

Suzette Herft

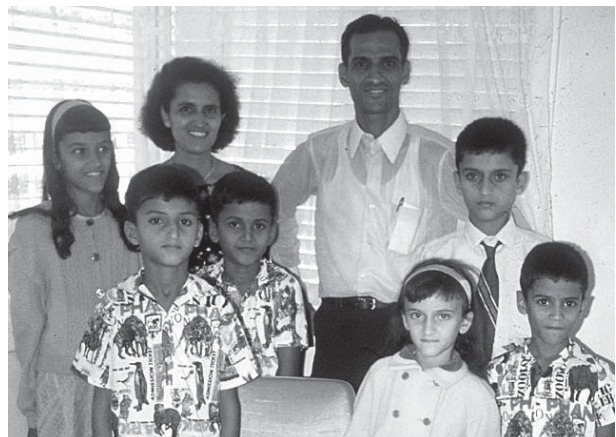
Soulful, Sublime and Shining....



Growing up in **Sri Lanka**, my childhood centred around the pop songs coming through the speakers of the sole English speaking radio station, the sounds of the BBC. I sang along to songs from the Beatles, the Seekers, The Everly Brothers, Englebert Humperdink, Petula Clark and other popular artistes. I learnt all the words of the songs by painstakingly writing them down as I heard them. (There was no tape recorder around for me who had very little and spent my time climbing trees, playing on the streets and singing at every opportunity I could get, including being the youngest in the Church choir).

I sang in the same choir at St. Mary's Church, Dehiwela, that my aunty Amy did when she was younger. She had (and still has at age 85) a beautiful voice. Amy is my father's sister. In November 2015, I took my father Clair Herft, who was 83 years old and my two children, Christopher (17 yo) and Genevieve (14 yo) to Sri Lanka to celebrate with Amy her 85th birthday. She and I are also born on the same day. It was the first time that I had been back in 43 years. One of my favourite memories of my childhood in Sri Lanka is of my father's family gatherings... where everyone was singing. My grandfather was a fine singer as well and lead the group in a boisterous way, encouraging everyone to sing along with him. My father's love of music influenced my own love of music. For this gift, I am so grateful.

All through my life I have **collected songs**, writing them down in songbooks and now downloading lyrics from the internet. All these songs have been used at one time or another during my performances or sessions. Nowadays, these songs find their way into the singing sessions that I facilitate and have become well known in Melbourne and on the festival circuit.



My family and I on the day we arrived in Australia - 13 May 1972

When my family moved to **Australia in 1972**, I couldn't quite get used to the Australian Pop and Rock that my peers were listening to. Instead, I gravitated towards my Father's record collection. He had saved all his spare money (not an easy task when you have seven children to support and having to start in a new country with nothing), and purchased a record player... the one in a box, with the logo of the dog listening to the gramophone – 'His Master's Voice'. My father collected a new record each pay day, which I eagerly anticipated. I was soon singing along to his **record collection of Jim Reeves**, Hank Williams, Hank Snow, Gene Autry, Charlie Pride, Slim Dusty and other country and gospel crooners.

I bought a cheap **guitar when I was 14** with the money I earned from working a little part-time job and furiously taught myself every chord I could find and practiced the songs I knew. I was encouraged to take my guitar to church where I learnt a lot by watching the choir leader play his guitar. He later helped me buy a better guitar than the cheap one I had.

When I was 17 and just finished high school, I attended Teachers' College. It was here that I was exposed to the music of the **Singer-Songwriters** such as – Joni Mitchell, Don McLean, Jim Croce, Neil Diamond and Janis Ian. Every Wednesday we had a folk night and some of my musical peers were also writing their own songs. So began my journey in songwriting. When I started writing songs, they were pretty basic, limited by my basic playing of the guitar. By the time I was 20, I had become more confident and I was writing much better songs in general about a range of subjects.

In my early 20's I was introduced to the world of **American and English** folk music. I became hooked on the likes of Joan Baez, Judy Collins, Sandy Denny and Emmylou Harris. My early performances in the 80's at the Spaghetti Theatre, The Pancake Parlour and the Twilight Café contained songs I had learned from these albums. Later when I started performing at places like One-C-One". (Melbourne's oldest folk venue) and other folk venues, I started incorporating some of my own songs in the sets. This led to performances in my **late 20's and early 30's at Folk Festivals** all around Australia, including, Port Fairy Folk Festival, Maldon Folk Festival, Woodford Folk Festival, Victor Harbour Folk Festival and the National Folk Festival.

I love songs that tell a story as well as songs that have a social justice focus. I think that comes from the influence of people like **Joan Baez** and Pete Seeger who use their music to bring awareness to a particular issue or use their 'voice for the voiceless'. I feel strongly about this, so I began researching and writing a show to commemorate 50 years of public performance for one of my heroes – Joan Baez. This show has received numerous accolades and standing ovations since its debut performance at the National Folk Festival in 2009 and every festival since, including the recent Port Fairy Folk Festival in 2014 and more recently again at a repeated performance in 2015.



With my father Clair Herft (83) and my two children, Genevieve (14) and Christopher (17) in Sri Lanka 2015

As a migrant, a psychiatric nurse and a mother you cannot help but be exposed to a variety of experiences, the joys and struggles that people share. When I worked in the hospital, I would take my guitar on night shift and we would have a singing session. It was a great way to connect with my patients.

Motherhood in my mid 30's meant that performing often took a back seat. However, I still kept stealing time for writing and recording, between the breast feeding and home renovations. I **re-launched my career in 2008**. Since then, I have performed at a variety of venues and events locally, nationally and internationally, as well as recording an additional 4 albums. Some of my more recent festival performances include - The Apollo Bay Music Festival, The National Folk Festival, Maldon Folk Festival, Newstead Music Festival as well as an unforgettable **standing ovation** at Port Fairy Folk Festivals in 2014 and 2015.

In 2012, I travelled to the USA fulfilling one of my dreams of undertaking a 'musical pilgrimage' to the States. I performed at numerous places, including, Flagstaff Folk Festival in Arizona, and other venues in San Francisco, Phoenix, Tucson (Arizona), San Antonio, Austin (Texas) as well as the famed **Bluebird Café**, Vanderbilt Hotel (Nashville) and The Passim Club (formerly Club 47

in Cambridge, Boston) where Joan Baez got her start. Inspired by the Songwriters in Nashville, and having participated in several 'Songwriters in the Round', plus attending a **Nashville Songwriters Association Workshop**, I came back enthusiastic and passionate about supporting the local songwriting scene. I have since started a monthly support group for songwriters, where songwriters can share their new songs, ask for critique, learn about songwriting and the music business from their peers.

I continue to perform at many venues and festivals around Australia. I have recorded a total of 6 cds and now writing songs for my 7th cd of original songs which I hope to record by the end of the year.

For me, my music is like my very breath, giving me life... giving me wings to fly when I open my mouth to sing.

Enquiries: HeartSong Music: P.O. Box 1146 Kensington, Victoria. 3031 Ph: 61 + 3 + 9372 1740 heartsongmusic@bigpond.com
Links: www.suzetteherft.com
<https://www.facebook.com/SuzetteHerftMusic>
<https://www.facebook.com/suzetteherft>
<http://www.youtube.com/user/SuzetteHerft/videos>



Leading a singing session in Australia