

## Memories of the Motuihe Health Camp

My name is Marjorie Mumme but my family name was Hennum.. I attended the Health Camp on Motuihe Island for about two weeks when I was 6 years old. This was in 1937. My older sister Merle came with me as well. We were sent there because we were too thin and skinny. They came through our school and picked us out so we were sent to the Camp to get some fresh air and exercise and to fatten up.

I don't remember travelling to the Camp. I suppose it was by ferry but I do remember walking up the path through the avenue of trees past the classrooms to our dormitories at the top. My sister and I were put in different dormitories which didn't help our homesickness. We missed being home badly. I cried every night before I went to sleep. We were woken by a bell every day and we all had tasks to do before school. Mine was to polish the brass doorknobs, which seemed to be a waste of time to me. We also had PT – physical exercises – on the courtyards between the dormitories before school started as well. .



The classrooms behind the avenue of trees leading to the dormitories (top left) and dining hall (top right).  
painting by Marjorie Mumme

School was just like school at Birkenhead Primary back home. There were lots of kids in my class – about 30 I think – and there were about classrooms along the avenue. I don't remember exactly what we ate but there was all the food you could eat! We hadn't seen so much food in all our lives. I remember being allowed eat pudding before the main course if you wanted. Food was available all day long – I remember the dates being there anytime we wanted them. We cleaned out teeth at night with salt. I'd never used salt to clean my teeth before and it was odd dipping my toothbrush in a pot of salt then scrubbing my teeth

It was summer when were there and we were taken down to the beach for swimming. The beaches are long and flat, so you could walk out a long way before it got too deep, but then it shelved quickly. Once I went out too far and suddenly found the water was over my head, which scared me and put me off swimming for a long time. There were sea anemones in the rock pools and we enjoyed watching them close up when you touched them until someone told up they were blood suckers and so we were too scared

to let our feet touch the bottom of the pool. It was years before I found out that we had been tricked.

My family was poor. My parents were living in Napier in 1931 when the big earthquake struck and destroyed their house. My mother was 7 months pregnant with me at the time and the experience left her terrified of earthquakes for the rest of her life. My mother's parent lived in England and paid half of our fares for her, my older sister and I to go there soon after I was borne, with the government paying the other half. We returned to NZ after a year in England and lived for a while in Hastings but there was no work there for my father so we shifted to Auckland. We travelled up by train and I remember arriving at the railway station, the walk to the ferry terminal to catch the ferry then the long walk from the Birkenhead terminal to our rented two room cottage opposite the Birkenhead primary school. We arrived there tired and with all of our possessions together with the dog in the baby's pram, plus twenty pounds (forty dollars) in cash. That was everything we owned. We had a vegetable garden but there wasn't ever food to spare. We had very few clothes – mainly just one set of everyday wear. We couldn't afford sheets on the beds either. We slept on the bare mattresses with a blanket over us. On cold nights we would put the coats we could find over us, and there was always a race to grab the tablecloth as well. There was no school dental nurse in those days and all my teeth were rotting. I had to have them all removed when I was seventeen years old. I had to leave school on the day I turned fifteen to start work, because my parents needed the money to keep us alive. I worked for Atwoods for a while then worked as an accounts clerk for Birkenhead Ferries, mostly doing the invoices for the freight being shipped to Waiheke Island. There was only one truck on Waiheke at that time, owned by Mr Day, so most of the invoices went to him. But lots of people simply carried away the goods we had shipped there on their shoulders – lengths of timber, window frames, bags of potatoes, you name it. We walked a lot in those days.

While we didn't have much money, they were still very happy days. In many ways they were the best years of our lives.

Marjorie Mumme (nee Henum)