

***The Old School Days In The 1940's***  
***Remembered by Josie Markie (nee Easton)***

I was nick-named Witty at an early age. My name was Agnes Maud Easton. I was called Witty until I went to high school. I have two sisters, Anne, nick named Paddy and Shirley.

Our family lived just past the Rere Slides. Our Dad drove a passenger freight truck for Gisborne Transport. It must have been school holidays as he had taken us to town, as a holiday, as it was the only time we went to town as we didn't have a car. Dad took us in the truck and on the way home, we got as far as Ngatapa Hill when Mr JB Williams stopped us to tell Dad our house had burned down. He said to call at the Rere School, owned by Mr Glennie, as the General Store had closed. Kind people had put blankets etc together for us. Dad's brother, uncle George worked for the Harris family, and he had a house. We stayed with him for a while. Then were able to move to the Shearers quarters till Dad was able to get boards from an old bridge to build a floor and sides for a house. It had a canvas cover for a roof. We slept at one end. It had a big fireplace made from iron sheets. It had a pipe across the fire to support the camp ovens. Mum cooked in the camp ovens.

As I was of school age, I went to stay with my Grandparents, Mums mother and father at Patutahi. At this time Ann was ill with rheumatic fever and Shirley was too young to go to school.

I went to Patutahi School.

A lot was going on at home that I didn't know about. I think Dad got a building, like a 3-room house. When I got home (don't remember how long I was away) we had 2 bedrooms, sitting room a dining room/kitchen with a coal range. A veranda along one side with a washhouse at one end and bedroom at the other. It had a copper to heat water, a tub and bath. Water was pumped from the river to a tank which was on top of a tank stand.

A concrete pipe was dug into the ground on one end and a cream can was put inside with a board on top to use as a fridge. It worked well.

It was now time for me to go to Rere School. I went with Dad and walked home. It wasn't long before Dad got 2 horses. Paddy and I rode on Bonny, a Black/Brown horse and Shirley had a white one.

At school I was in the highest class the whole time I was there. Approximately 6 years. Some boys would be older.

Our Teacher, Miss Hair, a short little lady, made us listen to the radio everyday as they read out names of the soldiers dead or missing in action. She said, you never know when an uncle or someone your family knows, name will be read out.

Each morning the 9am bell rang, we sang God Save Our King as the flag was raised. Inside times tables were printed on paper and hung above the black board.

We didn't have milk but apples instead. I handed them out. Sometimes, if I liked a boy, I gave them a big Apple or 2 small ones.

Each family bought a bottle of milk to school. It was put into the billy on the stove with sugar and cocoa. Sometimes the milk was not so fresh when it went into the billy. You never know who bought the sour milk but there was no cocoa to drink on those days. The taste on a cold winter's day was never to be forgotten.

We played knuckle bones and marbles at the back of the school. We used pine needles from under the trees to make little houses and we lay on the grass and watched the "thistle down" float by. We knew all the names of the clouds. That's how we spent our lunch hour.

At home time there were 3 to 4 horses to saddle. Shirley hit a horse on the rump and said "get out of my road". It did and stood on her toe. A trip to hospital and one little toe was gone.

Going home the road was high above the Rere Slides and on a sunny day we could see trout in the edges of the pool at the bottom.

Dad came home one night with 4 bantam hens that old Mr Snow Hanson gave him. Us kids went down to the fowl yard which had a 6-foot-high wire netting sides. Carefully opening the box out flew the 4 hens, over the netting sides, over the river and into the cabbage trees, never to be seen again. Who said chickens can't swim.

Mum had a great vege garden until one day the gate was left open. It had a chain with a weight on it and worked ok so long as it wasn't pushed open too far. We had gone to town and got home to the open gate. Mums poor garden. The air was blue but the pigs lived on.

Another teacher I remember was Miss Bagley (Marge) No Christian names were used at school. She rode to school and wore riding trousers and long boots all day.

After assembly, one Monday, she said Mr Smith, who had a little shop in front of his batch had been robbed by 3 schoolboys. They owned up and each got three of the best. We all sat at our desks frightened to move or breathe.

We did learn to swim with the help of a piece of wood in the river down from the house. One arm and a leg on one side.

We wanted to find out if hens could swim. We threw one in the river, when it came back out, we threw it in again. We did this about 5 times. I dried it with my skirt as it looked close to death. It lived to lay many more eggs.

Oh, those were the days. To be able to turn the clock back would be amazing.

***Prior to an afternoon tea visit to Rere School by Josie and her two daughters, Jaki and Sherryll, in July 2022, Josie wrote these memories. They were collated by her daughter and read out during her visit.***

***Josie especially wanted the students at Rere School to know what it was like for her, any many others, living and schooling in the 1940s.***

***Sadly, Josie passed away on the 18<sup>th</sup> of August 2022. She talked about that visit often and was grateful to the students for their keen interest and thought-provoking questions.***

***Through our Mum, Rere School will always have a special place in our hearts.***

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