

# Bundanoon History Group

## Monthly Newsletter

September 2022



**Guest Editor:** Graham Morgan

### From the President

We have just returned from a holiday to the Eyre Peninsula in South Australia to discover a place we had never previously visited. I use the word 'discover' lightly because it is only in a visit that you begin to understand what explorers really went through to map our vast country. Travelling in comfort, staying at motels, and eating great food also makes you think about how on earth the explorers even survived in our sometimes-harsh environment and climate.

Edward John Eyre was born in England in 1815 and is remembered as the first man to travel from Sydney to the Swan River in Western Australia. In 1838 he left Streaky Bay and moved through the Gawler Ranges where he saw and named the Sturt Desert Pea.



Eyre was determined to explore beyond the Head of the Bight.

At Fowlers Bay he was joined by Wylie who would have had a hand in his survival for the rest of the journey.



Eyre described this bay as a place of 'Whale Carnage'! Fortunately for us it was the opposite. It is now a nursery where the females give birth and nurture them until they return to the Southern Oceans. In one direction we could not count the number

of mothers and babies and in the opposite, the impressive cliffs of The Great Australian Bight.

A little further down the road we came to the start of the Nullarbor Plain only travelling as far as the Roadhouse.



Perhaps this section is best observed from the comfort of the Indian Pacific train in air-conditioned comfort.

Looking forward to our meeting on Monday in the Soldiers' Memorial Hall with our guest speaker Andy and the Fathers' Day Raffle draw.

Amy

### From this month's editor

The guest editor is always grateful to receive material from other members to help make the newsletter interesting and informative, and this month is no exception. Thank you to all who've helped! But here goes first with a few thoughts of my own.

## The High Tea – and a twist

I have no doubt at all that everyone who attended the High Tea at the Pill Factory on 9 August had a thoroughly enjoyable time. Some of us have perhaps missed the opportunity to dress up a bit in the past couple of years, and that was a good excuse to dig out the glad rags again – but more about that later. We were all most impressed by the effort the “staff” had made in that regard – and the work the organisers had put into the whole event was outstanding. The sight of the tables as we entered the dining room was awe-inspiring. Congratulations to everyone involved – and when can we have another one, please?



Photo courtesy Joy Brown

I took the chance to have a look around the building and tried to imagine white-coated “chemists” beavering away with mortars and pestles or test tubes concocting various pills and potions, although I’m not sure we have much recorded detail about what actually went on in the “factory”. Was there a dark corner, too, where the ghost of Gus Nicholas and his photographic equipment could be lurking? We should again thank Bud Townsing for his informative talk about Gus’s work at our earlier monthly meeting, and the owners of the building for offering us the opportunity to hold a function there. We are indeed fortunate to have such an interesting historic building in town.

I did have a rather surreal experience that day. We had learned that morning about the death of Olivia Newton-John. When getting ready to go to the function I stood for a minute staring at my (embarrassingly large) collection of shirts trying to pick an appropriate one, and when I looked at the label on the shirt I pulled out I saw that it was ...Koala Blue. Now that was an Australian-slanted clothing line founded by none other than Olivia herself, in the US in 1983, which at one stage had outlets in many countries including Australia. The company did not last – although my shirt has – but what made me choose that particular shirt on that particular day? How spooky is that?

### Speaking of food ...

Here’s a recipe for a delicious fruit slice that’s nearly always on hand in our house: it’s called

#### **Mrs Atkins’ Fruit Slice:**

##### **Ingredients**

125g unsalted butter  
1 cup brown sugar  
1 egg, lightly beaten  
225g mixed dried vine fruit  
150g self-raising flour

##### **Method**

Preheat oven to 190C and butter a 28cm x 18cm baking tray.

Melt butter in a saucepan large enough to hold all ingredients.

Add brown sugar, stirring over low heat until dissolved. Remove from heat and cool for a few minutes.

Stir in egg, then add fruit and sift in flour. Stir well to mix.

Press into tray and bake for 20 to 22 minutes.

The slice should have developed a caramel crust and will still move slightly when you rest your hand in the centre. If it is positively liquid, cook another three minutes.

Cool a little and mark into 4cm squares with a sharp knife. Allow to cool completely in tray, then cut into squares and store in an airtight tin.

My wife Kay adds a little cinnamon and nutmeg to the flour to give it even more flavour.

## **Membership report**

Since I'm currently History Group Membership Officer, I thought I should give a brief update. Our membership is now back up to exactly 150 again. I say 'again' because we first hit that number some time ago, but it has rather plateaued in recent times. At renewal time each year there are always a number of drop-outs for various reasons, but the numbers always creep up again during the year. Please do let me know if you know someone who has shown interest in joining, and I can send them a joining form. Or you could invite them to a meeting as a visitor and introduce me to them there. We always like to see new members.

A recent new member is a student at the University of Western Sydney who is doing a Master's Degree on the social impact of the 19th century railway expansion. She has selected Bundanoon as a case study. Her thesis will be structured around a timeline of the development of Bundanoon, from 1914, and will compare the social growth with the number of trains that went through. We have provided her with copies of our books for background reading and offered to assist with research into our archives. At some stage we may even be favoured with a talk by her at one of our monthly meetings on the results of her research. Sounds very interesting!

At this point things are held up a little by the work going on in the Old Goods Shed, which leads me to my next topic ...

## **Old Goods Shed Rejuvenation**

Amy gave us a rundown in the previous newsletter of some of the work being done to make the Goods Shed a more inviting place for visitors, and I thought I might add a little to that.

A subcommittee was formed some time ago and has done a thorough survey of the present and desired format of the Shed and produced a very detailed report which the main Committee has readily accepted. The sub-committee's view was that the Shed has served us well but is now somewhat tired and dated. It is an integral part of the heritage-listed railway precinct but has its own story which is not told well. We read in the last newsletter how the sliding front door to the street will be reopened; there will be new museum-style lighting, timber-look flooring, clear glass displays (the

old glass-fronted cabinet has gone), and digital displays to complement the current wall displays. Many working bee hours have already been spent and more are planned.

All this will, of course, cost money. A member has kindly offered to help meet the cost of a TV monitor for digital displays to be installed on the wall on the railway side, and it is hoped grants can be accessed to help meet the cost of new lighting, new computers, and new flooring. The proceeds of our Fathers' Day raffle will be a big help, too – see below.

The plan is to have all this finished reasonably soon, and we hope to have a grand reopening celebration a month or so later.

Incidentally, there has recently been an upgrade to our digital records access, with much consolidation of sources and better use of "cloud" facilities.

## **Fathers' Day raffle**

Our big fund-raiser for the year is drawing to a close and we thank all those who have donated items for the prizes and bought or on-sold tickets, and the many helpers on ticket-selling days – especially Noelene Thurston and Marion Phelan who were on duty for many of the wintry morning shifts. Extra special thanks, too, to Noelene for taking on the role of raffle organiser this year and steering it through.

A number of local businesses contributed prize items or vouchers, and they also deserve special thanks and support:

***Bundanoon Botanicals***

***Bundanoon Post Office***

***Bundanoon Pharmacy***

***Bundanoon Newsagency***

***Potter's Pantry***

***Little Jack Style Restaurant***

***Delicious***

We hope you can make it to the big prize draw at our September 5 meeting, and good luck if you have tickets! There are three baskets to be won.

There is still the thought of another Big Book Sale in 2023, but it can't be done without having somewhere to store donated books before the event. So: another call, please, for suggestions or offers of storage space.

### **Garden Club history**

I'm grateful to Alison Ayers, BHG and Garden Club member, for providing me with the following story which is edited from an article in our sister club's August newsletter. I thought it was an important piece of Bundanoon history we could share in.

### **Vale Beryl Gosbell and Norma Rowen**

Beryl Gosbell and Norma Rowen were founding members of the Bundanoon Beautification Committee, which formed on November 26, 1970, and later became the Bundanoon Garden Club. Beryl was the inaugural President and hosted the first meetings at the Royal Hotel (now Bundanoon Hotel) which she owned with her husband George. Later the Gosbell family sold the hotel and bought the Killarney Guest House (now Quest for Life). In time, the family moved on, to Bowral then Noosa.

Beryl Gosbell died on June 8, 2022, in Queensland. She contracted pneumonia and then COVID in January, and sadly never recovered her strength. Beryl's daughter Georgina told us that Beryl remained herself, bright and alert to the end. Norma Rowen died on July 25, 2022, aged 100 years and six months and her funeral was held in Bundanoon at the Holy Trinity Church. Norma was a Life Member of Bundanoon Garden Club.

Beryl was in touch with Bundanoon Garden Club in March 2020, at the time of the 50th Anniversary celebrations. It was important to Beryl that the club was proudly continuing the tradition of beautifying Bundanoon.

Beryl's daughter Georgina Gosbell recently sent BGC some family photos and press clippings, including a news article from 1981, which gives an interesting insight into the early activities of the club. The article was written as coverage of a luncheon at the Gosbell home in Bowral, where a citation was presented to the Bundanoon Garden Club by the National Council of

State Garden Clubs Inc. of the U.S.A. for outstanding community service. We do not know the name of the newspaper. During the luncheon, the Garden Club secretary, Norma Rowen, tabled a report which gives an admirable picture of the early work of the Club, and that appears below.

*"The Bundanoon Beautification and Garden Club was formed at a meeting convened by Mrs. Beryl Gosbell at the Hotel Bundanoon on November 26, 1970.*

*Subsequently monthly meetings were held there and later at "Killarney" Bundanoon, whilst the proprietors in each case were Mr. and Mrs. George Gosbell.*

*Initially to raise funds, several functions were held, taking the form of a couple of poolside parties and a wine-tasting dinner at the Bundanoon Hotel, a plant stall and a cocktail party at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Eric James at Penrose.*

*Later, other than from a dollar annual subscription from approximately 50 members, an annual dinner dance held at "Killarney" was the only source of fundraising.*

*This was always both financially and socially successful.*

*One must recall that in 1970 when this Club was formed, many townships such as Bundanoon were going through a very depressed period.*

*The tourist industry had declined greatly, real estate values were at an all time low, houses were unoccupied and there were many unsaleable blocks of land, which subsequently meant the Council rates were barely adequate to cope with other than the necessary problems.*

*Projects which the club tackled were varied.*

*Initially the Northern entrance to the town - shabby signs and notice boards were removed and replaced by one large tourist sign and some 70 native plants planted.*

*An area behind the Community Hall was converted into a pebble garden with a sign board showing the town layout. This project alone cost \$600.*

*Clearing an area near the Oval and swimming pool, and the purchase of four picnic tables and stools which Moss Vale Apex Club installed for us, was another*

worthwhile effort, with the trees and shrubs to complement it.

The Wingecarribee Council were very cooperative and as well supplied paint so the wooden fence could be rejuvenated.

An average of 100 trees and shrubs per year, including an avenue at Penrose have been planted. Originally all purchased by our Club and half subsidised by the household whose footpath it was on.

The avenue on either side of the railway line was the major planting, and in the first year some members even did the actual planting before Council took over the task of planting for us.

Instrumental in having the cemetery grounds tidied up and water laid on, extra garbage bins for town, we pestered Council quite considerably.

Equally we at times also made our presence felt to the Parks and Wildlife folk with regard to the Morton national Park.

Working bees helped clean up a church grounds, inspected trees in need of water during the extended dry periods, met with Council Engineer for his permission and support in our various endeavours.

The last of these decision-making inspections was carried out by President George Tarrant, Treasurer Bob Greason and Beryl Gosbell. It is with great sadness that we report the death of our dear friend and original member, Bob Greason, but are happy to announce that we shall be making our next major project a park, which we agreed that day to be worthwhile. This shall be at the Northern entrance to town once again, but on the opposite side to our first project some ten years ago.

We hope to have the continued support of the Wingecarribee Council with both this park and work we have planned on the completion of sewerage at the Ferndale Recreation Reserve.

Several of our members are involved in the community effort of Meals on Wheels when it is our Club's turn, and I think we all agree that pleasure has been equal to effort in all we have attempted.

The last social evening was held at the home of Mr and Mrs. Eric Rowen in the form of a supper party and to farewell George and Beryl Gosbell on their departure from Bundanoon to Bowral.

The club .....(unclear text)...quiet year due to sewerage being installed in Bundanoon limiting the start of any new projects.

1982 ..(unclear text).....repair work needed as an aftermath to the sewerage upheaval."



Incidentally, the photo above is of great interest to Kay and me because George Tarrant (1904-1986), the president of the Beautification Committee, and his wife Gwendoline, were former residents of the house we now occupy. Ed.

### And now part two of our own BHG history, courtesy Ralph Clark

In the last BHG newsletter I told the story of the formation of the Bundanoon Research and Preservation Group, in March of 1984. In this article I will cover the next few busy years.

By the end of the Group's first year a window display in the Newsagency window had been produced, as had a large guest house map positioned in estate agent Lucy Rocca's window. The Group had joined the Berrima Historical Society and affiliated with the RAHS. It had been arranged that copies of all the Group's information would be deposited at the BDHS Archive, where members were already using the microfiche

readers and other records. The Group voted in the RAHS elections, as well as contacting the parent body to see if a Cultural grant could be obtained to help with filing newspaper cuttings. Mention was made at the April 1985 meeting of 'the war effort contribution, when coachwood was taken from the gullies for large quantities of rifle stocks.' Interviews with long-term residents were already happening, as were tours. It was recorded that Suzy Taylor was to interview Mrs Thatcher, Ada Fowler and Mrs le Plastrier; John Hughes interviewed Mr Vince Ellsmore. A Bundanoon/Exeter tour was planned with the BDHS; Les Grice's itinerary from a previous tour was discussed. Members queried whether it would be possible to "find out the old history of what is now known as Quinkan Angora Stud." I am not sufficiently familiar with our Archives to know whether any of these items are there - it will be interesting to investigate. Official records had been obtained from Australia Post and the Police Department. By the March 1986 AGM there were already 36 foolscap pages of relevant transcripts from the Scrutineer. Meetings at this time were held in the Health Centre in Laurisel, the cottage behind today's Jumping Rock café. Two steel cabinets were purchased at a Penrose auction, repainted, and postmaster Ray Unwin made space available for them. A new member, Pauline Dickson, brought along some comparatively current photographs; Aub McCarthy was asked to take a series of photographs of the town and to file the Group's growing collection of negatives and images. "John Hartley returned newspaper items up to 1890 and Ken Phillips has taken copies of John Hartley's photographic notes." A new IMB Bank account had been opened. The secretary, Norma Edmonds, contacted the Bicentenary Authority requesting information about an advisor for publishing books and an expert on the writing of local history, services which the Group understood were available. The conservator at the Australian Archives gave advice on storage and upcoming seminars. Consideration was given in November 1986 to money-spinning ideas for the following year's Brigadoon: as well as printed envelopes and notepaper they were investigating printing on coffee mugs, plates, etc. A busy Group indeed. Ralph Clark

Bundanoon Research and Preservation Group. inc:  
1984,

[Thank you to Ian Smith, our Archivist, for the following story](#)

### **The Becke Sisters**

or

### **Portugese days, a champion surfer and a globe-trotting author**

It's not unusual to meet unassuming Bundanoonians only to later discover that they have led rather unusual or unexpected lives. Such was the case with the Becke sisters, Alrema and Niya, who lived in Old Wingello Road in the early 1960s. If their life in Bundanoon was uneventful, their lives prior to coming to the Highlands was, it could be said, rather glamorous and noteworthy.

Alrema was born on 20 October 1897 and her sister Niya on 27 September 1898. Perhaps because they were born about a year apart, they seemed to have a close bond that apparently remained with them throughout their lives. Both were born in England to Australian parents – George Louis Becke and Fanny Sabina Long.

Louis had led an adventurous and itinerant life living and working in the South Pacific islands. In the early 1890s he started writing and authored some thirty-four works of fiction. He and his family subsequently lived in England, France, and Ireland. In London especially, he was treated as a literary celebrity. Financial success, however, eluded him and after returning to Australia Louis and Fanny separated in 1911. Louis died in 1913.

Fanny now found life a struggle having to bring up two daughters by herself. She worked in various jobs including as a school matron and received support from the Girls Realm League for Alrema and Niya (the League supported 'girls of gentle birth' who through lack of means may have to support themselves without receiving any proper training).

In 1913, Alrema, now 15, commenced working as a commercial artist for the firm Smith and Julius. Niya, aged 13, has also left school and become an apprentice milliner. Both were gifted in the arts – Alrema in drawing and painting and Niya in creative writing. In 1919 Niya had her first poem published, in *The Bulletin*. The title of the poem was 'This I Would Ask'. Two other poems were published - 'Sanctuary' and 'Reverie'.

In 1919, Fanny and the girls were living at Manly. Being near the beach may have awakened in Alrema a passion for sun, sand, and surf.

1919 was significant for Alrema (aged 20) as she married Harry Ernest Levy Samuels of Mosman. They lived at Cremorne, but Alrema would spend months each year at a bungalow called 'Merriwing' at Palm Beach. By 1923 Niya was working as a journalist for the *Daily Telegraph*.

Fanny and Niya returned to England in 1926 and Niya soon got a job with Thomas Werner Laurie, a London publisher of books that were considered 'avant-garde' in some cases, racy in others. Nonetheless Niya was involved with more mundane publications editing, with notes, *Laurie's Cyclopaedia of Notes* (published in 1926), for example.

Adventure beckoned however, and by 1928 she was living in Portugal, especially at Estoril a glamorous and fashionable beach resort. Returning to London Niya became personal secretary to Mrs. Alec Tweedie, a successful and well-known traveller, writer, and artist. Mrs. Tweedie was wealthy and well-connected and hosted weekly soirees at her Mayfair apartment. Niya also attended these occasions that regularly included guests with royal connections, e.g., the Prince and Princess Arthur of Connaught and King Faisal of Iraq.

Meanwhile, back in Palm Beach, Alrema ('Sammy' to her friends) divorced Harry in 1929 and became a champion surfboard rider and acclaimed supporter of Palm Beach lifesaving club, serving as club vice president and raising hundreds of pounds for the club. In January she 1933 she won a prize for the best suntan on the beach!

By October 1933 Niya had returned to Sydney and was working as a journalist. Some of her stories included 'Social Surf Season Opens at Palm Beach' (a survey of the social elite at Palm Beach, including her sister Alrema), before waxing lyrical about Arabida and Estoril on "the Portugese Riviera ...with its ... cosmopolitan atmosphere of voluble chatter and laughter" though concluding that "for beauty, colour, waves and proper surfing atmosphere...the beaches of Australia beat them all."

In January 1935 'Sammy' was described as 'the best woman surfboard rider in Australia, who is burnt the

colour of mahogany...she is one of the identities of [Palm] Beach.' This year romance blossomed again for Alrema, who became engaged to Captain Rex Francis Strangman Beale. He was as keen a surfer as Alrema. In her usual *bon vivant* style she celebrated by hosting a champagne cocktail party for eighty guests.

Summer 1936 was for Alrema a giddy whirl of parties and surfing that often-included Niya, including one that would be 'Sammy's last big flutter before she marries'. *Smiths Weekly* in January reported under the headline "Privileged Playground That Is Palm Beach" that 'Mrs. Alrema Samuels.....dreams of surf boards and is never happy except when on the beach or in the breakers.....Sammy's surf suits are as snappy and well chosen as ever, without any attempt at the over-daring. They are for use, rather than decoration.'

In April 1936 Rex and Alrema married and in pursuit of Rex's army career, moved to Edgecliff. By July they were living in Bendigo, and later they moved to Toorak. All the while Niya was residing in Neutral Bay and continued working as a journalist.

With the onset of the Second World War Rex enlisted in the AIF and served in the Malaya-Singapore campaign with 22 Brigade HQ. Tragically, he was severely wounded in the battle for Singapore and died on 13 February 1942. Alrema inherited all his property.

With Rex away at the war Alrema moved back to Sydney and from September 1940 to February 1943 she lived in both Mount Colah and Mosman, I suspect together with Niya. However, by the end of February 1943 she had returned to live at her beloved Palm Beach – perhaps to remember better times with Rex?

In the ensuing years Alrema found love again and in January 1952 she had become Mrs. J.C. Hardie and was living at 'Winscote', Sunrise Hill, Palm Beach.

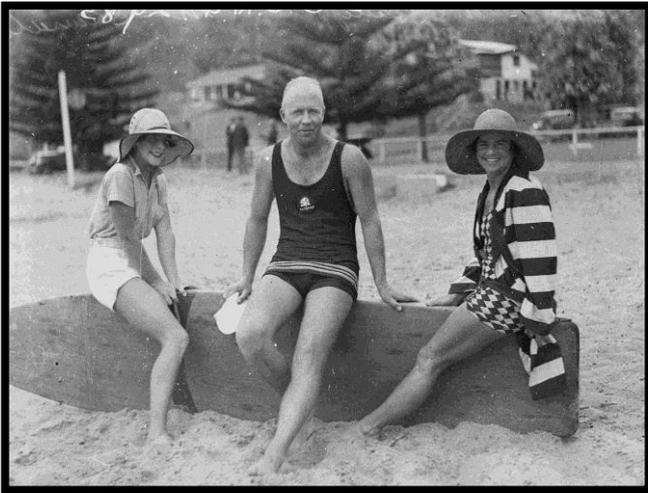
In 1959 Niya and Alrema's mother died in England. Sometime after, Niya and Alrema moved to Bundanoon to reside in Old Wingello Road. There were no street numbers back then and unfortunately, I haven't been able to identify which particular house they were living in.

In 1963-64 Alrema and Niya assisted E. Grove Day (Senior Professor of English at the University of Hawaii) with a biography of Louis Becke that he was writing. By

March 1964 he noted that Alrema suffered from arthritis and not long after that they moved to Balmain.

It seems that Niya preferred cooler climates while Alrema's preference was for warmer places. However, mutual support probably led them to living together. So, in 1968 Niya was living at Blaxland in the Blue Mountains, and into the 1970s Alrema was at Avalon and Newport. By 1972 Alrema and Niya were both living at 23 Bardo Rd., Newport. In 1977 Alrema and Niya appear to have moved to the Southern Highlands, quite possibly at Harbison Aged Care at Burradoo.

On 26 February 1980 Alrema died and was privately interred at Bowral. Her location at this time was at Burradoo. The following year Niya died. She was at Harbison Aged Care in Burradoo and is buried in the Anglican Section of Bowral General Cemetery.



Alrema (r.) and friends at Palm Beach c1934-36.

Courtesy State Library of NSW, image No. 2985



Alrema's husband Maj. Rex Beale, May 1940

Courtesy Australian War Memorial, image No. 1434

### ... and finally

At last, after what seems to have been a particularly cold and damp Winter, we are about to enter Spring – so, Happy New Season! Actually, in my rather perverse way I don't feel we should say it's Spring until the Spring equinox comes along (September 21/22). However, a certain close family member has a birthday on 1 September, and I don't dare admit that her special day isn't the first day of Spring in MY calendar ...!

Cheers for now,

Graham

### Greetings from our BHG Vice President in Japan

Good morning all,



I've been in Tokyo for 4 weeks now and the time has whizzed by. I am just about surviving the extreme humidity/heat. It's been hotter than usual (Climate change), up in the mid 40's at times, which is oppressive and limiting what one can do. I am hoping it's starting to cool as we get nearer to September. We also had a typhoon one week ago which unfortunately meant that my earthquake training with one of my grandsons was cancelled. A big disappointment for me. It's a simulation centre, apparently very scary, but seen as necessary training for everyone.

My apartment was meant to have internet but hasn't! It's a long story and I am just resigned to the situation now. There's free Wi-Fi in some of the local convenience stores (which still works just outside the shop window), plus on the buses and metro. Phones and data are surprisingly expensive for such a high-tech economy.

It's great to be living 10 minutes from my son's family. My grandkids just turn up at my place, unannounced and whenever, but thank goodness for Google translate. Whilst they understand English, they won't always speak it, especially when we are all together. It's almost the end of their school holidays with most schools returning at the beginning of September. We have had some real fun times and I have walked miles chasing around Tokyo after them.

We also had a trip up into the mountains which were beautiful and a welcome escape from the concrete jungle. My apartment fronts onto a busy and noisy main road, and the traffic literally never stops. It really is 24x7.

Hoping this finds everyone well and I look forward to seeing you all sometime in the not-too-distant future.

Good luck with the Raffle!

Best wishes,

David

#### **Forthcoming events**

**Mon. 29 August** – BHG Committee meeting

**Mon. 5 September** – Members' monthly meeting: guest speaker Andy Carnahan who will present to us

*'A Short History of Information Management-From Gutenberg to Google'*

Fathers' Day raffle draw

**Mon. 26 September** – BHG Committee meeting

**Mon. 3 October** – Members' monthly meeting

**Fri. 14 October** – Meat raffle night at the Club

**Tue.-Thu.18-20 October** – coach trip to Junee

(Waiting list only)

**Sat. 5 November** – Trivia night at the Club, 7:30.