
Thelma Jean Stewart

I joined the W.A.A.A.F. in July 1944 when I became 18 years of age. I had an average education and in my older years I attended Perth Girls School on the top of Plain Street. I was an equipment assistant and was placed in various sections, but quite often I worked in the hangars, checking planes for any parts which needed being replaced. I enlisted because in those days if you weren't in uniform or serving your country a white feather was placed in your letterbox.

I did my rookies training at Karrinyup Golf course which was taken over by the R.A.A.F. After our completion of training, we had a Passing Out Parade. We were supposed to be photographed, but the girl who was the photographer broke her ankle when she was walking across the cattle grid so we missed out.

We were given our postings after the Parade which was attended by our relations and the R.A.A.F. did a fly-over. I was posted to Ascot Vale in Melbourne Victoria and was stationed there for approximately 15 months and later I was posted to Boulder (WA), Merredin, and in 1946 I was sent to Perth for a discharge. I would have liked to serve overseas but unfortunately we only remained in Australia. I enjoyed my time in the W.A.A.A.F. where I made many friends and got to travel around. The people in Melbourne were quite indifferent to us and not very friendly, whereas the people in Kalgoorlie were most friendly and every morning on the Parade Ground, some names were called out and were told that some families were willing to be our hosts for the week-end, and were taken on various outings and treated like one of the family which we certainly appreciated. I heard about the end of the war on the radio and was very happy to know our boys would be coming home again, but we felt very sorry that some people had nothing to celebrate because they had lost their loved ones, but that is war, unfortunately.

When I arrived home, at first I felt like a fish out of water because we had always been told when to get up, how to dress, when to eat, do our jobs and when to go to bed, but after a short while I was settled down and got used to wearing high heels again.

I had various jobs, waitressing, as a factory hand, as a fare collector on the buses where I met my future husband and who I finally married, and I managed to have him employed as a driver, because he would be coming home from work and I would be setting off to start my shift on the buses.

Sadly, we broke up after 8 years of marriage and he went to Sydney. I had two children, a boy and a girl and I brought them up single-handedly. I worked at a lot of jobs including at the GPO so I could feed them and give them a good education.

I am now 78 years old and I am disabled because I took up smoking during my years in the service and now suffer from emphysema (shortness of breath) and I have a bad heart. I cannot walk for very long because my legs make me stagger, but I know there are many people who are a lot worse off than I am, but I do wish my memory and hearing were sharper but that is the usual as one gets older.

Mrs Thelma Stewart

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I now live with my son. He does the food shopping, the cooking and the dishes and Saturday he does the weekly wash, so I am very lucky.