



# Kimberley Society

## Book Note

*Lil's Story: The Story of Sister Mary Elizabeth Rogasch* by Joan Rogasch (compiler). Peacock Publications, Norwood (SA), 2010, 222 pages, illustrated, map, ISBN 978-0-9807855-0-0.

In *Memoirs of a Nurse*, Mary McCombe (née Rogasch), having lightly masked her characters, wrote about Halls Creek and its Australian Inland Mission (AIM) hospital. Mary's family and friends knew her as Lil and, in *Lil's Story*, Joan Rogasch pays tribute to that hardy woman by turning her journals, photographs and poetry into a book. The result is somewhat disjointed, due to large gaps in the journals, but it provides interesting glimpses of events, places, and people encountered over a period of about 24 years. The material varies in style, ranging from comments about everyday happenings to prose that celebrates the beauty of nature and applauds the strength of individuals.

Lil wrote most of her journals in pencil, sometimes retaining only a carbon copy. Preparing that material for publication presented the usual range of problems that come with transcribing old, handwritten notes in which some words, especially the names of people and places, are either unclear or illegible. The editor's footnotes help to clarify some points and illuminate others but readers in search of historical data may need to do further research.

*Lil's Story* starts in 1917 at Oodnadatta, where Lil, aged 36, was on her first AIM posting. She had qualified as a Probationer Nurse at Adelaide Children's Hospital in 1909, an Obstetrical Nurse (1910) and an Inspector of Nuisances (1915). The 1910 training made her eligible for registration as a midwife. The Oodnadatta jottings give way to others about Hergott (Marree), Kangaroo Island, and the "Mareeba" Babies' Hospital in Woodville (SA). Lil then went to the Kimberley, arriving in September 1918 as the region's first fully-qualified AIM nursing sister. She served at Halls Creek until 1921 and later wrote about those years in *Memoirs*.

The Kimberley component of *Lil's Story* starts in Chapter 4 with material that was found at the last minute and inserted into an almost completed manuscript because it was too good to leave out. In it, Lil tells of her second trip to Halls Creek—the first one having been a rushed motor vehicle trip prompted by a medical emergency. This rare firsthand account of women travelling in the Kimberley mentions several female residents, particularly young Katie Bridge from Springvale Station. Other women then emerge when Lil takes up her nursing at the end of the fortnight-long horse and buggy trip. It is, however, the men who receive the most coverage. After mentioning them once, Lil often uses only their nicknames or the initial from their surnames.

Chapter 5 contains random Halls Creek jottings for 1919. Chapter 6 is a collation of published accounts written about or by Lil and taken mostly from *The Inlander*, which the Rev. John Flynn edited. Other more personal writing follows, leading into the period when Lil, who married Cecil David (Mac) McCombe in 1923, lived in Wyndham. Valuable material there includes journal entries about the 1929 search for the aircraft *Southern Cross*. Chapter 13 recounts Mac and Lil's adventurous driving tour from Wyndham to Perth via the east coast, before they resumed their lives in Wyndham. Chapter 14 records the landing of the *Abel Tasman* in 1931, some two or three years before Lil and Mac moved south to live in Corrigin.

*Lil's Story* can be purchased from [Halls Creek Visitor Centre](#).

Cathie Clement

Note: For a later work related to this one, see the book note for *The garden of myth : life at the AIM Hospital, Halls Creek, Western Australia, 1918–21 and 1946–48* by Joan Rogasch & Dulcie Andrew.