



# Molly Budtz-Olsen

## Reflection by Ann Warrell Robilliard (alumna 1972 – 1974)

Many of my fondest memories of my Women's College days are of the impact Molly Budtz-Olsen had on my life in my first three years at UQ.

My schooling from ages 9 to 17 years was undertaken in Mareeba on the Atherton Tablelands of North Queensland. As I was an anxious overzealous student I was entered in an early enrolment scheme for University and completed my first year of a Science degree at ANU.

I then decided to transfer my enrolment to Medicine at UQ. My Commonwealth Scholarship was to be re-instated after completion of first year Medicine. No accommodation at Women's was available in February 1972 and I boarded at the Teachers College in Spring Street. This seemed an isolated existence, but I kept up my morale by swimming at the Spring Hill indoor pool each day, bussing to UQ and bonding with a group of girls in my lectures, "pracs" and "tutes".

I was very much the "brown country mouse", with most of our cohort having done their schooling in Brisbane, and living, especially in the early years, still at home.

You cannot imagine my delight when I was contacted by Molly telling me a room was available in the "Old Wing" after Easter 1972. My parents were greatly relieved!

Not only was I fed and roomed, but I met many friends in their first year of other faculties as well as Medical students (a few from first year, several older students and then younger Medical students).

Coffee and meal breaks were not to be missed rituals at Women's, bringing fun and laughter in an astonishingly packed academic life.

By 1973, I had a boyfriend, Ian, who was eventually to become my first husband. He lived at Cromwell College, which was then a boys-only College. Budtz astutely realised none of us was flush with funds, and offered me (and whoever I could rope in) several hours work moving some bricks for a fence at her family home. So, Andrew, a six-foot Adventist, Ian and I, moved bricks for an afternoon and were very fairly paid. This gave us all many coffees with friends at the Uni caf and the nearby haunts.

I suspect it should also have been a lesson in how to choose a man. But that is a story for another day. Or perhaps not. In any case, Budtz again came to my rescue.

In late 1974, I was home in NQ, when floods overwhelmed Brisbane. I always earned my pocket money over the Uni breaks, so I telephoned Budtz. Molly's first response sounded like "why are you bothering me now? I have plenty to do."



I explained I had called to check how College, in its riverside location, was coping. I realised the lowest blocks, which were tutors' and staff accommodation, would be quickly flooded. I swiftly asked Budtz if I could send some of my holiday earnings to assist in some small way. Budtz explained the College insurance would cover the cost of damages to the effected buildings. I had been listening to the news reports. I knew the insurance companies would cover damage from rain and wind, but would not cover damage from rising waters from the river. This had become a point of contention between policy holders and insurers in Brisbane already.

I asked Budtz about this. At this point, Budtz laughed and I sensed her relaxation. She explained to me that, surprisingly, when she "had gone up on a ladder to check the roof of the low riverside buildings, (she) had discovered many tiles had been damaged by the storms" and this had resulted in water flooding down into the buildings. Thus the Insurers believed the damages were "storm damage" rather than "flood damage", and they would pay for the repairs.

Budtz at her indomitable best.

In 1974 I had been elected Student representative to the College Council and Budtz allocated two rooms with a "Jack and Jill" bathroom to Anne Fitzpatrick, President of the Student Council, and myself. These rooms had previously been delegated to tutors, who were in short supply in the lean times of the 1970s, and other such similarly spacious accommodation was occupied by senior students completing post-graduate studies or completing longer undergraduate studies, such as veterinary and medical courses. This accommodation gave Anne and I better opportunities to discuss College affairs in what were relatively turbulent times. For example, our "year" had been the only one refusing to wear academic gowns for the College photo. This sensible use of the generous and luxurious accommodation might also have encouraged us or our fellow students to stay in College for a few more years.

During semester breaks, our rooms were, again sensibly, rented to people attending conferences at the University. This obviously enabled our College fees to be kept to a minimum. We were permitted to leave a reasonable amount of "decoration" on the cork pin-boards in our rooms, while packing up only our small bundle of clothes and books. This resulted in one kind soul leaving me a note to say he had appreciated my cluster of aphorisms left on "my" board. A much-appreciated fillip to my self-esteem.

My "work" as representative to the Council was far from onerous, but there was one occasion when I stumped up to represent a first year Arts student. One of our cleaning ladies (for simplicity, Jean) had been confronted in the communal showers of "The Old Wing", by the sight of the lass and her boyfriend (both actually much awarded gymnasts in the ordinary world, believe it or not) strip naked, emerging from a shower. Budtz of course was told. The decision to remove the "fresher" permanently from College was obviously made. I discussed the issues with the young lass, who, with her partner was completely unabashed and could not understand the position of the College. Amazing! All visitors to Women's were "signed in" to a book at the front desk, and had to be accompanied from the front



foyer to a coffee area or one's room, and vice versa. Very few would dream of breaking this rule, and definitely not blatantly.

In fact, I had been horrified one morning to return from breakfast in the Hall to find "my lan" in my study/bedsit talking to the afore-mentioned Jean, a lovely woman. A friend had "signed him in". Jean had welcomed him into my open room. I never really understood the reason for lan's presence that morning. But young love must have been mutual then. I certainly would never have broken a rule of Women's. Of course, we had trysts, but never at Women's out of hours!

When I attempted to put the young fresher gymnast's case to Budtz, I pleaded the follies of Youth and the Times (1970s), to no avail. Budtz, of course, asked if I had ever broken the rules. I was able to answer relatively truthfully. I certainly would not have put any staff in the position the youngsters had put Jean. And again, almost no "Women's girl" would.

The lass was "sent down", as the Brits would say. When I next saw the young gymnast, she indignantly informed me she had immediately found accommodation at Cromwell College, which had become co-ed in the past two years! She obviously would never understand Budtz' position as 'in loco parentis'.

Lastly: I had had to enter first year Medicine instead of entering straight into second year, having completed first year Science at ANU, because I had never studied Biology or Zoology at school or ANU.

For the first time, 350 freshers were admitted, but only 250 would be accepted into second year. This was probably the start of the push to produce more humane doctors and fewer academics....

During exam time, Budtz managed to fund some delightful breakfast meals to encourage us at that stressful time. My personal recollection is that I had poached eggs, asparagus and Hollandaise sauce on the morning of my Chemistry exam at the end of first year. Chemistry was the only subject in which I obtained a Credit that year. Without that result, I would not have been admitted to second year Medicine. Eggs Benedict, as I later realised it was, is still my favourite breakfast or Brunch!

To me, Molly Budtz-Olsen WAS Women's College. Strength of character, understanding of people, hard work, generosity and a fine sense of humour.