

11<sup>th</sup> March 2016

## HASTINGS BLOSSOM FESTIVAL IN 1959.

I was twenty and working in the Wellington Public Library when it came up for discussion at morning tea that in a fortnight's time the four Blossom Festival trains would be going up to the Hastings Blossom Festival. The trains were to leave at seven pm on the Friday night and would travel all night to arrive in Hastings at seven am the Saturday morning. We would have all day at the Festival to see the parade, the Highland Dancing, the bands and the marvellous flowering trees everywhere then at seven pm that night we would re-board the train for the trip back to Wellington arriving back at the station at about seven am Sunday.

We found that the price for the ticket was very reasonable and when I talked to friends at the St Peter's Anglican Church Bible Class in Wellington I discovered for five shillings we could have breakfast at St Matthews Church in Hastings and use it as a base. So for about ten shillings each way we could book and go. On the train both ways.

There was great discussion from the seven of us who decided to go as to what to wear, take and how we would sleep, change our clothes, wash etc. Some wanted to take sleeping bags and blankets and pillows and suitcases but when it was pointed out to us that we needed to carry everything ourselves we quickly altered our baggage to a reasonable size. We decided to all take sandwiches and cold drinks mainly of the cordial nature. There was supposed to be no alcohol allowed. I had to actually go out and buy a pair of slacks as I didn't have any. Frocks and skirts were the order of the day for young women at that time.

We duly arrived at the station in plenty of time and found our seats. The carriages were all of the old fashioned style of four seats – two facing each other. That meant there was a bit of space to store things under the back of the seats on the floor and on the roof rack above. There we grabbed two lots of these facing seats and had to put up with a pimply faced boy who had the eighth seat. We weren't very happy about that but in the end he did fit in very well and actually looked after us when some other young men from the carriage who did have alcohol wanted us to swap seats and go and sit with them. We were just lucky that our carriage did have a toilet on our end of it but it only had cold water in the hand basin.

I don't think we really had that much sleep on the way but when we did arrive in Hastings there was much rushing around, mirrors out of handbags, clothing patted down to make sure we did look ready or Hastings. We went off the train in groups and found our way to the Church hall where they did have a lovely welcome breakfast waiting for us. We were very pleased that we could leave some of our belongings in a lockable side room for the day so we then set off to walk right down the length of Heretaunga St and over into St Aubyn St at the end to go to see the Highland Dancing in Windsor Park. Most of us had never seen any before and we thought it was very grand. There were an enormous number of people everywhere

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and you continually had to go round or through many groups of happy holidaymakers. Box brownie cameras were the order of the day and I wished I had one too. Everywhere we went were a huge number of blossom trees out in full bloom of quite a variety of colours. Far more so than what there are today. We walked back to Heretaunga St to watch the marvellous parade at noon and most of the huge number of floats were covered in blossom or flowers of every size and shape.

There were several bands, lots of clowns, and riders on decorated bicycles, and prams everywhere. We really didn't miss anything and had lots of flags, sweets, balloons, and stalls to get fruit and other edibles from during the parade. There were several lots of jugglers and we stood and watched them by the kerbside. I have no idea really of how long the actual parade went for as everywhere we went we met someone we knew or recognised off the train as we all had a train label to show we were from Wellington. I met two cousins from in Havelock North and they introduced me to other people who were friends of theirs. Even after the parade had finished there was still a lot of the band music going on. I lost my watch and had to find the Police Station and I was so pleased as someone had handed it in from Windsor Park. The police had a huge container full of lost property that had been handed in but fortunately mine had my name on the back so it was easy to identify.

Late in the afternoon we returned to the Church Hall and they had put on a tea for us – nearly all the parish had brought a plate of something for us to we were not at all hungry as we returned to the train close to seven. As we got on we were all given small baskets of mixed fruit. I cannot remember what it consisted of but it was a very good ending to a great day.

The homeward train left sharp at seven and most carriages were very much quieter on the way back to Wellington. There were a few gaps. Some who missed the train completely so I was able to have a whole seat to myself. We did all have different stories to tell and everyone had a different view of the dancing and the parade but most decided then and there to go again the following year.

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