




MERCY COLLEGE ALUMNI

Where are they now?

<i>Introducing:</i>	<i>Rita Massimo</i> <i>Class of 1989</i>
<p><i>Hi, my name is Rita Massimo.</i></p> <p>I started year 7 in 1984. I was relatively a confident, sociable and certainly, I would hope a respectful student towards my teachers and fellow students.</p> <p>I recall the first few months in Year 7 being slightly overwhelming in having to learn to read a timetable and remembering where the locations of the classrooms were and of course trying not to forget any of my text books!</p> <p>Coming from a strict European family who considered education of great importance, they were pleased to hear that I was actually enjoying my education.</p>	
<p><i>Tell us what it was like for you attending College?</i></p> <p>Attending Mercy as a secondary school wasn't even debatable as I knew no better about co-education high schools as most of my family attended same sex schools. Being so close to home many of the girls from my primary school, St Pauls in Coburg, progressed to Mercy.</p> <p>Transportation was very convenient whether I walked, caught the tram down Sydney Rd or simply got dropped off by my father or uncle. I loved commuting after school via the tram to hang out either at the Coburg Mall, Wendy's Ice Cream Parlour (now Zartar's) or Hungry Jacks, which was further up.</p> <p>During my six years at Mercy I made lots of friends although I never really had a best friend but I had multiple groups of peers I hung out with. Till today I still think that's the way to go with teenagers. The more people and personalities you experience the less opportunity you have to become stuck with the same personalities and ideas of just a couple of girls. In fact, my year level was a very close-knit group. I don't recall many arguments although there was an unquestionably degree of bitchiness, but the school made it very clear that those behaviours weren't acceptable.</p>	



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Times were so different for teenagers back in the 80's. Money was a struggle for many families, and we couldn't ask for much. We had to wait for special events to get presents and there was no way that by 15 years old we didn't have our first job at \$6 an hour!

We also made some great friendships with the boys from our Brother schools in the local area. St Joseph's Pascoe Vale, Marist Brothers and Trinity College. Of course, the Year 10 ball was a highlight and it wasn't unusual for the students to become an item!

I also recall the strictness of the school policies. Blazers had to be worn to and from school, hair tied up, no necklaces, no make-up, and of course bum huggers under dresses? And trust me we would be called up if our dresses blew up and we weren't wearing bum huggers. That still makes me laugh thinking about it!

Did you set out with a career plan?

It would be fair to say my passion that led me to my fulltime career started in year 8. I recall I got into trouble by Mr Joy during a science class because I was being disruptive. As a consequence, he made me sit at the front of the class for the rest of the year.

Well, it wasn't as bad as I thought. I began to really enjoy science classes and was eager to learn more in each class. I actually became addicted to the science subjects. By the time I reached Year 12 I had completed biology, chemistry and physics. This was only the start of my passion to follow a pathway related to science.

I looked at options like forensic science,

dermatology or plastic surgery. My scores were always higher than average, although it didn't come naturally. I spent late nights studying and summarising chapters of my science text books. Coming from a family where Italian was our first language, I felt I wasn't smart enough to achieve this success.



Mercy's First Year 12 Chemists

Back Row - Left to Right:
Francesca Sidari, Hanna Mtanios, Susanna Piu, Natalina Ambrosini, Margaret Canny, Christina Khan, Lidia Bombardella

Front Row - Left to Right:
Luisa Pontes, Lisa Williams, Sharon Morris, Caterina Colantoni, Tania Menelli, Rita Massimo, Angela Duarte, Collette Makdissi, Germana Metelli



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I recognised I had a passion to learn about the skin, yet I had no idea what to study? In 1990 at the age of 18, I began 1st year of a science degree until my future plans were shattered when a lecturing Professor advised me that quote.... "For every male dermatologist that exits practice, only a male re-enters practice." So, much to my family's disgrace I left my proposed path to attend Flagstaff College of TAFE (now Victoria University) to complete an Advanced Associates Diploma of Health Science (Beauty Therapy).

I knew I would have some focus in learning about skin. After 2 years full time I still wasn't fulfilled. I made a point to essentially avoid the beauty side of my job and focused on anything to do with the skin.

I just had to make this work.

For the next few years, I began working from home. In addition, I got another job at a salon in Werribee and to fill in the gap, I got a job with ANZ bank as a bank teller.

You talk passionately about your growing family and your drive in pursuing your career?

In 1994, I married my wonderful husband and by 1996 had our first child Jessica. My new role as a mother inspired me to quit Werribee and ANZ, in order to focus and potentially grow my existing clinic. I was determined to move forward as I felt my potential had not yet been fulfilled.

In 1998, I commenced a Naturopathy Degree at Southern School of Natural Therapies. In 2000, I gave birth to my 2nd daughter Natalie. I still had 8 months to go and was advised by my co-ordinator to complete the remaining months on line and come in to attend the practical sessions.

Computers were a new thing to me and I found it all very difficult. Unfortunately, between all the hurdles, I never managed to complete the last semester of my degree. I was devastated, although I knew I had learnt enough to be able to recognise the relationship between nutrition and the many elements of skin conditions. At this point, I never really had a career plan, but I just wanted to work in a job I loved, so I just kept following my passion in Skin.

Where has your career path taken you in terms of connecting with wider organisations, meeting people of varying cultures; locally and internationally?

My clinic continued to grow and my passion for further education flourished. I attended medical conferences both in Australia and overseas, completed over 40 certified courses both online and face to face, wrote a number of articles for the industry journals and presented public talks on topics related to the skin.

In 2011, at the age of 40, I made the biggest decision for my career. I had enrolled at Victoria University to study a Dermal Science Degree as a mature age student. I was in my element once again. I surprised myself in 2016 when I was honoured a golden key in academics. This achievement gained me a ranking in the top 15% of students with the highest grade within the Biomedical and Law faculty of the university. Finally, in 2017, the biggest highlight was graduating and being presented the degree by the chancellor.



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Let me tell you, don't let your negative thoughts hold you back from reaching your dreams. There were so many times I wanted to give up when the hurdles kept occurring, and yes there were numerous tears shed and late nights studying, but nothing beats knowing I did it.

If only I could see my old professor I would say "as a female –I made it"

I have been fortunate that my career has taken me to unexpected places. I tried to never stay behind. I was determined to be one of the well respected and highly regarded Clinicians in the industry. I wanted to set examples for my peers and I wanted the graduates to look up to me.

Just like I had my mentors. I too travelled overseas to be personally mentored by many amazing practitioners. My biggest achievement was the week I spent with Professor Fiona Woods- the skin burns guru in Perth.



Do you keep in touch with any of your College friends?

Thanks to FB, I have been fortunate to have kept in communications with many school friends. My time at Mercy has held a great place in my heart. It's so wonderful to reflect on my 6-year journey at Mercy. 3 of those years being the top guns of the school, for the reason I was in the year level where we were the first Year 11's and then of course we were such good and smart girls the school decided to proceed with Year 12.

When I do catch up with old school friends it enables me to hold onto a time in my life that I may not have realised then, but we are all unique. I feel honoured I was given the opportunity by my parents to attend a fine, reputable catholic Girls high school so close to home.





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What's next for you?

Currently, in 2020 I continue to run my own clinic of 30 years, liaising alongside a vascular surgeon treating leg veins with laser. Recently I accepted a role supervising 3rd and 4th year Dermal Science students at Victoria Uni with more plans ahead given health!!! Ohh let me not forget to add I am furthering my studies as a Dermoscopist.

What's that you ask? A person who examines many skin lesions on the body to determine whether they are suspicious or benign lesions.

Now at 48 years old, I intend on continuing to fly high to new places. Although my career seems so accomplished to many, I figure until I have health and a passionate drive my dreams are limitless. So then what's next for me ?..... still LOTS. Ultimately, I would love to complete my Phd and possibly volunteer my skills in a 3rd world country caring for burn or skin trauma patients.

What message of encouragement, advice would you give to current students?

Calling myself a Mercy Alumni, I follow the values the school instilled in us.

That of honesty, respect and consideration of others.

Power in women!!

I hope all current students pursue their dreams. Don't be afraid to fulfil your passion, no matter what field of career pathway you take. I cannot say enough how valuable it is to be in a career you love rather than just in a job that makes you money.

Money will follow when you love your job. Don't be fooled by the hidden truths in the social media scene.

Don't let anyone influence what the trends say you're supposed to look like or what job is supposed to be successful and make you rich.

Till date I don't have a web site, and just because I have FB and Instagram I certainly don't use it to promote me nor my business. The most of 30 years of my business has been word of mouth. I may be exposed to skin injectables, but I have never allowed anyone to morph me into someone I'm not just because it's a trend. I am going to maintain the importance of a luminous skin that will never go out of fashion, a clear, heathy complexion will always be admired.

Thank you for this opportunity to share my story with the Mercy community and I hope the students of today will take inspiration from this to never stop trying to achieve the best version of yourself.

Rita Massimo March 2020