



For almost 60 years, generations of the Seymour family have cared for the open-to-the-public Katandra Bushland Sanctuary at Ingleside.

Story by Rosamund Burton

Life Stories

# The Katandra legacy

It is the Seymour family's love of the bush, along with the support of friends and enthusiasts, that is the driving force behind the Katandra Bushland Sanctuary. I am privileged to meet four generations. Sixty-five-year-old David Seymour has been president of Katandra Bushland Sanctuary Trust for nearly 20 years, and today his daughter, Jenna has dropped by with her two sons, Freddy, 7, and Huey, 4, who are cooking marshmallows on a fire. And with them is David's 90-year-old mother, Ruth.

David explains that his great uncle Harold Seymour bought this land along the escarpment at Ingleside in 1946. During World War II, he had joined the Volunteer Defence Corps and was attached to a unit based here atop Foley's Hill at Ingleside. He bought 25 acres of

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bushland, initially living out of his car when he came up for weekends, then in a shed, while he had a stone and brick cottage built.

Harold and his younger brother Roland, David's grandfather, owned Seymours Service Station at Roseville, which they established in 1929. The brothers grew up in Queensland. Having had no high school education, Harold did a joinery machinist apprenticeship and in World War I put his hand up for military service, serving as a mechanic and truck driver. After the war a couple of fellow mechanics were operating the first Manly bus service and asked Harold to be a driver. He moved to Sydney and drove buses, then worked as a motor mechanic again, before setting up the service station. There he worked full-time until

aged 79, then part-time for a further 10 years, until the business was sold in 1982.

Ruth first came to Katandra aged 20, when she got engaged to Don Seymour, David's father. "I met Don doing accountancy at North Sydney Tech," Ruth explains. "I worked in solicitors' offices for many years and Don worked at the Seymours Service Station."

For 70 years she has been involved in the preservation of this small piece of bushland. She also does bush care work at Wheeler Creek every Wednesday morning, and David and she also are part of the volunteer group which cares for the bush at Currawong on Pittwater's Western foreshore.

Harold loved sharing his bushland with friends and became knowledgeable about the native flora.

"He loved the land so much and when this area started being cleared for market gardens, he couldn't stand the thought of seeing his bushland bulldozed," says David. So Harold decided to give 18 acres to the NSW Government on the condition it remained bushland. Initially, it was considered too small an area, until Department of Lands officials visited and realised the biodiversity it contained.

"So, they accepted the land - except due to red tape, Harold couldn't give it to the government, he had to sell it; so he sold it for one dollar, and it was gazetted as a bushland reserve in 1967." Later additions of land from Harold and nearby Crown Land has increased the size of Katandra to approximately 30 acres (12Ha).

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PHOTO: Katandra Bushland Sanctuary

to look after the land; the first president was Robert Anderson, director of the Sydney Royal Botanic Gardens, then Don Seymour was president for the next 30 years.

David's earliest memory, aged four, was the first meeting of the Katandra Bushland Club, established to maintain the bushland. "I won the raffle... the prize was a small wattle tree, which I had the privilege of planting."

David, Ruth and I stand in the wooden yurt, which acts as the information centre for people visiting Katandra. The walls are covered with photographs and information about the flora and fauna. There is also a stuffed wallaby, an echidna and a tawny frogmouth, as well as several other specimens, all roadkill in the local area,

which have been preserved by a taxidermist who worked for the Australian Museum.

We then set off on the two-and-a-half-kilometre walking track. Along the escarpment, David points out a stringy bark and a turpentine tree with its rough bark. "We have a list of 376 plants," he says, and indicates a large fruited red mahogany. "That's a rare eucalyptus, uncommon in the area."

A swamp wallaby sits motionless in the undergrowth and a couple more disappear into the scrub. David says a quoll has been spotted here. Other creatures that have made Katandra their home include black cockatoos, endangered pygmy possums and lyrebirds.

Ruth recalls seeing a koala here, in the 1950s. "You'd see

their scratches on the trees." But David has never seen one and says there is no longer enough bushland to sustain them.

"The development occurring around the sanctuary is a challenge," he explains. "Mona Vale Road being widened has slowed the movement of animals along the corridor of the escarpment," he says. "They've improved some of the underpasses, so animals can get through, but every time there is new development it stops the animals moving around so easily."

Maroon-coloured stalactites and stalagmites grow in a sandstone cave. We gaze up at the magnificent red rock formations and David points to a big old Sydney peppermint with ribbons of

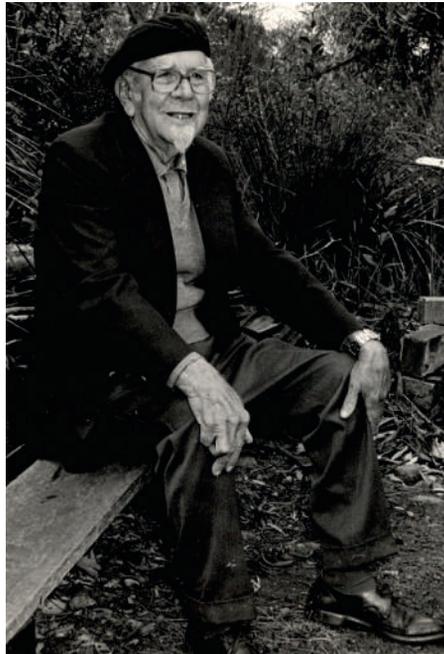
bark around its base.

Because Katandra has been cared for over nearly 80 years, weeds are not a huge problem, David explains. "After heavy rain, when water comes down the creeks, that's when weeds get washed in."

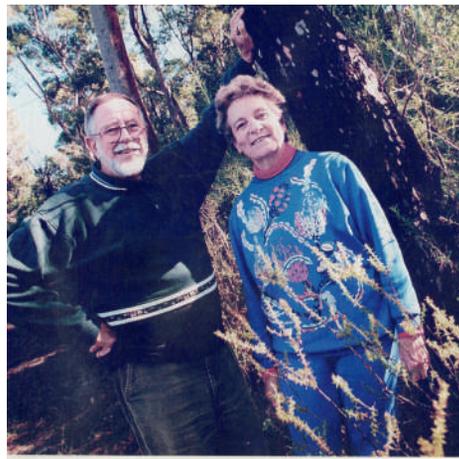
At a fork we follow the outer circle walk, but along the inner track David says is a fallen tree in which a pair of Powerful Owls had been nesting. David points out the rare *Bertya brownii* with its tiny candle-shaped male flowers and star-shaped female flowers. "This is my favourite tree," Ruth says, when we reach a large double-trunked angophora. "I hug these trunks, and they're always cold, even in Summer."

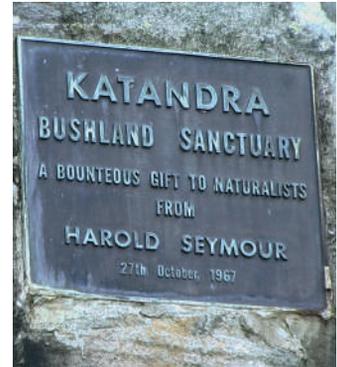
Both David and Ruth have a phenomenal plant knowledge.

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CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Harold Seymour who bought the land in 1946; Harold and his brother Roland owned Seymours Service Station at Roseville; David Seymour on our tour of the sprawling sanctuary; Harold's last address to the Katandra Trust in 1987; Harold at the handover ceremony in 1967; Don and Ruth Seymour; Ruth, now 90, is still an active bush carer.





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 Ruth says hers comes from listening to and learning from people who knew. David was a science teacher for 40 years, teaching physics and chemistry at Barrenjoey High for 32 of them, until he retired five years ago. "I have a great interest in nature, and I am always trying to identify the plants here."

This piece of unspoilt

bushland has been a much-loved place for many over the years, including MPs Jim Longley and Bronwyn Bishop, who were regular visitors. And the late former mayor of Pittwater Patricia Giles did one of what she called 'mayoral walks' in Katandra. "The Pittwater National Heritage Association organised a night walk here two years ago and there were thousands of

fireflies here," David says. "It was like being in a fairy land. We all stood here absolutely mesmerised."

We have been slowly descending and now see magnificent tree orchids. On reaching Katandra's largest creek the only sound is the water gurgling over the rocks, and we're surrounded by cabbage tree palms, monkey rope vines and coachwoods.

Ruth walks ahead of us as we climb back up to the escarpment. David tells me that with their shared love of nature, Don and she spent many years travelling around Australia. When he died, she thought her touring days were over, until a friend told her a company in Brookvale, which hired vehicles to tourists, needed another driver. "I didn't tell the kids,

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**THIS SPREAD:** Katandra hosts a variety of birdlife, including lyrebirds, black cockatoos and Powerful owls. Also abundant ferns, palms and flowering plants including (from left) *Boronia ledifolia*, *Dillwynia retorta*, *Bladfordia nobilis*, *Epacris pulchella* and *Tongue orchids*.

but two weeks later I drove a Landcruiser to Adelaide and brought back a Holden combo. When I was asked to take a Landcruiser to Perth, my daughter Elizabeth said, 'I hope you said no'. I didn't, I replied, I said, 'When?' For 11 years, until aged 85, when due to the COVID pandemic the company closed, Ruth drove all around Australia relocating vehicles. And five

years later she certainly isn't slowing down.

We pass a couple of tall Gynea Lilies, their brilliant red flowers just starting to open. "They're not natural to this area, but because Harold planted them, we tolerate them," says Ruth with a smile. "He wanted to be able to sit on the rock above and look down at the flowers."

It feels such a privilege to

walk with them both, with their extensive knowledge and lifetime connection to this place, and their observations of incremental changes - the decreased flow of a small creek, their concern about that termite nests were falling off trees several years ago. The result of their custodianship is a very special pocket of bushland.

**\*Katandra Bushland Sanctuary is open to visitors every Sunday from 10am to 4pm from the beginning of July to the end of October (entry by donation). The Friends of Katandra assist the Trust in caring for Katandra (three meetings a year). For more information visit [katandrabushlandsanctuary.com](http://katandrabushlandsanctuary.com) or phone 0431 857 407.**

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