

Mrs. Edna Daniels, at 22 Beavers Road, Northcote

Would you start off, Edna, telling me when you very first started the calisthenics.

What, me doing it?

Well, any history about it at all.

Actually, the club itself was formed in 1900 at Holy Trinity, Thornbury. I naturally wasn't there then, but one of the ladies who commenced it in the first place, she belonged to the church until the day she passed away, her daughter did it and her grand-daughters did it. I started doing calisthenics when I was 9 and until I stopped doing it I only missed one year.

Then in 1935 the lass that was secretary, was getting married and couldn't take it over, so I took it over and have been going ever since. Right through the Depression days, we never closed the doors. We never had any money, but a lady, Miss Hopton, who lives down in Union Street, was tied up in calisthenics, had the Boswick ^{BOSWORTH} Calisthenic College, and she more or less stood by us to pay the money when we could. As time went on, each year we got a little bit extra. The kiddies had to pay threepence a lesson, but these days they pay \$1, \$2, \$3 a lesson, and it was threepence a week they had to pay. The seniors had to pay, I think, sixpence.

That has gone over the years and the classes have just grown and we have gone in competitions and I think they do very well. The seniors are in the championship section at Royal South Street, so that means that they have to be in the championship sections in local competitions. We have three very good teachers up there. The lass that has the littlies, she is the one that one the graceful girl in 1970 and she is a very good teacher.

Now tell me their names.

Helen Simmons has the juniors and the seniors. Her sister, Suzanne Beatty^{ie}, has the intermediates. Both of them were pupils of Miss Hopton at Clifton until they decided not to continue there. Cheryl started as a little tiny tot, about six years old, and has been with us ever since. She worked up until last year, and she always said that she would give it away when she was 30. She has 3 children of her own ~~and this year~~ - she did have the sub-juniors for about three years, then she gave it away teaching for the last two years on account of Amanda - she's not 3 yet - but this year she has come back to class and she is doing the baby/sub-juniors combined. We didn't have enough to make two separate sections so we have combined the two of them and she has that section.

What was the lady who first formed the club in 1900?

Her name then would be Kitty Freeman, and when she married it was Mrs. Sturtevant. She was the instigator of the calisthenics.

What was the name of the group when it was first formed?

It was always Holy Trinity. Always Holy Trinity.

How many calisthenic groups have there been in Northcote, do you know?

Yes, there used to be one at the Uniting Church, which was the High Street Methodist. There was a class there.

Has that finished?

Years ago. Then there was a Miss Ellis, who has now passed away. She formed Zene Calisthenics, which was her name backwards. She had a class in the Church of Christ in St. Georges Road, Thornbury. That was her.

Mrs. Simmons, she went to a class in Rennie Street, there's a little Presbyterian Church in Rennie Street, Thornbury. That's where she started before she went to Clifton. Then there was one other at the Prince of Wales Park Methodist - they had a class there. Then there was a class in the Presbyterian in Rossmoyne Street, there was one in the Presbyterian in James Street.

How many of those are still going now?

None. Only us.

Only you, the only one. About how many membership do you think you had with all the various age groups?

I wouldn't know. At our classes?

Yes, yours.

We fluctuated up and down. One time you only had juniors and seniors - you only had two sections. Then they broke it down that you had juniors, intermediates came in, then seniors. Then they altered it again and they made it juniors, sub-intermediates, intermediates, seniors. They ~~the~~ brought in the baby section.

THEM THEY BROUGHT

How old are the baby section?

The baby section are from about 4 up to under 7. Then the sub-junior section is 7 and under 9, junior section is 9 and under ~~10~~ ¹¹, intermediates is 13 or 12 to under 16 and the seniors are 16 up. We have 70 odd on the roll at the moment.

Well, maybe you have some things you can tell me about Northcote in the Depression time. Were the people that came to your classes very poor? Was there lots of unemployment then?

Well, there was lots of unemployment, but up at Holy Trinity the Minister at that particular time was the Reverend J. H. Rafferty and we had a soup kitchen up there. I had no connection with it because I wasn't old enough, but they used to have the soup kitchen every day for anyone that came ~~up~~. Now, as I say, I had no direct contact with helping people because I was going to work and I know that they used to go down to Smith's, which was the butcher in Bastings Street and get stuff from down there and then they had the soup kitchen going all the time. It was a hard time and the young kiddies of today don't realise what it was like to go through that period really.

When you first started off in the calisthenics, were you learning from someone, and then did you become teacher?

No, actually, Miss Hopton she belonged to this college, Bosworth Physical Culture College.

Where was that?

They used to meet down at the Blind Institute in St. Kilda Road, and then Miss Hopton transferred. They used to have these demonstrations in the old ~~Worth's~~ ^{WIRTH'S} Olympia. The first Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday in August every year. We used to do competitions in July at the Fitzroy Town Hall and you never got the results of those competitions until we went to this big demonstration that used to go on for three nights. All the classes used to do an item, sometimes the whole floor would be full of clubs from all over the place. You would only do rod exercises or frearm exercises or a figure march. The teachers belonging to the college always did a march and at one period they used to have the Blind Institute orchestra playing down there at the ~~Worth's~~ ^{WIRTH'S} Olympia. ^{CIRCUS BUILDING.}

When I first started it was a Bosworth teacher that taught up at Trinity. Over the years we kept the Bosworth teachers and then we got Mrs. Simmons, she was still connected to Bosworth with Miss Hopton and then after about 12 months, she made a remark to me and I said, "Well, if you want to go on your own, you go on your own". Miss Hopton was quite in favour of that. Clifton closed a few years ago now. Miss Hopton, dear old lady, is in her 80's and still goes around to all competitions and is really marvellous actually.

This is sort of what went on in Northcote in those days, actually.

Did you become a teacher?

No, I just ^{TOOK} ~~went~~ over secretary and treasurer of the girls' club then we had teachers for the married ladies class and, it's a few years ago now, the lass that was teaching, she didn't let us know until right on the Christmas holidays, that she was definitely not taking the class the next year. It came to the annual meeting on the first Monday in February and we had no teacher. So the lasses at the meeting said, "Why don't you take it on". I said, "Well, I've never taught but if you are willing to put up with me we'll have a go". So that's it. That's how I came to ~~be~~ teach the married ladies.

Are you still doing that? It keeps you pretty fit?

I don't do any work now. I teach them, but I don't get down on the floor like that. But, now we have a nice class up there, I've got 18 ladies and we put on a concert at the end of the year, an afternoon concert, and the ladies do their items. Then we have girls that have gone in competitions through the years, solo competitions, they ~~will~~ help with the programme because we do change costumes and things. We put those on in between items and that gives the ladies a longer time to change and then we have afternoon tea.

So, when a married lady goes there to do some exercises, are they expected to go along regularly, they just can't go along for a bit of a fun, keep fit thing?

They go regularly.

They would be expected to go in the concert?

Well, they don't have to go in the concert but we do like them to come every Monday unless they're ill or going on a holiday. They have to pay their class fee whether they're there or not. So that's an incentive to make them come along. You get some other classes. I know one lass who has just joined us this year - she has been going to a class up in Preston for quite some years, and they have not got a teacher, they just all go along on a Tuesday morning and do it to tapes. To me, that has got nothing. It doesn't mean anything.

Not even for them just to keep fit?

I don't think they would work the same. You see, we start at, say 1.00 p.m., and we finish around about 2.45 or 3.00 p.m., and we don't stop the whole time. The clock just slips by, you're just working the whole time. Well, that's what you go for. You don't go to sit around and chat. The ones that are perhaps not doing an item, they don't all have to go in all the items if they feel they don't want to go in them, well then they sit and have a little chat on the side. Otherwise, some of them are just going the whole afternoon. That's what it's meant for.

It's quite a serious business.

It's serious, but we don't do competitions. The ladies will not go in competitions.

It's only the juniors.

It's only the girls club that does the competitions. The ladies are not interested in it and they're really good, actually, because wherever you place them in the team, well they couldn't care whether they're in the front line or the back line, or where they are. To me, they're out of four walls. I'll say to them, "Forget what you're having for tea tonight, or what you had for breakfast this morning, think of what you're doing here". That, to me, makes their brain ~~keep~~ active. I think so.

TO BE.

Edna, tell me something about the costumes, starting back from early on and the difference in making them and the costs.

When we started they used to have a little frock and we used to raise money and we would give them the cost of one costume a year towards the mother's expense. Perhaps, we might buy a whole set of costumes and put it in the wardrobe or we would credit their account with the money. That was when we were only taking seniors to Ballarat. But as time went on, and intermediates went, then the juniors went, I said to the committee, "Well, we can't keep handing out money like this all the time because you're not getting sufficient money in." So, what we do now is just pay the teachers and pianists accommodation at Ballarat then perhaps allot so much money. We pay all their entry fees for competitions which, this year, I just made out the entry forms for club competitions - we only do four and it's costing us nearly \$300 for entry fees. Now we don't ask the mothers to pay that. That was paid by the club.

We may pay for sequins and trimmings that go on the costumes but the mothers have to pay the rest of it. If they don't do sewing, they have to pay somebody. Now everything is leotards, it's not a frock now, for exercises. We were getting them made but now we find that we can get good patterns, buy the lycra and the mothers can make it for a third of the price. That has cut down considerably. Two years ago you paid \$20 odd for a leotard, which is a lot of money. Now they have one leotard for the whole physical exercises and one leotard for each item. It depends whether it has got long sleeves, less than \$8.

Would they have any other ~~more~~ fancy costumes than that? How many costumes per year would they need?

Well, it just depends on the items. See, they do their physical work - freearm, rods, clubs, figure march - plastique is a long frock, ~~the~~ dance could be a national costume ^{FOLK} they have to get, a song pertaining to the numbers they are doing, a song and dance is something tizzied right up, spec - that is something fancy too - it is now running close to \$100 per year for costumes.

How much is the club fee?

The club fee is whatever section they are in. It ranges from \$1 for the littlies to \$3. It depends on how long their lessons are.

Is that per lesson?

Per lesson.

How often?

Once a week.

The pianist, tell me about the pianist.

They're not used as much as what they used to be because they're harder to get. We ~~did~~ have two up at Thornbury which is very lucky. One is a lady - she does the junior section - and then we have a man - a young chap - and he does the intermediate section and only plays for a couple of items for the seniors. They are not cheap now, and by the time you pay their fees - they actually get more than the teacher gets.

What would their fee be?

It just depends. We pay her \$6 per hour and we have got to pay him \$7 per hour.

Is it very hard being a pianist for a calisthenics class? You don't just hand them the music?

You've got to play what the teacher wants. That has altered over the years considerably. At one time it was more or less straight out four-four time or waltz time, but now your work is set to tapes and the music is more or less pepped up, jazzed up. This is why it's hard to get pianists who can play that type of music that will give up their time to play for calisthenics.

Tell me about this square dancing in the 50's.

We started a dance up at Trinity Hall and we used to have it on a Saturday night, once a fortnight, and we had over 200 in the hall there, and that went for quite a while. The Church of Epiphany that was up on the hill, they used to run one up there and that was on the opposite Saturday to what we did. Well, it went into more or less a lapse, then.

Who was your caller then?

I don't know who the caller was then. We did have a couple of school teachers and we used to go round dancing twice a week - Saturday and then once through the week - at different places. Then we lapsed it for a little while until we were going away in 1969, and did a refresher course, and went to Seattle and down the west coast and centre of America for about five weeks.

Where were you dancing then?

Other clubs. Going to their dances. The convention was in Seattle and then in 1976 there was the centenary of the Americans and the convention at that time was in California and it was at Disneyland, Anaheim. ~~There~~ were nearly 50,000 dancers. Too many, really, because it was too crowded. ^{THERE}

Where did they hold that? At a huge place it must have been.

Well, they had quite a few halls. Getting from one hall to another was just like a crowded football match, because it was just so crowded really. They danced in what they would call a big coliseum type hall, a very, very big hall really. That is the main dance floor, then you have the other dance floors as well.

We took ⁴ ~~this~~ group to Alaska in 1978, because we finished in Edmonton. We arrived there just after the Commonwealth Games, that was the first Canadian convention they had ever had. We danced at the convention there in Edmonton and then after that we came home.

In 1981, we took 28 to America and the convention then was back in Seattle. 1969 was when it was there before, and it was back in Seattle in 1981. So we took ~~the~~ dancers there.

When you say "we", who do you mean?

Well, a group of people who wish to ^{GO} ~~do~~, my husband and I. We sort of organise the tour. They're not all square dancers in the group, but if they want to join the group, they can. You don't have to be a square dancer. From there, we came down from Seattle, we wended our way up the west coast of America up to Seattle and then we came back down the centre and that was about five weeks.

Edna is now going to talk about early Northcote.

My mother and father were married and bought a house in Salisbury Grove. They were there for five years.

What was their name?

Clarke. Of course, the area around Northcote around Separation Street was entirely different to what it is now. There was an open-air picture theatre just down from Separation Street, next to the hotel, where all those shops are now. That was an open-air picture theatre, or entertainment, perhaps a vaudeville show, I should have said. I don't remember much of that because I was only a little girl. I hadn't started school when they sold the house in Salisbury Grove. Then they built a home up in, (it was Boundary Road, then it was changed to Dundas Street, then it was changed to Miller Street,) and they built up there before the electric tram was laid down, or the line was laid down, in Boundary Road, before the bridge went over the railway line. They were there for ten years.

What did your father do for a living?

Actually, he used to work for my uncles driving a lorry carting coke to all the different factories that burnt coke in those days. Then he was a driver for Howe's Tannery, until the Depression days when he lost his job. Then he was caretaker of the Masonic Hall in Johnson Street, Fitzroy, until the day he passed away.

There have been many, many changes in High Street, Northcote. I remember trams and then the buses came along, then of course the electric trams. Double deckers, yes, which I didn't mind and then, of course, the electric trams. I think some people, (some may think different,) that the Plaza shopping centre that has been built in Northcote, has given Northcote another life. I think it would have absolutely died, because we had nothing as far as good shopping in High Street. It has really gone to the pack. We had Balls up there, and Alexanders in High Street, but they've all gone. I was sorry to see Balls go, I know it was like a junk house inside, but they catered for, your haven't got that type of shop anywhere in Northcote at all now. You see, you've got Dimmeys and you have got Balls down in Richmond. People can go down there and do shopping, but you've got nothing like that in Northcote.

Is Balls anything like that Paradise shop that's down there?

No, no. Balls, you went into the door and you could hardly get in the door. But they had manchester, they had drapery, they had haberdashery, they had materials by the roll or the yard, and then you had Love and Pollards up opposite Mitchell Street. You had all those shops.

Very cheap?

Oh yes, well we used to buy all our materials for calisthenics for costumes. You never went anywhere but to Balls, and they would get it in for you. I've even gone down, not so much now, because quite a lot of the ladies have taken the weight off my shoulders regarding materials, because they go out and look around and hunt round and buy and ask me for the money. I give them the money. But we used to go down to Balls at Richmond after a while. Some of them even go now ~~down~~ to Dimmeys.

They've still gone down there, but as far as here is concerned, it's gone. It has completely changed as far as Northcote is concerned. It's sad, actually.

You think though, that it's really better since we have had the Plaza?

I think it's brought people back into Northcote.

Do you think it has helped the side of the road where most of the shopping is in Northcote, or is it worse?

Well, I don't know about the actual High Street shopping, because actually I'm lucky, *THE SHOPPING* Mr. Daniels does, if we want any local or just light little things ~~to get~~, he might go over to New World ~~over there~~. I don't go more or less up and down High Street.

You just go to the Plaza, because you're very close to it.

That's right. But I do my grocery shopping down in Station Street, Fairfield. I think it's good down there.

Tell me, why do you go down to Station Street, Fairfield, when you have got New World just around the corner?

Well, because I like SSW, have done for years. You see, we had one here and then when they closed we had one up in High Street, Preston, and just over Murrumbidgee Road, and that shop was so tiny and they couldn't extend it ~~and~~ ^{So} they closed up there and ~~they~~ opened down in Station Street.