



Photo from cover of the 1987 booklet *The McCall Gardens Story*

Maisie Gillespie's Memories of McCall

Maisie Gillespie

Maisie and Jim Gillespie migrated from Scotland in 1948 and lived in Riverstone till they moved to a retirement village in Canberra 25 years ago. Maisie was the first ever, clerical assistant at Riverstone Primary School for many years and, after the Villawool Textile Factory closed at the Meatworks in 1978 Jim became the General Assistant at the school. Their daughter, Mary, after graduation, came to the school as a Special Education Teacher. When Maisie sent Judith Lewis information on the McCall Garden Colony, she enclosed the following:

"I was wondering if the Historical Society would like the enclosed booklets about the McCall Garden Colony. The reference to the Presbyterian minister is ME. I just loved those boys, and they gave so much love to me..."

Just to give you a few insights of their innocence, here are a couple.

George's favourite chorus, when asked, was "Jesus Wants Me For a Sardine" (meaning "Sunbeam")!

One Easter, one of the boys was very upset because bad men had killed Jesus. Trying to explain the Resurrection, I told him that Jesus was not dead but was with His father in Heaven and that all those who loved Him would go to Heaven to be with Him one day.

"Will it be today, Mrs. Lesky?"

"Only God knows when that will be," says I.

"Will I get my dinner before I go?" says he. Got his priorities right, eh?

Another time we were talking about Calvary. One boy asked where that was. Before I got time to answer, another boy said, “Don’t be stupid, it’s in Chinatown.” It was hard to keep a straight face sometimes.

Two years ago, the warden of our village asked us to share our special memories of Christmas and I have enclosed my contribution.

Christmas

-that special time of the year when we not only ponder its true meaning, but also a time when the whole family gets together, though sometimes circumstances do not always allow this to happen. We especially ponder the special memories of loved ones gone before, who shared this time with us, and who now dwell in God’s haven of rest. I have fond memories of another “family” and our Christmases together.

For 25 years, before we came to Canberra, I had the privilege of ministering to a group of “boys” who lived in a residential home near where we lived. I say “boys” because that is what they were intellectually – some were physically as well – but ages ranged from 20 years to over 60 years. Our daughter, Mary, came with me as she played the piano.

What joy they greeted us with each time. Christmas time, singing the carols (in their own special way), made me think, “What much more pleasure they would have if we had the carols by candlelight!” For safety reasons the boys handicaps had to be considered. I might say here that the setting was ideal, for the home was set on a hill with fields all around.

Having gained permission from the matron in charge, who was delighted with the idea, I decided to “give it a go”. Here Jim came into the picture. He made 100 special masonite holders for the candles. That was to begin with! The Matron thought it would be an idea to invite the parents and families, hence more candle holders, Jim!

Jim became an integral part of the evening and he had such a lot of “help” setting up the sound system. That first night grew over the years. We included hand-held instruments, tambourines, triangles and shakers (made from sauce bottles). The boys were not able to read, but they all had to have a carol sheet.

Never will I forget the gusto when we sang! “We Three Kings” and “Oh, Star of Wonder, Star of Light” could be heard all over the valley.

Mrs Lesky, as they called me, will never forget the love these boys gave, and I know, in their own special way, they knew why we celebrate Christmas!

It’s Loving and Giving That Makes Life Worth Living.”