

A very fortunate 'boomer'

I am an original 'baby boomer'. Born in the wake of WW2, to parents whose own youth and educational opportunities were cut short by war; who made the courageous decision to leave Scotland and emigrate to Australia in 1956. They hoped for better opportunities for their children and as a consequence, I have had a very fortunate life.

I entered Medicine on a Commonwealth Scholarship [no University fees for the 'boomers'].

I was the first of my family to go to University, and at my school to do Medicine. Half the girls finished school at Intermediate Certificate after Year 3, to enter the workforce, head off to Business College, or Nursing, then hospital based. Such was the expectation for girls in 1964.

At University the only discrimination which I experienced was the exclusion of women from the Public Bars, which meant the 'Ladies Lounge' out the back with beer a few cents more expensive.

In 1972 conditions were changing for female junior residents. Salaries were now equal for male and females (from 1971); hospitals which previously limited females on the basis of 'inadequate accommodation' now found that with female given names suppressed, they were unable to choose. I decided early on that neurology fitted my personality. In the days before cerebral scans, this was by far the most challenging clinical specialty. In my third year I became the first female medical registrar at Royal North Shore Hospital, xxxxxxx and I became the very first female neurology trainees in the new College system.

As the Australasian Fellow appointed to Queen Square, London I got in the 'back door' so to speak and inadvertently became the first female registrar 'on the house' at this Neurological mecca. I stayed for 3 years, while only a few noticed that I was a bit different.

On my return to Sydney in 1981, I was offered a position at RNSH, as a VMO. With no provisions of maternity leave in those days; no part time hospital positions, I set up in private practice which provided flexibility but excluded any chance for an academic career. I have had a very satisfying career as a clinical neurologist, a mix of clinical practice, teaching, administration, involved with patient advocacy and public education programs. Neurological practice today is unrecognisable to that practiced in 1972.

I am in awe of the extraordinary achievements of many of the younger College women today and I am so pleased to see what has been achieved in just a few decades.