

## **Pauline Prosser (nee Permain)**

### **Night tales from Nedlands**

In 1933, My father and mother (Harry and Eloise Permain) were employed by the Nedlands Golf Club to manage the affairs of the Golf Club and tend to the needs of the members and associates.

In 1939, War was declared and my father volunteered his services to the Army but as he was too old for Active Service (he had already served in the 10<sup>th</sup> Light Horse and the 5<sup>th</sup> Camel Corps in the First World War), he joined the 5<sup>th</sup> Garrison, and was stationed at Swanbourne and Swan Barracks in Perth. My mother continued her employment at the Golf Club with the help of temporary staff.

In about 1942 an Anti-aircraft Gun Emplacement and Searchlight Site was positioned by the Army on the corner of Stanley and Melvista Avenue, opposite the Golf Club, this being the highest point in the area. There were approximately 25 soldiers stationed there and they camped on the grounds of the Golf Club, alongside the two-storey white brick building of the Clubhouse. Several times a week my mother would invite a few of the soldiers to our table to partake of a home cooked meal with my brother Keith and myself. As the soldiers were mostly from the Eastern States, they really enjoyed this meal.

I might add also that the Nedlands Golf Club was the only Club in W.A. that had its own swimming pool, and this was used of an evening by the soldiers to cool off after a hard day of training. The use of the golf course was also extended to them if they had a need of a relaxing game of golf.

All the local youngsters used to gather around of an evening when searchlight practise was held, and to see all those beams of light crossing the sky was a sight to behold, even if some of us were too young to realise what it was all about at the time.

At the same time there was an American Flying Base situated at Crawley at Pelican Point and these flying Catalina seaplanes used to take off at dawn two and three times a week for the North-western coast of W.A and elsewhere on patrol. We used to say a prayer for them when we heard them fly over our heads and then breathe a sigh of relief when they returned safe and sounds a few days later.

Even though, as children, we never really felt the effects of the War, the housewives had to divide their food rationing coupons – tea, sugar, butter and meat, from one month to the next, to make sure that the family had enough food to go around.

Clothes rationing coupons were also issued and new clothes were a No No, we all had to make do with “hand-me-downs” regardless of whether they were boys or girls clothes at the time.

Sweets and chocolates were practically non-existent and unless you had a member of the family in the armed services, they were few and far between. I might add that occasionally we received the odd chocolate bar from the soldiers when they came for a meal.

Petrol of course was well and truly rationed, and many cars – if you were lucky enough to have one, had 'Gas Producers' at the rear of their car, and this helped to supplement their petrol. Push bikes were well and truly the form of transport for the majority of persons.

In regard to the surroundings at the Clubhouse, there were slit trenches placed along the many fairways, to stop the enemy planes, if and when they reached this far, from landing. Luckily they never did. There were also slit trenches placed outside the Clubhouse on the lawns as the street running past the clubhouse was a main bus route.

Some homes had air raid shelters built in their back yards, or otherwise a slit trench was dug in the back yard. As there was plenty of room in people's yards, it was no problem for these to be dug.

Housewives kept a ready stock of food, torches, blankets etc. handy in case of emergencies, together with first aid kits. There were also air raid warnings and practises and on day (when it was practise and not the real things, and not hearing the first warning blast, my mother thought it was real, and together with other staff members, she grabbed the safe takings, and held it under her apron and rushed downstairs and jumped into the slit trench to emerge later on when the 'All Clear' went.

During the war, whilst going to school in Perth, we were all made to carry first-aid bags over our shoulders and were shown how to use gasmasks if called for at any time whilst at school. All the buildings in Perth had to have blackouts and there were no street lights after sunset. Our homes had to have blackouts across our windows and large strips of brown sticky paper placed across any large windows to prevent shattering in case of bomb blasts. There was as yet no T.V. All our news came from the old mantel model or cabinet wireless sets, and these were the focal point for families to gather at news time every evening, to keep up to date with the progress of news from overseas and how our troops were doing.

Being only in my early teen during the War, my friends and I were not too much aware of the seriousness of the actual events, but in later years, we were to bless the faith that everyone had in the Powers That Be, and that we came through safe and sound.

When peace was declared, schools were closed for the day, whistles were blown, bells were rung, there was dancing in the streets and general euphoria all round – everyone had huge smiles across their faces, and a state of jubilation existed all round. If any Service Personnel were seen, they were all given hugs and kisses and congratulated on a job well done.

All in all, my memories of 1939-1945 were memorable, and thank goodness for all those brave men and women who helped bring peace and goodwill to our country and home.