

THE STORY OF LINDA

Linda Swanton Renshaw was born on August 1st 1927. Tragically, she had a severe health problem - a hole in the heart. In those days they were known as Blue Babies. No operation was available and nothing could be done. She wasn't expected to live. 15 or 20 years later, it would have been a totally different story.

Life for the family was changed completely. The telephone was put on as we lived some 5 kms out of the town of Warragul. For Dad to go into Warragul to purchase supplies for the week, a lady from next door came and spent the time with Mum for support.

Time went by and when Linda started to walk, she had to squat with her knees near her chin to get breath. She was blue in the face and from time to time suffered heart turns. She couldn't walk any distance and she could not do very much. She was given a couple of canaries in a cage which she loved to look after. As she grew she collected the eggs from the henhouse and helped Mum in the kitchen.

Linda attended the Lillico State School for 6 years. There were about 15 -20 children but numbers were dwindling. Transport was via a Shetland pony named Tommy and the route to the school was through the farm paddock. Learning was difficult for her but she did manage to progress to Grade 4. When Dorothy went to High School, Linda was unable to continue at school.

1948 proved to be a very important year - a life changing one for Linda. Someone gave us a copy of the Women's Weekly in which an article outlined a new operation available for hole in the heart victims. Shirley was to go on a short holiday in Melbourne and Dad requested her to investigate the situation further at the Alfred Hospital. This done and much planning later, neighbours, Mr & Mrs C Pattinson who owned a car, took us to the hospital so that Linda could be assessed.

At that time the oldest patient they operated on ^{was} 14 years of age. Linda was 21, but even so she was operated on by Dr Officer Brown at the Hamilton Russell section of the Alfred Hospital. The operation was successful and made a dramatic difference to her life. When Mum went to see her after the operation, it was the first time she had seen her with pink cheeks; previously, she was always blue in the face.

No dentist would touch her teeth which were in a very bad state. A year later, Linda went back into hospital to have all her teeth out. While there the turns she was taking and had been taking for years, were diagnosed as epileptic siezures. Medication was prescribed for her. Though much healthier physically, nothing would replace the development that should have taken place over the 21 years.

Linda could walk long distances now. A doctor must have asked her how far she could walk. Without telling anyone, she took herself off down the road - 1½ kms there and 1½ kms back. Later she casually asked how far it was to a certain landmark. We were shocked - this was a new Linda.

10 years later in 1958, our mother passed away after a long illness with cancer. She always had had concerns about what the future held for Linda.

By chance, or was it by chance, that a representative from the Department for the Disabled was visiting Warragul - Rev. Lex Pollock notified us of the impending visit. Shirley and Linda attended the meeting and learned for the first time of the Oakleigh Centre - also what was available there.

After leaving Warragul, we had a holiday in Perth visiting Mavis & family. We set off in Shirley's new car, putting the car on the train going over to the West and driving back across the Nullabor on the way home. In addition, we spent some time touring the south west of W.A. What an experience!

At the Oakleigh Centre, a training group was in progress for a workshop which was to be started later. Linda participated in that group and coped very well. A taxi-system operated to enable the workers to attend the workshop but only within a limited area. Houses to rent were rare and we had difficulty finding something suitable; we ended up building a house at 297 Huntingdale Road Chadstone so that Linda could attend the centre.

Settling into the workshop full time wasn't a problem. She could read and count, so along with some others, she was given interesting work to do - e.g. placing the relevant birth stones into birthday cards,

assembling electric light cords and power points - under supervision of course.

On one occasion, the centre had a surplus of work - far more than they could handle. Shirley and Dorothy helped out by doing some at home. When finished, Linda's response - I'd better check them. We had to smile.

Also the workmates had activities amongst themselves; at that time Tiny Tins Tea included bird cards as a promotional tool. Linda liked to collect these - 3 books of them - and swapped spare cards with others at work. We used to introduce her to others as our sister; now we were introduced as Linda's sisters. She had a life of her own. And this was to continue for some 30 odd years - not without its difficulties of course.

Some 10 or 12 years later, the Oakleigh Centre took on a further enterprise - establishing a hostel on the premises. Many of the participants had elderly parents and so provision was made for the future. Later on, Linda was admitted to the hostel.

Yet another venture some time afterwards - what was termed Independent Living where 7 or 8 of the occupants moved into a suburban house. They lived as a family with rotating carers. Linda was admitted to a house in Mt. Waverley which was very comfortable. I remember her telling me how excited she was about her new home.

For the workshop, the hostel and the Independent Living, we are grateful to those who initiated these new ventures and developed them to a stage where Linda was able to fit in. Oakleigh Centre was in the forefront of caring for the disabled at that time.

Linda passed away following a heart attack on July 1st 1993.

Dorothy & Shirley