

Retyped from Original

Note: Mrs Stockbridge was asked by Mrs Craig to provide the details

Interests and Activities - From Rita Albany Stockbridge
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I came to New Zealand from Sydney, Australia, on the "Greyhound of the Pacific" The Awatea in June 1940.

I came over to join my husband and we lived in Berhampore. I had one little boy and although he was too young for Kindergarten I was invited to join the Berhampore Free Kindergarten Mother's Club. They were very friendly to me and I joined in the activities of the Committee. This began my association with the Free Kindergarten movement, which continues to this day.

Late in 1942 we moved to Pinehaven - which is about 1.5 miles from Silverstream. There was no transport and for three years I walked and pushed the next baby to Silverstream in his pram.

Pinehaven Womens Guild

It was war time and the women of Pinehaven decided to form the Pinehaven Women's Guild for friendship and general fund raising activities and to help the war effort. I was elected Secretary. Our main work was Friendship between local women - arranging speakers on various topics - visits with gifts of cookies, jam etc. to American Servicemen in Silverstream Hospital. I didn't visit, but did cake baking and made lots of pots of jam to be taken to the Hospital. We organised street stalls in Pinehaven and made donations to Charities - Free Ambulance, Free Kindergarten, etc.

Move to Establish Free Kindergarten

Mrs W. Malcolm and myself called a public meeting in a private house at Silverstream. This was to set up a Committee to work for and establish a Free Kindergarten in Silverstream. This meeting was chaired by myself and addressed by Mrs Roberts (wife of Ben Roberts M.P. for Wairarapa, our electorate). Win Malcolm was elected President and I became Secretary, an office I retained until I left Pinehaven about 5 years later. We have a very good Committee of local people men and women. The Community were very supportive. We raised funds in many and varied ways - we formed a Concert party "The Pinehaven Players". We had Concerts in Pinehaven Hall, Silverstream Hall, and in the Concert Hall at the Silverstream Hospital - much enjoyed by the American Servicemen. I was in the Concert Party. We also raised funds through Garden Parties in Chatsworth Road homes. I organised these functions, with the back up of a good active Committee. When a Garden Party was to be held I canvassed all houses in Pinehaven for a donation. Yes there were a lot of lonely people and they were glad to see me. On the day of the Garden Party I would go round with a box tray fitted on the chassis of an old style English pram and collect the donations. Mrs Marjorie Cody would come and take them to the Garden Party. She usually collected 4 or 5 loads from me. A Free Kindergarten was set up and run in Silverstream Hall, where it continued until the Silverstream Free Kindergarten was built. A Mothers Club was formed and many a new mother to the area made her first friends through the Mothers Club. I retain friendships formed to this day.

Upper Hutt Free Kindergarten Association

From the Silverstream Committee we called a meeting to form "The Upper Hutt Free Kindergarten Association." This has continued to work for, and open New Kindergartens throughout The Upper Hutt area. I was still Secretary of the Silverstream Local Committee and I became Secretary of the Upper Hutt Association.

At this time I was also Secretary of the Silverstream Branch of the N.Z. Labour Party and took an active part in that organisation. I travelled over the Rimutakas to the Wairarapa L.E.C. taken over by M.P. Bob McKeen from Island Bay. What a Road - my very first hill climb. The mountains are well away from the City of Sydney.

I was interested in the establishment of a Kindergarten in Silverstream, because I thought this would help my second son who was very slow to learn. He was later described as Intellectually Handicapped. The last 6 months I lived in Pinehaven I took Sydney to the Special Class at Thorndon school every day. I rode my push bike with Sydney on the back to the Silverstream Station - train to Wellington - walked from Wellington Station to Thorndon School - at the back of the Wellington Girls College, every day. I started work - part-time while Sydney was at school at the Wellington Dry Cleaning Co - as a repairer. After 6 months the school decided he should go to Levin Farm for Intellectually Handicapped Children. He remained there for 34 years. Now he is in an I.H.C. Hostel at Titahi Bay. During this time my older son went over to Australia and stayed with my mother.

In 1948 we were given a State Housing tenancy in Taita and we came to live at this House. After Sydney went to Levin Farm I continued to work at Wellington Dry Cleaning Co until I went to Sydney, Australia to visit my mother and my 14 brothers and sisters. I had my third son while I was in Australia and brought the 2 boys back when I came home.

I.H.C. Society

I became a member of the I.H.C. Society which I joined at their second meeting. I attended night meetings in Wellington, travelling by train. I helped with the I.H.C. for a number of years. Frequently helping with the opportunity shop in Petone. Also collecting on their Annual Collection.

I was interested in the Co-operative Movement in the Hutt Valley and joined shortly after we came to the Lower Hutt Valley. I joined the Taita Co-operative Womens Guild. I was President for a while and then I became Secretary for about 6 years. The Co-operative guild was interested in the Co-operative Shops, and also in getting improvements and amenities for Taita. Many a letter I have written to the Lower Hutt City Council asking for improvements in the Taita area - some were granted - some not.

Mrs Mary Dowse, Mayoress of Lower Hutt, was a member of Taita Co-op Womens Guild. We elected her our delegate to the Lower Hutt National Council of Women, shortly after its formation. She became President of the L.H.N.C.W. and set that branch on its way on a very sure foundation. I also became Secretary of the N.Z. National Co-operative Women's Guild - with Branches in Auckland, Palmerston North and Brunner in the South Island.

My third son, Benjamin David was born in 1950, when he was 2½ years old he attended Play Centre in the Taita Community Hall. I trained as a Play Centre Supervisor and passed the exam to receive a Supervisor's Certificate. But I was really more interested in Kindergarten. Benjamin at 3 years started at

the Taita Community Kindergarten and I joined the Committee. I was sent as a delegate to Lower Hutt Free Kindergarten Association to plead the case for setting up a Free Kindergarten in Taita. However, within a short time the Community Kindergarten closed down through lack of support and not being able to pay its way, this was early in 1955.

Taita Free Kindergarten Establishment

However, I continued as a Committee of one to represent Taita and make sure Taita would have the next Free Kindergarten to be built in Lower Hutt. Years later the Lower Hutt Free Kindergarten Association called a meeting to form an Establishment Committee for a Free Kindergarten Building in Taita.

I was elected Secretary and remained for 7 years until the building was completed and the children were attending. Maude Olsen became our President and she was a wonderful inspiration to us all. We actually sold a dream to the people of Taita and they were right behind us. Our first big money raising effort was a Queen Carnival with 3 Princesses. One from the Rugby Club, one from the Kindergarten Committee and one from ? (blank)

I acted as Secretary of the Kindergarten Committee Princess, we had a very hard working Committee. Resulting from the Queen Carnival the Rugby Club Princess won and they went ahead with their building in Fraser park. The Kindergarten Princess was second and we had a nest egg for our building. This was added to with lots and lots of money raising functions over the years. So much so, I am proud to say, Taita Kindergarten Building is the only one which was opened debt free and with money in hand - later loaned to other areas to help them get started.

I remained a Committee member of the Lower Hutt Free Kindergarten Association for 15 years. Only retiring to make way for younger members to join. When I retired I was made a Life Member. I still receive the minutes of the monthly meetings and attend the annual meeting. I served as President of the Lower Hutt Free Kindergarten Association for one year. I was a member of the Committee which organised the National Conference of the New Zealand Free Kindergarten Union which was held in Lower Hutt some years ago. This was another dream of mine - to hold the National Conference of the New Zealand Free Kindergarten Union in Lower Hutt so Kindergarten people throughout New Zealand could see what a great place Lower Hutt was, and how well we provided for our Pre-Schoolers. I have been associated with Lower Hutt Free Kindergarten Association for 35 years.

Mothers Club Activities

Soon after Taita Free Kindergarten was opened the Head Teacher organised a mothers' club, for the mothers of children attending Kindergarten and women supporters. I belonged to the Mothers Club for a long time. From the Mothers Club we formed a "Talents Group" which I joined. We supplied an item for the Lower Hutt United Mothers Club "Talents Evenings". These concerts were held in the Lower Hutt Town Hall over a number of years. They were of a very high standard and were very well patronised by the public of Lower Hutt. We certainly all enjoyed ourselves and raised money to support Committees working for new Kindergartens in their area. It was while raising money for Taita Kindergarten I started making Marmalade for sale. I always said my lemon tree went a good way to help defray the cost of Taita Free Kindergarten. I sold marmalade on stalls and in the office where I worked.

N.Z. Labour Party

I also continued my interest in the New Zealand Labour Party. I joined Taita Branch very shortly after we came to live in Taita. I was Secretary of the Branch for a time, then Treasurer, then President - and Vice President over a number of years. About 8 years ago I began to make marmalade again for sale mainly for Labour Party funds - but I always take some for the sales table at any Womens Organisations to which I may go. Lots of people only know me as "The Marmalade Lady".

In 1949 I was appointed a Justice of the Peace. I was a foundation member of the Lower Hutt and Bays Justice of Peace Association. I have now been made a Life member of this Association.

In 1979 I was made a Life member and given a Gold Badge by the New Zealand Labour Party to recognise 50 years of active service for the Party. In 1989 I was again honoured with a function to recognise 60 years of service to Labour and the Community.

Justice of Peace

As a J.P. for over 41 years I have been pleased to serve the Community. Witnessing signatures at all times of the day and evening. I have helped many people with problems. Mainly by writing letters for them - or giving advice where they could get their problem solved. It has been a pleasure, over the years, to write References for adults, or children leaving school, when they applied for positions. To learn they have been accepted has been very pleasing. These References have been accepted in Great Britain, Australia and New Guinea. Positions obtained have been Teachers, Nurses, Bank Officers, a Store Detective in a London store and tradespeople. I am still available at my home and people still come to have papers witnessed. My mother was a Justice of peace in N.S.W. and I acted as her Secretary. I have 2 sisters, a niece and a nephew Justices of the Peace in NSW and Queensland - so I have to behave myself - whether I want to or not!

Womens Section - Taita/Pomare Branch NZLP

On 1980 we started a Womens section of Taita-Pomare Branch NZLP. All members then were over 60 and we come together as a very social group - we have political speakers and discussions. We raise funds for the NZLP with social afternoons and street stalls at Taita shops. Also from Sales of "My Marmalade". I have been convenor for this group since it started and act as President, Secretary and general dogsbody.

Friendship Club

I have belonged to Mrs Iris Craig Friendship Club for 12 years and I enjoy every minute I spend there. There is a great feeling of friendship and Iris organises such wonderful trips in and around Wellington and the Hutt Valley and longer trips to various places throughout New Zealand. I feel its rather wonderful to have someone else doing the organising, it's a great change for me.

Nowadays I belong to the Avalon C.W.I. and the Lower Hutt Townswomen's Guild. I do not take an active part but I am very proud to be a member.

I have been made a Life member of the Upper Hutt Free Kindergarten Association
 Life member of the Lower Hutt Free Kindergarten Association
 Life member of Lower Hutt and Bays Justice of Peace Association
 Life member of New Zealand Labour Party

I served as a member of the Taita Central School Committee for 3 years. I canvassed from door to door in Taita collecting funds to help towards the cost of the Lower Hutt Library Building. I was a guest at the opening of this complex, also the opening of the Town Hall and the Horticultural Hall. I attended the first Civic Ball in the Town Hall and many other Civic Balls.

I was a member of the Hutt Valley Consumers Co-operative Society for about 2 years.

In 1961 I commenced work as Manageress of Adams Bruce Taita shop, after 9 months I transferred to a Lower Hutt shop. I left there and became a shop assistant at J.R. McKenzies in Lower Hutt for 3 years. I left McKenzies and took a position at the Head Office of Foodstuffs Wellington Co-operative Society, Four Square, in the Accounts Section. I stayed there until I retired at 66 years of age. Although I worked at paid work for about 25 years I kept up all my voluntary community activities. I also acted as Publicity Officer for Lower Hutt Free Kindergarten Association and had lots of articles published in the Evening Post and the Hutt News. I made a scrap book of these articles. It is held at present at the Taita Free Kindergarten.

I have enjoyed being Secretary of these organisations and I have made many friends along the way.

I never had to worry about baby sitters while I attended night meetings. My husband never wanted to go out, so there was no friction when I did. We celebrated our golden wedding in February 1989 with a delightful open house with my son and daughter in-law, Ben and Dianne at Newlands, and a great many friends.

I have 5 grandchildren and 2 great grandchildren. My hobbies nowadays are making marmalade and knitting toys and dolls for my smaller grandchildren and great grandchildren.

I have always been a back room worker. I never worried who got the credit - as long as what I wanted was accomplished. I have had many helpers along the way. I always remembered R.L. Stevenson's poem recited by my Headmistress in primary school days:

"Be good sweet maid and let who will be clever
 Do noble things - not dream them all day long
 And so make life, death and that vast forever
 One grand sweet song"