



03 May 2017

Adelaide Advertiser, Adelaide

Author: Deborah Bogle • Section: General News • Article type : News Item  
Classification : Capital City Daily • Audience : 128,230 • Page: 15  
Printed Size: 389.00cm<sup>2</sup> • Market: SA • Country: Australia • ASR: AUD 5,787  
Words: 342 • Item ID: 768085694

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# Dear Quentin: First lady of letters puts pen to paper

**DEBORAH BOGLE**

THE bond between them is obvious.

Dame Quentin Bryce and her sister, Diane Craddock, walk arm-in-arm through Mrs Craddock's vast Adelaide garden, pausing to admire a scarlet fuchsia grown from a cutting snipped in the gardens at Yarralumla during Dame Quentin's term as Governor-General.

Here for the launch of her book, *Dear Quentin: Letters of a Governor-General* at the Hawke Centre tonight, Dame Quentin, 74, is staying with her sister, 80, and her husband, retired cardiac surgeon David Craddock, as she always does when she visits Adelaide.

Born into a family of four girls in rural Queensland, the sisters always wrote letters, first at boarding school then later to each other, as their adult lives took them to different parts of the country.

It was a habit they learnt from their mother, who wrote letters every Sunday at a desk

"never used for any other purpose", Dame Quentin writes in her introduction.

"It's just been a natural thing for me. It started when I became Governor of Queensland. There were masses of letters, from people from every background – farmers and soldiers, doctors and grandmothers, lots from little children and most of the correspondents in there I've never met."

As Governor-General, Dame Quentin wrote up to 50 letters a week, mostly in her firm, rounded handwriting, in fountain pen on her vice-regal letterhead.

"One of the lovely things about letter writing is that it gives people a way of telling you things that they couldn't or wouldn't put into words, things that they can't really express verbally because the emotions attached are too deep," she says. "It brings tears."

The collection from her time as Australia's first woman Governor-General opens with

a letter from sister Diane.

"Dear Quent," begins the letter written the same day as the swearing-in ceremony.

"She put her hands on my shoulders like this," Dame Quentin recalled of the day, "and said 'just remember where you came from'."