

Barrier Daily Truth



Professor Frances Separovic AO

Medal winner made in BH

‘It really ended up nurturing me’

By Craig Brealey

A “woggy” kid, the daughter of immigrant labourers and a student at the Broken Hill High School in the 1960s is now a member of the Order of Australia.

Frances Separovic, the first female professor of Chemistry in Victoria and a Fellow of the Australian Academy of Science, was recognised in the Queen’s Birthday honours list this week.

Professor Separovic was made an

Officer in the General Division of the Order for distinguished service to science education, particularly in the field of biophysical chemistry, and to young women scientists.

It is just over a year since the Professor of Chemistry at Melbourne University was put on Victoria’s Honour Roll of Women for her extraordinary achievements that include her work at Harvard Medical School and St Hugh’s College, Oxford.

Frances Separovic came to Broken Hill

as a three-year-old from Croatia. She was born in 1954, the same year, incidentally, that the Australian Academy of Science was founded.

Her parents, she said, had very little schooling in their home country and worked “bloody hard” in labouring jobs to give their children the best chance in life.

She told the BDT that she looked recently at a photograph of the Broken Hill High School Year 1A class of 1966.

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Special event

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everything we will need."
He said having a 4WD rally opens up a new area of driving and fundraising.
"When we've been in Broken Hill before, we've had to go to Port Augusta, Wentworth or Cobar - basically places that can sleep a lot of people.
"Now we can head out into the desert, the cars are newer and mechanically sound.
"The attendees are expecting to camp and feed themselves.

The rally is still growing but it is proving popular.
"It's events like this that keep Camp Quality ticking.
"We are really looking forward to kicking off in Broken Hill."
Everyone is invited to go to Discount Tyres at Westside Plaza on Sunday, June 30, between 2pm and 4pm to meet the entrants and wish them well for the week ahead.

Medal winner made in BH

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"I saw a picture of all these kids and you think back to how you felt at that time. I was one of the 'woggy' kids, and they really made you feel like one, but by the time I had finished school I was very much accepted.

"I made the mistake of studying hard because I thought they knew everything. I was always in the library reading - one of the nerdy kids who didn't like sport."

She said her parents, Tony and Kate, had gone to school only up to about second grade, unlike some immigrants who had university qualifications but not the English to work in their fields of expertise in Australia.

"They worked bloody hard. Dad was a miner at Thompson's Shaft and the Pinnacles and mum cleaned houses.

"In high school they bought us the Encyclopaedia Britannica and paid it off. I was always reading it and I remember my cousin Tony, who was a few years older than me, wanted to look up sex and we found all these anatomical drawings. He said 'no, that doesn't look right. I think it is supposed to be fun.'"

Prof. Separovic has won her honours for her achievements in science but she said a good education was the main thing, and that was what she was given at the high school where she completed her HSC before going to university on a scholarship.

"I am very fond of Broken Hill. It really ended up nurturing me and the teachers were always encouraging me.

"They were young because in those days teachers would spend a couple of years in the bush to pay off their scholarships.

"They were full of enthusiasm and they'd tell us to go and see the Woodstock movie, or Easy Rider, and protest against the Vietnam War.

"It is not so much science as education itself because it enhances your life so much.

"Dad passed away a few years ago but he told me 'I was terrified of going to work every day.' That really shocked me.

"In my work I get to travel the around the world, meet people from all different places and I can't wait to go to work every day.

"I love being a scientist because you can make out how things work. Whether it's molecules or antibiotics or toxins, when you discover how things work you can make them work better or stop them. At an atomic level you can see how they work like little machines."

Prof. Separovic said many of her old classmates from school and members of the city's Yugoslav community had sent their congratulations this week.

"I've had a lot of nice messages. I told mum I'd won an Order of Australia, 'a medal from the Queen', I said, and she was very proud."