

MAY 2026 PLOD ESSAY

More than a dressmaker!!! Sylvia Stibbs

Sylvia Stibbs, was the daughter of Wilfred and Edith Stibbs. She was born in 1919 and lived her whole life in Wonthaggi. Sylvia attended the local State Primary School and Wonthaggi Technical School before beginning her dressmaking career as an apprentice to local tailor, Mr Frank Hartley, for five years. At the same time, she attended night school classes in dressmaking and design in Melbourne. Sylvia also graduated from the Bambi Smith modelling and charm school. Sylvia died on 4th April 1999.

Wonthaggi & District Historical Society's interest in Sylvia and her achievements was sparked when we received a wonderful donation from her great nephew,



Sylvia Stibbs modelling the dress and the dress exhibited in the Railway Station Museum

Leigh Cloak, a dress, designed and made in response to a Myer Emporium competition in Melbourne. The stunning frock was sewn then the fabric was hand stenciled. It is breathtakingly beautiful. Myer wanted to buy the dress but Sylvia refused the offer. The frock has, for many years, been carefully stored by the family and passed down through her decedents. This frock is now part of the Society's collection and is on display in the Museum.

Some of her notable competition wins include

- 1964 being State finalist in a nationwide baking competition conducted by "Women's Weekly". Her recipe for "Rock Candy Mountain" cake was one of six selected from thousands.
- 1965 her considerable general knowledge won her \$2500 furniture and electrical goods on the TV show "Feather your nest".
- 1971 there was the trip to Paris she won in a contest run by New Idea, a popular women's magazine. New Idea readers were asked to identify a Coco Chanel drawing from three sketches; and in 25 words describe her fashions. Sylvia had no difficulty in identifying the style of the woman she describes as the mother of *French* fashion. With flair, typical of Miss Stibbs, a Coco Chanel miniature outfit was made and attached to her entry

- 1973 The South Gippsland Sentinel Times, 5/7/1973 states "Look what the dressmaker won!.....a \$600 mink stole". She won it in a national magazine's 50-word competition as to why she would like to win the stole – the reason was for her mother to wear it to her grandson, Lew Arthur's wedding.
- There was trip to the United States she won through a basketball promotion.
- A trip in Kathmandu was won for her nephew Lew Arthur.
- Sylvia won a trophy in a Chili cook-off in the United States.
- Other winnings were an English electric cooking range, also an automatic frypan. Sylvia adapted her winning recipe, Golden Glow Cake from an old American recipe to win the cooking competitions. More wins included a microwave oven, other electrical goods, a kitchen, wallpaper, curtains and a host of other wins she has forgotten.



★

A half-guinea prize goes to Miss (or is it Mrs.) Sylvia Stibbs, of Hunter st., Wonthaggi, who suggests:

When buying seedlings, take along one of those plastic food bags which are commonly used these days for wrapping food in the refrigerator.

Place the seedlings in the bag, and they won't wilt in even the hottest of weather, and they'll be as fresh as the moment you bought them.

WONTHAGGI COMPETITIONS

WONTHAGGI, Thursday.—The Wonthaggi musical, elocutionary, and dancing competitions were continued at the town hall to-day. Awards:—Recitation, under 10 years.—Thomas Gannon, 1; Gweneth Plummer, 2. Song, 12 years.—Alsa McKenzie, 1; Edna Handley, 2. Recitation, under 12 years.—Leslie Ross, 1; Thomas Gannon, 2. Piano Solo, 14 years and under.—Sylvia Stibbs, 1; Jill Martin, 2. Prepared Reading, 12 years and under.—Leslie Ross, 1; Thomas Gannon, 2. Piano Solo, under 16.—Margaret Brown, 1; Jill Martin, 2. Recitation, no tuition.—Grace McCulloch, 1; Doreen Irvine, 2. Piano Solo, under 12 years.—Jill Martin, 1; Joan Moore, 2. Recitation, under 14 years.—Leslie Thorn, 1; Rayma Norris, 2. Piano Solo.—Doris Sutherland, 1; Thomas Gannon, 2. Impromptu Reading (open)—Leslie Thorn, 1; Sylvia Stibbs, 2. Champion Recital (open), serious and humorous.—Rayma Norris, 1; Sylvia Stibbs, 2. Champion Solo.—Ronald Dickinson, 1; Sylvia Stibbs, 2. Violin Solo (open)—Linda Humphries, 1; Margaret Williams, 2. Juvenile Choir Championship.—Wonthaggi State School, 1; St. Joseph's School, 2.

Piano Solo 14 y.o Sylvia Stibbs

Prize Winning

PRIZE winners of THE ARGUS "S" recipe competition for July have been

The first prize, awarded to Mrs Sylvia Stibbs, of 46 Hunter st., Wonthaggi (V), has given us a most useful and delicious "snack" recipe.

These orange cases should be a welcome contribution to a children's party menu. They are colourful and different, easy to prepare, and doing double duty. The orange flesh may be added to a fruit salad for a sweet to follow, or try it just sugared and sprinkled with coconut.

ORANGE CASE FISH CREAM

6 oranges.
1 dessert-spoon butter,
1 tablespoon flour,
½-pint milk.
1 bay leaf.
1 tin salmon or whitebait,
1 teaspoon lemon juice.

Wash oranges, dry, cut off tops, and scoop out flesh. Melt butter, stir in flour, when smooth, add warm milk. Stir until thick. Add fish and lemon juice. Fill orange cases with mixture, sprinkle tops with grated cheese and pepper. Dot with butter. Bake 15 minutes to brown tops. Serve with fingers

awarded to Mrs Sylvia Stibbs, of Latrobe, T. that curry is a delicious done front of the f

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Sylvia was also a short-wave radio enthusiast regularly communicating with operators throughout the world.

Photo / article South Gippsland Sentinel Times September 18, 1975.

"Voice of Germany invited listeners to write saying which place they would like to visit in Germany; what German product they would like to buy, who they would like to meet etc. Miss Stibbs said Heidelberg and backed it with reasons. And unlike so many who wanted to buy a Mercedes-Benz, she nominated a sewing machine. Every second person wanted to meet Willie Brandt, she nominated James Last."

Later in the article Miss Stibbs stated she corresponds with other national radio stations in Europe and irked by the lack of Australian news, dropped Mrs Whitlam a line. Back came a prompt reply commending Miss Stibbs for her interest and referring her to the Minister for the Media. Quoting directly from the press article "Australia does not miss out overseas, now; thanks to a proud Australian at 46 Hunter St, Wonthaggi." *In fact, the interest German Press and radio showed in Fraulein Stibbs at the German Consulate in Melbourne last week, a little South Gippsland town could get quite a wrap!"*



Sylvia enjoyed a diverse range of interests. A politically active member for the Labor Party, she was the first to take part in a lively debate. Photography, show card writing, in which she had done a course and piano playing were also amongst Miss Stibbs accomplishments. She had a musical background; her mother was a music teacher and her father was a singer.

Sylvia, who looked after her mother until her death in 1979, remained single. She enjoyed a close relationship with her sister Edith, her nephew, niece and their children. Loved ones described her as a great communicator.

Fay Quilford
May 8, 2026

