

A story written long ago finds a new home

Thirteen years after she published her memoir of her mother's wartime journey from Austria to Australia, Crestmead author Phyllis McDuff is making headlines again.

A recent German translation of her book, *A Story Dreamt Long Ago*, has provoked a passionate response from Austrian readers because its main characters – Phyllis' mother and grandparents – were notable members of Viennese society.

The memoir centres on Bettina Mendl, a prominent critic of Hitler who fled the Nazis in 1938 to outback Australia where she married Joe McDuff; a station manager.

The tale of Bettina's journey from the ballrooms of Europe to the dusty plains of the outback and back again has enchanted Australian readers since its publication in 2003.

Upon its German language publication it won the Austria Prize for Services to German Literature jointly awarded by the University of Sydney and Macquarie University.

Bettina's father; Fritz Mendl founded Ankerbrot with his brother Heinrich in 1891. Ankerbrot are wholesale cereal traders and a large bakery chain.

Due to Ankerbrot's vital role in food production, Fritz was assigned the task of managing food rations in Vienna during the First World War. He became the hero of Vienna when he smuggled 1000 wagons of grain into the city to feed its desperately starving people. For his efforts, Emperor Franz Joseph I awarded Fritz the Order of the Golden Fleece.

Stories like this have elevated the Mendl name and the history of Ankerbrot into Austrian folklore, stitching them into the fabric of the country's national identity.

At home in her kitchen in Crestmead, Phyllis said the Mendl's story still resonated with Austrians more than a century later.

"People have received it quite passionately. Schools are buying it for their students to read. This is attracting international attention. While it may have its provenance in Austria, it found its way into the world from here in Logan with the support of Logan Libraries and the Regional Arts Development Fund," she says.

Last year, Phyllis received a RADF grant to fund research into her family history for a new book centred on events around the time of the 1848 republican revolutions when Queen Victoria survived six assassination attempts.

Phyllis has lived in Crestmead for 51 years, raising her own family and helping to develop the local pony club and equestrian centre, but it is her ancestral ties to Austria that have set the path for her writing.

A Story Dreamt Long Ago is now available as an e-book on www.phyllismcduff.com.au