

Valerie Jean Kingston
17 November 1930 – 17 March 2026

Early years

Valerie Jean Kingston was born Valerie Jean Rochester on 17 November 1930, in Sydney at Marrickville. Her parents were William (Bill) Frederick Rochester and Vera Dorothy Emma Wallace. She had one sister, Wilga Merle Rochester.

It was a different world back then—a world of Don Bradman, Phar Lap, and *Gone with the Wind* (Valerie's favourite film). Valerie had a happy childhood, first at May Street in St. Peters, and then from age seven at Challis Avenue in Dulwich Hill. Except for a few months at Hay in western N.S.W., she lived in Challis Avenue for the rest of her life—88 years altogether—first in her parents' house at number 3, and then, after her marriage, in her own house at number 5.

Valerie's family were Methodists, and she often spoke about the old days at the Dulwich Hill Methodist Church. She had many friends there. She sang soprano in the church choir, took singing lessons from choirmistress Daisy Hooker, and sang solos. The old church with its enormous organ is long gone; an IGA supermarket occupies the site now.

Valerie's mother Vera had a small but close family. Vera's parents lived with Vera in Challis Avenue, and Valerie was particularly fond of her grandfather, a retired blacksmith known to all as Pa. Vera's older brother Tom lived with his wife Win and daughter Faye at Clovelly. Vera's younger sister, also Wilga, lived in Dulwich Hill with her daughter Cathy. There were frequent visits among the three siblings. Valerie's father's family were further away.

Valerie's father Bill worked for the Post Office, and his last appointment was Postmaster at Hay in western N.S.W. Valerie was 16 when the family moved to Hay. She remembered looking down from the balcony of the postmaster's residence on the upper floor of Hay Post Office, at the women gathering to pick up their mail, hoping to hear from their men returning from the war.

The arrival of the mail train was the main social event in the town at that time. There were also balls, which Valerie attended. She sent a newspaper cutting to city sweetheart Denzil, showing her at a ball in Hay, attended by a local lad. The caption spoke of 'Valerie Rochester with her peaches and cream complexion.' But she also sent Denzil a signet ring which he wore all his life. It arrived from Hay in a matchbox; the stamp was almost as big as the box.

The Hay interlude only lasted a few months, because Bill fell ill, and the family returned to Sydney, where he died shortly afterwards. Bill's superannuation kept them financially secure.

Valerie attended Marrickville Girls High School. After leaving school she worked as a telephonist at Ogden's Furniture in Marrickville. There was a millinery workshop in the building, and she used to admire the beautifully dressed buyers from upmarket department store David Jones who visited the workshop. She liked to be well dressed herself.

Three old references survive from this time: two from employers and one from the minister of Dulwich Hill Methodist Church. They represent her as 'reliable and conscientious', 'regular and punctual', and (says the minister) 'a well bred, refined, ladylike and courteous girl.'

The references give some details about Valerie's employment before she went to Hay. She was employed by Metal Equipment Manufacturers Pty. Ltd., at 22 Newington Rd, Marrickville, from 29th January, 1946 to 16th August, 1946. According to a journal available online (*The Tool Chest*, August 1999, p27), they manufactured 'small forged hand tools such as hammers, shears, wrenches and other small tools'. She next worked at Stoddarts Pty. Ltd., at 125A York Street, Sydney, 'Specialists in Millinery', from 19th August, 1946 to 23rd May, 1947, as a 'Junior

Clerk and Assistant Switchboard Operator'. Stoddarts 'sent Miss Rochester to College to study Shorthand and Typing, and she has made good progress in her course.' They regret losing her 'but her people are moving to the country.'

Valerie's early adult years were full of activity and enjoyment. Work, choir practice, and singing lessons filled the week. On Saturday she washed her hair and twirled it with long strips of rag to make ringlets, ready for cinema on Saturday night. Sunday was church and choir. And always there were visits with family, singing around the piano (played by sister Wilga) at home, and outings to the city, hatted and gloved, with best friends Clare Rogers and Lily Todd.

Marriage and family

Valerie married Denzil Howard Kingston on 18 October 1952. Denzil and Valerie were teenage sweethearts who met at the Dulwich Hill Methodist Church. They had two children, Stephanie Joy Kingston, born in 1953, and Jeffrey Howard Kingston, born in 1958. The family lived next door to Vera in Challis Avenue. Stephanie became a Geography teacher, Jeffrey became a university lecturer.

While Denzil worked in the printing industry, Valerie raised the children and ran the home. Later, she brought Vera into number 5 and cared for her there, with help from her sister Wilga, now married to Alan Sullivan and living at Lugarno. Valerie was an unassuming person, getting through a great deal of work and holding the family together without drawing attention to herself. She used to say that she had three rules: no drinking, no smoking, no swearing.

Valerie tended the garden at 3 Challis Avenue even as a teenager, and gardening became one of her great pleasures in life. She obtained cuttings from far and near, and could say where each plant had come from, making her garden a memorial to her friendships. She also enjoyed several handicrafts, including knitting, embroidery, and pressing flowers for card-making. Opening the old Sydney telephone directory was hazardous owing to the pressed flowers that often fell out.

The family had wonderful holidays. Each Boxing Day, we would pack clothes, Eskies, and Sox the dog into the station wagon and head for Toowoong Bay, on the Central Coast, where we first had a tent, then a caravan, and finally a mobile home with a great ocean view. Denzil had to work, but he travelled up each weekend.

Denzil took his annual leave in the May and September school holidays, and we went on car trips. We travelled all over Australia and New Zealand. These trips inspired Stephanie to become a Geography teacher.

Valerie took a great interest in politics. She read the newspaper every day, and the family often talked over the news of the day. Stephanie remembers Valerie talking over political issues with sister Wilga from all possible angles.

Last years

Denzil and Valerie lived on together in their house in Challis Avenue until Denzil died in 2014. By then, Valerie was beginning to suffer from dementia, so Stephanie and Jeffrey moved back into the family home to care for her. She still managed to find some pleasure in life, walking in the street, visiting neighbours Victoria, Ken, Clare, Suzie, and Angel and Kristina, enjoying musical performances by the children of neighbours Kath and Craig, and watching Andre Rieu music videos, although by the end she needed help with even basic tasks.

We acknowledge with gratitude the many people who helped her during these years. Her

doctor and neighbour Michelle kept her in good physical health. Neighbours Suzie, Kristina, and Pauline came to the rescue when we needed help at short notice. The care workers from Uniting changed over the years, from Yamilet at first to Yin, Emma, Donna, Amporn, Munu, Carmen, and Joanne at the end, but they were all wonderfully professional and compassionate.

In her last few years, Valerie had several short stays at Glen Osmond House, a Uniting respite centre in Petersham, where she was very well cared for. It was there that she had a stroke and had to be taken to Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, where, after a week of palliative care, she died peacefully on 17 March 2026.

Jeff Kingston, March 2026

This eulogy, as well as Denzil's eulogy, and Denzil's memoir, 'The Best of Both Worlds,' can be found online at http://jeffreykingston.id.au/denzil_and_valerie.