

Riebeeek Hostel

How It Was – The “Old” and “New” Hostels

Mrs E.J. Olwage was the matron who saw the start of the “old” hostel in Cannon Street and who cared for, scolded and loved every individual boarder who spent any time under that roof. Matron Olwage must look back with satisfaction on all that she achieved there under very difficult conditions for the building was old, as was much of the equipment. On the Sunday that Mrs E.J. Bartlett, who was the headmistress from 1957 to 1972, first entered the hostel, every corner shone and every locker bore its fresh and gay floral arrangement in an assortment of small containers.

She remembers the 38 pairs of girlish eyes that watched every move she made and the 38 pairs of girlish ears that listened to every nuance of her voice. It was an altogether unnerving experience for her, for youth is the sternest and most intolerant of all critics. She felt that the boarders probably summed her up a lot more quickly than she got to know them, but she has many fond memories of the happy times spent with the boarders, both at the old and the new hostels – occasions which ranged from all-day picnics at Jeffrey’s Bay to coffee-making

sessions in her flat. In this sphere, as well as in school life generally, Mr McIntyre was an important and well-loved figure, especially by the “babies” whose birthday sweets “Mr Mac” never forgot.

Rather sadly, much of this intimate family atmosphere was lost with the official occupation of the New Hostel in Preller Road in January, 1970. It was perhaps inevitable that the first two years of getting the new hostel off the ground should be difficult. Virtually overnight the number of boarders doubled, the hostel staff were new and the matron retired after nearly eighteen years of devoted service.

Miss Bartlett and her sister moved into the Superintendent’s flat and it was a period of re-adjustment, and trial and error for all. But after nine years of effort, they were proud of the modern, spacious building and of the amenities they were able to provide, as well as the furniture they had been able to have made for the New Hostel due to the funds raised through activities such as “The Big Walk” and “The Big Swim”.