

**"We Missed out on our Teen Years"**, is a book by Sharon O'Neill about her mother, Ronnie O'Neill, (nee Drinkwater). Sharon produced this book for her mother's eightieth birthday, "trowelling" Ronnie's memories. The book, subtitled "Growing up in rural Australia in the 20s, 30s, and 40s, has a cover showing 19-year-old Ronnie (christened Veronica) in AWAS uniform. "1925 was a good year for Australia," the book begins. "Radio had begun to take off, Vegemite was being introduced to Australian palates, and Veronica Gladys Drinkwater was born in Maryborough, Queensland."

Ronnie's father was a ganger, or railway line maintenance man, a good steady job in depression times. They moved around, to Westwood, to Lawgi, at the end of the line from Rockhampton, then Thangool, then to a suburb of Rockhampton. It's a family story, well told, with sadness about her brother Ern, who died too young. Ronnie won a scholarship which would take her to high school or commercial college. She chose the latter and excelled.

It was 1943. Rockhampton was crowded with 70,000 GIs. Ronnie, aged 18, joined the AWAS in June, and reported at the Drill Hall before catching the train to Brisbane. There were three other "new girls" ...Nelly Allen, an Aboriginal girl who came down from Cairns, and Joyce Kent and Bunny Radburn from Rockhampton.

In Brisbane they were sent to a Stenographers' School, (Ronnie had a shorthand speed of 250 words a minute.) All ended up at Central Bureau. They shared a hut at Chermside. Ronnie worked for a while in the Henry Street garage, then in the fire station at Ascot Park on the key punching machine. Excellent photos show Ronnie with Bunny (another key puncher) and other girls, including Sally Spiers, an American WAC, at lunch in the Park. It wasn't all work. The book shows Ronnie's invitations to dances at some American units. These had big bands (Ronnie loved to jitterbug), but evenings ended at 11.30 when trucks took the girls back to camp.

Central Bureau moved north, leaving the AWAS and WAAAF behind. Ronnie went down to Melbourne to work with FELO. There she met the man whom she was to marry, Geoff O'Neill. They had two daughters, one of whom wrote this book.

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