

Miss Linda Pump. - One of The original Teachers.
IN 1925 - Story of Teaching at R.E.P.S.

4189

I cannot remember any other ambition I had as a child than to become a teacher. I attended the Ringwood State School No. 2997, two miles from my home, for all of my primary school education. The staff, including several Junior Teachers, were popular with the scholars; the curriculum was wide, the teachers excellent, and competition among the children was keen.

Passing for the Merit Certificate was the standard in Grade 8, and attendance was compulsory from age 6 years to 14 years, unless the Merit was passed earlier. There were no State High Schools in the eastern suburbs - the nearest was Melbourne High School on the corner of Spring and Victoria Streets. It was co-educational, entry was by Entrance Examination to what today would be year 9, with Intermediate Certificate in year 10 and Leaving Certificate (Matriculation) in year 11. Few students went on to do Honours in year 12.

I was aged 15 when I had completed year 11 and, like most other students, I applied to the Education Department for a job as a Junior Teacher. There was only one Teachers' Training College in Melbourne, the Melbourne Teachers' Training College in Carlton, so most students preferred to start teaching straight from High School, with practical teaching and guidance from the permanent staff - the Head Teacher and Assistants.

I was appointed to the Ringwood East State School No. 4180, a new school, with Mr. W. W. Whittle the Head Teacher; Miss Susie McEwan, who had had no secondary education, had been a paid monitor until my arrival, so I replaced her, with the princely salary of nineteen shillings and one penny - or \$1.91 - per week.

I walked about three miles from my home in Canterbury Road to the school; many of the pupils had known me when we were all pupils at the Ringwood School, and they were prepared to call me by my Christian name, but I remember saying, "You'll have to call me 'Miss' now", and I never again heard them say anything else. It was the natural thing for children to do then, and teachers were all highly respected.

On my first day, on arrival, the H.T. asked me what experience I had had in teaching. "None", I replied, so he said, "Well, you will have this room with grades one to four, and I will be in the other room with grades 5 to 8. Here is the roll which you will fill in, and there is your Time Table." That was my introduction to teaching, at the age of 15 years.

I clearly remember looking at that Time Table and asking a Grade 2 pupil, Jack Meyland, what was the meaning of "W.D.B.L.D.G." "Word Building" came the answer, and so I began.

The only other staff member was a teacher with no secondary education - a "Sewing Teacher" - who came on several afternoons a week. From memory, I think that her name was Miss McMillan, from the Western District. Her salary was less than mine, of course, so, by the time that she paid her board, she had very little left, and she was not very interested in the job.

Tuition in teaching from the H.T. was nil. He would dismiss the school at 3.45 p.m., sweep out the school, get on his bike and ride away. I taught as I had been taught - thank goodness for the staff at the Ringwood State School.

When the H.T. was absent, ill, it was my job to open up the school, push back the concertina dividing wall, and take charge of the eight grades, with, perhaps, 80 to 90 children, and little help from the Sewing Teacher. When she did arrive, she said, "I'm not going to work like this. We'll dismiss the school and go to the Education Department". There were few telephones in those days, so we walked to the nearest Railway Station at Ringwood, and took the train into the City and went to the Education Department. On hearing our complaint, I can remember the man looking at me and saying, "You go back and open that school tomorrow and, when we can find a reliever, we'll send him." At age 15, who was I to argue, so, for about a week, I carried on, mostly alone, and I had no trouble whatever with those pupils, and I had no "higher duties" nor cleaner's remuneration. How things have changed!

When the reliever did arrive, Mr. Whittle retired from ill health, and Mr. Hatfield was appointed H.T. He came from Jumbunna, and he had never had a Junior Teacher under him. His son, Ray, had already passed his Merit, and he could not enter a High School until the following year, so he sat in my room and I taught him algebra and geometry.

Mr. W. Henderson was the District Inspector (D.I.) who visited the school twice a year. The first visit was for a check on the organization, the buildings and teachers generally. The second was to examine the pupils, both orally and in their written work. It was a busy day, for all the pupils' work had to be corrected and the results entered in the roll, with a written report by the D.I. The chances of a teacher's promotion rested on that report.

Once a week, I had to take an afternoon to visit the Glenferrie School to learn sewing. We had to make samplers in both woollen and cotton material, showing various stitches and methods, such as hemming, topsewing, whipping, pintucking, patching corners of sheets, three cornered tears, gussets and many things unheard of by dress-makers today, and all by hand. There were no fancy sewing machines then.

When the sewing teacher resigned, I had to teach sewing. I had never learnt knitting myself, and I remember a lass asking me how to turn the heel of a man's sock. I had learnt the rule "never admit to a child that you do not know", so I said, "You may sit next to Vicky (Hooker); she has just turned hers, and you must whisper." Next week, it was the toe, so again Vicky, unknowingly, was my nower. Fearing that she would ask me the next week how to cast on with four needles for the second sock, I asked my sister, and she taught me that. Incidentally, I have never knitted a sock in my life.

The school ground was fenced in with posts and wire netting. Mr. Molloy's orchard, with plenty of beautiful ripe cherries in the spring, was on the north side. The children were never warned, but I am certain that they never attempted to steal any of his fruit.

The large yard had been cleared along the front fence to a depth of a line running from the back of the school building. Behind that was bush land, gum trees and scrub, good cover for hide and seek, "chasey" and other games.

The girls played basket ball and rounders on the northern side, and the boys, cricket and football. Despite such a small attendance,

compared with Croydon and Ringwood, we had our share of wins when we played at Ringwood, Croydon, Mitcham and Forest Hill.

Other games were marbles - very popular- skipping - every girl owned a rope - and every boy scratched holes to play marbles. Balls were bounced against the wall, and some played hopscotch. Even jacks, played with the jack bones from a roast leg of lamb, was popular.

Although electricity was laid on, we had no means of heating water, and we were not popular if we asked the woman who lived across the road if she would sometimes give us hot water when a child had an accident.

Mr. Dew was the D.I. in my second year there in 1926, and he would not examine me for my practical teaching for promotion. In the following year, on the return of Mr. Henderson, he was so disgusted that he urged me to apply for a transfer to the Ringwood School where I had the opportunity to pass the third and second class examinations.

Both the School Committee and the Mothers' Club were active, and they held a euchre party and dancing in the school on about every fourth Friday night. Cards were played in one room and dancing was enjoyed in the other, with Mrs. Sinclair on the piano, George de Pelsenair on the violin and Bill de Pelsenair on the saxophone and drums. Desks were stacked high against the back wall, and the orchestra was on the dais. When concerts were held, a platform was erected before the front windows, and stools were borrowed for the audience. I think that the school owned about three chairs and a piano.

The concerts were popular, and the children were well trained in singing, reciting and play acting. They loved dressing up.

Miss Linda Pump
(Mrs Cuthill)