

### **Barbara Gordon Abbott (Nee Swan)**

Date of birth 21.7.28 at Three Springs W.A. (My parents were living in Carnamah. It was depression time and we lived in a tent in tent land, Mum, Dad and 3 and a half-year-old brother James who later served in the Air Force in Darwin and elsewhere. We moved into an abandoned butchers' shop that only had three walls and a flywire fourth, that was condemned at that time, later coming to Perth just before I was two).

Life was very hard and my father was away a lot because he was doing sustenance work on the Peel Estate and other places to get enough money to feed a growing family, which eventually became eight living children.

We moved several times and I attended Highgate Infants School until I turned nine in 1937 and then moved to Mt. Hawthorn where I attended the school there. It was while I was still at Mt Hawthorn school that the war started in Europe. We had no wireless but the next-door neighbours called us in to hear Mr Menzies, our Prime Minister, announce that because Britain had declared war on Germany, Australia was now at war. And I remember my mother saying "Thank God", (my parents were both English migrants).

From then on life changed. Schools quickly started digging slit trenches in the schoolyards, many teachers were called up and disappeared and some of the married ladies returned to the workforce, (before that, married women were not allowed to be employed as teachers). We also put up blackout curtains at every window and taped all the glass in the windows and doors to prevent it causing injuries should bombs fall.

Some people now wonder why we were doing all this with the war far away in Europe but they forget that the German battleships and submarines were in the Indian Ocean and that the Sydney was sunk before the Japanese came into the war. Singapore was a strategic point at that time and that is why there were many enemy ships in our area then. After the war when the blackout curtains came down my mother turned the material into black pants for her girls for school!!! School hours were staggered. Some children went to school from eight till twelve and others from one till five. This allowed some space for High School children to be evacuated when the war in the Pacific started in December 1941. Daylight saving was also introduced to allow children not to be going home too late at night. I left Mt Hawthorn and in 1941 attended Perth Girls' School in East Perth where we sandbagged all the under-croft and started knitting squares for rugs, balaclavas and socks for the forces. These were either in navy or khaki.

In 1942, we were evacuated to primary schools closer to our homes so that we did not have to pass through the middle of Perth. Trains were commandeered for troop transport and you often had to wait hours for them. Part of our school days were spent rolling bandages for the Red Cross, learning first aid in case of need and making up first aid packs. We still continued the knitting for the troops. We also corresponded with members of the forces through church groups. We were all supposed to carry a first aid pack, which among other things carried a rubber ball to put between our teeth when bombs fell and barley sugars to help counteract shock. The barley sugars were often eaten!!

In 1943, we were back at Perth Girls Schools again as the suggested use of the building for a hospital did not eventuate. I could watch the Catalinas taking off from Matilda Bay from the window of my classroom and also the barges going up and down the river carrying goods. We experienced many air raid warnings but never knew whether enemy planes had been sighted or not.

I started work in 1944 and was in the Perpetual Trustees building on the corner of Howard Street and St George's Terrace on the second floor. Every time an air raid warning sounded, we were told to put our typewriters into the strongroom together with any cash, before we were allowed down to the basement, which served as an air raid shelter. Hence, we were always the last down there, as we had to use the stairs and not the lift. It was always very crowded down there.

My brother was in the Air Force and often brought friends home, which was great for me and my girlfriend as we could date them. I also dated some English sailors when they called into Fremantle on their way home from the war. They seemed very young homesick boys and as my mother was from Yorkshire, I often took them home to meet her and give them some good home cooking for which they were grateful. And if I found a man in charge of stores, that was an added bonus as he would bring tins of fruit and cream which we had not had over the war years.

Rationing was very much in force and eggs were unobtainable. Meat, tea, sugar, and butter were all rationed as well clothing and petrol. This rationing continued well into the 1950's for when I got married I still had coupons and although by then my husband owned a car we were running on power kero until petrol came off ration in February 1950. My mother used to help out with tea and sugar, as with a large family the little we were allowed was spread more evenly. I remember we used to queue up for things and if you saw a queue, you joined it. Often it was a rabbit at the other end, or sheets or towels. We could only get white sheets or towels in 1950 and I queued up and eventually got married with three double bed sheets and three white towels.

Stockings were unavailable so we started painting our legs with brown stuff and as stockings had seams at that time we would help each other drawing a straight line down the back of the leg. We often bought used parachutes and used the silk to make blouses or nighties and such like. My sister in law at that time worked at Maylands Aerodrome sewing fabric on the planes. She was quite large so held the needle on the outside and passed it through the fabric to some smaller person inside.

We never took up smoking as they were unavailable and anyway we never had enough money to buy them. The best thing that came out of the war for us was that my father got a job in 1941 as a Rates Clerk and eventually was put on the permanent staff of the Perth City Council. If the depression had kept going and no war came, this would never have happened.