

Morongo Girls' College - a place to call 'home'



CAROLINE STOK, ARCHIVIST

Nora Valk (MOC 1946) is a survivor. She made it through the Second World War, including an internment in a Japanese concentration camp, then travelled half way around the world to make Australia her home. Now 90 years old, Nora Valk is committed to telling her story; to honour her past and educate others.

Nora was born in the former Dutch East Indies to parents Paul and Gladys Valk. She had a happy childhood until the Second World War tore her family apart.

In 1942, in the thick of the Japanese occupation, Nora's father was sent to a Prisoners of War camp in Japan whilst Nora and her mother were sent to a camp in Ambarawa, Java.

The conditions were terrible and deteriorated further during their time there.

In April 1945, then 15-year-old Nora watched helplessly as her mother died of dysentery.

Japan surrendered in August, just five months later, and a grieving Nora found herself free. However Nora's troubles were not yet over.

Just as WWII was ending, the Indonesian War of Independence was beginning. Alone and without family, Nora again faced the possibility of being caught up in war.

This time luck was on her side. Evacuated out of Indonesia by the British, Nora was taken to Singapore, where she anxiously awaited news on the fate of her father.

After many letters, and through the aid of the Red Cross, there was finally some good news for Nora. Her father, too, had survived the war.

Contact was made, and Nora was able to reconnect with her father. Together, they travelled to Sydney to recuperate and consider their options.

Nora's father was able to gain employment with a Dutch-based company, and it was decided that Nora should go to boarding school to enable her father to work.

Not knowing where to start in the hunt for a suitable school, they reached out to connections they had made in Sydney. Following a glowing recommendation from an Old Collegian, Nora applied, and was accepted at Morong Presbyterian Girls College.



From left: 1. Nora Valk in the Morongo Girls' College uniform 1947; 2. The Morongo Girls' College Baseball team in 1947 - Nora is standing second from left, and Dorothy is standing second from right; 3. Dorothy and Nora c1946-7.

She started in February 1946, in Year 10. Just six months after the War had ended.

The travel from Indonesia to Sydney, then on to Geelong 'felt like a whirlwind', and the adjustment to boarding school life wasn't easy for Nora.

Following the freedom of a summer spent on Bondi Beach, Nora found boarding school life to be claustrophobic – its 'rules and lines (of students)' frustratingly similar to life in the Concentration Camp.

Over time, Morongo grew on Nora. After the trauma of her earlier years, it was nice to have some stability. She began to feel more at home as she developed friendships with the other girls, and joined in their extra-curricular activities, including baseball and church on Sundays.

It was at Newtown Presbyterian Church that she was first introduced to the boys of The Geelong College.

The two Colleges came together for events from time to time, and at the Senior School dance, one particular Geelong College boy caught her eye – Fred Davies.

Notes passed between Nora and Fred with the help of mutual friend, Dorothy Brownlees, and a teenage romance began.

But all too soon, Nora's time at Morongo came to an end, as circumstances beyond her control forced her to return to The Netherlands.

Nora was devastated. She was finally feeling at home in Australia, surrounded by new friends, and didn't want to leave.

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Geelong College student, Fred Davies, 1947.

But there was nothing she could do, and she was forced to return to the country of her birth.

But Nora didn't go quietly. In an act of protest, she refused to finish her final school year in Holland. Instead, she enrolled in a typing and shorthand course. This would go on to serve her well.

Since then much has happened for Nora. She went on to marry and have three children, and has been blessed with ten grandchildren. Nora has maintained life-long friendships with the girls she met at Morongo, has shared her story with school students, has travelled the world, and lived in many places.

She returned to Semarang, Indonesia for the first time in 1973 to visit her mother's grave, and has visited a number of times since.

As the years march on, Nora is committed to remembering her past – the tragedies, as well as the triumphs – and passing history to next generation

A well-loved photo album holds some of these memories, including of one of Nora's most cherished moments – her two years at Morongo Girls' College.

It was there at the College that a young Dutch girl, fresh from the horrors of war, found exactly what she needed. A place to call 'home', and friends she has never forgotten.



Read more about Nora's story

Dutch author, Syl Van Duyn has penned a young adult novel based on the life of Nora Valk. Titled 'Girl Out of Place', it has been translated into English by Ernestine Hoegen and is available to purchase in bookstores and online, both on Kindle and in print.

View the book trailer for 'Girl Out of Place'
cutt.ly/nora



Get in contact with Nora

Nora would love to hear from her College community, in particular, any fellow Morongo Old Collegians.

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