about it. I just want her to be here forever.

**Iris:** It was a busy, friendly shop and Moira and I were good friends, both interested in church work, fashion parades – just general ladies' interests, nothing fancy. I loved working there, but I hated doing TattsLotto. They were all losers, queued up on a Friday afternoon. But some very nice, eligible men used to come in. A couple of them flirted with me and gave me nice Christmas gifts. They flirted with Moira even more. They'd say, "Where's the lovely Moira today?" My greatest challenge was [former prime minister] Bob Hawke. He slapped a book down on the counter one day and said, "I'll have this wrapped up." I gave it to him and he started to walk away. He was so rude. I just said, "Thanks for saying thank you." I put *him* back in his box.

Once, I was in a car accident going to work. The fella went through the stop sign and hit me. I just injured my knee, but a boy from the bank was walking past and went to the shop to tell Moira. She was at the hospital before I was!

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## ***'When she walks into the dining room, I say, "Here comes the queen!"'***

Iris Palmington

Moira's a worrier. She worries about her family and everyone. I don't. Not as much. And she's always beautifully dressed. She's interested in books, ballet, theatre. She's just a good friend. I think my daughter chose this place mainly because Moira was here. The first day, they took me into the dining room and I heard, "Hello, Iris!" It was Moira. I felt so relieved! At lunch, we sat with two men, one I had a semi-romance with.

Moira's a charming, intelligent woman who'd never do you a bad turn. When you see her walk into the dining room, you think, "We're going to have a good day." I say, "Here comes the queen!" She comes in on her stick, so stately and gracious. All the other women look up to her. She takes an interest in them all. She knows whoever's sick and talks to them.

You'd call Moira a lady, whereas I'm pretty rough around the edges. I'm surprised that so many people here like me. I can swear like a trooper. If I do something wrong, I'll say, "Oh shit!" I think I once heard Moira say "bugger". I barrack loudly and shout at the football umpire; my mother would be ashamed of me. I had a pretty rough husband, and I think I got it off him. I left him when my kids were in high school. He was playing around and drinking too much. One night, he went on with a lot of nonsense and went to hit my daughter. The next day, I got a flat and moved out.

Moira often talks about Frank and cries. She's a very private person. She stays in her room a lot. When you get older, you don't reveal too much; you keep it all inside you.

She comes to my room every day to make sure I'm all right. She only stays five or 10 minutes, but it's security. Moira's the most wonderful person you could wish to meet, the nicest of anybody here – even me.

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