

LIFE WITHOUT FATHER
(A HOME FROM HOME?)

Extract From
DOWN MEMORY LANE
by
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(nee Newman)

I was barely seven years old when our mother died and my brother was only three. My two sisters were twelve and thirteen. Our mother had been in for quite some time but nevertheless her death in 1924 came as a dreadful shock to all of us, and completely disrupted our whole family. Father sent a telegram to his sister Ada who lived in Auckland and she came to look after us for a while. She could not stay indefinitely however, so he arranged for us to be admitted to the Hawke's Bay Children's Home in Napier. There was no family support in those days and as he was a working man he could not look after us himself nor could he afford a house-keeper.

Aunt Ada was very busy the next few weeks sorting and checking all our clothes and marking each garment with our names. Our little brother's clothes were packed separately, as for the first time in our lives we were to be parted from him, although mercifully we did not yet know this. He was to go to the Boy's Home, which was up on the hill a short distance from the girls. No way could boys and girls be allowed to live together even though they were only children and henceforth we would be able to see our brother only when our father came to visit. Only four years old and he had not only lost a much loved mother but was also taken from his sisters and placed among strangers. I have often wondered who suffered the most at that time, him, us, or our father, who could not have been very happy with the decision he had to make. He loved his children and was a good father but just felt that under the circumstances he could not cope and was doing the best thing for us all.

It was with very mixed feelings and much trepidation that we entered the Orphanage grounds through the high iron barred gates and had our first glimpse of the three storied old place which was now to be our future home. The driver of the cab our father had hired, helped to carry our luggage to the door where we were met by the Matron who wore a white frock with a white veil on her head. Her usual attire we were to discover, as she had been a nursing sister in the great war and apparently still liked to look the part. She ushered us to her office, which also doubled as staff room and we waited while father completed the necessary formalities. This done, he said goodbye to us all and promised to come and see us soon, exhorting us all to be good children. Then he was gone, back to the waiting cab and we were alone with our immediate future, be what it may. She surveyed us without a word for a few minutes- Three weebegone crying children, uncertain of what may happen next. There was no attempt to comfort us, I don't think she would have known how. Instead she said briskly, "Now stop crying and come along to meet the other children".

Where our brother was we did not yet know, though he had gone with our father in the cab. Our bags were whisked away into an upstairs closet, and that was the last we saw of the clothes our aunt had so carefully prepared. Our pretty frocks were later taken from us and disappeared into the same closet. We were never to wear them again, but were put into other faded hand-me-downs belonging to the Orphanage. Actually the place was not an Orphanage in the true sense of the word because few of the children there were really orphans. Some had only one parent living, or came from broken homes where the parents were separated.

Still tearful, but also curious enough to take stock of our surroundings, we followed the Matron upstairs to the next floor, then along a passage and out the back door, to a covered yard. Beyond this was a path to another building away from the main house. This was a two storied place, the lower floor of which was used as a playroom and the upper one divided into cubicles as sleeping quarters for the older girls who were known as house-girls. The play-room seemed to be full of younger children and the chatter of their voices ceased suddenly as the Matron appeared in the doorway with us in tow. Over a dozen pairs of eyes gazed curiously in our direction as the Matron introduced us by name then left us to get acquainted. My two older sisters were soon chatting like old friends to a group which gathered round them, while I hung back shyly. Presently I felt a small warm hand grasp mine as its owner said "You can play with me if you like, I will be your friend!" I looked at her with a tearful smile and saw a snub-nosed little six year old with very blonde hair and a deep dimple denting each cheek as she smiled. We became instant friends and remained so through the years until we were adults. Out of all those children there was just one other child with whom I became really friendly- a pretty little girl with dark wavy hair. Our friendship also stood the test of time and to this day we are still close. This girl was a natural leader, which at times was misunderstood by some of the others, who thought her a bit of a bossy boots. As I have come to know her better through the years I have realized that her assertiveness, and somewhat sharp tongue were just a facade to hide her own feelings of insecurity.

Life at the Orphanage was very spartan, and not at all what we had been used to. However it is surprising how adaptable children can be and soon we became one of the herd. Summer and winter alike we all had to take a cold bath on rising. Not just a quick in and out again, we had to actually lie down in the, to us icy water, on getting into the bath and also once more before getting out, to wash the soap off. Not exactly our favourite pastime in the frosty weather, but it probably did a great deal for our constitutions and certainly protected us against colds and influenza, Not that we were interested in the health aspect of it in those days, although we must have been among the healthiest children in Napier, and also the possessors of the

soundest teeth as we rarely required dental attention. This of course was not due to our cold morning baths, but to the fact that night and morning we had to clean our teeth with salt. Not for us the use of flavoured tooth-paste, salt was cheap and plentiful and I really believe it strengthened our teeth and gums as many of us kept our natural teeth well into adult years.

There were about 40 girls in the Orphanage, who perforce, had to be divided into age groups to use the bathroom as there were only two baths and I think two showers in the room. Two girls to each bath and it was up at 6 am. with an hour to get through the lot as breakfast was at 7 am. Believe me, we did not need any urging to be quick, thanks to the cold water!

Every Wednesday night we took it in turns to have a hot bath and I can't recall how frequently the water was changed—not very often, probably! After our baths we were issued with clean night attire and clean clothes for the morning. Our frocks were apparently only made in two sizes, large and small. If you came in between, you either ended up with a dress half way up your thighs or a couple of inches below your knees.

Bells were rung for meals and after washing our hands we had to form into an orderly queue in the basement before filing upstairs. Meals were very predictable as there was little variation in the menu from week to week. Breakfast always consisted of a plate of porridge, or rather to be more exact, a slab of half cold porridge topped with cold milk and no sugar. As the porridge had to be served and the plates in place on the tables, before we were allowed upstairs, it was always cold by the time it took us to reach the dining-room and take our places. Porridge was followed by a slice of bread and dripping, usually mutton fat which we used to call candle grease. Every child also had a mug of cold milk. No talking was allowed at the table nor in the queue formed before meals and an older girl, a house girl, was seated at the head of each table to enforce the rule. We had a real tartar at the head of ours. If one dared to put an elbow on the table while eating, she would sneak up behind and 'Bang', the unsuspecting child's elbow would be forced hard down on the tabletop. Any talking would merit the offender being ordered from the room, where they would have to wait in the hall, facing the wall, until the Matron had finished her meal and appeared from the staffroom. That was the worst that could happen to us—that and the punishment that was bound to follow. Invariably, though, a warning would suffice, for the punishment meted out was usually the strap and we all knew how heavy-handed the Matron could be, even the house girls!

The Head Matron was very stern and unbending, even sadistic on occasion and the children were all in fear of her. On the other hand, her assistant was a plump motherly type, well liked by most of her charges. The cook at that time was a braw scotswoman, tall and angular with a stern face but a heart of gold, and very fair in her treatment of the girls who worked in the kitchen. I can recall she sang a lot at her work, nearly always the

same refrain. I can still remember the tune and the words that went with it. Except for school days grace was sung before and after each meal. Lunch on a school day was excepted because mostly we took cut lunches to school. Bread and jam sandwiches. How we hated them. The grace before meals was a four-lined stanza which went as follows ;

Be present at our table, Lord.
Be here and every where adored
These mercies bless and grant that we
May feast in paradise with thee.

This did not mean very much to us but we had to sing it before we could take our seats and start our meal. I must mention two amusing little anecdotes with regard to this. The first concerns my eldest sister who was named Grace It was a very natural mistake made by a twelve year old at our first meal in the Orphanage. When we were all standing behind our places waiting, Matron said in her usual stern manner, "GRACE!" Up piped a tremulous young voice, "Yes, Matron?" Matron ignored her and repeated amid stiffling giggles from the children, "Grace, please girls."

The second story was told me many years later by my blonde girl friend - "Remember the grace we used to have to sing?" she asked one day, "and the line that went - May feast in paradise with thee?" "For years I used to sing 'May feast on parrot's eyes with thee.' I really thought those were the right words."

Finally when she was about ten years old she thought the words were a little odd, so listened carefully to what the other girls were singing. It is amusing sometimes how things sound to the ears of a young child. After meals we had to stand again and sing grace before leaving the table. This time it went:-

"Praise God from whom all blessings flow
Praise him all creatures here below
Praise him above ye heavenly host
Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost."

I mentioned before about taking cut lunches to school. This mostly happened on wet days or when rain was expected as we had quite a distance to go to school and necessitated running there and back most of the way so we would not be late. With an hour for lunch this did not give us a great deal of time for the return journey. Mid-day dinner was the one meal when we were not expected to sing grace in unison but were expected to say it silently instead. The meal was substantial enough, but lacking in variety and we always knew what the day's menu would be as it was simply a repetition of the previous week. Monday it was cold meat left over from the Sunday roast. Then we had shepherd's pie, boiled mutton, tripe and sausages etc. appearing on the table with monotonous regularity each week. Tripe was the most un-popular, it was revolting! Only half cooked it tasted like insipid cardboard only not nearly so edible. In fact it was more like chewing on

rubber and just as hard to masticate.

As we were not permitted to leave any food on our plates, many a serving of tripe was surreptitiously spooned into handkerchiefs under cover of the table and later flushed down the toilets. Handkerchiefs had then of course to be washed and dried because every morning before breakfast we each had to show them as we went upstairs and drop them in a basket, receiving a clean one in return. Should any girl have lost hers she would be deprived of her currant bun which was served as an extra on Wednesday's and Sunday's; tea-time. Tea-time all the week consisted of two slices of bread and jam, without butter, followed by the usual mug of milk in the summer or cocoa in the winter without sugar.

After tea we played outside for a while if it was summer, or else spent the evening until bed-time reading quietly or playing with our toys. Wednesday night was 'games night' when the games cupboard was opened as a special dispensation and we were allowed our choice of table-game once we had finished our home-work. Tea was at 5pm and bed-time: for the little ones—those under six, at 6pm. The next group were called for bed at 7pm and all school girls were in bed by 8pm. House-girls stayed up a little later but were still in bed by 9 O'clock.

Saturday morning was washday and after we had donned aprons we all had to wash our own clothes. All except the little ones, the older girls had to do theirs. Several galvanized tubs were placed on the concrete outside the back door near the wash-house filled with warm soapy water. About four girls to each tub knelt on wooden gratings like junior washer-women. When our clothes were washed they were inspected and anything boilable was put into a large bubbling copper in the washhouse, then finally rinsed and pegged on the lines by the house-girls.

All children from the eldest to the youngest were allotted house-hold chores on a Saturday morning. We all had to make our own beds and stand beside them until they were inspected by the Matron herself. If the corners were not properly tucked under or the bed not made according to her high degree of perfection she would strip the blankets off and the unfortunate child would have to remake it. After that it was mopping and polishing floors for us, cleaning the stairs and dining room or tidying up the grounds. Even the 'littlies' had to make themselves useful.

Every other Saturday we all had to have our hair washed. This was done in the laundry where the two big wash tubs were brought into use, one filled with warm water and one with cold. This was another job the Matron enjoyed doing herself. We all stood in line waiting our turn. No shampoo used here, but coarse home-made lye soap and no half-measures employed. Matron would rub our scalps roughly with her finger tips as we leaned over the tub of warm water, then dunk us swiftly in the tub of cold water till we came up gasping. Then a quick rub with the towel by the Sub-Matron and

we were sent outside to finish drying off. None of us enjoyed this rough and ready treatment very much particularly my fair-haired little friend. She became very nervous and upset when her turn came and knowing this, Matron seemed to treat her more roughly than any of us. She would shove the child's head right under the cold water and hold it there for as long as she dared. The poor girl came up coughing and spluttering and crying hysterically. She told me years later that she really dreaded having her hair washed. No wonder after the way she was treated!

To out-ward appearances the Head Matron was the ideal person to operate such an establishment. She was highly efficient and being a fully qualified nursing Sister the committee must have felt very fortunate they were able to obtain the services of such a treasure. Little did they know that the very qualifications they found so attractive did not endear her to the children in her care. In fact many of them hated and feared her. Certainly her charges were always clean and neatly dressed and very well mannered, they had to be;— however she was incapable of showing them any warmth or affection. She was always cold and aloof in her manner and never would she unbend sufficiently to give one of us a cuddle, it was just not in her nature. She definitely did have a sadistic streak and should never have been in charge of young children.

I can remember one child who was the baby of the Orphanage at that time. She was about four years old and the only child that the Matron seemed to have some strange sort of feeling for. Even her treatment of this child however was typical of the woman. She would sit the little one on her knee while she was hearing our home-work and after the little one had snuggled down for half an hour or so, the Matron would suddenly grab her and shove her under the cage-like base of her cane arm-chair. There she would imprison her until after she had heard our home-work heedless of her whimpers and cries of distress. The more the child cried out the more Matron would bare her teeth in a mirthless grin, until suddenly tiring of the game she would release her sobbing little prisoner and leave the room.

I have no idea what motivated this woman's behaviour towards us. Maybe her war experiences had twisted her in some way or maybe such actions were her idea of having fun at our expense. Whatever the cause I know her actions caused many of us to both fear and hate her and believe me such incidents were very frequent. We made no complaints about what was happening, for who was there to listen? We were too young to know where to turn to for help and anyway children have great imaginations, don't they? Always making up little stories— who would have believed us? I said nothing to my father because I did not want to worry him, but when he took us out for the afternoon once a month he probably wondered why we were so reluctant to return. Every Saturday he came to see us armed always with a bag of boiled lollies which we were supposed to hand in after he had gone, but sometimes shared among our friends. Anything in the way of food that our parents brought when they visited us

had to be handed in to the Matron and was portioned out to us later. On visiting days our young brother was escorted down the hill from the Boys' Home and those were the only opportunities we could be together. We were among the fortunate ones as our father was always there for us on a Saturday. Some of the children waited week after week in vain hoping someone would visit them. Tragically waiting for a parent who never came. My best friend was one of those whose mother very rarely came to visit her, and several times my father was able to get permission from the Matron to take her out for an afternoon with us. We would all go to the pictures or perhaps down to the Parade to play on the beach. Saturday evenings after we had finished our tea and there was no home-work to be learned, we were permitted to choose a board-game from the games cupboard to play with our friends or if we wished to set up a game of table-tennis. Alternatively we could help ourselves to the well-stocked book-case or open our lockers and sort through our childish treasures. The lockers were hinged seats under the windows in which we kept our precious possessions. Two girls to each locker was the general rule and it was understood that no one invaded another's locker. No keys were necessary or provided. Some-times the Sub Matron would play the piano and we would gather round for a sing-song. Thus the evening passed pleasantly until it was bed-time.

Sundays were the SABBATH and observed as such. We were actually served hard boiled eggs for breakfast with bread and butter or 'scratch' as we called it, for it was certainly spread very thinly. After breakfast certain chores had to be done before we dressed for church. The Home was inter-denominational therefore each Sunday we attended a different church with one omission, that being the Catholic church. As there were no Catholic children admitted to the institution that was understandable. The favourite church of most of us was the Congregational because the service was so informal and special attention was given to the children attending. There was also a choir formed from the Sunday school class and one child in particular had a lovely voice and sang solo. I for one really enjoyed listening to her.

We marched two abreast in a crocodile to church all dressed the same in our grey and red Sunday uniforms plus grey hats with red ribbon trim. None of us liked being in uniform nor did we like marching in a crocodile because people stared as we passed. However we must have looked very smart and though we would never have admitted it, that was probably the very reason we drew such attention our way. After the service we marched our crocodile back home again and changed out of our Sunday clothes. Then we all filed upstairs to a roast dinner which was definitely the best meal of the week.

In the afternoon it was Bible class for the older girls and Sunday-school for the little ones. We each recited the verses we had been given to memorize the previous Sunday then settled down to listen to the story of the day and the discussion which followed it. We quite enjoyed Sunday School as our young teacher was well-liked and made it all so interesting. The Bible-Class was held in a different room.

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Once a year a Sunday school picnic was arranged and we all clambered up on the back of a truck where we sat on the forms provided, singing all the way to the picnic ground, which was usually by a river. At Christmas time the two young woman teachers arranged for us to go carol singing also on the back of what was probably the same truck. I suspect it probably belonged to a friend of one of them but of course we never knew that. I must admit that although the discipline at the Orphanage was very strict, perhaps even cruel by today's standards, we did have some very happy times. For example Christmas was quite a high-light in our lives. A really fun occasion.

The dining-room which doubled as our living room was festooned with colourful decorations and we always had a Christmas tree. Before we assembled for breakfast gifts for each child were put in place around the long tables.

The children all gave each other gifts of course, but there were also extra presents for those who had parents and a special gift from the committee members placed under the tree for each child. The week before we had all been given pocket money-not much, just a few shillings each, and taken to town to spend it. It was amazing what we could get for a small sum. We certainly learned the value of money at a young age. Our father could always be counted on to remember his family at this time. Once he gave me a doll's cot he had made which was about eighteen inches long and twelve inches wide and fitted one of my dolls perfectly. Another year I received a toy gramophone which really worked. There were two small records with it and I played them endlessly for quite some time. I still remember those two records after all these years. Christmas was one time when the rules were relaxed and we were allowed to talk at the meal table, and for once the Matron would turn a deaf ear to our excited chatter.

In the afternoon the younger children were all sent to their beds for a nap as that evening was to be a concert for which we had been in training for weeks. We all had a part to play in this and quite a programme had been organized. The boys came down from their Home on the hill and various members of the Committee responsible for the administration of the Children's Homes were present with their families. We for our part, entertained them with songs, dances and recitations and finished with a play which was stage-managed by our sub-Matron. We all wore the appropriate costumes for the parts we played and enjoyed ourselves as much, if not more, than our audience. The fancy costumes we wore were normally kept in trunks in the cupboard under the stairs. A dark cupboard incidently, which was often used as a punishment area for misbehaviour. It was very dark and scary, until ones eyes finally became conditioned to the small amount of light which filtered through the cracks around the closed door. If one wished one could see enough to open the trunks and try on the various costumes they contained. This passed the time very pleasantly until perhaps after an hour or so in confinement the door would be opened and we were free once more.

Summer was always a welcome relief after the dismal Winter with its ever-lasting rain and cold frosty mornings. We hated the Winter. It meant trudging what seemed like miles to school in heavy tweed capes, rain hats and boots. Oh, those boots, how we detested them. We were the only children who wore boots to school and were ridiculed by some of our mates because of them. Once outside the Orphanage gates some of the children would remove their boots and hide them in the hedge until they returned home; even going to school barefoot was better than being seen in those hated old-fashioned boots. Much more fun too, to be free to walk in all the puddles on the way home.

September heralded the arrival of Spring when we shed our heavy Winter clothes and were issued with reasonably pretty cotton frocks made for school wear and worn with cardigan until the weather grew warmer. Our new school frocks were made by a dress-maker who came on certain days of the week to do all the sewing for the children with the aid of an assistant. Some of the printed material was quite pretty and fitted reasonably well. Wearing them to school removed some of the feeling of apartness we felt when dressed in our drab old-fashioned Winter garments.

Such was life in the Napier Children's Home in the 1920s until the fateful day when our father met us at the school gates and introduced us to his new fiancée. After they were married our life at the Home ended and after two years of separation we were to become a family again.

PART TWO

It was wonderful to be back in our home once more, with my family all together again. We still missed our mother of course but it was our father's hope that his new wife would fill that role and make us happy. We were very happy too for a while, as we explored familiar places and met with old friends such as the children across the road with whom we used to play. We were also re-enrolled at our previous school, the Hastings West which was not very far away. There were friendly faces here too and it did not take us long to settle in there.

Sadly however, our happiness was to be short-lived. Far from wanting to mother us, it soon became obvious our stepmother resented having us around and showed it when our father was not there. Our brother being the youngest was her favourite and was treated more kindly but it was not long before my two sisters left home and became self-supporting, because they could no longer stand her treatment of them. Then I was the one she turned on. I do not know if she just disliked children, or had no idea how to treat them. She certainly was not the motherly type, though she never physically abused me. She found fault with everything I did and the slightest misdemeanour would be reported to my father when he returned from work and punishment demanded and exacted. The same thing that had happened before, causing the departure of my two older

sisters was now happening to me, but I was only about eleven years old and far too young to make my escape the way my sisters had.

My father I think, had been aware for some time that things were not going well and according to plan. Certainly he had an excellent housekeeper and a good companion for himself, but a mother for his children? That was where he had made a big mistake and the knowledge must have really bothered him especially as his two older daughters had been driven from their home by the woman he had married. He had been offered a contract to redecorate a farm-house some miles from Hastings but had been reluctant to accept because of his family. He could take his wife but not us, so when he finally realized his plans for a happy united family had failed he decided to accept the contract and let the house once more. We would be happier back in the Children's Home he thought, little knowing the unhappy times we had spent there. When he told us, I cried and begged him not to send us back, but by this time his mind was made up and he had convinced himself he was doing the right thing. He did explain that it wasn't because of anything I had done, it was because he had accepted a job in the country and could not take us with him. I was very upset because secretly I had thought he would send our stepmother ^{away} certainly not us - not again! I was sure our stepmother was behind the plan, just to get rid of us, so she could have our father all to herself.

Be that as it may, arrangements were made for our re-admittance and our father drove us himself into Napier as he now had a car, actually bought when we first left the Orphanage three years ago.

It was a 19-29 Essex sedan. I was now 12 years old and feeling very miserable and sorry for myself. No-body asked my young brother how he felt about the idea, he would not have been any happier than I was. I am sure now it must have been a very difficult decision for my father to make and the only one satisfied with the turn of events was my stepmother.

We turned in through the iron gates which had been opened for us and stopped the car on the lower horse-shoe as it was called. I surveyed the old three storied wooden house with the flight of concrete steps up the left side to the top level, wondering who among my former friends would still be there and what if anything had changed. It certainly looked the same - the upper horse shoe with the large karaka tree with the berries we were warned not to eat, still growing in the corner. The swings were still where they used to be and there on the hill above them one could just see the boy's home through the trees. My father would be taking my brother up there presently when he had delivered me, I thought. My brother was nine years old, just the age I was when I left this place, never dreaming I would ever return. I was very subdued as I followed my father up the wooden steps which led from the basement level on to the veranda and so to the front door. The Matron was waiting for us, and "Horrors" - she was still the same stern-faced martinet I remembered! As we entered her office I was aware

of a couple of faces peering around the corner of the hall. Formalities over, my father kissed me and held me close for a moment then he left me abruptly and hurried off without looking back. I know I cried, and I have wondered since if he did too; it could not have been easy for him to abandon his children like that, knowing, as we did not even suspect, that it would be quite some time before we saw him again.

Life at the Home had not changed much since my departure three years previously. However from the lofty level of a twelve year old I was able to view events rather differently, and also by right of age I received a few more privileges. For one thing I was no longer packed off to bed with the 'littlies' at 6pm. I was now able to answer the call "Eight o'clocks to bed", which was quite an improvement. On holidays and weekends we were allowed to take a book to bed with us, until we were told to settle down, usually only half an hour or so later. Still and all it was quite a concession. After the Matron had completed her rounds of dormitory inspection and the lights were turned off, we would talk in low voices until we went to sleep, or I would be appointed story teller, a sort of junior 'Tusi Tala,' and curdle their blood with horrific stories of witches and ghosties and things that go bump in the night. I had a very active imagination, on which I drew for all sorts of horrors, so much so that it was a wonder that my young friends slept at all.

There were three dormitories and the children were more or less grouped together according to their ages. The younger children in our room were usually asleep by the time we came to bed and in any case they were all down one end of the long room while my friends and I were up the other and we had of necessity to keep our voices low in case we were heard by one of the staff.

Some nights as a variation I would start the ball rolling with a few opening sentences and then the girl in the next bed would pick up the tale and so on until each had added her own little bit of horror to an impossibly gruesome story.

Sometimes caution would be thrown to the wind as voices were raised in excitement until they were heard on the floor below and the Matron herself would come to investigate. As she never failed to clear her throat at the turn on the landing half way up the stairs, we had fair warnings of her approach and by the time she reached our dormitory we were all tucked up snugly in bed and to all intents and purposes sleeping the sleep of the innocent.

She was a chronic throat-clearer so we never really knew if it was by design or accident that she always chose the same spot on the stair-way to give us this timely warning, but I do not think it was in her nature to be deprived of the pleasure of catching us out.

Anyone heard talking was ordered down to the main hall where they were left standing for an hour or so facing the wall with a blanket or pillow slip over their heads. No carpet beneath their bare feet only cold linoleum,

and occasionally they would be locked in the linen closet until Matron went to bed. However there were times when the child would be completely forgotten. In which case she would huddle in her blanket on the floor till the morning when she would finally be released.

Some nights we would be awakened by the urgent clanging of the fire-bell and leap from our beds, grab a blanket and rush out to meet the other children and the staff in the hall. From there it was out through the window and down the fire-escape as quickly and orderly as we could. This was fire-drill and happened whenever the Matron decided we needed the exercise. Actually it was quite exciting while it lasted, though I doubt if we would have enjoyed it so much had it been the real thing. At least we were being well trained to the procedure should the necessity arise. Fortunately it never did! The object of the exercise, was that we should be prepared,

"Be prepared"-the Girl Guide motto! We had our own Guide company in those days and a Brownie Pack for the younger ones. Brown Owl and our own Guide leader were a couple of dedicated women from the outside, who gave of their time and experience to teach us Guide and Brownie lore. There was much to learn of both lore and law, for both played a large part in the Guide Movement. I think we all enjoyed the meetings when we were dressed in our blue uniforms and gathered round our Camp fire. Half the thrill of course, was that we were actually outside after dark on some occasions, which was a rare change for us! We also enjoyed all the other activities associated with our meetings. Mind you, I have since forgotten the various knots we learned to tie and the Morse Code and Semaphore we learned. Sure, I can still remember the 'Guide Promise' but most of my 'reef knots' turn out 'granny knots' these days, and I could not signal the Morse Code if my life depended on it.

During my last year at Primary school I contracted rheumatic fever and was confined to bed for several weeks. It appeared to happen quite suddenly, when I woke one morning feeling somewhat stiff in the legs. By evening my joints had become quite swollen and I developed a high temperature. I found it extremely difficult to rise from the chair in which I was sitting and it was impossible for me to walk without assistance. The Matron had two of the girls help me upstairs to my bed and called the doctor. He said I had rheumatic fever and a leaky valve to the heart and gave strict instructions I was to remain in the bed and to be kept very quiet. There was a small bedroom opposite the bathroom to which I was transferred from the dormitory and nobody was allowed near me except the girl who brought my meals and the house girl who cleaned my room. Matron herself would pop in every morning to see all was well and the doctor called several times a week until I started to improve. After the first week I got very bored with my own company.

I had all the books I wanted to read and whatever else I needed to amuse me, but I missed my companions, even more so when I could hear them

playing outside and I could not join them. They were still not allowed in my room but it was not long before they would come to the window and talk to me.

My father came to see me and brought me a set of photo paints and a pile of old photos to tint. Years ago when he had his picture framing business in Emerson St, part of his work was photo tinting and this was one of the books of colour he had still in his possession. It was about 3 or 4 inches square and looked like a book of coloured blotting paper. He showed me how to tear off a tiny portion and soak it in a small glass of water. The resultant colour could be applied to the photo with a fine brush and it required some practice to ascertain the correct amount of water to use and how much paper I needed to give the required depth of colour. I soon mastered the procedure by trial and error and spent many happy hours colouring every photo I could lay my hands on.

My father was a very wise man. The most expensive gift he could have bought me would have given me much less pleasure than that little book of coloured paper with the magic trapped inside it. To be sure my efforts were not very professional but I was no longer bored, and quite content to stay in my bed as the doctor had ordered, and amuse myself.

Finally, the day arrived when the doctor pronounced himself satisfied with my condition and I was allowed up to join the others. I was not allowed to do any work however or to exert myself unduly. This suited me fine as I would much rather spend my time reading or helping with the sewing and mending. After a period of convalescence I was allowed to return to school. So once again I joined the others on the long daily hike.

The Home on Bluff Hill was only about five minutes walk to the beach and we spent many a happy evening in the summer when a picnic tea would be packed in a large hamper and we would all trek down the road to enjoy it on the sand. When a suitable time had elapsed after our meal we were allowed into the water for a swim before returning home tired and weary and ready for our beds.

We enjoyed both good times and bad times in the Orphanage, but I have deliberately omitted most of the bad times as I really feel they were out-weighted by the good, and to be perfectly honest, so long as one kept in the Matron's good books and obeyed the rules, life was not too bad.

She still enjoyed her moments of sadistic fun at our expense but one learned to keep out of her way. I recall on cold frosty mornings she would insist that we go outside and play skipping, which was great on the face of it, to get the circulation going. That is until Matron decided to take a hand. She would hold one end of the rope and one of the older girls the other. The rope would turn and several girls at a time would run in to skip. Then the fun would begin. Faster and faster, she would turn, with a decided swish on the down-stroke. The girls would endeavour to jump faster but before long some one would miss a step. Woe betide the unlucky one whose legs got caught

by the heavy rope. She would score a nasty burn across the back of her legs and limp off painfully, while Matron would smile in toothy mirth and start turning again to catch the next victim. She also enjoyed playing rounders with us, particularly if she could be the one to catch the ball when the girl with the bat missed it. All her strength went behind the throw and she tried to aim for the legs. She seldom missed, and my! How that ball hurt! Whenever she went on holiday we all breathed a great sigh of relief. The Sub-Matron would now be in charge and the whole atmosphere of the place was visibly relaxed.

Miss M- was pleasant and easy going and nothing like the martinet who preceded her. I am afraid she was so good natured we often took advantage of her and found if we used the right approach we could get her to agree to almost anything.

She had once been a Matron at an exclusive girls' college in Havelock North and would frequently regale us with tales of her 'Young Ladies' and how well behaved they were etc. I guess we were little horrors sometimes especially after the strict discipline we had been used to previously. She once told us, unwisely, that she was a descendant of Simon De Montfort.

I say 'unwisely' because we never forgot it, and from that day on she was nick-named 'Simon':- not in her hearing of course, well not intentionally. Simon we may have called her but she was not simple! She knew what was going on. One day she was in her room when a girl called out to another at the top of the stairs, "Do you know where Simon is"? Quick as a flash she popped out of her bedroom, "Here I am dear, who is looking for me?" A case of the biter being bit, I would say.

Easy going and all though she was, there were times when someone overstepped the mark and roused her ire. She would order them up to the clothes room and plod up the stairs after them muttering angrily to herself all the way. Down came the punishment strap from the wall and the hapless one would be bent over a bin. Poor 'Simon' would be so breathless from climbing the stairs that she had no energy left to apply the strap with any degree of force, so the hurt was minimal. Panting with exertion, she would punctuate every stroke with a word as she admonished the child, telling her what a naughty, naughty ^{girl} she was etc and never behave like that again!

Sometimes two or three girls would follow, at a safe distance of course to give moral support to the one who had fallen from grace. They were very careful to avoid detection or they would have received the same punishment- Maybe even worse. It was not a morbid desire to watch the process that drew them as their sympathies were entirely with their friend, but they were more interested in finding out just how many strokes 'Simon' was capable of before she had to give up. As she was somewhat on the stout side such sessions usually did not last very long as we knew from past experience

So intent was she, that she failed to notice the mischievous group outside the door who were counting every stroke. Sometimes the count reached twelve before old 'Simon' finally ran out of words and 'puff'. Before she had time to turn around the girls had slipped away stifling their giggles, to meet the punished one around the corner. The claim that it did not hurt a bit, was very likely true for I can also speak from experience. She was never vicious. Our 'Simon' she just endeavoured to keep discipline in her own bumbling way and most of us look back on her with affection.

It was she who arranged and supervised our occasional concerts and rehearsed us until we were perfect-or almost so. These concerts were the high-lights of our existence and enjoyed by all. We would rehearse for weeks until finally came the great night, usually a Saturday. The fancy dress boxes were hauled from the cupboard under the stairs and those taking part were given their appropriate costumes. Members of the Committee and parents were invited. The Home was not an Orphanage in the strict sense of the word as few of the children did not have at least one parent, even though some of the children never saw them. On the Saturday afternoon we all had to have a rest in preparation for the night's entertainment. After the evening meal had been cleared away, chairs and forms were set out for the visitors and a curtain rigged across the room for a stage. The boys arrived from up on the hill and it was all systems go.

When I was twelve I wrote a play for one of these concerts and after old 'Simon' had tidied it up a bit and composed a couple of songs for it, I believe it was quite well received. We had some real juvenile talent among our numbers and we all thoroughly enjoyed ourselves. There is a great deal more I could write about this period but it is impossible to remember every thing and indeed some things are best forgotten.

It was now 19-30. I was thirteen years old and due to sit for my School Certificate of Proficiency, the examination which was held at the end of our final year at Primary School, Standard 6-though now it is called Form 2. My two friends and myself, the 'Three Inseparables' as we liked to call ourselves, had always been very well placed in the school examinations and had no doubts about our ability to gain our Proficiency Certificates. In fact two of us felt very confident of our chances of winning the Dux medal which was the highest and most coveted honour.

However we were not given the opportunity of sitting for the examination as we were both accredited, our passes thereby losing any chance we may have had of winning the Dux medal. The girl who did win it was a most unlikely candidate and was as surprised at the result as everyone else. As it turned out, I was to be very proud of my young brother a couple of years later, as he carried off the Dux medal of his own school and in a way vindicated the family honour, though I must confess in all honesty my girl-friend possibly stood more chance than myself at winning.

As it transpired it had been decided by the Committee that the three of us were to be given the opportunity to continue our education at the Napier Girls High School. This was quite an innovation as we were the first children to be sent on to High School though we were not to be the last.

For some time I had been nursing a secret ambition to be a Journalist and had confided this to my dad. My other two friends had, as far as I know, no idea of which course they wished to take.

We were duly outfitted with the regulation navy blue gym tunics and blouse. The tunics had three box pleats back and front and were worn with a navy girdle. Typically of course, ours were too long allowing for our growth. Regulation length was just above the knee-, ours came below our knees. However this did not bother us too much, we were so excited at the very thought of Secondary School, a hitherto unheard of prospect.

Besides the gym tunics which were to be worn with navy blue flannel shirts in winter and white cotton blouses in summer, we were issued also black woollen stockings, black shoes and the regulation school hats-, navy blue felt with blue and white band for the winter and a white panama hat with the same coloured ribbon for the summer. Navy blue and white ties were worn with the uniform, besides which we each received a brand new case to carry our books, instead of the heavy leather school bags we had been used to. School bags were for boys and we were always very self-conscious about them at Primary School. Besides all this, was the added thrill of actually having new clothes instead of having to wear hand-me-downs. I know I was very excited at the whole prospect and I suspect my two friends were too. We were given the job of marking our new clothes and the pile of books we were provided with, and finally all was ready for the great day. Little did we know what that day would have in store for us.

Finally the summer break was over and the first day of our new term had dawned. The day was Tuesday and the date was February 3rd 1931. A day we were never to forget. Dressed in our new uniforms and both excited and a little apprehensive at our role of 'new girls' we walked unknowingly into the most horrific and terrifying experience of our lives. Had we known of course, what was ahead of us, we would never have left home. As it was, we had not gone very far before we became aware of an eerie stillness in the air. The birds were silent and we could not hear any dogs barking, as they normally would have been. The sky was obscured by a weird haze and all around this deathly quiet.

We thought perhaps we were in for some sudden electrical storm and hurried on our way.

Once arrived at the High School we quickly forgot our temporary unease as we joined the other pupils in the hall for assembly. The Headmistress addressed us, welcoming back the old pupils and instructing the new ones. A

hymn was sung, a prayer said, and then we were dismissed to our allotted Form rooms. My two friends and myself were to be in Form 3C, which was the Home science course. Apparently the Matron in her wisdom had decided we should be taught something useful, for in those days the only occupation for a girl reared in the Orphanage was to be employed as a housemaid. We had no say in the matter and had no chance to express an opinion. Our Form Mistress was a sharp-featured woman in mortar board cap and black cape but seemed pleasant enough. All the teachers wore the same cap and flowing cape, which was the traditional garb and also worn on Capping day by students of the Teachers Training College.

I can remember our first lesson was mathematics or maths as it was called. Some of the classes were held in our own room but for a number we used to vacate our classroom and proceed to another, carrying all the books necessary for that particular period.

The first half of the morning passed quickly and it was almost time for recess. As I recall, a glance at the clock on the wall showed it was 10/45am when the bell rang. We put our books away in our desks and were just getting to our feet to leave the classroom when all HELL broke loose. Unless one has experienced a severe earthquake, it would be impossible to imagine the horror of it. Much has been written of course about the appalling earthquake that hit Hawkes Bay that disastrous day, however I can only relate my impressions of the event through the eyes of a thirteen year old.

For a moment we stood petrified with fear and shock as the floor tilted alarmingly beneath our feet and the teachers table slid across the room and landed with a resounding crash against the wall. A tall cupboard crashed over releasing a wild cascade of books and papers across the heaving floor. Someone screamed "earthquake" and immediately there was a mad scramble for the door. We were in an upstairs classroom with a small railed deck outside the door and steps leading to the quadrangle, below which was our recreation area. The press of bodies on the small platform outside the door broke the railing as the panic stricken girls struggled to save themselves. Screaming with fright they pushed and shoved their way down the steps in a tight group. Many of those unable to get past them to the comparative safety of the play ground took advantage of the broken railing on the landing and jumped the ten or twelve feet to the asphalt below. I was going to do the same when something made me take a hasty backward step, as I did so a long sheet of roofing iron came off and fell in front of me, it made an awfull clatter. One end was resting on the ground below the other against the landing, with barely a second thought I sat on the end of it and slid to the bottom where I picked myself up unhurt and ran to join the others well away from the building. Later much later I could see the funny side of the episode and thought that had there been a loose nail or jagged edge to that sheet of

iron I may have received more damage to my posterior than a torn pair of navy blue cotton bloomers:-Yes we still wore bloomers in those days with elastic in the waist and legs. The thought has also occurred to me that had I not taken that step back I would not be writing this narrative today.

A teacher was attempting to gather the confused and frightened children into a group and get them around to the front of the school to join the others already seated on the lawn, wondering what was going to happen next. We were all very distressed and every time the ground shook, would start nervously to our feet.

We watched in awed fascination as houses across the way tilted on their foundations and lost their chimneys as they crumpled and fell in a pile of bricks and rubble. When the dreadful shaking subsided and the tremors appeared to be less frequent we were told to make our way to our homes as quickly as possible. To this day I cannot recall what must have been a night-mare trip for us, for the devastation we passed must have been appalling.

Shocked and dishevelled we finally arrived back at the Orphanage glad to be still alive. The Primary School children were also coming home in small groups looking even more scared than we were. On our arrival I found my father was there waiting anxiously. His first thought when the quake began, was for my brother and I, and was very relieved to see me. Owing to the great crevasses in the roads and the piles of rubble, there was no possibility of any cars being able to get through either way. My dad had a motor bike, so to him it was no problem; he had the dubious honour of being the first person to get through from Hastings. He told us later he had set his bike at the gaping holes and cracks in the road and jumped them like a horse over a hurdle.

When all the children were checked and counted, both boys and girls it was discovered that my brother and another young boy were missing. And my father set out to look for them. It was some considerable time before two tearful and woe-be-gone little boys were discovered hiding under a culvert. They were covered in soot as a falling chimney had emptied its contents over them. They looked for all the world like two little chimney sweeps from a past era.

We spent the rest of that dreadful day out in the open, too afraid to go inside. Some of the older girls and the Matrons collected up pillows and blankets preparatory to our spending the night outside and also between the tremors organized a meal of sorts. The power, gas, and water had all been turned off but there was plenty of milk and the where-with-all to make sandwiches.

We knew the town was afire because we could see the smoke pall from Bluff Hill and as the night fell the sky was red with the glow of the flames. Apart from that, and the knowledge that the town was wrecked we had no further

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news as we had no radio. There were no transistors then. As we spread our blankets on the grass and tried to settle down to sleep we could still feel the ground trembling and heaving beneath us like a bad-tempered giant grumbling and flexing his muscles. There was to be very little rest for us that night. Between 8-30 and 9pm there was another very heavy shake which caused us all to leap up in alarm, afraid that the earth was going to open up and swallow us. If we slept at all that night it was only in short naps, broken by the numerous tremors that occurred throughout the night. It was very fortunate for us that it did not rain that night or we would have been forced to spend the night inside. Actually we would have been quite safe as the house was stoutly built, and withstood the upheaval bravely. In spite of this fact, we still felt safer outside.

Next morning someone brought us the news, that a large number of the townspeople had spent the night on the beach where tents and supplies were being distributed. As it was much safer out in the open it was decided we should join them. We were a very large party about 30 boys and 40 girls, but there were plenty of tents and no shortage of food which was pouring into the area from other districts by the truck load as roads were speedily and temporarily filled in to allow traffic through. Food was also commandeered for distribution from any grocery store left standing throughout the area.

Children are very resilient and despite the night-mare experience we had been through, many of us were now beginning to look on this as an adventure. The ground was still uneasy and still trembled from time to time but so long as that was as far as it went, our fears subsided somewhat. Practically the whole length of the Marine Parade was festooned with tents and people's belongings, as much as they were able to salvage. The place looked like a huge outdoor furniture market. There were beds, lounge suites, tables, chairs and all manner of things. The broken buildings and rubble of the wrecked town looked as though the place had been hit by a bomb. It was very fortunate that the weather was fine as many folks did not bother with tents but spread their bedding on the sand with the rest of their possessions they had managed to save, around them. They cooked what food they could on small make-shift stoves but most of the food distributed was cooked in camp kitchens which were soon set up in Nelson Park and along the Parade. People queued up in both places for a free meal.

As regards our own group, due to the unusual circumstances, discipline was greatly relaxed and we older girls were free to wander as we chose. The Head Matron was on sick leave and the Sub-Matron was in charge. As we wandered among the crowds on the beach we overheard many scraps of conversation. It was said that the fire in a large portion of the business area had started in a chemist shop and also that Hastings had been devastated and burnt, and indeed a large area of it had!

The Nurses Home was a pile of rubble and many of the night nurses had been killed in Tuesday's quake. It was later announced that the total death roll in Napier was over 300 people.

We knew that the HMS Veronica was in port because we had seen the crew and officers helping to clear the rubble and search for dead and wounded. Two more ships had arrived from Auckland and their crews joined in the rescue work. What Napier would have done without their cheerful support and help is difficult to say because as well as the tremendous work they did, they must also have done much to raise the morale of the people.

After two or three days, the children were told that arrangements were being made to send us to Auckland. This was exciting news indeed and preparations for the trip were soon under way. A great number of people were leaving the stricken area for other centres and now that the twisted railway tracks had been straightened, we also were soon on our way.

We were met on our arrival on Saturday February 7th, just four days after that dreadful experience, by the Mayor of Auckland and members of the Sunshine Club. From the railway station we were taken to the premises of the Northern Rolling Mills and given a hearty breakfast, after which we were transferred to the launch which was to take us to Motuihi Island in the outer Harbour which was to be our home for the next ten months.

We all owe a great debt of gratitude to the Sunshine Club whose members were our hosts and benefactors for the whole time we were in Auckland and who provided us with picnics and concerts and many other forms of entertainment. They also organized the camp on Motuihi Island and received the numerous donations of money and clothing given generously by the people of Auckland. The clothing was delivered to the island and the money collected used to buy other necessities for us, and provide us with outings to the mainland.

The launch trip to the island was a wonderful experience and the welcome we had received in Auckland all along the way was really terrific. None of us had ever been on a launch before and we were very excited as we crossed the gangway to the deck. With great interest we watched the City and foreshore fade into the distance then turned our attention to the islands looming closer. On our left we were informed was Rangitoto Island which looked like a volcano, which indeed it is, though now extinct we were relieved to hear. The three humps at the top present the same appearance from whatever angle they are viewed. The island itself was the home of many rabbits and wallabies.

Beyond Rangitoto was another large island called Motutapu and to our right Waiheke Island the largest of them all. Motuihi was a small island situated between the three of them.

When we arrived we tied up at the jetty in a sandy cove called Sunrise Bay. A path followed the base of the cliffs to the beach and a narrow spit on the other side of which, was another strip of golden sand with

with the equally picturesque name of Sunset Bay both bays were very little distance apart. Time for swimming later however, for now we followed a metal road to the left leading up a slight incline to the camp where we were to live.

There were no tents as we expected, but several long wooden buildings which were to be our home for the next few months. We had arrived, leaving all the horror behind us, though nothing could erase it from our memories. Here we were once more met by a welcoming Committee--a doctor who was to be our medical supervisor for the length of our stay, the organizers of the camp, and a group of nurses and sisters who had also been brought from the Earthquake area. We were shown the various buildings and told what they were for. There were separate dormitories for girls and boys, a cookhouse and dining room combined, a recreation room, storeroom and staff quarters. There was also a schoolroom divided into two classrooms and a hospital which was put out of bounds, thereby becoming a tempting magnet for curious children. The camp had previously been used as a quarantine camp by the Auckland Health Department, and prior to that, a great many years ago the notorious Count Von Luckner had been imprisoned here with members of his crew.

We quickly settled in to life on the island, which promised to be one long picnic, until it was decided that it was high time we received some schooling. The announcement was received with loud groans by the children who were quite happy as things were. However desks, chairs, and all other equipment necessary had been brought from the mainland and two teachers had already arrived. The die was cast, our fate decided and it was into the schoolhouse for us all the following Monday morning.

We three secondary school girls presented a slight dilemma. We had already passed through the sixth standard and had received our school leaving or proficiency certificate. For a while we attended with the others albeit somewhat resentfully, then we were told we were free to attend classes if we wished or could help with the younger ones. A male teacher taught the older pupils and a young woman barely older than ourselves taught the juniors. We sat in on such classes as art or singing which we enjoyed and took turns in the other room. The arrangement suited us fine and was a sight better than having to work in the kitchen or laundry as the house girls did. After school the junior teacher taught us what little French she knew.

It was not long before a romance developed between the two teachers and inevitably the children soon discovered it. They were subject to a fair amount of barracking from the older pupils and whenever they contrived to be alone together, someone else would contrive to 'accidentally' cross their path and break them up in confusion. Stifled giggles, would reveal the fact that more than one little horror was witness to yet another close embrace. Life on the island was not without its small excitements.

One of them I could well have done without. We were playing on

the beach on Sunset Bay one fine sunny day. A dare-devil game, jumping from the lowest end of the bank on to the sand below and gradually working our way higher and higher. The final jump was about ten feet above the sand. The others were game to try it, and did, but I was not so sure, I never was much of a one for physical sports and felt I had reached my limit. As I hesitated my best friend urged me on. "Come on" she called "Hurry up Glad, you can do it!"

Why not? I thought, the others did it. So I drew a deep breath and jumped off the end of the world! Well, that is what it felt like, with my eyes shut. I landed with a jar on the beach that sent both my knees smashing into my face. Within a few seconds one side of my face puffed up alarmingly and the eye on the other side was almost closed. The girls were both scared and horrified and rushed forward to help me to my feet. My girl friend was full of apologies. "I shouldn't have dared you -- I'm sorry!" she said, as I limped back to camp supported on each side and followed by an anxious group.

"Tell Matron you fell, won't you? Say you fell off the bank!" Which after all was half a truth. I knew we would be reprimanded for playing such a dangerous game, so that was the story I told. There was also the dread thought that the beach would be put out of bounds, which would be about the worst punishment we could conceive. As things turned out Miss M- believed our story and set about bathing my face, clucking over me sympathetically.

Next morning I woke with one beautiful 'Shiner'. Each day it passed through every stage of the rainbow until finally it disappeared. If the girls ever played that game again, I never knew of it!

We had been on Motuihi Island almost ten happy months now and during that time I had been visited by my Aunt and eldest sister on frequent occasions. It was a sad day when we learned that we were soon to return to Napier.

I had missed having father visit us as I guess, had my young brother but the visits of our aunt compensated for that, and also with all the boys and girls living in such close proximity we were able to see much more of each other than when we were in Napier. However the day finally arrived for our return. The trauma we had all suffered after the quake, had passed and we were all very much happier children than we were on arrival, part being due to our healthy sea-side environment and relaxed atmosphere, but the greater part to the many kindnesses and friendship shown to us by the Sunshine committee and other Auckland folk with whom we came in contact and who went out of their way to make us happy. I really believe also that the absence of our previous Head matron contributed much to our general improvement. We no longer lived in fear of her strict discipline or punishments for the slightest breach, nor could she ruin our games with her warped humour. We certainly were not afraid of our present Head; she was far more lenient and understanding than her predecessor, and any punishments we did get were probably well deserved.

Of our return to Napier I remember very little— as one gets older the gaps in one's memory widen until the pictures one tries to recall are somewhat like a jig-saw puzzle with many parts missing. I recall that the work of clearing the debris had continued while we were away and most of the badly damaged buildings had been demolished. temporary shops replaced many of the lawns and flower beds in Olive Square at the lower end of Emerson St; these were built of timber in the form of a square with a board-walk around all four sides. Business continued much as usual here while the town was slowly being rebuilt. When the new Napier finally emerged from the ruins it was a place to be proud of as also was its sister City of Hastings.

Back at the Orphanage we were soon rummaging through our lockers checking out our toys and personal possessions. All were intact and nothing had apparently been disturbed in our absence. The little ones were soon running for the swings and seesaws and once more the grounds echoed with the shouts of children at play. Soon we were back into the old routine but somehow things would never be quite the same again. In fact the Napier earthquake was the turning point of all our lives. The building, which had stood for so many years was later condemned as being unsafe. A large old house belonging to a well-known Napier family of which our former Matron was a member, was made available for use as a home for the children and eventually the old home was demolished. The new residence was close to the Central School which was extremely convenient for the children. This however all took place well after I had left, to earn my own living.

We three friends were told that we were to return to High School at the start of the new year's term. We were quite pleased with this prospect, though we had missed a full year's tuition and our class mates would have now entered Form IV. We tried on our school uniforms and found to our delight that their length was now just right as we had grown a little taller since we last wore them. We thought we may be asked to lengthen them but our dear old 'Simon' was not such a martinet as her predecessor and did not remark either on their length or lack of it.

I still had a hankering to be a journalist and my ambition must have been told to the Headmistress because the first morning back at High School I was instructed to report to her office. She told me to collect my books from my classroom and go to 3B room which was the Commercial classroom. This I did.

However at recreation my friends sought me out and proceeded to dissuade me from this treachery to our group. "We are your friends" they insisted. "You don't know anyone in that class, you will be all on your own. If we are together we can stick up for each other--you will have no one in there. Why don't you tell the Head you would rather remain with your friends"

What they said made a certain amount of sense and I found myself wavering. 'After all, I could always be a reporter later on when I grew up.'

I thought. What did not occur to me that if I was to succeed in my ambition it would take a great deal of hard work and I would need a good education. The Head mistress herself should have pointed this out to me when I returned to her office with my request. But no, after all I was only a little nobody from the Orphanage and she had given me my chance, so she told me curtly that if that was what I wanted I could report back to 30 room. I did and so blew my chances of being a career girl.

My father was very annoyed when he found out, because it was he who told the Matron what I wished to be and apparently if I showed promise in that direction, my education was to be continued through High school and even on to university should I make the grade. He made it clear that he was very disappointed in me. All I could do now was to settle down to work with the others and forget my dreams.

Nothing further of any note happened that year, we simply attended various classes and pursued our studies until the end of the school year. We were now fifteen years old and in spite of the fact that our first year at high school had been cancelled out because of the earthquake and the resultant time spent on Motuihi Island we were not to be given the chance of any further education. In other words we had had our lot.

At the ripe old age of fifteen years we were considered old enough to support our selves and positions were found for us in domestic service which in those days was considered the only type of work we were capable of doing. Most of us were able to prove this idea wrong and as we gained confidence we were able to improve our lot, and find our own levels in life. I still visited my brother in 'Gordon House' as the boys section of the Childrens Home was now called. Later when he was transferred to France House the home in Eskdale for the older boys, I lost touch with him for a few years until he himself had taken his place in the outside world. My father and stepmother had long since returned to the family home in Hastings, but though I never lived with them again, I did visit them occasionally. So another chapter of my life closed and the future, whatever it might hold in store for me, was mine to explore.