

Year One

England was at war with Germany. A little, insignificant painter had magically gained control of an ailing nation. A nation not yet recovered from earlier world aggression, and international depression. Progressively, entire countries were slipping under the power of the swastika.

America and Australia seemingly had exhausted their populations of youthful manpower, through fighting in North Africa and surrounding areas of the Middle East. The Italian forces were assisting the Germans in these locations, and the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbour – creating havoc in the once serene Pacific region.

Australians were returned from the Middle East to be sent to the Malaysian New Guinea areas. Young men who were schoolboys when the conflict had begun, were anxious to defend our liberty – with many of them hiking up their ages to allow them to enlist. They wanted to help in the chaotic battles to prevent the conflict spreading insidiously throughout the so-called ‘civilised’ nations.

From the arduous task of individual survival during these times, to the needs of men in finding work to feed and keep families, came those with money – creating projects for these men, whilst profiting along the way. Through this, it became essential for

science and technology to produce the best and fastest means to move, build, create, and heal.

A snowball of scientific progress began rolling, and men expanded their knowledge with continuous momentum. Those born, or educated, to help their fellow men, were forced into attempting radical methods to save life. A great revolution in medical science and technology swept throughout the world.

In the beginning, Man, the most economically produced computer, survived the corrections made within its individual housing. Early scientists discovered that growing trees, herbs, and plants could assist in malfunctions, and the mechanics – with the assistance of the medicines – constituted minor repairs, and allowed rest and loving care to assist in recovery.

We have adjusted our way of life to accept the faith of man in giving us knowledge to live with many adversities, genetic and traumatic, for our brief existence on this earth.

Jane Starts to Nurse

Jane was eighteen. She was the sixth daughter of British parents who had migrated to Australia before the First World War. Many women were replacing men in communications centres in the allied services, to enable men to fill the increasing appetite of the War God. Jane had decided to join the R.A.A.F. and was studying Morse code and telecommunication.

A preliminary course was necessary prior to acceptance, and final papers had not yet been completed. On a visit to her parents, who were living in the country, a fall from a horse left Jane with a fractured ankle and a subsequent sojourn in the local district hospital.

Because of the intake of females into the forces, the nursing

staff was depleted, and observing the need (and with not too much persuasion from the dear old medics attending her), Jane changed her mind about joining the services and decided to enter into the hospital to train as a nurse. Her parents were not well pleased, since nursing was a respected profession, but lowly paid. However, little was said, as everybody had decided Jane would last only a few weeks due to the fact that she had always had her own ideas, and surely would soon tire of the menial tasks involved.

Recovered from the ankle fracture, the day arrived for the interview with the Hospital Matron. Usually, Jane liked to wear frilly-necked dresses with flared skirts billowed out with a rope-enforced petticoat. But for this day, she chose an austere, lemon-coloured linen suit, with a straight skirt, set off by a silk blouse – with generous pintucking the only decoration. Brown shoes, gloves, and handbag toned with her brown hair, dark brown eyes, and tanned skin (acquired by sunning outdoors whilst resting her broken bones).

In her bag, Jane had taken her Birth Certificate, education qualifications, and two character references; one from her church Minister and one from the local town Mayor, who had known the family for many years.

Jane walked confidently into the hospital, and ten minutes before her appointed time to visit the Matron, knocked on the door over which a sign indicated that this was where her fate would be decided.

“Come in,” a mild, but firm, tone answered Jane’s knock.

Jane stepped into a large room with a huge desk in it. The floor was polished like glass, and everything in the room looked as though it had just been painted. A large brass jardinière on an oak stand stood brimming with huge chaster daisies, and blue

hydrangeas, somehow taking her mind from what had suddenly become an almost terrifying experience.

The matron – grey-haired, petite in stature, wearing the whitest, crispest starched veil and uniform – smiled gently and said, “Sit down.”

It was obvious that here was someone who would understand immeasurable problems, but would demand the precision of a spider spinning its web. Jane wondered if she would be able to live up to the standards this woman had devoted herself to attaining. She wondered what she was doing there; why she had changed her mind and put herself in the position of dedicating the next four years of her life to people who would live, suffer, and, even though perhaps not at this time, eventually die. “Why?” she asked herself. Why had she chosen to help people live, when men were needlessly slaughtering each other on land, sea, and in the air, all over the world?

The thought dissipated, however, when the matron said, “I’ll show you around the hospital. You will be part of it for the next four years, and it will be your home. We really need more young ladies to join us, as so many are going into the Forces.” Formalities completed, the tour began.

In the middle of the building was a large kitchen with a big, gleaming steel sink. In the bottom of the sink, was a flat tray full of holes, underneath which ran a snake of piping. Matron warned Jane that many nurses had burned their hands on these pipes as steam was used to boil the dishes. Though mostly done by ward maids – the nursing staff cleaned up evening suppers, early teas, and night requirements, as the maids were not on duty at these times. It was everybody’s duty to leave a tidy ‘Day Room’ as it was termed. Tall stands supported trays already set for the noon meal,

and large refrigerators occupied almost one wall of the room. Four trolleys stood against the wall near the door in readiness to be transported to the main hospital kitchen – little bright red lights shone at the base, as they were slowly heated to receive the food.

The next room, near the day room, was an area of continuous activity. Here was a room full of endless cupboards, which contained; all the medicines, equipment for administering it, drawers of glass syringes, needles, and stainless steel bowls of every size imaginable. The cupboards above them held stacks of linen parcels, which were slightly stained from sterilising.

Underneath large windows two sterilisers bubbled merrily away, and beside these, was a tiny, round cylindrical machine with a door that looked as though it had been stolen from one of the wartime submarine hatches. Along the benches, nurses were busily setting trays with linen first, and then many odd looking items on top. Two nurses wore rubber gloves and had their faces covered with gauze masks edged with blue, leaving only their eyes and forehead visible to Jane's interested gaze. They used strange tongs to place objects onto trays, obviously a carefully taught and practised art. The nurses politely said, "Good morning Matron," and she replied, stating that Jane would meet them later.

Across the hall – an area of gleaming polished wooden floor – was a room, above the door of which was a sign (in the same black and white stark lettering as that above the Matron's door), reading 'SISTER'. This was a smaller room than the Matron's, but it was used by more people, and contained trolleys filled with charts that seemed very important, as they were under the watchful eye of the sister. The desk was in front of a large window through which the entire activity of the ward in front could be observed. Again there was a wall of cupboards containing the recordings of