

Growing Up at Willow Court by Margaret Bratt

Welcome to the 'Walking through Time' podcasts. There are plenty more to make your visit to New Norfolk more enjoyable.

Came here as I child, I think 1936/37. Stayed at the Freemasons Hotel because our furniture hadn't arrived to come and live in the house cause my dad was going to be one of the doctors here. The first night we were here the hospital had a band. So they came on the front lawn and played for us kids, which we thought was absolutely, settling us in beautiful and we loved the place from then on.

We met Dr Brothers children, kids Peter and Margaret and Tony, and we all used to go down the creek, and play in the creek, that was our playground. I had the tennis court on my back fence, so I was literally was born with a tennis court in my hand. Went to the state school, then went to the Convent School and then went to boarding school in Hobart.

Mum always had a patient, a male patient to do all the gardening. She didn't have a lady patient to help her in the house, she did all the housework herself but, all our vegetables were free, well I suppose it cost Dad about a dollar per year for the rent. Our vegetables were all free, our wood was all free. The woodsheds have all gone now. The garage is gone, and then the war came and we had to move out of here, and go up onto Barnett Avenue, and they put another doctor in. But when Dad came home from the Prisoner of War camp, he didn't last very long because he was full of TB, and he couldn't do anything for the troops, and the Japs had no medicine, he couldn't even fix them. So when he came home we came back down to this house.

But the place was immaculate. That avenue, you could walk down that avenue and there wouldn't be a crumb, or a match. One of the patients that was his job. Every patient seemed to have a job and his job was to keep the leaves, pick up all the leaves, and he never stopped from the time, breakfast, dinner and tea he was cleaning up.

A lot of the patients worked where they repaired their shoes, they mended all their clothes, baked all their own bread, grew all their own vegetables, it was self-contained, they did everything. I don't think they ever needed – milk, they had their own milk. Oh, you'll love the story about the milk cart. Down at Frascati, they had hedges that went around the whole area, big area that round the garden, so he would bring his horse and cart round with the milk, and then he probably came to us later, and while he was inside having a cup of tea, one of the lady patients in Brotherson house gave him a cup of tea, we would move the horse and cart, much to his horror when he came out again. 'Bloody kids! Look what they're wearing!' and every time we did it we could find a new spot, poor old Mr Dan.

We played football on the oval with the patients. Ahh, they didn't play cricket. We played tennis a lot with the staff but I was never allowed, my father said to me, 'the tennis court wasn't put there for you, it was put there for the staff'. So we used to have somebody on watch in the avenue to make, when he was coming up the avenue at 5 o'clock at night to go down to the pub and have a beer, and they'd say to me 'Quick Marg, get inside. Hide. Here comes your Dad'. So, I'd have to come off the tennis court.

The matron called us over, just Brothers kids and our kids, over to her cottage on Christmas Day. She made coconut ice, bars of coconut ice, and every Christmas we had to go over there. And she was a really dear old darling, and she was a tiny little thing, always wore black. I don't know why old women had to wear black in those days, it was revealing their age. So we used to like going over there and getting all this lovely coconut ice. And then Christmas Day we'd have, Mum would be

slaving away in that terrible kitchen over a wood stove. We did finally get electricity, an electric stove. The government gave us an electric stove after the war.

During the war, Peat brothers had this wonderful idea that the Japanese would be coming here and so we would have to be prepared. So we went right up the top of the hill, the back of the hospital where the wood yard used to be further up and we built a hut up there out of gum. And we took cocoa and sugar, and anything we could sort of get out of the kitchen that wouldn't rot. And we had it all stored up there ready and I think it would have probably lasted a couple of days. We had no bedding up there, we were just going to lie on the gum.

The other thing that happened, during the war was, across the road were the Barma boys. Between us, we built an air raid shelter. So we got all the shovels and the picks and, they had a paddock there which has probably been built over now. We built a straight line tunnel, which filled up with water, didn't it? We had one down at the school, at St Brigid's school. I don't think they had one down at the state school, underneath all the pine trees, and that was full of water. And Mrs Brothers, that's all she did all day, was make camouflage nets and smoke. She never stopped smoking. Well, we all did in those days, anyway. I was one of them.

That beautiful creek down there, when the hydro came and put some new poles up, they were rounded with bark. So, the men cut them so they were in half like canoes, so we grabbed all those and we used them in the creek for our canoes. We thought we were marvellous. I don't know how we blocked off each end, we must have done something, put mud or rocks or something there. But there was always something to do. We weren't climbing trees, and playing tennis and playing football with the patients. There was always something. We had a great old time.

And under Frascati, Peter decided we would pick all Mum's raspberries and make some wine. We stored it all under the house, I don't think they ever knew that there was a proper cellar there. We found the door and anyway, we got in there – you have never tasted anything so vile. It had a mould on top, and Pete said 'it's supposed to have a mould on top, we'll just scrape the mould off and have a drink of it'. Well, oh my god, there might have been a bit of water, but sugar, no, no sugar, just that.

The walking through time project has been made possible through the assistance of the Australian Governments 'Your Community Heritage' program and funding from the Derwent Valley Council. We would like to thank the many members of the public who have given freely of their thoughts and memories to make this project a success.