

Thelma Collinson (Sharman) YHS 1943



Janet. Frank & Thelma Sharman - Feb 2010

Thelma was born in Yallourn to Richard (Syd) and May Sharman, who lived in Yallourn North and who both worked at the SEC.

Thelma, affectionately known as 'Sharman', was the middle of two siblings, older brother Frank and younger sister Janet who both grew up in Yallourn North. Times were tough for the Sharman family in those early years, not only was there the Depression to deal with, but nature also intervened regularly with devastating floods and bushfires, not unlike what many country towns have to deal with today.

Thelma attended the Brown Coal Mine State School and then Yallourn High School up until Form 5. She was a keen netballer who also tried her hand at football! In the book titled "The Old Brown Coal Mine", Thelma's photo appears as a member of the Brown Coal Mine single women's football team of 1944/45. They played the married women's team. It is not recorded who won but Thelma said that she caught the ball at a boundary throw in and thought that she could stop to take a kick! The story goes on to say that someone yelled out that the umpire was 'one eyed' whereupon he promptly pulled out his glass eye to prove it! The team only played once and so it was back to netball for Thelma.

A swimming pool cut into a bend on the Latrobe River was very popular and close to the mine. That's where Thelma learnt to swim and loved every minute of it as she was a strong swimmer.

Thelma's first job after leaving school was performing secretarial duties with a Mr Langhorne at the Yallourn Advisory Council, but this only lasted for 2 years. In 1949 she applied and was accepted for nurses training at the Children's Hospital in Melbourne. This was a big move for Thelma, leaving family and friends, however the challenge and excitement was what she was after, so with hugs and kisses all round, off she went to the 'big smoke'. She recalled that there was a wonderful camaraderie existing in the nurses' home. She excelled in lectures and derived great satisfaction in caring for sick, dependent children. She easily won the confidence and cooperation of children separated from their families. She was a born carer, not only for children, but also to people from all walks of life. It's here that because of Jeff's fastidious and detailed recording of family history, the following transcript exists of Thelma's early nursing memories:

"The 6 months adult component of the training spent at the Children's Hospital added another dimension to my nursing career. I enjoyed the experience very much. I became very aware of how important our observation skills are especially in the nursing of children. Adults could be specific and descriptive in describing their condition, pain, complaints, symptoms, whereas in children's nursing the nurse's observations were of immense importance and value."

Thelma returned to Yallourn and took up a posting at the local Hospital. Significantly she was now nursing with Dr Andrews, the Doctor who had delivered her into the world back in 1930. For experience and to again whet that appetite for adventure, she then took an opportunity to spend all of 1954 at the Winton Hospital, some 180km north west of Longreach in Central West Queensland. Barbara Watt, also from Yallourn, went with her.

Returning to Yallourn in early 1955, Thelma again took up her post at the Yallourn Hospital and was back with family and friends.

The Red Cross offered Thelma the opportunity to accompany an elderly patient to England on the SS Himalaya. She arrived in London in December 1955 after 4 weeks at sea. The task of caring for her patient successfully completed, she took up residence in Paddington where a New Zealand friend from Yallourn, Marie O'Sullivan, was living. Also staying was Marie's cousin, Shirley.

After meeting her future husband, Jeff, through a mutual friend, she was invited by Jeff to accompany him and a group of friends who would be hiring a car to do the "Grand Tour of

Europe". However, there were only 2 spare seats left in the car, leaving Thelma the unenviable task of having to choose between her 2 friends for the last seat. She was of course very keen to go, but only if both Marie and Shirley could go too. That was Thelma's nature, always wanting to please everyone, so she reluctantly told Jeff that she couldn't choose between her 2 girlfriends. Needless to say, and going against Jeff's usual strict observance of rules, he relented and told Thelma that all 3 girls were welcome as long as they kept their luggage to a minimum! So with the car overloaded, they all set off commencing on Anzac Day 1957. Sadly, Thelma had to leave the tour in Vienna due to the arrival of a telegram alerting her that her father was terminally ill. She was quickly on a plane back to Melbourne. Her beloved father died 6 weeks later.

Not long after this, Thelma was chosen to be the face of "Miss Penny Parade", an honour bestowed for raising money for the Hospital's Appeal and also for being the best looking nurse in the competition! September 1957 and Jeff was back in Melbourne. It wasn't long before he was on the country train to Yallourn every second weekend for a couple of years to see Thelma. On 3 January 1959, Thelma and Jeff were married at St John's in Yallourn and then set up home in Kennedy Street, South Oakleigh. Judy was born in 1960 and Michael a couple of years later.

After 9 years of being a stay-at-home-mum to rear the two children, Thelma eventually returned to work. The family at this time were living in Greensborough, actually on the rural/urban fringe and reminiscent in a lot of respects to her early life in the country.

Thelma spent 6 years or so nursing in the Spinal Unit at the Austin Hospital where she dealt daily with the trauma and tragedy of her patients and their families. Following this period in her life, Thelma went on to run the Austin's Staff Clinic.

In late 1977 Jeff was offered a one-year work posting with Siemens to Munich in West Germany which included the family. Thelma was obviously thrilled to have the opportunity to take the family overseas for a new adventure, which included touring many European and Scandinavian countries, countless weekend trips around Bavaria and a skiing adventure or two. But all good things must come to an end and it was back to Melbourne for the family, but with more lifelong friendships and great memories.

In 1981, Thelma and Jeff moved to a new home in Balwyn which was the family home for 32 years.

Thelma's final job was the pinnacle of her illustrious nursing career. She was appointed the Deputy Director of Nursing at Cedar Court Private Hospital. A major task she was involved with was the Hospital's first ever accreditation, a project that she led from start to finish and which was achieved to the exacting specifications demanded.

In 1987, Jeff was asked to establish an office for Siemens Telecommunications in Wellington, New Zealand. Jeff and Thelma found a beautiful house overlooking the picturesque Wellington Golf Club in Heretaunga. Thelma now had no other option than to turn her hand to another sporting challenge, this time learning to swing a golf club. When not playing golf or socializing with her many great friends, Thelma became proficient at embroidery and anybody that's visited home can bear witness to how good her talents were with this craft. They returned to Melbourne in 1991 after more than 4 years away.

Contracting Parkinson's Disease some 6 years ago was a shock and a setback, but one that she overcame with time. She was challenged but she dealt with it in her own inimitable style. She never dwelled on it and after a while, returned to her happy-go-lucky self. She was always an optimist and always saying she was fine, even when she wasn't.

In February 2012, Thelma's health took a catastrophic turn when she suffered a stroke which limited her speech and movement. Thereafter she needed the type of care that only a residential facility could provide and she was admitted to the Noel Miller Centre in Glen Iris.

Thelma died on Sunday, 7 April 2013 at the Noel Miller Centre with Jeff at her side. Her funeral was held at the Balwyn Anglican (St. Barnabas) Church on Friday the 12th April 2013. Over 150 people attended the service, a testament to the love felt towards her by so many and to the many lives touched by her beautiful presence.