

Vale Sue Dixon



By George Davey, AM

Friends and colleagues of Sue Dixon were saddened to hear of her passing in August 2016 after a short illness.

Sue was born on 10 January 1928 in Malvern, Adelaide. After graduating from Unley High School she commenced her career in microbiology as a laboratory assistant cleaning test tubes at the then recently established Institute of Medical and Veterinary Science (IMVS). Sue was awarded a cadetship by the IMVS to study at Adelaide University where she graduated with a BSc in 1949. From 1949 to 1952 Sue worked as a bacteriologist at the IMVS and then resigned to start a family. After rejoining the IMVS in 1960 Sue assumed responsibility for the National Salmonella Reference Centre established by her mentor and good friend the eminent Dr Nancy Atkinson. From 1967 until her retirement in 1983 Sue was the head of the Salmonella Reference Laboratory (SRL) and Food Hygiene Laboratory at the IMVS.

Sue was one of a number of formidable and influential female Australian microbiologists of her generation who played leading roles in transforming the profession of food microbiology in this country. Her contemporaries included Margaret Dick (Kraft Foods, Melbourne), Jenny Taplin (MDU The University of Melbourne), Dr Barbara Keogh (CSIRO Dairy Research Laboratories, Melbourne), Professor Nancy Millis (The University of Melbourne) and Dr Phillis Rountree (Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, Sydney).

In 1977 Sue and her colleague Jenny Taplin at the Microbiological Diagnostic Unit (MDU) identified infant formula as the likely cause of a widespread national outbreak of infant gastroenteritis from *Salmonella bredeney*. However, it was only through Sue's forensic and innovative approach to microbiological analysis of foods that the source was ultimately confirmed and traced to contaminated milk powder ingredient, which was something no other Australian food testing laboratory was able to achieve. Her work in this area

greatly influenced future approaches to investigations of outbreaks of food borne disease and the methods adopted by regulatory authorities and the Australian dairy industry to prevent *Salmonella* contamination of dried milk products. This development was especially important in meeting food safety requirements for valuable export markets for Australian dried milk products. As a consequence of the national media attention to this investigation Sue became widely reported as 'Salmonella Sue'!

The discovery in 1977 of *S. bredeney* in infant formula and the detection around the same time of *S. adelaide* in calcium caseinate in a range of dried dairy based food products such as invalid diet supplements and slimming diets highlighted the importance of a national *Salmonella* typing system. This led to a collaboration between the SRL, MDU, the Commonwealth Department of Health and the Australian Society for Microbiology (ASM) in establishing a National Salmonella Surveillance Scheme (NSSS). Sue played a key role in the development of the NSSS which has been a major tool in the epidemiological investigations of salmonellosis and early warning to health authorities of food-borne disease from *Salmonella*.

Sue was an active member of the ASM where she served on the Membership Committee from 1979 to 1981 and the working party to investigate the establishment of a Fellowship category (FASM) from 1982 to 1983. She was also President of the South Australian Branch of ASM from 1979 to 1981. In 1983 Sue was elected to Honorary Life Membership of ASM.

Sue was also active in the Australian Institute of Food Science and Technology (AIFST). In 1974 she participated in the inaugural AIFST/CSIRO/UNSW Specialist course for the food Industry: Food-borne microorganisms of public health significance, where with good humour and diplomacy she taught the teachers some basics in food microbiological techniques. For subsequent courses (1976 and 1979) Sue co-authored with George Davey chapters in Food-borne microorganisms of public health significance (the 'Green Book') on serological techniques for the identification of *Salmonella* species.

Prior to the establishment of Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) and its predecessor organisation the National Food Authority (NFA), microbiological specifications for foods were developed by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC), Food Microbiology Sub-committee. Sue served on this committee from around 1979 to 1983.

Sue played a significant role in helping both government and industry Australian food microbiological testing laboratories to improve testing methodologies and performance. She was a member of Standards Australia Committee FT/4 Methods for the Microbiological Analysis of Foods from around 1976 to 1983 and a member of the National Association of Testing Authorities (NATA) Biological Testing Advisory Committee from 1982 to 1987.

Apart from the important part Sue played in developing national microbiological food standards, improving laboratory testing methodologies and procedures, assisting in the epidemiological investigations of food-borne disease and surveillance of *Salmonella*, Sue was a role model and mentor to many young aspiring food microbiologists. She was always willing to offer her guidance and wisdom with humour and empathy. Sue is sadly missed.

Vale Joan Faoagali



The following is an edited version of a self-written eulogy distributed to mourners at Joan Faoagali's funeral in Brisbane on 7 January 2017, plus additional personal comments from David Paterson.

Joan Faoagali is remembered by many microbiologists as a Director of Microbiology at Royal Brisbane Hospital from 1985 to 2006 and then Princess Alexandra Hospital from 2006. Born in New Zealand in 1940 as Joan Wilson, Joan married her first husband, Malaki Faoagali in 1964. After graduating with her medical degree from Otago University and then undertaking her junior training in Invercargill, in 1968 her young family travelled to Samoa by 'banana boat'. Joan soon realised that an unmet need in Samoa was pathology so she returned to New Zealand in 1969 to undertake pathology/microbiology training. By 1974, Joan had been appointed as Director of Microbiology at Christchurch Hospital.

Unfortunately Joan's husband, Malaki, developed a malignant paravertebral tumour and he died in 1978. In 1985, Joan and her second husband Jim Gwynne travelled with her family to take up an appointment as Director of Microbiology at Royal Brisbane

Hospital. Here Joan was responsible for a busy department in a hospital with a large population of immunocompromised patients creating an endless supply of interesting microbiology. Additionally, the hospital had a steady stream of antibiotic resistant organisms, including MRSA, which was the subject of a memorable expose by '60 Minutes'. Joan was filmed rubbing her finger along a dusty hospital surface saying 'and this will grow MRSA'. Fortunately one of Joan's key loves was infection control and she developed and published several key interventions against resistant bacteria.

Joan had a great love of education and training. She spent 6 years as examiner in Microbiology for the RCPA. She was also Queensland representative for the RCPA for close to a decade. At her funeral, RCPA President Michael Harrison gave a glowing tribute to Joan's huge voluntary workload for the college. Additionally, Michael Nolan (formerly Chief Scientist at RBH) gave a heartfelt eulogy representing the feelings shared by a large number of scientists with whom Joan worked.

Joan was the first successful 'multitasker' I ever met. In the days when microbiology 'sign-outs' were initials on a printed report, Joan would bring a swathe of reports to Grand Rounds where she would sign-out plus make insightful comments during the meeting. She had 7 children so it was no wonder that her Saturday morning 'desk clean-up'/research time was accompanied by a child or two. Joan published more than 100 peer-reviewed papers and as recently as November 2016 attended scientific meetings (despite having breast cancer metastasised to bone and liver). Her funeral was standing room only, and a wonderful mix of Samoan spirit, family emotion and reflection by more than 50 professional colleagues.