

# Donation of Historic Photo

Recently, two visitors to Legacy House donated a beautiful photo of Junior Legatees from the 1930s.

Two sisters, Carleen and Marg, dropped in to give Melbourne Legacy a photo of their mother, Margaret Burns, as part of the Geelong Legacy Junior Club and a few other items. This is one of the nicest photos we have of young girls in the early years of Legacy.

In some ways, the photo is an example of a very common story in World War 1. A loving couple, Norman and Nell Burns with a daughter and a second babe on the way, when the husband enlists and leaves Australia for the fighting in Europe. The soldier died in the trenches of France and the young family is left without a father. This was the reason Legacy was formed 100 years ago, there were just so many families devastated by the war.

Heartbroken, Nell never remarries. The daughter, Margaret, attends Geelong Legacy Junior Club with girls that share the same experience of growing up without a father – hence the photo with the other girls. She is helped by Geelong Legacy to find employment. She marries and her husband serves in the Second World War. The son grows up to become a RAAF pilot. Many years later when Margaret is a widow, she finds friendship in joining the Geelong Laurel Club (another term for Legacy Widows' Club).

What is not common, is the treasure trove of love letters and war diaries that Margaret found when her

mother died. Nell had left instructions that a precious box of letters should be burnt on her death. That would have robbed the family of understanding how much Nell and Norman had loved each other and why she remained unmarried. Margaret and her daughter Carleen then compiled them into a book for the family, titled "Norman's War".

The letters, diaries and war medals are being donated along with the story to the Australian War Memorial. Many thanks to Carleen and Marg for telling us their family's story and donating the Laurel Club badge and the Geelong Legacy photos for our archive.



Carleen and Marg giving items to our archivist Kath Leech at Legacy House.



Some of the many first world war orphans in Geelong.

Margaret was a prolific writer who became a mature age student as she returned to education and studied at university. Often it was more for the love of the subject rather than the accomplishment of completing the exams. As well as compiling her parents love story into a book for the family, she also wrote short stories, like this one that highlights her mother's pain over the loss of her husband in the First World War.

Margaret's Laurel Club Badge.



Geelong Legacy Junior Club in the 1930s. Margaret Burns is standing on the far right.

## And the band played on

by Margaret Ganly (nee Burns)

*No-one looked twice at the little old lady alone on the street in the park. Her face was like any other old woman's. She wore a heavy blue-grey coat against the fresh breeze, although most people were enjoying the sunshine and the gala occasion of the band concert. Her eyes were watery. Or was it unshed tears there, as the music brought back memories?*

*Her Norman had played in a band like that, a lifetime ago. How he loved the military precision, the uniform and being part of his country's militia. They had been just married when war against Germany broke out, and he chafed as his younger mates, one by one, left the hometown to fight the "Hun".*

*They thought they would clean it all up in a few months, but Nell had a baby and the boys were still away. Norman could hold back no longer, and he joined up. The months of his training were hard ones for Nell who had never been alone in her life before. He came home often enough at first, but as time came nearer for embarkation, Nell's fear grew and Norman's excitement increased.*

*Nell was very pregnant by this time – too much, so her sisters said, for her to go to the wharf to see the troopship sail. All her family went and although she was miles away from Port Melbourne, she could hear in her head the band playing, see the crowds waving and the streamers floating. She had seen so many pictures in the newspaper of other departures.*

*When the fatal telegram was brought to her by the vicar at the family beach house in Torquay, she just wanted to die too. But the band played on. She just had to keep going. One thing she*

*held on to was that Norman had had time to respond with delight to the news of the birth of his son. That was the last thing she could do for him. His letters from England and France made her proud of him and there were all stored away in an old perfume box – "Quelques Fleurs". Memories!*

*It was such a long time ago and many difficulties were lived through after that. Yet it seemed like yesterday that the armistice of that almost forgotten war was declared. She remembers how she was trying to hang curtains when the news came to Geelong. How the people went mad. Everyone thronged out into the streets, dancing, laughing, singing and bands playing. How they played! But she, alone with her children, just sat on the floor and cried and cried - while the bands played on.*

*There had been another world war since that "war to end all wars". This time Norman's son could not wait to get into it also. But this was a different war, and no-one knew just when or from where her handsome son would take off in his bomber. Subsequent newspaper reports did not alarm her unduly – everything was under control in the early days. It was only in the years after it was all over and the skinny shadow came back to go on with his life, that bits of his experiences were glimpsed. But he came back to her.*

*Now he is married, gone miles away to live, and she is alone again. Yes, she has her daughter nearby and four lovely little granddaughters from her two children - no other little girls are so pretty. She closes her eyes. She must go home soon. It is getting cold.*

*And the band played on.*

