

OBITUARY

Johanna Coy

Johanna Coy, an honorary life member of the Dietitians Association of Australia (DAA), passed away on 18 July 2012. She was 90 years old.

Born Johanna Frederica Höweler, she undertook her preliminary nutrition training in Holland during the war years of 1939–1944, and completed a dietetic diploma in 1946. A two-year scholarship allowed her to complete a master's degree at Harvard School of Public Health, after which she worked with the International Refugee Organisation based in the American Zone of Germany. Her commitment to human rights continued as she decided to travel to Australia in 1950 on board the *Fairsea* in order to ensure that the 60 children on board received the food allocated to them during the journey.

Choosing to stay in Australia, Johanna worked as a dietitian assistant at the Royal Perth Hospital and in 1952 joined the Department of Labour and National Service in Melbourne where she organised the testing of recipes for the Large Scale Catering Manual. In 1953 Johanna was appointed to the position of Public Health Nutrition Officer for Tasmania. She spent 34 years with the Tasmania Department of Health, married Cyril Coy, and remained an active member of the Battery Point community until her death.

Johanna knew the value of collective action and was one of the pioneers of the dietetics profession in Australia. Johanna supported the establishment of the Australian Association of Dietitians which operated from 1976 to 1983, and later the establishment and development of DAA (from 1983 onwards).

In 1984, Johanna bought together a handful of Tasmanian dietitians to establish the Tasmanian branch of DAA. She was elected as its first chairperson, a position she held until 1988. Johanna served as a DAA Councillor in the years 1985–1988. For many years, Johanna was the nutrition advisor to the National Council of Women in Tasmania.

Her determination to make a difference to people's lives was demonstrated by her work on practical public health nutrition problems. This included providing advice for a reliable, affordable food source for vitamin C (oranges were very expensive in Tasmania in the 1960s) for infants and children. In response to the relatively high prevalence of

goitre in Tasmania, one of Johanna's jobs was to count the weeds in 62 Tasmanian pastures used for grazing milking cows. She was working on the theory that certain plants may have produced goitrogens which were carried in cow's milk.

Johanna was committed to reporting her work in the scientific literature, most often in her own time. She was sole or joint author on 55 papers in national and international journals. Topics covered were diverse, including iodine deficiency, dietary fibre, milk, bread, food and nutrition of infants, children and mothers, longitudinal studies of infant and child growth, and the history of foods and drinks in Tasmania. Her significant scientific collaborations included those with Ian Lewis, professor of paediatrics at the University of Tasmania, and with Nancy Hitchcock, then with the Princess Margaret Medical Research Foundation in Western Australia.

Johanna demonstrated a passion and energy for lifelong learning which she passed on to others. For Tasmanian dietitians, Johanna was both an iconic figure and an inspiration to strive harder. Despite being retired for over 25 years, Johanna regularly attended and contributed to branch meetings, conferences and weekend workshops until about two years ago. Johanna was generous in sharing with others and was full of encouragement to those she calls 'our new leaders of the profession'.

Johanna was recognised for her service to the profession of Nutrition and Dietetics, spanning over 60 years. She was made an honorary life member of DAA in 2000. She was the first dietitian to be the subject of a Lecture in Honour while still alive to hear it, at the 25th National DAA conference in 2007. In 2011, Johanna was inducted onto the Tasmanian Honour Roll of Women established by the Tasmanian government to honour Tasmanian women who have made an outstanding contribution to the State. Her award was for service to health.

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