

Dr Valerie Asche:

Senior Researcher, Menzies School of Health Research, 1987-1994

01 Valerie Asche on: coming to Darwin in the mid-1980s

Austin was offered the job as Supreme Court Judge up here. He was already a judge in Melbourne in the family court and we came up in January 1986 to just view the place and we were shown a house where we might live. And Ella Stack, who was then I think Mayor, not Lord Mayor, of Darwin met us and she arranged a morning tea at Menzies which had only been going 2 months. She told them that I would be coming and I was going to be appointed. The Director was rather staggered. But I had taught him at Melbourne University so we knew each other. So that when I knew we were coming in the April of 86, I knew there was a wonderful job waiting for me. And this was going to be different from anything I had ever had. It was no teaching, no diagnostic work but research. I had been working in terrific jobs in Melbourne but this was something that was really quite exciting so that I didn't notice really that there was no university. I just found that the Menzies was a wonderful place, it was going to be a wonderful place.

02 Valerie Asche on: Menzies School of Health Research

I was appointed Head of the Microbiology Unit. There were only about five of us other than the Director who was Professor Matthews. The rest of us were appointed Heads of various sections and then we recruited into those sections as the years went on.

The purpose was to investigate and help treat diseases that were very common up here and were not seen in the southern states.

I was there until 1994 and during that time we opened a branch at Alice Springs and we had workers who went to various Aboriginal communities looking at the health, the diseases that are common in the Territory, such as eye diseases, sexually-transmitted diseases, respiratory diseases and heart diseases. So we visited and took specimens and we wrote many papers. I don't think I had ever seen an Aborigine before. [*Is this really what she meant?*] At our hospital in Melbourne we may have had one or two of Aboriginal descent come.

03 Valerie Asche on: Menzies joining CDU

Menzies was not anxious to join CDU - it was the other way round. Well I think that the university was interested in having Menzies because by then we were receiving a large percentage of national health and medical research funds, and we were something rather valuable.

04 Valerie Asche on: her involvement with the university

There were two things that I think I made a contribution to the university. The first was that I was appointed Chairman of TopFM. And at the time we had great hopes that the university would use TopFM perhaps for some of their courses. And the second thing was with the wife of the Vice Chancellor Professor Thompson - he was not called Vice Chancellor at the time. His wife, myself and the wife of the Librarian who had been appointed here, we formed a distaff group. One of the main things that that group did was to look at the graduation ceremonies and provide the gowns, trenchers, and any other things that were required for graduation. And as the years went on, the university took over the purchasing and owning of the gowns. In the early days we owned them. Now I had become President of the Women Graduates Association in the Northern Territory. From that group I was able to provide the workers for the graduation ceremonies. And from the very beginning, the very first graduation up here,

until two years ago we ran the graduation gowning. And the university paid us a \$1000 for each graduation and in the last ten years or so there have been three graduations so we with our \$3000 in graduations gave it all back in scholarships. We had no expenses. *[In the last 10 years there must have been more than 3 graduation ceremonies]*

05 Valerie Asche on: the part the university has played in her life

I just feel I have beaten a track to this university. I have gone to everything Austin has had to do. I must visit here twice a week.