

## Vale Jennifer Taplin BSc (21/4/1929–21/10/2016)



*By Joc Forsyth*

Jenny was born in Ballarat. Soon after, her parents moved to a 300 acre property at Millbrook. She was educated at home until, aged seven, she was able to cycle to the local, one-teacher, State School. In this environment she acquired a permanent love of nature. In 1941, as a shy only child, she was sent to board at the Hermitage CEGGS. Her father's death just before her final examinations led to her failure. She repeated the matriculation with success, but had to attend a boy's college to study science subjects.

When she applied to the University of Melbourne to study biology she was guided towards bacteriology. Jenny, while a sensitive person, had an attractive and gentle personality with a quirky sense of humour. Specially in her final year she made life-long friendships among her classmates. Janet Clarke Hall, where she resided, also earned her lasting loyalty.

When the final examinations were over she joined the Public Health Laboratory (PHL) within the Department of Bacteriology. Here she was intimidated by the idiosyncratic but meticulous Miss Merrified, and, initially, was terrified of Dr Michael Wilson, the assistant director. In 1953, she and some colleagues found their pictures in the press during the national outbreak of typhoid and salmonellosis stemming from imported coconut. For the next two years she followed her mother, first to Sydney and then to England, working in bacteriology in both places. She returned to re-join the PHL (later re-named the Microbiological Diagnostic Unit) and here she remained. Whenever possible, however, she managed to travel to improve and extend her expertise. In 1962 she worked at Colindale with Dr Pat Carpenter. Back in Melbourne she worked, primarily, on enteric pathogens. PHL was the regional reference laboratory for the phage-typing of *Salmonella* Typhi. Jenny built up an encyclopaedic knowledge of the evolution of typhoid in Australia. She was also sent the phages for the typing of *Salmonella*

Typhimurium. To master this technique, she raised funds to return to Colindale. Back in Melbourne she struggled to cope with the huge demand for results.

Jenny's work was extremely careful and her record-keeping was meticulous. She was swift to spot, and follow up, the unusual. In 1977 this led to her recognising the onset, among much else, of the slowly evolving national outbreak of *Salmonella* Bredeney among young children. From this dramatic episode, rose the National Salmonella Surveillance Scheme to which Jenny's knowledge contributed. Jenny's fun side was demonstrated by her role in the jocular video produced to celebrate the 1977 furore. Here she played both a condescending state premier and a salmonella dancing the Petronella.

Her ingenuity also was tested in a solo assignment to isolate salmonellas in Tuvalu. Here she had to raid the island's garbage tip for glassware which couldn't bring on the aircraft with her.

While she did little undergraduate teaching, she often spoke at meetings of microbiologists and food technologists. She established excellent and trusted relations with colleagues across the country as well as within the Victorian health department. When she retired in 1989, experts in the field came from across the country to speak at her festschrift.

In retirement she took up acting as a volunteer guide at the Melbourne Zoo. She was also able to travel widely often combining this with bird-watching. Alas, all too soon, she was struck down by a severe stroke that followed surgery. She showed amazing courage in this shocking adversity which finally rendered her unable to live independently. She then suffered years of increasing pain and dependency without complaint and with remarkable cheerfulness. She died swiftly after a respiratory infection.

All the time there was another, private, side to Jenny Taplin. She was always a devoted member of the Toorak Uniting Church. Her family circle was small but on this she bestowed support and affection. Her devoted care for her mother was exemplary. Her supportive sympathy for friends in distress was outstanding. Her general niceness and exceptional kindness in times of trouble were noted in the tributes which flowed in after her death.

She was a marvellous, able and conscientious colleague with a gorgeous laugh who shall live long in the memories of all who knew her.