

## Merle Chalmers

In 1953 at Wiley Park Primary School a choice had to be made by my parents as to where I started high school the next year, Marrickville Girls High or Canterbury Girls Home Science School. I had no say in the matter, however two of our neighbours girls were attending Canterbury and so Mum decided that would be where I would go. How grateful am I that she did.

In the January before school began we went into the City to purchase the navy blue three box pleat uniform needed together with the velour hat and white short sleeved blouses. The school badges and hat band together with the PE uniform were purchased from the school.

In 1954 we still had three term years and so my first term saw me in 1A with a whole lot of girls I did not know, many coming from the closer surrounding primary schools. I wasn't the only newcomer to the school though, as both the Headmistress (Miss E Stark) and the Deputy Headmistress (Miss L Armstrong) began as the leaders of the school that year. There was a huge contrast between the two, Miss Stark small and soft spoken and Miss Armstrong tall with a commanding voice.

First year saw us studying, English, Mathematics, History, Geography, Physiology, Cooking and Home Management, Sewing, Music also Library. The subjects I least enjoyed were cooking and sewing, but I knew that we only had to do cooking for one year and then we would be able to choose typing or shorthand and typing and business principles. At the end of term 1 the Education Department said that Physiology was no longer to be taught and instead we started studying Biology.

There were four sport houses, Adelaide (blue), Brisbane (yellow), Canberra (green) and Darwin (red). I was placed into Adelaide which was great as blue was and still is my favourite colour. Sport was my best thing as I was already playing tennis at Inter District level and A grade in senior comps. My cooking teacher was in Adelaide and enjoyed tennis so I was very lucky in that she did help me a lot in the cooking area.

In second year I was elected Adelaide Junior House Captain and in third year Senior House Captain. I took this job very seriously and I realise now how learning to encourage girls to participate in the annual athletic and swimming carnivals helped me in my job, leading a team of 5 other people to achieve work objectives.

We didn't have many excursions but I do remember being in the choir and singing in a mass schools choir for Red Cross. Also we were taken to Newtown to see a Shakespearian Play – Twelfth Night. At the end of the performance we were taken back stage to meet the actors. I met Leonard Teale who played Superman in a radio series later on, he also became a well-known actor in many Australian films.

Our school did not have a MP Hall and so when Presentation Day came around at the end of year we all went to the Campsie Odeon picture theatre for the day. I have stood up on the stage there and made a speech and Miss Armstrong was the one who helped me prepare for that. She showed me how to correctly speak into the microphone and how to project my voice. I think she must have had some stage training.



In Third year I was elected Senior Prefect as well as being Adelaide House Captain (the first time that this had occurred). We attended a Nationalisation Ceremony that year at the local council chambers and I gave a welcoming speech there and got my name in the local paper. I still have the clipping.

The year 1956 was very exciting for two reasons. One was that the Olympic Games were to be held in Melbourne for the first time and I had both an uncle and cousin competing. The other reason was that television was now available for the first time in Australia to coincide with the Olympic Games.

We sat for the intermediate certificate in those days and we all expected after finishing that there would be a job somewhere for us. In the December I applied to the AMP Society for a job and had to have an interview in the January. I started with them at the end of January and worked there for seven years until I got married because in those days they did not employ married women and so I had to leave.

I need to thank my Business Principles/Bookkeeping teacher Miss Robbins who continued to tell us for 2 years that learning these subjects would be our "bread and butter" when we started working and although I didn't need the bookkeeping to much later when my husband and I had a business, the business principles part helped to construct correspondence in my job.

After leaving school, and starting work, a few of us from school decided to attend Night College to improve our shorthand and typing. We did this for 12 months at Belmore Tech. We were surprised to find that our teacher for these subjects was Mrs Little who had taught us the year before at Canterbury.

In my business life I have been a general typist, secretary, office manager, properties officer, and Manager of a Unit with 8 staff. I believe I have been able to achieve all this because of the basic good teaching received at school which prepared me for all the jobs in some way. However you still need to be an ongoing learner through life and in doing that you may achieve more than you thought possible.

I enjoyed my three years at Canterbury Girls School and thank all the teachers who took the time to guide, teach and set examples for us to follow. In 1983 I saw an ad in our local paper for a school reunion meeting and so I went along with a great deal of excitement hoping to meet old school friends. This was the start of my being part of the committee of the Cantabrian Girls Ex Students Association. Since that time I have been the Secretary, Treasurer and now for over ten years the President of the Association.