



Extraordinary Editha

Imagine this: the year is 1929, it's a hot Brisbane weekend at Somerville House, and the pool is full of boarders – not swimming, scrubbing. They're cleaning the pool under the watchful eye of Swimming Captain Editha Bentley, whose duty was to empty the pool each week, clean it, and refill it in time for the next round of training. The process started after school when Edie (as she was known) turned the wheel to drain the pool. After persuading her fellow boarders to help her clean it, she would turn on the tap to fill the pool and then rise early the following morning to turn the water off before it overflowed. It seems a far cry from today's modern technology, but it worked: a skilled swimmer, Editha won the Junior Championship for three years running (1926 to 1928), claiming the MacMillan Cup outright. She also held the Senior Championship from 1929 to 1930. Her determination and commitment were hallmarks of her life, and would later see her cross the seas as a war-time bride to marry her English love.



Editha joined Somerville House in 1920 as a kindergartner and established herself as an athletic force to be reckoned with just a few short years later. She was a member of the School athletics team from 1924 to 1930, a member of the Brockway Cup team from 1928 to 1929, the 1931 winner of the Mollie Gould Cup and a member of the House Committee the same year – to name just a few of her achievements. She continually brought honour to Somerville House in external competitions, holding the open and backstroke championship at the Queensland Secondary Schools' Swimming Association. But Edie was interested in more than reaching individual goals – in true Somerville spirit, she worked tirelessly to train younger swim team members to help them thrive. Perhaps helping to scrub the pool was all part of the training.

Editha graduated from Somerville in 1931, but she didn't end her relationship with the School – or with water. In 1939, she met an Englishman in Sydney and fell in love. Edie was set to marry Eric Robinson in 1940 when war broke out. Originally her fiancé was to return to Australia for the wedding, but when World War II began, it was decided Edie would travel to England to be married. The journey was not a simple one; she took one of the early flying

boat services to London, a trip that took eight days and included numerous overnight stops, with each landing and take-off from the water.

The adventures were just beginning for Editha, as she soon became Mrs Robinson and settled into her new home in Essex, London. She would become accustomed to rationing and blackouts as German forces bombed London during the Blitz. One can only imagine the bravery of a young woman living so far from home during such tumultuous years. Though the Robinson's home was just 11 kilometres from the city centre, she reported to the Brisbane Telegraph that "only portions of their roof suffered".

In 1949, Editha made another journey over the water, returning to Redcliffe, Queensland, to visit her parents. This time her travel took much longer; she boarded the British ocean liner Orion, a converted troop ship, on November 11 and spent several weeks at sea before residing with her parents for six months. She spent the remainder of her married life in the United Kingdom, but eventually returned to Australia (although she kept in close touch with her beloved English relatives).

Her relationship with Somerville House continued, and her generous spirit and love of swimming were always on

display. At some point, she graciously donated the MacMillan Cup back to the School. It, and Editha, played an integral role at the opening of the new Aquatic Centre. She joined young prep student, Belinda Harris in symbolically pouring the water from the original School pool into the new one, using the MacMillan Cup. A photo of the two Somerville students featured on the cover of a Somerville House Foundation brochure.

Editha's kindness and passion for supporting other Somerville students continued even after her passing in 1997. Editha's final gift to Somerville was a generous bequest of \$650,000 – one of several charitable donations to causes close to her heart. Editha is remembered by the many students who have benefitted from her gift over the years. Her community spirit, bravery and generosity demonstrate our Somerville House values and inspire generations of Somerville girls.

*Gifts in Will have an ongoing impact on the Somerville community, and can provide life-changing educational opportunities for young women. Contact Director of Philanthropy, **Ms Petrina Gilmore** on (07) 3033 9289 for a confidential discussion about Gifts in Will or other ways to contribute to the Somerville House Foundation.*