

west end LIFE

getting personal

“ I'VE lived in share houses since 1979 and the places I remember with the most affection are West End houses - as they were in the '80s and early '90s.

Old colonial cottages with louvred sleepouts, '40s places with mullioned windows and funny little flats converted from grand mansions with city views and pressed tin ceilings. The most glamorous place of all was an exquisitely graceful grey house in Doris St with verandas like a ship's deck, nouveau lead lighting and old, grey Axminster carpet with pink roses in the double sitting room.

Enjoying these often run-down houses was an art pursued to high degree in some circles. Around the corner from Doris St there was a stretch of communal housing in Ryan St with a combined riverfront slope 100m long - a venue that hosted a regular 100 or so guests, enjoying impromptu open air concerts, gorgeous fire sculptures and more.

West End was like a country town - cars cruised slowly, nobody locked their back doors and the first espresso coffee ever pulled south of the river was at Franco's in the old West End markets circa 1979. The counter-culture was close knit and easy going and we made our own fun putting on cabarets at the Paint Factory (Donkin St) and gigs at the Boundary Hotel.

But most of the fun was had in the kitchen at parties. I first met my partner at Ryan St and I still party with the group of people I met around 20 years ago. Happily I still live in West End but only because my partner Robbie bought a place here 10 years ago.

Each of the houses I've lived in retains a little bit of my emotions, my story. When the old grey house was sold and repainted a fashionably correct colour and given a federation carport a bit of me mourned the passing of a more gracious time.

You can't stop change but I wonder what will be left in another 10 years to remind us of the generations of people who contributed to the life story of this historic suburb.”

Leah Cotterell, West End

□ Leah will be singing at the Riverjazz concert, which is on between 6 - 10pm at the Eagle St Pier tomorrow. leahcotterell@optusnet.com.au



Singer Leah Cotterell and daughter Jeannie, 3.