

2016

Dawn Mary Buffham (nee Harris) 3/4/1928 – 18/3/1916

Dawn was born to Annie and Douglas Harris and grew up in the Cohuna District, living on a farm at Wee Wee Rup.

She was the youngest sister of Lorna O'Connor, Dorothy Scott, Estelle Kiely and Joan Harris.

She attended school in the Cohuna region.

On completing school, she was too young to enter nurse training so she worked for the State Savings Bank.

Dawn received her basic nurse training at the Bendigo Base Hospital from 1945 to 1947 and nursed at Elmore and Rochester before doing her Midwifery training at St. Vincent's Hospital, Melbourne in 1948 and 1949. She did further training in Infant Welfare at Berry Street, Melbourne.

In 1954 and 1955 Dawn was based at Lister House.

During this time she often travelled to Elmore and Rochester to relieve staff. Her role was Acting Matron, which encompassed all facets of nursing, including midwifery.

An excerpt from 'The First of its Kind, Bendigo District School of Nursing' gives a wonderful insight into 'Sister Harris':

"One sunny afternoon in Bendigo on the 18th October 1955 a nervous but excited group of 17 and 18 year old girls gathered for orientation at Lister House in Rowan Street. The gracious white building's entrance was guarded by rampant lion statues either side of the steps.

We were met by our tutor, Sister Dawn Harris, thereafter to be only addressed as 'Sister Harris'.

Her Christian name to be knowingly whispered to each other.

She was immaculate in blue uniform with long sleeves and stiffened white collar. Her lightly starched organdie veil sat perfectly, showing only a discreet peep of reddish hair.

She spoke distinctly but quietly and smiled at us reassuringly.

Her instructions were concise regarding etiquette.

I only recall that no jewellery was to be worn, and lipstick to be of a soft pink shade."

Marie Godfrey was in Dawn's first tutorial class at Lister House in 1954, then when Dawn completed her refresher course at Berry Street in 1965, Marie was Dawn's tutor

In preparation for going overseas, Dawn moved to Darwin to take up a position with the Royal Flying Doctor Service and the School Medical Service. She travelled to extremely remote areas gaining a wealth of experience with difficult and challenging medical and environmental conditions.

Dawn then proceeded to Canada and was a charge sister of a Catholic hospital in Toronto.

This hospital had an intensive paediatric service to which she was appointed as supervisor.

She helped set up the paediatrics program for the government.

In 1967 Dawn, her friend Monica, nephew John Scott and two of his friends travelled on a Greyhound Bus for 5 weeks.

Leaving from Toronto, they visited New York, then down the east coast to Texas and Mexico and back up through Los Angeles, San Francisco, across the Midwest to Minneapolis and back to Toronto.

Shortly after this Dawn heard that Monash were considering a service similar to Toronto, so Dawn decided to come home on the off chance that she may secure the job of supervisor.

Dawn worked at the Queen Victoria Baby & Paediatric Unit in 1970 where she set up the whole unit, which encompassed one entire floor of the Queen Victoria Hospital.

Dawn had previously worked in Murtoa where she met Ian and Joy Anderson, who set up a blind date at the Horsham Ball with an eligible local, Fred Buffham.

They had a fleeting courtship with Fred proposing to Dawn "out the other side of Mita in the middle of the scrub".

They were married 12 months later in 1972, during the next Horsham Ball season.

After marriage they settled in Goroke in the Wimmera and Dawn immediately became active in local matters, including parish activities at the Catholic Church across the road.

She continued her nursing, travelling to Horsham Hospital working in the geriatric unit.

However, her first and greatest love was the Goroke Community Health Centre. This started as a District Nursing Service but developed to include regular visits from GP's, Meals on Wheels, a dental service and various support services.

Further to her involvement in the health sector, she was actively involved in the Goroke swimming pool project.

This was followed by the Goroke Golf Club which saw 110 acres of Stringybark scrub become an 18 hole golf course.

Dawn was instrumental in the organisation and development of the course and the buildings.

Since moving to Bendigo in 1991, she had been deeply involved with St. Therese's Parish as a Special Minister, and on numerous other Parish Projects, including pastoral visits and reading at Mass.

She was active in Bendigo Lions Clubs, volunteering at St. John of God Hospital and various social 'Ladies Groups'.

She and Fred also enjoyed travel. They especially enjoyed travelling to Asia, three times together to China (four for Dawn), Vietnam, Hong Kong and New Zealand.

Country life is not complete without man's best friend.

Minnie Bannister, Maggie and the very vocal Ruby have brought Dawn and Fred enormous pleasure.

Dawn had a love of the arts and culture, opera, ballet, literature, learning, fine dining and especially family and friends.

We remember Dawn as a woman of unlimited energy and goodwill who had a loving and affectionate nature.

She was a good wife.