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## Una Abbott

### **THAT'S HOW IT WAS, FIFTY YEARS AGO.**

"There is plenty of work for you here. Helping me and Dad, there is absolutely no need for you to volunteer for service." That was my mother's reply to my question. "Please may I join the Air Force."

In 1940 I was 18 years old. I was restless at home and dissatisfied with my life on the farm.

What would you do? Why do you want to leave home? We thought you were happy here. It was all good reasoning. I was happy.

I guess I wanted more. More of everything. I worked hard for years after leaving school. I helped with the housework, the cooking, the cleaning and making countless loaves of bread three times a week. I helped with all the chores on the farm. I stooked the hay, sewed the tops of wheat bags, filled the horse feeders with chaff and a 'handful of oats'. I milked the cows and fed the countless baby lambs and calves.

I drove flocks of sheep to wherever they had to go in fine weather and in foul. I helped my dad burn logs in a pit to make charcoal for the gas producers on the tractor and the car. The war was on and petrol rationing was in force.

I was never taught to handle money. It was never discussed. Dad had charge accounts at various stores and goods were booked up when needed. There was little need for cash. Mother covered the cost of a country-dance, rarely a film and the annual Show Days. Sure I was happy. I was too busy to be unhappy. I was clothes, fashion was not a big thing in those days, a smile was more important in the long run.

"Yes I am aware Judy Cockram has enlisted in the Air Force. But I am not having you in the Forces. I have heard that girls go into the Forces for the entertainment of the officers. And that is not for you." My mother said.

I was not sure at all what mother meant about the officer, but that is how it was.

A letter came from the Manpower office. It was considered my brother and I should remain on the farm or join the Land Army. Both positions we were ably experienced to fulfil satisfactorily. I did not like the man from the Manpower office, or his advice.

Perhaps my parents thought Ivor, their only son would enlist if I left the farm. It was a big property, too much for dad to manage by himself. They had pioneered the farm and Ivor was the only son.

"You must listen to what your mother has to say. We know the girls are joining up. Jean Stone has gone into the Navy, Esma Ball into the Army only this week. But you settle down and be grateful for what you have." Said my dad.

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For two years I pestered my parents. I was the fourth daughter. Lorna was married; Wilna and Verna were manpowered to nursing duties. Ivor, Norma and I lived on Lyndhurst with Nat and Dorothy Ball at Gnowangerup.

No doubt I was happy at home. My parents are kind and loving. My restlessness was healthy. I wanted to do my own thing.

My dream came true, when my dad was allocated two Italian Prisoners of war. Captured in the Middle East they were sent to work on the farm for the duration of the war. Tony and Rosaline would never know but their arrival on the farm was followed by a letter from the Air Force calling Ivor and I to the recruiting office. Ivor was sent to the Air Crew training centre at Clontarf, and I was sent to the WAAAF centre at the Karrinyup Golf Club.

I learned to appreciate the discipline my parents had instilled in me. I learned to march, to salute and to sleep on hard beds with palliasses of straw. I had injections and inoculations and slept between grey blankets, minus sheets. I thrilled to the music of the brass band and loved my navy blue uniform. I ate from enamel plates and drank from enamel mugs.

On Graduation Day I saw my first male Officers and they looked harmless enough to me. I was posted to Point Cook, the coldest place on earth. I trained as a cipher assistant and was promoted to Corporal. I was posted to RO4 on Albert Park Lake on Melbourne.

My mother was wrong, I was never asked to entertain any Officer. I thoroughly enjoyed my days as WAAAF, 113257, Corporal Ball U.L Conduct Excellent.