

Foreward

Fée Josephine Cunningham was born at the Renmark irrigation settlement in South Australia, just 13 years after Australian Federation and during the first year of 'The Great War' of 1914-18.

Fée was among the first generation produced by young adventurers arriving after long voyages from many parts of the British Empire and Europe as free settlers, to start a new life. Dreamers drawn by a romantic vision presented in the Chaffey Brothers prospectus known as 'The Red Book', faced a life of hard work and basic living conditions on their 'fruit blocks', but certainly enjoyed freedom with life on the River Murray. This was a time of transition and birth of the new Australian Nation from young British colony states, when loyalties of the new settlers were still shared between 'The Old Country' and the new.

This quite detailed biography, includes a fascinating insight into a childhood lived on 'the settlement' under pioneering conditions and records a subsequent journey through a long and productive life encompassing the World War 2 and post war eras to the new millennium.

As a young woman, Fée attended Woodlands and Montessori Colleges in Adelaide before graduating and working as a kindergarten teacher there and in Renmark. After a long engagement she married Renmark son Ian Showell in 1938 and produced her first boy Harry and daughter Josephine before the onset of World War 2.

Life as a young mother of two, with a husband at war was not easy and the family support mechanisms were not as they are today. Post war additions of Hague and Lydia followed and were intended to cement her family faced with a changed and restless returning husband. Fée's memories of that period and the balancing of her family, business, social and artistic endeavours after the war are recorded.

Fée's contribution to the economy of the Riverland with husband Ian Showell in pioneering the houseboat holiday industry in the 1960's should be noted and she outlines those formative years.

Hand written notes, penned over a seventeen year period have been researched, transcribed and edited with Fée's direct input over the past seven years to date of publication.

Most of the artwork and illustrations included have been drawn / painted by Fée and were prepared either specifically for the biography (in a sketchbook), from her body of work, or from cards hand painted by her for the Hague Showell family over the past few years.

Most of the illustrations were drawn after the age of 90 and with failing eyesight.

As a dedicated artist of some 40 years, working mainly in water colours and oils, Fée has generously given away to family and friends over the years, many hundreds of full-sized, framed paintings and hand painted cards. Her main subject matter has been Australian flora, roses, River landscapes and latterly cats. Her works bear the signature FÉE or the non-deplume EMMA, in the lower right hand corner.

In December 2006 at age 92, Fée arranged and published completely on her own accord a 32 page children's book, titled "A to Z of Furry Friends" comprising cat sketches and paintings.

The included DVD (rear cover insert) contains anecdotal and biographical video of Fée and family taken over a thirty year period on super8 film, Hi8 video and digital media recorded and edited by HS.

It has been a definite privilege working with Fée over the past few years in collating, typing and publishing this volume. Her strength of mind and courage in the face of the maladies of age including failing eyesight and hearing are truly uplifting. Two of Fée's favourite expressions "**Age is but a number**" and "**You are only as old as you feel**" are a timeless inspiration to those she touches.

Her first stroke in 2007 left her using a walking frame, but with her usual spirit she refused to give in, saying "*I WON'T use a frame*" – Within a few weeks she was back walking unaided

After her second more serious stroke in 2008 she was advised by her physician she would not walk again and would be bedridden. She said that "*this was not an option*" and after three months hard work and rehabilitation in Adelaide was able to again live alone and walk with the use of a frame.

Her friendship-base and loyal following is quite remarkable and can be firmly attributed to her positive, caring attitude and the way in which she engages those around her.

I just know that future generations will truly appreciate and value this life and this snapshot of - *Another Time* !

Hague Showell, September 2009
Son and Publisher