

MARGARET COLDITZ (Nee Camfield) - School Captain 1943

Excerpts from personal life story written by Margaret for her family approximately in 2005.

After marriage, women remained in the home. The husband went to work. Therefore, mother cared for their children at home. Mothers trained them, by example, in home care- cooking, cleaning, general hygiene, shopping, home nursing. Mothers entertained the children- outings, beach picnics, taught them to swim, taught them to play with other children. This was good education. Mothers taught introductory mathematics, reading, clock faces, the alphabet, nursery rhymes and read books with the children. The mothers were well trained in the 3Rs, so when the children started school, they had had good tuition at home. They were well disciplined and usually settled into school, learning easily. They would start school in the term of the year when they became five years of age. i.e. four years – almost five years. This was in NSW.

Transport of that era.

There were VERY FEW CARS. People walked. At Newcastle Railway Station there were a few taxi cars but horse drawn carriages were still there. Some private bus services ran to the beaches. There were trams into Newcastle. If people went overseas, it was by ship. Pioneer airmen came to Newcastle e.g. Bert Hinkler, “Smithy” and Newcastle welcomed Amy Johnson, the first lady to fly solo from England. We certainly welcomed her.

Few homes had telephones. There were street corner phones and fire alarms.

Newspapers were delivered morning and evening. Letters were delivered AM and PM. Ice for ice chests (no refrigerators) and bread came in horse drawn carts.

Entertainment. There were film theatres with black and white films. Local concerts and dances were held, Jazz was “in” and most churches (not Methodist) held Saturday night dances. Plays were performed by the local people. Therefore they really made their own entertainment and nurtured their own local orchestras and bands. Hiking and picnics were popular. Speers Point Park was extremely popular There were no wirelesses or TV in the homes yet. Wirelesses became popular about 1935. We listened to cricket in England

at 2am to hear how Donald Bradman scored. We were disappointed once he went out for “a duck”.

Infants School, Hamilton 1930-31

A child would start school in the term when he/ she turned 5. I started on 24th May 1931. That was wonderful because we had a half day holiday! It was Empire Day. After raising and saluting the flag, listening to all of the speeches and singing many Empire songs e.g. “Three Cheers for the red, white and blue”, we could return home and we had time at Bar Beach, a swim, play in the sand and a beach tea.

In school years we had kindergarten, where we sang and danced and acted out stories and nursery lines. We started pre-writing, using slates and slate pencils. Next came transition when we sat at desks instead of mats on the floor and we used books and pencils. We were taught to read words by phonetics – SH-O-P, C-A-T etc. By the end of 2nd class, we could read the local newspaper. In 2nd class we concentrated on the three Rs. We started to learn the Times Tables by rote AND we enjoyed it. Singing, speech and drama we, too, enjoyed. We learnt to dance “The Maypole”. Skipping was popular and we sang many “skipping choruses”. We read and read books provided by the Education dept. These increased in difficulty. We were well prepared for “The Big School” i.e. the school over the road when we spent 3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th classes- separated forever from the boys who went to the Boys school – over the road. This separation was for the rest of our school days. There was one high school – Cooks Hill Intermediate where both sexes attended.

Years 3-6 were happy school years. There were fifty in most classes but we were well disciplined and well behaved in school and one teacher did manage very well. Hamilton Public School had many pupils who passed the QC (qualifying exam) and progressed to the two selective schools- Newcastle Girls’ High School and Newcastle Boys’ High. These were the only 2 schools in Newcastle where students could matriculate if they wished.

Note -during the above periods we had two “shadows” in our young lives, namely

- a) The Great Depression and
- b) the presence of infectious diseases

- a) The Great Depression affected all of us but those who did not own a home were badly hit. Near the Breakwater at Nobbys, Newcastle, the very poor lived in tents or shacks. They were very poor. I remember men coming to our home to beg for food and clothes. My parents helped many. We were so fortunate to own our home and my father always had work but sometimes only three days/ week.
- b) The infectious diseases- gastric enteritis, diphtheria, whooping cough, measles and mumps ended the lives of many children. There was no vaccine. When I was 9 years (1935) we received vaccination. We were frightened because it was new and not yet fully tried.

Of course, a bad scourge was poliomyelitis. Sister Kenny and her Sisters had a clinic in Newcastle. We were really concerned if we heard that someone was in "An Iron Lung"- a larger respirator. The crippling effect of polio was fearful.

High School 1939-43.

Selection for High School has been described. To attend the two selective high schools was a great honour. I was highly honoured when, in 1943, I was Captain of Newcastle Girls' High School.

Commencing in 1939 was very exciting. We studied English, French, Latin, German, Maths I & II, Elementary Science- Physics and Chemistry and Ancient and Modern History. Most left school after 3rd year at the age of 15 years and proceeded to Business College.

We had a very large shadow after August 1939- World War 2. Fortunately, we were all good friends. There were 500 students, and the teachers knew most of us. We were never over- extended in our work at school or in homework. We had a fine gymnasium and large hockey field and basketball fields and 2 tennis courts which we were allowed to use on Saturdays for No cost. The war caused great concern because the BHP Steelworks were a target and Newcastle was shelled from a submarine (Japanese) from the harbour. If all the shells which were fired had exploded that night, there would have been little left of Newcastle. The fact is that the shells were old and didn't all explode. They had been given to the Japanese during WW! By the British when Japan was ab ally!!

At any time during school hours, we knew that if there was danger of an attack we could be evacuated by bus, to the country. We had to carry "dilly bags" at all times. These contained emergency food- a packet of biscuits and a block of chocolate (these were hard to preserve so we did not dare to eat them), a cork and earmuffs. The cork was to put between our teeth and the earmuffs were to lessen the effect of blast. A pair of clean Bombay bloomers were included.

So apart from the fact that most of us had relatives in the forces and we didn't know where; the fact that we ourselves could be 'bussed' away from Newcastle was quite unsettling. We grieved with our friends whose relatives were missing etc!!

Changes at school during the war years:-

Included seeing our hockey fields converted to trenches where we could shelter if necessary. Our lovely gardens were converted to vegetable market gardens- produce was sold and money raised went to Red Cross.

Air raid drills were frequently carried out and we sheltered under desks.

We knitted and knitted- four stick needles and a ball of khaki wool were always with us and we produced many pairs of socks for soldiers. Because of staff shortages, production of these in factories had slowed and members of the public were needed to replace the usual source. We enjoyed helping.

Changes in the community during war years- Blackout!! All streets were blacked out. There were no streetlights and inside homes, all windows or openings to the outside had heavy dark curtains so that no light could show outside. There were Wardens to patrol this, and it was eerie outside as search lights scanned the sky for enemy planes. Food was rationed and coupons were supplied to obtain tea, sugar, butter. Meat was restricted. Material was rationed but we could obtain certain material to make dresses. There was a great shortage of chocolates and cigarettes. No chocolates were ever on display. Home gardens were converted to vegetable gardens.

The streets were safe. Even though there were no lights, we were not afraid. We felt we could walk safely. There was good discipline in daily living and street attacks did not occur.

Post High School Days.

My last two years at school were free from the anxiety of post school uncertainty. I had always wanted to be a nurse and my application and interview was made at the end of third year so I felt secure regarding future studies.

On 1st February 1944, after successfully completing five years (note- it was not six years then) of high school studies, I commenced a four-year general Nursing course at the Newcastle General Hospital- not yet "The Royal".

It was four years of very heavy physical work and of study. We had one day off duty per week and usually had to attend a lecture on that day- in full uniform. We had two weeks per year for annual leave and we worked 12 hour shifts, broken shifts and three months straight each year on 12 hour night duty shifts. It was compulsory to live in the Nurses Home. Iron beds and horse hair mattresses and grey blankets (@) made it rather like army barracks. Lights were turned off at the meter at 10.30pm. Late leave was until 11pm. Fortunately we all got along well and life in the Nurses Home was friendly. The war continued and as at school, we cheered each other and grieved with each other. The sinking by the Japanese of the hospital ship "The Centaur" was cause for anxiety. One of our former trainers, Nell Savage, was the sole female survivor and was later presented with the George Medal.

We were relieved when America came to our rescue in the Pacific. Service men later used to say "It was the men of the Coral Sea Battle who saved Australia". Newcastle became a centre for Rest and recreation by members of the American forces. Bebarfalds Building in Scott Street became the centre. We were most grateful to America. Darwin had been severely bombed, and invasion was close until General MacArthur's intervention in the Pacific. We were all relieved when WW2 concluded.

After 4 years of general nurse training and most of us e]went to Sydney for one year of Midwifery training and after that some did a third certificate- Mothercraft. Throughout all of our training we worked in hospitals. Wages were small but we had Nurses' Homes.

Post 1949. Post Graduate Nursing Studies.

Before 1950, Australian nurses who wished to pursue higher studies in Nursing Administration and Tutoring had to go to London. In 1949, the College of Nursing, Australia was opened in Melbourne. Courses were made in conjunction with Melbourne University so that studies could be completed in Australia. This was considered to be PIONEERING nursing for Australia. I was chosen to be in the 2nd year intake in 1951. To do the Sister-Tutor course we went to Melbourne Uni for lectures in psychology, educational psychology, anatomy and physiology, biology, chemistry and physics and micro-biology. Other lectures were School Administration, History of Nursing, Tutorials. The course was a full academic year. We studied diligently and felt quite triumphant when we finished with distinctions. After two years of teaching, we were admitted as fellows of the College and the ceremony took place in the State where we lived. Mine was in the great Hall of Sydney University. We were called PIONEER Nurses in Melbourne. By this time Sydney had established a College and the College of Nursing, Australia was establishing branches in each State.

Later I was in charge of the Nurses training School at the Royal Newcastle Hospital and we had nurses in the first ten in the State at some (several) State Final Exams. I continued in the position until I resigned in October 1958. I had married in 1955 and we were soon to have our first born.