

## Sifola - an early gem from Elliot's Farm

*Photo 1: Graham and Liz Anderson's cottage, once the Elliot family's from 1946 to 1979*



There's a weatherboard cottage on the corner of Dawn Street and Victoria Parade with signs advertising it as a holiday rental. It's been many a decade since the cottage had a coat of paint but what makes it unique is it is possibly one of two island properties that are still pretty much in original condition.

Marie-Louise Potter (nee Elliot) wrote an interesting book titled "Bananas, Bullfrogs and Boarding School: My Coochiemudlo" about growing up on Coochie with her brother Gilbert and her parent's farming days including the building of this cottage. Claire and George Elliot bought their 10 acre Coochie farm with a rundown cottage and a draught-horse in May 1946 which they called 'Sifola' after their home in the Solomon Islands. Much of the land was overgrown with lantana and wattle trees but with a lot of hard work overcoming draughts and flooding rain, Sifola farm grew a wide range of crops and produce such as Cavendish bananas, custard apples, tomatoes, lemons, avocados, eggs, beans and beetroot. The Elliots sold their crop in the Brisbane markets at Roma Street as well as in Melbourne and Sydney. The farm was sold in 1962 to a developer who subsequently cut the land up into smaller blocks with the exception of the cottage and house block (Potter, Marie-Louise. Bananas Bullfrogs and Boarding School: My Coochiemudlo. (2000) 1st ed. Logan City, pp23, 215).

Graham and Liz Anderson have been visiting Coochie for 40 years, and after buying the Elliot's cottage in 1979, three generations of Andersons have happily made Coochie their second home. The property still had traces of the farming days with old and/or dead custard apple and paw paw trees leaning into each other. Graham cut them out in an effort to reduce the swarms of mosquitos but they kept the large frangipani tree which stands in the front garden providing much needed shade and the beautiful fragrance when in bloom.

*Photo 2: Graham and Liz Anderson with the old frangipani tree behind*



Marie-Louise was visiting the island one day and knocked on the Anderson's front door. Graham and Liz were delighted to meet her, inviting her through to see what changes had taken place. Marie-Louise was so excited to see the old frangipani still standing, "I planted that tree when I was a little girl!" she exclaimed. The tree would be at least 60 years old.

During the first few years before a regular ferry service to Coochie was available, the Andersons would bring their boat across as the house was a short walk up from the beach, a bonus when carrying all the necessities a family needs for a couple of weeks. One of the Anderson daughters remembers how at high tide her parents would let them swim across from the Victoria Point jetty, mind you they slowed the boat down to keep a close watch on the children, pushing any jelly fish away as they swam the channel heading for Coochie's southern beach.

Graham recalled when the 'Windshuttle' vehicular ferry service started from Redland Bay it meant they could drive the land rover across, but, he cautioned with a smile, "the service officially operated every Thursday - SOMETIMES!"

Coochiemudlo continues to offer children a sense of freedom that is not so easily afforded in the city. As the Anderson children spent most of their holidays at the cottage, there was always a group of at least 12 kids who moved around together. Graham and Liz had one major rule for the children, "you can go anywhere on the island but be back here by dark!"

The beaches around Coochie often brought mysteries and surprises. Sometimes dolphins would be seen swimming in the hole near the barge ramp and even coming up onto the concrete. It's thought they may come from Tangalooma Resort on Moreton Island where they have dolphin feeding on the beach at sunset.

In the late 1980s the Andersons were walking along Norfolk beach when they came across a chap furiously cutting into his hand! With each jab he'd take another swig of rum and keep cutting. Somewhat alarmed Graham and Liz asked what the problem was. The fellow had been swimming when a stingray barb went right through his hand so he was cutting a deep hole in his hand to get the barb out. The Andersons took him up to the Underwood's house which overlooked Norfolk Beach as Mrs Underwood was a registered nurse. Thanks to her rapid response she performed emergency first aid and organised for the man to be taken to hospital.

Coochiemudlo has always been known for characters and tales that can only come from small communities. Keith Brown (Brownie) used to be

the official ranger on the island, he was in charge of the dump, a mechanic and ‘all round go-to’ person which included at times transporting bodies. Bear in mind this was before islanders could access an ambulance service. A local resident had unfortunately passed away and Brownie was asked to take the body down to Dick Whitehall’s ferry but needing some help and called on Graham. The body was wrapped and laid out in the back of Brownie’s ute but the gentleman must have been a tall chap because his feet were sticking out the end of the tray. Anyway, Graham and Brownie get down to the jetty and carry the body down to the ferry. Dick Whitehall wasn’t going to put him in with the other passengers so they had no choice but to strap it on top of the ferry. And that was one way to get off the island ‘feet first’ as it were but not necessarily alive and kicking.

Coochie used to have an active sailing club in the 1990s and Graham and Doug Seib would sail together often. One time they were sailing around the island in the catamaran trials. They were sailing off the north-west corner of the island. Graham was trimming the sail when they felt a solid BUMP BUMP under the boat. “What was that!” Doug called. Looking into the water a boot popped up, then another boot attached to a pair of trousers. The two men were pretty sure they must have sailed over a body. Not wanting hang around for a grisly find let alone come last in the race they picked up the wind and raced on. It was later they heard that two fellows had gone missing at Peel Island and the papers were later to report a story of a decomposed body being found off the northern end of Coochiemudlo.

The Grahams are active in the Uniting Church and bring up to 40 young people to the island for a two to three day camp twice a year. Graham gets clearance from the Redlands City Council to set up tents on their block and for meals they use old doors which when set as a table can set up to 12 people. Seniors groups also through the church often come over to visit and tour the island and the Andersons provide morning tea from the cottage on these occasions.

Where possible, the Uniting Church supports Baptisms to include full immersion in water. One day two individuals from Tarragindi’s Baptist Church wanted to be baptised in water and Coochiemudlo offered exactly what was needed. Graham popped into the Kiosk to let them know what was happening near the jetty in case people thought something was amiss. A little while later, a sign went up:

***“Baptism at 1.00 o’clock in front of the shop. Shop closed from 12.30 – 1.30”***

The sign worked as quite a crowd of locals gathered around to witness the event.

Three generations of Anderson continue to enjoy what was once Sifola Farm's cottage and it matters not in the slightest that the cottage doesn't shine like a new penny. The patina of the wallpaper, polished smooth linoleum and nicks on doorways and cupboards all bear witness to family stories of love, laughter, growing up and happy days on Coochiemudlo Island.

### **Acknowledgements**

Graham and Liz Anderson, Tarragindi and Corner Dawn Street and Victoria Parade, Coochiemudlo Island. 2017

*Written by C. Leonard*