

Alma Hotham

I grew up in Black Springs. My mother was May Muriel Martin, she lived at Mt David, as her father was the Manager of Mt David Mines. My mother and her sister were sent to boarding school in Sydney, as her mother died quite young of cancer. My father was Edward Thomas Hotham. He was an only child who lived on the family property 'Glenroy' at Black Springs. My father always vowed he would have a large family because he did not like being an only child.

When my mother returned home from finishing boarding school, she met my father through the local dances held in the district, either Burruga, Mt David or Black Springs. In those days, square dancing was very popular, and Dad used to call the dances, so he stood out from the crowd. My parents were married in the Catholic church at Rockley, beginning their life together at 'Glenroy'. They had ten children, Harold (who served in the army in Papua New Guinea) Horace, Kevin, Betty, Veronica, Noel, Keith, Neville, myself and Alan.

We were a very self-supporting family and lived off the land. We had lambs, steers, pigs, chickens, and grew our own vegetables. We were a very organised family and had allocated days for chores. Monday was for washing where Mum would take all the clothes, sheets and linen down to the well. She would light a fire, draw the water and place it in a big pot over the fire, hand wash and wring out everything to hang on the line that was next to the well, and the sheets would always be snowy white. Then there were domestic days, where Mum would iron everything using a flat iron warmed on the stove, or clean the house. We had visiting days, and I can remember clearly, Mum would bake, then walk to a nearby neighbour with one child on her back and two or three walking behind. We all had chores. Mine was to bring in the 'little wood' for the big open fire, my sister, Veronica, had to set the table, then we both did the washing and wiping up, after the water was heated on the stove.

I did all my schooling at Daisy Bank. It was a two mile walk to school with only one teacher, Mr Bill Woodhouse. Every month a school inspector would make a visit, and I can remember on that day we were all well dressed and very well mannered. Once, when the inspector had left, Mr Woodhouse asked us how it all went. The room was silent until a little chubby faced boy, James (Jim) Moran, father of chef Matt Moran, replied, "Well Sir, it gave me the dingbats!" There were a few 'rebels' at the school who used to take off on their horses mid-morning and not return till the following day. During the school holidays, I would pick peas in summer and potatoes in winter. With the pocket money I would always buy a new dress every Christmas.

I had a very happy childhood. We played sport, cricket, soccer and on Sundays we would go over to the Hanrahan's, as they had a tennis court, and the families would play together. At night we would play cards, either 500 or Euchre. I can remember we had a big wireless and when the Test cricket was played between Australia and England all the neighbours would come to listen, sitting up till the early hours of the morning when the game was in England. On Sundays, there was a



program called the World Tenors, and I can still hear the melodic whistling of Ernie Hanrahan coming up to the house to sit and listen to the tenors.

When I left school, I worked as a nurse under Matron Pat Kirkman, for four years. It was very practical and hands-on, where you literally learnt on the job and that made for very skilled nurses. I can remember clearly when I first started, everyone said, "If you need anything you'll find it in 'Cecil's' shed, it's got everything." So, on one occasion a patient was seriously ill, and Dr Robey turned to me in an urgent voice to go and get the 'cocky's perch'. I raced out through the hospital across the yard to the shed, frantically searching for a 'cocky's perch' and I couldn't find anything that even looked like one. I was too petrified to go back without it. When I eventually returned, I found out the 'cocky's perch' was Dr Robey's nickname for the stand to use intravenous drips!

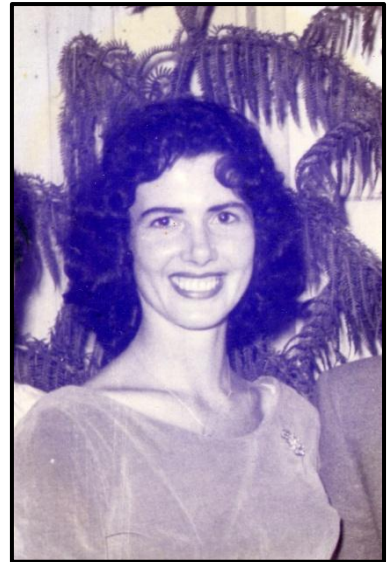


Another incident that I'll never forget was when a woman arrived at the hospital after giving birth at home. When Dr Robey arrived, he was quite upset and asked, "Why did you leave it so late to come in?" To which she replied, "I thought it was just the sour plums I ate!"



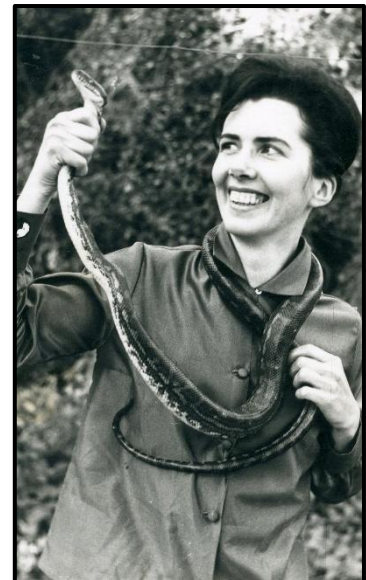
We stayed in the nurses' quarters at the hospital and got up to all sorts of antics. We would go horse riding at night or go on the back of a motor bike out to the cemetery. I can remember one particular time, we decided to play a prank on the neighbour, Mrs Sandy Williams. One of the girls stuffed pillows under her dress and pretended to be in the throes of labour outside Mrs Williams' house and we were all watching, and boy did we get into trouble! Little did we know she had phoned Dr Robey. The next day Dr Robey told us in no uncertain terms to keep our antics in house!

Unlike many women of my generation who tended to marry early and start a family, I had independence and opportunities to do other things. At 21, I went on a working holiday with my good friends, Lucy Arrow and Gwen Gunning, to New Zealand. I loved my time there. Firstly, I worked in a big department store called Mackenzies, not unlike David Jones, in Auckland. I really enjoyed it, meeting new people and having a fun social life. Then we travelled to the South Island and worked a season picking tobacco. It was a very different experience but fun nevertheless. During my time there I would spend my money on trips, such as going to Rotorua with the mud pools and strong Maori culture. I just loved the whole experience. I didn't intend going home after 9 months but Gwen's sister Joan was getting married. I always thought I would return but I suppose life got in the way.



Alma with Sister Thaddeus,
Brisbane

I returned to work at Oberon Hospital, then my friend Faye Fitzpatrick and I decided to go on a working holiday around Australia. We only made it as far as Brisbane! I got a job at Mt Olivette Hospital that was run by the Sisters of Charity. I worked on and off there for 9 years. I made many friends, including a prominent sports broadcaster who worked for 4BC which meant that every Saturday I got to sit in the members stand and watch the races.



1965: Brisbane, Lone
Pine Park

I had to return home as my mother had become ill with cancer and I wanted to be there. I went back to work at Oberon Hospital, but it wasn't the same. Things had changed, so I went to work at Bathurst Base Hospital, in an administrative position for twelve years. In 1980, I brought the Steveson's house in Scotia Avenue, Oberon, where I still live today. I can remember hearing that the house was for sale and, as I had always loved the house, I raced up to see Bill Dawson to tell him I wanted to buy it, without even thinking about how I was going to pay for it. That's how keen I was!!! After finishing my 12 years at Bathurst, I continued to work casually in admin at Oberon Hospital until retirement.

Throughout my life, I have been very active in the community, doing Meals on Wheels for five years. My involvement with the Oberon Catholic church has included many tasks, scripture teaching, catechism, giving services during the week, cleaning, helping those in the parish who are housebound, and I continue to help and carry out duties to this day.

I have always had an active social life playing tennis and golf and pursuing activities through Oberon U3A.

I have very special memories of my travels abroad. In the 1990s, I travelled to Europe with Rita Stapleton and Mary Behan. Then I went to the USA with Doreen Grady. I particularly remember I wanted to see the Grand Canyon, but it wasn't on the itinerary, so a group of us decided to charter a plane to see it, and while it seemed extravagant it was totally worthwhile, and I've never regretted the decision.

When I look back over the years, one the biggest changes in Oberon would have to be the hospital. Nowadays, it's all red tape. Back then it was about the patients not the paperwork. There were many seasonal workers back then and after spending their money at the local pubs, some would end up outside the hospital needing care. We simply looked after them, patched them up and gave them what was needed, no forms, no questions asked. Dr Robey was the same, he took great personal interest in all his patients and showed huge amounts of compassion to all those he treated. The hospital was extremely busy back then, with up to 8 women in the maternity ward about to give birth, operations that needed to be performed and farm accidents that had to be attended to, all done through hard work and dedication, and with only one doctor and the nursing staff.

And it's very noticeable now that when I go down the street, there are many people I don't know, not like the old days where I knew everyone. And I remember when I played golf, there wasn't a person I didn't know. That's not the case anymore.



2013



Tracey Cunynghame, Greg Dargan, Robyn Stapleton, Alma, 1997

If I had to give advice to future generations, it would be not to give in to peer pressure. Throughout my life I have seen far too many times when young people are influenced by their peers and end up making bad choices. The other point I would like to make, is the negative influence of social media. It tends to have a detrimental impact on younger people and my advice would be stay off it and learn a sport instead!!!

I have had a very fulfilling life, and I continue to live independently, and for that I am both proud and grateful.

(March, 2025)