

# DANDENONG EAST STATE SCHOOL 1403

Memories from ex- students -

Margot Titcher (nee Pegg) & Margaret Modok (nee Crabtree)

## LATE 1930s INTO THE 1940s

Do you remember...

Do you remember listening with Miss Austin to Winston Churchill's speeches on the radio? Who would have guessed that one-day an ex-student, Glenda MacAlpin, would become his private nurse?

*Sewing Classes:* White wool for babies' booties and first vests was put aside in favor of khaki in huge quantities as all the knitters swung into producing scarves, balaclavas and gloves with no fingertips - for more accurate handling of rifle triggers. Margaret remembers forgetting to bring her work to school and her punishment from Mrs Dunlop was to darn her son's socks.

"Actually it was rather enjoyable, as I was able to sit on the outside step in the sunshine". Remember when each piece of knitting was completed we were able to sew onto the article our name and address hoping some soldier would write to us.

*School Picnics:* For those who's Parents could afford it, a trip by bus to Edithvale with a pannikin strung around every neck, ready for the raspberry Vinegar.

### World War 2:

*Armistice Day:* When army personnel from the First World War came to the school and gave speeches the girls would sob to ...

"... we would remember too, the brave, who of their dearest treasure gave, so blithely and so willingly their lives for you and me."

And - a pupil, Glenthorn Prior, at one stage, played the Last Post. He would later meet an untimely death on the coast, interstate, whilst attempting to rescue a drowning person. Glenthorn was a good man - a very sad loss.

*Anzac Day:* Taking handfuls of flowers to school so that the older girls could make up wreaths that were placed on the memorial opposite the Town Hall.

And, when all the students marched down to Lonsdale Street to lay the wreaths at the War Memorial. Those who had fathers at War were among the selected few who were allowed to lay wreaths - brothers were not counted. This "miffed" Margaret who was blessed with seven older brothers: her sister, Judith,

now Campbell-Wright, also expressed disappointment, and those who had them, proudly wore the medals of family and relatives who had fought in earlier conflicts.

*Drill:* We remember filing out to designated positions under the pine trees in the playground - on the New Street side - lying prone in the gravel with a pen or pencil-rubber between our teeth while under mock attack.

*Victory garden:* Behind the house opposite the school where the boys labored instead of attending woodwork classes.

*Funds for the War Effort:* Funds were raised by school concerts, fancy dress days and parades through the Main Street. Margot remembers taking toffees to be sold around the classrooms. Makeshift stalls were set up by the school gate to sell sweets and produce to passers by. We also remember making small posies from flowers from our gardens at home, attaching leather straps at each end of a tray that was then placed around our necks. We would then walk the Main Street and sell these posies to raise more money for our War Effort. We also purchased Government War Saving Stamps to raise funds.

*Egg Drives:* Who of us remembers walking from door to door collecting very valuable eggs for the hospitals? We were so good - very few were broken.

*The arrival of Sewerage:* a not inconsiderable improvement! No more "night men" as we called them, visiting to collect the "filled" cans. "We seemed to have sewerage pipes at 40 Princes Highway for ages," remembers Margaret. "I remember brothers Geoffrey and Esme chasing each other round and around those pipes which were stacked in our back yard, and Esme chipping half of his front tooth!"

*Class Sizes:* it was quite common for classes to have up to 70 to 80 pupils in a class and all under one teacher who was very much in command. In winter a few lucky ones were allowed to have the desks close to the fireplace, which crackled happily most days when it was cold.

*Monitors:* teachers selected monitors to water the pot-plants and to arrange the flowers that fellow pupils brought in. Our vases more often than not were jam jars or clag jars. Margot remembers Diana Cornish being delegated to follow her with a shovel of sand out into the yard whenever she felt ill, until Miss Austin suggested to her Mother that it may be wise not to give Margot a cup of cocoa before she rushed off to School!

*Transport:* we walked - called "shanks pony" - everywhere, some up to 2 or 3 miles to come to school. Some lucky ones, like the Nisbett Sisters, were able to ride their ponies from their farms. Others, if our parents were able to afford it, had bicycles - mostly second hand. Margaret remembers "dinking" her

sister Judith up the McCrae Street hill, while Judith sat on the special seat that was installed behind the saddle and firmly bolted to the back wheel.

*Girls Games:* many a happy time was passed playing games of all kinds in the girl's yard. Games such as Queenie, branders, keeping off, drop the hanky, skippy, marbles, creeping ups, somersaults, hand stands, oranges and lemons, tunnel ball, the good ship sails through the alley-alley aye, rounders, hoppy and ball games. Many a time was spent designing floor plans with walls and doorways from pine needles off the pine trees in the school-yard. Other entertainments were skipping races, French knitting, umbrellas, swap cards, and much to our parent's dismay, we plucked one another's jumpers to make multi-coloured balls of fluff. We remember arriving home late for lunch one day after dancing in delight in falling snow (sleet).

*Lunch at Home:* (for some) Margot remembers having her feet in a bowl of cold water that was placed on the floor under the table. She also remembers taking home a number of girls from school - they would bring their own lunches to eat – “and we would sit on the back verandah where Mum would give each of us lime cordial.” A short cut was often taken over the school fence and through Masters Paddock to Ronald Street.

*Misses Masters:* Margot remembers visiting them in their cool dark house beside the school in Foster Street - was there a cellar? Learning about the birth process when their cow went into labor and produced a calf near the school gate. Putting “itchy powder” down each other's necks from the trees in the front of their home. Seem to remember one of these dear ladies or perhaps both, suffering from Goitre. Yes we remember the tablets being passed around as many residents of Dandenong and surrounding areas suffered from Goitre due to lack of Iodine in the soil and drinking water.

*Spelling:* names were listed monthly in the local newspapers for any students who received 100% results. An incentive.

*Injections:* we seemed to line up each year for injections given by Dr Boileau, later Sir Gilbert Boileau, and the needle always seemed to break in Kevin Quist's arm, and we winced just thinking of it. But one by one we endeavored to put on a brave face and say -“It didn't hurt!”

*School Milk:* we don't remember this during the War, but Margot certainly remembers it being supplied when she returned as a student teacher in 1949. The milk would arrive early and would sit in the sun until “playtime” when by then it would be quite warm and beginning to froth. Margot very kindly did not insist on it being consumed.

*Teachers:* Miss Austin who commenced teaching at a very young age as a student teacher was now teaching her second generation of pupils. Among these two generations were the Titcher family children. During Warren Titcher's

attendance he had an accident on the swings and the swings were removed. His son, Mac, fell from climbing the main frame of the swing so that last structure was taken down. Mr McCartney came out of retirement to free the younger men, so they could join up and go to war. Mr Crabtree was also a temporary teacher at Dandenong East: His Father was very musical and he remembers singing for him in Grade 4. Mr Curran is another who encouraged us "budding artists". Stan Thomas and Ian Stuart were very good and Margaret confessing to trying to compete **with what????** We all actually entered Competitions and had our efforts displayed in the Dandenong Town Hall. Quite an honor! We know there were many other Teachers who gave of their best to us, so please forgive us if our memory has missed mentioning you, but thank you all!

*Exotic Pupils:* most carried Anglo-Saxon names, so girls named Zelda Fritzlaff and Erica Schlasenger stood out because their names were so different at that time. Now these names and others with European origins are part of our beautiful country. And Margaret married one with the name Sander (pronounced Shandor). We have come a long way since those days.

One or two ex-pupils became very rich and famous through their hard work: One was Don Figgins of Figgins Shoeware. He and his wife met an untimely death in a helicopter accident.

*Mr Chandler:* who boarded in Ronald Street, raised money as a fortune teller and attended school functions and fetes complete with lipstick, head scarf and a harem outfit. Margot spotted him stepping into a taxi prior to a performance - otherwise he might not have been recognized. **Few did!** He appeared prettier than most women. Was he our first Drag Queen!

*The Brawls:* The school ground split half-brother against brother, friend against friend over some long forgotten issues. Well organized beforehand and timed for the last bell of the day, the hair-pulling (yes, most of us girls had long plaits in those days, who could afford a hairdresser?) and punching barely began when teachers materialized from all directions - including Miss Taylor who lived across the road from the school, on the New Street corner - to break up the fights, collar the ringleaders and march them to the Headmaster's office along with any others they could round up en-route. The rest would "magically" disperse with few sustaining any damage. That is except Margaret Clucas with her blood nose. Margaret Clucas's nose would bleed at the drop of a hat. Everyone knew that! Besides says Margot, I hardly touched her! We are happy to report Margaret Clucas and Margot Pegg are still good friends. Margaret Modok remembers taking refuge at the Cruickshank home or the Chadwick's and sometimes at the Bolch home. The Headmaster Mr Towner would strap the boys one by one.

*Strappings:* Who remembers holding out their hand to be strapped by Miss Austin. Margaret Modok admits that she jolly well deserved the numerous strappings. **Mrs Crabtree had Judith and some of the elder brothers helping her manage the shop we had in Brighton Beach and Margaret was at home with the younger brothers and her Father, so yes, you had to be tough in those days to run with the boys, they were her only playmates at that time.???? Not clear , did you all live apart.**

*Health:* Most of us in those days went to school with a handkerchief pinned to us somewhere, or tucked in our pants - sometimes with elasticized legs which was the exception as elastic was in short supply. Camphor bags hung around our necks to ward off the cold germs and many of us reeked of Eucalyptus or Vicks Vapor Rub. Margaret remembers her mother pinning a coarse type of cotton around her chest or having a wad of cotton wool tucked in the front of her singlet to keep her warm. Department nurses called at the school at regular intervals to check all was well with each and every one of us. The Whooping Cough Epidemic was coming to an end but Poliomyelitis was a big concern. Removal of Tonsils was put off for an indefinite time. Remember a great, young and so-very-brave man by the name of Graham Sleeth. His mother would lovingly tuck him up warmly and there he would lie, on the front verandah of their home, on the corner of Princes Highway and Robinson Street waving to all who would pass. We were not allowed to get close just in case we also caught this rather frightening germ. But it did not stop us yelling at one another. We felt guilty at being healthy, climbing the trees in the nature strip out front of our homes, swinging from our legs and watching the world pass upside down. Girls with long hair were encouraged to wear it in plaits to curb the spread of head lice. Remember your mother telling you to put your head over a big sheet of newspaper and having your hair combed with a very fine comb, to check all was well. There were very few Doctors in town and fewer Dentists. Margot's dentist was one who called to the house on his way to the Italian Prisoner of War Camp just out of town on the "s" bend in Rowville. Remember the burgundy uniforms they wore? Later as we grew, we discovered what wonderful people these were, and much to our delight many settled around the Dandenong District at the end of the War.

*Garden:* The school garden was an award winner in the Education Department prizes. The main path to the front door passed beneath an arch of roses. When most of the garden was demolished in 1949 or early 1950 Mrs Dunlop and other Teachers took cuttings and the **sunny South Climbing** Rose with its heavy pink blossom and the dark red climber graced the Pegg family home for decades. Do you remember being allowed in this garden only if you were very good?

*Sweet Shops:* Lunches and small boiled sweets could be purchased from Charlie Dear's sweet shop opposite the school in Foster Street. Ice creams disappeared during the War along with most of the chocolates. Mr & Mrs Dear and their daughter Joyce showed infinite patience as we bought "one of those, and one of these" with our few precious pennies of pocket money, if you were lucky enough to get pocket money! One favorite was the Sherbet Confection. A sherbet filled bag with a licorice straw for sucking up the sherbet was always a treat. The taps were often crowded with pupils trying to dampen the sherbet and encourage it to fizz. If you were thrifty you could purchase a lot of sweets for a penny - sometimes up to 20 for this single penny! Those lucky enough to have a refrigerator were lucky indeed as flavored ice blocks could be made in the ice trays. The only place in Dandenong around that time to purchase ice blocks was an enterprising lady who had a Milk Bar near the Station. She would make and sell these wonderful ice blocks in a square cone. Do not remember the price though, but Ah! How the flavor lingers. A lot of homes had ice chests. The Crabtree's had a Coolgardie Safe for many years, and when we did eventually get an ice chest, we were able to suck pieces of broken off ice.

*Leisure:* After school hours, many of the girls attended ballet classes in the Town Hall and were in the annual pantomime as well. Elocution and piano lessons were other leisure activities. There never seemed to be a shortage of performers when volunteers were called for at the school. Do you remember the concerts on a Sunday afternoon in the Dandenong Town Hall where you would sing along to the bouncing ball shown on the screen? All this for a donated silver coin (threepence was the smallest coin) as it was a Sunday and you were not allowed to charge an entrance fee.

*Clothes:* because of rationing, dresses were made to last as long as possible and hand me downs were quite normal. Margot remembers horizontal plain blue fabric-inserts being let into a blue & white floral frock to enable her to be able to wear it for another year. Fortunately most of us were growing up - and not out in those days. She remembers the effect was rather attractive and Margot didn't feel badly at all. Margaret remembers having maybe two frocks which her mother kept washing: these things were unimportant in those days.

*Haircuts:* most parents cut their children's hair: some unfortunate boys and girls went to school with what we called "the pudding basin cut". Mothers who had a perm looked as though they were wired for outer space. Yes we have come along way.

*Books:* few children owned books of their own, but we read those from the school library. Most books were written by **English Sutors** who wrote "Fields of Bluebells", "Villages", "Castles", "Snow" and the like, except for Mary Grant

Bruce and Ethel Turner. Favorites were “Milly Molly Mandy” and “Amelia Jane Stiggins”. Margot was able to see “Fields of Bluebells” 44 years later in 1983.

*Rewards:* excellence was rewarded with a stamp on the relevant page of a student’s exercise book. Margot recalls Mr Ketty, the Headmaster, handing out new H.B. pencils to the best writers. But before this the first few years of our school life we wrote on slates. Has anyone kept one of these treasures? The upper classes were allowed to use pen and ink. The nibs were being constantly changed until one got used to dipping the nib very carefully into the ink well. These ink wells were regularly filled by the ink monitors and they were quite often splashed with ink. A favorite sport was to dip the end of the plaits of the girl sitting in front of you into these ink wells.

*Shelter sheds:* Remember playing in the shelter sheds during recess and lunch times? There was one for the girls and one for the boys. They were a good place to eat lunch, chat, do the coloring competitions and hope to win a prize.

*Toilets:* These were outside and in an emergency or when one wanted to wag class for a few moments, off we would go quite safely to these outside toilets. Sadly it’s a different story now.

*Memories:* Competitions where you decorated your bike, scooter or dolls pram and then paraded around the quadrangle. Yes we used to be taught to walk tall as we would march around and around this bitumen square. It was also an assembly place for us to fall in line, to honor the King and the country. The cloak room where we hung our school bag or jacket? The precious pennies we brought to school to be deposited into our State Savings Bank passbook.

*Nearby Shops:* Opposite the school was Mr Arblaster’s shoe repair shop. We children often had the task of calling in after school to pick up the family repairs. Usually tips, or heels and toes or a full or half-sole replacement. Shoes had to last as long as possible. Some of us did our own repairs at home on the shoe last and there was a shortage of leather. There was also a shortage of rubber and many of us would cut up old bicycle tubes (that had been mended many times before being cut up) to make rubber bands that were used in a hundred and one different ways.

*Cinemas:* Most children would visit the local picture theatre and were enthralled by the films and the serials. Remember dear Mr Spinks who would always give us pass-outs and then collect them when we went back inside. The serials. The “goodies and the Baddies”. Could anyone hear any of the words spoken? It seemed to be more fun to stamp cheer and boo in those days. Sometimes they would be very frightening films and we would slink down in our seats or cover our faces peering through half opened fingers. And the lolly boys. Oh they were so very important with their tray of sweets around their shoulders.

Seem to remember a few of my brothers earning much needed pocket money this way. Shirley Temple was a favorite, and many girls would go to bed with rag curls to create the desired effect.

Dandenong was a small country town in our youth. You knew nearly everyone. Mr Quist Senior with his peppermint lollies; people sitting on their front verandahs chatting to people passing by. Market days were a treat and the smells and the pretties delighted many a small child. Later the market was taken over by the Army and on a weekend we would make flags with pieces of paper and red, white and blue pastels. Yes it was the Union Jack in those days. Sometimes the soldiers would allow you to have some of the tinned fruit and give you a comic. Magic moments. The tunnels that ran under Dandenong were often a play area, but we seemed to know not to enter these drains/tunnels if it had been raining. Don't remember any reports of drownings or anyone being swept away! Then at Christmas, making paper chains from discarded paper and clag from flour-and-water to stick the ends together. Such memories.

Perhaps you could write your memories down so others that follow us may enjoy!