

PRECEDE:

Former First Lady Tamie Fraser has spent a major part of her life under public scrutiny. Now living a more private life, she has the opportunity to work on her golf ... and loves every minute of it.

ENJOYING LIFE TO A TEE

By Karen Harding

Tamie Fraser could have been a top flight golfer but, well, life got in the way.

Not that the former First Lady would tell you that herself, of course. It's just that the tantalising combination of good golfing bloodlines, early exposure to the game, natural aptitude, a tall and athletic build and, above all, a passion for playing would seem just the right ingredients to make a champion.

There was only one problem. Time.

Tamie's life, both public and private, has not allowed her to play anywhere near as much as she would have liked.

The daughter of 1933 South Australian Amateur Champion Helen Seeck (later Beggs), Tamie can't remember when exactly she first picked up a club but she does know she was very young.

"My mother was a very good player and she used to take us out in the paddock with a 3-iron. I started to go out with her when I was about 16 or 17, I suppose, to Chalambar (near Ararat in Victoria) and that's where I had my early golf."

At 20, Tamie married Malcolm Fraser and the following year the couple moved to Canberra, where Tamie joined a local club. Her handicap dropped from 36 to 19 in a single season. But not everyone was pleased for her and they showed it. With her enthusiasm for competition blunted but not her love of playing, she kept her handicap hovering around the mid-teens as well as she was able in the following years, given the demands of being a young mother of four and a political wife.

"I used to have about ten rounds a year, I suppose, sometimes up to 16 or 17 maximum, and I would swing between 15 and 18."

She did not return to formal competition, however, until she and her husband left politics, whereupon she joined and played pennant for Balmoral, a sand scrape course in country Victoria.

These days, long out of political life but still very much involved with a number of charities, she divides most of her playing time between The National and Flinders, both on the Mornington Peninsula where she and her husband now live, and also Royal Melbourne where she has been a member for 50 years.

Asked to nominate what she likes about each of her courses, she replied, "I think Moonah (one of the three courses at The National) has that lovely links appeal. Flinders is very beautiful and has some great holes. And, of course, Royal Melbourne is the archetypal course. I'm very lucky."

She has never had a hole-in-one but has been close once at Flinders and has watched one of her playing partners make the perfect shot.

"Out came a bottle of green ginger wine. We all had a huge tumbler of it and no-one could hit it anywhere for the rest of the round," she laughed.

In June 2004, Tamie was made an Officer of the Order of Australia (AO) for her work in fostering the recognition and preservation of Australian art and her role in numerous community groups. On receiving the award she said, "Helping people is a good thing to do and I've tried to do it in all sorts of directions. I'm humbled that people have thought to put me up to receive such an award."

Said to have disliked electioneering and public speaking, she nonetheless did plenty of both during her time in politics and used her position as the wife of the 22nd Prime Minister to support a range of humanitarian and social causes.

"When you're in politics, you have to make the most of it and there were lots of things to enjoy."

These included founding the Australiana Fund in 1978, remaining its President until 1983. The Australiana Fund raises funds to purchase and maintain artworks which are Australian in origin or association and housed in the official residences of the Prime Minister and the Governor-General.

Amongst other things also, Tamie was instrumental in setting up a Women's Committee to raise monies for disabled children and has been active within the Red Cross for 50 years, though no longer holding office.

A keen gardener, especially of old roses, she has been President of the Australian Open Garden Scheme since 1992 and is a member of the Mornington Peninsula branch of the Heritage Rose Society.

But the charity that best marries her social conscience and her passion for golf is her position as Chairperson for the Counterstroke Golf Classic, a fundraising golf tournament for the National Stroke Foundation.

Initially started by the late Sir John Holland in 1994, the tournament is played twice each year, once at the end of February on the Mornington Peninsula and the other in early September on the Bellarine Peninsula, using some of the finest courses Victoria has to offer.

The Bellarine event is played over three days at Barwon Heads and at Thirteenth Beach, home of two excellent courses, while on the Mornington Peninsula side the 2010 courses will be The National, Sorrento, Flinders, The Dunes and newcomer to the rota, the Greg Norman-designed Settlers Run.

Comprising men's, women's and mixed 4BBB competitions, each day is a separate competition, allowing players the choice to play one, two or as many days as they like. Funds raised are directed towards research and other important programs.

Tamie generally tries to play one day and has even partnered her husband to success in the event.

“We won at The Dunes, in the mixed, so we were very excited,” she said.

Husband Malcolm also comes from a good golfing family but only dabbled in the game until his retirement when he decided to start playing again. The two now play as much as their still busy schedules allow and enjoy watching the game on television.

“We’re a couple of terrible couch potatoes. It’s such fun and you get so involved with who’s going to win and it’s so close, very often,” she said.

At 73, she plays off 20 – no mean feat. Both Flinders and The National are coastline courses, subject to some very strong winds off Port Phillip Bay, and the three courses at The National are particularly challenging.

Still blessed with a graceful swing and armed with the kind of learned appreciation for the game that comes from having grown up with it, Tamie continues to strive to improve her handicap, currently working on her pitching, a skill not needed much on the sand scrape greens of Balmoral.

But, mainly, she plays for of the sheer pleasure of it.

“I love the game; I love it. And Malcolm loves it too. It’s such a good thing to do together.”

A well known statesman once quoted George Bernard Shaw’s, “Life wasn’t meant to be easy” and it stuck in the nation’s consciousness, becoming a household saying.

The second part of the quote, though, goes along the lines of, “But take courage, child, it can be delightful.”

That is how Tamie Fraser has chosen to live her life. Full, interesting and with regard for the welfare of others less fortunate.

And, always, playing golf whenever she can.

