

## PLOD ESSAY: Beatrice Ridley, Rose Lodge's first Supervisor

In 1974, The Wonthaggi & District Elderly Home's Committee established a nine-bed aged care hostel plus four flats for independent living on a site situated at the end of Court Street. The site had been a pine plantation of Crown Land next to the hospital – the boundaries being Graham and Baillieu Streets and the adjoining lane. It had been a wonderful playground for kids, and for family picnics, as well as a place for courting couples and cover for the 'look-out-man', who with his gun was guarding the state Mine Payroll when it passed on its way from the bank to the mine. Now it was to be an elderly citizens home and aged-care facility.

The nine elderly people, who took up the beds, along with my mother, Beatrice Ridley, the home's first supervisor, named their new residence, Rose Lodge.

It had been a long-time coming. A public meeting held 27 April 1961 was the first step in providing special housing and care of the aged in Wonthaggi. It wasn't until 7 June 1965 that tender was accepted from W.S. Purvis & Co. for £16,717 (\$33,434) to build "The Pines", the first building for the Aged in the District, but it was essentially inadequate and it was not long before it was realised more must be done.

Nine years later, a new hostel was built to the cost of \$105,000, which was to be completed in June 1974, but articles in the *Sentinel Times*, revealed that \$7,500 was still owing on the building and the mayor, Cr G Mortimer, was to launch an appeal at a public meeting to wipe off the debt. After the meeting, forty collectors took part in a Sunday door-knock to raise money for the Elderly Citizen's Home Appeal. The appeal was apparently a success for the new hostel was completed.

Three months earlier, on 7 March, an advertisement had been in *Sentinel Times* announcing the need for a "Hostel Supervisor".

The ad noted the qualifications for such a person: "Whilst preference may be given to the appointment of a person with nursing experience, this should not deter people without training from applying. The basic criterion for appointment will be a genuine understanding and concern for the needs of elderly people."

My mother always said to us that she just wanted to look after others, "as I would like my mother and father cared for. In other words I wanted to treat everyone as I would Mum and Dad." Maybe that is exactly what she told the Committee when she applied for the job for she became the first Hostel Supervisor, and, from the moment the Hostel opened, she ensured that Rose Lodge was a real home for all in her care. She was paid \$30.00 a week, which was the amount a pensioner could earn and still keep their pension. A self-contained flat, which had been built at the end of the Hostel, was included as part of her salary. She had two days off, but only after the breakfast duty and back in time to prepare tea. (Sometime later Marion McRobert was employed for the two days off with Mum being there



Beatrice Roberts Ridley  
7<sup>th</sup> January 1911 to 13<sup>th</sup> July 2002

overnight).

Marie Coleman, the Minister from Canberra, officially opened the new hostel. She unveiled a plaque that was placed by the front entrance and planted a tree in the front garden. The hostel was fully furnished with wall-to-wall carpets ready to receive the first nine residents chosen from thirty-eight applicants. There is no record of how the residents were chosen but it is clear there was consultation with medical and social needs taken into consideration. No bonds or monies were required up front just a percentage of the pension paid for a resident's up-keep. Each resident had their own room and there were two shared bathrooms – one Ladies and one Gents. The residents had to be able to vacuum their own

room, make their bed and look after their own personal laundry.

As Supervisor, Mum was responsible for the complete running of the hostel, all cleaning, all meals except the main meal at lunchtime which came from the hospital kitchen – Mum had to help the residents choose their meal from a menu provided by the hospital and then phone in the list to the kitchen. The hospital laundry took care of the bed linen and towels weekly. When residents were ill, Mum looked after them, and took them to the Doctor. My sister, Jenny and I were often called to drive residents to appointments. Also, as residents became frailer we were called upon to help change beds, vacuum rooms, and, at times, if Mum was ill, we would fill-in to prepare breakfast, tea,, etc. On the odd occasion I stayed overnight when Mum had an overnight hospital stay. There just wasn't a back-up plan for these hick-up in her job description so Mum just called on family.

Mum did spoil her Rose Lodge Family. She would give them breakfast in bed if they wanted to rest; she would do laundry for the Bruntons as Mrs Brunton was clinically blind; she would put on Christmas for any residents who didn't have family celebrations to attend.

Since Mum treated them like family, I remember all of the first residents: Mr & Mrs Brunton, Mr Johnson, Mr Russell, Mr Cordon, Mr Grabham, Mrs Denier, Mrs Newton & Mrs Jennings. Mum had Foon's take a lovely photo of them all together for the wall. She used to buy bits and pieces to make the place like home. The Wonthaggi Aid Society donated a black-and-white TV set early in the piece. On New Year's eve we would take all the residents and Mum to our home to watch the Edinburgh Tatoo on our colour TV and have supper. I don't know if she bought the piano or if it was donated, but Mum would have had something to do with it being there. My Grandfather had been a wonderful pianist and Mum carried on the tradition of singing around the piano at Rose Lodge. Fred Thompson, a Physio for the blind at the hospital used to come and entertain on the piano. It was also used for Catholic Mass and when Hazel Cattel held Anglican Services at the hostel.

Our children used to love spending time with their grandmother as she did her duties at Rose Lodge. They were welcomed by the residents and interacted with them. Paul even helped Mr

Grabham build the wonderful large letterbox at the front. Ian was fascinated with the shower, which was a handheld one, unlike any he had ever seen.

Mum allowed residents to bake or garden just like they would at home. Mr Grabham was a great gardener and planted out the beautiful rose garden in the front with the bushes both he and Mum paid for. I used to have a plan of the position of each rose and its name. He may have taken Mum's generosity too far when he took over the outside store room for his gardening stuff with lots of manure and tubs filled with liquid fertilizer, but he did have a great vegie patch and the roses were a credit to him.

There are some funny incidents I remember: Mr Russell and Mr Cordon had a duel with their walking sticks one day after some fallout; one day Mum sent out an SOS that Mrs Denier had to be carried out to a taxi and the driver refused to do it. A memorable day was an excursion by an intrepid pair to find out if it was a good idea to take the residents on a walk to the Back Beach for a picnic as they were all longing to do. After Sunday lunch Mum and Mr Grabham set off with sunhats and oranges ready for their journey.

It must have been about 5:30 when my bedraggled mother arrived at our door as asked if we would go get Mr Grabham from Reed Crescent after we took her to the Hostel. The two of them had made it to the beach, taken off their shoes for a paddle, but a large wave took Mr Grabham's shoes and oranges out of reach. The long walk home with no shoes took a toll on his feet, so Mum tied their sunhats onto them. At the Rifle Range end of Reed Crescent Mr Grabham refused to walk another step. He sat down and put his feet in the big drain to soothe them in the water. That's where we found him. The residents made their own meal that evening and the proposed trip to the back beach was cancelled.

I can't remember exactly when Mum retired as Supervisor, perhaps late 1976 or early 1977. Ten years later on 10 January 2000, Mum became a resident of Rose Lodge, a year later we held her 90<sup>th</sup> birthday party there. She stayed until mid 2001 when it was time for hospital and aged care for her. She died in the Wonthaggi & District Hospital 13 July 2002.

*This is an edited version of the story presented to W&DHS by Barbara Robertson, Beatrice's daughter.*