

2/3 A.H.S. CENTAUR ASSOCIATION, INC.

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NEWSLETTER MAY 2020

CENTAUR COMMEMORATIONS 2020

Instead of our front page being full of plans to commemorate those who served on the Centaur and particularly those who lost their lives, we are reluctantly reporting that all communal commemorations have been cancelled.

Families will continue to remember in their own way as they have always done. It is sad, though, that we can't be together physically.

Many of our members live nowhere near the various commemorations yet each year they join together with us in spirit. This year we will all be joining together in spirit with someone who is remembering somewhere...

One major casualty of the present situation is the printed newsletter. Unfortunately the printer is out of bounds. If you know someone who relies on the printed newsletter would you please print a copy from your electronic edition and send it to them.

THE LAST POST CEREMONY AWM CANBERRA

Because of COVID-19 The Australian War Memorial is closed to the public, but each evening they replay a previous Last Post Ceremony from their Archives.

On 14 May at 4.55pm they will be posting an archived AHS Centaur Last Post Ceremony to their social media platforms.

If you have an account and follow the Memorial on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or YouTube, you will be able to see the footage. You are also able to view past Last Post Ceremonies on the Memorial's website. For any further information, feel free to contact the Last Post Ceremony team at lastpostceremony@awm.gov.au



CENTAUR DISPLAY

AT THE SHRINE OF REMEMBRANCE MELBOURNE

The Shrine of Remembrance in Melbourne is also closed to the public until further notice, and there is some doubt as to when the planned Centaur display will be staged. However the plans remain in place and the work of preparation is proceeding. One day this will all end, life will get back to whatever is the new normal, and the display will be open to the public. Those who have already indicated they would like an invitation to the opening will be notified as soon as we have a date.

IMAGINING CENTAUR

*Neil Sharkey, Curator
Shrine of Remembrance, Melbourne*

Award-winning artist Dean Bowen encountered Centaur's story when the ship's wreck was discovered in 2009 near Moreton Island, off Queensland's south-east coast. Deeply touched and inspired, Bowen created a series of interpretive charcoal drawings. These works form the bedrock of the exhibition. Bowen's beautiful, unsettling, work underscores the horror of the violation, considered among the greatest war crimes ever committed against Australians but which, today, is largely forgotten.

"My initial inspiration for this series of works was the discovery of the Centaur's wreck in 2009. The events of the sinking touched me deeply and I worked intermittently on the series over several years. One drawing soon led to another as I imagined the events of that night in 1943..."

The art of internationally renowned artist Dean Bowen is hallmarked by quirky vibrant compositions depicting people, animals and everyday places and objects. His playful, simple renditions of rural and urban scenes implore the viewer to appreciate the beauty that exists

Continued next page

Continuing Imagining Centaur:

all around them—while simultaneously hinting at the hidden stories, motivations and undercurrents which exist in the lives of his subjects.

In the Centaur series, Bowen explores darker territory than is typically his wont. His child-like compositions amplify the horror of the events of 14 May 1943. Centaur's victims were blameless in the truest sense—their role being to assist the sick and injured of both sides. It is envisioned that Dean's work will also be utilised in an animation that will accompany the exhibition.

Alongside Dean Bowen's thought-provoking work will be a selection of relics from the sinking, on loan from the Australian War Memorial as well as a number of other items on loan from the Centaur Nurses Memorial Fund whose educational and fund-raising activities have kept the memory of the Centaur alive to the present day.

VIRTUAL COMMEMORATIONS

Though all communal commemorations have had to be cancelled for 2020, Centaur will not be forgotten on 14 May. Organisers of the various regular commemorations have found other ways to mark the anniversary.

The **AWM** will replay a previous Centaur **Last Post Ceremony** (see front page) at 4.55pm. It can also be viewed later.

Centaur Primary School which conducts the Service at Point Danger will remember on their website and Facebook. (centaur-p.schools.nsw.gov.au)

Macksville High School which usually participates in the Macksville commemorations will also have a commemorative piece added to their website and Facebook page. (macksville-h.schools.nsw.gov.au)

Centaur Association will add a commemoration to our website: centaurassociation.wordpress.com

Brisbane

The Centaur Memorial Fund for Nurses which conducts the Brisbane Service will update their website to commemorate this year's anniversary. www.centaurnursesfund.org.au

Dapto

Dapto-Port Kembla RSL sub-Branch which conducts the commemorations at Dapto will lay a wreath.

Congratulations

Robert (Jack) Gray

Association Member Jack Gray from the Illawarra district of NSW turned 100 years old on 14 October 2019.

Information from Vet Affairs Summer 2019:

Jack was born in the Sydney suburb of Erskineville. He enlisted in the Australian Army Dental Corps in December 1942 and was a captain (then acting major) with 2/2 Dental Unit. He was the youngest dentist to graduate at the time. He moved between units as men required dental work and was always welcomed wherever he went.

At one point Jack was posted to Wau, New Guinea, but getting there wasn't easy. The plane had to fly in through a gap in the mountains and through clouds. The Japanese were close by and the pilot had to turn back twice before arriving. Personnel and equipment were unloaded with engines running in preparation for a quick take off.

Jack's unit was then moved from Wau to a nearby village lower down the mountain where he contracted dengue fever on the second day. He was taken to Port Moresby hospital then back to Australia. He was in a coma for two weeks. He did not return to New Guinea and worked in Australia until his discharge in January 1946.

He developed some long-term friendships and advises younger veterans to look after their friends.

He credits his longevity to cod liver oil, constant mental and physical activity and not drinking or smoking too much.

From the Centaur Association:

Jack has been a member of the Association for many years. When his dental unit was posted to New Guinea they travelled on the Centaur's first voyage. He tells the story that because of the very real fear of enemy action he made his group sleep on the deck. When they objected he said he would give them a very good reason when they arrived in Port Moresby.

When Association members marched with the Oranje veterans for the Sydney ANZAC March, Jack would join us for the reunion, having watched the March on television with one of his mates.

Jack was our inaugural wreath-layer at the Dapto-Port Kembla RSL's Centaur commemorations at Dapto, and continued in this role until last year when he was in hospital.



TS CENTAUR AUSTRALIAN NAVY CADETS

*LEUT Linda T. Vann ANC
Commanding Officer TS Centaur*

On Wednesday March 11th we had a visit from four ladies from the Bribie Island Branch of The Partners of Veterans Association. The purpose of their visit was to present TS Centaur with an RSL Community Link Memorial Project to commemorate the twelve nurses on the AHS Centaur. The concept is that cadets who are interested in the project are assigned a nurse who they are to research and represent on ceremonial occasions by wearing the nurses memorial plaque and a representative link card. The cadets were all keen to be part of the project.

March 11th was the last weekly parade for TS Centaur before all cadet activities were suspended as part of the Covid-19 restrictions. The cadets are continuing to work on the AHS Centaur Nurses Project and looking forward to when we can resume normal activities and they are able to represent the Nurses on ceremonial occasions.

Two of the AHS Centaur Nurses projects are included below.

AHS Centaur Captain Myrle Moston **by RCT Tyson Copas**



With the outbreak of fighting in New Guinea, the allied army there needed constant resupply as well as medical evacuation for sick and wounded troops. In January 1943 the Centaur, a passenger and cargo ship which had been operating along the Western Australian coast for twenty years, was converted into a hospital ship capable of carrying almost 300 patients. Sister Moston was posted on board.

In early May 1943, the ship set out from Sydney Harbour for its ill-fated second voyage, heading north to Cairns. On board were members of the 2/12th Field Ambulance, 12 nurses from the Australian Army Nursing Service, and 68 seamen from the ship's crew.

At approximately 4.10 am on Friday, May 14 1943, with many of those on board sound asleep in their bunks, Australian Hospital Ship Centaur was torpedoed by a Japanese submarine I-177 off the coast of Queensland, despite being ablaze with lights and clearly marked with red crosses.

Sister Ellen Savage, the only survivor among the 12 nurses later wrote: "My cabin mate, Myrle Moston and myself were awakened by two horrific explosions and practically thrown out of bed. Sister Moston and I were so shocked we did not even speak, but I registered mentally that it was a torpedo explosion. We rushed to the porthole, looked out, and saw the ship ablaze."

Still in their pyjamas, they rushed to the deck and jumped overboard together. Myrle was struck by a piece of falling timber and died in the water; she was 35 years old. Within three minutes the ship had sunk. Of the 322 crew and staff on board, only 64 survived.

Myrle Moston's name is listed on the Roll of Honour in the Canberra War Memorial, along with about 40,000 others from the Second World War, and her photograph is displayed today beside the Pool of Reflection.

AHS Centaur Sister Mary Hamilton McFarlane **by RCT Jayden Copas**

On the 14th May, 1943, AHS Centaur was on route from Sydney to Cairns when she was struck by a Japanese submarine south of Moreton Island, off the Queensland Coast. The boat was sunk and many lives were lost.

Mary Hamilton McFarlane was a Lieutenant Sister, on the Australian Hospital Ship Centaur



Birth date: April 10, 1915
Birth place: Cowell, South Australia, Australia
Death: May 14, 1943 (28)
Off Stradbroke Island

Went down with AHS Centaur, Queensland, Australia
Place of Burial: Queensland, Australia

Immediate Family: Daughter of Clyde McFarlane and Mabel Mary McFarlane, sister of John Norman Muir McFarlane

Occupation: Nurse

Mary Hamilton McFarlane had no children and was not married.



Cadets with the ladies from the Partners of Veterans Association Bribie Island.

Remembering

ex-SGT JACK HOWARD ARGENT, NX80674

Ship's Medical Staff, Survivor



Story submitted by his son, John Argent

This is the story of Jack Howard Argent (NX80674), a member of the Australian Army Medical Corps and staff of the AHS Centaur in May 1943. He was also my Dad.

Jack was born in Sydney on 21 April 1923, the second son of Marjorie and Cecil Argent. His older brother Clive died as an infant before Jack was born. Jack matriculated from Canterbury Boys High in 1940.

Jack's high school years coincided with the Great Depression. His father worked for the NSW railways as a blacksmith but only had three days' work a week, so Jack worked a full shift after school at the Sydney Morning Herald as a copy boy to bring in extra money. He would get home about midnight to start his homework.

He was already 6ft tall in his late teens so it was a simple matter to convince the recruiting officer that he was born in 1922. With his mother's approval he joined the Army on 29 December 1941 aged just 18 (officially 19).

One of the advantages of putting up his age was that he had two 21st birthday parties. One with his army mates from Centaur on the "official" date just a few weeks before the sinking, the other one with family a year later on the real date.



He joined the Australian Army Medical Corp and was posted to the 202 Camp Hospital in Cowra NSW.

In August 1942 he was transferred to 2/1 AHS Manunda to replace one of the hospital staff killed during the raid on Darwin in February. The Manunda had been damaged during the raid and lost twelve personnel. After extensive repair and refitting in Perth she went back into service on the New Guinea run with Jack as part of her AAMC staff. In March 1943, he was posted to the newly commissioned 2/3 AHS Centaur.

Centaur did several shakedown voyages along the eastern seaboard thence to NG and back to Brisbane with wounded servicemen. The ship returned to Sydney for reprovisioning before departing for Port Moresby on 12 May 1943.

Like most of those on board Jack was asleep when the torpedo struck at 0410 hrs on 14th May. The blast knocked him out of bed so he grabbed his life-jacket and headed out on deck. On the way he tried desperately and unsuccessfully to force open the door to one of the nurses' cabins.

Apart from some discussion with my mother while he was recuperating in Tamworth he refused to talk about the Centaur. He explained to my sister shortly before his death that he didn't talk about the event "because he couldn't save the nurses".

Once he abandoned ship he was able to swim far enough away to avoid the suction created by the rapidly sinking Centaur. Eventually he found his way to the main group on the hatch-cover where Sister Savage was one of the survivors.

After being rescued by USS Mugford and returned to Brisbane he was admitted to Greenslopes Army Hospital. After seven days he was given leave and a travel pass back to Sydney.

His only physical injury was the loss of all hair follicles below the knee on both legs from standing in a bunker oil mix for 36 hours awaiting rescue. He suffered with the resulting psoriasis for the rest of his life.

On the train returning to Sydney, the stress from his experience caused him to break out in hives. He was taken off the train in Tamworth and sent to the 7th Army Hospital to recover. When his physical injuries had healed he was placed on light duties to recover from the psychological trauma he had endured, and became the hospital's telegram delivery boy.

Sometimes out of terrible tragedy a truly wonderful story emerges. It was during the month of his arrival in Tamworth, that the AAMWAS Sergeant in charge of admissions returned from her leave and took an instant shine to the new telegram boy. Sergeant Helen (Betty) Robinson is my mother.

By June 1944 he was well enough to be reassigned to full duties. He was posted to the 2/1 Australian

Jack Howard Argent cont.

General Hospital which embarked for Bougainville in November aboard ATS Duntroon. In January 1945 he was transferred to the 25 Battalion, Australian Army Pay Corps and promoted Corporal.

The situation on Bougainville was so grim that any person capable of holding a rifle was sent to the front. He saw action at Slaters Knoll in March and April where as a novice to front-line action, he was sent to a forward foxhole and couldn't understand why all the experienced men behind him weren't firing at the advancing Japanese soldiers. At the last minute Jack fired and was met by a volley of return fire from the enemy who now knew his position.

One bullet grazed the top of his head resulting in a bald patch which ever after he used to cover with his thick hair. He saw action again a few more times before the end of the war, and witnessed some horrible retribution by the enemy towards the local people. These latter events haunted him for the rest of his life

Following the local surrender by the Japanese on 21st August 1945 there was no urgency to repatriate the 25th Battalion as they were in a safe location, they could recover from the privations of war and they had ample food and water. In December he was confirmed in the rank of Sergeant.

The Battalion embarked for Sydney aboard SS Nordues on 14 February 1946. Wasting no time on his return, his engagement to Helen Frances (Betty) Robinson was announced on 16 March. He was discharged from the Army on 17 May 1946 and they were married at St Andrew's Cathedral in Sydney on 21st December.



Jack and Betty on their engagement

Initially they lived in the Argent family home at Punchbowl in Sydney, looking after Jack's step brother. Betty's parents meanwhile lived in Wahroonga where her father James was chauffeur to a wealthy retailer, Sir Sydney Snow. Part of James' remuneration was the use of a house for a peppercorn rental close by Sir Sydney's estate in Wahroonga.

In 1949, Sir Sydney sold his retail business to Nock and Kirby then retired to his country property at Bowral. He retained James as his chauffeur so Betty's parents moved down to Bowral with him. When Sir Sydney retired he donated his mansion in Wahroonga, 'Bonnie Brae', to the Red Cross as a convalescent hospital for soldiers. He offered the chauffeur's house to Jack and Betty for £1200. Two children, John in 1950 and Helen in 1952 were born during this time.

In 1955 they built a new home in Turrumurra which was to be Jack's home for the rest of his life. Their second son Phillip arrived in 1956.

After his discharge, Jack began a career with IBM and received awards from Head Office for his sales efforts over the next three years.

The lure of a new career saw him accept a position with a record company, Capitol Records. In 1955 he accepted a position as Sales Manager for the emerging Festival Records.

When the company went through a period of financial trouble, he accepted a position managing their biggest artist, Johnny O'Keefe. The contract to manage Johnny was held by an American Company, Lee Gordon Artist Management.

Jack was their only Australian employee and we still have some £25 invoices for appearance fees at various RSL Clubs which Betty typed for him. Every Saturday night Jack would go into the ABC television studio and assist Johnny with the live presentation of "Six O'clock Rock". Then, every Wednesday Johnny would arrive at Turrumurra to pick Jack up in his blue convertible Cadillac on his way to a show at the Newcastle Workers Club.

This was one of a number of occasions in Jack's career when he did all the work and received none of the credit for his efforts as all the biographies for Johnny O'Keefe only mention Lee Gordon who lived in USA.

By 1960 the pressures of frequent travel and looking after a temperamental artist saw Jack accept a position with a Music Publishing Company, Leeds Music which was based in New York.

They looked after the copyright on behalf of various song writers. Each year from 1963 Jack would be away for six weeks from the middle of January travelling around the world including the annual world music conference, MIDEM in Nice, France. He would then go on to London, New York (Head Office) and Los Angeles.

Jack Howard Argent cont.

On his first trip he met and established a friendship with Manager to the Stars, Brian Epstein. So, in 1964 he was able to announce the formation in Australia of Dick James Music within the Leeds stable. Dick James Music, handled all the music and copyright dealings for the Beatles, Gerry and the Pacemakers, Cilla Black and Billy J Kramer. A very major achievement!

Some years later he secured the rights to all the material by British song writing duo, Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Webber. These included "Jesus Christ Superstar".

In a eulogy after his death the esteemed music historian Glen A Baker wrote: "It was as a music publisher that Jack established himself in this country as an industry leader, becoming not only a senior Publisher Director of APRA (Australian Performing Rights Association) but also Chairman of The Australian Music Publishers Association. Few industry figures will have been more respected by his colleagues than Jack Argent"

He was honoured with a full-page obituary in the international music magazine, Billboard, and the new music room at Montrose House in Sydney was named in his honour.

In 1955, Frank Brown, who built the family home, introduced Jack to Lions International. By 1959 he was President of the Kuring-gai Club and in the following twenty years held all executive positions including Zone



Jack, Betty, John, Helen and Philip Argent seven weeks before Jack died

Chairman and Deputy District Governor. He took enormous pleasure from his work with Lions as he enjoyed assisting those that needed extra help.

One instance that I remember clearly was the first post-war visit to Sydney by the Japanese Navy. Lions International were assigned to offer hospitality to the visitors and despite some horrific wartime memories

Dad took the whole family to meet and welcome them. We all presented the young men with Australian gifts because as Dad said they weren't responsible for what happened. Many years later he told me that was one of the hardest things he had ever done.

His war experiences left long-term scars and through fellow Lions he rediscovered fishing. The solitude and companionship of fellow veterans helped evaporate some of the dark memories.

Fishing was always a big part of our family holidays at places like Harrington, Myall Lakes and Tuross Lakes. I was never aware of these dark times at home and only learnt some of his darkest memories when we fished together after I was married.

Betty's father taught Jack how to restore old wares which he found very rewarding. Over a period of years from the late 1960s he and Mum developed a thriving Antique and bric-a-brac business which Mum continued for twenty years after Jack passed.

At the end of 1981 following international takeovers and manipulations in New York (which only came to light after his death), Jack's contract was not renewed. At the peak of his professional influence, this move destroyed his self-confidence and began a very quick deterioration of his health. He collapsed two days before his 60th birthday passing away five weeks later on 25 May 1983. His wish was that his ashes were scattered in Pittwater, "because no one knew where the Centaur wreck was."

Early in 2010 Mum and I attended the official briefing to confirm the discovery of the AHS Centaur wreck by David Mearns.

At the National Memorial Service on 10th March 2010 in Brisbane we were joined by my wife Denise, my daughter, Vanessa and Jack's first grandchild. It was also my honour to attend, and drop a wreath, during the official Navy service over the wreck site, off Moreton Island, later that year.

Disclaimer:-

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OUR RATIONALE

To honour those who served and gave their lives on 2/3 AHS Centaur.

To provide a means of communication for Survivors, Descendants, Relatives, Friends & Organizations interested in 2/3 AHS Centaur.

To help the healing process which for many still continues.

To ensure that the memory never fades, and the facts are not forgotten by succeeding generations.

To turn a tragedy into a triumph, and to foster a peaceful and forward-looking attitude.

Last Post

Doreen Chegwyn niece of Pte Basil Douglas Colefax 2/12th FA, 22 September 2019.

Roberta (Bobbie) Pettiford, widow of Pte Alan Pettiford, survivor since deceased, 2/12th FA, 23/11/2019

Pam Key, sister-in-law of Pte Jack Key 2/12th FA, 24/11/2019.

Tony Fitzgerald 1/12/2019, and Isabel Fitzgerald 15/12/2019 daughter and son-in-law of Pte Clem Woods 2/12th FA.

Irene Burrows, sister of Ptes Allan and John Maynard, 2/12th FA, 20 /1/ 2020.



This edition's **Last Post** is particularly poignant for the Association. All the people we are farewelling have been long-term members. We have met them at various Commemorative Services or they and their families have kept in regular touch by phone and email.

For many years **Doreen Chegwyn** attended the Services at Point Danger with her husband Geoff. Doreen's uncle Pte Basil Douglas Colefax was a Tweed identity who is commemorated in Colefax House at Centaur Primary School.

We've met **Bobbie Pettiford** many times at the Brisbane Service. Alan was the last Queensland survivor of the Centaur. Bobbie was a great correspondent with the Association until her later years when her sons, Robert and Colin, kept us in touch.

Pam Key's family has kept us up-to-date with Pam's life and welfare over many years.

Two foundation members were **Isabel and Tony Fitzgerald**. With Isabel's sister Lucy and their families they regularly attended Commemorations at Concord, Dapto and the AWM in Canberra, more often than not, managing to attend at least two each year. During their latter years, Isabel became Tony's carer and it is so sad, though perhaps fitting, that they should have died so closely together.

Isabel and Lucy had a very Centaur-centred childhood. They grew up in the Illawarra district of NSW with which the 2/12th Field Ambulance had a close affinity. The veterans of the 2/12th Field Ambulance had been their father's friends and they took his family under their wing. As children Isabel and Lucy attended all Centaur commemorations at the Cenotaph in Martin Place and many veterans' functions.

Irene Burrows was a name on the end of many letters until we met her when the Navy took us all out into the Coral Sea on HMAS Manoora for a Service over the site of the Centaur. Irene had lost two brothers on Centaur, and she attended the Service with the name of each on either side of her chest. Irene was determined to honour her brothers in this way, and as her daughter Kaylene tells, she wasn't always truthful in answering some of the Navy's medical questions...

As if losing two brothers on Centaur wasn't enough for one person to bear, Irene also lost her son and daughter-in-law on MH370. Four months later she lost extended family on MH17. More recently her husband George passed away in December 2018 and her youngest son, Paul, in June last year.

In all this sadness Irene remained positive and buoyant. She had not been well, but made it to celebrate her 90th birthday and to meet her three great-grandchildren born in late 2019.

She leaves her family and those of us who knew her with great memories and the inspiration to remain positive against all adversity. We were all very lucky to have known her.



Association member, Ron Bergman, sent us this painting executed by survivor since deceased Ron Moate MN. Ron Moate was Chief Pantryman and stewards' delegate on the Centaur. Ron Bergman believes it is a painting of a training ship from Ron Moate's early career in the merchant navy.

Ron Bergman's Centaur story is one of the near-misses. Along with Robert Westwood, David Abbott and Roger Hart, he applied to be taken on as deck boy. They were successful, he wasn't. Only Robert Westwood survived.



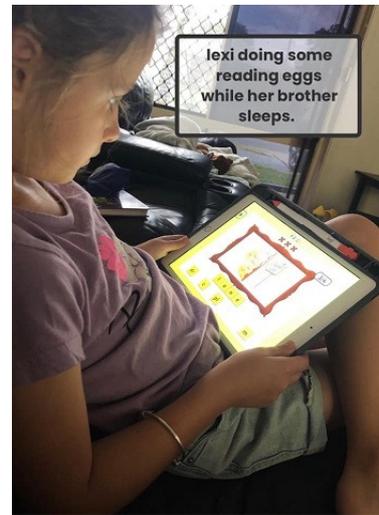
For home schooling parents, grandparents and carers, a great public service announcement from

Centaur Primary School.

From the school's Facebook page:

Don't worry about them regressing in school. Every single kid is in this boat and they all will be ok. When we are back in the classroom, we will all course correct and meet them where they are. Teachers are experts at this! Don't pick fights with your kids because they don't want to do math. Don't scream at your kids for not following the schedule. Don't mandate 2 hours of learning time if they are resisting it.

If I can leave you with one thing, it's this: at the end of all of this, your kids' mental health will be more important than their academic skills. And how they felt during this time will stay with them long after the memory of what they did during those 4 or more weeks is long gone. So keep that in mind, every single day.



Technology can provide a great learning tool.

Help from the ABC



The ABC will extend its educational programming on ABC ME to support students and caregivers at home. The expanded schedule moves from blocks of primary school content in the mornings through to secondary school content in the afternoons. Beginning Term 2.

From Centaur Primary School post on Facebook:

Home Schooling Update: My child just said: I hope I don't have the same teacher next year...

It reminded a member of the Association of Miss Seven who yelled at her mother in a fit of pique and frustration: I HATE YOUR SCHOOL.

But our reporter remembers just two months ago in another life before the wheels fell off when that same Miss Seven said to that same mother: 'Mummy, if you die, I want you to know that I love you very much; I'm very grateful for all you do for me, and I'll always remember you.'

Our reporter would like to remind that mother and all home schooling parents that one day when this is all over you will get your real Miss Seven back.

Maths in the Kitchen



Planning
Organising
Measuring
Sorting
Categorising
Weighing
Counting
Sequencing
Estimating

Reading in the kitchen

Recipes, instructions, packets, jam tins...

And the proof of the pudding is in the eating

Let us remember the Centaur - a vessel of mercy on the turbulent waters of a world at war.