

Gorman House

Supplied by June Weise, resident at Gorman House in 1964.

I came to Canberra in 1964 to commence working in The Department of Army, and much to my mother's delight, I was too young to move into a government hostel. So, I lived for a time at the YWCA Hostel in Civic. (Another story in itself).

However, after a couple of years, not only was I old enough to move, I had outlived the strict rules (or so I thought) of the Y.

I'm not sure why I chose Gorman House. Maybe it was the proximity to the city!

At that time, the Blocks were segregated and I think I started out in "A" Block, sharing with the untidiest female I think I have ever encountered. Luckily, I can't remember her name. Anyway, it was normal to start by sharing with someone so you didn't suffer loneliness or homesickness.

"A" Block was considered a double Block and there was actually one married couple living in it at the time. In hindsight, I feel sorry for the poor man...where did he shower or bath.

After serving my "apprenticeship" in the double Block I was allowed to move to "B" Block to a single room, which was of course, a female block. The room was poky and bland (room B32). The good thing though I was right next to a bathroom. As I had come from a country town where we certainly didn't have a shower at our house, I was happy that there was a bath for me. I got used to being the first one up to have a bath daily. After a couple of years, I moved to a much bigger room (room B36) and again, had the bathroom next door. By now, I had learnt to make the room homier. I put up my own curtains and purchased my own TV and Radiogram (remember them).

Apart from meal time, I didn't mix as much as others did. I already had a boyfriend whose family were not transient residents- in fact they had actually moved here to run an orchard in Pialligo. However, I did go to a few parties and the interaction at meal times was great. We were often the last people to leave the dining room.

Mila, the woman in charge of the dining room, ran a strict establishment. You were allocated a certain seat at a table (with your own linen serviette); and that's where you sat for each meal. Occasionally, on a quiet Sunday night you may move to sit with friends. Of course, you took your own serviette and then put it back in its correct place afterwards.

Sometimes you were allowed to have guests for a meal, which of course, you had to pay for.

I had my sister stay with me for a couple of weeks once. We shared the same single bed!! I don't think I paid for her though! Don't tell my family!

Somehow, I remember that the Manager was a Mr. Dorsett, but I couldn't be sure of that. He roamed the corridors of a night protecting us innocent girls and knocking on our doors if he suspected we had a male in our room.

He did care though, and once after I had had a bad experience with a Dentist where my mouth wouldn't stop bleeding, he contacted my family for them to take me home to fully recover. The funny side of that experience was that I had to use a hostel towel to help with the bleeding. During the trauma, I was told several times I would have to pay for the damaged towel.

Ministers and Priests often visited us, again to protect our innocence and ensure that we hadn't fallen by the wayside. As we often had our clothes stolen from the clothesline it was quite normal to hang them in our rooms. What a rush it was to take down our indoor clothesline so our underwear was not on display when we answered the door to them.

We also had a regular hawker visited us, selling clothes which were different styles to what we could buy in fledgling Canberra.

I left Gorman House to move into my newly erected house before I got married a couple of months later.

I made some long-lasting friendship at Gorman House.

My story doesn't necessarily end there. My daughter had a stall there when the markets were there and I would often turn up to visit her and reminisce. Many a time I have been to Sage Restaurant where I bore my friends with stories of the past.