

# From Toucans to Telephones

BY BELINDA HOGAN

*For Linda Thomson, collecting salt and pepper shakers was more than just a passion. Her daughters Angie and Sandy remember their Mum and her colourful collection.*



For most of us, a salt and pepper shaker is nothing more than something that sits on our dinner table to use to season our food. But for Linda Thomson, mother of three and grandmother of six, collecting salt and pepper shakers of all different shapes, sizes, designs, ages and materials, was her passion in life. With hundreds of different varieties from pineapples to poker machines, toucans and telephones to Betty Boop, Linda's collection can enlighten us about the world's cultural values and perspectives.

Because she passed away in 2003 after a long fight with cancer, Linda's collection now resides with her youngest daughter Angie Flemming, in the Brisbane home she shares with her husband Rod and children Jakob and Hamish. With her elder sister Sandy Williams and her family living close by, they say their mother's collection parallels her eclectic personality.

Angie remembers, "Mum shared the joy of her collection with all,

which was always displayed. She would share the stories and always have a laugh over the rude ones." According to the sisters, it was this cheeky humour along with the excitement of finding new salt and pepper shakers, which helped Linda get through the good and challenging times during her life.

Born in Christchurch, New Zealand, in 1944, in the suburb of Papanui, Linda was the youngest of three children by 10 years. Her mother was a housekeeper and her father, then 63, was retired. Linda's older siblings spoil her and often took the blame when Linda did something naughty.

As a child, Linda loved to spend her time with her aunt in the High Country, which was only accessible by troop carrier or horse back. Here, she gained a love for the outdoors and animals. Being poor, the family struggled financially after World War Two. Angie feels this had something to do with why she became a collector of not just salt and pepper shakers, but also teaspoons and dolls.

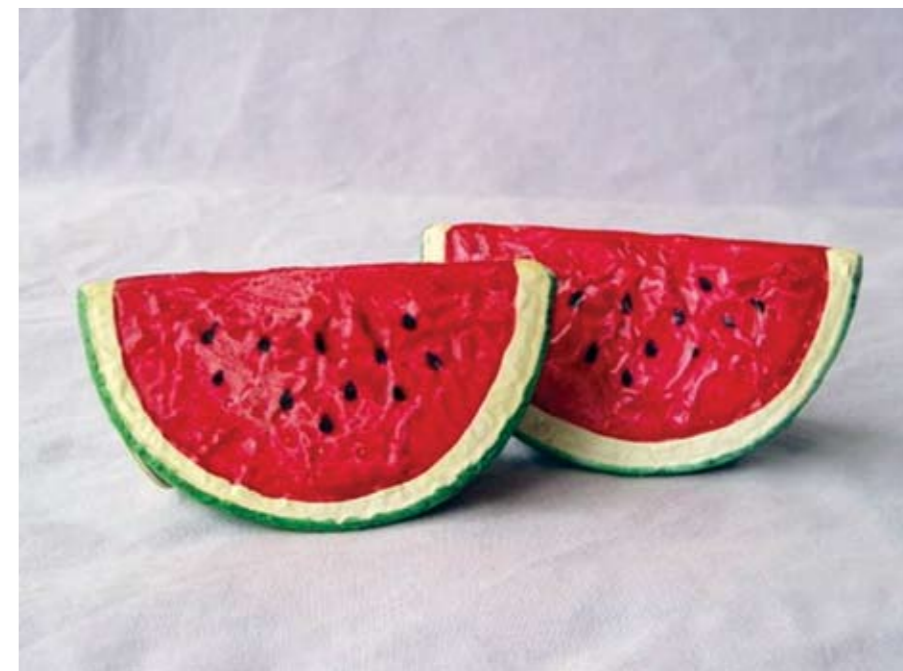
"Mum used to tell us that they were poor and she never wanted such scarcity in her life; I believe this possibly influenced her 'hoarding,' personality."

But tragedy struck Linda's family when she was nine, when her brother was killed in a motorbike accident. Being considered too young to attend her brother's funeral was something that Linda never got over.

As a young woman Linda worked for the Christchurch Press Newspaper and got married when she was 17. By the age of 23, children Sandy, Angie and their younger brother Duncan had arrived on the scene. When the children were young, the family moved to the remote Shenley Sheep Station in South Canterbury. According to Sandy and Angie, life on the station was wildly fabulous and Linda made



Linda with her daughters Sandy and Angie



sure the children learnt the lessons of self-sufficiency and compassion.

"Mum preserved all her own fruit and vegetables and made her own butter," Sandy says. "She kept an immaculate house, but it was never a surprise to arrive home from school to find a litter of puppies or a clutch of chickens born out of season in the warming drawer of the oven to ensure their survival." Angie adds that she was a very charitable woman. "Mum would get out of bed in the wee hours of the morning if someone needed assistance," she

says. "She made herself available to anyone that needed help." In later years, Linda spent a great deal of time also working for various volunteer services.

After spending nearly a decade at the Station, Linda, her husband and family moved back to Christchurch where she ran a local business and re-established her career. Soon after returning to Christchurch, Linda's marriage dissolved. Although she had a couple of sets of shakers from her childhood, it was a birthday present from Sandy that kick-started her





collection in the mid 1970s. "I clearly remember purchasing Mum a pair of squirrels with those little plastic ball eyes," Sandy says. "I spent so long thinking about what I was going to buy for her birthday. It was very significant as it was the first time I had been shopping on my own and the first birthday Mum had with us kids."

That simple present sparked an interest in Linda who at the time was going through some difficulties. Sandy recalls, "I really believe that Mum at the time needed an out, which the shakers seemed to provide."

This cute pair of yellowish brown squirrels was soon joined by many other sets.

"It became a growing, moving thing," Angie says. "Mum would buy a lot on her travels, by mail order, at garage sales and often small collections from people."

With Linda now remarried and living in Auckland, she realised she had to do something to house them. "She had a massive floor to ceiling shelf unit in her house that was purpose built for the salt and pepper shakers," Angie recalls. "It was her pleasure and enjoyment and Mum would love to share that with people."

Salt and pepper shakers have been produced in every shape, colour, size and object imaginable. Collectors, to differentiate types, also class them. One of Linda's pieces is a grey and white sheepdog, with a black cat on its back, which in turn has a little yellow bird laying on it. This is called a 'Stacker'. Another is four strawberries dangling from a frame, called a 'Hanger'. Another is two big tomatoes being pulled on a cart by a blue and white donkey – a 'Nodder'. This rather quirky name is given because the shakers sit on a base. Linda's collection consists of many 'Huggers', which describe two pieces that wrap around each other. There are red cats with their necks entwined, a mouse hanging onto its cheese, a



Two Ladies



The Squirrels



Laurel and Hardy



The Dog, the Cat and the Bird



Two Chefs

monkey squeezing a banana and a chipmunk grabbing an acorn.

The collection also boasts 'Carrier and Carts', (one object pulling another); 'Rockers', (round bases that move when touched); and 'Bench Sitters', (two sitting objects). Some of the standouts in Linda's collection are the 'Go-Withs'. These are sets consisting of two different objects relating to a common theme. Laurel and Hardy, Santa and Mrs Claus, a martini with a floating green olive, a grand piano with its stool and even a record player and its collection ... are all part of Linda's mix.

"Mum was very proud of her collection and was always happy to show it off," Sandy says. "But not in a boastful way, more in a 'connection with people' way."

After moving to Australia in 1997 to be closer to her children and grandchildren, Linda was diagnosed with cancer early in 2002. Determined to see Angie get married in July the following year, Linda (just dismissed from hospital) was the life of the party.

"It was 3.00 am and I said to her, 'Mum, I think you should go home'," Angie recalls. "She

definitely lived life to the full."

Leaving her beloved salt and pepper shakers to Angie with strict instructions to keep some and sell the rest, is testament to the fact that family was at the forefront of her mind.

"Mum was very colourful and enjoyed variety in her life," Angie says.

Linda's memorial states: 'Delivered more than she promised'. And it is clear, by her quirky and colourful collection, that Linda definitely viewed life with a mischievous and generous smile. 🐼



Part of Linda's vast collection