

REMINESCENCES - JOHN(JACK) GRIMSHAW

My time at Stanley Bay Primary School was from 1937 – 1943, a time for which my memories were only favourable. Teachers I recall from that period were: Miss Matthews, Miss Armitage, John Elmsley, Lou Barton, Garth Turbott, Mr Tunncliffe, Mr Burgess, Mr Bullians, and a relieving teacher – Mr Allen.

The school motto was “**Who does his best does well**” which I notice has been expanded, but I do not think it adds anything, in fact it may weaken the effect. The school at that period was two parallel buildings, with a basement in the right hand building, which was used for storing bicycles and, in the summer, the storage of cases of apples supplied by the Government – this was in addition to the ½ pint bottles of milk daily, which was drunk in the mornings. The apples were divided into class lots and delivered to classrooms in the afternoon by the Std 6 pupils. I recall that on the outside of the boxes was the Count number; the smaller numbers indicated larger sized apples, which were reserved for Std 6 – a type of bonus for the delivery system.

The girls played in the top playground and the boys in the lower playground. As these were asphalted, skinned knees were a regular occurrence, especially when the boys played King of Sene. As the Park was just down a right of way across Glen Road, cricket and rugby were played there until the Army took it over around 1942 for an anti-aircraft base as the Naval Base was nearby. Should they have had to fire the guns, these would probably have sunk into the ground, which had been reclaimed from the mud of Ngataranga Bay!

Swimming was at Stanley Bay beach which had the ferry wharf in the middle of the beach, going out into the harbour. When we swam for the Proficiency Certificates, those doing the 880 swam to the end of the wharf and back, the 440 was to the halfway shed and back, and the other shorter distances were along the beach – all had to be done at high tide as the tide went well out. In late 1942 or early 1943, the wharf was taken over by the Navy, extended for another 100 yards and an American Liberty merchant ship, the “William Williams”, was brought there. It had been torpedoed, with the torpedo having gone straight through, and did not sink. Consequently we lost our ferry service, and were given free bus rides into Devonport, thus Stanley Bay became known as Charity Bay.

After the Japanese entered the war in 1941, it became imperative to have air raid shelters and a row of concrete block shelters with reinforced concrete roofs were built along the top of the lower playground by Harry Anderson, one of the parents. What they would have stopped was very problematical! Each student had to wear a pouch in which were earmuffs and a rubber, the latter to put between your teeth when bombing took place to absorb shockwaves, and you wore a name tag around your wrist. The Std 6 pupils had other duties, particularly in regard to incendiary bombs, and I remember I was assigned a wooden long handled shovel, working with someone else who was to put a load of sand over the bombed area and I was to shovel all this into a metal bucket to clear it away.

Another memory was the return of the “Achilles” from the Battle of the River Plate”. Some of the more senior pupils were taken to an empty section at the top of Russell Street, overlooking the Naval Base. As the ship docked, we all cheered, but I doubt whether our juvenile voices were heard down on the dock. In Std 5 & 6 we had Woodwork for the boys and Cooking for the girls, these classes being held in classrooms alongside Devonport School. I can't recall how everyone went there and back, but quite a few of us had bicycles and rode there. The Woodwork teacher was Mr Lazelle, who was a bit of a tyrant. When we return to school afterwards, on most occasions the girls were only too happy to unload their cooking attempts to the boys, who were only too pleased to devour the “delicacies”.

Most of us went to school barefooted, it being not too long after the Depression, and even in winter, frosts, hail and puddles never worried us. One of my best subjects was Arithmetic and I regularly scored 100%, being rewarded a couple of times with a half day off. When I was in Std 6, our teacher was the Headmaster, Mr Bullians, who was retiring at the end of the year, and frequently I was told to take the class during Arithmetic so that he could attend to other things. My greatest joy was being awarded the Dux Medal in 1943.