Deanne Hooper – A feisty fortitude

Deanne at an adaptCARE disco, St Catherine's Hall, Launceston 23 September 2025

The thought of her two boys, Dylan and Kaidyn, makes Deanne smile. Thinking about the loss of another son, Michael, and the lower half of her right leg reminds her of her grief and sorrow. Thinking about her Aboriginal heritage makes her proud, and thinking about unfulfilled promises of jobs reminds her of her anger and disappointment. These observations capture some of the ups and downs Deanne has experienced in her 56 years.

Deanne is the youngest daughter of Nola, an Aboriginal woman from Cape Barren Island and Allan, an Englishman from Manchester. Her parents met in Melbourne when they were working at the Red Tulip Chocolate Factory, a company founded by Jewish immigrants in 1939 and bought out by Cadbury in 1988. Her older siblings, sister Belinda and brother Allan- known as Butch- were born in Melbourne, but Deanne was born in Myrtleford in northeastern Victoria.

Although she recalls living in other places in Victoria as a child, including Kyabram, Hastings and Cranbourne, the place Deanne remembers best and with great fondness is Cape Barren Island. She was 13 when the family returned to Cape Barren Island in 1985. The move had been triggered by the tragic loss of her sister's 14-month-old son whom they had gone to bury on the island, but Deanne's memory of island life was one of freedom and being surrounded by the love of extended family.

Truwana, as Cape Barren Island is officially known, is the second largest island of the Furneaux Group, with the larger Flinders Island to the north. Deanne is related to most of its 80-odd inhabitants who are descendants of the mixed European and Aboriginal people who relocated there in the late 1870s. Her mother, Nola, is a respected Aboriginal elder, both on the Island and in the Launceston community where they both she and Deanne now live. As a former Chairperson of the Aboriginal Elders Council in both places, Nola has given many 'Welcome to Country' addresses at public gatherings. She retired from this role in August 2025 following health issues.

A Welcome to Country from Aunty Nola, Deanne's mother

Deanne says she hated being the baby of the family because 'I was always the last one to find out things.' However, being the youngest gave her the opportunity to spend some of her childhood on Cape Barren Island, unlike her sister Belinda who was already an adult and her brother Butch who had remained in Melbourne. From her mother she learnt a lot about her Aboriginal culture and from her father, who worked on the local council but got a lot of flak because he was a 'white fella', she learnt how to take things on the chin. She also learnt to make do with what was available. The island didn't have much, but it had all she needed. She attended the local school with ten other children, who were all taught together by the sole teacher. Deanne liked school, and she liked that she could go home or go swimming when she wanted. There were enough people – just – to field a softball game – her favourite sport – or a cricket or football team. They made their tucker from what was available seasonally – kangaroo patties, sea pies, which despite its name could be made with either meat or fish and which was known to have been served to British sailors during the 18th century, or mutton birds. She remembers going mutton-birding on Big (Great) Dog Island and Babel Island, the latter being Australia's largest mutton bird rookery, and as an adult, making the trek on the Tasmanian mainland by car to Smithton and then by small plane to Trefoil Island (Titima) near Cape Grim, owned by the Trefoil Island Aboriginal Cooperative and home to an estimated 1.5 million breeding pairs of short-tailed shearwaters.

Deanne moved to Launceston to do a Hospitality and Catering Course at a work readiness training facility in Youngtown, where, since 2004, the Glenara Lakes Retirement Village now stands. Deanne does not remember how she came to undertake the course, but she does remember that it was done through Job Net with the promise that they would arrange a job for her after she completed the course; but a job never materialised.

Before the site Deanne studied at became a work readiness training facility in 1983 it had been the 'Northern Tasmania Home for Boys,' which had begun in 1921 and renamed 'Glenara' in 1973 before closing in 1982. The reason she remembers this is that one day when she was at the college, she noticed she was being observed by a man whose scrutiny of her made her angry and she ask him what he was looking at her for. He apologised but told her she thought she looked familiar. After further discussion the person she reminded him of, and who he knew, was her uncle, Derek Peardon who had played for Richmond in the Victorian Football League (VFL) between 1968 and 1971, and that Derek had an association with the Boy's home, but it was not clear to Deanne at the time what that connection was.

Deanne's uncle, Derek Peardon, c.1968

As it turned out, Derek was part of the Stolen Generation. In 1955 or 1957 as either a five or seven-year-old (the records vary), he was taken from his family on Cape Barren Island and placed in the Boy's Home in Launceston. In an interview in October 2022, Peardon says he has been left wondering if he had not been stolen and taken to the Boy's Home whether he would have had the short but illustrious football career that made him Tasmania's first Aboriginal football player to play in the VFL, and later inducted into the Tasmanian AFL Hall of Fame.[1] He is also the man who inspired his former Richmond team mate, and later legendary Essendon coach, Kevin Sheedy to learn more about indigenous Australia, which helped Sheedy to later create the blueprint for Dreamtime at the 'G, the annual Australian rules football match played between Australian Football League clubs Essendon and Richmond since 2005.

[1] *National Indigenous Times*. *https://nit.com.au/24-10-2022/4034/how-a-little-known-palawa-speedster-inspired-the-afls-greatest-indigenous-showcase* (accessed 14 October 2025)

Despite no job, Deanne stayed on in Launceston to raise her children. She gave birth to her first son Dylan in 1993 – he has now made her the proud grandmother of four grandchildren – three girls and a boy – Deanne correctly picked their genders during each pregnancy. Her second son, Michael was born in 2002. After losing him at birth she felt trapped in a bubble and couldn't speak, but she remembers the kindness of one of the nurses who told her to think of him as sleeping, a thoughtful phrasing that helped lessen her loss and grief. Her third son Kaidyn was born in 2007, a couple of months before her dad died.

Dylan, aged 3 on a visit to Cape Barren Island

A memorial quilt made for Michael by his paternal grandmother

Kaidyn, adaptCARE disco, St Catherine's Hall, Launceston 2024

Deanne is no stranger to hospitals. Born with a hernia between his heart and liver, Kaidyn has been in and out of hospital all his life. Nevertheless, she did not expect to spend time in one herself. However, in 2021, after several months of severe pain in her right leg and numerous visits backwards and forwards to different doctors and hospitals to find out what was wrong, that was the result.

Deanne is a diabetic. Her problem was that one leg felt cold as ice while the other was as warm as toast. Despite doctors telling her that her cold leg had a pulse and not to worry, something was seriously amiss, and Deanne knew it. The couple of Panadol Forte and two Endones she was regularly prescribed did not alleviate the pain. Eventually Deanne found her mobility impacted and she was left crawling around in agony. She felt she was in a bubble of pain. Back to the doctors she went yet again, now with sister Belinda yelling at whoever would listen; 'I am sick of looking at my 52-year-old sister crawling around. I can't stand the pain she is!'

Eventually a diagnosis was made. An amputation was needed. Her lower right leg was dead, and she was told it's 'Your leg or your life.' Deanne flew to Hobart for the surgery at the Royal Hobart Hospital as amputations are not performed in Launceston. An epidural meant that she was awake for the operation. Two weeks were spent in hospital in Hobart, followed by three weeks of rehab at the LGH in Launceston before a transfer to the John L. Grove Rehabilitation Centre for six and a half months. The wound healed well, and a prosthetic leg was made. Deanne calls it 'her little buddy.' Soon after her operation Deanne agreed to share her experience with the LGH Rehab staff, and now, several years on, as she shares her story again, she says she still has a phantom leg where her missing limb used to be. And while she mostly wears a smile on her face, she stills feels the pain.

Staunch Richmond supporters, mother and son Tiger fans Deanne and Kaidyn at adaptCARE's Christmas BBQ, St Catherine's Hall, Launceston, 29 November 2025