

Paul

Paul owns and runs local café Grounded House at 499 Macaulay Road. He was born and bred in Kensington. His parents, Tony and Lina, lived and ran a tailoring business at the same property for over 50 years, after arriving in Australia from Italy in the early 1950s. After living overseas, Paul returned to his Kensington roots and established Grounded House in his family home. Read on to find out more about Paul's life growing up in Kensington and how he returned to living and working here.



Tony and Lina

Paul's life in Kensington begins with his parent's story. Paul's father Tony arrived in Australia from a small village in Sicily in 1954. And his mother Lina arrived in Australia in 1956 from Calabria.

Tony and Lina met in Melbourne in 1956, married and moved to Kensington where Tony, a trained tailor, approached the owner of 499 Macaulay Road, FW Harry who was also a tailor, asking to buy the business and property. Two years later, Paul was born. He was the first of four children.

In the 1950's and 1960's Kensington was a popular place to live for the Italian community. Macaulay Road in those days had lots of shops that were owned by Italians who lived above their shops. The butcher, fruit shop, shoe repair and delicatessen were all owned by Italians. Everyone shopped locally too and knew each other well. The picture below is

of the Kensington Fruit Market which was on the opposite side to Grounded House.

School and early years in Kensington

Paul remembers walking to and from Kensington Primary School every day. There wasn't a lot of traffic but the lady from the grocery store would walk him and his siblings across the road home. He recalls there were two milk bars on McCracken Street. One just a few doors up from the Kensington Neighbourhood House and he would walk across at lunch time and buy treats. He and his brother would build billy carts and race them down Macaulay Road, stopping briefly at Gower St, just in case any cars were coming. It is hard to imagine this on the busy Macaulay road now!



Tony worked hard and long hours in the shop, tailoring clothes and suits, and making alterations. Lina would help in the store as a seamstress. Paul and his siblings wore clothes that his father made. If they bought clothing his father could alter them so their clothing would always fit perfectly. When Paul became a teenager he was less keen on wearing clothing his father made and much more into wearing Levi's - the coolest jeans brand at the time.



Here is a picture of Paul as a baby with his parents on the day of his christening in what is now his café and the tailoring business in the 1980's.

Working class Kensington

Kensington in the 1960's and 70's, being an inner city suburb, wasn't a desirable place to live due to public housing and the smell of the saleyards and abattoirs wafting through the area, making housing very cheap. Paul would tell people he lived near the Flemington racecourse as no one knew where Kensington was at that time.

Paul's parents kept their tailoring business going until the late 1990's and after retiring, Tony and Lina would sit in the shop front area watching the world go by, and catching up and sharing a coffee with friends.

Travelling

Paul kind of fell into the café business. He worked in a bank from 1977 to 1983. He saved up to go travelling for 6 months with his brother in 1983 around the US and Europe, visiting his parents' home towns along the way. When he returned to Australia, he started working in a pizza shop in St Kilda through some family connections made while travelling to Italy. He saved up some more and travelled again in 1985. In 1986 he bought the St Kilda pizza shop he'd been working in, thus beginning his career in the hospitality industry.

Meeting Ursula

Paul met his Irish wife, Ursula, while on holiday in Dublin in 1991. Ursula followed Paul back to Australia, where they married in 1992. Paul sold the pizza shop and they moved to Dublin for three years before returning to Australia. Paul and Ursula go back to visit Ireland regularly.

Café businesses and Grounded House

Paul eventually bought cafés in North Melbourne (1999 to 2004) and then in Yarraville (2004 to 2008). Tony passed away in 2005. Lina always liked the idea of her son Paul running a business in the family home, like his father. That's when the idea of Grounded House was born but unfortunately, in the process of setting up the café, Paul's mother became ill and passed away. So she never got a chance to witness the opening of Grounded House in the old tailor shop. Paul always feels the presence of his parents watching over him. Paul and Ursula also live in the family home.

Eleven years on, today 90% of Paul's customers are regulars and locals. There are lots of black and white photos of Paul's family and the different eras of Kensington displayed at Grounded House, including one going right back to approximately 1911.

The name of Paul's café is a play on words – with Grounded being a reference to coffee, and House referring to the location being a home for Paul and his family over generations.

What Paul loves about Kensington

Paul loves Kensington's proximity to the CBD and he also loves how, despite that proximity, Kensington manages to maintain a community feel and village atmosphere. Paul is happiest spending time with family, and when he can travel.