

JOAN MACLEAN (NEE ALBOROUGH) – for the AIM Archives

Joan was born on 23.12.1909 in England. At the age of 5 she immigrated to Australia with her parents, William James and Catherine Alborough and her two sisters, Phyllis and Cecily. She grew up in Bondi NSW. On leaving school, Joan worked in an office for six years, until she was old enough to train as a nurse.

Hazel Wallis, one of Joan's dearest friends from training days, went nursing in Marble Bar and inspired Joan to join her there when her training was complete. In 1938/ 1939 she joined Hazel in Marble Bar. Joan eventually became Matron of the hospital but, I understand, that was after the hospital became a Government enterprise rather than an AIM hospital. Joan and Hazel remained close friends until Hazel's death.

Joan married William Gordon Maclean (known as Bill) in Port Hedland on 11.1.1941. They had three children - Harry William, Catherine and Ailsa. In the late 1940s Bill's health was a concern so the family moved south to Adelaide. Bill, however couldn't tolerate the southern cold, so he ventured north to find work in the little mining town of Tennant Creek. Once he had found a house, the family followed. Living conditions in both Marble Bar and Tennant Creek were very meagre by today's standards, but we three children were always clothed and fed and happy.

During 1950/51, when there was a shortage of staff, Joan worked at the Tennant Creek hospital. However, she stopped when Bill's employment required him to be away from home during the week. Crèche facilities were certainly not heard of at that time.

All three of the Maclean children attended the Tennant Creek School to complete their primary schooling. However, secondary education was not available in Tennant Creek until the late 1950s, so they were sent to Boarding School in Queensland.

At this time, Joan ventured into a new career, becoming a qualified school teacher by training (and studying) "on the job" under the supervision of the school's Principal. This type of training Joan referred to as "Pressure Cooker Training". Her change of career direction was possibly instigated by (a) her love of children and imparting knowledge to them, (b) the school often being understaffed and thus there was a need and (c) the extra income helped with school fees.

Joan taught in the Tennant Creek School for about twenty years, eventually teaching the children of some of her first grade 2 students! She was a very much loved teacher – going the extra mile to ensure that her charges had the best she could give them. She had a special interest in helping students who had difficulty learning to read and during her final years at the school, taught a class of children who had learning difficulties

Joan would have liked to continue teaching but at the time women were expected to retire at the age of 60. However, she continued to contribute to children's learning by researching and writing information booklets to be used in conjunction with specific units of work in the "Social Studies Curriculum" She also spent time, working in a voluntary capacity, to assist teachers in helping students who had difficulty developing literacy skills.

Over her 30+ years in Tennant Creek, Joan contributed significantly to the wellbeing of the community. She was a fore-runner of the "Keep Australia Beautiful" campaign and I still have an image of her walking down the main street of the town carrying a string bag and picking up any papers, bottles or cans that had been dropped. At first people were puzzled by Joan's project, but her efforts to promote community pride in the town and its environment gathered momentum...and the rest, as they say, is history.....

Her other community interests included her involvement in the Prison Reform Group, The Arts Council, the Historical Society and of course the Church.

Joan's Christian Faith underpinned her whole life and perspective on living. In Tennant Creek she started the Sunday school for the children in the town. This took place every Sunday at the A.I.M. hall, and gradually the numbers grew and other people in the town joined in with the running of classes.

For many years Joan was the person all visiting clergymen went to when they arrived in the town. She always made herself available to play the organ or piano for services, no matter the denomination

In 1984 Joan was awarded the Order of Australia Medal for her services to the Tennant Creek community. This was presented to Joan at Government House in Adelaide.

Joan and Bill moved to Adelaide in 1982/3? where they were in closer contact with relatives and the environment was less harsh for an aging couple. Bill was diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease and dementia not long after they came to Adelaide and Joan cared for him for as long as she could before doctors advised that nursing home accommodation for Bill would be a better option for them both. Bill died in 1990.

Joan herself continued to live in her own home. Her generous, gregarious, friendly nature never changed, and even when she eventually went into a nursing home, aged 90, she maintained old friendships while developing new ones.

Joan died in May 2003