

Memories of Boarding School, 1949-1955.

I started at SCEGGS MV in 6th class, my first 4 years of schooling were at the Leura Public School, don't ask how a girl that lived 40 miles out of Cooma ended up at school in Leura??!! Anyway having been 'dumped/deserted' in this strange place I came across a fellow sufferer, Ellen, who had also been to a public school. This gave us an immediate bond, which lasts to this day, and we spent all our early days/weeks complaining about the dreadful things private schools did and how much better public schools were – to this end we used to sing/yell "public schools forever, private schools never" wherever we were!! Of course six years later, when it was time to leave SCEGGS MV for the last time, it was with great sadness and wanting to stay forever.

Middle House was our dormitory, under the veeeery strict rule of Matron Wood, who actually wore a nurse's uniform and marched around the corridors army style. Shower/bath time was a very organised affair with Matron Wood standing at the end facing the shower/bath cubicles and assigning each girl a shower or a bath – no long soaking under the hot water in those days with a strict time limit enforced. However some of the older girls, and we were quick to follow their lead, worked out that it was possible to fit 5 in a bath at once and two in a shower cubicle. The bath one worked easily as long as Matron Wood didn't come to investigate some 'odd noise ie giggling', don't think the cleanliness/hygiene would have been particularly good! The shower option was also fine so long as each girl remembered to stand on only one leg (and not two right legs at once!). The entry/exiting was quite an art, though soon perfected.

Another escapade of at least 8 of us was a midnight feast (probably 10pm) out on the Covered Way roof. The feast consisted of dry, stale bread rolls, which we took from the dining table by stuffing down our tunics before leaving the dining room, very hygienic! One night when we were all out on the roof Matron Wood decided to do a bathroom inspection and put the corridor and bathroom lights on, which of course illuminated 'our' roof area!! Fortunately our evasive actions worked and Matron Wood didn't see us. Once the lights went out we all rushed back inside, only to discover one of our number couldn't climb back in the window so a couple of us returned to the roof to heave our friend back in!

There were rumours abounding about 'some girls' swimming in the creek in the 100 acre paddock. The slightly muddy water, stoney creek bed etc would not have made for smooth swimming, hearsay had it that swimming costumes were optional! Not sure how close the railway line was..... perhaps a train passenger with binoculars would have had quite a surprise!

One of our great joys was the Saturday night screening of a movie – the old projector with the enormous reels seemed such a wonderful, modern device. We girls all sat cross legged on the floor, I don't ever remember any complaints about the hard wooden floor and no back rest! In her day Miss Badhams used to sit on a chair at the back knitting yet another one of her beautiful/dreadful knitted skirts.

If we had committed some misdemeanour during the week our punishment was often to miss the weekly movie.....what a disaster!

Inside the Dining Room and just inside the entrance doors, was a raised platform which held the High Table, here the Head Mistress and Staff sat, watching our every move! The rest of the room was taken up with individual tables, sitting at each table were about 8 girls and a Mistress at the head. The two girls sitting at the bottom of the table were on table/kitchen duty which meant collecting the food and returning empty plates etc to the kitchen. The Mistress served the food, it was useless saying you didn't like something because that usually meant a larger helping. My solution to that problem was to toss it down the front of the tunic to be dumped when safely outside, where there was usually a hungry cat waiting for our left-overs. This 'solution' depended on the Mistress looking away/being distracted!

Another important thing we learnt were 'table manners'! We learnt that you must not ask for anything, so we had to rely on our fellow table mates asking "Would you like the salt/Can I pass you the sauce etc?" Needless to say there was a lot of kicking/nudging that went on to alert someone to our pressing need! We also learnt that you didn't start your meal until everyone was served and the Mistress had picked up her knife & fork, and no one moved to clear plates until everyone had finished their meal, with all cutlery placed neatly on the plate.

When on Table Duty, which lasted for a week, we had to set the table, serve the meals from the kitchen and clear the table after the meal. In those days we had proper white linen table cloths and serviettes, and the cutlery had to be placed in the right order and at the right place. The main skill I learnt from this exercise was how to fold a serviette into a triangular/hatty looking thing to be placed in front of each table setting. I still use this skill when we have a large family dinner, now days it is a paper serviette that gets folded and it is very useful for holding a named 'scratchy' so everyone knows where to sit!!

When the new building was being built we also found ways of getting inside and climbing up the ladder to the first floor, not sure what was so exciting about the building, maybe just showing that we could! On one occasion there was difficulty getting out, I think the ladder had been moved!

My greatest delight was that as soon as lessons were over, and we'd been given our obligatory piece of fruit (called 'Tack'), it was time to rush down to the Sports Field for sport. This lasted until 5pm when we had to head to the dormitory to change for dinner. Some nameless girls didn't like sport so used to take a book, as well as the obligatory hockey stick, and once near the Pine trees on the way down just 'disappeared'. They spent their sport time hiding under the trees reading books, and of course talking.

Perhaps the most useful, though not beautiful, piece of our School Uniform was the wonderful blue rain cape. Apart from being a very effective waterproofing garment, with the head hiding hood and usually shin length cape, it also served the purpose of hiding whatever was being carried under cover!

Every Sunday morning we walked to Bong Bong for our weekly Church service. This was when our capes really came in very handy, not only for rainy days, but also to keep out the cold Moss Vale winter winds. We certainly had a lot of religious services with morning and evening Chapel, and of course the weekly Scripture class with the local Minister.

Miss Badhams, to my way of thinking, was an authoritarian and bully as all her punishments for any misdemeanour didn't have any logic or showing why it had been a wrong/stupid thing to do. I had managed to get on her wrong side and only needed to be 'seen' to spend nearly every Saturday morning weeding the front garden, just outside her office window. I probably would have learnt something, other than a dislike of gardening, if I'd known what my misdeed had been, the ones I did know were for talking!

When in Senior House, where Miss Baddham's flat was, a friend and I were caught talking after lights out and so Miss Badhams had us, in our dressing gowns and slippers, at 10pm on the landing outside her open flat door. Her instructions were that we had to keep talking nonstop until she told us to stop, sounds easy, and it was for Judy, but once I was told to talk I couldn't think of anything to say! Judy just kept saying "I have a blue dressing gown and it has one, two, three buttons on its front", which she repeated ad infinitum! Every time I ran out of something to say Miss Badhams came out and gave me an extra 15 minutes – think I eventually made it back to bed about midnight!

About 3 of us were in trouble for nicking, and eating, carrots out of the garden, and I didn't even like raw carrots! Of course Miss Badhams dealt with us in an appropriate manner – which was for each meal for a day we were given a carrot on a plate on the high table platform, and there we stood for the entire meal time chewing our carrot.

But perhaps the greatest life useful-lesson came from Miss Graham, just after she became Headmistress. Sandra and I were up in the top paddock looking at the train line, and decided that we would have a much better view, and see so much further if we climbed up the ladder to the top of the train Signal box! Not seeing anything wrong with that idea, up we went. We could certainly see a lot further and to our absolute delight along came a train, we happily waved to the train from the front Driver to the very end Guard's carriage. For some unaccountable reason the train's Driver was not happy with two girls at the top of their signal box, and for some reason he decided that there were no other likely candidates for the culprits.....so rang SCEGGS. When Miss Graham made her announcement and asking the offenders to come forward Sandra and I knew we were for expulsion at the very least. I think we were almost more worried about what our parents would say and the shame we were bringing to their door! So we crept round to Miss Graham's office and knocked on the door, which was greeted by a very nice 'come in' – not the blasting through the door that we expected!! We were asked to sit down and to discuss with her just what we were doing on the Signal box, and had we stopped to think about just what

was the purpose of the Signal. To which we replied, No, we just wanted to see around and the train was just a bonus! By the time the half hour discussion about train safety, government property and using common sense, which she seem to think we had plenty of because we were SCEGGS girls, was over we slunk out of her office having learnt a very important life lesson of 'always thinking before acting' – much more effective than weeding the front garden!

Enough for now

Rosemary Manusu (Campbell)