



"WE MUST TAKE CARE  
NOT TO ALLOW OTHER  
PEOPLE'S NEGATIVE  
IMAGERY TO INVADE  
OUR OWN"

Art Teaching Diploma and was ready to begin her career as a teacher. Her destiny was literally mapped out on a pegboard at the Department of Education where students' names were pinned to a map of New South Wales.

"Harden Murrumburrah," Vanessa read. "Where, what...?"

The time spent in this small town just west of Yass was one of the happiest in Vanessa's life. She was fortunate to rent a small cottage on a 400 hectare property at nearby Binalong, and for three years taught art at the local school. Her studio was a science lab and her tools were three paint brushes, a jam jar and a hammer. She rode horses, baby-sat the farm children, and occasionally rounded-up sheep.

In those days the journey to Sydney would take her through Berrima, and each time she passed through this picturesque town her belief grew stronger that one day she would make the Southern Highlands her home.

Inevitably Vanessa would take on more challenging positions in teaching and art. She became head of art at Leumeah High in Campbelltown and East Hills Girls School, then art co-ordinator at Trinity Grammar School in Summer Hill. Trinity was an art-oriented school, with its own commercial gallery on the premises run by gallery director Max Taylor.

"Max helped to establish my reputation as an artist," Vanessa recalls. "He encouraged me to exhibit my own work in the gallery. At this time, too, I was very pleased to be able to introduce the concept of artist in residence at Trinity Grammar."

Vanessa has lived a varied and successful life. She has lectured at the University of Western Sydney and at the International School of Colour and Design. As a freelance illustrator she has designed covers for best-selling books including *The Dark Room* by Minette Walters, *The Touchstone* by P. Horsfall, and a collection of poetry by Judith Wright. She has won prestigious awards and prizes, and has accepted many commissions, public and private.

The artists Vanessa admires most are Whistler, Lloyd Rees and Clarice Beckett, and the influence of their work can be seen in her paintings. She finds truth in a quotation by Albert Einstein: "all matter is light energy transformed into various frequencies". She feels that the importance of colour in art is often overlooked. "After all," she says, "colour is light, vibrating at different wavelengths and frequencies."

Vanessa still lectures regularly in Sydney, but since her move to Bowral the focus of her life has been her painting, her weekend workshops, and her dogs. She is devoted to dogs and recently completed a portrait of a family dog, an unusual commission, but one which she enjoyed. "Ted, please don't interrupt," she tells



VANESSA FORBES' HIGHLAND MIST

a small terrier, who has fixed her with a determined eye and is growling softly, but persistently

The classes Vanessa holds at her home studio are small, with each student following an individual programme. A variety of techniques are taught, in all mediums, so that students learn to build their skills. Vanessa is adamant that each student should be free to develop an individual style.

Three years ago Vanessa attended a course in neuro-linguistic programming. She studied techniques to assist in the differentiation between left and right brain sensibilities, to lessen tensions and to evoke the capacity to release inner abilities and talents. "We must take care not to allow other people's negative imagery to invade our own," she says. She is mindful, however, not to impose these concepts on her students. "I'm happy to employ the techniques I've learned through neuro-linguistic programming and time-line therapy, but these are tools I would only implement if a student specifically requested this."

In the studio, one of Vanessa's students is working on an abstract study of a landscape. The student talks excitedly about her teacher. "I hadn't drawn for years and years," the student says, "and I thought I'd attend one of Vanessa's workshops. I was completely overawed by the whole situation and just sat there miserably among the other artists thinking 'I can't do this! I can't draw!' Vanessa saw my distress and took me into the garden. She explained a few of the principles of neuro-linguistic programming, and the way in which she could lessen my stress levels. I was happy to trust her, and it was amazing. I went back into the class quite a different person."

"I love teaching," Vanessa says. "The sharing of knowledge is vital. And I love the energy and dynamics of a group of people within a studio. My aim is to encourage and bring forth each person's unique talent; to allow their perception of their own world to be expressed. But my reward is to witness the growth of confidence and self esteem in each individual."

Vanessa is contented in the Southern Highlands. "I know that at last I'm achieving what I'm supposed to in my work." 