Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE4802

Mitchell, Lorna May

(1913 - 2014)

Born	19130704, Kunanalling Western Australia Australia
Died	20141009, Kalgoorlie Western Australia Australia
Occupation	Politician, Red Cross Worker, Teacher

Details

Lorna Bell was born in Kunanalling and went to school in Kalgoorlie and Coolgardie. She married Rex Mitchell in 1934 and they had one daughter, Jan. Rex died in 1985, aged 83.

During the Second World war she joined the Red Cross where she became known as ‘Mrs Bottletops’ as she collected aluminium tops from bottles for recycling as part of the war effort. She met the Australian Troop trains full of soldiers going to or returning from the war, providing soup and other special meals. She ran the Parakeet Dance Hall to raise funds for ‘the boys’ and later met the trains carrying war brides on to Melbourne and Sydney and on to the US to provide a last touch of home in Kalgoorlie for the women. Lorna said that after a chance to change clothes and freshen up, ‘… many was the girl who cried on my shoulder before getting back on that train’. She also helped run the Blood Bank and assisted in the rehabilitation of the returned soldiers. After the war Lorna became involved in the Fresh Air League, a charitable organisation that gave underprivileged goldfields children the opportunity to enjoy a ‘fresh air’ holiday by the sea.

From 1946 Lorna devoted much of her time as a voluntary aide assisting deaf children with their education. In August 1947 she became an assistant teacher – special education with the then superintendent recognising her incredible perception and ability to teach deaf children and others deemed ‘unteachable’ because of their disabilities. In 1951 as principal she opened her school dedicated to the teaching of these children. It became the greatest achievement of her life for 33 years, and in 1985 the school was named after her. For her work she received the British Empire Medal and as a further honour in 1998 for her continued work with people with disabilities the Active Foundation made her an Honorary Life Member and Life Governor.

In 1969 she was elected the first woman to the Kalgoorlie town council and later became deputy Mayor. In a decade of service to the council and community affairs she raised the status of women and opened the door for many to follow.

A select list of her other contributions to the community includes helping organisations such as the Citizens Advice Bureau, Women’s Health Care Centre, Friends of the Hospital, Police and Aboriginal Community Relations Committee, Goldfields Childcare Centre and Goldfields Aged Welfare along with active roles in social or professional organisations such as Business and Professional Women’s Association, Hannans Golf Club, Goldfields Repertory Club, president of the Senior Citizens and president of Prospect Lodge.

Lorna was a Justice of the Peace and Kalgoorlie’s best fundraiser, ticket seller and tin rattler for numerous worthy causes. In 1996 she received the Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) for services to the community.

Published resources

Site Exhibition
Faith, Hope and Charity Australian Women and Imperial Honours: 1901-1989, Australian Women's Archives Project, 2003,
http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/honours/honours.html

Karlkurla Gold: A History of the Women of Kalgoorlie-Boulder, Criena Fitzgerald and National Foundation for Australian Women, 2012,
http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/wikb/wikb-home.html

Book
One Hundred Women of the Eastern Goldfields, 2000

Resource
Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Archival resources

National Library of Australia, Oral History and Folklore Collection
Lorna Mitchell interviewed by Criena Fitzgerald [sound recording]

Author Details
Criena Fitzgerald

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