



# Kimberley Society

## Book Note

***Nurses With Altitude: A collection of stories compiled by Gaye Richardson.*** Hesperian Press (Carlisle, WA), 2008. Soft cover, 264 pages, ISBN 978-0-85905-441-6, RRP \$35.00.

Two years ago I was fortunate enough to attend an RFDS Flight Nurses Reunion which was held at Fremantle Oval on a Sunday afternoon. The organisers had arranged a wonderful display including models with old RFDS uniforms, lots of RFDS memorabilia and slide shows from personal photo collections. Associated with this reunion was getting many of the nurses who attended to contribute stories of memorable flights and incidents related to their RFDS flights. Although I never actually worked for RFDS, I went on many flights for either clinics in the Kimberley or Pilbara or retrievals of newborn babies all over the state.

These stories resonate the incredible camaraderie that exists between the RFDS staff. To me this is all the more remarkable in face of unpredictable flying conditions, unpredictable aircraft and the politics that unfortunately goes with any organization.

One particular story by Flight Nurse Dianne Graham concerning a Christmas Day and not settling down to Christmas Dinner until late at night after numerous flights certainly reflected the unpredictability of a day's work with the RFDS. My motto was to never travel without a jumper, a book and a credit card.

The book features numerous black and white photographs of flights, patients and locations. It also features an excellent grid reference and map to locate all the towns and communities and air strips mentioned in the book.

Of particular interest to me was a story titled almost like an Aesop's fable of "How the Vickers Cot got its Velcro" by Flight Nurse Carol Ellis. It's said that memory is an unreliable but powerful thing. The story concerns a Vickers Cot being used to transfer a sick newborn baby. The plane was hit by severe turbulence, the lid of the cot jumped open and the baby flew out and landed on the floor. I was the Paediatrician on that flight and have never been on such a rough trip in my life. The baby coming out of the cot was potentially disastrous as being firmly belted to my seat it was difficult to get out and get the baby and replace it in the cot. Following this flight all Vickers cots were fitted with Velcro straps to keep them closed. On reflection, I believe this flight was made from Karratha to Meekatharra not from Derby which was said to be the starting point of the trip. However it's a great story and seeing it is over 20 years between the documenting of the story and the actual incident one will have to accept two slightly differing opinions. Also of particular interest to me is the fact that the aircraft Mike Whiskey Juliet Piper Navaho came to Wyndham in 1975 and was still flying us around clinics in the Kimberley in 1991.

I think this is a wonderful book of stories of outback Western Australia, and Gaye Richardson, her husband and [Hesperian Press](http://www.hesperianpress.com.au) are to be commended in publishing it.

Jack Vercoe