

Judith Lewis

Clarrie Neal

Judith was the second child of Mr & Mrs Garnet Shepherd of George Street, Riverstone and was born in July 1937 at the Hospital/residence of Sister Barnes located in Garfield Road; today the site is occupied by the Doctor's surgery. Other children in the Shepherd family included Bill, b.1935, and Rob, b. 1940. The family endured more than their share of tragedy when their mother passed away in 1950. Garnet's sister Vera Stockwell, who lived nearby became their carer, getting the children off to school and providing their meals through the week. Bill passed away in 1961, aged 25.

Judith attended Riverstone Public School from 1943 till 1948, and has wonderful memories of her early school days, the games, events such as bonfire night that was held on Empire day, and of the Sunday School picnics held at St. Pauls in Elizabeth Street. With her mother as the Sunday School teacher at St. Pauls, Judith attended Sunday School from the age of two until she was confirmed at age 14, and she became a Sunday School teacher herself.

There are happy memories of their annual holidays spent at the Blue Mountains, and in later years spent at Narrabeen - holidays often shared with other families.

Judith loved school, doing well in all subjects, and has fond memories of most of her teachers; this appreciation of school was to continue all her life. In 6th class she won a Bursary award that enabled her to attend Parramatta High school from 1949 till 1953. Judith recalled High School being a lot more demanding and not as blissful as her primary school days.

Always having in mind a career as a teacher she attended Balmain Teachers College; this involved long days, catching the 7-00am steam train to Sydney, change into the electric train to Town Hall, then get the bus to Balmain. The day ending with the return trip home on the steam train arriving in Riverstone at 6-00pm.

Her first posting as a school teacher was in 1956 to North Parramatta Primary school where she taught 3rd class, then in 1957 to Granville Girls school where she taught 5th class and later that year to Seven Hills Infants where she taught Year 2. In 1958 she was transferred to Riverstone Infants, and recalls for the first time since 1949, how blissful it was not having to travel those long hours by train.

Going steady with Kevin Lewis since 1955, they became engaged in 1957 and married in August 1958. She resigned from the Education Department in 1960 to start a family and thought her teaching days were over -- not realising how wrong you can be. Their three boys were -- John, born 1961, Peter, born 1962, and Paul, born 1964. Judith joined the school Mothers Club in 1966, and found herself inundated with offers of casual teaching positions.

In 1968 she accepted a semi permanent position, working four days a week, as the Teacher/Librarian at Riverstone. In 1975 she was appointed permanently to this position and attended Kuring-gai Teachers College to gain her Diploma as a Teacher/Librarian. During the 1970's there were further promotions to Deputy Mistress, then Assistant Principal, and when she retired in 1992 she was the Relieving Principal.

Her career with the Dept. of Education spanned 27 years, five years as a teacher and 24 years as the Teacher/Librarian. Also in the 1970's she was appointed as the Supervisor of the Special Unit classes.

She believes her many years of teaching the children with Special Needs have left her with the most endearing of all her school memories. Her memories of some of these children include -

"Billy*", who came in to close the windows of the library for me each afternoon for all the years he was at primary school.

One young girl who was an elective mute, had not spoken one word in her first three years of schooling. It was February, 1983, I was supervising the handful of students whose parents had not consented for them to attend the school swimming carnival; as they finished each piece of work they would bring it in to me and usually stay for a little chat. With a group of them around my table, she announced "when my mother has her nightie on her boobs bounce up and down". She then withdrew back into her shell, but this day was the beginning. By the time she was in Year 6 some teachers were wishing that she would occasionally stop talking.

Another favourite was Tom* who initially would only communicate with me by talking into his hand formed into an imaginary puppet. The whole school soon learned when Tom had done some good work in class, he would run across the playground, book in hand, calling "Lewis, Lewis, Look, Lewis, Look!" Tom would pick me handfuls of weeds from the playground, which I would duly admire before placing them in a vase. At lunch time he would stand at the door between my office and the library and loudly call out, "All you chillun be quiet, Lewis has a headache".

Tim* was not in a special class, but he needed special care. He was a very angry little boy, who often came to school in very dirty tatty clothes. Judith had spent many hours trying to help Tim, even to the extent of organising the buying of shoes for him and fitting him with clothes from the School Uniform pool. The year after she retired she was asked to return to the school for a few hours each day to ease Tim back into the classroom, following a suspension. She believes Tim is a victim of his environment and life is never going to be easy for him.

Judith believes her last year at school was the most rewarding. She has wonderful memories of her last day, her send off, and she was resigning as the Relieving Principal of the School. The staff were great, the kids were great, there were gifts - including a gold watch and a domed clock, the office was filled with flowers, the Special Classes presented her with a Pensioner Pack, containing a grey hair net, a packet of Ford Pills, denture paste, etc.

Later, at an official farewell attended by representatives from the Department of Education and staff she was presented with an electric organ, (which she is finally learning to play,) a Medal, and was thrilled to learn that the School Library was to be named the "JUDITH LEWIS LIBRARY."

In 1983 Judith was given the task of organising the hugely successful Riverstone Public School Centenary celebrations. As Chairman of the committee she enlisted the help of Margaret Crouch, Rosemary Phillis, Michelle Nichols, Rosemary Hynds and other P & C representatives to ensure its success.

Outside of school, Judith played an active role in the re-formation of the Riverstone & District Historical Society in the mid 1990's. With the community showing an increasing awareness of local history, the Society was re-formed with Judith as President, a position she still holds today.

In 2000, Judith was a founding member of the committee formed to organise the Riverstone Festival held in May each year. Judith has been the group's Publicity Officer since its inception.

Throughout her life, Judith has been an active member of St. Pauls church in Elizabeth Street, keeping church records, cleaning, sending cradle roll birthday cards, etc. When she retired in the mid 1990's she became a scripture teacher, teaching the children in the Infants School Kindergarten and 2nd class. In 1985 she helped produce a book on the 100 years of history of St. Pauls, a big effort in those days, before the advent of computers.

In 1994 she enrolled in the French Class at the Hawkesbury University of The 3rd Age (U3A), when there were only a handful of members and six courses. Today there are now 280 members and there are more than 50 classes to choose from.

In 1995 she became the Secretary and the Class Co-ordinator. She continued on as an active committee member until 2007, serving as the President from 2001 to 2007. For her continuous efforts as a committee member, Judith was rewarded with U3A Life Membership in 2007.

Today, Judith continues her work and interests at the Riverstone Museum and the Historical Society, the Riverstone Festival, the Hawkesbury U3A, her Scripture teaching at the Public school, and has proven herself to be a truly outstanding member of the community of Riverstone.



Judith holding flowers presented to her by a fellow Historical Society member in celebration of her OAM award in 2009. Photo: Rosemary Phillis.

Compiled by Clarrie Neal, March 2008.

* Names changed for privacy reasons.