

Resek History



The underpinning values of Ellen and Marietta's educational work has been to foster a keen involvement in the practical advancement of individuals and communities. Based on strong beliefs in social justice and a celebration of diversity, the Resek sisters embody the concept that with support, cooperation, skills and opportunity, people can flourish. Also, that the values of helping others to flourish, are far more important than seeking status, or striving to own ever more consumer goods.

The enduring hope behind the Resek Scholarship is that it may assist the recipient to continue to make a significant professional and personal contribution to the wellbeing, learning and development of others.

Ellen and Marietta Resek were born in Vienna, into a warm and loving family, in which they were surrounded by, music, arts, sport and appreciation of nature and learning. Their parents were progressive thinkers and non religious. They were open to people, ideas and discussion. They encouraged Ellen and Marietta to consider the importance of values, and to question what was significant in life and worth striving for. Education, both theoretically and in its application was of great importance.

Both Ellen and Marietta thrived on hearing ideas, as well as learning many practical skills in the home. They had a neighbor who was not at all competent at running her home and Ellen and Marietta as quite young children, used to delight in going round to this neighbor to do her housework for her, so that they could hear her interesting political and social views about the world!

Both of the girls enjoyed and did very well at school, experiencing a wide range of activities, friends and subjects. That is, until Hitler came to Austria on the 12th of March 1938, when absolutely everything changed; because of their Jewish heritage. Distrust and fear suddenly affected social relationships, even those that had been established over many years. Almost overnight, 'National Socialism' was enthusiastically embraced within their country.

The atrocities of this historical time and the holocaust that followed are well documented. Ellen and Marietta had first-hand experience of this regime, and witnessed it in action. Their parents however, managed to send them to safety in 1939, on a scheme that was called the *Kindertransport* - it provided escape and refuge for ten thousand Austrian Jewish children.

So, in 1939, aged 15 & 17 respectively, Marietta & Ellen arrived in the north of England, and lived in different host families, where they both became central in assisting the running of these households. Times were not easy in England at that time because of the outbreak of World War 2. Bombings were a reality, resources were scarce, futures were uncertain, and life for everyone began

to revolve around the war effort. Ellen and Marietta were classified as class “C” aliens, meaning that using a bicycle, radio or camera was not allowed, and visits to the coast were out of bounds.

It is impossible to imagine how it would have felt at that time, to have had one’s reality so traumatically and suddenly overturned. And, to be living in a context that couldn’t have been more different from their early years in educated Viennese society. Yet the response of Ellen and Marietta to this new situation was to draw on the resourcefulness and learning that had underpinned their formative years with their family.

As well as supporting the homes in which they were living, with child care, housework, cooking, support and general management (becoming very important and valued members of those families) they also found paid work. Ellen as an ‘alteration hand’ in a wholesale fashion establishment, and Marietta as a trainee dressmaker. They attended night classes, and taught French and German to the armed forces. They also set up a small dressmaking business which began to flourish.

Eventually, by studying part time, Marietta and Ellen achieved teaching qualifications and their new direction became clear. They were able to teach at TAFE and High schools in England.

After the war in 1947, Ellen & Marietta spent 3 months in America, staying with family friends who would have liked them to have settled there. However, they were unsure whether they would be suited to life as they experienced it in America. They returned to England and by chance, saw an advertisement for a 10 pound emigration visa to Australia. This opportunity coincided with meeting someone from Adelaide, who was very enthusiastic about their future here. He also knew of accommodation that would be suitable. The timing was right to make a new and independent start together in Australia.

In 1950 they arrived in Adelaide. Ellen gained work at the Institute of Technology while Marietta applied to the Education Department and taught at Nailsworth & Croydon High Schools. Marietta also became an Arts graduate from the University of Adelaide

In the late 50s they mutually wrote the reference book *Successful Dressmaking*, which has recently experienced renewed popularity. Their second reference book, *Success with Dress*, was published in 1980 and has also been a classic learning resource.

In the 1960’s both of the Resek sisters gained employment at Western Teachers College as Lecturers in Clothing & Textiles, and Home Economics. Western Teachers College became Torrens College of Advanced Education in the mid 70’s and moved to a new site at Underdale, on Holbrooks Road. The course known as ‘Home Economics,’ ended in 1989.

In addition to their significant contribution to Home Economics, Ellen & Marietta continued their lifelong interest and support of the arts and community involvement through their ongoing work at Carrick Hill, both in the library and as a guide. They have also worked on the Women’s Information Switchboard and maintained their musical interest through the Unley & Burnside Orchestras. They are vitally interested in the arts in all its forms.

The generosity shown by Ellen & Marietta Resek, in donating funds to enable the setting up & continued maintenance of the Resek Award since 2004 has provided great support to many students of Home Economics, and through this, had a far reaching impact on the health & well being of generations of school children and their communities.

It is hoped that in glimpsing some of the background to Marietta and Ellen’s life, it will become apparent that their skills in ‘Home Economics,’ go to the heart of what it means to ‘manage life’ – even in the midst of difficult circumstances. Learning about management of resources and self sufficiency, is as relevant today as it was when Ellen and Marietta began their professional careers. Perhaps even more so in view of the importance of sustainability, and diminishing world resources.