

MEMORIES OF BRISBANE CITY HALL

My first sighting of Brisbane City Hall was Christmas 1933 when as a nine year old I came with my family from Longreach to visit my grandparents, recently arrived from Tambo, Central Western Queensland..

I thought then that the City Hall was a beautiful building and still do. Mum took us for a ride to the lookout in the Tower and we were up there when the clock chimed. What a noise!!! I think that has been my only visit to the tower.

I came back to Brisbane for a few months in 1935 and stayed with my grandparents and often saw City Hall whilst in the City, especially when attending the movies at the Tivoli Cinema across the road.

What is now King George Square was then a very wide Albert Street with traffic flowing past the door of City Hall, crossing Ann Street and into Roma Street.

Across from City Hall on Ann and Roma Streets corner where the Crest is today was the majestic Windsor Hotel with its lovely iron lace veranda railings, a popular rendezvous for country guests when visiting Brisbane. It was a perfect partner for City Hall. Much has been said over the years when the Bellevue was demolished by the "wreckers ball" but nary a word did I hear when the Windsor was demolished.

In 1938 my family moved to Brisbane. I attended school in the City. We lived at Paddington. Our tram stop outwards was where Hardy Bros Jewelry store is today and our stop on the way in was near the stairway to the Restrooms. Many is the visit I made to those Restrooms over the years right up to to-day when I often have a cuppa and a sandwich at the Red Cross Café.

When I left school at the end of 1939 and began working I passed City Hall twice a day in the tram and often when taking a lunchtime stroll. It was the highest building in Brisbane and I never tired of its beauty.

I don't recall what the year was when Albert Street was divided by the erection of the King George V Memorial, flanked by "The Lions" - maybe 1937/1939

During World War 11, I attended the dances at City Hall on Saturday nights. They attracted so many men and women of the fighting forces of all nations, most of them away from home, lonely and making the most of to-day for who knew what to-morrow would bring. I couldn't count the number of times I have

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Quick stepped, Jazz Waltzed, Fox Trottled and Gypsy Tapped my way around the dance floor of the lovely Auditorium. The Sunday night dances attracted mostly American Servicemen, also away from their loved ones, enjoying the company of the local girls whom they taught to Jitterbug. Not only the girls learned to jitterbug but some of the local lads who were not old enough to be in the Services.

There were two nights that stand out in my memory of scenes witnessed by the stately City Hall. On the evening of Tuesday August 14, 1945 word filtered through that Japan had surrendered in the Pacific. I was in town that evening and had not heard the news. My friends and I walked up Queen Street heading for a dance venue. We met groups of joyous servicemen, mostly inebriated. We asked why they were so happy. THE WAR IS OVER we were told and were promptly hugged and kissed by complete strangers, didn't matter whether we were plain or pretty and we didn't care either - our loved ones would be coming home. We abandoned the dance and went to City Hall. Wide Albert Street was already a seething mass of people. King George V soon found out that "There was room on my horse for two" (acknowledgement Rolf Harris) and even more as servicemen clambered all over the monument whilst others rode on the lions backs, there was singing and dancing in the streets. People who had never seen each other before hugged and kissed. Brisbane had been "brownd out" for several years and it was fairly dark so we couldn't see very well who was kissing who but it didn't matter. My friends and I, now an enlarged group ended up in Roma Street in front of where the Crest Hotel is now. Two young policemen from nearby Roma Street Police Station were sent out to "keep law and order". As they approached us we circled around them and played "Ring a Rosy". They could see they had no hope of "keeping order" so joined in the fun hoping their Sergeant would understand. It was very late when I got home that night!!! The "Courier Mail" headlines next morning were spectacular as the Prime Minister had announced Peace in the Pacific had been declared. When I arrived at work, in an American Shipping Company next morning on Wednesday, August 15, 1945, the American boss told us the Office was closed for the day. GO OUT AND CELEBRATE, but make sure you are back here tomorrow.

The streets of Brisbane were thronged with happy people and City Hall Square was again packed to capacity. That evening there was an official

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Ceremony in front of City Hall probably by the Lord Mayor, who from memory was Sir John Chandler.

Wonderful as those two evenings were, I sincerely hope it will be a "one off" for Brisbane City Hall which was not built when World War 1 ended. It is something that hopefully citizens of Brisbane will never do again - for that particular reason.

I used to hear remarks about the dreadful acoustics of the Auditorium when this was the biggest venue in Brisbane for Symphony Concerts and for overseas artists, the likes of Eileen Joyce Concert Pianist (March 1948), Winifred Atwell, The Vienna Boys Choir and many others. As well as Annual Balls and Debutante Balls, voting days, Chelsea Flower Shows, Speech Nights, the crowning of the first Miss Queensland - Miss Rhonda Kelly, who went on to be Miss Australia - after World War 2 and many Gala events now forgotten by me, the City Hall has been host to all.

The beautiful organ in the Auditorium is a tribute to all those in Council Office over the years who were responsible for its installation and I have heard it played many times.

In 1950 I married, and my husband and I became ratepayers. Our 16 perch block cost us the equivalent of about \$40 per annum in rates. This year I paid \$1416.25 after concessions on that same bit of dirt.

In those days we paid our rates and electricity bills at City Hall, Adelaide Street entrance, up a few stairs and left to a row of Cashiers cages. These were the days before electronic banking, direct debits and credits and credit cards. Not many of the working class had cheque books so we paid in cash.

In 1950 I changed from a tram traveller to a bus patron. The privately owned bus from Swann Road, Taringa travelled along Adelaide Street from George Street, turned left at City Hall and across to the junction of Ann and Roma Streets outside Roma Street Police Station near where the Markets used to be. On the trip outwards, the bus travelled on the other side of Albert Street, picked up passengers at Adelaide and Albert Streets then via Adelaide, George and Roma Streets to Coronation Drive and thence to Taringa so I did not miss my daily observance of City Hall.

IN 1953 I left work to become a Mother. My contact with City Hall was restricted to shopping days in the City until the day my first baby was due for her Triple Antigen Needles - no Medicare then. Along with many other Mothers I lined up at the Health Clinic. The event was like an assembly line. Mother sat on a chair near the Doctor, Nurse swabbed baby's arm, Doctor jabbed in the needle, babies howled, toddlers glared at the Doctor before bellowing and Mothers searched nappy bags for a bottle to soothe the child. Then most of us had to clamber on to buses and trams with strollers (for which we needed a permit), nappy bags and fretful children. Two car families were a bit scarce then. No wonder on arrival home, we enjoyed that cuppa, a Bex and a good lie down!!! In 1961 I lined up at the Health Clinic again with my second baby not knowing then that this little fellow would in the year 2004 celebrate his 25 years service as an employee of Brisbane City Council!!!

When King George Square was being developed I often wondered did the Lord Mayor (was it Clem Jones) lay awake at night worrying in case our beautiful City Hall fell into the big hole in front of it. To me, the big hole seemed perilously close to the main Entrance.

With the advent of big shopping centres in the suburbs and phones in most homes, it was now not necessary to go to the city to conduct business

In the last few years I have spent time in City Hall by attending the midday concerts on Tuesdays and the Operatif/Singing Brisbane concerts. I am fascinated whilst at these concerts by the beauty of the Auditorium. How lucky we are to have such a wonderful place to come to be entertained and whilst there my thoughts wander back in time to the many times I have been in this Auditorium. I often sit in the foyer waiting for the doors to open and see groups of mostly Asian tourists. On walking in, it is eyes up to see the ornate ceiling in the foyer, some oohs and aahs then click, click,click. How many places in the world have our lovely City Hall photos been shown? Then there are times when I visit Museum of Brisbane and learn more about our City - I love local History.

These days I wait in Adelaide Street, opposite City Hall to get my bus home to St Lucia.

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BRISBANE CITY HALL, you are now dwarfed by the many high rise buildings around you, and you have a lovely Square in front of you. If no one else in Brisbane enjoys what a lovely building you are - don't fret - YOU HAVE ONE LONG STANDING ADMIRER!!!

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