



# ***Not a Peony Bush***

*by*

***Dorothy Murray***



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## ***Synopsis***

This is a story of my family, or rather, of some members of my family. Not that they were famous - or even infamous. Nor were they immensely wealthy, in the ranks of high society, or politically powerful. They were Just ordinary people leading ordinary lives, yet there is enough of interest in each

of their life stories to warrant the recording of condensed accounts of their years on earth before these anecdotes are lost forever with the passing of the years.

I have adopted the idea of the family tree as the framework for these essentially true stories and hence, even though Book 3 is an "Epilogue", the book is of necessity incomplete in the sense that the family is still vibrant and will hopefully, continue to be so for centuries to come, so that at no given point in time can "THE END" be truthfully written.

The book is divided into three segments:

**Book 1**, entitled "Some Early Branches", deals with true stories of some of my ancestors, tracing their lives and the varied circumstances which caused them to settle in Australia from such widely differing countries as America, Scotland and England. A lot of research about the times in which these great-grandparents and grandparents lived has been carried out so that I could tie in their personal stories gleaned from old family records and from tales recounted to me by my parents, with historical events which played some part in their lives. However, no attempt to create a historical novel as such has been made - more emphasis is placed on the personal rather than the historical.

**Book 2** I have called "Memories" and this deals with my own childhood in Sydney up to the time of my marriage in 1943. A lot of memories of Manly and district in the 30'S and 40'S are dealt with in this segment and, once again, historical events such as the opening of the Sydney Harbour Bridge and the Japanese submarine infiltration of Sydney Harbour during World War 11 are tied in with my own personal life history. Topics such as Politics, Sex, Religion, Education etc. are treated from a child's viewpoint.

**Book 3** is titled "Epilogue" and consists of only three short chapters - "Birth", "Death", "And Birth Again", and these three chapters tie up the loose ends and bring the family story up-to-date. They deal with the birth of our four children, the death of my parents, and the birth of the grandchildren to whom is now entrusted the future growth of the family tree.

No attempt has been made to write about my husband's side of the family, so that the "tree" is necessarily lopsided.

Dorothy Murray, 1976.

*I am the family face;  
Flesh perishes, I live on,  
Projecting trait and trace  
Through time to times anon,  
And leaping from place to place  
Over oblivion.*

Thomas Hardy, "Heredity"  
Moments of Vision (1917)

## **DEDICATION**

This book is dedicated to Cathy, Kevin, Helen and Christine, the four young branches on the family tree for whom my husband and I take full responsibility and to the two smallest twigs on the tree, Craig and Mark, for whom Cathy and her husband Julian Van der Veer must accept the responsibility.

It is dedicated also with much gratitude to my husband Keith without whose help the four above-mentioned branches would not be growing on the tree

and also without whose unfailing encouragement and help this story would have remained unwritten.

## **Prologue**

A low moan escaped from the woman in the huge four poster bed and the midwife paused in her preparations and walked to the bedside to assess how labour was progressing.

"It shouldn't be long now dear," she murmured encouragingly. "A few more pains like that last one and it will all be over."

"Thank God," gasped the woman through clenched teeth as another pain took control of her. "I don't think I can take much more of this." Her words were cut short as another tearing, rending spasm caused her to let out a stifled scream which changed a few minutes later to sobbing relief as the midwife held up a tiny baby girl for her inspection. The scream coincided with Alan Ferguson's arrival home from a tiring day at the office and he was not a little annoyed by the fact that his dinner was not on the table and that his wife was not at the door to greet him but seemed to be otherwise engaged. Surely the baby was not due for at least three more weeks - hadn't everything been organised with his mother-in-law to take over the care of young Donald at that time? He was certain he hadn't confused the date.

A man of punctilious habits, this disruption to his carefully planned routine was most annoying, to say the least!

He walked quietly over to the bedroom and peered round the door just in time to see the midwife holding the baby by the heels while she administered a slap to its tiny buttocks and was rewarded with a gasp followed by that first wonderful cry - the universal cry of all mankind ... "I am alive!"

"Congratulations Mr. Ferguson. You have a beautiful little girl."

His annoyance gave way to pleasure as he gazed at this helpless little creature which, despite its red wrinkled skin and slightly misshapen head, was strangely beautiful because she was his own daughter. He crept silently over to his wife's bedside and kissed her gently on her moist forehead. His

voice was choked with emotion as he whispered, "Good work Stella. She's a bonny wee lass."



*Dorothy and her mother, Stella*

It was a touching moment for Stella. She loved her husband dearly but he was a man who detested any display of emotions and her whole life was spent trying to conceal her naturally volatile nature in order to please him. Now, confronted by his unchecked tears, she flung her arms about his neck and burst into tears herself.

So it was that I was welcomed into the world on a glorious Spring evening in 1924 and took my place as the smallest twig on the family tree.

Half a century later as I tried vainly to blow out all 50 candles on my birthday cake with one breath, a chance remark of our eldest daughter Cathy triggered off a train of thought of which this book is the end result.

She jokingly remarked that I would have needed stronger lungs to blow the bagpipes if the family had still been living back in Scotland. This started me thinking about the past and the many family anecdotes which, if not recorded, would surely die with me. When the children were younger they had often asked me to tell them some of these fascinating stories and now I resolved that, rather than let them die locked in my head, I would try and commit them to paper before it was too late.

There is an old Chinese proverb which says "To forget one's ancestors is to be a brook without a source, a tree without a root." It would be a great pity to let the children go on living as branches of the family tree without some knowledge of the roots from which they had sprung.

I have jotted down thoughts and memories concerning the various family members as they have come flooding into my mind and have drawn up a sort of condensed family tree to make it easier to fit the characters into their respective branches.

The stories are essentially true as I experienced or heard them told to me but I have allowed my imagination free play with some of the earlier members of the family without altering the essence of their life stories. All the characters are real and the only divergence from absolute truth has been the alteration of the names of a few "fringe" non-family characters. This has been done to save possible embarrassment to their descendants.

I have tried to depict the various meaningless names on the tree as warm human beings complete with failings as well as virtues and if I have succeeded in humanising these names I will have been amply repaid for the two years of effort which have gone into the writing of this book.

A remark my husband made in a letter to our son Kevin during the early stages of the book when I was delving into old family records for detailed information about the past suggested the title for the book. He wrote... "Your mother's book is taking shape but the family tree is certainly proving to be no peony bush."

What a boring family tree it would be if every branch had a sickly sweet peony blossom on it. I prefer to think of it as a robust oak tree where every branch has a few brittle twigs and imperfections along its length but the tree itself is strong and vigorous and will go on being so for centuries to come.

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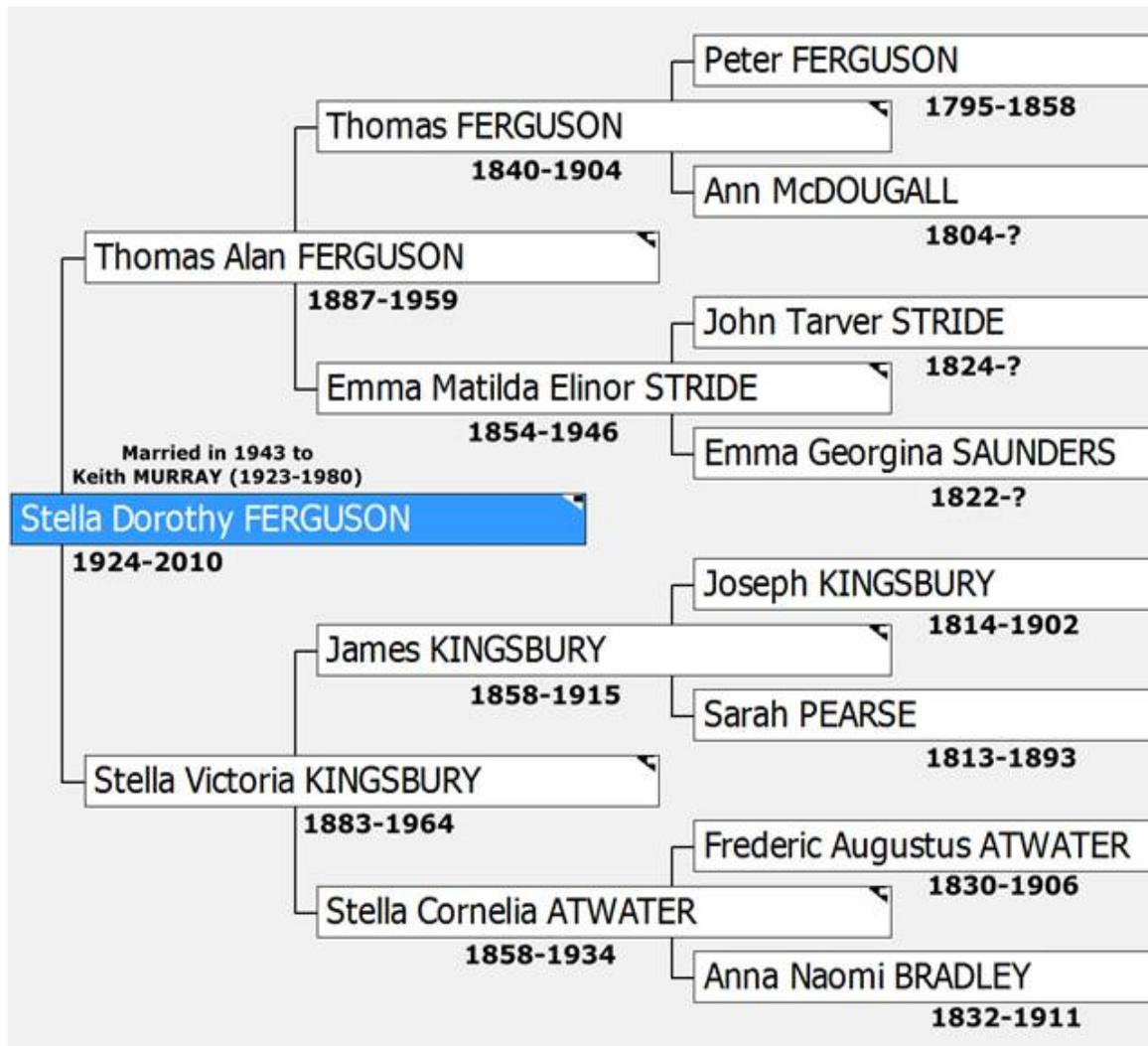
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# **Book One**

## **Some Early Branches**





*Dorothy Ferguson's Ancestral Tree*

## **Chapter 1**

### **Great-Grandfather and Great-Grandmother Atwater**

She had been sitting on the padded seat in the huge bay window since early afternoon. Now the sun had sunk behind the distant hills and a slight chill in the air caused her to ring the tasselled bell cord hanging beside the ornate marble mantelpiece.

When Nellie appeared at the doorway she was carrying a taper and flints to light the reading lamp on the highly polished cedar desk which dominated the room.

"No, Nellie. Please don't light the lamp. I enjoy sitting here in the dusk. You might get the fire going though. It's turned a mite chilly in here now the sun's gone."

"Yes ma'am" Nellie said with a slight curtsy as she busied herself at the enormous open fireplace. It wasn't until there was a cheery blaze lighting the room that Anna Atwater turned from the window and broke the silence.

"It doesn't look as if the Colonel will be here today after all Nellie. You might ask Cook to serve dinner a little later than usual just in case he does arrive, but if he's not here by 7 I'll dine alone. By the way, where are the children? Has Bridget arrived back from the park yet?"

"Yes ma'am. They're in the nursery I believe. Will there be anything else now ma'am?"

"No, thankyou Nellie. I'll just sit here a little longer where I can watch the driveway just in case the Colonel does get here. Tell Bridget I'll come up shortly to read to the girls before they go to sleep."

"Yes ma'am."

This little scene, with slight variations, had been enacted daily for the past month since the War ended and the remnants of the Army started straggling back to their homes. Anna had received a letter by special delivery from Frederic in April giving her the news of the victorious peace and stating he would be home as soon as he could finalise the discharge of the men under his command and arrange for the wounded to be transferred to hospitals near

their own home towns. How long would this take? She had no idea. All she knew with any certainty was that he had come through the ghastly slaughter of the last four years unscathed and that he would soon be in her arms again. That was all that really mattered. She would have to be patient just a little longer. He was one of the lucky ones who would soon be reunited with his family and she offered up a silent prayer of thanks for the thousandth time since his letter had arrived.

She picked up the book on her lap and leafed idly through the pages but the light was too dim to read by and, after a few more minutes, she rose and started upstairs to the nursery. Her head throbbed and her stays were laced so tightly she could barely breathe.

She was a short young woman given to plumpness and it was a constant struggle to maintain the slim waist and high rounded bust-line that Frederic admired so much and that the fashions of 1865 demanded. She was a warm sentimentalist at heart but disguised this imagined weakness with a stern, forbidding exterior. This cloak was only lifted when she was with her children, whom she loved dearly. She found it impossible to be her real self even when she and Frederic were alone in the privacy of their bedroom. She lived in constant dread that he would think her a loose immoral hussy if she displayed any sort of warmth or pleasure when he made love to her, although her whole being ached to abandon herself in passionate ecstasy.

Now, as she entered the nursery puffing slightly from the exertion of mounting the stairs, the two girls rushed over to her and clasped her round the knees. The younger girl, Fanny, almost disappeared beneath the billowing folds of her mother's skirt as she sank into an easy chair. Seven year old Stella rushed over to her bed and gathered up a bunch of withered dandelions lying there.

"Here you are, Mama" she cried excitedly. "We picked them in the park especially for you."

Anna accepted the offering graciously.

"Let's arrange them in a vase and put them on the dressing table, shall we?" she suggested, and Stella raced off to return in a few seconds with a small glass tumbler. "Papa will love to see them there if he arrives home tonight." Papa was an almost forgotten figure to Stella and a complete stranger to Fanny who had been born six months after he went away to the War in 1861.



*Anna and Frederic Atwater*

Stella had been three when he left and she could just remember his slim straight figure as he rode down the driveway and turned to wave before urging his horse to a canter and disappearing through the tall iron gates. She could remember dear Mama bursting into tears and being helped into the house where she took to her bed for almost a week. The doctor came to see her every day and Mama looked very pale and sad. Now Papa was coming home and she looked happy again. Stella could hear her humming softly to herself as she arranged the flowers in the tumbler she had brought her.

Stella couldn't understand what the War had been about, she knew some people in another part of the country wanted to keep black people to work for them and not pay them any money. Her Papa and a lot of other men thought that these black people should be allowed to be free and work for money just like Nellie did. She was black but Papa paid her some money to do the housework and she had a nice warm bedroom in the basement next to the kitchen and Mama and Papa were very kind to her. But she couldn't understand why so many men had been killed or why it had taken so long for Papa's side to win the War. She was glad it was finished and that now all the men would be coming home, she must tell Papa when she saw him that she had a new teacher at school. Mr. Simpson had come home last month but he couldn't write properly on the blackboard because he didn't have his right arm. His empty sleeve hung at his side and flapped loosely when the wind blew it. She must ask Papa if he knew what had happened to Mr. Simpson's arm at the War.

Bridget was busying herself clearing the tea things from the nursery table with a sullen expression on her face.

Anna always felt ill at ease when in Bridget's company. The girl was so hostile and any attempt on her part to be friendly and bridge the social gap met with no response whatever. If nursemaids had not been so difficult to come by the last few years she would have got rid of her months ago but she did look after the children well and was careful not to overstep herself and bring the unspoken conflict out into the open. So there existed a sort of uneasy truce between them.

Now Anna longed to be alone with the children and she called to Bridget as she was leaving the nursery carrying the heavy tea tray. "You needn't worry about coming back upstairs tonight Bridget. I'll get the girls undressed and into bed and I'm sure you'll enjoy an extra hour to yourself."

"Thank you Mrs. Atwater" the girl mumbled, and Anna heaved a sigh of relief as she heard the clatter of the tea tray gradually disappear down the stairs.

Later, after the girls had been washed and tucked into bed she read to them until their eyes drooped and they fell asleep and then tip-toed out of the nursery and downstairs to her own lonely dinner.

She was worried about Bridget's behaviour. It was obvious that the girl was desperately unhappy. She had come to work for Anna 18 months ago shortly after the death of her father in the dreadful riots which brought New York to a virtual standstill in the summer of 1863. The memory of those five terrifying days were still fresh in Anna's mind. She had arrived from Philadelphia to spend a week with her mother only two days before the rioting started. Nellie had come with her to help with the girls. Suddenly the simmering unrest in the city flared into open violence. Thousands of rioters had gone berserk and went on a rampage of burning, looting and killing which became so serious that finally the army was called in to restore order. The riots had been triggered off by the passing of the new Draft Law which allowed a draftee to buy his way out of Army service for \$300. Many of the rioters were impoverished Irish immigrants like Bridget's father who had no hope in the world of raising this amount of money and so were being forcibly drafted into the army to fight in a war about which they had little understanding and even less interest.

The feeling against Negroes ran high. Only three streets away from her mother's home the mob had hanged two Negroes from a tree in the park and Anna had feared for Nellie's life. Her mother had barricaded all the doors

and windows in the house and allowed no one to enter or leave until she was certain it was safe.

The figures released after it was all over revealed that no less than two thousand had been killed and eight thousand wounded. Bridget's father, who had been one of the principal agitators amongst the militant Irish migrant groups, was mown down by rifle fire when the Army was ordered to quell the rioting by force if necessary. His death reduced his family to appalling poverty and it was out of sheer necessity that 14 year old Bridget was sent out to work. Anna's mother had heard of the predicament of the family during the course of her charitable work and, knowing that Anna was on the lookout for a nursemaid, had paid the child's fare to Philadelphia and given her a letter to deliver to Anna.

As soon as Anna saw the thin pale child standing on her doorstep she took pity on her and decided to give her a chance. She wished there was some way she could reach the girl. She was determined not to give up - perhaps it would be easier when Frederic was in the house again. At least she'd be able to share her worries with him and he might have some suggestions as to how to help Bridget.

It was not until August that Anna's long wait was ended when a cab drawn by two of the most decrepit looking horses she'd ever seen drew up at the front porch and Frederic jumped out and leaped up the steps in one bound and almost squeezed the breath out of her as he lifted her off her feet and carried her into the entrance hall. Oh, the joy and relief to have him home again! That was one night when she threw caution to the winds and revelled in their love making until they fell into an exhausted sleep towards dawn. And that was the night that their son Hubbard had been conceived. She often thought that it was not surprising he was such a beautiful baby because he had been conceived in rapturous love. He came easily into the world and thrived from his first breath.

Not so little Jamie, who arrived 18 months later in the fall of 1867. That winter was one of the bitterest Anna could remember and Jamie seemed to be sick the whole time. Frederic began to talk of moving the family to a warmer climate. The railroad to the western States was under construction and he had a pipe dream about travelling West and going into the business of buying and selling land to the thousands of new settlers the railroad would surely bring to the West coast.

He had speculated in land before and seemed to have an unerring instinct about where to buy and when to sell at a good profit. Why, the very land they lived on was part of a huge tract of land he'd purchased 25 years earlier on the rural fringe of Philadelphia just before the big migrant boom of the 40's sent land prices sky-rocketing. He'd sold all but five acres at an enormous profit. These five acres he kept for himself and had built this stately home sheltered from the gaze of the outside world by two rows of elms on either side of the long gracefully curving driveway. Now, although the sprawling, fast-growing city had expanded and the surrounding area had become part of suburbia, his property was still sufficiently rural for him to revel in the peace and quiet of a stroll through the grounds.

As he enjoyed an after dinner cigar on the front porch on a summer evening six years after his homecoming he had reason to be a little smug and pleased with the way life had treated him. His home was lavish, his wife well dressed in the latest fashions, his children attended good schools, his household ran smoothly and efficiently with well-trained servants and his stables housed six of the finest horses in the city. He was 48 with a distinguished War record behind him and was a well respected member of Philadelphia society. Still, the lure of really big money to be made out West was a strong one.

It was not until ten years later, however, that he finally made the move to resettle the family in California.

Two events which occurred in 1876 triggered off a chain of events which resulted in his ultimate decision to move.

The first was Jamie's death in May of that year. He had insisted that the child accompany him and his brother for a day's horse riding. It was a beautiful Spring day but Anna, as usual, had fussed over the boy and begged him not to take him with them as he was suffering from a slight cold. He'd lost patience with the way Anna molly-coddled the child and a nasty scene had followed where he accused her of turning the boy into a milk sop. He'd bodily lifted Jamie into the saddle and set off angrily at a full gallop with the boys meekly following behind on their ponies. It had been a day of wonderful masculine companionship until a sudden shower of rain in the late afternoon had soaked them to the skin and sent them scuttling for shelter. Jamie's cold had worsened and within a week he'd succumbed to pneumonia.

Anna tried hard not to blame Frederic for his death but the nagging thought never left her that if he'd only listened to her pleas to leave Jamie at home he'd probably still be alive. The damage was done, however, and a gulf formed between husband and wife which widened until they became almost total strangers although they continued to share the same roof and even, on rare occasions, the same bed.

The second event occurred only six months after Jamie's death.

Stella had grown into a rather pretty girl of 18 with her mother's short plump build but with a lot of her father's strength of character and determination of purpose. In fact, Anna regarded her as a little too forthright in her opinions but was willing to concede that the younger generation of women were allowed considerably more freedom to express their views than she had been. Anna's sister Amelia had offered to take Stella to a ball at one of New York's leading Universities in August and she and Frederic had willingly given their consent for her to attend. It was at the ball that Stella had first met James Kingsbury. He'd seemed a decent enough sort of boy on the rare occasions when Anna and Frederic had met him. Frederic blamed himself for not noticing the way things were developing. It had come as a terrible shock to him when Anna had confronted him on a cold wet day in the fall and had tearfully mumbled that Stella believed she was pregnant. In high dudgeon he had hurried to New York and summoned the young man to his hotel room where he'd given him a dressing down he wouldn't forget in a hurry. Stella had been strictly forbidden to see James alone and wedding arrangements had been finalised with as much speed as decency would permit.

After the wedding he'd gradually simmered down and accepted the fact that they weren't the first pair of youngsters to land themselves in hot water and he'd be willing to wager his prized Army boots that they wouldn't be the last.

The drama had had one good effect at least. It had made Anna snap out of the dreadful apathy into which she'd sunk following Jamie's death and, with the arrival of little Ada seven months later, he felt she was gradually becoming her old self again. She even offered to let Bridget go to live with Stella and James to help with the baby. This was a tremendous sacrifice for her because she'd come to rely on Bridget more and more over the years.

Frederic never ceased to wonder at the amazing change in the girl since he had first met her on his return from the War. Then she'd been a sullen surly child but, with the birth of Hubbard and young Jamie, she'd suddenly

blossomed into a cheerful helpful nursemaid and one the children came to idolise.

After two years of study James obtained his medical degree and set sail for Australia with a tearful Stella and the baby, but instead of it being a permanent separation, Anna and Frederic were soon to welcome them back again to Philadelphia. Apparently James's degree was not recognised in Australia and it was necessary for him to do a further year's study in the States. This time he enrolled at the nearby University of Pennsylvania as a 3rd year student and once more settled down to study.

Stella had given birth to a son shortly after their return and had named him Hubbard. The child contracted meningitis when he was six months old and died despite the careful attention which was lavished on him.

It was in 1881 that James graduated and the time for the sad farewells drew near. They were to sail from San Francisco and Stella had begged her mother to allow Bridget to go with them. Stella was again pregnant and was so sick carrying this baby that she felt she couldn't face the long trip without Bridget's help. So it was decided after many long family discussions that the entire family would travel to Los Angeles together on the newly opened Boston Railroad and would settle there permanently. As Frederic pointed out, they would be that much closer to Australia and it would be a shorter trip for Stella to visit them if she ever got the chance. What he didn't use as an argument for the move but what was one of the main reasons he argued so convincingly in favour of the change was that he was hopeful that taking Anna away from the old home where Jamie's memory was in every room would have the effect of helping her to forget the past. Perhaps they could still enjoy married life together and the rift could be healed.

Shortly after their arrival in Los Angeles Frederic purchased an enormous tract of rural land on the fringes of the city near where Pasadena now stands. This he had cleared and planted with orange trees and subdivided it into small holdings which were offered for sale back East as citrus orchards. There was no shortage of buyers as he was able to offer growers a guaranteed market for their fruit because of a carefully negotiated agreement with the railroads. He named the area Clearwater. Today it has been swallowed up by the sprawling densely populated city but he realised his dream of land development and for 25 years he and Anna lived a full and happy life in this "retreat". As Frederic had hoped, the gulf between them caused by Jamie's death so many years earlier gradually closed and it was a bitter blow for Anna in January 1906 when Frederic was killed in a streetcar accident in Los Angeles at the age of 83. She survived him by exactly five

years. One bitterly cold night in January 1911 she was lighting a kerosene lamp in her home when the sleeve of her frock brushed against the flame as she reached for the glass chimney and in seconds she was engulfed in flames. Her son Hubbard and his wife who lived nearby heard her agonised screams for help and raced in to discover her trying to beat out the flames in the bathroom. She was rushed to hospital but did not live through the night.

At her hospital bedside were her son Hubbard and her younger daughter Fanny with their families. Her elder daughter Stella was, at the time of her mother's death, living in Australia and it is her story which fills a later chapter in this book.



*Frederic, Naomi and family*

## **Chapter 2**

### **Great-Grandfather and Great-Grandmother Kingsbury**

Joseph Kingsbury was born in the village of Taunton in Somersetshire England in 1816, the son of farming parents. As a boy he helped with the farm chores and marvelled at the skill with which his father handled sick animals, a skill which caused him to be regarded as something of a veterinarian in the village. It was not uncommon for him to sit up all night with an ailing animal on one of the surrounding farms and often Joseph spent the time with his father helping to nurse an animal out of danger. He picked up quite a wealth of homespun medical knowledge in this way over his boyhood years which was to stand him in good stead in his later life.

He was 15 when he commenced his five year apprenticeship to a cooper in the village. It was during this period of his life that he became intensely interested in religion. He had been baptised in the Church of England and reared as a nominal Christian but during his adolescent years he became convinced of the truth of John Wesley's teachings and joined the Methodist faith. He was active in lay preaching and was a constant seeker after truth.

After serving his apprenticeship he set up in business for himself as a cask maker in a neighbouring village about two miles from his home and it was here that he met and fell in love with Sarah Pearse, the daughter of the local Registrar of births, deaths and marriages. Sarah was a small, frail looking young woman with an elfin face whose appearance completely gave the lie to her strong character.

It wasn't long before Mr. Pearse was given the task of recording his daughter's marriage to Joseph in 1836.

It was about this time that Joseph conceived the idea of migrating to Australia with his new bride. He became convinced that in a new country there would be far wider opportunities to practice his religion and spread the faith which had become almost an obsession with him.

The Government was offering to pay a portion of the fare to the new colony in the hope of attracting free settlers in larger numbers now that the transportation of convicts was coming to an end, and Joseph was quick to take advantage of this offer. Sarah agreed to leave home and parents and

travel with him to the other side of the world to a practically unknown country, and this gives some idea of her strength of character and determination of purpose. She was only 23 at the time and must have realised that there would be very little chance of her ever seeing her homeland or her family again. What doubts and fears she must have suffered as the "Coromandel" left Liverpool on a balmy Spring morning in May 1838 can only be guessed at. The journey lasted almost five months, and it was on an equally beautiful Spring day that the ship's anchor was finally dropped in Sydney Cove on 2nd October of that year.

What a topsy-turvy country it must have seemed to these early English migrants! A country where the seasons had done a complete turn-about and winter occurred when it should have been summer. A country where Christmas Day was usually spent gasping for breath in the unbearable heat instead of gathered around a cosy fire eating a gargantuan dinner followed by the traditional steaming plum pudding.

The long sea journey 'which was marked by almost constant bouts of seasickness had taken its toll of Sarah's health and she was frighteningly thin when they were at last able to set foot on land again.

Joseph lost no time in taking her away from the brawling boisterous quayside and they moved into a small cottage in Newtown where they were to remain for the next five years. As soon as they were settled in their new home Joseph started to preach in the park which was later to become the Domain every Sunday afternoon. Despite the ridicule his actions brought and the indifference and even hostility of his audiences, he persisted in his endeavours for several years until his reading and study of the Bible gradually convinced him that baptism should be by full immersion at the request of a thinking believing adult rather than the token sprinkling of water on the head of an unknowing infant. This greatly concerned him and finally caused him to leave the Methodist Church and join the small band of men and women of similar persuasion who formed the nucleus in Australia of the Church of Christ. It was in this faith that he spent the remaining years of his long life.

He and Sarah moved to Enmore five years after their arrival in Australia and Joseph became active in community work in the district. He was one of the founders of the Church of Christ at Enmore and was a regular preacher there for over half a century. It was his proud boast and a pointer to the persistence of his character that he did not once miss the weekly communion service in the Church for 2,548 Sundays over the next half century! He

became the Mayor of Marrickville for several years and was one of the first aldermen elected to the Newtown Council.

Sarah found it much more difficult to adjust to life in her new country. She longed for the grey overcast skies of England and the cool green fields she was used to seeing from her bedroom window back home in Somersetshire. She was scared by the vastness of this land and the red dust, the unbearable heat, the flies and the mosquitoes almost drove her insane when she first arrived in Australia. But she was a devoted wife and intensely loyal to Joseph although she found it difficult to keep pace with his many interests.

In addition to his work in the civic life of the community he earned quite a reputation for his skill in treating medical problems and he became widely known throughout the district as "Dr. Joseph". He was adept at pulling teeth in the bloodthirsty manner of the day.

He used to sit straddle legged on a chair with his victim sitting on a cushion on the floor at his feet with his head firmly grasped between Joseph's knees. After a stiff whisky was administered to the terrified patient Joseph yanked and tugged at the offending tooth until it emerged dripping with blood held firmly in the steel jaws of the forceps! In those days when qualified doctors were few and far between and beyond the reach financially of a large percentage of the early settlers many a woman had Joseph to thank for the safe delivery of her baby or for his skills freely given to splint a broken leg or arm of some member of her family.

It was into this tightly knit, strictly religious family that James was born 21 years after his parents set foot in Australia. Two brothers and one sister had been born many years earlier and James must have been something of a surprise packet when he decided to put in a late appearance when his parents were well in their forties.

At first Sarah was a little disappointed to find she had another son but the disappointment was short lived when she saw how much like his father the new baby looked. The similarity was almost ludicrous. It was like looking at a miniature hairless version of her husband. She had no way of knowing when she first left her bed two weeks after the baby's birth that at that moment in far-off America Anna At water was giving birth to a daughter who was to play a tremendous role in her new son's life.

As James developed it was plain to see he wasn't only going to look like his father but he showed every indication of being interested in the same things.

He had an insatiable curiosity about anything of a medical nature and as time passed it became increasingly evident that he would not be happy unless he could become a doctor.



*Joseph and Sarah Kingsbury*

After much discussion, it was decided to send him to the United States to do his medical training. Joseph wrote to a well-established University in New York and received word several months later that James had been accepted as a student in the Faculty of Medicine and would be expected to enrol the following August. It meant incredible sacrifices for Joseph and Sarah to send James overseas for his training but they were willing to make such sacrifices if they allowed their son to achieve his lifelong ambition. He was not quite 18 when he set sail for the U.S. bubbling over with excitement and with his hopes at a high level. The voyage by sailing ship lasted 75 days and then followed the bone shaking cross-country railroad trip. He must have been one of the first passengers to make the crossing from Los Angeles as the railroad load only reached the West coast the month he left Australia. He lost no time enrolling at the University and had been scarcely a week in the country when a ball welcoming new students to the University was held. It was at this ball that he first met Stella Atwater.

It is not difficult to imagine the upset to his parent's household caused by the arrival of James's letter announcing his impending marriage and the reason for its haste, but Joseph and Sarah decided to make the best of it and did their utmost to welcome their daughter-in-law to Australia 18 months later. But, despite their honest endeavour to overlook the unfortunate circumstances surrounding their son's hasty marriage, they could never quite bring themselves to lay half the blame at his door. To them Stella was, and

always would remain so, the scheming woman who seduced their son and ensnared him into an early marriage which they regarded as quite unsuitable.

Stella's frequent bouts of homesickness over the years, bouts which James always assuaged by allowing her to travel back to the U.S.A. for long periods at tremendous expense, did nothing to endear her to them and there remained a veiled hostility between them for the remainder of their lives. This hostility was only brought out into the open on one occasion but was implicit in many incidents hinted at in Stella's diary over the years. It was in 1898 five years after Sarah's death when Stella made up her mind to return to America for the birth of her seventh child that Joseph confronted her on the wharf and accused her of being a spoiled, selfish woman who had no regard for her husband and the expense she was causing him when he could ill afford it. Twenty-two years of bitterness must have welled up in the old man on this occasion and he felt he could remain silent no longer.

He died at Enmore in 1902 at the age of 88, nine years after Sarah's death, a much loved and well respected member of the community. The enormous size of his funeral reported in several newspapers of the day is some indication of the esteem in which he was held in the district. But there was one chief mourner listed in the obituary notices who must have been secretly relieved that at long last the unspoken feud was ended and she could get on with the job of making her own marriage work without the implied criticism and overtly hostile attitude of her husband's parents .

### **Chapter 3**

## **Grandfather and Grandmother Kingsbury**

He noticed her as soon as he walked into the Great Hall at the University. She was sitting by herself on a straight-backed chair at the far end of the hall with her tiny hands resting quietly in her lap. She looked so alone despite the buzz of activity which surrounded her that he felt a tug of sympathy for her.

He walked over and sat down beside her.

"How do you do? May I sit here? By the way, my name is James Kingsbury and you are Miss, errr..."

"Atwater. Stella Atwater. How do you do?"

She stole a glance at him as she spoke and saw a short, stockily built, handsome young man who seemed to bubble with vitality. She was intrigued to detect an accent she was unfamiliar with and was startled to learn in answer to her question that he was an Australian.

"But you're not black!"

His hearty laugh was embarrassing because it drew the attention of at least a dozen pairs of eyes and she'd been trying to look as inconspicuous as possible in this all male world on this rare occasion when women were permitted within the sacred precincts of the University. The occasion was the ball to welcome new students to the University of Pennsylvania at the beginning of the academic year and Stella had attended with her cousin Lizzie. They were chaperoned by Lizzie's mother who was busy at the moment ensuring that her daughter's dance programme was filled with names of suitable male partners.

Aunt Amelia was a bustling, pushy sort of woman and Stella dreaded the next few minutes when she would surely descend on her with the same purpose in mind. Aunt Amelia meant well but she could be a mite overpowering.

James's laugh was infectious and Stella found herself joining him in the joke against herself in spite of her embarrassment.

"Perhaps you should brush up on your geography," he chuckled. "There are quite a few white people in Australia and we actually have a few roads and buildings too, believe it or not! Kangaroos don't spend their time hopping down the main street in Sydney as people over here seem to think. We've managed to become quite civilized in the past 80 odd years

The arrival of Aunt Amelia just at that moment interrupted further conversation between them. James had suddenly become aware of a short, heavily built woman standing in front of him. A bosom of alarming proportions protruded above what was, for want of a better word, her waist, which was rigidly encased in whalebone corseting. He had leapt to his feet as Stella introduced her Aunt and was rewarded with a glimmer of a smile from the forbidding, tightly clenched mouth. She edged herself into his vacated chair and proceeded to fire pointed questions at him concerning his family background and his reason for being so far from home. She seemed somewhat mollified when he confided to her that he was enrolled at the University to study Medicine and he must have created quite a reasonable impression on her because she condescended to allow him to fill his name in for three dances during the evening on Stella's as yet virginal dance programme. Conversation between them was carried on for the remainder of the evening in short bursts either over or around the formidable barrier of Aunt Amelia's bosom, except for the time they were dancing together, but by the end of the third dance they were both conscious of the fact that they wanted to see more of each other. Stella cleverly contrived a number of compelling reasons why she must visit New York in the weeks which followed, and they managed to see each other quite frequently. Conversation flowed easily between them.

Stella was curious about every aspect of his life in Australia and he in turn was grateful to have a friendly ear in this country where he still felt a stranger. He had barely spoken a word to a soul apart from his lecturers since arriving in the States. Now the flood gates were opened and he poured out his loneliness and homesickness to her. Before many weeks had passed they were deeply in love and it wasn't long before James began to indulge in some extra curricular anatomy studies with Stella on a far more personal basis. Their need was mutual. James felt isolated from all he valued back home and Stella had been desperately unhappy since the death of her younger brother had caused her mother to withdraw into herself and neglect her husband and other children.

Stella invited James to dinner at her home on his first free weekend. He felt he already knew her family because of their long talks but he was totally

unprepared for the lavish surroundings and the obvious wealth of her home. He had pictured her in an entirely different setting. She was so completely unspoiled and naturally friendly that it was difficult for him to fit her into this background.

The visit was anything but a resounding success. James had been awkward, clumsy and at a loss for words when introduced to the Colonel, whose military bearing and explosive way of talking at high speed on a bewildering variety of topics had the effect of reducing him to almost speechless terror. Stella tried her hardest to put him at his ease but the atmosphere in the house at that time was very strained and, to everyone's relief, the evening finished early. James did not meet Stella's mother on this first visit. The Colonel had apologised for her absence at the dinner table, explaining that she was indisposed with a headache and had been forced to retire early.

The truth was that Anna was still so distraught at the death of Jamie that she was under heavy sedation and spent most of her time in her room with the shades drawn in a drug induced stupor. She emerged eventually several weeks later an embittered woman who appeared to have lost all interest, temporarily at least, in her home and family. The fact that Stella was becoming very involved romantically with a young Australian medical student in New York completely escaped her notice until she was shocked out of her apathy and self pity by the startling news that Stella believed she was pregnant.

It is difficult to imagine today what a furore the announcement caused in the Atwater home, James was summoned to the Colonel's presence and was given a verbal lashing which tore him to shreds, Stella was caught up in a whirl of wedding preparations which gave them no time to be alone, James wrote to his parents and broke the news to them. It took months for their reply to reach him and, by the time he did receive it, he and Stella were married and renting a small brownstone house in Brooklyn not far from the University. Joseph and Sarah did not condemn him but were obviously most upset at the news. His father begged him not to give up his studies and sent a sum of money sufficient for their immediate needs.

What they must have felt like to be suddenly thrust into this situation at the age of 18 with almost two years of study ahead for James can only be guessed at. But, whatever the disappointments and hardships, they seem to have made a wonderful job of facing up to their responsibilities and getting on with the job of living life to the full.

There was tremendous excitement at Ada's birth and, when she was a year old James completed the course, gained his degree and the trio set sail for his homeland full of confident plans for the future. All was not plain sailing for them, however, when they arrived in Australia, The medical authorities in N.S.W. refused to recognise his diploma and insisted that he return to America for a further twelve months of study. Although this was a cruel setback to his plans it was finally agreed that they should return to Philadelphia where they could live with Stella's family whilst James attended the nearby University of Pennsylvania to complete a third year of studies. Shortly after their return to America baby Hubbard was born. They were both shattered when he died so unexpectedly six months later but, with the buoyancy of youth, they bounced back and Stella was again three months pregnant when they finally set off for Australia again in June 1881.

The day of departure from America was a day of mixed emotions. James was jubilant at the thought of returning to Australia with a wife and daughter and an MD degree, which would stand up to any scrutiny, tucked under his belt. The future looked bright and rosy and he was impatient for the ship to weigh anchor.

Poor Stella was all too aware that it would probably be many years before she saw her family and her beloved homeland again, and she found it almost impossible to say "goodbye". She stood at the railing for hours after the ship sailed until the coastline became just a blur through her tears and finally there was nothing but ocean to be seen no matter which way she looked. She felt utterly desolate. Why, she might as well be going to the moon - she would be so isolated on the other side of the world.

Fortunately she kept a diary for many years and has recorded not only the events of the day but also has put down her thoughts and feelings. This has been a wonderful help in researching the material for this book. There is nothing quite so revealing of character as a diary and Stella's is no exception. I shall refer to it frequently during the telling of her story. Reading it is like lifting a veil from the past of almost a century ago. Stella emerges through its pages as a woman who wanted to escape from the restrictions imposed on her by Victorian society but who found herself enmeshed in an inescapable web of custom and tradition which bound her with invisible cords too strong to break. A large part of her life, typical of the women of the upper middle classes of that era, seems to have been one long round of visiting and leaving calling cards and "at home" afternoons when the calls were returned. An entry of 22nd November 1888 is very significant of the way she felt at the time ...

"After that (dinner) I went and called on Mrs. E.. and I did not enjoy my call there one bit for she has nothing to talk about but fashions etc. and she and I have no thoughts in common. I then called on Mrs Curnow and the moment I am in her presence our souls seem to meet and we understand things and each other at once. Her husband is the Editor of the Herald and this fact is apt to bring the family into intelligent people's company - that call helped to counteract the ill effects (if I may say so) of the first call. I often wonder why we will continue to do things uncongenial to our own feelings but I know why I do in this case - just for the sake of my precious Husband's practice. I often declare that I will discontinue this fashionable calling."



*Stella and James Kingsbury*

All through the pages of the diary are poignant references to her longing for her family and for the country she loved till the day she died. My father used to say jokingly she was a "Yankee to the back teeth" and many a time he used to goad her into bristling defence of her compatriots by some criticism of America or Americans casually thrown her way just so that he could revel in her reaction, she was the perfect butt for his teasing and it was mostly left to my mother to gently smooth her ruffled feathers when the teasing had gone far enough. She remained almost aggressively American until the day she died and never really settled in Australia contentedly. Her bouts of homesickness resulted in severe depression on a number of occasions and James's solution to this problem was to allow her to return to the states on no fewer than six separate visits lasting sometimes up to 18 months. The drain this must have caused on his income does not bear thinking about because

she never travelled alone, being accompanied always by a nursemaid and one or more of the children. Twice James went with her himself. When she first arrived in Australia, however, there was not enough money to allow James to indulge her in this way and it was only because she loved him so deeply that she felt she could face life in her new country.

Baby Edward was born three months after their arrival in Sydney but he too was to live for only a few months and this time it wasn't her own dear Mama and Papa who helped her through the time of grief but Sarah and Joseph. James was a wonderful support all through the ordeal although he too was suffering. He had delivered the baby himself. Stella had insisted on him doing this now he was qualified and his disappointment at the loss of another son was intense.

James had registered with the N.S.W, Government Medical Board a few days after his arrival in Sydney to enable him to practice in NSW and had established a practice in Church Street, Newtown where he was to remain for many years. Photographs in the family albums of the interior of Garfield House Newtown could be used as references for a movie setting of a typical Victorian drawing room. There is the glass fronted cabinet filled with stuffed birds, the potted palms so popular in the eighties, the mantelpiece cluttered with bric-a-brac, the anti-macassars on the backs of the velvet upholstered easy chairs and the heavily draped piano bedecked with family portraits. A photograph taken outside shows the family playing croquet on the side lawn with my mother, who was about four at the time the photo was taken, dressed in a frilly white voluminous frock with heavy buttoned boots reaching almost to her knees.



## *Garfield House, Newtown*

She had been born in November 1883 and had been named Stella Victoria. James had remarked at her birth that he intended to name her after "the queen of his house and the queen of his country" and he had his way. I wonder did Stella object to having Victoria tacked on to the baby's name. It would probably have been more appropriate in her opinion if James had named their daughter after the U.S. President's wife!

A third daughter, Vera, was to arrive three years later. She became my favourite aunt. To me she seemed to represent everything I wanted to be - beautiful not only in physical features but with a truly beautiful nature, graceful, elegant, poised, unruffled, unselfish and extremely clever with her hands. That she should have denied herself the chance of marriage and children because of a lifelong attachment to her eldest sister's husband is a tragic story for another chapter.

When Vera was two years of age Australia celebrated its Centenary. A tremendous number of events were organized to mark the occasion throughout the whole year and one such event is mentioned in Stella's diary written on 25th November of that year. Apparently the doctors in Sydney had arranged for a day's outing on the Harbour the day before and wives had not been included in the invitation. Reading between the lines I can almost hear Stella's injured tone as she bade James goodbye early on the Saturday morning. "I think they are very selfish as they went off by themselves to celebrate the Centennial- she writes the following day. "I know at least one Dr. that would have enjoyed himself better had he had his wife along too."

It was a scorching day and Sydney was ringed with bush fires which cast a pall of smoke over the Harbour but, undaunted, Stella made up her mind not to be left at home all day on her own with the children and she had Cook pack up a picnic lunch for herself and the three girls and set off for Manly where they had a "sea-bath" which lifted her spirits tremendously. The return trip by the 4.30 ferry in the afternoon was frightening because of the thick smoke haze and she remarked that "the sun looked like a ball of fire." At least the "sea-bath" cooled her off in more ways than one!

Only a month later a party of baseballers arrived from the USA on a goodwill tour as part of the Centenary festivities and Stella was able to indulge her pro-American feelings to the full. She was beside herself with excitement and happiness but was also a little apprehensive lest the baseballers misbehave themselves and bring disgrace to her beloved

country. Her diary reveals just how much this whiff of home meant to her. She travelled by launch in the morning to Watson's Bay where they cruised around waiting for the "Alameda" to come through the Heads. When it did arrive it was greeted by an almost deafening cheering and blowing of horns from the crowd of small boats gathered around the harbour entrance. The band on the launch on which she found herself just one of an excited crowd comprising not a few Americans struck up and played all the American airs they could think of. The touring party were then driven to their hotel in flag bedecked drays which were drawn by four or six horses each. Later that evening a reception was given the men at the Theatre Royal. Stella and her sister Fanny, who was here on a prolonged visit, were in the front row of the audience.



*SS Alameda in Sydney*

After speeches of welcome to the tourists by leading Sydney citizens Maggie Moore sang "Star Spangled Banner" to the packed theatre. A large American flag was draped behind her and the theatre was decorated in flags, most of which were American. The whole episode must have made a big impression on Stella because she mentions it several times in later entries in her diary.

James's practice was steadily increasing in volume and he was often called out at night for a home confinement which sometimes took most of the night. One memorable occasion my mother often told me about points to the fact that, apart from being a much loved and well respected doctor in the district, he also was a bit of a King Solomon in his wisdom. He had been up most of one particular night attending to two women in labour who lived next door to each other and were very close friends. He happened to know that Mrs. A. was hoping for a daughter and Mrs. B. for a son. It transpired

that both babies were born within a half hour of each other. Mrs. A's baby was a boy and Mrs. B's a girl. Both women were at first bitterly disappointed. James, with a deadpan face, suggested to each quite seriously that, as he was the only one who knew as yet what sex the babies were, he could quite easily swap them and each mother would be satisfied. He swore absolute secrecy but, hardly were the words out of his mouth in both households than he was greeted with outraged cries of "You couldn't dream of taking my baby away from me. I wouldn't swap my baby for all the boys (or all the girls) in the world!" Such is the wonder of mother love.

Both James and Stella were active in political circles, being keenly interested in the infant Labor Movement in N.S.W. James for many years was an enthusiastic supporter of the Free Trade and Land Reform Movement and also contributed generously to the funds of the Newtown Single Tax League. He was nominated for President of the League but the pressures of his work were too great to allow him enough free time to accept the nomination. He was untiring in his support of the Labor Movement's candidates for Newtown in the 1891 elections and there was great excitement in the district when Labor won the seat.

Stella for her part was interested in women's issues way back in 1889 when it was only the women of means who could afford the luxury of such interests outside her home and family. It seems a movement suggested by the editoress of a women's magazine called "Dawn" was formed then to discuss matters concerning women and to urge reforms in this area. The movement was named the "Dawn Club" and Stella was one of the foundation members. What the fate of the Club was remains a mystery. No further mention of it is made in Stella's diary.

They still found time to take numerous short holidays as a relief from the increasing strain James was feeling. A favourite retreat was Jenolan Caves where they went often not so much to soak in the beauty of the Caves but to enjoy the hunting of the bird and animal life which abounded in the area. Stella writes frequently of her excitement at joining the hunting group of "sportsmen" and tramping for miles through the thick forest to shoot these little creatures. This is one trait she certainly didn't pass on to her granddaughter. I can never see the sport in such a one-sided affair where the odds are heavily loaded in favour of the hunter. To kill for food - yes, if it is done in a humane way - but to slaughter innocent animals and leave the carcasses rotting in the bush or, worse still, to hang the skins as an ornament on the walls of home or throw them on the floor as a completely unnecessary mat seems to me the absolute antithesis of the word "sport". The inconsistency of

Stella's participation in this pastime is summed up in one entry where she remarks that they shot 12 wallabies during the day but they brought home with them two baby wallabies as pets for the children. "I do hope they survive as they are so cute" she writes that night in her diary.

Although she was a woman who gave a lot of serious thought to God and religion Stella was never one to accept without question some of the dogmas of organised church worship. She attended church regularly but quite often seemed to cross swords with the preacher following the service. She writes about her striving to accept in blind faith the teachings of Christ as preached by His ministers but she remained a rebel all her life.

One beautiful little quote from an entry written in her diary when she and James were visiting Melbourne in January 1889 seems to sum up her attitude to the "fire and brimstone" evangelical type of Christianity so prevalent in that era. James was attending a Medical Congress in the city and Stella had taken herself off to Fitzroy to hear a Mr. Houchins preach on "Hell Fire".

"I think he proved himself 20 years behind the times - oh such bosh to listen to! and he might be such a grand man too!" she reports.

I enjoyed a quiet chuckle when I read her remark written just a month earlier. New South Wales was experiencing a drought at the time and all the preachers in Sydney had organised Sunday 30th December 1888 as a day of prayer for rain. Stella couldn't resist getting up early on the morning of that particular Sunday and confiding to her diary that it had been raining heavily all night and "now that the rain has started without their prayers, perhaps it will continue without them."

She must have had many a laugh up her sleeve at the pomposity and snobbery of the day while still, for the sake of her position in the community as the wife of a well known doctor, maintaining an outward appearance of conformity. But, during the Medical Congress in Melbourne mentioned earlier it is obvious she was "kicking against the pricks". The doctors attending the Congress were invited to a reception at Government House accompanied by their wives. Stella tells of it in her own words: "It's a grand house - fine and large - and we saw some fine dresses, but I never shall aspire to such life. I enjoy mingling with the middle classes. I like intelligent people and people who live for more than show."

How she would have loved to live in today's free society!

She was a woman who liked to experiment with all manner of "isms" and James seems to have humoured her by taking an interest in many of her ventures into the unknown. She dabbled in palmistry, phrenology, spiritualism and hypnotism in quite a serious way. There are pages of notes about their attendance at a seance where they were astounded at the phenomenon of slate writing, but when she became disillusioned with the subject she seems to have pigeon holed it and not dwelt on it further. It is obvious that all through her life she was seeking the answers to unanswerable questions which she couldn't find in the stifling, restricting atmosphere of the non-conformist Protestant church in which she found herself involved through her marriage.

It was this rebellious attitude that first caused her to run foul of Joseph and Sarah. Although they must have tried hard to accept her into the family circle they never could quite find the forgiveness in their hearts to overlook the circumstances of her marriage with James. It is quite clear that they laid the blame at her door and her outspoken questioning of some of the beliefs they held only caused her to slip further from favour in their eyes. But even open disfavour in the eyes of her father and mother-in-law couldn't dampen her enthusiasm in her search for truth.

She was still seeking the answers when I was a little girl and she had become a member of the Christian Science faith. I can still remember the dilemma of my mother and aunts when she was stricken with pneumonia when I was nine years of age. Although extremely ill she refused to allow them to call in a doctor because of her strong convictions about the power of mind over matter. It was not until she lapsed into unconsciousness that they hurriedly summoned a doctor but by then it was too late and she died a few hours later. What irony for the widow of a doctor to die because of her refusal to seek medical help. But what strength of character to have the courage of her convictions to the last breath of life.

She seemed to me to be like the King of Siam in the musical "The King and I" who is described in song as a man who made mistakes but also a man who tried. I couldn't think of a better epitaph for my grandmother. Often in the pages of her diary she tells how she strove constantly for perfection in her character - she writes of trying to conquer her hasty temper and her unkind thoughts. I know for certain she wasn't successful with the former at least. Many a time I was on the receiving end of a sharp rebuke and a hastily administered slap when I was guilty of some childish misdemeanour. She used to come to the boil quickly but just as quickly subsided and then

obviously suffered pangs of remorse long after the incident was forgotten by everyone else.

In 1892 Stella was again overjoyed at the birth of a third son, Clifford. He went with the entire family to the States a year later where they visited the world's Fair at Chicago and he was no doubt the only member of the family not impressed by the wonders on exhibit. Stella as usual couldn't help remarking that "They are so much more advanced in America than Australia." She resolved to jot down a number of ideas she saw which made a big impression on her, amongst them being "the things to put the foot on to try on boots and shoes, the marble WC's and paper appliances, the folding beds, the cake tins that open and the folding sewing machines."

Clifford was almost two when he too contracted meningitis and died. There seems to be a common belief often expressed that, because the death of a child was so common in the past, parents expected to lose several of their children and couldn't possibly have felt the loss as acutely as a parent faced with the death of a child today when such an event is fortunately a rare occurrence. But one would have to be made of stone not to feel the suffering of Stella when she writes of baby Clifford's death in June 1894. It speaks for itself:

"This last fortnight has been one of the saddest I ever spent in my life. My darling baby Clifford has been taken from me. It seems as if I could not part with him. I do love him so. My whole heart was wrapt up in that dear baby - he was so good, so beautiful, so sweet. He was taken ill just a fortnight before he died on the 9th of June, just last Saturday, with meningitis - was unconscious for a week so I feel comforted in the thought that he did not suffer, but oh why! was he taken? I cannot write more. He would have been 2 years old on the 27th of next August. Was laid out in the waiting room and the table and chairs were covered with beautiful flowers, wreaths, crosses, hearts etc. and oh how he loved flowers. I put a little rosebud in his dear little hands."



*Clifford Kingsbury*

Eighteen months later when she was pregnant for the seventh time it became an obsession with her that if the baby could be born in America it would survive. She desperately wanted to be with her ageing mother and father and her sister Fanny at the time of the baby's birth and, as usual, long suffering James packed her off on the "Monowai" in January 1896 with my mother and Vera.

This sudden dramatic decision to go to America for the baby's birth was the deciding factor which caused the simmering disapproval of Joseph, now a widower, to flare into open hostility. There was a dreadful scene on the wharf before the ship sailed when Joseph accused her of being a selfish spoiled woman who constantly bled his son by her everlasting extravagances and her constant demands. With characteristic frankness she reports the incident in her diary but, also in keeping with her ability to set aside unpleasant happenings, she doesn't mention it again.

On their arrival in America they lived in an annexe built on to her parent's home in Clearwater and it was here that her last baby Kent was born three months later. James and Ada arrived in California a month after the baby's birth and Stella's joy at being reunited once more as a complete family in her own homeland was all too evident in her early entries regarding their stay. Tragedy struck again however when baby Kent died at the age of 8 months, also with meningitis, without ever seeing his mother's adopted country. Even the fact that he'd been born in "God's own country" didn't spare him from the same fate as his three brothers.

The family did not return to Australia until 1898 and James soon found himself so inundated with patients that he decided to retain the doctor who had taken his place during his absence in the States as a partner. Still, the work load proved too heavy for him and at the turn of the century he suffered a crippling stroke. It took many months of careful nursing to get him on his feet again but he was determined not to become a useless invalid at the early age of 42 and it was by sheer determination and strength of will that he recommenced his work again on a limited scale.

They decided soon after, however, that a change of air could work wonders for James and the family moved to Katoomba for about two years.

Perhaps it was because I knew of this connection with Katoomba through my mother's stories that I imagined as a child that the famous Three Sisters at Katoomba had been named after my mother and her two sisters. I was firmly convinced of this and even today I always give them mental name tags of Ada, Stella and Vera.

Ada was married two years after the move to the Blue Mountains and it wasn't long afterwards that the others decided to return to Newtown. Shortly a new problem began to present itself. Eighteen year old Vera showed obvious signs of falling in love with her brother-in-law, Will. It was equally obvious that he returned her love despite the fact that he had only been married a few years to Ada. Naturally James and Stella were very concerned and in an effort to break up the romance before it got out of hand they decided once again to travel to America with my mother and Vera. It would also give James a chance for a long holiday he sadly needed and in April 1905 they left on board the "Sierra".

They were all living in Clearwater California the following year when two noteworthy events occurred. The first was in January when old Colonel Atwater was killed in a streetcar accident in Los Angeles. He was 83 years of age and had been in failing health for some years. The rift between Frederic and Anna caused by Jamie's death so many years earlier had gradually closed as Frederic had hoped and he and Anna were for many years before his death a very devoted couple. Anna was stunned by the suddenness of his death and Stella was glad she happened to be on hand to help her over the first sad months following the old Colonel's death.

Three months after he was killed the world was shocked to hear of the gigantic earthquake which reduced over 500 blocks in the centre of San

Francisco to rubble, killed 700 of its citizens and destroyed 28,000 buildings. The sheer horror of the magnitude of the disaster took some time to register because all communication with the stricken city had been cut off. Two days after the initial shock had sent the city tumbling Stella, James and my mother travelled the 360 odd miles north for James to offer his services to help the medical teams who were hard pressed treating the thousands of injured. They also attempted to trace some of Stella's relations who had been living in the city but discovered later that they had been away from home at the time and so were unharmed.

My mother often described the scene to me. Fires were still raging out of control in a large section of the city and seemingly bottomless chasms yawned in the asphalt streets as if waiting with open mouths to swallow more human victims. The smoking rubble was mountain high and steel tramlines were literally tied in knots as if they were made of nothing stronger than rope. People seemed to be wandering around still in a numbed state of shock. Over 250,000 had lost their homes and all their possessions. The memory of that dreadful scene never left my mother and years later when I first saw the film "San Francisco" her descriptions were brought vividly to life. One thing the film couldn't portray was the sickening stench of death which hung over the ruined city and yet this was one of the most distressing aspects of the disaster.

On their return to Australia at the end of the year it soon became evident that the enforced separation of Vera and Will, rather than weakening their feelings for each other, had had the opposite result. How this situation was met and with what results is another story but it is sufficient to say here that the problem was one which greatly troubled James and Stella for the remainder of their lives.

They purchased a home in Marrickville and James set up a practice there on a small scale while still continuing to see a few old and valued patients at his Newtown rooms. Despite all the precautions regarding his health he suffered a second stroke only two years after their return and for the remainder of his seven years of life he was bedridden most of the time and required constant nursing care. This care was shared largely between Stella and my mother and Vera. Apart from almost total paralysis resulting from the second stroke he suffered frequent intense bouts of pain which seemed to be caused by constantly recurring bowel adhesions.

Finances were stretched to the limit because of the sudden loss of James's income and the two girls volunteered to seek outside work to relieve the

situation. My mother had been teaching elocution in a small way before her last trip to the States and now she took up teaching professionally in the city. She very soon established herself as one of Sydney's leading elocution teachers. She was a born actress and her charm and delightful manner on the stage resulted in her tremendous popularity. There is a book of her old press clippings in the family archives but I will deal with them in more detail in her story later in this book as this chapter rightfully belongs to her mother and father.

Vera commenced working for a wholesale import/export firm in Clarence Street where she was to remain for the next 35 years, and life settled down into a fairly hum-drum routine broken only by a couple of noteworthy events which helped relieve the monotony of the long days and nights. The first of these was the upheaval caused by my mother's second broken engagement in circumstances which were almost unbelievable but which I will relate in another chapter. The second was the news of Anna's death in Los Angeles. An old faded newspaper clipping of January 1911 gives the full details of her tragic death but I have already passed these on to you so won't repeat them here.

Death released James from his long years of suffering on 2nd July 1915 and, although he was only 57 years of age, I don't think there was one person who loved him who wasn't glad for his sake that the end had come.



*James and Stella, with daughters Ada, Vera, and Stella*

There followed many years of gradual deterioration of living standards in an effort to eke out the depleted amount of money left in James's estate following his long illness and death. All the servants were dismissed and for the first time in her life Stella was forced to cope with her own housework.

Gone were the halcyon days of overseas trips and frequent holidays. The Marrickville home was sold - the Newtown practice and home had been disposed of years earlier - and a smaller home purchased. This in turn was sold and a series of smaller cheaper cottages and flats were rented, each one seeming to be a little smaller and a little cheaper than its predecessor. All Stella's jewellery she loved so dearly was sold piece by piece until only the remnants of her extensive collection of opals was left to divide between my mother and her sisters after her death.

When I first remember her she was living with Vera in a flat in Raglan Street Mosman. There was a huge peppercorn tree in the backyard and one of my clearest childhood memories is sitting with her on the lawn under this tree when I was five years of age taking it in turns to brush each other's hair. Mine was an untidy tangle of curls but hers was a soft silky length of fine grey hair reaching to her waist which she invariably tied into a bun on the nape of her neck. I can still smell the peppercorns as I write this and hear her almost catlike purr of contentment as I gently stroked the brush through her hair.

When she died she and Vera were sharing a flat close to Spit Junction, Mosman. The room in which she died looked straight out to the Sydney Heads through which she had first sailed 56 years earlier as a nervous young wife and which she had passed through so many times during her married life.

I wonder if her spirit made the final trip back home to her loved America?

## **Chapter 4**

### **Grandfather Ferguson**

It was a cold blustery March afternoon In 1840 when Thomas Ferguson was born. His first cry blended with the wail of a pipe band at practice in the courtyard of Edinburgh Castle high above. The tall narrow fronted stone house where his parents lived was built in the shadow of the huge rock on which the Castle had stood guard for centuries. The Castle was such a focal point of life in the city of Edinburgh that Thomas came to regard it as he grew up almost like a benevolent father keeping watch over his children clustered at his feet.

Peter Ferguson came hurrying home on this particular afternoon having been summoned from his printing shop in Paterson's Court by his sister-in-law as soon as the baby's birth had appeared imminent. He hurried through the front door and up the three flights of narrow wooden stairs just ten minutes after the arrival of Thomas and was greeted by Annie with a tired but triumphant smile as she cradled the new-born baby in her arms alongside her in the bed. He was their first child and was something of a novelty in the family circle. He had many cousins but they were all at least twenty years older than he. His father had been the youngest child in his family and had not married until he was 45 years of age. The family had always regarded him as a confirmed bachelor until he had met Annie McDougall and, after a whirlwind courtship, he rushed headlong into marriage with such gusto that the family was still reeling from the shock ten months later when Thomas was born.

Annie was 24 years his junior and was a girl of sparkling wit and unusual beauty. He had been immediately attracted to her when she came into his shop with an order for the printing of her 21st birthday party invitations. He had taken especial care with the job and delivered the carefully wrapped parcel to her parent's home personally. It was natural for them to extend a personal invitation to him to attend the party and following this he became a frequent visitor to the home. Annie thought him a most attractive man, so much more mature than the young men who continually hovered around her like moths around a candle. How much of this attraction was due to the fact that he was obviously a well established gentleman of substantial means is not certain.

Now, with the birth of Thomas, the marriage was firmly cemented. Three sisters followed in quick succession and all were duly baptised in the small

kirk which still stands today in the Parish of St. Cuthberts.

Thomas, being the only boy in the family, spent more and more time in his father's company. The printing shop was a delight to the small boy. The smell of ink permeated everything and the magic of the printing press never lost its fascination for him.

Every afternoon on his way home from school he was in the habit of calling in to the shop and watching his father at work. He was thrilled if he was allowed to run errands and became familiar with the maze of twisting climbing streets and laneways in the Old Town.

Hurrying excitedly home from school one afternoon when he was eight years old Thomas was surprised to find the door of his father's shop locked. When he reached home he was puzzled to discover the downstairs living room crowded with a motley assortment of sober faced relatives and neighbours. His father looked as if he'd actually been crying and he took the boy aside and, sitting in the big easy chair near the dining room window, he lifted him on to his knee.

"Tom, your mother is not going to be living here any more. She has gone to live with God in Heaven. I know you'll be a good boy and will help look after your little sisters."

It wasn't until many years later that Thomas learned his mother had died in childbirth. The stillborn son she had given her life to produce was buried with her in the family plot in the old Greyfriars Churchyard nearby.

There followed a short period in the boy's life when everything was so topsy turvy that it seemed to him that things would never settle back to the old familiar pattern. Eventually it was decided after a lot of discussion that he was to be sent to live with his Aunt Christina who worked as a cook/housekeeper in a boys' boarding school in Eyemouth.

She was quite elderly and Thomas had only very dim memories of her when she had visited them some years earlier. She lived in a cottage in the school grounds and was quite agreeable to having Thomas live with her and it was arranged that he should be enrolled in the third grade at the school.

On a beautiful summer day in 1848 his clothes and books were packed in a small trunk and loaded on to the horse drawn coach to travel the 40 odd miles to the coast where the driver delivered him to the front gate of the

school where his aunt was waiting for him with a cluster of schoolboys curious to get a glimpse of the new boy. She seemed incredibly old but not nearly as frightening as he had imagined. She ordered one of the older boys to carry the trunk up the steep path to her cottage and then proceeded to busy herself setting a bowl of hot soup and a slice of thick bread before him.

"Here lad. You must be famished after your trip. Eat up and then I'll show you where you're to sleep. Tomorrow I'll take you to see the Headmaster and you can get settled in to your class."

The soup was followed by a glass of milk and then his trunk was unpacked and he was undressed and tucked into bed. After his aunt had blown out the lamp and closed the door firmly behind her he remembered to kneel by the bed and say his prayers and he suddenly felt terribly homesick. He wondered how his little sisters were getting on in their new homes. The two eldest had gone to live with a cousin just around the corner from his old home and the baby, who was just starting to toddle, was being cared for by his mother's youngest sister. Aunt Flora. He wished he could have stayed with his father. He must feel very lonely now that the house was empty. He tried hard not to cry but Christina found his pillow wet with tears when she checked later to see if he was asleep. She sat on the side of the bed and stroked the hair back from his damp forehead.

"Poor wee ladie" she whispered softly. "Don't upset yourself. We'll get on fine together, just you wait and see."

Never was a truer word spoken. Thomas came to love his aunt and the little cottage overlooking the ocean. The school was perched on a steep grassy slope above the cliff edge and the sound of the waves breaking on the rocks below was a source of constant delight to his city bred ears. He settled in well at school and was popular with the other boys although he kept to himself a good deal of the time. The only time he really missed his mother was on the one day in each school term when parents were permitted to visit the school to check on their sons' progress. It was an exciting event for both parents and boys. Mothers arrived laden with parcels containing home made fruit cake and bags of fruit and sweets and a picnic atmosphere prevailed all day at the school.

Thomas had written a laboriously penned letter to his father explaining about visiting day and Peter had replied that he would certainly try to make the journey in November if he could arrange for someone to look after the shop for the day.

Thomas was beside himself with excitement when the day finally arrived and raced down the steep path as soon as he saw his father walking through the gate with a group of parents. He was carrying a parcel under his arm and Thomas spent an agonising ten minutes trying to imagine what it contained. Perhaps it was a slab of his favourite currant cake or even some fresh apple pie bought at Mrs. Macdonald's bakery next to the printing shop. With his mouth watering at the prospect he tore off the string as soon as his father handed him the parcel and, while a handful of boys looked on, he opened the box to find... a pair of sturdy lace-up boots! To make matters worse, there was a card tucked in one of the boots written in his father's beautiful copperplate handwriting which said "Happy Christmas Tom, from your affectionate father."

Christmas was still more than a month away. He had imagined he would be going home then for a few days but when he saw the note he knew it was his father's way of telling him he would remain at school for the holidays.

He thanked him politely and was man enough not to show his disappointment but, as far as he was concerned, the day was a dismal failure.

The boots lay untouched in their box for several weeks until a spell of wet weather brought them to mind. When he tried them on they were several sizes too large and were most uncomfortable. In his next letter to his father he mentioned this, hoping he would suggest exchanging them for a smaller, lighter pair of shoes. His father's reply was typical: "I am sorry that the Boots are too large for you. Would they not do by putting a little wad in at the toes or are they too large all other ways?" No mention of exchanging them for a more suitable pair of shoes so he was stuck with them whether he liked it or not!

It was during his third year at Eyemouth that a chance conversation with his aunt was to sow the seeds for a decision he made in later years which was to completely alter the family history. They were sitting in front of the fire in the early evening on a raw day not long before Thomas's 12th birthday. He was engrossed in his homework and Aunt Christina was reading the newspaper by the light of the kerosene lamp on the table between them. She looked up from the page she was reading, took off her glasses and remarked, "It says here that gold has been discovered in Australia. That will make a big change out there no doubt. There's nothing like a whiff of gold to bring the people rushing there in their thousands. Oh Tom lad, I'd give a lot to be

young again and I'd be tempted to go myself. I've always wanted to see Australia and just imagine the excitement!"

A few minutes later she burst out, "Did I ever tell you lad that your Aunt Mary and I were born on the very day that Australia was settled by the British? Of course your grandparents didn't know about it at the time because it took more than six months for the news to reach the papers here, but I was most excited when I learned the date in my history books at school. It was one date I had no trouble remembering."

Thomas was dumbfounded. He'd never known until that day that his aunt had been a twin and now in answer to his question she told him that her sister had only survived for three weeks. His aunt's exact age had always been a well-kept secret but now he did a quick mental calculation and discovered that she must be 64 years old. From that day on he began to take a special interest in learning as much about Australia as he could. He resolved that if he ever got the chance he would go to this far away land which seemed to offer such an exciting challenge to anyone with a spark of adventure in them.

Thomas spent six happy years at Eyemouth. His father wrote regularly but he seldom saw him during that time.

He was in his senior year in the school when Aunt Christina confided to him that she was thinking of retiring when he finished his final examinations. She'd reached the age of 66 and thought it was about time she took things easy. The news set Thomas off on a new train of thought. He was planning to return to Edinburgh as soon as school closed for the long summer vacation to join his father in the printing business. Why couldn't his aunt go with him and live with her brother and him in the old house? He was sure his father would welcome her with open arms after so many years at the mercy of a succession of housekeepers, some of whom had apparently left much to be desired.

As predicted, Peter was overjoyed at the idea and before the brief summer of 1854 had fled Thomas was settled back in his old room again and Aunt Christina was installed in a small room on the ground floor near the kitchen where she wouldn't be troubled by the stairs.

It didn't take Thomas long to learn the rudiments of the printing trade. He'd already absorbed a fund of knowledge from his early years and was a keen and enthusiastic apprentice.

Four years after his return to Edinburgh his father died suddenly and Thomas took sole charge of the business at the age of 18. Less than twelve months later Aunt Christina suffered a stroke and died three days later without regaining consciousness.

Thomas found himself alone in the old house. He'd had so little contact with his sisters over the years that they seemed like strangers on the rare occasions when he saw them and now he realised there was no real reason for him to remain in Scotland. Any ties that bound him to the place had been severed with the deaths of the only two people in the world he really cared for. This was his big chance to do what he'd dreamed of doing since that night nearly eight years earlier when Aunt Christina had fired his imagination with her chance mention of Australia.

No sooner had he reached this decision than he set about preparing for the big adventure.

It took twelve months or so to finalise his father's estate, sell the printing business and arrange for his Aunt Flora and her husband to move into the old house. By now, in addition to his youngest sister who was nearly 14 she had a tribe of children of her own and welcomed the chance to move into a larger house than the one she'd lived in since her marriage.

On Monday the 13th August 1860 he said his dutiful farewells to aunts, uncles, cousins and sisters and turned his back on all that was familiar to him. It was a hot day and it could have been perspiration that trickled down his cheeks as the train pulled out of the station and the waving figures on the platform dwindled into mere specks. He would never admit to shedding a few tears but as the view of Edinburgh Castle grew distant and finally disappeared altogether there was a peculiar lump in his throat and a smarting moisture in his eyes.



*The Eagle*

He had booked passage on the Black Ball ship "Eagle" which sailed from Liverpool five days later. After a voyage lasting almost fifteen weeks the ship reached Melbourne on the 26th November 1860. It was a steaming day - hotter than any he'd ever experienced in his life and his stiff high collar and heavy woollen suit were wholly unsuited to the climate.

During the trip out he'd been told that the goldfields of Bendigo were almost mined out and he wisely decided to seek employment as a printer until he could assess the situation. His meticulously kept wages record is still in the family archives. It shows an average weekly wage for the next seven years of £2/5/3, hardly a fortune but evidently enough for him to live on comfortably as a single man.

He had always had an abhorrence of liquor, a legacy from his early childhood when his father had strictly forbidden it to be brought into the home. In 1872 he became Secretary of the Melbourne Total Abstinence Society, a position he was to hold for 32 years until his death in 1904. The liquor licensing laws of the day left much to be desired and he worked untiringly for reform in this direction. Although the Parliament of the day had passed restricted legislation in almost every occupation, the liquor trade was permitted to carry on 17 and a half hours out of every 24 and there was much widespread alcoholism and very little understanding of its treatment. Thomas carried on his work with tremendous zeal and energy and it is largely to his credit that many worthwhile reforms were instituted. I must admit that every time I have a glass of wine with my dinner or drink one of my infrequent diluted shandys I feel a little like a traitor to his memory.



*Thomas Ferguson*

He was so engrossed in his work that he had little inclination to indulge in the time consuming pursuit of a wife. Men greatly out-numbered women in the colony at that time and eligible suitable women were few and far between. His enforced bachelorhood had soured him and turned him into a dour gloomy type of man who had no time for frivolities. It was not until 1886 that he met a woman who so appealed to him that he decided to propose marriage to her.

He had been asked by the Temperance Society to attend a series of lectures being given by a Mrs. Emma Brown, a young woman evangelist with the newly formed Salvation Army. She had been lecturing in Australia for the past three years since her arrival from England and had been drawing large crowds to her meetings in every town she visited. Interest in the Salvation Army was growing and its influence was being felt in many Western countries.

As soon as he saw her walking purposefully onto the stage and heard the sparkling witty way she put her message across he was spellbound. He was no mean speaker himself at public functions and her eloquence impressed him greatly. He made discreet inquiries and discovered that she was a widow with two young daughters and with no family ties in Australia. He lost no time setting about the business of methodically courting her and even followed her back to Sydney when she finished her Melbourne tour. They were married in Sydney in June 1886.

Almost from the start the marriage ran into trouble. Emma was a strongly independent type of woman (my brother always asserts that she was the world's original Women's Libber!) who had been used to making her own decisions for many years and she found it intolerable to be suddenly tied down to a man fourteen years her senior who tried to dominate her every move. While she was a deeply religious woman her religion was a joyous thing full of love and laughter and she chafed at the dreary fun suppressing approach to religion which Thomas practiced.

A son, Alan, who was destined to become my father, was born ten months after the marriage to be followed sixteen months later by a daughter.

Matters went from bad to worse until Emma finally took the almost unprecedented step for those days of leaving him and taking the four children with her to settle on the outskirts of Sydney. Thomas tried many times for a reconciliation of their differences but he completely underestimated Emma's fierce determination to "go it alone" and the separation was permanent.

He died in 1904 a lonely, embittered man but one who, despite the failure of his personal life, was a well respected citizen of Melbourne. Seven years after his death the Melbourne City Council granted a site at the corner of Bourke and Russell Streets and a drinking fountain was erected in his memory. Many eminent citizens of Melbourne spoke at the unveiling ceremony and all praised his hard work and untiring efforts for "sobriety and temperance."

For many years the fountain stood on this site as a tribute to his work but it was removed some years ago to Melbourne University Square fronting Grattan Street in Carlton where it still serves as a memorial to one who deserves not to be forgotten.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Grandmother ("Nana") Ferguson**

Two months after Thomas returned to Edinburgh from Eyemouth the baby girl who was destined to become his wife 32 years later was born in Devonport on the South coast of England not far from Plymouth. It was September 1854 and England was involved in the Crimean War. Together with France, Britain had declared war on Russia only six months earlier and had pledged help to the Turks. A week before Emma was born the Allies landed troops in the Crimea on the North shore of the Black Sea and began a year long siege of the Russian fortress of Sevastopol. British, French and Turkish troops were engaged in a fierce battle at the Alma River only four days after her birth. Of course, Emma was completely unaware of all this national drama but the busy port of Plymouth nearby was alive with activity as the British Fleet played its part in the drama. Peace was restored seventeen months later and Britain sat back and licked its wounds.

Emma's father was a stern but ineffectual type of man and her mother was a gentle frail woman. How they managed to produce such a headstrong, vivacious and strong-willed daughter is a mystery of genetics which will never be solved. The set of her chin was enough to give a clue to her stubborn determination. She was highly intelligent with a quick, sharp mind which didn't fail her until the day she died 92 years later.



*Emma Ferguson*

When I first remember her the sharp mind was encased in a body so gross and useless that it was difficult for me to imagine her as a slim young girl. Her body had betrayed her many years earlier and for as long as I could remember she had been a figure propped up in an enormous double bed, with failing eyesight and hearing, being waited on hand and foot by a dedicated maiden aunt who was elderly herself. She had a sort of primitive

hearing aid which consisted of an ear piece with a long length of tubing at the other end of which was a funnel. When this funnel was thrust into my hand after first being cleared by vigorous blowing, and the other end was inserted in her ear it was all I could do to keep from laughing when I was expected to carry on a shouted conversation through this contraption. But she never lost her sense of humour and it was an awesome sight to see this huge mound of blubber shaking with laughter as she recalled some long forgotten humorous incident.

But I digress ...

While she was still a young girl she was very much influenced by the author Charles Dickens who was a close friend of her parents, John and Mary Stride. He was a frequent visitor to their home when she was very young. Being at the peak of his career as an author she was fascinated by his books and devoured every one of them as they came off the presses. A complete set of Dickens' works was one of my father's proudest possessions. I wonder did he inherit them from his mother?

Another man who was to make a profound impression on her when she was a young woman was William Booth who was also a regular visitor to her home. He was a Methodist minister who founded a Mission to help the needy in the East End of London in 1865 when Emma was eleven years old. The idea of such practical Christianity appealed to Emma who all her life had a great disdain for the type of Christian who occupied a pew every Sunday at church yet closed their eyes to the appalling poverty and need on their doorstep.

When she was eighteen she travelled all over England for the next three years preaching the type of doctrines on which he based his Mission. It was while she was preaching in Chatham that she met George Brown, a steward in the Royal Navy. They were married in the Registry Office of the District of Stoke Damerel in the County of Devon on the 7th of October 1877 after a very disjointed courtship which lasted nearly two years. It was necessarily disjointed because he was away for long stretches of time at sea. She told me many years later that in all the six years they were married she never called him anything but "Mr. Brown" even in the privacy of their bedroom! My modern mind boggled at the thought and conjured up all sorts of vivid imaginings but I didn't dare shout any of my questions down the speaking tube. No matter how they achieved it, they succeeded in producing two children, no doubt in the normally accepted manner.

Emma continued to work for the Blue Ribbon Gossellers after her marriage and the following year William Booth renamed the organisation the Salvation Army. Her first daughter Caroline was already nine months old when she was introduced to her father on one of his rare home leaves and by the time the ship sailed Emma was again pregnant. This time it was two years before he was home again and met his second daughter Rosaline. He broke the news to Emma that his ship was scheduled to sail to Australia to join the fledgling Australian Navy and it was decided that Emma should travel out with the two girls and join him in Sydney where they could make a new life for themselves and the children. Emma was excited at the prospect. Her parents were dead and she had no close ties to keep her in England. She thought how good the warm climate would be for the two girls and it didn't take her long to finalise arrangements in England and pack her belongings for the long journey.

She sailed from Plymouth in January 1883 on an Orient Line sailing ship. The trip took almost six months and many a time she told me about the incredible difficulties of the voyage. There was no such thing as refrigeration in those days and passengers were required to provide their own food and water for the trip. One entire deck of the ship was set aside for the housing of the animals needed for the journey.

Emma took with her a dozen laying hens, a goat for milking and three sheep. Two large water casks filled to the brim with fresh water were replenished at several ports during the voyage and it was only at these ports that fresh fruit and vegetables were able to be bought, Barrels of flour, sugar and tea were also stored on board. The animals belonging to passengers were slaughtered in rotation and the meat cooked and shared between all. Towards the end of the voyage the hens were gradually killed one by one to provide fresh meat but Emma refused to allow the goat to be killed. Instead she sold her to a young man on board who was travelling to Australia to settle on the land.



*Orient Line ships in harbour*

The ship arrived in Sydney on July 4th 1883 just a few days before Caroline's fifth birthday. Rosaline was only three but could still remember highlights of the trip 70 years later when I questioned her about her arrival in Australia. There was a letter from the Admiralty waiting for Emma at the Shipping Office in Sydney advising her that her husband had died from a middle ear infection resulting from an attack of measles which he had contracted while his ship was in San Francisco several months earlier. So Emma found herself in a strange country with two young children and with no husband to support her.

It was typical of her not to wallow in self-pity. She immediately approached the Australian headquarters of the Salvation Army and offered her services as a lecturer to help spread the doctrines of the Army in New South Wales and Victoria. Her work in England was widely known and her offer was accepted eagerly. She was based in Sydney for a few years and was untiring in her work for the Salvation Army. It was after she had been here three years that she was sent to Melbourne where she met Thomas Ferguson.

At first he was just another face among the many she saw when she was preaching but she gradually came to notice that he was present at every meeting and always occupied the same seat in the front row. It wasn't until a week later that he waited for her after the meeting, introduced himself and offered to take her for supper at a nearby cafe.

She had heard of the work he was doing in the Melbourne Total Abstinence Society and was full of admiration for this serious "sobersides" but it wasn't

until he followed her back to Sydney and proposed marriage to her that she realised he had anything more than a passing interest in her.

His proposal of marriage was perfectly timed. Emma was tired of travelling and the thought of settling in one place where the two girls could attend school regularly was tempting. He was obviously a good man and she felt certain he would be a kindly father to the girls. Even though he was a good deal older than she and seemed a very serious sort of a man she had great respect for him and was sure she could learn to love him in time.

I have told the story of the dismal failure of the marriage in the preceding chapter, but it is well to hear Emma's side of the story.

It didn't take long for her to realise that the marriage was a mistake. Their natures were completely incompatible and the arrival of two children did not help matters but rather put a further strain on the relationship. Thomas was so set in his bachelor ways that he found the noise of the children unbearable and his way of coping with the problem was to throw himself into his work and spend less and less time at home with his family, when he was home he was such a stern disciplinarian that the children lived in awe, not a little tinged with fear, of this tall bearded father and stepfather. He believed in the maxim "Spare the rod and spoil the child" and he ruled the children with a firm but loving hand. Unfortunately they could not see the love behind the firmness. It was an unhappy home almost devoid of fun and laughter and Emma's spirit was crushed beneath the weight. It was only after ten years that she finally decided on the drastic step of leaving him and trying to rear the children on her own.

It was a sad time for them both.

Thomas loved his wife and children dearly but found it impossible to express this love and he never fully recovered from the shock of the marriage breakup. He was aware that one of the main reasons for the separation was his inability to bend even slightly from his rigid and inflexible code of behaviour but he found it impossible to change a lifetime's habits at this late stage.

All the evidence in the old family records points quite clearly to the fact that Emma retained a keen interest in her husband and his work for many years following the separation. There are a number of faded newspaper clippings telling of his efforts to have hotel trading hours shortened and other reforms to the Liquor Licensing Laws put before Parliament.

She was intelligent enough to realise that her aggressive demands for independence were largely responsible for their inability to live in harmony and she spent a lifetime striving to master this flaw in her nature.

Whatever the complex reasons for the separation she was never able to sink her pride and return to Thomas.

## **Chapter 6**

### ***My Father - Alan Ferguson***

My father Alan (actually Thomas Alan) was a boy of nine when his parents separated.

As soon as Nana (my childhood name for his mother) reached Sydney she purchased land on the outskirts of the city at Canley Vale with the object of establishing a poultry farm. The fact that she didn't know one end of a chook from the other didn't worry her in the least. With typical spirit she set about the business of learning the ropes by reading all the literature on the subject she could lay her hands on and, largely by trial and error, she managed to make enough money out of the farm to support the family. There was even enough at first for her to feel justified in enrolling Dad as a boarder at the expensive Camden Grammar School. He had a keen intellect, no doubt inherited largely from his mother, and even at this early age he had already read the complete works of Dickens in addition to the entire Bible. He remained a voracious reader all his life and seemed to have the wonderful gift of being able to absorb and remember all he read. My earliest memories of him conjure up a picture of a tall greying man with pince-nez glasses clipped on the bridge of his nose seated with his feet up on our threadbare lounge with a cigar in one hand and an open Encyclopaedia on his knees. This ritual was repeated nightly until he had read through the complete set of Encyclopaedias on our bookshelves.



*Alan Ferguson*

I used to reckon he'd have scooped the pool if he had entered the old radio quiz shows conducted for many years on Sydney radio. His fund of knowledge was astounding. He was a crossword puzzle fanatic and it is not surprising that this talent has been passed on to our daughter Cathy who has a flair for words which is quite remarkable. His proud boast was that he averaged only 10 minutes to complete the daily newspaper crossword puzzle. The cryptic puzzles used to slow him down to an average of 30 minutes! It was not uncommon for him to fire a cryptic clue at us at any odd hour of the day or night and, when we rewarded him with blank stares which mirrored our equally blank minds, he would triumphantly throw the solution at us in the same explosive manner.

It was a tremendous pity that his formal schooling came to an abrupt end when he was twelve because of lack of finances. Nana had worked long and tiring hours managing the farm but it was an uphill battle and she finally had to admit that there just wasn't enough money to spare for further schooling for him. His sister Carrie had married and much of the tedious menial work of the farm evolved on to Rosie and his younger sister Vera. There was certainly nothing left over from the carefully managed budget to spend on the luxury of an academic education for the only boy in the family.

His first job was as a delivery boy for a Jewish bootmaker in the inner city. He worked twelve hours daily for six days a week for the princely sum of 5/- (50c) which was increased to 7/6 (75c) when he turned thirteen. Old Mr. Goldberg took him aside one day and put his arms around his shoulders.

"Alan, you're too bright a boy to be doing this sort of work. I have a good friend who owns a wholesale grocery business in Clarence Street. He is prepared to take you on and train you. If you want to give yourself a chance for a really good job I'll not stand in your way. I've already told him what a good lad you are."

Dad accepted his offer and for the next six years or so he worked his way up learning every facet of the wholesale grocery trade until he became private secretary to the manager.

During his annual holidays it became habitual for the family to rent a cottage at Dee Why Beach to escape the unbearable heat of the summer at Canley Vale.

Dee Why is about fourteen miles north of Sydney on the beautiful Palm Beach peninsular and, as far as Dad was concerned, these holidays were the highlights of an otherwise rather dull life.

The journey from Canley Vale took the better part of a day and was an adventure in itself. Firstly the old carthorse had to be harnessed between the shafts of the dray which was piled high with the family's luggage. Then followed the familiar train trip to the city after Brownie had uncomplainingly pulled the load the two miles to the station. There always seemed to be last minute instructions for the neighbour who agreed to handle the farm's chores in their absence. These were invariably shouted above the noise of the hissing steam as the train pulled out of the station. The bone rattling tram ride from Central Station to Circular Quay was followed by the peaceful yet exciting trip to Manly by paddle-wheel steamer. Dad never tired of this trip even though in later years it became a daily ritual which was to continue for well over forty years. During this time the old paddle-wheelers gave way to steam but somehow the romance of the ferry trip never left him for the remainder of his life.

At Manly they boarded a horse-drawn tram which took them as far as what is now called the Queenscliff Lagoon. The excitement of the holiday mounted with the first sighting of the surf as the tram reached the end of the Corso and the horses set off at a brisk pace following the beach for its full length to Queenscliff before they cut across country to Pittwater Road and the terminus at the lagoon. In later years this horse-drawn tram was replaced by one using steam which terminated at the same spot. The last lap of the journey was by hired horse and sulky until at last the rolling sands and surf of Dee Why came in sight.

Dee Why today is a bustling thriving metropolis which boasts about eight sets of traffic lights and a bumper to bumper stream of traffic edging noisily through its shop-lined streets. High rise blocks of home units stand shoulder to shoulder on almost every available inch of land in the district but in the early 1900s it was still a sleepy little seaside village. There was a cluster of tiny weatherboard and fibro cottages grouped around the half dozen or so equally tiny stores on Pittwater Road and a few more cottages were scattered through the bush closer to the beach. The beach itself stretched in rolling litter-free sandhills for half a mile or more from the ocean's edge and cradled a clear unpolluted lagoon which was the home of literally thousands of black swans. I can still remember as a child what a thrilling sight these made returning at dusk to the lagoon. They arrived in groups of twenty or so birds, each group flying in strict "V" formation like well-trained pilots

demonstrating their flying skills at a modern air show. Unhappily man has all but driven these beautiful creatures away until now all that remains of them, apart from an odd survivor, is their picture on Dee Why's official emblem.

It was during this period of his life that Dad decided to attend night school to study shorthand and typewriting. He mastered shorthand quickly and it was one of his greatest delights when Parliament was in session in Macquarie Street to race right across the city in his lunch hour or in the evenings to join the Hansard reporters just for the fun of trying to take down the speeches as practice.

This love of shorthand he passed on to me and in my teens I became almost addicted to the art. It has been a wonderful standby all through my life during boring speeches or sermons to be able to drift off into a sort of trance and transpose the words mentally into shorthand. I guess it's this natural aptitude that is the reason all three of our daughters found it an absorbing study and one at which they all excel. But that's jumping ahead a bit - I wasn't even a subconscious squiggle in my father's shorthand notebook at this stage of his life.

When he felt he was proficient at shorthand and typing he was successful in obtaining a clerical position with a legal firm in Hunter Street. It wasn't long before one of the partners recognised his potential and offered him the chance to study Law. Dad jumped at the opportunity. Before he could become an Articled Clerk, however, he had to bring his schooling up to Matriculation level and then begin the long haul of working a ten hour day and continuing with his law studies at night. A lesser man would have been discouraged before he started but it was a challenge which Dad seemed to relish and he persevered for many years until he achieved his goal and was admitted to the Bar in about 1917. The cataclysmic events of the Great War seem to have passed him by almost unnoticed during the last few years of his studies.

When the War broke out he was the only source of income for his mother and two remaining single sisters, the poultry farm having failed a few years earlier. He regarded it as his principal duty to support them financially rather than join the Army to fight in a war which he felt, rightly or wrongly, had very little to do with Australia anyway. But I think it would be closer to the truth to say that they provided him with a convenient moral excuse to steer clear of the distasteful and unpleasant business of killing or possibly being maimed or killed. Anyone less militaristic than Dad would be difficult

to find and, although his attitude was to cause much violent criticism by his contemporaries and he was to receive quite a few white feathers from well meaning ladies during the War years, he was quietly firm in his beliefs and slowly but surely worked towards his goal while the world collapsed around him.

Shortly after Vera married in 1916 Nana decided to dispose of what was left of the poultry farm and settle in Dee Why permanently. She had grown to love the area on their holidays there many years earlier and now she purchased one of the cottages on the main road, a grand name given to what was then little more than an unsealed country road, and moved in with my father and Aunty Rosie. The cottage was named "Rosemary", a combination of Aunty's two names, Rosaline and Mary. It was in this cottage that Nana died thirty years later but the house outlived her for almost a quarter of a century.



*Dee Why in the 1930's*

For many years before being bulldozed out of existence "Rosemary" had stood on its narrow plot of land and had watched the buildings creeping closer. The cottage right next door had been loaded on to a truck one morning and trundled off to another site but still "Rosemary" clung on and stood its ground until finally there was a blank brick wall standing right on its boundaries on either side and the sun found it difficult to warm its ageing timbers for more than a few hours daily. The stately gum tree in its front yard interfered with electric light wires and so fell victim to man's progress.

It wasn't until Aunty Rosie died in 1970 that the march of progress, which had been temporarily halted by her determination to "stay put until they carry me out in a box feet first", was allowed to continue. It seemed to be

with almost indecent haste following her death that the little cottage was demolished and today a large furniture store and three banks side by side stand on the land where I often used to play as a child.

Because of his lifelong disinterest in organised sport of any kind it seems almost paradoxical that Dad should have joined the Dee Why Surf Life Saving Club during the time he lived in the district and that he was given the honour of life membership of the club in later years. This was awarded him as an acknowledgement of the many years he gave freely of his services in a legal capacity to help the Club. He was apparently a strong swimmer in his younger years but, by the time I arrived on the scene this interest had almost disappeared and I can barely remember him donning a swimming costume except to paddle at the water's edge to keep an eye on my brother and me when we were learning to swim.

He was a keen bushwalker when Don and I were young and was a member of the Manly Bushwalker's Club, a club which must long since have ceased to exist as it would be difficult now to find enough bush left in and around Manly in which to walk. He combined this hobby with a keen interest in the Scouting movement and for several years was District Rover Master, a job which brought him into contact with many teenage youths who seemed to flock to our house in large numbers when I was a child. This interest took up a lot of his leisure time in those years but always seemed to me to be incongruous in one with his literary leanings. No matter how unlikely a candidate for the role of Rover Master he appeared to be there was no doubting his sincerity in his dealings with the young men in the troop - in fact, sincerity is a word which comes easily to mind when recalling Dad. He was a dedicated and sincere Freemason who tried to live up to the ideals of Freemasonry and refused to render lip service only to the code of behaviour taught in the lodges. He was a member of three different Lodges at the time of his death, one being the Lodge Rose Croix which has a very small select membership of men who have reached the 33rd Degree. At his funeral a large number of his Masonic friends in full regalia paid their respects to a loyal and sincere brother Mason.

It was a few years prior to his move to Dee Why that Dad first met my mother. It is an interesting story in itself.

At the time he was studying Law and was concerned about his lack of a strong well-modulated speaking voice which would have been an asset in future court work. He spoke fluently and well but in a rather high pitched

voice, one which certainly lacked any strong dramatic quality. In an effort to overcome this he commenced taking elocution and voice production lessons from my mother who was regarded as one of Sydney's leading teachers in this field. They were immediately attracted to each other and, as the months passed, this attraction gradually deepened to love, but there seemed to be no possible future in their romance because my father still had many years of study ahead of him and both he and my mother had family obligations which seemed to stretch endlessly into the future and which neither felt free to shirk. So at the end of his course of lessons they decided reluctantly to go their own separate ways.

They were not to meet again until five years later on the day that Dad's final examination results were published. He was so elated at his success he felt he must share his excitement with someone who would understand what a long hard battle he'd fought to succeed and, on an impulse, he hurried across the city to the Palings Building and up the old wooden staircase which led to Mum's studio. He admitted to me years later that he was as nervous as a schoolboy as he knocked on her door.

Mum was teaching a class and she admitted to me years later that when she opened the door and saw him standing there and sensed his suppressed excitement she guessed the reason for his visit and it was all she could do not to throw herself into his arms and reward him with a kiss. How long the next half hour must have seemed until the lesson was over and they had the studio to themselves. Then how quickly the time flew while they brought each other up-to-date on all that had happened during the time of their voluntary separation. It was plain from the instant they saw each other again that they were still very much in love and now Dad felt he could offer her a worthwhile proposal of marriage which she felt free to accept as the death of her father two years earlier had released her to a large degree from her obligations to her family.

There was only one obstacle blocking the way to their marriage plans. Dad was already engaged to another woman! Who she was or just how he came to land himself in this predicament I never discovered but I do know that, when he broke off the engagement, she sued him for breach of promise and not even his newly won legal status saved him from losing the case. Damages to the tune of £300 (\$600) were awarded in her favour and as this represented every penny of Dad's savings it meant that marriage plans had to be postponed for a further two years.

It is almost unbelievable to picture Dad in a situation such as this. If a poll had been conducted in Sydney at that time to discover the single man least likely to find himself the central figure in a legal case because of his involvement with two women simultaneously Dad would have undoubtedly emerged as the undisputed winner. He was not an aggressively masculine type of man nor one who could be described as the proverbial "ladies man". In fact, he always appeared to me to be almost neutral sexually but of course I was seeing him through a daughter's eyes at a much older age than he was when this drama took place so I'm not a competent judge in this matter.

One other little snippet of information about this mystery woman which I was able to glean over the years was the fact that she had three very big brothers and my mother was terrified during their wedding service that the brothers would create a scene during the silence following the minister's plea for "anyone knowing any just cause why these two should not be joined in marriage let him now speak or hereafter forever hold his peace." However, nothing broke the silence except Mum's audible sigh of relief after the brief pause had passed undisturbed.



*Alan and Stella's wedding day*

After their marriage and honeymoon, which I shall treat in greater detail in the following chapter, they moved into a little cottage in Pacific Parade, Dee Why. Although electric trams had by then replaced the old horse-drawn and steam trams of Dad's childhood memories, the trip to the city was still quite

a lengthy one and one which was not without hazards, particularly following heavy rain when the swampy land surrounding the Queenscliff Lagoon became an impassable lake and the tram was forced to turn back. It was not until years later when this whole area was properly drained and filled in with household rubbish and soil and grassed over that the tremendously popular playing fields of today's Keirle Park and the District Park became a reality. The era of the paddle-wheel ferries had passed and the first steel double-ended screw vessels were in service for the 35 minute trip from Manly. These ferries are interwoven in a continuous thread of memories throughout my childhood and I'll talk about them in more detail later, but sadly today they are fast becoming obsolete and a fleet of speedy hydrofoils is quickly edging these old faithfuls out of service.

Because the lengthy trip meant a very early start in the morning and a late return home in the evening Mum was on her own for long periods and it must have been a lonely life for her, isolated from her family until their first baby Douglas was born sixteen months later.

I've often tried to picture her in those early days of marriage. She had been reared in a wealthy home with an abundance of servants and it was not until the last twelve years or so that she had been forced to earn her own living. Moreover, all her life had been spent in closely settled districts such as Newtown and Marrickville. Her social life had been a full one because of her teaching programme and many nights would have been spent at concerts or the theatre. Now she suddenly found herself in a tiny fibro cottage with primitive amenities hidden away in the bush in a sparsely settled outer suburb of Sydney. She had to cope with a fuel stove and copper, a chip bath heater and kerosene lamps for lighting. She was 36 years of age and must have found it extremely difficult to adjust to her changed circumstances but she was never heard to complain.

Although her home was only about a mile from "Rosemary" she was not able to draw much comfort from the companionship of her mother-in-law or sister-in-law who seemed to have erected an unseen barrier designed to keep her at a respectable distance, perhaps they felt Alan had married out of his social class or they may have resented her pampered childhood and felt she would not be a suitable wife for him, especially as she was almost four years his senior. It is my guess that they would have reacted in the same way to any woman who married their beloved son and brother. Whatever the reasons she was never able to feel complete acceptance by them even though her marriage was idyllically happy for forty years.

It was following the birth of Douglas that they decided to move closer to the city and bought a lovely little cottage on the foreshores of North Harbour about a mile from the Manly Wharf. There was a glorious uninterrupted view from the front verandah straight out through the Heads. It was in this cottage that I was to be born a few years later and where I lived until my marriage.

## **Chapter 7**

### ***My Mother - Stella Ferguson***

It is difficult to write of my mother because so many lovely and yet poignant memories come flooding back. How could I describe her in one sentence better than the one which was repeated over and over again to me after her death by literally dozens of her close friends and casual acquaintances: "Your mother was a perfect lady."

This implied no snobbery or "plum-in-the-mouth" affectation on her part but a recognition of her truly ladylike qualities. She was a warm sincere person who treated everyone with whom she came into contact, be it the cleaning woman or a wealthy and influential client of Dads, with the same friendly graciousness. And yet she was a strict disciplinarian and my brother Don and I knew we had to obey the rules she set down or face up to her displeasure.

She was a far stronger character than my father and there was no doubt that she was the dominant partner in their marriage but her dominance was achieved so quietly and with such consummate skill that I doubt if Dad ever realised that he was not the ruler in his own household. Don and I knew it instinctively though and it wasn't Mum we approached if we wanted to go somewhere or do something of which we felt our parents might not approve. It was easy to wheedle anything out of Dad but we had to be pretty sure of ourselves before fronting up to Mum.



*Stella Ferguson*

In all the forty years of my life before she died I don't think I ever heard her raise her voice or lose her temper but we were certainly left in no doubts about her anger if we overstepped the mark and committed some misdemeanour of which she disapproved. She was always in complete control of herself and I never heard a swear word pass her lips. I think I was the despair of her life because of my frequent use of colourful slang and my tomboyish behaviour as a child. I can still hear her saying, "Dorothy, a lady doesn't use slang!"

She could be obstinate and stubborn, possessive of my brother and me and quietly but effectively manipulative of my father, but she was so wonderfully generous with her love and unfailing help that these faults could be completely overlooked. To me she was a perfect mother and I loved her dearly. I think she was the most thoughtful and unselfish person I have ever met - Dad used to say she carried these traits too far. We always seemed to have "strays", either human or animals, under our roof. I never knew her to refuse help to anyone and our home was a haven to an assortment of misfits over the years.

I've already told you of her birth so won't repeat myself.

When she was four years of age she developed a serious disease of her eyes which resulted in her being totally blind for four months and left her with

poor eyesight for the remainder of her life. Her mother writes about it on a number of occasions in her diary but doesn't say exactly what caused the trouble. Apparently it was something beyond the scope of her father's medical skill because she was under the care of a specialist during the period of her blindness. Now and again during my mother's childhood Grandma makes references to her in her diary and from these little glimpses a picture emerges of a very serious, conscientious, thoughtful child with a promise even then of her dramatic talent which played a big role in later years.

She was born in Newtown in the days when that suburb was largely composed of well-to-do homes just two years after her parents arrived from America and her childhood was spent in the lap of luxury. The house boasted a cook, a nursemaid named Bridget who had come out from America with her mother and father, a housemaid, a coachman and "Buttons" a young lad in a buttoned uniform whose job it was to assist patients to alight from their coaches and usher them into the waiting room and then repeat the process in reverse on their departure from the surgery. He also rode standing on a small platform at the rear of the coach when Grandfather made his house visits and he was there for the sole purpose of opening the coach door and placing the footrest in position at each stop.

It was a frequent, almost weekly, occurrence for Grandma to shop in the city with the three girls and Mum vividly recalled the leisurely trip from Newtown to the shops in the heart of the city. There were no parking problems in those days and the horses were tied to one of the many hitching posts outside the stores and watered at one of the frequent horse troughs provided. Buttons and Magnus, the coachman, patiently waited no matter how long the shopping expedition went on. What patience must have been needed to be a servant then!

Mum's formal schooling didn't start until she was seven. I guess the delay was caused because of the trouble with her eyes but Grandma records the event in January 1891. She writes: "Stella has begun going to school and seems to like it. I don't think she will be able to keep at it regularly - she is such a thoughtful little thing and puts her whole strength and heart into anything."

Her schooling was interrupted twice by lengthy trips to the United States. The first was when she was nine and the entire family went to visit the Worlds Fair in Chicago. It was the first time she had met her grandfather and grandmother Atwater but apparently she made a good impression on them although the old Colonel scared her half to death! He had the same

effect on her as he'd had on her father many years earlier and rendered her speechless on their first meeting. Perhaps this was the reason she impressed him because this was the era when it was believed that "children should be seen and not heard."

When she was just twelve her mother went back to America for the birth of her last child and she took my mother and Vera with her. They were joined a month after baby Kent's birth by her father and older sister Ada. It must have been planned for her parents to settle permanently in the states because they rented a ten room home in Oliver St. Los Angeles in May 1896. It had gas fittings in every room and hot and cold water and the rental was \$35 per month. Grandma says in her diary: "I hope we have hit on the right place and I hope Doctor will succeed - have no fear if he can only become known."

However, it must have proved unsuccessful despite their hopes and the death of Kent finally triggered off their decision to return to Australia in 1898 when Mum was fourteen. She returned with a pronounced American accent having attended school in the States for almost two years. She never quite lost a trace of that accent and this was part of her charm when she recited in later years.

When she was nineteen she became engaged to a minister of the Church of Christ where the family attended regularly. He was twelve years her senior and was a very devout and respected man. It was only three weeks before the wedding was to take place that Mum became unnerved at the prospect of marriage with such a solemn older man and decided to break the engagement. Her decision must have caused a big upset in the family. The wedding invitations had been distributed, wedding gifts had begun to arrive at the house and her fiance was absent on a preaching mission in New Zealand when she realised her mistake. On his return she met the ship at the Quay and suggested they walk through the Botanical Gardens where she broke the news to him that she wanted to break the engagement. Although he married a few years later I think he always had a soft spot for my mother. I met him when I was a small child and was intrigued that Mum should ever have considered him as a possible husband. I remember remarking to her that I was glad she hadn't married him because by then I would be about thirty years old, to which she laughingly remarked that I wouldn't even be here at all and even if she had married him and had had a daughter it still would not have been me. But this study in genetics was beyond my childish comprehension and I was only grateful that she had chosen my father instead and that I had turned out to be me.

It was shortly after her 21st birthday that Mum made her third and last trip to America. This was the trip designed to take Vera away from the influence of her brother-in-law but, as you know, it was not successful although they stayed away for 16 months. It was during this trip that the San Francisco earthquake took place and made such an indelible impression on my mother.

She began teaching elocution whilst in the States and a large number of her sketches and poems date from this period. I often wish I could have seen and heard her perform at this time. When she returned to Australia she started teaching seriously and for many years she gave annual recitals by her pupils in the St. James Hall, Sydney which in later years became the Law School and even later was transformed into the Phillip Street Theatre. Her talent was tremendous and when I was a child I can remember vividly the spell she was able to cast on her audiences with no costuming or stage props but with just the skill of her interpretations of the numerous sketches she presented.



*Stella with two of her pupils*

There are many newspaper cuttings in the family archives and nearly all the critics mention her charm of manner and the "soft timbre of her voice with its hint of an American accent." The only adverse comment in her press cuttings was a mention that her voice was so soft and velvety that it lacked

conviction in some of the more dramatic pieces she rendered. In later years I was able to join her on stage for several concerts when I was about nine or ten and even then when she must have been about fifty she was able to reduce her audience to laughter or tears in a matter of a few minutes. I often read through some of the old pieces in her fading handwriting and, although now they are hopelessly old fashioned in their phraseology I can still remember the effect they had on the audience when she walked to the centre of the stage and spoke these same words.

It was when she was twenty-four and living at Marrickville that the most incredible event occurred. At this time her father had just suffered a second stroke and was in need of constant nursing care. It became habitual for Grandma and Vera to attend the morning church service each Sunday at the local Church of Christ and my mother used to attend in the evening. In this way there was always one of the family within reach if Grandfather required anything.

The minister of the church was a handsome dark haired young man who was an eloquent gifted speaker. It wasn't long before he was attracted to Mum and she to him. Following a courtship carried out mostly as he walked her home after the evening service he proposed marriage to her and presented her with an engagement ring. Mum related to me many years later how incredibly attractive he was and how close she came to losing her virginity on one occasion when she visited him at his home when he was ill with a severe cold. He was not too ill, however, to literally sweep her off her feet and into the bed alongside him and smother her with passionate kisses while he unbuttoned her bodice and his hands caressed her virginal breasts. It took all her strength of will to resist his pleadings!

He recovered both his health and his composure, however, and life flowed on smoothly. It wasn't until Mum was travelling home from the city by tram several months later that she started chatting to a young woman who looked vaguely familiar and it was discovered she lived only a short distance away and was in the habit of attending the same church in the mornings so they never actually met at the service. They noticed each was wearing an engagement ring and to their horror they discovered they were both engaged to the same man! I've often wondered how he intended to extricate himself from this situation - perhaps he was hoping to be transferred to a different church and gradually let both romances die a natural death. We will never know what his intentions were because as soon as the news became known he was very quickly transferred to an unknown destination after being

severely chastised by the church authorities. Gradually life settled down again and Mum recovered from the shock and buried herself in her work.

It was four years later that she first met my father and a further seven years after that before the way was finally clear for them to marry.

They went to Jenolan Caves for their honeymoon and it must have been right from the wedding night that Mum had to assume the leading role. She told me years later that despite Dad's tremendous fund of knowledge and his mature age he was in the kindergarten class as far as any understanding of even the basic fundamentals of the sex act was concerned. Fortunately, although she was a virgin herself, she was not ignorant of the theory of love making if not the practice, thanks to having been reared in a medical atmosphere, and she was able to guide Dad through his initial bungling, fumbling, inept attempts without the whole thing becoming a complete fiasco. She was a wonderfully understanding woman and I'm sure her skill in handling this aspect of their marriage was largely responsible for the success of their union. Hers was a warmly emotional temperament but she quickly recognised the fact that sex was not a matter of great importance to Dad who regarded it purely as a necessary function to be indulged in for the procreation of children. Mum was sensible enough to know she would never be able to change him in this regard and she loved him so deeply that she was able to sublimate her sex urges and direct them into the care of her husband and children, and their marriage was supremely happy for forty years.

They were able to help each other through the tremendous ordeal of their first son's death with gastro-enteritis at the age of thirteen months even though the blow was a bitter one especially at their age when the child-bearing years were rapidly shrinking. Fortunately, Mum was already pregnant when Douglas died and was overjoyed when she gave birth five months later to a second son whom they named Donald Alan.

Following my birth two years after that Dad heaved a sigh of relief because all that bothersome sex business could now be set aside and he could go back happily to his books and his study content in the knowledge that he had fathered a son to carry on his name and a daughter to keep his wife happy.

## **Chapter 8**

### ***The Eternal Triangle***

The basic theme of this chapter is as old as man himself. The stage props and costumes change according to the age in which the play is produced and the principal roles are played by a variety of actors and actresses but the theme remains unaltered and will no doubt continue to be enacted on the stage of life until the world ceases to exist.

Because the three principal roles in this particular version of the ancient story were very real and dear to me I intend to tell their story without apology but with a true understanding of their very human failings in the hope that they will be remembered with love and not condemnation.

I've already given you a thumbnail sketch of my Aunty Vera. Now, how best to give you a picture of Aunty Ada? Dear, lovable Aunty Ada. What a picture of a confused bewildered woman comes to mind when I think of her. Where Vera was poised and unruffled Ada was a veritable fuss pot. Where Vera managed to look elegant no matter how simply she was dressed Ada contrived to look dowdy even in the most expensive gown. Where Vera was beautiful in face and figure Ada was a little too short and plump to be considered beautiful.

There were two things, however, that they shared in common.

The first was their love for each other and the second was the fact that they both loved the same man.

Probably today a trio faced with this dilemma would meet the problem head on with a painful but final divorce and a remarriage in a distant state or even a different country. I doubt whether the solution which these three finally reached would be acceptable to many women in our society today.

When Ada married Will in 1902 she was twenty-five and he was a few years older. Photographs of the wedding party show my mother and Vera as bridesmaids and already Vera shows promise of emerging beauty even though she was only fifteen at the time.



*Ada and Will Hunter*

It was just three years later that my mother discovered some passionately worded love letters from Will hidden underneath Vera's mattress. When she confronted her with them Vera confessed they were deeply in love with each other and it was then that, after a hurried family conference, James and Stella decided to remove her from temptation by taking a prolonged trip to the States.

The problem would have been a lot simpler if the two sisters had not been so fond of each other but, although there was a difference of ten years in their ages, they were bound by very strong ties of sisterly love. Ada must have been placed in an unenviable position, she already had a baby son and was to all outward appearances a happily married woman. Her home was large and expensively furnished and her future seemed secure. Then suddenly the whole structure came tumbling down around her.

To discover she has been supplanted in her husband's affections by another woman is a shattering enough experience for any woman to cope with even if the other woman is a stranger and totally unknown to her. But to make the discovery that the other woman was her own sister who was as dear to her as life itself was for Ada a million times harder to face.

Divorce was not even mentioned as a possible answer to the problem. Such a course was unthinkable in the type of families to which they both belonged. There were strong religious overtones to the concept of marriage and the vows Ada and Will had made before God to take each other "for

better or for worse" meant just that. Besides, there was the baby to consider and both felt he should not be deprived of a secure home life. Despite the fact that he was unable to keep from loving Vera, Will was also extremely fond of Ada and his son and didn't have any wish to hurt them.

For many years the situation remained almost static while all three buried their heads in the sand and tried to pretend the problem was non-existent. Ada gave birth to a second son and a few years later to a daughter, Dorothy, while Vera commenced working in the city on her return from America and tried to avoid any close contact with Will. There was a sort of unspoken agreement between the sisters that the subject was taboo. But, despite all their precautions, it was obvious that the feeling between Will and Vera was far deeper than a casual attraction and there came a time when the matter had to be brought out into the open and thrashed out. It must have been an embarrassingly painful discussion for all three.

Finally agreement was reached that the marriage would continue to function in all respects as normally as possible but Ada agreed, although it must have been the most painful decision she had ever made in her life, that Will and Vera were to be free to express their love for each other in as discreet a manner as possible without recriminations from her.



*Stella, Vera, Ada. 1916*

This agreement was adhered to scrupulously for more than thirty years until Ada's death in 1944. The trio were inseparable all those years. If a theatre outing or a holiday was suggested the three always went together. On Sundays it became habitual for Ada and Will to alight from the tram at Vera's flat about a mile from the church they attended with unflinching regularity and the three walked arm in arm for the

remaining distance and sat side by side in the same pew for many years before returning to Vera's flat for midday dinner and a quiet Sunday afternoon spent in each other's company.

Will was generous in providing for his family and was careful to treat both women on an equal basis with birthday or Christmas gifts. When he returned from an overseas trip in the thirties he presented each with identical silver fox furs and he was never neglectful of Ada in ensuring that she lacked nothing in material necessities.

Where the whole agreement fell short was in the unspoken but nerve-racking strain it placed on Ada in particular, who was emotionally starved all those years. She finally cracked under the strain and suffered a nervous breakdown which left her a vague, muddled and broken woman. She died not very long afterwards at the age of 67 and even today her memory evokes in me a feeling of pity that such a lovely woman should have been the victim of so much undeserved heartache during her lifetime.

It was only six months after her death that Will and Vera married.

The agreement had forced Vera into a lifetime of barren childlessness lived on the fringes of her sister's marriage. She had never been able to declare her love openly and had had to satisfy her very strong maternal yearnings by lavishing affection on her nieces and nephews. She would have made a wonderful wife and mother and yet she had to be content all her life to stay hidden in the background with only occasional chances to be alone with the man she loved.

Of the three people concerned probably Will was the least affected emotionally by the agreement yet the frustration he suffered must have been difficult for him and his role would not have been an easy one.

Shortly before Ada's death it was discovered he was suffering from Parkinson's disease and the nervous twitchings of his hands gradually worsened until his entire body was affected by the palsy and he finally became completely helpless. Knowing the difficulties this progressive disease would be certain to pose in the future did not deter Vera from her determination to marry him and she nursed him devotedly for 13 years before he died on Boxing Day 1957 on a blazing day when Sydney was encircled with bushfires and the heat was appalling. Just two months before his death she had suffered a stroke herself and they were both hospitalised.

I was with her when the nurse broke the news to her that Will had just died in an adjoining room and I shall never forget her look of utter sorrow. From that moment on her will to live came to an abrupt end, I think she felt there was no point in her recovering if he no longer needed her and she outlived him for less than four months.

A second stroke wrote "finis" to her life in the following April and rang down the curtain on the final act of the play.

I like to think the three are reunited in death in a union which is sublimely happy because it is uncomplicated by the restrictions of human limitations.

## **Chapter 9**

### ***Cousin Dorothy***

My cousin Dorothy was the only daughter of Uncle Will and Aunty Ada. I have always felt she was a much maligned and misunderstood woman.

Perhaps it was because I bore the same name that I felt a special affinity with her as a child although she was about fourteen years my senior and so was quite grown up before I really became aware of her.

She was always regarded as the black sheep of the family but to my childish mind she appeared to be the most warmly human of all the members of that particular branch of the family.

Looking back, I think her worst "crime" was that of being born 40 years too soon. Today her conduct would not even raise an eyebrow or cause a scandalised "Tut, tut!" but her exploits then provided the subject matter for many a whispered conversation which always seemed to be cut short just as the interesting part approached if I happened to come within earshot lest my innocence should suffer by hearing of such sinful things.

She could not have failed to be aware of the undercurrents in the household caused by the unusual relationship shared by her parents and her aunt and this must have made a big impact on her in her most impressionable years. I am convinced that a lot of her outrageous conduct during her adolescent years was the result of rebellion to what she regarded as adult double standards of behaviour and was her way of coping with a situation which she couldn't fully comprehend but of which she instinctively disapproved. It was a sort of "If you can't lick 'em, join 'em" attitude only instead of just "joining 'em" she tried to outdo them and the result was a turbulent teenage period.

She settled down, however, and her parents were greatly relieved when she married at the age of 22 a tall, handsome, well-built Army officer who shall remain nameless. For several years there was a breathing space, a son and daughter were born in due course, and it seemed as if the troubled years were forgotten. But it was not to be.

During the early forties the family peace was suddenly disturbed by a lurid divorce case in which Dorothy played the starring role. The case featured in

the headlines of a sensationalist Sunday paper and must have caused acute embarrassment to her family at church that particular Sunday.

When the dust finally settled Dorothy lost custody of both children to her husband but her pleading resulted in him allowing her to keep her daughter. The loss of her son, however, had a sobering effect on her and she never got over the fact that she became a virtual stranger to him. His father remarried and moved to the country and she only heard occasional reports of her son's welfare. She was shocked to read an account a few years later of her ex-husband's death in a shooting accident on his country property. The part of the newspaper report which disturbed her most was the fact that her son, who was about twelve at the time, had been the one to discover his father's body. She worried endlessly about the traumatic effect this would surely have on the boy but, as far as I know, she never saw him again.

Although she never could have been described as pretty or softly feminine Dorothy was an incredibly sexy woman - the sort of woman who unconsciously sends out signals which turn every male head in any room she enters. She was used to males being attracted to her and could pick and choose her lovers with a carelessness natural to a sexually attractive woman.

Time passed and many years later she remarried. Her second husband was a wealthy man who provided her with a beautiful harbourside home and surrounded her with luxury. The only snag was the fact that he possessed a roving eye and was easy prey for a pretty woman. I remember Uncle Will remarking at the time she remarried that "she would have to be careful because she was just losing her curves and there were plenty of younger women just getting theirs."

Uncle Will was himself a bit of a connoisseur of the female figure and possessed a large collection of artistic erotica which always made me feel a little uncomfortable when visiting him as a child. Part of his collection comprised some beautiful marble nude statuary and he had a way of lovingly running his hands over the smooth marble breasts and rounded thighs of his favourites as he extolled their beauty that was distinctly embarrassing to me at that awkward stage of development when I was beginning to assume roughly the same shape as the statues. I was suddenly acutely aware of my budding body underneath my ill fitting clothes. But that is digressing from the story ...

Years passed and finally the inevitable happened. Her husband became attracted to a younger woman and asked for a divorce. He was generous in

his proposed settlement but insisted she leave the home she loved so dearly as he intended to move into it with his new bride after the divorce was finalised. This was too much! That he should even consider bringing this new woman into her home to sleep in her bed with her husband - she still thought of him as her husband despite the divorce - was unthinkable!

He purchased for her a luxury unit in a beachside suburb and Dorothy received her marching orders in a formally worded letter from his solicitors a few months later, she was to move in one month's time.

Her depression deepened with each passing day as she packed her personal things and prepared to leave the home where she had been so happy. The night before she was to move she wandered through the strangely bare looking rooms, robbed now of any of her own personality and finally she climbed into the huge bed where she had known such rapture in the now dead past, and it was then that she took an overdose of sleeping tablets.

The Coroner returned a verdict of "Accidental Death" but I can't help wondering ...

## **Chapter 10**

### ***Aunty "Vivi" and Uncle Albert***

I had two aunts named Vera but somehow my father's sister was never called anything but Aunty Vivi by my brother Don and me. Perhaps this was a method we adopted to save confusion with our mother's sister Vera but, whatever the reason, I think it best if I continue to use our childish name for the purposes of this story.

Aunty Vivi was only 16 months younger than my father and was a fast moving, fast thinking, fast talking woman who used up so much nervous energy she was always as thin as a broom handle. Nana declared that she learned to walk and talk earlier than my father and this doesn't surprise me at all - she had plenty of practice in the latter for the rest of her life! She was my "second favourite" aunt and was very high on my childhood list of people I loved. She thought and acted so fast it was a real challenge to keep pace with her and she had a sparkling sense of humour similar to my fathers which, like his, bordered on the sarcastic if she was dealing with people of slower intellect.

She must have had a hard childhood. She would have been only seven at the time her parents separated and even at that young age she was required to collect, wash and grade the eggs daily on her mother's poultry farm, a task which took at least two hours every afternoon following her return from school. She and my father were inseparable as children, probably because they were so close in age and so much younger than their two half sisters, but she was always the leader in any mischief they hatched between them. Her vivaciousness and daring were the perfect counterbalance to the serious side of Dad's nature and it must have been a sad day for her when he was sent away to boarding school soon after their arrival in Sydney.

After her sister Carrie married at the turn of the century even more of the farm work evolved on to her shoulders and there wasn't much time or opportunity during her teenage years to meet young men who would be suitable marriage partners. It wasn't until she was in her mid-twenties that she met Albert Buttery, a young Englishman who conducted a business delivering butter, eggs and ice in the district. He called regularly at the farm to collect eggs for resale and Nana began to notice he was taking longer each day to pick up his supplies from Vera in the packing shed. It didn't take long for her to add two and two and come up with the answer that he was actually courting Vera in his own quiet way. The courtship was a lengthy

one because he was basically a shy man and it took the threat of losing her when there was some talk of selling the farm and moving to Dee Why to spur him into proposing marriage. She was 28 at the time they married in 1916 but, in common with many thousands of sheltered young women of that era, she was completely ignorant of the facts of life. She confided to me many years later that poor Uncle Albert had spent their wedding night sitting in a chair by the side of the bed wrapped in a blanket while he tried to explain to her the basic fundamentals of the sex act. She had been so shocked by his initial attempts to consummate the marriage that she was unable for the rest of her life to enjoy a naturally wholesome sex life.

Uncle Albert was a huge man, well over 6 feet tall and very well built. His large body supported an equally large head which was completely devoid of hair and his hands were so big he needed only one to lift me on to his lap when I was a little girl yet, despite his size, he was the gentlest of men.

He always reminded me of a mild-mannered, docile Great Dane. He was the most softly spoken, placid natured man I ever knew and he and Aunty were a study in contrasts. If he could be likened to a Great Dane she could most certainly have been described as a fox terrier snapping at his heels but I never once heard him snap back or even give a warning growl. He went through life at a ponderous, unhurried pace, completely unperturbed by his wife's dramatic outbursts and the aura of worried unrest which surrounded her most of the time.

He drove his car with the same easy-going, amiable disregard for Aunty's non-stop verbal instructions which began the moment the ignition was switched on and the starting handle cranked and continued in an unceasing flow until the car was safely garaged again. She was the only person I knew who could carry on a conversation with a car full of passengers and still manage to verbally drive every inch of the way. She kept up a constant patter of interpolated instructions to Uncle - "Watch out for that man stepping off the kerb Albert?", "Don't take that next corner so fast - it's very sharp", "You'd better pull up at the railway crossing Albert even if the gate's not down. There might be a train coming", "You nearly ran over that poor woman with the pram Albert." After one such trip I remember my father asking him how he put up with it. Uncle looked surprised, shrugged his shoulders and said, "I don't hear her. I just switch myself off." What a wonderful philosophy!

Cars were his passion in life and he was never happier than when he was sitting behind the wheel "taking a little spin" as he used to say. For many

years he prided himself on owning a Morris Cowley on which he lavished infinite care. I can still see him in the grey dust coat he always wore when driving with his check tweed cap pulled over his shiny bald head and with a look of utter contentment on his face.

They were married almost three years before my cousin Alan was born. He featured largely in my life as a child and I'll speak of him often in later chapters so won't elaborate here except to say that his birth was a difficult one for Aunty. My mother told me many years later that the night Alan was born the doctor called to the home to attend the birth had been drinking heavily and he made such a shockingly botched up mess of the delivery that it was impossible for Aunty to bear any more children. Whether this is true or not we'll never know but the fact remains that Alan was their only child.

Following their marriage Uncle Albert gave up his business and joined the Public Service as a prison warder. It seems an incongruous occupation for so peaceable a man but he remained in the service for the rest of his working life and at the time of his retirement he was the Deputy Governor of the gaol at East Maitland, a prison housing some of the most hardened criminals in the State.

He and Aunty lived in a large house inside the prison walls. It stood on one side of a paved courtyard facing the Governor's residence and the outer and inner gates of the gaol comprised the remaining two sides of the quadrangle.

One of the most exciting holidays I ever spent was in this house when I was fourteen and my brother and I stayed for a fortnight with Aunty and Uncle. We grew accustomed to the sight of armed warders pacing the walls above our heads and the sound of clanging metal as the gates opened or shut. A lot of the heavy housework such as wood chopping and floor polishing was done by trusted prisoners commonly called "trusties" and, although we were not supposed to talk to these ostracised members of society Don and I managed to sneak a few conversations with them as they worked. I remember being surprised that they looked and sounded just the same as other men. Up until that time I'd always imagined that criminals would somehow look completely different.



*East Maitland Gaol*

A funny little human interest story dating from this particular holiday comes to mind as I write. Don and I had spent the first two weeks of January staying with friends of the family who had three children about our age on a dairy farm at Coffs Harbour. The weather was extremely hot throughout the whole State - in fact it was while we were staying on the farm that Sydney experienced its hottest day ever recorded on what is still referred to as "Black Friday", the 13th January 1939 when the temperature reached 113.8°F. in the shade! We children spent a good deal of the time in company with some of the farm animals lying in the shallow creek running through the bottom paddock gorging ourselves on watermelons from the hundreds of magnificent specimens growing in the paddock. Altogether the five of us polished off no fewer than 28 huge melons in the two weeks we were there and I know I felt as if watermelon was coming out of my ears!

On the train journey south we were wakened by the conductor at 2 a.m. when the train reached Maitland and Uncle and Aunty were waiting on the station to meet us as we staggered off rubbing the sleep from our eyes. Aunty was full of excitement about a big surprise she had waiting for us which was to be kept a secret until lunch time. We could hardly get back to sleep again wondering what it could be and, true to her promise, the surprise was produced with a great flourish at lunch. It was a tiny pale watermelon with anaemic looking flesh - we'd thrown better specimens to the pigs on the farm - and our hearts sank. It took all the training in polite manners we'd received over a lifetime to try and seem enthusiastic as Aunty cut off two huge slices and watched with keen anticipation as we forced it into our mouths. We even remembered our manners sufficiently to thank her with a

hug and a kiss and she never knew just what a lesson in tact and diplomacy she'd unwittingly taught us with that surprise.

Some years earlier when Uncle was still a junior warder he came very close to death at the hands of two desperate prisoners in this same gaol. Both his attackers shared the same cell and were employed during the day in the prison tailoring room. Although they were searched each night before being returned to their cell, they managed somehow to smuggle a large pair of razor-sharp scissors into their cell by separating the blades and each man strapping a single blade on the inside of his leg so that it was concealed beneath his trousers and wasn't noticed in the cursory frisking they were subjected to at the end of the day's work.

Because of his height it was necessary for Uncle to stoop when entering the cells and the two took advantage of this knowledge to lie in wait that night as he carried their dinner tray into the cell. Having both his hands occupied and being slightly stooped to get through the door uncle was completely vulnerable for a few seconds and in that time the two prisoners lunged at him and rained blow after blow at his unprotected head. Their action was one born out of sheer desperation because it would have been virtually impossible for them to fight their way out of the prison to freedom. It was only a matter of minutes before they were overpowered and Uncle was rushed to hospital where he hovered between life and death for several weeks. He bore the scars of that attack all his life but as a result of the incident far more stringent precautions were instituted in the prison itself.

It was when Aunty was 60 that she fell and severely broke her hip. Months of hospitalisation and numerous painful operations followed which were only partially successful. When she was finally discharged from hospital more than a year after the accident she was left with one leg about five inches shorter than the other and was destined to suffer pain for the rest of her life but with typical courage she refused to give in and stagnate as a helpless cripple. She wore a shoe with a built-up sole and with the help of two walking sticks she managed for many years to carry on a fairly normal life. Later, when it became impossible for her to move around even with the help of the sticks she improvised and used a traymobile to lean on around the house and in this way she was able to do all her own housework and even coped with some of the gardening.

Not long after her accident Uncle retired and they moved to a home in Newcastle. He was a keen amateur mechanic and enjoyed nothing better than to tinker with his car engine. It was on a windy night some years after

his retirement that he met his death because of this interest. He had gone down to the garage shortly after dinner to work on the car and had propped the garage door open with a chock of wood. The wind blew the door shut while he was lying under the car with the engine running and he failed to notice what had happened.

It was much later that Aunty became alarmed at his long absence. She was unable to get down to the garage herself but phoned a neighbour who discovered his body with a spanner clutched in his hand still lying under the car where the poisonous carbon monoxide fumes had killed him.

The shock was severe for Aunty but she was determined to continue living on her own and gradually she adjusted to his loss and bounced back with as much spirit as ever.

Many years passed and just one month short of her 81st birthday she suffered another fall at about midnight when she was apparently making a cup of tea. It was a bitterly cold night and she was not able to move after the fall, even to get to the phone to summon help. It wasn't until about 9 the following morning that a neighbour found her semi-conscious still lying where she had fallen. She was taken to hospital but pneumonia set in and she failed to respond to treatment. It was only a matter of a day or so before she gave up the unequal battle and died.

It saddened me terribly to imagine her suffering during her lonely ordeal that night.

I still miss her birthday and Christmas cards which used to appear with unfailing regularity with a letter and a handkerchief tucked inside. Birthdays are just not the same since her death.

## **Chapter 11**

### **Aunty Rosie**

My father was born just one day after his half-sister's seventh birthday. She had been promised a baby brother or sister as a birthday present by her mother and could hardly wait until she got home from school that day to see if the baby had arrived in the mail. Her disappointment at not finding the promised gift gave way to intense excitement the following morning when she was shown her baby brother. She really regarded him as her own special present and imagined for years that he had been late arriving because of a delay in the mails.

She was never a very robust child and was painfully thin all her life, which earned her the nickname of "Bones". When she was twenty years of age she spent a year in a sanitarium supposedly suffering from tuberculosis. She was finally discharged from hospital and sent home to die. The doctor's prognosis was that she would only live for six months at the most. She certainly confounded the experts by living in perfect health until she was 90 years old! A few years before her death, whilst having a routine chest X-ray, it was pointed out to her that there were no signs of tubercular lesions on her lungs and it was certain she had never suffered from the disease after all!

She was only a young woman when she became engaged to be married. Nothing is known of the young man who was her fiance except the fact that he was drowned in a boating accident off Dobroyd Point in Sydney Harbour not long before they were to marry. She never discussed the incident and it was only because of a chance mention of it by my father when we were bushwalking in the area near where the boat had foundered that I heard of the tragedy. From that time onward Aunty Rosie devoted her whole life to caring for her mother.

As a child she had always seemed to me to be a rather drab, colourless, shadowy figure and it wasn't until Nana died in 1946 that she emerged from the shadows and that her own personality became evident. It was then that I realised she had spent her entire life completely swamped by Nana's stronger personality. I wish that I had understood this when I was a child and had got to know her better at that time but, when we paid our weekly duty visit to them at Dee Why I was always so intimidated and overawed myself by Nana that I retreated into my own cocoon and never emerged long enough to discover what a wonderfully warm person Aunty Rosie was.

She must have been a magician the way she was able to stretch the meagre finances of the household. Their sole source of income was a weekly sum contributed by my father and by Aunty Vivi and Uncle Albert and she eked this small amount out with such skill that it makes the mind boggle. There never was so much as a crust of bread thrown out yet she always managed to serve an ample baked dinner for our weekly visit and never failed to point out the number of different types of vegetables she provided - usually a variety of no less than four or five!

Her wardrobe was a marvel of ingenuity. Most of her frocks were purchased from St. Vincent de Paul stores or Red Cross stalls and trimmed with little bits of lace or braid with tremendous skill. She took a great pride in her appearance and her greatest joy in life was to dress up. She had a different coloured set of underwear to match every frock she owned and would not think of wearing pink underwear if her frock happened to be yellow. She was appalled at the thought that if she didn't match her underwear to her outerwear she could be involved in an accident and be taken unconscious to a hospital where the dreadful discovery would be made! I'm sure she even felt she could die in peace provided her under and outer garments didn't clash.

She enjoyed this pastime so much that if she needed to purchase a number of items at the local shops she would make separate trips for each item changing her entire outfit each time.



*Rosie, Emma and Stella*

This love of pretty clothing and soft materials was the subject of a family joke my father used to relish. It seems that at one stage of her life Aunty Rosie had been drawn towards the Catholic Church and even contemplated the idea of entering a convent although her whole family background was strongly Protestant. This came about because of her friendship with a Catholic family living next door to them at Dee Why. She even went so far as to make discreet enquiries about convent life and conditions but the idea was quickly dropped when she discovered that nuns were expected to wear unbleached calico underwear! She very smartly decided to remain a Milanese-panted Protestant!

She became widely known in the district as "the Duchess of Dee Why", a title she secretly enjoyed, and indeed she did seem like a duchess when she was dressed ready for an outing.

She had two luxuries during all those years. The first was an almost weekly visit to the picture theatre which was nearly opposite "Rosemary" on Pittwater Road but which has long since been demolished. She thoroughly enjoyed a good film and no doubt would have become an avid TV fan if she'd been able to afford a set in the latter years of her life.

Her other luxury was one which used to cause the family much secret amusement and that was the purchase of half a dozen bottles of stout each week "for medicinal purposes". It was suggested to her many years before by a doctor as a tonic to improve her appetite and she was always careful to point out as she sipped a glass before meals that she didn't really like the stuff but was taking it under doctor's orders! I think she almost expected her stepfather to leap from his grave and knock the glass from her hands.

When she was 83 she fell and fractured her thigh. The whole family thought this would be the end but she once more confounded the doctors by getting up and walking again. Only twelve months later a second fall broke the other thigh and again she came through the operation, although this time she wasn't able to walk and was cared for at home for almost two years by two of my cousins. She had become a legend in Dee Why because of her refusal to move from her little cottage as civilisation encroached on it from every side and it almost broke her heart when she finally had to be hospitalised and was not granted the freedom to die in her own home. A little incident which occurred on the eve of her departure for hospital bears reporting if only to give the reader an idea of her courage and her sense of humour in the face of the certain knowledge that she would never see her home again.

At the time she was being nursed by my cousin Isabel who was a trained nursing sister and the local Church of England minister had arrived to offer comfort to her prior to her removal to hospital, which had been arranged for the following day. He apparently was overlong in his platitudinous mouthings and, after much audible sighing and muttering, Aunty finally sat bolt upright in bed and started reciting "Mary had a little lamb" in her shaky voice. This so unnerved the minister that he, thinking she had temporarily taken leave of her senses, quickly decided to close the visit with a word of prayer. Aunty was silent until he started "committing this poor sinner to God's tender care." This was too much for her and she proclaimed as loudly as she was able:

"I am not a sinner. I haven't been out of this house for years, I haven't even been out of this bed for years and it has been utterly impossible for me to sin even if I'd wanted to. I refuse to be labelled a sinner when I haven't had the chance to commit a decent sin for years!"

It was on this note that the minister beat a hasty retreat and he was hardly out of the door before Aunty was chuckling at his discomfiture.

"The pompous young upstart," she declared. "He needed bringing down a peg or two!"

She wouldn't allow the cottage to be sold while she was still alive and for two years it stood deserted and empty while she lay in her hospital bed and literally shrank before our eyes. When she died there was hardly enough left of her to raise a mound under the bedclothes.

I'm glad she wasn't alive to see the wreckage of her home after the demolishers had finished with it. At least she was spared that sorrow.

# **Book Two**

## **Memories...**



## **Chapter 12**

### ***...of a verandah***

Of the myriad memories gathered over a half century of living none are more precious to me than those of childhood. The metamorphosis from child to adult was accomplished decades ago. Gone is the wide-eyed, innocent, irresponsible child, replaced by the tired-eyed, aware and responsible adult. The transitional process necessarily has had its painful periods so that the memories of those few fleeting years of innocence become doubly precious as the years add their harvest of experiences to the bank of stored memories.

It is inevitable that the area in which these childhood experiences were gained should form a backdrop to the emotional impressions and so it is that Manly and its surrounding districts will always remain something special in the story of my life.

If I were asked to describe my childhood in one word that word would most certainly be "idyllic". I was fortunate to be born into a family where, although there was sometimes a shortage of money, particularly during the depression years, there was never any shortage of love. I was welcomed into the world with love and was nurtured and reared with love. What more could a child ask?

My father and mother had been married for 16 months and were living at Dee Why when their first baby Douglas was born. When he was a few months old they moved to Manly where they purchased a lovely little weatherboard cottage built on a sloping block of land in Lauderdale Avenue about a mile from the ferry wharf at Manly. This cottage, with very little imagination, they renamed "The Glen" and it was here that I was born and lived my entire life until my marriage.

Douglas was a normal, healthy, happy baby until he contracted gastro-enteritis at the age of 13 months and in less than one week he was dead. There were no antibiotics for this dreaded complaint in those days. His death was a heartbreaking experience for my mother and father and it was perhaps fortunate that another child was on the way at the time he died. My brother Don was doubly welcome when he was born five months later. He was a sickly child and it is not surprising that, with Douglas's death still fresh in her mind. Mum was over protective of Don. It wasn't until a baby

clinic sister suggested that he be allowed to sleep in the open air that he began to thrive.

There was a huge open verandah at the front of the house and, although it was mid-winter, he was wrapped up snugly and his cot moved to a sheltered end of the verandah. From that moment on he began to improve in health and when I was born I too slept on this verandah in all weathers.

The view from our beds was breath taking. There was a bush reserve in front of the property which reached to the water's edge of a quiet little bay named North Harbour which stretched for a mile or so to the west of Manly. This bay was home to dozens of yachts of all shapes and sizes and at the time I was a child it also provided a livelihood for licensed fishermen. It was a common sight to see them rowing their dinghies in a huge semicircle from one of the many little beaches dotted on the foreshores paying out their nets over the stern.

Then began the long slow job of hauling the nets in hand over hand until the catch was revealed in a flurry of foam as the last of the net reached the shallows.

It was a favourite pastime of all the neighbourhood children to join in the work, which we regarded as fun, and be rewarded with a few of the left over fish after the fishermen had taken their choice pickings. One of the most popular beaches used was Forty Baskets Beach opposite our home, so called because many years earlier fishermen had netted no less than 40 baskets of fish there in one record haul. Net fishing was banned from the North Harbour while I was still a youngster when it was discovered that fish re-population was not keeping pace with catches. I think the only ones pleased about the new laws were the fish themselves. I know we children were terribly upset at the decision as it meant the end of an exciting part of our childhood.



*The verandah at The Glen*

Beyond the bay the Sydney Heads were clearly visible from our verandah and Don and I got to know the names of nearly every regular ship entering or leaving the harbour as well as being able to identify at a glance every ferry plying between Manly and the city.

The hill opposite our home was named Dobroyd Point and one blisteringly hot day when I was about five the bush on this headland caught fire. There were at that time only about half a dozen homes grouped around a footbridge at the landward end, about three or four homes fronting Forty Baskets Beach half a mile away and one lone cottage on the crest of the hill where a school friend of my brother lived with his parents. All the rest of the headland, which today is covered with high class homes, was heavily timbered and the fire raged fiercely from about two in the afternoon until it burned itself out on reaching the point in the early hours of the morning. Don and I stayed awake for a long time that night watching the spectacular sight from the safety of our beds at each end of the verandah.

There were wooden-slatted Venetian type blinds which could be lowered and tied to metal fittings set in the floor of the verandah but these were only used in very heavy weather and I got so used to sleeping out that I felt quite hemmed in when I married and for the first time in my life slept within enclosing walls.

We not only slept on this verandah but nearly every meal winter or summer was eaten at the old lino covered table occupying the centre of the floor space with the half dozen rickety wooden chairs grouped around it. This meant trundling all the necessary cutlery, crockery and food from the kitchen at the back of the house using a traymobile, but the million dollar view was well worth the extra effort.

It was while entertaining guests to a meal on this verandah that I experienced what could be described if I were writing an article for "The Reader's Digest" as "My Most Embarrassing Moment." It happened this way ...

My brother Don joined the Air Force in 1942 and one of his early training camps was at Uranquinty not far from Temora in the Riverina. Whilst there he was shown tremendous hospitality by a local farm family who entertained the boys from the nearby camp regularly. There were two sons and two daughters in the family, the sons at the time being in their early twenties. I was about 16 and at that very self-conscious stage girls seem to reach at a much younger age these days when the entire family came to Sydney for the Royal Easter Show. My mother was anxious to return the hospitality they'd shown to Don and she went to a lot of trouble preparing a magnificent dinner consisting of soup, roast duck with all the "trimmings" and apple pie and cream. This was eaten as usual on the verandah as it was a glorious day. I ate far too much and being most uncomfortable I surreptitiously undid the band of my full dirndl skirt, intending to do it up before I moved from the table.

There was a perforated metal meat safe hanging above head height at one end of the verandah. This was used to store left over meat as refrigeration was not yet within the reach of the private home in the days before Sir Edward Hallstrom invented his famous "Silent Knight" refrigerator at the end of the war. We had finished the main course when Mum asked me to store the remnants of the roast duck in the safe and, completely forgetting my unbuttoned skirt, I climbed onto my chair and was reaching up with both hands holding the plate when, to my horror, the skirt slid to my feet and I was left standing there in a flimsy pair of see through scanties! I don't think the two boys had ever seen anything like it down on the farm. They went off into paroxysms of laughter and it was some time before things settled back to normal again. I'll never forget the surprised look on their faces!



*The SW view from the verandah*

The verandah proved a convenient exit point for a burglar one afternoon when I was about 7 or 8 years of age. As we opened the back door we disturbed a man who was ransacking drawers in the front bedroom. He rushed from the house, leapt over the verandah railing - a drop of about 8 feet to the lawn beneath, and disappeared into the bush reserve at the front of the house. My father set off in hot pursuit but was unable to catch the thief. The interior of the house was a shambles and contents of drawers were scattered all over the various rooms but nothing of any real value was stolen. The location of the house rendered it particularly tempting for housebreakers and it was burgled three times over the years.

It was not long after this incident that Don and I found a sack hidden in the bush in front of the house and, with visions of finding possible stolen loot inside we tore it open to discover the bloated drowned bodies of a cat and seven kittens with heavy stones which had been used to weight the sack down in the water. The sight sickened us both and when a few months later we came across another sack in a similar spot in the bush we argued for a long time about who was going to be brave enough to open it. I was finally given the job with the promise by Don that I could keep anything that was inside. It took all my courage to undo the tight rope knots but I was rewarded with a sackful of brand new gardening tools! Don and I dragged the heavy sack home and were very down-in-the-mouth when Dad insisted it had to be taken to the Manly Police Station. If no one claimed the contents, which police felt were stolen probably from a shop and hidden temporarily in the bush for safe keeping, for a period of three months the tools would be released to us. Those three months seemed to be the longest of my life. We kept a calendar and religiously crossed out the days until we could claim our find. It was typical of Don who is the most scrupulously honest person I

know to insist that the tools were mine and there are still a few remnants stored in our garage today as a reminder of an exciting childhood event.

A familiar sight as we ate breakfast on the verandah in the years just prior to the War was that of the "Awatea" steaming through the Heads at precisely 10 past 8. This occurred with predictable regularity when she was on her weekly Trans-Tasman trips between Wellington and Sydney. She was a beautiful looking ship with dark green hull, white superstructure and bright red funnels and was a popular link between Australia and New Zealand in the pre-War years. Her master at that time was Captain Davey, father of the famous radio entertainer Jack Davey. Captain Davey used to boast that Sydneysiders could set their watches by the arrival of his ship from New Zealand and I can vouch for the correctness of this boast. Some people assert that he deliberately delayed his entrance through the Heads if he arrived a little early so he could live up to his reputation. He earned for himself the title of "8.10 Davey". This originated from the wireless messages sent from the ship announcing the expected arrival times in Sydney. The messages never varied, being always worded "Arriving 8.10".



*The Awatea*

The "Awatea" made her maiden voyage between Wellington and Sydney in September 1936. What an unforgettable sight she made as she nosed into view from behind North Head for the first time. Altogether she made 225 Tasman crossings in the next six years and created a still unbroken record of 2 days, 15 hrs. 22 mins. for the crossing from Sydney to Wellington.

At the outbreak of World War II, under the command of Captain Morgan, she was requisitioned by the British Ministry of War and was stripped of all her luxury fittings. Her beautiful paintwork was camouflaged in drab grey and black and she was pressed into service as a troop transport. In this capacity she saw service in many theatres of war during the next three years until on 10th November 1942 she sailed from Algiers in North Africa in a fast convoy escorted by destroyers. She was carrying petrol, stores and

troops intended for landing at Djidelli where the troops were to attempt the capture of a German held airfield. The other ships discharged their troops in an unopposed landing near the port of Bougie about 100 miles east of Algiers early the next morning and "Awatea" broke from the convoy and continued on her own to carry out her part of the mission.

Heavy seas made the landing impossible, however, and she finally had to abandon the attempt and rejoin the convoy at Bougie Bay, Paratroops were sent in to capture the airfield but the delay spelt doom to "Awatea". No sooner had she rejoined the convoy at Bougie Bay than wave after wave of German bombers taking off from the as yet uncaptured airfield rained destruction on the assembled ships. "Awatea" was directly hit a number of times and she sank quickly with a heavy loss of life. News of her sinking was received with stunned disbelief by thousands of Sydneysiders. It seemed inconceivable that we would never again see her green bows slicing proudly through the water as she entered the shelter of Sydney Harbour at precisely 8.10 a.m.

We had a grandstand view from our verandah in May 1942 when four Japanese midget submarines sneaked into Sydney Harbour and made us all sit up and take notice. I think we as a nation were inclined to think the War was still a long way off and we were shocked out of our complacency that night when it was realised that the enemy was right in our midst! What a noise there was as the guns on every harbour headland seemed to start firing at the same time. Their staccato bursts were punctuated by the deep "vroom" of dozens of depth charges dropped by scurrying bantam-like naval patrol boats which succeeded in sinking all four intruders before the night was ended.

The flash of the guns and the dozens of searchlights crisscrossing the sky made a spectacular sight and it would have been tremendously exciting if we hadn't been so scared stiff when we realised that this was not a practice exercise but was the real thing!

The baby subs, had been ejected from the womb of the mother ship outside the Heads and had waited their opportunity to pass through the steel anti submarine boom net stretched across the entrance to the harbour from Middle Head to Watsons Bay. It is now known that they evaded detection at the boom opening by hiding under the keels of Manly ferries which passed through the narrow guarded opening at regular intervals. Their prime target was the American cruiser "Chicago" which was anchored off Clark Island that night. It was learned later that one of the torpedoes released actually

scraped the cruiser's stern but at the crucial moment of firing the ship had drifted slightly with the tide and so narrowly missed destruction. The old Sydney ferry "Kuttabul" was not so fortunate. She was anchored at Garden Island and was used as extra sleeping quarters for the overflow of Naval personnel who worked on the ships at the Island naval base. The torpedo intended for the "Chicago" continued on its course after missing its target and scored a direct hit on "Kuttabul" which sank almost immediately with tremendous loss of life amongst the unsuspecting naval ratings on board.

It seemed to me, as a fervently patriotic 17 year old, that it was the height of idiocy when, after spending countless thousands of pounds to sink these submarines many thousands more were spent to raise them and bury the dead Japanese trapped inside their steel coffins with full military honours! What a glaring pointer to the absolute stupidity of war!

One of these submarines has now found a permanent resting place at the War Museum in Canberra.

Our cousin Alan who was five years my senior spent several years during the War as a naval rating. Most of his service was spent on corvettes operating the newly perfected Asdic equipment then being installed on some of our more modern ships.

Alan was over 6 feet tall and as thin as a bean pole. His height and slimness were accentuated by the tight fitting jacket and bell bottom trousers of the naval uniform he wore and he was once jokingly asked if he'd joined the Navy as a "pull-through" for the guns!

Our home was a "home away from home" for Alan whenever his ship was in port and he had a few days leave. On board ship the entire crew worked a roster of four hours on duty and four hours off duty continually. This meant that sleep had to be taken in small doses and no one on board could afford the luxury of insomnia. Alan was so used to this routine that he would fall asleep the instant he was placed in a horizontal position.

One night he was sound asleep at one end of our verandah when a violent storm broke. The thunder was deafening, the lightning spectacular and the rain was a solid wall of water. In a few minutes the verandah was inches deep in water and we were all struggling to carry the beds through the glass doors into the shelter of the lounge room. Through all the commotion Alan slept like a baby until we had to wake him to move his bed. He leapt out of bed the instant he was awakened, felt the water swirling around his feet,

shouted "Crikey, she's sinking!", was steered inside by my mother, and fell asleep again instantly. In the morning he had no recollection of his close call to abandon ship!

There was a huge old gum tree whose branches almost overhung the verandah railing and the noise of the cicadas in summer was ear splitting.

It was a favourite pastime as we ate our meals to the accompaniment of this well hidden insect orchestra to see who could sight the largest number of these beautiful little creatures. A rare find was a velvety Black Prince who made a distinctly different warbling noise and seemed like a solo artist making an occasional guest appearance with the orchestra. The cicadas attracted dozens of kookaburras and these became extremely tame over the years. My mother made a habit of feeding these birds daily with mince meat and it was not uncommon to see a half dozen or so perched on the verandah railing eating out of her hand. This intrigued a little neighbour's child who used to come in often "to see the kookabuggers". "I've heard that in the Army the cooks are often given that title" Dad laughingly remarked, "but it's not often heard from the mouth of a three year old!" It remains to this day a family joke and kookaburras in our vocabulary will always be referred to as "kookabuggers" in memory of little Margaret Anne.

## **Chapter 13**

### ***...of politics through a child's eyes***

"All politicians are crooked. They're only in it for the money and the perks the job offers."

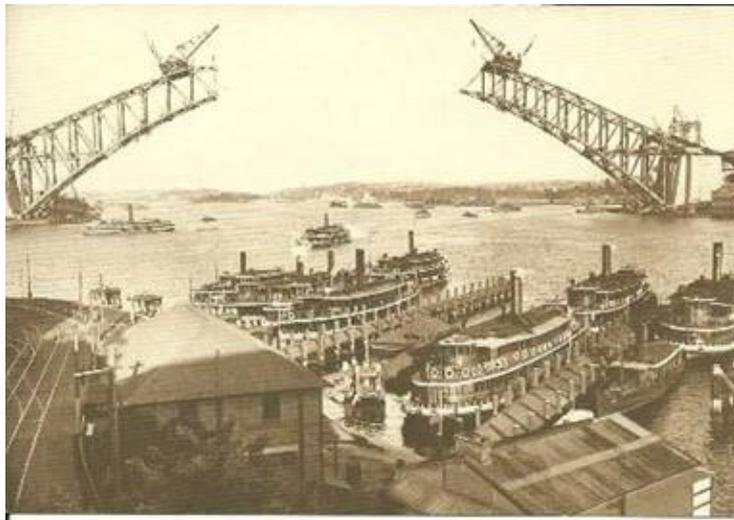
This was a dogma of political faith I was to hear many times with a thousand different variations from my father's lips as a child. He lumped politicians in the same category as schoolteachers and bus conductors as the least deserving of all members of the community. What caused him to hold these strong opinions I'll never know. I realised as I grew up that there was a lot of "tongue-in-cheek being employed when he burst forth into one of his frequent tirades against these occupations, but because of this unintentional brainwashing when I was a child all politicians loomed on my horizon as villains and the arch villain in the piece was Jack Lang, the Premier of New South Wales.

The whole community then seemed distinctly divided into two camps - those who loved this man, in fact almost worshipped him as a saviour of the oppressed working classes, and those who hated him with a violence not very often seen as an Australian characteristic. There seemed to be no moderate thinking "middle-of-the-road" opinions held and it is a measure of the greatness of the man that he had the power to stir otherwise apathetic people into displaying such strong emotions. Naturally my father and his friends were in the "hate Lang" camp. They saw him as the main cause of the depression which held the country in a vice-like grip and they were afraid of the power he wielded. They could see nothing but ruin ahead for Australia, and New South Wales in particular, if he were to remain in the Premier's office.

My childhood impressions of the Great Depression are of children coming to school in the depth of winter with bare feet purple with cold, of girls at school in cheap cotton frocks all year round with out-at-elbow threadbare jumpers worn over the skimpy frocks in winter, of the staple lunch diet of most of the children at school which consisted of bread and dripping while they tried not to be too envious of my sandwiches spread with real butter and even with a filling of jam! Of an endless stream of worried looking men appearing at our back door with trays of shoe laces and oddments hung around their necks which they hawked from door to door, of the drawer full of shoe laces my mother had because she didn't have the heart to refuse the unspoken pleading in their eyes. Of the long discussions even in our own

household where my father was at least still able to carry on working as to whether the budget could be stretched to provide me with a new pair of shoes or whether I would have to put up with pinched toes for a few more months while a piece of Kromhyd was glued on the worn sole.

It was at the height of the Great Depression in March 1932 that the Sydney Harbour Bridge was opened. For years I had watched in wonder as the two sides of the steel arch crept closer and closer like two boxers approaching each other from opposite sides of the ring and about to shake hands in the centre. Each side of the arch was supported by two huge steel cranes which to my child's eyes looked for all the world like men leaning out at an angle so they could take the strain of the enormous weight they were supporting. Sometimes at night when a wild storm was raging I would wake and think of these brave men on top of the arch and pray that they'd be able to hold on so the bridge wouldn't topple down. I honestly believed they were real men who took turns all through the day and night to hold up the bridge and never deserted their post and even today when driving across the bridge I look at these steel giants through an enlightened unimaginative adult's eyes and spare a nostalgic thought for the child who worried so greatly about them all those years ago.



*Constructing the Harbour Bridge*

Our family joined the thousands of excited people who thronged every approach to the bridge on its opening day. Jack Lang was scheduled to cut the ribbon to officially open the bridge but for many months prior to the date members of the New Guard, a group of militant anti-Lang men, had boasted that they would prevent him from doing so. Excitement ran high as the time approached for the official party to arrive. There was a heavy police escort provided for the Premier and every precaution was taken to ensure that the

threat was not carried out. Just as Mr. Lang was poised to cut the ribbon a horse suddenly broke from the surrounding mounted escort. Colonel de Groot, a member of the New Guard, spurred the horse to a full gallop and slashed the ribbon with his sword as he raced through the astonished onlookers. He was quickly pounced on and taken into custody but the New Guard had achieved its purpose and made good its threat to prevent Lang from opening the bridge.

Wedged tightly in the crowd about half a mile or more from the scene we had no way of knowing what had happened. There were no transistor radios to give us an up-to-the-minute coverage and it wasn't until we had walked across the bridge in a jostling, singing, happy crowd that we learned of the incident. We were in a little cafe at Milsons Point which was doing a roaring trade reviving footsore pedestrians with afternoon tea when a rush extra of the evening papers came on to the streets giving details of the events of a couple of hours earlier. Dad hurried out to buy a copy and the scene that followed was one I'll never forget. My staid scholarly father seemed to suddenly take leave of his senses and joined forces with complete strangers in giving three loud cheers for de Groot. In fact, he led the cheering from the vantage point of one of the cafe tables, much to the embarrassment of my mother.

"What a smack in the eye for old Lang!" he shouted until Mum put the brakes on his enthusiasm and he quietened down. It was perhaps fortunate for him that all the patrons in the tea shop at that particular moment seemed to be anti-Lang sympathisers.

Last year when Jack Lang died at the age of 92 I was most interested in a long TV documentary about his life and work and I was amazed to discover that he wasn't nearly the villain I'd always thought him to be. In fact, he emerged through the film as a hard working sincere and concerned leader who, in spite of glaring mistakes, did achieve a tremendous amount of good in his lifetime. I was reminded of the old poem:

*There is so much good in the worst of us,  
And so much bad in the best of us,  
That it hardly behoves any of us  
To talk about the rest of us.*

The only politician who did not earn Dad's contempt and criticism was Robert Gordon Menzies. In fact, far from criticising this man, my father was outspoken in his praise and admiration of him. He was Prime Minister

all through my childhood and was a figure who did stand out on his own as a strong forceful leader. He was an eloquent gifted speaker with a ready wit and stories of his prowess in this field are legion, but there is one little anecdote in which I had a personal interest that bears recounting.

Just prior to the Second World War there was a strong interest displayed by the Government in migration. The theme for the enormous advertising campaign to launch the project was "Populate or Perish". My first job when I was not quite 15 was to type thousands of envelopes for leaflets which were sent to all migrants who had come to Australia in the preceding 20 years enquiring if they had members of their families who would be interested in migrating to this country if the Government offered them an assisted passage.

The Millions Club of N.S.W, of which my father was President at the time, formed the "Millions for Australia League" and Mr. Menzies was asked to speak at an official luncheon to publicise this organization at Sydney Town Hall. The hall was packed with hundreds of grey-haired elderly business men when Mr. Menzies got up to speak.

"Gentlemen, we must populate or perish" he said at the close of his address. "I repeat .gentlemen, we must populate, populate, populate!" with his point being emphasised by a loud fist on the table. Then with a benign smile as he looked around at all the bald, greying heads he finished his speech with: "There's no need to rush home immediately gentlemen. Enjoy your lunch first!"

I was unable to comprehend the bitterness behind the nickname given to Mr. Menzies at the outbreak of hostilities with Japan when he became widely known as "Pig Iron Bob". He earned this title because of his pre-war dealings with Japan to sell them our scrap iron which was manufactured into armaments which were used against our troops in the fighting years later. He was a strong enough leader to emerge unscathed through the bitter criticism but it did have the effect of putting the first tiny blot on his copybook in my otherwise unblemished concept of him as a politician.

## **Chapter 14**

### ***...of the vanishing ferries***

The Manly ferries are so interwoven into childhood memories that no story of my life would be complete without reference to these beautiful craft which today are fast disappearing from the Sydney scene.

In the shadowy mists of very early memory I can recall the daily ritual of waving a tablecloth from the verandah to my father's ferry every morning as it crossed the Heads on its way to the city and the answering wave of his newspaper from the upper deck where he always occupied the same seat.

Then there was the joy of an occasional trip to town and the thrill of being given a penny each to place in the musician's collection box when it was rattled under our noses during the journey. There was a piano at each end of the upper deck and a team of three musicians who usually travelled on the same ferry. The team consisted of a pianist, a violinist and a piano accordionist. After entertaining the passengers on the upper deck the pianist took over the collection box and then, in the manner of the ancient strolling minstrels, the three traversed the length of the lower deck, even penetrating the sacred portals of the Ladies Cabin at one end of the ferry. I can recall one occasion when my mother cleared out a huge pile of sheet music from the old piano stool and decided to offer it to our favourite trio who used the ferry "Dee Why" as their floating concert hall. Don and I waited at the Manly Wharf until the ferry docked and then excitedly lugged the heavy bundle of music up the gangplank and gave it to the surprised man. We were rewarded with a sweet from all three and in the months that followed it seemed almost disloyal to travel on any other boat because we used to hope they'd play "our" music.



*The South Steyne*

These decks where we once scampered so happily in those far off uncaring days of childhood now lie in 40 fathoms of water off Long Reef near Collaroy. On the 25th May 1976, during the writing of this book, the "funeral" of this grand old ferry was reported on TV News. Stripped of all her superstructure and with her entrails removed she did not even resemble the once proud ferry of the thirties. She was ignominiously towed to a point off the end of Long Reef and scuttled there to provide the beginnings of a man-made reef designed to attempt to attract more marine life to the area. A crowd of childhood ghosts lie buried with her in her watery grave but at least she was spared the fate of her twin sister ship "Curl Curl" who was sold for scrap iron in 1963. These sister ships were built in 1928 on the Clyde River in Scotland and sailed here under their own steam. To the casual observer they were identical twins but Don and I discovered that there was a slight variation in the way the white stripe on their sides was painted and we used to confound our friends by identifying which ferry was approaching the wharf even when it was still a long way off. The line on the "Dee Why" ended in a point like a sharpened pencil whereas on the "Curl Curl" the point was reversed.

The ferry which was and still is my firm favourite was the "South Steyne", the glamour girl of the fleet. We were eating breakfast on the verandah one morning in 1938 when she entered through the Heads on her maiden voyage. She had steamed under her own power from Leith Scotland where she had been built and had only taken 64 days for the trip, travelling through the Suez Canal and via the north coast of Australia, she was fitted with false wooden bows to protect her in the heavy seas and this gave her an ungainly appearance when we first sighted her, but what a beautiful butterfly was to

emerge from the wooden cocoon. She had slightly elevated bows at both ends and this gave her a graceful banana-like appearance. She was fitted with the ultimate in passenger comforts, even sporting a bar from which light refreshments were available. She was a familiar sight to be seen from any of the northern beaches during the summer months as she made her way up the coast as far as Broken Bay taking passengers on an ocean cruise. It was like hearing of an accident befalling an old friend when I saw the news on TV last year that she had been gutted by fire and it was expected she would have to be scrapped. Happily it was decided to restore her and at the time of writing this is taking place.

Perhaps it is unfair to say that the "Bellubera" was a jinx ship but that was the feeling of numbers of people about this ferry, whose name means "pretty woman". She was a pretty woman but also one that seemed to court disaster. Not being of a superstitious type of nature I wondered at the strange effect this ferry had on me. On one occasion I even deliberately waited half an hour for another ferry and was late for an important engagement rather than travel in her.

She was built at Morts Dock in Sydney in 1910 and so was one of the older members of the fleet when in 1935 it was decided to convert her from steam to diesel electric power as an experiment. The work was completed in June 1936 and there was much publicity about her resumption in service because the conversion had increased her speed to 16 knots and great things were expected of her in the future.

However, the experiment was short lived because only five months later in November of that year she was almost completely destroyed by fire whilst tied up at the Company's wharf at Neutral Bay. Two crewmen perished in the flames and she was very extensively damaged before the fire could be brought under control. It was not until September 1937 that she was back on duty again having been almost completely rebuilt, but bad luck seemed to stalk her.

One day her engines broke down while she was passing the Heads and she drifted perilously close to the rocks at Dobroyd Point before another ferry managed to pull alongside her and the passengers were transferred before she was taken in tow and pulled to safety. We watched the drama from the verandah of "The Glen" and were not in the least surprised that it was the "Bellubera" which was cast in the leading role.

It was this ferry which featured in my one and only venture into the life of crime. I was 17 at the time and was working as a stenographer at the Manly Council. My best friend, just a year my senior, was Josie Byrnes and we were inseparable. On the day I launched myself into crime there was a storm of cyclonic proportions raging and the seas were enormous. I'd watched the ferries that morning from the verandah and they were being tossed about like corks in the mountainous seas, I persuaded Josie to accompany me after work on the 4.45 ferry just for the excitement of the rough crossing. Neither of us had any money with us but we intended to hide in the ladies toilets until the ship emptied and refilled at the Quay and thus have the thrill of the return trip absolutely without cost. The journey was fantastic fun - I'd never before experienced it so rough. Two windows on the upper deck were smashed by the force of the huge waves and the lower deck was awash each time we dipped into the wave troughs. When the ferry tied up at the Quay we carried out our plan and hid in the toilets but after the noise of the disembarking passengers had died down there was an unusual quiet outside our voluntary prison. We asked ourselves "What is happening? Where are all the people who should be streaming on board for the return trip to Manly?" Imagine our dilemma when we ventured a look through the porthole and saw a sign which read "Ferries Discontinued Until Further Notice Due To Rough Weather".

Feeling like criminals we emerged from our hiding place and confessed our sin to the employee at the turnstiles. He took us like two prisoners in custody to the company office upstairs where I rang my father's office and was lucky to catch him just as he was about to leave to attend his Masonic Lodge. He paid our fare and gave us enough money for the bus trip home from Wynyard Station. It was almost 8 o'clock before we finally arrived home tired, wet, hungry and much chastened by the whole incident. I resolved then and there that a life of crime was not for me and the fact that it happened to have been the "Bellubera" which was the venue of our venture into crime only strengthened my conviction that she was jinxed.

I can't remember which ferry was involved in an incident which occurred shortly after this and perhaps it is unjust to lay the blame on "Bellubera". It happened that while I was at work in the Council Chambers not far from the wharf one morning there was suddenly a loud crash and the sound of splintering timber. When we all rushed over to the wharf to investigate what had happened we discovered that one of the ferries had snapped its mooring ropes and had crashed through the wooden wall of the office. It must have scared the typist half to death because the bows of the ferry came to rest not three feet from her desk!

Bellubera's run of bad luck seemed to come to an end when she was completely reconditioned and had brand new engines installed at Newcastle in 1954. She was off the run for 8 months while the work was carried out. In addition to the replacement of her engines she had twelve plates put in her hull, three on both sides fore and aft and she apparently cast off the bad luck spell together with her old engines because she was like a new woman when she came back into service in October of that year.



*SS Bellubera*

At the time of writing this book only two of the old ferries remain on the run - the "Baragoola", a veteran of 54 years of age, and the "North Head" which is the new name given to the old "Barrenjoey", originally built in 1913. This vessel was taken out of service in 1948 and was rebuilt at Morts Dock in Sydney to a completely new and modern design. Her old engine and boilers were removed and she was converted to diesel electric power. Then, to complete the transformation, she was re-christened the M.V. "North Head" on 7th May 1951 and returned to service. As with the others of her size and age her days are now numbered as a fast moving fleet of hydrofoils jostle for supremacy in the feverish race to move people faster from Point A to Point B. The first hydrofoil, the "Manly", was purchased from Japan in 1964 and must have caused a shudder of apprehension to run through the entire fleet of veterans then still in service. Sadly, I feel the "South Steyne", when she is reconditioned following the recent disastrous fire, will probably be the last of the romantic era of ferries we will see on Sydney Harbour.

## **Chapter 15**

### ***...of swimming and boating***

Being born within sight and sound of the water it is not surprising that to my brother and me swimming and boating played a very large part in our lives.

Living next door to "The Glen" was a happy, boisterous, rollicking family of three girls and three boys who were so much a part of our day to day living that they seemed almost to be an extension of our own family. The Stevens children could swim almost before they could walk and were as at home in water as they were on dry land. They owned a canoe, a small dinghy and an open 10 foot launch with a spluttering engine amidships encased in a dilapidated wooden box and in these three craft we spent endless hours emulating Mr. Toad of "Wind in the Willows" fame "just mucking about in boats." The long seemingly endless days of the summer school holidays never saw a shoe on our feet and we developed leatherlike soles which allowed us to scramble unthinkingly across oyster covered rocks without tearing our feet to shreds.

Moored opposite our home in the North Harbour was a magnificent sailing boat, the original "Mistral". Her successors of the same name achieved fame in the early Sydney to Hobart yacht races in later years but this boat was used solely for occasional weekend cruising and spent most of her time lying at anchor in the still waters of the bay. She had a temporary sharkproof net swimming pool moored to her stern and the owner occasionally allowed us children to use it as a special treat. One such occasion comes vividly to mind.

Our cousin Alan was spending the summer holidays with us and together with a number of the Stevens children we had rowed the hundred yards or so to the "Mistral" and were enjoying a wonderful day in the swimming net. The net itself was joined to a wooden frame measuring about 20 feet by 10 feet which floated on the surface and provided a flat ledge on which we could scramble and rest. Although not far from shore there was a deep channel between the boat and the beach and we'd been warned many times never to swim in this channel because it was a favourite haunt for sharks which came into the harbour to breed in the summer months. Now, someone in the group dared Alan, who was a strong swimmer and about 12 or 13 at the time, to swim to shore. The dare was taken up by others and a double dare issued. We all knew that no one could ignore a double dare and we waited with bated breath as Alan dived in and swam the distance in record

time. We were severely reprimanded on reaching home because Mrs. Stevens just happened to be watching us through binoculars at the time and as a punishment we were forbidden the use of the floating pool for the remainder of the holidays.

Another frequently used swimming spot was the pool Council erected directly opposite our home at a little beach we called Crystal Beach. Today this entire area is taken up with a couple of boatsheds and a modern marina with dozens of boats neatly tied in their allotted pigeon holes along the full length of both its arms stretching well out into the bay. The pool was demolished some years ago and re-erected on a larger scale at the much more popular Forty Baskets Beach a short distance away. I didn't suffer any pangs of regret when the old pool disappeared as it was not one of my favourite swimming spots. It was in the shadow of the hill behind it for a large part of the day and so seemed to me to be rather cold and forbidding except on a really hot afternoon. The best part about Crystal Pool to my mind was that a swim there was usually the prelude to a day's picnic at either Forty Baskets Beach or better still at Reef Beach about half a mile closer to the point. This quiet little beach has recently received a lot of publicity because it has been "discovered" by the advance guard of enlightened people anxious to bathe in the nude. This has apparently caused quite a few cobweb-gathering pairs of binoculars belonging to residents on the Manly side of the bay to be dusted off and used to spy on the "offenders." In years to come nude bathing will probably be so commonplace that these people won't need to use binoculars to enjoy the spectacle, but by then the vicarious thrill of surreptitious spying won't have any meaning.

On rare occasions we even ventured in the Stevens' launch as far as the Roseville Bridge in Middle Harbour. The return trip took us all day and we were only allowed to go when some of the older children were with us as it meant the hazardous rounding of Dobroyd Point directly opposite the Heads where there was always a heavy swell running and the wide skirting of the bombora off this point where many small boats had been wrecked. We had to time our arrival in the upper reaches of Middle Harbour so that the tide was high or there was the danger that on returning to the boat after a swim in the Roseville Baths we would find it stuck securely in the muddy mangrove swamps.

On one memorable occasion we even took this tiny little craft with its temperamental engine right across the Heads and picnicked at Nielsen Park.

Looking back I can see that we were given a tremendous amount of freedom as children to "do our own thing" which is denied a host of children in today's more sophisticated highly organised urban society but which we never questioned as our natural right.

The humble little dinghy seemed like the poor sister of the launch but she blossomed and had her moment of glory on one night in the year when the Venetian Carnival was held at Manly, an annual event which caused great excitement in the area. There were the usual attractions common to carnivals - a ferris wheel, fairy floss, a Punch and Judy show held on the sand at the Ocean Beach, merry-go-rounds, a band concert at South Steyne in the area set aside for open air concerts, the band being seated on an ornate platform at one end and the audience seated in canvas deck chairs set out in neat rows under the pine trees. But the highlight of the Carnival was at night when dozens of gaily decorated boats of all shapes and sizes formed a slow moving procession in a huge circle around the quiet waters of the bay facing East Esplanade. Most of the boats had brightly coloured paper lanterns swinging from lines strung above them from bow to stern and their flickering lights were reflected in the mirror-like surface of the water, making a never-to-be-forgotten spectacle. A display of fireworks accompanied the procession and this added to the excitement of the night. A prize was given for the best decorated boat and although the dinghy never won a prize it provided us with days of fun preparing the finery for her one big night of the year. Only the older children were allowed to actually join the procession because after the glamour was over it meant a long row home in the dark so we younger ones had to be content with a grandstand view of the whole scene perched on the sea wall, a position we took up well before dark.

Why these carnivals were abandoned I'll never understand because they provided a unique tourist attraction and Manly's economy is largely based on tourism.



*Don and Dorothy, 1932*

There came a memorable Sunday in 1934 when Don and I became traitors to the little boats we were so familiar with and, together with our parents, hobnobbed for the day with the "hoi poloi" of Sydney society on a craft which can only be described as the ultimate in luxury afloat. The boat belonged to a wealthy business man who was at the very top of the newspaper world at the time. My father was acting as his solicitor in a divorce case in which he was cited as co-respondent. The case made headlines for a long period in the Sunday paper "Truth and Sportsman" which had a well deserved reputation for publishing unsavoury details of divorce cases and catering to a large section of the populace who revelled in such trash but I was too young to grasp the significance of all the behind-the-scene drama of high speed car chases by private detectives and desperate phone calls in the middle of the night. I was too young also to appreciate the enormous wealth of a man who could purchase the old pilot boat "Captain Cook", about half the size of a Manly ferry, have it completely remodelled internally as a superb ocean-going pleasure craft and employ a full-time staff of four to maintain it in immaculate condition. It caused quite a flutter of excitement this particular Sunday when it steamed slowly into North Harbour and a small dinghy in charge of a uniformed attendant was despatched to pick us up from the beach in front of "The Glen". We spent the day leisurely cruising around the harbour enjoying fine food and equally fine service but I really feel a lot of Grandma Kingsbury must have rubbed off onto me because I didn't enjoy myself nearly as much as I did on our barefoot days roughing it in the Stevens' launch with its protesting little engine.

It is safe to say my favourite swimming spot for many years was Fairlight Pool on "our" side of the bay only about half a mile from home. This was originally a privately owned one belonging to a family who occupied a magnificent stone home built right on the point overlooking the beach but when I was a child both the beach and pool had been opened to the public and we used it constantly during the summer months. The old home with its huge ballroom, its heavy stone balustrades and its numerous chimneys was a familiar sight standing in the centre of wide, beautifully manicured lawns surrounded by a paling fence.

Following the war when the fashion for home units caused a forest of these multi-storeyed giants to erupt all over the choice building lots in the district the old home was demolished and today a huge block of luxury units stands on the site.

Before moving on from Fairlight Pool there comes to mind a story from the war years concerning this spot which is worth recording if only to illustrate the peculiarly Australian sense of humour which at times can border on the macabre ...

At the height of the American invasion of Sydney in 1942 a young woman met an American soldier at the Quay one summer evening and they travelled by ferry to Manly, crossed the promenade and strolled by the harbour foreshore walk to the grassy slopes overlooking Fairlight Pool. Here, while engaged in "doin' what comes natcherally" the young man suffered a fatal heart attack at the height of passion. Terribly shaken by the experience the girl had enough presence of mind to hurry back to Manly and report his death to the police. A Coroner's inquest was held the following morning in the Court House next door to the Council Chambers where I was employed and by the time the Court convened there wasn't a man left in the Council - they were all next door enjoying the detailed evidence being given by the young woman. At the close of the inquest it was reported to me by the Overseer of Works that the magistrate had returned a finding of "Death Due to Natural Causes" but added the addendum that "he assumed the boy's parents would be notified that their son had died in action!"

All the local schools used to meet at the old Manly Baths on East Esplanade for an annual swimming carnival and a great day was enjoyed by all. There wasn't the feverish effort to lop split seconds off record times then and I'm sure that in today's earnest endeavours to train faster and faster swimmers a tremendous lot of the fun has been removed from the sport. A child wasn't expected to break records in a tidal pool where, in the wake of the incoming

and outgoing ferries nearby large waves added to the hazards of tide and weather, but what fun we had in the friendly rivalry between schools! I must admit to a feeling of sympathy for the children of Manly's future whose swimming carnivals will be held in a luxurious, modern, tiled, heated, enclosed Olympic Pool now being erected close to the District Park where they will be racing against the stop watch and not enjoying the thrill of reaching the barnacle covered board at the end of the Baths ahead of an arch rival from another school without any thought of how long it took to get there.

The glamour pool of the district without a doubt was the huge Manly Pool which was the largest shark-proof swimming enclosure in the Southern Hemisphere. It was built on the bay to the west of the wharf. Before this area was enclosed and made safe for swimming there was a small rock pool at its western extremity where the famous Marineland now stands which was reserved exclusively for the use of women and children. Apparently it was assumed that men were faster swimmers and could outdistance the sharks because they weren't even afforded the dubious protection of a rock wall - dubious, because at high tide any self-respecting shark could have swum quite easily into this enclosure. The rock pool is worthy of mention because of a sign erected on the beach which, although faded and battered, was still there when I was a youngster. It read:

"THIS POOL IS RESERVED FOR THE USE OF LADIES AND CHILDREN.  
GENTLEMEN PASS BY - BLACKGUARDS STAND AND STARE."

How close we still were then to the prudery of the Victorian era. The bay was enclosed by building a two level promenade stretching from the wharf to the rocky point at the other end of the bay, a distance of almost three hundred yards. Attached to this were hundreds of steel spikes driven into the sea bed at very close intervals supporting a steel shark-proof net. Dressing sheds and a restaurant were built at the western end and a huge sign painted on the wall of this building proclaimed that the length of the pool was 286 yards and the width approximately 75 yards. The upper tier of this promenade was asphalted and provided a short cut for thousands of ferry passengers via a flight of steps at the western end leading to the harbour foreshore walk and also to the roadway above. The lower wooden tier was reserved for swimmers. Attached to this level were steel ladders at intervals, two huge revolving wheels which provided a few novel ways of entering the water, and an enormous slippery dip. Moored in the centre of the pool at regular intervals were four or five round wooden floats, sort of

"halfway houses" on the 75 yard swim from promenade to beach and a huge square float containing a small slippery dip, a revolving wheel and a couple of diving boards.



*Manly Pool*

The promenade was officially opened on Christmas Day 1931. The foreshores and the promenade itself were packed with thousands of onlookers, the ferries were gaily decorated and the speedboats operating five minute thrill rides from a small jetty attached to the promenade did a booming business.

Two items from the programme of events held to celebrate the opening stand out clearly in my memory. The first was Boy Charlton's demonstration swim of twice the length of the pool. He was one of Manly's most popular swimmers and an Olympic gold medallist who was at the height of his popularity at this time. It was sad to read a small paragraph in the paper last year reporting his death in an old men's home. He died in obscurity and poverty, proving that the public has a short memory because he was the idol of the crowd on this particular day. The second event to make a big impression on me was a display by an escapologist. This man was bound securely with leather straps on hands and feet and a weighted belt around his waist and was then placed in a sack which was tightly bound with ropes. He was then hoisted with great difficulty to the top of the slippery dip ladder where the sack was released to slide the full length of the chute and disappear beneath the surface of the water with a loud splash. It seemed an eternity before he reappeared, having released himself not only from the sack but also from the leather restraints.

It was at this pool that my cousin Alan taught me to dive. He was an expert swimmer and diver and it was a favourite pastime to lie flat on the promenade and point out objects on the bottom of the pool which Alan would attempt to retrieve for us. Years later children used to dive for money thrown in by onlookers but there was no spare cash around in the 1930s and we had to be content with retrieving lost bangles, pieces of rubber bathing caps or shiny bottle tops.

In May 1974 Manly was lashed by the most violent storm in living memory. Huge waves pounded the usually quiet harbour foreshores and overnight reduced the promenade to splintered driftwood. The beach was piled high with rubble and all that was left standing of the promenade was a few posts and a short length of walkway lying at a crazy angle. These were eventually removed and the once proud pool was no more.

No story of swimming in Manly would be complete without reference to the surf and the famous pine trees planted in three rows the full length of the ocean beach. There was a tremendous public outcry when some of these trees were removed in 1942 to make room for gun emplacements to meet the threat of a Japanese invasion shortly after the outbreak of hostilities with that country. The day the first tree was cut down it was reported by Tokyo Rose in her smooth, silky, mocking voice on her daily radio programme from Japan, a frightening indication of the efficiency of the enemy's intelligence service in Australia. As I was at the time working as secretary to the Municipal Engineer I was responsible for writing the order for the cutting down of the trees earmarked for death and later for the typing of the wording used on the brass plaque which can still be seen on one of the stumps of these war casualties explaining to subsequent generations the reason behind its destruction.

Some years ago these famous pine trees began inexplicably to die. Every effort was made to discover the cause of their fatal illness and it was finally agreed that they were probably victims of man's advanced civilisation with its resultant smog and air pollution. Whatever the reason they continued to deteriorate despite unspared expense in an effort to save them and finally it was admitted that the battle was lost. A large number of dead trees were removed and today Manly presents a gap-toothed appearance viewed from the ocean. It still is, in spite of the loss of its famous pines, one of the most beautiful stretches of surfing beach in Australia.

## **Chapter 16**

### ***...of flying and its hazards***

Despite the enormous advances made in aviation during the Great War, flying was still a hazardous pursuit fifty years ago. It was rare to see a plane flying overhead and when one was heard approaching it was the signal for a general exodus from all the houses within earshot and an excited craning of necks to catch a glimpse of the cause of this seldom heard sound.

One day when I was only about five or six we were alarmed to hear a small bi-plane circling overhead with its engine coughing and spluttering - "That fellow's in trouble!" Dad shouted. "He's going to crash!"

We all raced in the direction we had seen the plane disappearing and came across it half a mile away, a total wreck with its battered nose wedged against the paling fence at the side of the large home overlooking Fairlight Pool and with the tail section slewed across the footpath. Goya Henry, the pilot, lost his leg in the accident. When he realised the plane was in trouble he tried to bring it down on the lawns surrounding the old home but was unable to gain enough height to clear the fence. We arrived on the scene only about ten minutes after the crash but there was already a large crowd of people there. I can still remember the stern reprimand Don was given by a policeman when he touched the propeller which was sticking out of the Ground at an odd angle a short distance away.

Not long after this a tiny plane with engine trouble startled golfers on the Manly Golf course by making a forced landing on one of the runways after circling for some time and waving the golfers away. Once again it didn't take long for an excited crowd to gather at the scene. Fortunately the pilot was unhurt but very shaken by his brush with death and the plane received only slight damage. The only casualty in the accident was a golfer who suffered a fatal heart attack as the plane came down.



*The Southern Cross*

Sir Charles Kingsford-Smith, "Smithy" to all Australians, was everyone's hero at that time. I was only three years of age when he circled the rim of Australia with Charles Ulm, and in the following year he made his famous Trans-Pacific flight from Oakland, California to Australia via Honolulu and the Fiji Islands, touching down in Brisbane where huge crowds gave him an ecstatic welcome. He and a crew of three had made the flight in a tiny Fokker monoplane named "Southern Cross" which is perhaps the best known plane in Australia's history. Today it rests in the Canberra Museum.

Two years after this triumph he made a round-the-world flight in the same famous plane, taking over two months to complete the journey.

In 1935 Smithy and Thomas Pethybridge disappeared when they were on their way to Singapore during a flight from England to Australia. They left London in November of that year and I can still recall vividly the tense days of searching when their plane, after leaving Allahabad, failed to arrive on schedule at Singapore. I think the whole of Australia joined in spirit in the extensive search which went on for days over the jungles of Burma where it was thought the plane had crashed, but no sign of the wreckage was sighted and eventually we heard the news on the radio that the search had been abandoned. Two years later part of the undercarriage was washed up on Aye Island to the west of Burma and it was assumed that the plane had probably crashed into the ocean. No further wreckage was ever discovered, so the precise nature of this famous pilot's death remains a mystery to this day.

A similar complete disappearance of plane and crew occurred two years later. This time it was the noted American woman pilot, Amelia Earhart, and her navigator Fred Noonan who disappeared while attempting a round-the-world flight in May 1937. They had already covered more than half the

distance in a twin-engined Lockheed Electra, having taken off from Florida, crossed the South Atlantic and flown across Europe and Southern Asia to Australia. They were on their way across the Pacific from Australia when they disappeared somewhere in the vicinity of Rowland Island well north of Samoa and in spite of a concentrated search over a wide area of the Pacific no trace of plane or crew was ever found.

Amelia Earhart was perhaps the most famous woman pilot of the times. She had already made successful solo Atlantic and Pacific crossings in fragile little planes that today look as if they'd barely make the distance between Sydney and Melbourne and there was tremendous public sympathy here in Australia when she disappeared.

Newspapers in both England and Australia gave wide coverage of an air race between the two countries in 1934 and I can recall the excitement of listening to progress reports on the radio news each day. A lot of starters fell by the wayside, most of them victims of engine trouble or fuel supply failures, and the race was eventually won by a British twosome, Scott and Black, who piloted a twin-engined de Havilland Comet racer especially built for the race. From memory the winners took about eight days to cover the distance. What a contrast to the modern supersonic jet which takes less than 24 hours to travel the same distance!

Learning to fly will always be fraught with hazards but when pilots are turned out in bulk as they were during the years of the Second World War the hazards were greatly multiplied.



*Tiger Moth*

Don joined the Royal Australian Air Force as a 19 year old in 1942 and was selected for training as a pilot. It was during one of his early training flights in company with his instructor that he experienced a hair raising incident. He and his instructor took off from the airstrip in a tiny Tiger Moth, a biplane widely used for basic training during the war years. They hadn't been long aloft when another plane flew in close and the pilot pointed agitatedly to the plane's undercarriage. Not being equipped with radio Don's instructor had no way of learning what the trouble was until he banked the plane so that he could see the shadow on the ground. Don was horrified to see that one of the plane's wheels had dropped off! It didn't do anything to help steady his nerves as they circled the airfield to see fire engines, crash wagons and ambulances lining up in readiness for their landing. The instructor did a brilliant piece of flying to bring the plane down on one wheel only but the inevitable happened and the plane somersaulted as it lost momentum. The two men were left hanging by their safety belts upside down with their heads about 6 feet above the ground. Don, being a stickler for correct behaviour at all times, nearly gave the Instructor an attack of apoplexy when he calmly asked: "What do we do now sir?"

The pilot's answer was short and to the point.

"Get the hell out of here son before she blows up!"

With Don's patient and painstaking temperament he was a "natural" to be made an instructor himself after he earned his wings, a fact which irked him greatly as he felt he was missing all the action but with action like this to face who could possibly yearn for the questionable excitement of enemy action?

Shortly after the war ended Don persuaded my husband Keith to join him for a joy ride in a Tiger Moth to introduce him to the thrill of flying. The thrill was short-lived, however, when Don turned on a display of aerobatics as they circled over Botany Bay, a display which convinced Keith that he was very glad he'd joined the Navy and not the Air Force. Not for him the frightening spectacle of looking at the blue waters of the bay under his head as he prayed the seat belt wouldn't snap and plummet him to certain death nor the sickening sensation of seeing the horizon suddenly lurch as the tiny plane went into a roll. Perhaps it was this initiation flight which causes him even today to steer clear of flying if possible at all times.

## **Chapter 17**

### ***...of transport***

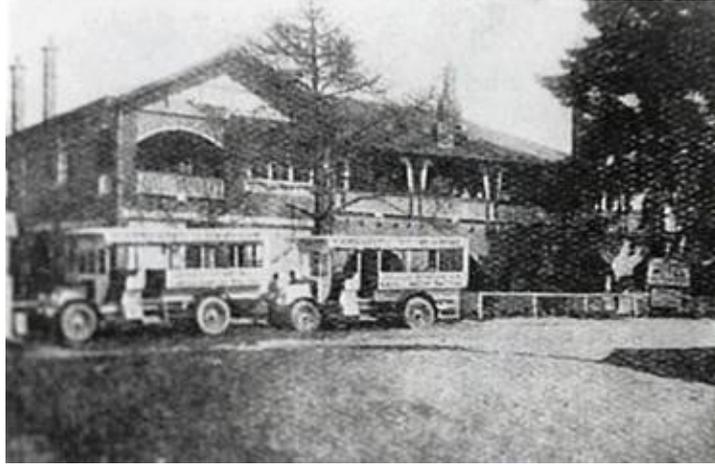
Fifty years ago cars were still something of a rarity for the average family which meant, of course, that public transport was well patronised and I feel that the old trams and buses of Manly deserve a chapter to themselves.

Strictly speaking, the buses in the district at the time should not be included under the title of "public" transport because they were all privately operated.

Running past "The Glen" to the fringe of the bush in Woodland Street Balgowlah where a dairy which supplied most of Manly's milk was located, was a little bus with seats built facing each other along the sides and across the back. We know all the drivers personally and our favourite was a plump, jolly, bald-headed man who gloried in the wonderful name of Mr. Horsey. It could have been spelt "Hawsey" - I never saw it written down - but to us children it was "Horsey" without a doubt. We used to delight in singing under our breath a popular song of the day:

"Horsey keep your tail up  
Keep the sun out of my eyes."

every time he happened to be our driver, much to Mum's consternation. I'm sure he was aware of this despite her anxious efforts to quieten us and I'm equally sure he enjoyed it tremendously. He was driving the bus the day I had my adenoids removed at the age of five. This traumatic event took place in a little private hospital in Manly in the early morning and at about lunch time, feeling very sore and sorry for myself, I was allowed to go home. There was no question of hiring a taxi - that was an unheard-of luxury - and so, still dressed in my pyjamas and brand new dressing gown and slippers, I was carried onto Mr. Horsey's little bus. He had to pull up quickly twice on the short drive home to allow me to make a hasty exit to be sick in the gutter and I can still remember his sympathetic kindness to a very miserable little girl.



*Northern Beaches buses, 1930*

It was a sad day indeed when the private bus company was swallowed up by the mammoth Government owned Department of Road Transport and Tramways and this sort of personal touch was replaced by whistle-blowing starters, impersonal conductors and drivers segregated from their passengers in little compartments with a sign over their heads reading:

"DO NOT SPEAK TO THE DRIVER WHILST BUS IS IN MOTION."

The private bus company was permitted to retain one bus route only on the Eastern hill and today this agreement is still in operation with a service running from the Manly Wharf to its terminus at the District Hospital on the crest of the hill. It is the last bastion of private enterprise in the transport field in the entire area with the exception of the taxis, even the ferries having been taken over by the Government in recent years and their familiar green and white markings replaced by blue paint so that they don't even look like the ferries of old.

The trams survived for a number of years until it was decided by the Government of the day to replace them with buses, resulting in reduced efficiency and a chaotic situation at the wharf in peak periods.

While they were still in service, though, the trams were definitely the most exciting way of getting around. The single carriages, coupled together in peak hours, comprised about four enclosed compartments fitted with sliding doors and four open compartments with a tiny driver's cabin on the very extremities of the carriage equipped with a control panel and an uncomfortable looking metal seat hinged on to the wall. They were powered by electricity fed through a retractable steel pole stretching from the roof to overhead electric power lines like a giant umbilical cord. A narrow wooden

running board which ran the full length of the carriage on either side was the conductor's perilous perch in all weathers. How he managed to hang on is still a source of wonder to me. He was provided with steel handles on the outside of the tram but of course he had to release his hold and wedge himself in the narrow doorway using his shoulder as support while he carried out the tricky operation of collecting fares and issuing tickets.

As children we naturally scorned the comfort of the enclosed compartments and made a bee line for the open ones. Admittedly it was a bit tricky trying to keep dry in wet weather. They were protected by brown canvas roll-down flaps and were quite cosy and dry until the conductor suddenly released the catch on the floor and with a clatter the blind shot to the roof exposing the passengers to the elements. But in fine weather what a thrill it was to sit high up on the skinny slatted wooden seats with the wind ruffling your hair and enjoy a wonderful uninterrupted view of the whole journey.

The route which was probably the one we travelled on most frequently ran from Manly Wharf to the old Spit Bridge. Because of the steepness of the hill to the west of Manly the tram had to dodge a direct ascent by the main road and criss-cross the hill in several wide sweeps. It started climbing just after it passed the Oval and laboured its way through a cutting in Ivanhoe Park where huge trees formed a shadowy arch overhead and where Dalley's Castle could be clearly seen towering like a mediaeval stone fortress clinging to the pinnacle of a huge rocky outcrop on the opposite side of the Park. Today all that remains of this landmark is the stone retaining wall with its carved gargoyles looking strangely out of place supporting many multi-storeyed blocks of home units.

It then crossed Sydney Road and made another wide semi-circular loop around a large block of flats before rejoining the main road opposite the Fire Station at the crest of the hill. From there it was an easy ride along Sydney Road until it turned off at Balgowlah just beyond the Boys High School and started the winding twisting descent to the bridge, a part of the trip which provided some spectacular views of Middle Harbour through the trees. There were not many homes built in this area at the time and I can remember on one occasion spending a day picnicking at Clontarf with the Brownies when I was about 6 or 7. We left the tram near the Masonic Temple which is still standing in Maretimo Street and from there walked through the bush to the beach at Clontarf, a distance of at least a couple of miles, with barely a home in evidence.

Today this beach is a bustle of activity during the summer months with a swimming pool, a couple of boat launching ramps, a busy kiosk and a large area set aside for parking, but then it was a secluded beauty spot tucked away in the bush on the foreshores of Middle Harbour and was just perfect for an isolated picnic. Few of the high-class homes which now dot the hillside overlooking the beach had then been built and there was nothing to disturb the peace and tranquillity except an occasional bird call and the distant clatter of the infrequent tram wending its way to the terminus at the northern end of the old Spit Bridge which could be seen from Clontarf only a half mile or so across the waters of Middle Harbour.

Many years earlier when the beach could only be reached by water it was a favourite venue for large organised groups of picnickers who travelled there by launch. One such group landed at Clontarf on the 12th March 1868 and before the day was ended Clontarf was to become notorious and feature in the headlines of the newspapers of the day.

The picnic had been organised as an entertainment for Queen Victoria's second son Prince Alfred, Duke of Edinburgh, a young man of 25 who was visiting Australia on a good-will tour. As the party set foot on the beach at Clontarf two shots were fired at the prince by a crazed Irishman named Henry James O'Farrell and the Prince fell wounded, fortunately not seriously. The would-be assassin was promptly arrested and brought to trial and the following month he paid for his crime by being executed at Darlinghurst Gaol. A pine tree bearing a plaque giving details of the attempted assassination was planted on the spot where the shooting took place and this, together with a nearby street named Duke of Edinburgh Parade, serves as a reminder to present day picnickers of this little touch of anarchy in Australia.

It was in one of the wealthy homes above the beach that Stephen Bradley, the convicted kidnapper/murderer of Graham Thorne lived in 1960 and where he first brought the small boy in the boot of his car after abducting him at Bondi. We, as a family, became involved on the fringes of this sad case. At the time we were living at Bantry Bay only a stone's throw from the spot where Graham's school case and books were found in the bush, having been thrown there by his killer as he sped along the Wakehurst Parkway at the rear of our home. The police set up a mobile centre in a tent near the water tank at the end of our street and it became a common sight to see police combing through the bush and helicopters landing on a cleared area just a few hundred yards away.

It was impossible with all this activity so close at hand not to feel involved in what was going on but we were totally unprepared for the shock we received shortly after the full scale search of the nearby bush commenced. One of the evening papers carried the headline "FOOTPRINTS IN CAVE" and a story about the finding of a toy car near a child's footprints in a cave not far from our house. Our son Kevin, 9 at the time, remarked at breakfast the following morning after the story that the footprints belonged to him and the toy car to his playmate, John, who lived next door. The two boys spent many hours playing in the bush and this was their favourite cubby-house where Kevin fully intended to live a hermit-like, rent-free existence when he grew up. Now he was hastily despatched to the police tent where his prints were matched with a plaster cast taken of the impressions found in the cave with the result that what the police had hoped was a promising lead came to an abrupt halt and the toy car was duly returned to the two boys. It wasn't until almost six weeks later that the discovery of Graham's body about two miles from our home led finally to Stephen Bradley's conviction and imprisonment. The resultant wave of publicity as the case gradually unfolded and Bradley's address became public knowledge was something the area of Clontarf could well have done without.

But this is digressing from the story of the Spit tram route as I remember it almost 45 years ago.

Then we travelled this familiar journey on dozens of occasions on our frequent visits to Grandma Kingsbury and Aunty Vera who lived in Mosman not far from Spit Junction. The journey over to Mosman after school was great fun but the return trip late at night was a different story. Don and I would be wakened from a deep sleep in Grandma's big comfortable bed and, still half asleep, we'd walk the short distance to Spit Junction and board a tram which terminated at the southern end of the bridge opposite a boatshed with a sloping iron roof on which was painted in huge letters the name of the owner - C. LYONS - surely an appropriate name for a marine establishment! Then followed the walk across the bridge on the covered wooden footpath beside the roadway and the ever present fear that the huge concrete blocks used as counterbalances for the opening central section of roadway might come tumbling down and crush us all to death, a fear so real that no matter how tired I was I always managed to hurry this short distance until the overhead menace was safely passed. Then the descent down the wide shallow wooden steps brought us to the tram terminus on the northern side. I wonder if the trams were supposed to meet each other? If they were it seldom happened that the Manly tram was waiting for us, I can remember clearly sitting shivering in the waiting shed many a night listening for the

welcome sound of the approaching tram. It was inevitable that we'd fall asleep again on the next stage of the journey and the last half mile or so which had to be walked after leaving the tram was usually a question of practically sleepwalking or of looking so forlorn that Dad took pity on me and ended up giving me a "piggy-back" ride home.

Not quite as frequent but still on a regular basis were our trips by tram to Dee Why to visit Nana Ferguson and Aunty Rosie in their little cottage "Rosemary" which I've already mentioned in earlier chapters.

Very few of the old landmarks remain from that period and travelling along the same route by car or bus today it is almost impossible to recall what a leisurely countrified journey it was in the thirties because the pace of the traffic flow has speeded up so alarmingly.

Once the tram crossed the bridge over the Queenscliff Lagoon suburbia was left behind. There were homes in plenty bordering the main road - mostly little- weatherboard cottages with water tanks and minute outhouses in the back yards - but beyond this fringe were market gardens, acres of glass hot houses growing tomatoes in abundance, dairy farms and even piggeries, one of which occupied the land where Manly Girls High School now stands.

Our favourite tram stop was at the spot where the buses of today disgorge hundreds of shoppers hourly at Warringah Mall, a huge suburban shopping complex in Brookvale. The land on which this shopper's paradise is built was then a dairy farm belonging to a family who lived in an old stone homestead set amongst the trees close to the roadway. Some of the trees are still standing today but the homestead is only a memory. Gone too are the graceful wrought-iron gates and the stone pillars which formed the entrance to this lovely property. Gone are the pet kangaroos and emus who used to peer at us through the gates as the tram stopped. Gone are the cattle who grazed so peacefully on the gently sloping paddocks beside the creek which ran through the property, a creek which now never sees the light of day having been forced into subterranean darkness through enormous concrete pipes. Gone is the country smell of fresh cow dung, replaced by the city smell of petrol, oil and exhaust fumes. Gone is the leisurely meandering pace of the journey where the tram driver even used to wait while we jumped off and fed carefully hoarded broken biscuits to the kangaroos through the gate, replaced by the frenzied heart-stopping pace of the traffic past this spot at almost any hour of the day or night.

Dee Why itself still slumbered in pre-suburban peace and quiet. One afternoon Don and I decided to count the number of cars driving on Pittwater Road past "Rosemary" in the space of an hour and we reached the grand total of 28! This number would be closer to one minute's tally today.

On a vacant block of land next door which she also owned and where a large furniture store now stands, Nana kept a pet goat answering to the name of Daisy who was mated once a year with a billy-goat belonging to the Salvation Army whose land bordered on her property - surely an eminently suitable match remembering Nana's close affiliation with the Salvation Army in her youth. The home which was run by the Army as an Eventide Home for Aged Men is still standing at the top of the hill but the acres of land where Daisy enjoyed her brief annual honeymoon are now used as an immense free car parking area with a sizeable slab taken out for the Dee Why Public Library and the modernistic new Council Chambers.

Daisy gave birth to twin kids when I was about 14 and they were named Donald and Desmond after my brother and his best friend at the time, Desmond Bennett. After they were weaned Daisy was milked every afternoon on the tiny back porch, a procedure she enjoyed so much that she never needed a leg rope or headstall and was always waiting there with an expectant look on her face and a welcoming "maaaaa" when Auntie arrived, milking bucket in hand. Much as I loved Daisy I could never bring myself to drink a tumbler of her milk because I had firsthand knowledge of the type of diet she indulged in to produce this milk. She provided me with my first introduction to the amazing gastronomic capabilities of the goat species. She not only kept the land free of rubbish and weeds and the grass neatly mown but on one occasion cheerfully chewed up a pair of woollen socks I'd carelessly removed in order to run barefoot in her paddock and she was starting on the shoes when I made the awful discovery! There was a glorious bougainvillea creeper growing to a height of about fifteen feet on the dividing fence and this was a riot of purple blossom in the summer months but, although this vine was covered with thorns as sharp as a porcupine's quill, there wasn't a single flower or thorn left below the limit of Daisy's outstretched neck.

Once a year during my teenage years a party of about fifty young people from the Baptist Church at Manly which I shall talk about later ventured past Dee Why to Narrabeen where the tram terminated at the boat sheds on Narrabeen Lakes just south of the bridge. Here we would hire 8 or 9 rowboats and spend a day picnicking in the quiet backwaters of Deep Creek or Middle Creek. The spot which we usually reached with much effort on

the rowers' part now houses a busy water skiing clubhouse and at almost any time of the day speedboats towing water skiers can be seen racing over the same stretches of water where we moved at tortoise pace so long ago.



*Narrabeen Tram Terminus*

Branching off from the main Pittwater Road line at a point just past the Queenscliff Bridge another tramline led through a tree lined cutting to Harbord Beach and, although we rarely travelled on it, the memories it evokes of the wonderful celebrations held each year to commemorate Empire Day on 24th May are worthy of mention as those celebrations are now extinct.

Because of the large flat open spaces available in the area Harbord, Curl Curl and Brookvale were favourite locations for dozens of bonfires on Empire Night and we were lucky to know a family at Curl Curl who owned a small property with tomatoes under cultivation in a number of glasshouses who invited us to join them each year. For months beforehand Don and I would buy packets of firecrackers from our meagre pocket money and hoard them in cardboard boxes under our beds. It's a wonder any of them still worked after the amount of handling they received while waiting for the day to arrive.

The British Empire was still a vibrant, meaningful, strong Commonwealth of Nations then and Australians, almost to the last man, woman and child, were intensely loyal to the concept of the monarchy and the Empire. After a morning of speeches held in all the schools we children were released to spend the afternoon in glorious legalized freedom collecting firewood and building bonfires which often reached as high as 30 feet or more. What a

sight it was when these were lit as soon as darkness fell and the night erupted in a medley of sounds of crackling flames, swishing rockets, deafening bangs and ooohs!" and "ahs!" mingled with the mournful sound of wailing dogs and the half frightened cries of small children experiencing their first cracker night.

A story comes to mind of Empire Day when I was in First Year at High School. There was a combined service for all the schools in the district held in the old Embassy Theatre, now renamed the Odeon, opposite the wharf. The principal speaker in a long list of boring speakers which we were forced to endure was the local Member of Parliament, a Mr. A.A.E.E.V. Reid, affectionately known in the community as "Alphabetical Reid." for obvious reasons, a largely self-educated and self-made man. He won the hearts of all the children in the packed theatre when, in the course of his speech, he advocated the abolition of homework. The cheering and applause were deafening.

"I never done no 'omework kids" he declared, "and look where I am today!"

The sentence became a byword in our house after that memorable day if Don or I ever wanted an excuse to wriggle out of a particularly distasteful homework assignment, but somehow it never carried much weight with Dad or Mum.

The last tram to run in the district left the Manly Wharf for Brookvale Depot at 1.27 a.m. on Sunday 1st October 1939 just one month after the outbreak of World War II. Despite the early hour it was packed with passengers determined to farewell the trams in a worthy manner. A mock funeral was held through the streets of Manly complete with undertaker, pall bearers and muffled drums. The tram was draped in black crepe and a long queue of mourning cars followed in slow procession. The tram was formally laid to rest at the Depot while the large crowd sang Auld Lang Syne and then a "wake" was held at a nearby hall where the "mourners" drowned their sorrows until dawn - a fitting tribute to the old trams which saw such long and faithful service in the district.

## **Chapter 18**

### **...of education**

The Title of the Drama: "My First Day at School".

The Place: Manly West Public School.

The Date: Late January 1930.

The Principal Actors in the Play:

1. Miss Robinson, a kindly woman of indeterminate age with soft brown eyes and thick dark brown hair plaited and arranged in a coil on the nape of her neck. A soft well-modulated voice, beautifully manicured hands and impeccable clothes complete the picture of this woman who was headmistress of the school.
2. An outwardly calm, self-assured mother of 46, who looked so much older than the score or so of other women in their twenties hovering over their chicks like anxious mother hens.
3. An earnest brother of 7 keen to protect his little sister from the inevitable knocks of the first day at school and very importantly seeing himself as one of the "big" boys now that he was responsible for keeping an eye on this "will-o'-the wisp" who happened to be his sister.
4. A very nervous, scared 5 year old girl - the thinnest, shortest, tiniest morsel of humanity in the entire kindergarten class - who burst into tears as the realisation dawned that she was about to be sucked into the maelstrom of school life with its bewildering new noises, new smells, new sights and new disciplines, and that she would be without the comforting presence of her mother to help her through the ordeal.

This particular drama only had a short run of one day but the underlying theme of the play - education - continued with variations for the next nine years while I was processed through the system's well-oiled machinery until at the tender age of 14 I was spewed out at the other end of the assembly line, an Intermediate Certificate clutched in my eager hands, and was considered educated and ready to take my place in the ranks of those capable of earning a living in the community.

Those nine years were, in retrospect, some of the happiest of my life. I was a keen student, absorbing information fed to me like parched soil soaks up the drought-breaking rain and, largely because of the atmosphere of learning

cultivated at home, I crammed as much knowledge into my head during those nine years as it would normally take five years longer to acquire.

But the first year in the kindergarten class brings to mind some experiences which were far from happy as I strived to adjust to this unfamiliar way of life.

There was the time I considered myself unjustly punished by the harassed teacher who would have needed eyes in the back of her head and the wisdom of Solomon to make the right decisions all the time. I was standing innocently in line at the front of the class waiting for the teacher to mark my first efforts at paper folding when a boy standing behind punched me hard in the back. The initial punch was missed by the teacher who happened to look in our direction just as I turned around and landed a very satisfying retaliatory blow in his soft abdomen, only to be singled out as the guilty party and sent to stand behind the piano in disgrace. There was a very narrow space between the piano and the wall where the raffia floor mats were rolled up and stored when not in use, and it was into this narrow prison that I was banished. Being so small my head was below the top of the piano even when I was standing on the rolled up mats and so I was invisible to the class. I'm convinced to this day that the teacher completely forgot that I was there.

Much later the class were playing games which required a musical accompaniment and I'll never forget the sheer terror I felt when the piano was played and the ear-shattering noise reverberated frighteningly in this confined space. There was no way to escape the fearful sound. I was too timid to venture out until permission was granted and I was reduced to terrified sobbing before I was ultimately rescued. The particular boy who caused this never-to-be-forgotten incident was not destined to become one of my favourite classmates!

And there was the time when, after painstakingly copying an entire page of O's from the blackboard into my writing book I was rewarded with a painful rap over the knuckles from the teacher because I had failed to put a small horizontal line on the top of each 0 indicating that they were "long" O's as in "both".

Counteracting the bad experiences there was the thrill of achievement when I discovered I was the only one in the class who could read - a skill which was taught and encouraged by my father a few months before commencing school and which came as second nature to me - and was asked to read a

little book called "Three Bad Pups" in front of the class. Almost bursting with pride I can recall being astounded that others found it difficult to master this "fun" subject.

On the non-academic side I can remember the excitement of receiving little gifts from some of the boys in the class which they passed surreptitiously under the desks during school hours. These were usually shiny rings and gaudy trinkets obtained from chewing gum wrappers and were highly prized by the boys as tokens of their feelings for a particular girl in the class. How humiliating it would have been to never receive one of these gifts - almost as humiliating as being left sitting like a shag on a rock beside a crowded dance floor in later years when to be a wallflower at a dance was the worst fate that could befall a girl. How early in life the need for acceptance by our contemporaries makes its presence felt!

It happened that for some reason which has been lost in the mists of time I was promoted half way through 2nd Class so that 2nd and 3rd Classes were completed in one year. This resulted in me finding myself one of the youngest in every class, so that by the time I was ready for High School I had only just turned 11 and this posed a problem which was to result in the one and only argument I was ever to witness between my parents. I was one of only two girls in the school to obtain a pass which entitled me to attend William Street Girls High School near Kings Cross in the city. In those days girl's high schools were few and far between, there being not one full high school anywhere on the peninsular between Manly and Palm Beach, and they were therefore very selective in their choice of pupils. The most highly sought after school available to girls from the North Side of the harbour was Fort Street at the southern end of the Harbour Bridge which was considered academically superior to all others, with William Street a close second choice, and the competition to be selected for either of these schools was intense. Imagine my excitement on gaining a place and equally imagine my intense disappointment when, because of Mum's insistence that I was far too young and immature to travel such a distance to school, It was finally decided that it would be far better for me to be educated at the local Home Science School. Here I would receive a good solid grounding in what were considered subjects suitable for a girl such as cookery, dressmaking, business principles, shorthand and typing, while still keeping up with academic subjects like English, arithmetic, physiology and history. Dad was keen for me to study Law, a calling which had as little appeal to me at the time as a fur coat would have to a Bedouin in the Sahara. After much heated discussion in which I was just a pawn without any say in the moves being planned, Mum won the argument. I was enrolled at Manly Home

Science School which only catered for secondary schooling to Intermediate Certificate level at the end of Third Year. At the time it was the only girl's secondary school serving a vast area, which today has at least five high schools offering teaching to 6th Year level for both girls and boys in a wide variety of subjects.



*Dorothy (left) 1938*

The years spent at this school passed happily except for one incident which occurred during a cookery lesson a few weeks after the second term began. Cookery was a compulsory subject for all first year students and it was one subject I can honestly say I dreaded. It occupied the entire Monday morning timetable, the class being dressed in white uniforms and being subjected to a rigorous inspection of hands and fingernails preceding the lesson to ensure that none of the playground grime ended up in the food we were preparing. After a lecture and demonstration we were divided into groups of four girls to each table where we endeavoured to try and turn out something reasonably resembling the demonstrated dish. The fact that we were expected to eat the often revolting looking results spurred us on to greater efforts.

It was constantly drilled into us that nothing was to be touched by hand. All ingredients obtained from a central pool at one end of the huge room had to

be carried on plates. There came the day when we were preparing apples for baking and discovered we were missing four tiny whole cloves needed as part of the ingredients for stuffing the scooped out cores. Being the smallest and most inoffensive of the quartet I was delegated the task of returning to the ingredients cupboard and securing the missing cloves under the gimlet eyes of the foul-tempered cookery mistress. All went well until I looked for a saucer on which to carry them back to the table, only to discover that the one remaining item left in the cupboard was a very large enamel dinner plate. Quite relieved at finding something on which to place the cloves I set off happily clutching the massive plate with its minute burden. My action was apparently interpreted by the teacher as a bold and cheeky gesture and, as I continued on my way quite unaware of her mounting temper at my back, I was suddenly sent sprawling with a well-aimed blow on the back of the head by a cauliflower hurled across the room by this obnoxious woman. This was the culminating incident which resulted in her removal from the school because of repeated similar displays of temper, but even her dismissal in disgrace was small compensation for my hurt pride, to say nothing of the hurt of the bump on my head.

It was in 2nd Year that I was first introduced to shorthand and became fascinated with the subject and, because of this enthusiasm, it seemed natural to follow a secretarial career on leaving school rather than the alternative usual occupations open to girls in those days of shop work, nursing or teaching.

Girls who went on to University in those pre-war years were such a minority they were hardly noticed. Only one girl from the entire year I was in went on the University and gained her B.A. This entailed her travelling to either Willoughby or Burwood - both schools being an immense distance from Manly - for the last two years of high schooling before matriculating and entering University.

Educational facilities and opportunities were most definitely weighted in favour of the boys in the community - girls were just not expected to need or desire a professional career and it was a very few who bucked the system. I must admit to being very envious of young women today who have the gates to any profession they choose flung wide open to them and "Big Daddy" in Canberra willing to spend thousands of dollars in the form of scholarships to help them achieve their goal.

I would have given anything to have had the opportunity to study medicine, the one really great desire of my life. But it was not to be. Cost of

University training was prohibitive for the majority of families and what money could be spared for such a reason was generally reserved for a son's education because of his much more easily recognised responsibilities in a future marriage situation.

So much has altered in the field of education in the past 40 years, particularly in the realm of female opportunity, that it is difficult to reconstruct the atmosphere of those times when only limited careers were open to the average girl on leaving school and tertiary education for girls was so rare as to excite comment when it did occur.

## **Chapter 19**

### ***...of shops and shopping.***

With a sixpence (today's equivalent of 5 cents) securely tied in the corner of a clean handkerchief Don and I would set off for school on Monday mornings, the only day we were permitted the luxury of buying our lunch. Mine was always spent in exactly the same way - a meat pie for fourpence, a cream bun for a penny and four rainbow balls for the remaining penny.

Not many schools had yet reached the sophistication of maintaining a canteen within the school itself and the "tuck" shop was a popular institution. These were mostly small general stores in the vicinity of the schools and they relied largely on the school trade to make a living.

Is it my imagination or is it a fact that the rainbow balls then were much larger than they are today? Perhaps it was only because my mouth was smaller - which reminds me of a frightening incident which has nothing whatever to do with shops or shopping but, as I don't intend to devote a chapter to the size of mouths, the story had better be told here...

At "The Glen" a quarter-size billiard table completely dominated the lounge room and provided many hours of fun over the years. On this particular occasion our cousin Alan was holidaying with us and, together with about half a dozen of the neighbourhood children, we were spending a wet afternoon playing billiards when someone dared Alan to put one of the balls in his mouth. Why did it always seem to be Alan who was the subject of a dare? This one was a "natural" because Alan was the possessor of one of the largest mouths I've ever seen. He took up the challenge and managed to get the ball into his mouth without any difficulty but, once behind his teeth, he found it impossible to remove it again. At first there was much hilarity as we thought he was just clowning around with his usual good humour but then we suddenly realised he was in trouble. He could barely breathe and was in great distress when, to our intense relief, a hastily summoned adult finally managed to dislodge the ball by almost dislocating Alan's jaw. It was a very subdued group who sheepishly replaced the cover on the table, rolled up the coir matting strips and stored the balls and cues away. Somehow the fun had gone out of the game.

On Saturday mornings it was a regular chore for Don and me to be entrusted with some of the weekend shopping at the little corner grocery store and butcher's shop about half a mile away and we always took with us the same

amount of money - six shillings. Today it would be 60c. For this amount we bought a leg of hogget weighing about 4 lbs. which cost 4/6, 7 pounds. of potatoes costing 6d. and 1 rabbit, the price of which rose over the years from 6d. to 11d. This rabbit was a bone of contention between Dad and Mum. It was bought especially for our huge desexed tom cat, Bibby, so called because he had a small white bib on his chest, the only relief from his glossy all black colouring. This haughty, fastidious animal refused to eat anything except his carefully prepared, well-cooked rabbit and I'm sure it used to make Dad almost choke to see Bibby devouring meat which cost almost a quarter of the price of the leg of hogget bought for the whole family. Bibby, no doubt due to his more than adequate diet, lived to a ripe old age and was still enjoying his gourmet meals for years after I was married.

The price rise in the cost of the weekly rabbit for Bibby was a sad blow for Don and me because we were allowed to spend the change we received from the 6/- in any way we wished and this meant that we had to absorb the increase and buy fewer sweets than before. It also meant a far greater deliberation on the best way of allocating the precious penny.

Would we buy cobbers, those delicious chocolate-coated caramels, or musk sticks, or the inevitable rainbow balls or possibly some pink and white striped humbugs, large peppermint-tasting boiled sweets which, with careful sucking, lasted the best part of an afternoon! All these delectable "goodies" were stored in tall glass jars ranged in a row on the grocer's counter and when we'd finally make our decision and point to one jar the sweets would be carefully extracted with a metal scoop and placed just as carefully in a tiny white paper bag.

We'd also leave the weekly grocery order which would be delivered later in the day. The supermarket, plastic wrapping and pre-packaging were still things of the future so most of the grocery lines were bought in bulk and it was a delight to watch the white-aproned grocer at work. Sugar, plain flour, rice, barley, tapioca and all manner of items arrived at the retailer's store in huge sacks and had to be weighed out into brown paper bags with 1lb. or 2lbs. stamped in blue on the sides and these were then deftly rolled at the top to prevent spilling - there was no cello tape then!

Tea and self-raising flour were two items that were pre-packaged. I remember the drawer full of Bushell's tea and Sydney Self Raising flour packet tops which Mum cut off and saved with meticulous care before redeeming them every few years for free gifts at showrooms especially catering for this in the city. The idea of redeemable coupons as an

advertising gimmick spread to some of the smaller stores and Flacks, a grocery shop on the Corso at Manly gave a green coupon for every ten shillings spent in the store. After collecting these coupons religiously for years Mum exchanged them for a set of sweet dishes comprising one large and six small cream coloured dishes with a floral pattern, known forever after in our family as the "Flack's set." The discovery was made after we'd been using the set for some time that there was one small dish where the design had been printed back to front and it became a household rule that the person who was lucky enough to receive this particular dish when sweets were served was entitled to a second helping. So there would be no cheating Mum always had to announce the pre-determined order in which she intended to serve the sweets! This system was strictly adhered to even if visitors were invited for dinner, much to their puzzlement.

Butter was delivered to the retailer in big square wooden boxes holding 56lbs. and the butter was scooped out with a flat wooden spatula and skilfully patted into shape on a little square of greaseproof paper placed on the scales in readiness. I used to marvel at the skill shown by the grocer in being able to judge to within an ounce the quantity of butter he'd remove with each dip of the spatula. These butter boxes were much in demand by the housewives when they were emptied. They were used in a variety of ways. Padded, covered with a tapestry material and studded with brass upholstery tacks, they made perfect footstools or low fireside seats for children. Carefully covered with scraps of wallpaper and with the inside padded and lined with taffeta or silk they were used as workboxes by hundreds of women who stored their current knitting, sewing or darning in them. I've seen them converted into shoe cleaning boxes, baby napkin storer and even, with the addition of a rope handle, a picnic hamper.

We were lucky enough to possess two but they were put to much more humble uses. One was painted a dull brown and stood by the side of the open fireplace filled with small pieces of wood for the fire. It was one of Don's Saturday morning chores to clean out the grate with the brass-handled cleaning set which stood at one end of the hearth, reset the fire ready for the night and restock the butter box with small kindling from the woodpile outside the bedroom window.



*Butter Box*

The second butter box, painted white and lined with newspaper on the bottom, had an even humbler use. It stood underneath one of the verandah beds and was the repository for the chamber pots used at night and discreetly hidden from view during the day. As I write this I am reminded of a humorous incident which occurred on the first occasion my husband Keith visited our home as a nervous, anxious-to-please 18 year old friend of my brother. He was interested in music and had purchased a second-hand turntable from an old gramophone at Paddy's Markets and, at great expense, had procured an electric pick-up head which he assured us he could attach somehow to a spot on our radio and the record he placed on the turntable would miraculously be heard through the radio speakers! This marvel was keenly awaited by us all. The only snag was that he needed somewhere he could rest the turntable so that the mechanism could hang in space below.

"A butter box would be ideal Mrs. Ferguson. Do you happen to have one?"

Before Mum could shake her head I had grabbed him excitedly by the hand and dragged him out to the verandah where I triumphantly produced the white butter box, removed its contents before his startled gaze and, to Mum's acute embarrassment, carted it into the carpeted lounge room where it performed perfectly. I received a lecture later from Mum about my unladylike behaviour and about the virtue of being reticent on such subjects as chamber pots which were never acknowledged to exist in polite company but which everyone used nevertheless. Keith and I often have a chuckle about his initial introduction to this unladylike girl who was to become his wife.

With the introduction of sewerage more and more people were spared the cold walk to the outside toilet and chamber pots gradually ceased to play a

vital role in everyday life. Their departure from the domestic scene coincided roughly with the introduction of packaged butter and the disappearance of the all purpose butter box.

The grocer displayed the same skill in estimating the weight of cheese he'd cut in wedges from the large round cheeses looking like edible cannon balls which were delivered to his store. These were placed on a scrubbed wooden board to which was attached a length of thin wire with a small wooden handle which sliced cleanly through the cheese in one deft downward stroke. The smell was so much more tantalising than the odourless, sterile, pre-packaged cheese found in the refrigerated dairy bar of today's supermarkets.

And the biscuits! I can never forget the thrill of anticipation as the grocer opened a new tin by cutting through the paper sealing the lid and the biscuits were revealed neatly packed row upon row with white corrugated paper dividers protecting them from breakage. There was no question of having to buy a full half pound of one particular variety -you were free to choose a few from each tin exactly as you fancied. The broken biscuits were never thrown away. Many a family in the depression years were grateful for these and the animals at the zoo never went hungry - large bags of broken biscuits were sold at the zoo entrance for 3d.



*The Corso, Manly. 1937.*

My favourite grocery store when I was a child was definitely McIlrath's on the Corso. It was a long narrow shop with two wooden counters stretching the full length of the shop on either side and with a floor of tiny blue and white tiles on which stood at intervals wooden chairs for the customers to use. Centralised at the far end of the floor space was the cash register in a

small enclosed box raised on a high platform where the cashier sat like a queen on her royal throne. A hundred times a day the assistants would slide the full length of the counter going to and from the cashier's box, their handwritten dockets clutched in hand together with the customer's money and change. Their constant slidings had polished the wooden floor behind the counters as effectively as if they were waxed daily. It was quite spectacular to watch these men at work and I often wondered how much shoe leather they wore out in the course of a year on the job. The entire back wall behind the cashier's box was stacked floor to ceiling with hundreds of biscuit tins on one half with wines and spirits neatly stored in racks filling the remainder.

Next door to McIlraths shop was a bakery and the tantalising smells that drifted in to the shop from this bakery were designed to make one's mouth water. Today the old flour mill from that bakery is still in existence and has been utilised as the focal point of the decor of an upstairs restaurant/theatre named "The Music Loft" which produces excellent variety shows as an accompaniment to dinner, eaten by elegantly attired patrons in air-conditioned comfort - a far cry from the sweating white-coated men tending the bakehouse ovens who were the original occupants of the loft. But the shop beneath where the delicious products of the bakery were sold has been replaced by an arcade featuring modern little boutiques and gift shops.

A huge variety of buns and bread was carried in the baker's cart for home delivery each day. This cart was square with large spoked wooden wheels and doors at the back which opened wide to allow the baker to reach into the sweet smelling interior with a long-handled type of wooden shovel and spill into his canvas covered wicker basket a wide sample of buns and loaves with crisp crusts which he then hawked from door to door while his horse patiently waited in the street, often with a feed bag tied to his head.

Most of the houses in our street were built well below street level and it was possible for tradesmen to serve at least six houses in a row without climbing back up to the street by using gates in the dividing fences. This meant that the baker would disappear from the horse's sight in one gate and reappear some ten minutes later well down the street. That horse, I am convinced, had an inbuilt timing mechanism because he used to time his arrival at the far gate with absolute perfection every time. He knew the route as well as the baker himself and never needed verbal instructions to tell him when to go or where to stop.



*Milko...*

There were no milk bottles to rattle or to wash out and return in those days. The milkman carried huge vats of milk in bulk in his horse-drawn cart and he called twice a day. Refrigeration was unknown and only the lucky few possessed even an ice chest so, particularly in the hot weather, it was essential to buy only enough milk for immediate needs. The first delivery was in the early hours of the morning and would be made right to the back door where a billy and a note was left the night before. Our billy hung from a hook on the window ledge to fool the neighbourhood cats but in the afternoon as soon as the familiar call "Milk-o" was heard customers lined up in the street with an assortment of jugs, billies and saucepans to have them filled from one of the taps on the back of the cart. True to her careful nature Mum had an aluminium measuring jug for our afternoon milk so we could be sure of getting just the right amount. Not for her the calculated guesswork of the milkman.

The tradesmen's horses provided us children with quite a nice little boost to our pocket money. There wasn't a child in the street who didn't collect buckets of manure which were sold to keen gardeners at a penny a bucket. There were unspoken, unwritten but nevertheless clearly understood areas allotted to each group of children and to cross these boundaries and penetrate another's territory, bucket and broom in hand, was considered distinctly unethical behaviour. It wasn't considered unethical, however, to try and delay the horse as long as possible in your own territory or to feed him lumps of sugar in the hope that what went in one end would be expelled the other end in a more lucrative form - a sort of quick return for your investment!

The butter, egg and ice man had a motor van for his deliveries and so his arrival did not create nearly as much interest in the neighbourhood children. Twice a week he would run down the 30 odd stone steps from the street, a

large heavy block of ice clamped in a steel, spiked, scissor-like carrier to install it in our wooden ice chest, the most valued item of furniture in the kitchen. Prior to buying the ice chest we relied on a domed asbestos butter cooler to keep the butter firm. This was a hollow circular shape about the size of a soccer ball which was cut in half horizontally and held one pound of butter. Even in the hottest weather it was very effective when it was stood in a basin of shallow water with a covering of gauze or cheesecloth draped over it with the ends resting in the water. But the ice chest was a tremendous improvement because it meant that all manner of perishables could be purchased in large quantities and stored for days, a luxury previously only dreamed about. This man also provided us with fresh farm eggs from the poultry farms at Oxford Falls and butter which he had weighed and wrapped in greaseproof packets before leaving on his run.

Every Friday the fish man would appear at the back door carrying a heavy basket of fish lying on crushed ice and with the basket decorated with fresh bracken fern. He could be heard when he was still a long way off calling "Fish-o" in a loud sing-song voice but Mum very seldom bought anything from him. I think she relied for fish on the free ones we'd occasionally be given by the local fishermen when we helped them with their haul.

Monday seemed to be the popularly accepted washing day, a job which used to take mothers of large families practically the whole day. Mrs. Stevens next door used to be up at 5.30 a.m. to light the fuel copper before breakfast and then it was a matter of continually boiling, lifting heavy steaming loads with the copper stick into the concrete tubs and rinsing by hand before hanging out line after line of clothes in a continually rotating process which didn't finish before the afternoon. It was a mammoth task even in our small family and it was a day I dreaded during school holidays when we were expected to help.

Rotary clothes lines were still to be invented and clothes lines were lengths of wire stretched between wooden poles or trees and supported in the centre by wooden props, These were long saplings cut from the bush with a forked end which fitted underneath the wire and which lifted the clothes high above the ground. Of course they often broke with the strain and the clothes-prop man used to make his rounds every Monday hoping for sales. He'd stagger down the roadway with five or six of these heavy poles balanced on his shoulder calling his wares in a voice that could be heard a quarter of a mile away.

The Ham and Beef shops of the day were enthralling places to enter. They hadn't yet assumed the dignity of the title of a Delicatessen and almost all the goods sold behind the glass domed counters were prepared and cooked on the premises. There certainly wasn't the variety there is today out the delicious aromas and tastes that resulted from this home cooking process had to be experienced first-hand to be believed. The owners spent the weekends boiling corned beef and legs of ham in big fuel coppers kept for the purpose, cooking chickens by the dozen in their kitchen ovens and preparing hundreds of moulds of pressed tongue and brawn set in clear jelly. The result was a tempting display ready for the week's trading.

I used to love shopping in the Ham and Beef stores but it was a different story with the butcher shops of the day. Most of the actual cutting up of the carcasses was done around scrubbed wooden chopping blocks behind the counter while you waited. I can still recall the horror I experienced when I made the awful discovery that the delicious chops and joints I enjoyed so much actually came from animals which had been unsuspectingly grazing in their sun drenched paddocks only a few days before they ended up in the butcher's shop hanging by a hook through the ankle and dripping blood onto the sawdust-covered floor. I'd always imagined before that day that meat was somehow manufactured like bread or biscuits. But the ultimate horror was seeing the carcass of a whole pig with an apple stuck in its mouth as the centrepiece of a butcher's window display. Ranged around this very dead looking pig was a variety of pre-cut meat attractively placed in neat rows garnished with fresh bracken fern and with small chunks of ice scattered through the whole display. Water flowed in a constant cooling stream on the inside of the glass window, but somehow the whole effect was wasted on me as it was the first time I'd seen a carcass complete with head and dull lifeless eyes and it was many months before I could bring myself to eat pork or bacon again.

The chemist shops in those days did not carry anything like the range of cosmetics and toiletries which stock their shelves today. The chemist himself was a much sought after professional man who used to carry out all manner of minor medical jobs such as lancing boils or syringing ears, tasks which today seem to have become the prerogative of the general practitioner. A good family chemist was highly valued and was relied on far more than the doctor for the diagnosis and treatment of everyday childhood complaints or injuries.

Hardware stores have always held a fascination for me and without a doubt the most fascinating shop I can remember as a child was Campbells on the

Corso - where Coles Supermarket now stands. This was a two storey shop, which in itself was then something of a novelty in the suburbs, and within its four walls it held an astounding array of goods. One side of the ground floor was devoted to materials, wool, clothing, haberdashery, manchester and similar items and the other held the most amazing assortment of paint, nails, kitchen gadgets, plugs, saucepans and so on, all in a glorious disordered jumble. Wide lino-covered stairs led upstairs to the gardening section where rubber hoses, terra-cotta flower pots and hand pushed lawnmowers were displayed. The age of plastics and of the petrol power mower had not yet dawned.



*Money-by-wire system*

But the most fascinating thing about a visit to Campbell's shop was being able to sit on the stairs above the cashier's box and watch the way she collected the money for purchases and returned the docket and change to the buyer. There was a system of overhead railway lines leading from every department to the cashier's box in a maze of crisscrossed lines from which hung small metal screwtop containers. When a purchase was made at the counter the assistant wrote out a docket and placed this, together with the customer's money, in a container, clamped it into position on the rail above and pulled a cord which sent it shooting towards the cashier's box at tremendous speed. She would place the money in the till, wrap the change in the docket, replace it in the container and send it shooting back on the correct line to the waiting customer.

The largest store in Manly then was William Cooper & Sons, a department store which was three storeys high and contained the only lift in the district. This was an automatic self-drive affair which was such an innovation that the young seemed to be the only users, the old people preferring to climb the stairs rather than risk being caught in "that contraption." Coopers seemed indestructible when I was a child but with the passing of time it was swallowed up by Buckingham's and changed its character completely. Today Buckingham's is no longer there and the building now houses several small shops and a few professional offices.

In fact, a walk down the Corso today reveals hardly one shop unchanged from those of 45 years ago.

About the only recognizable landmarks from that era are St. Matthew's Church of England on the corner of Darley Road with the Rectory still standing behind it, and the old Ivanhoe Hotel almost opposite. Perhaps they have survived as proof that man needs both his spiritual and temporal needs catered for in a community.

## **Chapter 20**

### ***... of sex through a child's eyes***

For a few brief years every human on this planet views life through the sexless eyes of early childhood. It isn't long, however, before an awareness of the fact that there are two different types of beings inhabiting the earth - male and female - begins to colour our every thought and action for the remainder of our lives, even though a good deal of the time it is a completely subconscious awareness. So it was with me.

Being a very ordinary, normal female of the species with an older brother, I first became aware of the physical difference in the anatomy of the sexes at a very early age. Don and I had always bathed together and it was natural for me to notice that he was the possessor of different equipment, so to speak. But it wasn't until I was about six or seven that I was given an insight into one of the amazing feats of which this exclusively male equipment was capable.

Leading down to the bush track at the front of "The Glen", a track which led right around the foreshores of North Harbour to Manly a mile or so away, was a flight of rough stone steps thickly overhung with trees and creepers. This hidden front yard with its natural rock cave and its numerous cubby houses built amongst the tangled undergrowth was a favourite spot for us children to play. There was a particular thin sapling growing at a distance of about 4 or 5 feet from the pathway half way up the steps and it became a ritual every time we passed this spot on our climb up the steps following an after school swim at Fairlight Pool for the boys in the group to see who could hit this tree with a carefully aimed stream. I suppose Freud would have rubbed his hands in glee at my distinct case of "penis envy" but, whatever the psychological implications, I know I was acutely envious of these handy little gadgets which were capable of performing such interesting feats. It wasn't until many years later that I became aware of even more amazing capabilities of this masculine organ. It came about this way ...

I was 15 and working at an Insurance Company in the city and had formed a very close friendship with a girl of my own age. In fact she was exactly four days younger than I and being an only child of a widowed mother she led a very quiet life. She lived in a flat at Kirribilli, a five minute ferry ride from the Quay, and I was spending the weekend at her home for the first time. After lunch on Saturday we decided to catch a ferry to Cremorne Point and

stroll around the harbour foreshore walk to Mosman Bay about two miles distant and from there to catch a tram back to Kirribilli in time for dinner. Altogether it turned out to be a disastrous afternoon but one which we often looked back on and laughed about in later years.

Firstly, we were followed by three youths until we evaded them by the simple process of going into one of the magnificent old homes bordering on the walk and waiting there for half an hour or so until they gave up and disappeared. Rather shaken by this experience we were just recovering our composure when an even more unnerving event occurred. Just as we were approaching the bridge at the end of Mosman Bay we noticed a man standing with his back to us wearing a long overcoat and blocking the pathway completely. As he heard us approach he suddenly turned to face us, whipped his coat open and muttered "What do you think of this girls?" I'd hate to have said what I thought of the amazing object he was clutching and waving in front of our astonished eyes because at that instant any hidden feelings I may have harboured about "penis envy" disappeared completely!



*Dorothy (left)*

Thoroughly confused and embarrassed we pushed past him and ran the remaining few hundred yards to the other side of the bridge, boarded a

waiting tram and arrived eventually at Velma's home unscathed except in mind. Forever after, we referred to him in conversation as the D.O.M. (Dirty Old Man) or The Flasher, both very apt titles.

Having a total of no less than twenty-three children in the four homes on either side of "The Glen" plus Don and me in the middle house, our yard, being the one central to all, was the main gathering ground for literally hordes of children and it was quite natural that a bit of childish "hanky panky" would result every so often between the sexes. What child hasn't at some stage of their life indulged in games such as Mummies and Daddies or Doctors and Nurses which have distinctly sexual overtones? I must have been around the age of nine or ten that I used to make my oft-repeated speech advocating nudity, which I thought would be a fabulous idea in the hot summer months. My argument, which seemed very logical to me at the time, was that: "We don't cover up the part of our bodies where the food goes in, so why all the fuss about covering the part where the food comes out"? The knowing looks and half hidden smiles that passed between Mum and Dad when I'd dramatically propound this theory always had me puzzled. It seemed so natural and reasonable an argument.

By the time I reached the age of fourteen or fifteen, however, I began to think that males were the most fascinating creatures on earth. Our house always seemed to have a goodly quota of teenage boys there at any given time, attracted no doubt by the lure of the billiard table, and I was never shy or uncomfortable in their company.

At the time my brother and I were keen members of the Manly Baptist Church, a Church which had a very large following of "young people" as we teenagers were called in the idiom of the day. It was common for 40 or 50 of us to go on organised picnics or to enjoy the Saturday night Social, an evening of quite innocent party games followed by supper - dancing was definitely OUT in Baptist circles - and at these gatherings it was quite normal to gradually pair off and start to "keep company", a practice which quite often led naturally to marriage a few years later. So strict were the unspoken but clearly understood sexual taboos in this group that sex was not a pressing problem to most of us but was kept in what was sincerely regarded by all as its proper perspective, not to be indulged in outside of marriage under any circumstances. But I think I can speak for all the group when I say that, in spite of the fact that alcohol was non-existent, that drugs hadn't even been heard of and that the games we indulged in would today be regarded as extremely childish, these gatherings were wonderfully happy affairs. The strict moral code imposed on us all, far from restricting and

frustrating us, had the opposite effect of freeing us to enjoy a healthy natural mingling of the sexes.

It was in this atmosphere that I first met Keith when I was a few months short of my 17th birthday and he was all of 18 and as good looking a young man as you could ever hope to see. Suddenly my secure world of carefully learned and faithfully practiced sexual attitudes went completely haywire. Alien emotions now made their presence felt in a bewildering variety of ways. My heart would throb painfully in my chest - in fact it seemed to rise into my throat and almost choke me - if he happened to smile in my direction. My knees would turn to jelly and I'd have to sit down quickly to cover my confusion if he spoke to me. My voice betrayed me absolutely and emerged as a trembling squeak the night he first held my hand and it was a combination of all these plus a hundred other previously unknown feelings which completely engulfed me when he first took me in his arms and kissed me. The fact that for both of us it was an initiation into sexual awakening made it all the harder to control but all the more wonderful to experience. But the longing for complete fulfilment grew stronger with each new shared discovery as the months passed.

Six weeks after the treacherous attack on Pearl Harbour by the Japanese Keith joined the Navy a month prior to his 19th birthday and the wrenching separation as his train pulled out of Central Station on its way to Melbourne where he was to undergo training was as painful as the amputation of a limb. Thereafter for many months we existed on a diet of a few hours in each other's company once a month. This was a diet which did nothing to satisfy the physical longing for each other as it was usually spent strolling through the Botanical Gardens, arms around each other, or travelling to Manly and back by ferry in the pitifully few hours which were all that were left to us from his weekend leave, most of the 48 hours being spent in travelling by crowded troop train from Melbourne and back again.

We announced our engagement on Keith's 20th birthday. It seemed a step nearer our ultimate goal although we both made a solemn promise to my parents that we would wait until the War ended before considering marriage.

The months dragged in a painfully slow progression until eighteen had passed since Keith's enlistment, then the Navy granted him two full week's leave before a posting to sea. We again approached my parents and quite blatantly used emotional blackmail to finally get their reluctant consent to an immediate wedding. We were so deeply in love and so appalled at the thought that in two week's time we may never see each other again, that it

seemed the only thing to do. Marriage was the answer to the whole problem! It was what we both longed for. It didn't matter that our combined bank balances didn't even run to double figures, that Keith was untrained for any civilian occupation, that the war showed no signs of ending, that we would be expected to live on my meagre salary plus the Navy's magnanimous eight shillings a day, or that we had nowhere to live. All we could think of was that we would be together.

Wedding plans were finalised in a matter of one week, a normal occurrence when so many war-separated couples snatched the rare chance of a few day's unexpected leave to marry and enjoy a brief honeymoon before the inevitable separation which could perhaps keep them apart for years.



*Keith and Dorothy, 1943*

We'd been lucky to secure a tiny beachside flat in Queenscliff where we started married life. The wedding ceremony was arranged to take place on my nineteenth birthday and was accompanied by all the usual trimmings - borrowed wedding frock, one bridesmaid, spring flowers decorating the church, organ music, photos, a reception to follow and a bouquet thrown with due ceremony to the waiting cluster of single girls.

It was perhaps inevitable that a marriage begun in such haste and under the strain of wartime, would develop problems as the years passed. As this chapter purports to deal only with a child's view of sex, however, and as my childhood ended abruptly with marriage and enforced separation with its ever-present worry, this is not the time or the place to discuss such difficulties. It is a measure of the lasting quality of our love for each other

that no matter what problems arose over the years they were faced and overcome, so that thirty-three years later the marriage has matured into a stable family unit. A lifetime of shared experiences have bound us together in a very worthwhile and meaningful union which has produced four wonderful children and two and a half grandchildren at the time of writing, thus ensuring the future healthy growth of the family tree.

## **Chapter 21**

### ***...of religion***

Except for the last ten years or so religion has always played a big part in my life. I was reared in an atmosphere of church attendance, Bible reading and prayer but it was an atmosphere where these things formed a very natural part of everyday life and where the sometimes narrow teachings of the Baptist faith in which we were reared were tempered with so much sound commonsense and humour that they rarely seemed oppressive or restricting but rather served to give a good solid foundation for a truly Christian way of life which reached into every facet of day-to-day living.

It was by pure chance that Don and I started attending Sunday School at the Manly Baptist Church, a good mile and a half uphill walk from home. A family of four children living just two doors from "The Glen" who were a little older than we were attended the Sunday School regularly and offered to take us with them each Sunday, and so it happened that we were absorbed into the fringe of the Baptist faith. Before many years had passed it was almost inevitable that Dad and Mum should start attending church on such special occasions as the Sunday School Anniversary services.

Who could forget the excitement of the purchase of the one new frock each year bought to coincide with the Anniversary services which almost took on the character of a fashion parade amongst the girls at least when we were all ranged on stepped up wooden tiers of seats built especially for the week's services at the front of the church? Or the thrill of receiving a special book prize for 100% attendance throughout the year? Or the enthusiastic rendering of the specially learned Anniversary hymns? Or the enthralling sermons by visiting preachers aimed at holding the children's interest and delivered sometimes with the aid of charts or even lantern slides?

Although I was never one to delve deeply into doctrines of religious faith or to question what was taught me in a very vague non-dogmatic way as a child concerning God and the church, I was always sincere in my efforts to live up to my interpretation of these teachings. For many years in my teens as a member of the Scripture Union I would never miss reading the daily portion of the Bible set down in the monthly leaflets distributed to members and to study the notes concerning this particular passage. I would sooner miss a meal than miss my evening prayers and for many years God was as real a figure to me as my own earthly father.

As a family group though we must have been regarded as something of an enigma by some of the ardent self-termed "out and out Christians" in church circles because, although we were involved in church activities to a very large extent, not one of us ever went to the extent of speaking in the peculiarly evangelically Christian way commonly used by most of our fellow Baptists. In fact, it made me acutely uncomfortable to hear one of these extremely sincere boys or girls buttonhole a complete stranger in the street or on the ferry with the opening questions "Brother (or Sister) are you saved? Have you accepted the Lord Jesus Christ into your soul as your own personal Saviour?" And then, following the startled answer by the unfortunate victim, a well-thumbed Bible would be pulled out of purse or pocket and an earnest lecture on the necessity of "being washed in the blood of the Lamb" and of "being born again" would be delivered interspersed with numerous texts from the Bible and finally the stunned listener would have a small tract pressed into his hand and he would be left in peace after a promise that "he would be remembered in prayer before the Lord."

It is easy to scoff at this type of behaviour but it would be difficult to find a more dedicated, well-meaning, honest and worthy group of people, and even though I found it impossible to go along with this sort of thing I had the greatest admiration for those who had the courage of their convictions to such a degree that they were prepared to face the inevitable abuse and ridicule frequently directed at them.

The monthly Sunday night evangelical service was perhaps the one I attended with the greatest misgivings because, from the vantage point of my position in the front row of the choir seats, I had a perfect view of the same two or three people each month responding to the appeal at the close of the service and walking down the aisle to the front of the church to signify their intention of their willingness to "accept the Lord Jesus Christ as their own personal saviour".

One of these "regulars" was the distinctly eccentric Len O. whose principal claim to fame occurred when he decided one day that the Lord had commanded him to baptise himself in a public place in order to witness for the Lord. What more public place where there was enough water to carry out his mission than the Manly Wharf when a fully loaded peak hour ferry was in the process of tying up alongside? Len, in a loud voice and with the open Bible in his hands announced his intention to the boatload of passengers waiting to disembark and then with a triumphant shout of "The Lord be praised!" he calmly stepped off the end of the wharf! A lifebelt was thrown to him but he ignored this and continued to preach a wet sermon to

the crowd until finally he was persuaded to swim ashore where he was promptly arrested for disturbing the peace, and spent the night in Manly Police Station. He didn't allow this heaven-sent opportunity to pass him by and whiled away the hours delivering lengthy sermons to his captive police audience who must have been very relieved when it was time to release him in the morning.

But the rarely conducted baptismal service held usually about twice a year in the church itself was a simple, moving and beautifully sincere ceremony and one which could not fail to impress. Baptism by full immersion is one of the cornerstones of the Baptist faith and a pre-requisite to full church membership. I was 14 at the time I was baptised in this way after months of preparatory instruction together with about 8 or 9 other candidates, as those requesting baptism were known. The baptistry itself was a large deep tank built underneath the pulpit at the front of the church with steps leading into it from the vestries at either end. When a baptismal service was to take place the floor panels were removed, the tank filled to a depth of about four feet and the minister in black flowing robe descended into the water. The candidates, men on one side in white shirt and trousers and women on the other dressed in long white gowns, walked down the steps one at a time and with hands clasped on their chests answered a few simple but at the same time profound questions such as "Do you believe in God?" and "Do you believe in the Holy Trinity?" and so on. When the minister was satisfied of the candidate's preparedness he took a firm hold of the hands and the back of the head and lowered him backwards until he was fully immersed, at the same time saying! "I baptise you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost." A blanket was quickly draped around the shoulders as the dripping figure ascended the steps and re-entered the vestry while the congregation softly sang an appropriate hymn.

Tent missions were fairly common when I was a youngster and one which was held in a large tent pitched on vacant land in Wentworth Street Manly where today it would be difficult to discover even one blade of grass was the setting for a very funny experience which still provides me with a chuckle 40 years later.

The tent was packed long before the meeting was due to start. We had gone along as a family to hear the missionary who was a large-framed, red-haired American whose reputation as a preacher of enormous ability had preceded him in a well-planned publicity campaign prior to his arrival in Australia. For my part I know I was attracted to the meeting out of sheer curiosity and, even nurtured as I had been in evangelical meetings in the Baptist Church, I

was totally unprepared for the emotionally charged atmosphere generated by this man with his magnificent voice capable one minute of filling the tent as he trumpeted about hell fire and damnation and the next of almost whispering of the love and forgiveness of God. Even at the end of a sermon lasting one and a half hours the congregation sat enthralled and when the appeal was made for people to go forward and "accept Jesus Christ as their own personal Saviour" the entire congregation almost to a man rose and made their way to the front where they were divided into groups, put in charge of numerous helpers and were whisked out of the main tent into smaller side rooms where further instruction was given. Mum and Don were in the first wave of people to leave their seats but Dad and I remained seated. As an awkward shy 12 year old I was completely out of my depth and was determined that my safest course was simply to follow Dad's lead.



*Faith Healing*

After what seemed like an eternity of extra appeals directed at the few "stay-puts" scattered conspicuously throughout the tent a helper finally made his way to the bench where we sat and, leaning over, enquired of Dad in an intimate confidential whisper "Brother, don't you want to do something tonight?" to which Dad, looking him squarely in the eye and with a completely deadpan expression on his face, replied "No thank you son. I went just before we left home."

These shock tactics had the desired effect and the young man withdrew in confusion. We must have been mentally written off as hopeless cases because the meeting was quickly closed to my intense relief, but shortly a new problem began to assert itself.

We had been waiting outside the now empty tent for a long time for Mum and Don to re-appear and now it was becoming increasingly urgent for me to

find a toilet. Whether this was due to auto-suggestion resulting from the exchange between Dad and the helper I couldn't say but I do know that the situation was becoming quite desperate when Dad suggested I use the grass outside the tent as it was in total darkness. I was going quite happily about my business in a state of blissful relief when suddenly the tent wall not one foot from my bare behind was raised and I was bathed in a stream of light shining out from one of the rooms filled with people who were most astonished to be greeted by this spectacle. To say I wished I could vanish from sight in a puff of smoke is an understatement! Dad didn't help matters by standing there helplessly convulsed with laughter wiping the tears from his streaming eyes! The incident served one good purpose anyway - it relieved the almost unbearable tension which had built up during the meeting and helped bring Mum and Don back to normality at breakneck speed.

Another mission at about the same time, held not in a tent but in the old Arcadia Theatre in Manly, stands out in memory as one of the most inexplicable and puzzling evidences of human nature I've ever witnessed. The theatre, today renamed the Metro, was twice the size it is now as in those days it extended from North Steyne right through to Sydney Road. When television arrived and made huge inroads into the size of theatre audiences one half of the old Arcadia was converted into Walton's Furniture Store and only the portion facing the Ocean Beach was retained as a theatre. In recent years the store has been removed to a new location and the building at present stands empty and deserted.

Every seat in the huge barn-like building was filled the night we went to hear an advertised faith healer named Van Eyk. The name is the only thing I can recall about the man himself but the meeting is etched indelibly in my memory. The format followed along similar lines to other missions with hymn singing, prayers and a lengthy sermon, but at the end of the sermon the whole atmosphere suddenly became electric. The preacher seemed to drift quickly into a trancelike state - was it self-induced hypnosis? - and in an entirely different voice he called on the sick and the maimed in the audience to come forward and be healed. Not only did his voice alter but his whole manner changed dramatically. It was as if there was a different man occupying the same body. He appeared to be wrestling within himself, the sweat stood out on his forehead, he alternately moaned as if in pain and then beseeched God to fill him with His healing power.

Then a trickle of people, some in wheel chairs, some on crutches, others leaning heavily on a friend's arm for support, began to move from their

places and make their way down the aisles. The trickle soon became a stream and then a flood as mass hysteria gripped the whole congregation.

Cries of "Hallelujah!", "Praise the Lord!", "Lord, save them!" or just "Jesus! Jesus!" repeated over and over, filled the theatre. As each one reached the stage the preacher, still in a seeming trance, laid his hands on the head of the sufferer and pleaded with God to heal him.

Whether it was an indication of the power of blind faith or a well-staged hoax taking advantage of the gullibility of the masses I'll never know but I actually saw people throw away their walking sticks and crutches, get out of their wheel chairs and walk back unaided to their seats! Others took off glasses, left them on the stage, and strode firmly up the aisles with no sign of stumbling. By the end of the meeting there was a great pile of discarded crutches, walking sticks, glasses, hearing aids and even steel calipers on the stage. Childlike, I wanted to know what would happen to all these articles. I'd still like to know the answer to this question. Would a lot of them be sheepishly reclaimed by their owners the next day as their faith diminished and they realised they had been a little premature disposing of them so hastily or were the owners permanently cured and so have no further need of them? I've often wished I could have followed up some of these "cures" but, whatever the scientific explanation for such a phenomenon, (and I suppose there has to be one?) it was a most exhilarating religious experience and one I'm very grateful I was able to witness.

Flanking "The Glen" on the opposite side to the Stevens family was an even larger family of 9 children but what a different life these children led in comparison. The mother was a thin, careworn, hard-working woman who kept the house and the children spotlessly clean by waging a constant uphill battle against colossal odds, especially during the depression years when the family was reduced to abject poverty only relieved by the charity of the nuns from the convent in Manly who were untiring in their efforts to help the children with gifts of food and clothing. Following the delivery of every box of used clothing or warm blankets the mother felt obliged to send the children to the convent school as a gesture of gratitude but gradually they would drift back to the State school which was closer and easier to reach and so the children received a "hotch-potch" education both secular and religious, and were never really sure to which school or church they owed allegiance.

Saturday night in that household was a nightmare for mother and children. During the afternoon the father and eldest brother regularly drank

themselves into a state of staggering abusive drunkenness and the sound of the blows and curses and the screams of the children which we could hear above the mother's pleadings were frightening to our ears because they were completely alien sounds in our teetotal household. On one particular night when two of the smaller children crept through the fence sobbing hysterically and hid in our house my father took it on himself to ring the police, only to be told that because the men were in their own home they were powerless to act. So the law unwittingly protected these drunken bullies and the abuses continued unchecked for years.

From the very middle of this ill-clad, ill-fed, pitiful bunch of children emerged a girl who had such a strong character and such high ideals that she grew up to marry a Baptist minister and become a pioneer in a remote mission in the highlands of New Guinea many years ago, one of the first white women ever to enter this untamed area still peopled by head hunting tribes at the time.

D. was one of the "strays" I mentioned in an earlier chapter who was taken under my mother's wing and sheltered under our roof. In fact she lived with us for some time, a sort of "lend lease" arrangement where, in return for being given food and shelter, she helped Mum with some of the household chores. But she received much more than board and lodging during her stay. She was given an insight into a vastly different sort of family life than she had ever known, she learned to enjoy good music and to read good books, and she came to love Mum as a second mother. She was a wonderfully responsive girl and became like an older sister, accompanying us on a holiday to the Blue Mountains and being treated as one of the family at all times.

When D. was about 12 or 13 the family moved from our neighbourhood into a small cottage not far from the Baptist Church and D. started attending services at the church and soon became totally engrossed in the practice of her new-found faith. It was unfortunate that one of her older sisters had become a narrow bigot who, although almost totally ignorant of the Catholic religion she professed, regarded D's. new found happiness as some sort of a threat. Numerous violent incidents involving this sister eventuated until finally the Child Welfare Department stepped in and D. was given permission to leave home although she was still under 16 years of age. A position as a live-in maid was secured for her with a wealthy widow and D. lived with her for many years. A lasting friendship developed which persists even today. In recent years this widow, previously a disgruntled, unhappy woman with no purpose in life, became an ardent member of the

Baptist faith and changed her entire life style, due in no small measure I'm certain to D's. fine example so long ago.

It became increasingly difficult after our marriage for Keith and me to keep up the practice of our religion with anything like the fervour of earlier years. For my part I felt as if I were living a lie and with Keith away at sea for long stretches of time it became easier to drift into a sort of religious "no-man's land" than to struggle to return to the unquestioning faith of childhood.

We were in this twilight zone of indecision when Keith was finally discharged and returned to civilian life nine months after the war's end and there occurred then a series of events which led us finally in an unswerving and clearly defined course into the Catholic faith. Being the possessor of a very strong maternal instinct, it was only natural for me to want a baby after the long delay caused by the War, and already two and a half years had passed without the chance to establish a family. This had become such an obsession with me that I'm sure I was on the verge of an emotional breakdown. It is easy with hindsight to see that my attitude was an utterly selfish one arrived at without giving any thought to the worrying position in which Keith found himself as he faced discharge after more than four years in the Navy.

Since our marriage he had recommenced a correspondence course in advertising which he had begun prior to his enlistment and immediately on his discharge he launched himself whole-heartedly into his first job with a small agency. But as yet he had no precedent to which he could refer so that he could form an idea of his capabilities or his chances to succeed in this totally untried field of employment. And yet here was I unthinkingly placing him in an untenable position by pressing him urgently to add to his worries a burden of alarming proportions. He was just not ready to face the prospect of fatherhood until he had proved to himself that he was able to provide for a wife and family.

It was in this frame of mind that he finally succumbed to my pleas and I fell pregnant within two weeks of his return from overseas. Almost from the beginning of the pregnancy I ran into trouble - nothing of a really serious nature but minor problems which added alarmingly to the quoted medical costs and put a tremendous strain on the emotions as well as on the budget. Details of the birth of Anne are irrelevant here. It is sufficient to say she was born seven weeks prematurely and, despite careful nursing, she survived for a total space of only 15 hours of life before her tiny heart gave up the

unequal struggle. It was only a few minutes after her death that the Mother Superior of the Catholic hospital in which she had been born gently broke the news to me and, standing with her arms around my shaking shoulders, she tried to comfort me by saying

"Try to look on the bright side If you can dear. She has gone straight to heaven to be with God. As soon as she started to haemorrhage and we knew the end was inevitable she was baptised and so she is happy with the Lord at this moment."

How could she know that such a statement, far from comforting me, had precisely the opposite effect?

Still clinging to my Baptist beliefs although no longer a practicing church member, it was extremely upsetting to think that without consulting me our unknowing, uncomprehending baby had been baptised by members of a faith of which I was totally ignorant.

Surprisingly, when Keith, still unaware of the baby's death, strode happily through the door an hour later almost hidden behind an immense bunch of flowers, his views were completely different. He reasoned that the baptism certainly hadn't done any harm and if it was a platform of Catholic teaching that an infant must be baptised before death in order to gain admittance to heaven, he pointed out that it was an indication of the depth of their faith and the strength of their beliefs that they had carried out this action in an emergency situation when it might have been too late had they waited to consult me in the matter.

Anne, a name agreed on by us after her death, was buried in a tiny white coffin in the Baptist section of Northern Suburbs Cemetery a couple of days later in a simple family ceremony. The plain little coffin containing this longed-for child around whom I had built so many hopes and dreams, was nursed by Keith on the way to the cemetery in a friend's car while I lay in my hospital bed and fervently wished I could have joined her in death. That would have been preferable to this terrible hollow hopeless feeling of loss.

Following Anne's death Keith began to read in depth about the Catholic religion and to visit a priest in the Catholic Information Centre in Sydney for regular lengthy discussions. Father James Freeman as he was then has since risen to the very top of the Catholic hierarchy and is now Cardinal Freeman. He and Keith parried questions and answers for almost two years before Keith finally made a decision to join the Catholic Church which he had

come to believe held the answers to so many aspects of Christianity which had earlier puzzled him. Our eldest daughter Cathy had by this time been born and was three months old when her father decided on this unprecedented step which for a time left me floundering out of my depth and uncertain as to the wisest course to adopt. Surely a mixed marriage whether of race or religion imposed extra strains on a marriage which sometimes caused its downfall and presented a disunited front to the children of such a marriage on a subject which I felt should be the fundamental basis of their childhood training. I was bitter and rebellious about what I imagined was a concerted effort being made to pressure Keith into joining the church and, determined to speak my piece and prevent what I felt would be a disastrous step, I confronted Father Freeman in his office fully prepared to do battle. His disarmingly friendly manner put me completely off balance and his calm logical approach to the whole problem was so reasonable that despite myself I simmered down and even found myself becoming interested in the subject. I began to read a great number of books on Catholicism and finally, six months after Keith's conversion to the Catholic faith, I followed his example.

The repercussions in the family were only to be expected. For as long as anyone could remember our family had been strongly Protestant and it was natural for them to feel that one of their number had turned traitor by "going over to Rome". It must have taken an enormous effort on the part of Dad and Mum to practice the tolerance of creed which they had always preached and to accept this upheaval of all their previously unquestioned examples and teachings but it is to their lasting credit that they did even though it took some years before they fully understood and condoned the change.

There followed seventeen very settled and happy years from a religious point of view. It was a relief to have a clear-cut, black and white yardstick on which to base all manner of moral behaviour rather than the shadowy grey yardstick which was the measure used by the individual Protestant who was free to make his own personal assessment of controversial Biblical passages, thus resulting in a myriad differing interpretations of the same passage.

Having had first-hand experience of both devout Protestantism and equally devout Catholicism it is not surprising that tolerance of both points of view is second nature to me. I find it difficult to understand intolerance, prejudice or bigotry about race or religion and both Keith and I have strived all our married life to rear the children with the same attitudes. The fact that today,

although not one of the four is an active member of any organised church but that all have a tolerant open-minded view of religion as practiced by others, is to my mind an indication of the success of this teaching rather than its failure. Two have even reached the currently popular stance of atheism in their thinking but even this radical view is respected by us as symptomatic of a decision reached after much careful thought and with the knowledge that they are free to change their opinion in the future if their thinking on the subject alters. One is married to a nominal Catholic, one to a member of the Church of England and one is engaged to a man who was reared as an Orthodox Jew, but the fact that these varying religious beliefs did not unduly influence them in their choice of a life partner is surely a healthy sign. Instead of prejudging and pigeon-holing them according to religion they were free to assess their worth as human beings without having their vision clouded by pre-conceived dogmatic religious principles.

Whatever other problems could arise in their marriages in future years it is reasonably safe to assume that religious intolerance and bigotry will not be included in the list.

As an agnostic in my own personal outlook today I feel something like the mugwump, that mythical bird who sits on the fence with his mug on one side and his "wump" on the other, poised to fly to either side at a moment's notice. I would dearly love to be able to experience again the unquestioning acceptance of the existence of God and perhaps in years to come this may be the case. Who can say?

Hand-in-hand with religious tolerance goes a tolerance of race and colour, not a popular subject in a world which is very one-eyed in this regard.

At the time of writing the immense numbers of black inhabitants of the vast continent of Africa are beginning to rouse themselves from centuries of enforced submission to white dominance and seek equality with their numerically weaker rulers. That the awakening process will inevitably be accompanied by bloodshed is a sad fact of life, but if individuals scattered throughout the world can be educated to racial tolerance the friction between nations would ease and the ideal situation of a harmonious coexistence between races of differing skin colours and cultures would be realised.

An idealist's impossible dream? Maybe. But someone has to dream and plant the tiny grain of the yeast of tolerance in the overwhelming mass of the dough of intolerance in the hope that it will spread gradually until this ideal

is accepted as not only possible but recognised as the only practical solution to one of mankind's most persistent problems.

# **Book Three**

## **Epilogue**



## **Chapter 22**

### **Birth**

Nineteen months had passed since the birth and death of Anne but the memory of this experience was still vivid and the fear of a repetition was very real, especially as the pains had started three weeks earlier than expected.

Would all the agony and effort be in vain once more?

Would this child also be too frail and tiny to withstand the shock of birth?

Would I never have the joy of holding a live child in my arms?

With these thoughts racing through my mind I lay for 14 hours on an unyielding, sterile, narrow bed in the labour ward of a small private hospital while the birth grew nearer with each intensifying pain.

The relief from all-enveloping pain following Cathy's birth was short lived when, through the anaesthetic-induced fog, I realised that this second girl child was not breathing. She lay motionless at the foot of the bed with the doctor administering life-giving oxygen and with two nurses pumping her stick-like arms and legs in unison in an effort to instil life into her tiny body which was a frightening deep purple in colour.

Almost hysterical with grief I was quickly given another whiff of anaesthetic and, when I finally woke twenty minutes later, it was to see a beautifully pink, lustily crying baby wrapped in a warm blanket and cradled in the arms of a very relieved looking doctor.



*Keith and Dorothy with a newborn Cathy*

It would be an impossibility for anyone who has never experienced the traumatic drama of childbirth to fully understand the overwhelming surge of joy that completely engulfed me as this miracle of humanity - flesh of my flesh and bone of my bone - this empty vessel into which I could pour all the pent-up mother-love stored within me, was gently placed in my arms for the first time. She was perfect! Each tiny finger and toe was in the right place! Even the rice-paper-thin, almost invisible fingernails and toenails were miracles of creation to be almost reverently touched and marvelled at.

God was very real to me at that moment. How else could one explain the mystery of birth, the unfathomable wonder of a new life, a composite of all its ancestors, who at the moment of birth has all the potential for love, hatred, jealousy, laughter, joy, learning and suffering, plus a myriad other human traits, locked in a body no longer than its mother's arm?

I needn't have worried about this baby surviving. She not only survived but thrived and grew into a curly haired moppet with quicksilver coursing through her veins in place of the normal blood supply. She was a blue eyed, loveable bundle of mischief who is now reaping her "come-uppence" with her 18 month old second son giving a repeat performance of his mother's antics as a toddler. Of an active, extrovert nature she excelled at any sport she played, and trying to keep pace with her many and varied outdoor interests was a full-time job. Today her energies are tested to the full caring for a home, husband and two lively boys, with a third child shortly to be added to her responsibilities.

The miracle was repeated two and a half years later with the birth of our only son Kevin, who arrived on the world's stage with comparative ease. This time it was a long, lean baby who was placed in my arms, one who didn't thrive but spent the first year of his life hovering dangerously close at times to death. Every childish ailment imaginable seemed to be aimed in his direction during his early years, but his mind more than compensated for any lack of strength in his physical stature. Today he is still long and lean, with an amazingly acute mind hidden underneath a shock of curly hair and with a string of academic qualifications adding lustre to his name. Of a quiet, sensitive, introspective nature, he was a complete contrast to his older sister. Like his father, he has an insatiable thirst for knowledge and is never happier than when thoroughly engrossed in the study or discussion of some obtuse philosophical subject.

For the third time, almost three years after Kevin's arrival, the miracle was repeated yet again with the birth of Helen, a plump, placid baby who weighed in at birth as the biggest of the children. I'm convinced she was the happiest, most contented and peaceable child to ever occupy a bassinette. She accepted life as it happened, coping with the bad and enjoying the good without question. She seemed to walk through childhood on an unswerving straight course in a private world of her own, impervious to all the family dramas surrounding her - a sort of female Mr. Magoo of cartoon fame. It was no surprise to us when, on a recent world trip, Helen passed through country after country just a jump ahead of disasters on a national scale. She left a trail of dramas in her wake, narrowly missing an assassination of a U.S. Ambassador in Greece, an earthquake in Yugoslavia, a tornado in Michigan, and a black uprising in South Africa.



*Dorothy, Cathy, Kevin, Christine, Helen. 1958*

Christine's arrival was the final birth miracle to occur in our family. Like her eldest sister she was also destined to have quicksilver instead of blood in her veins, with a mass of dark curls, bright blue eyes and two deep dimples in her cheeks, a legacy from my mother, she was a truly beautiful child with a personality as temperamental as a prima donna. But the bubbling vivacity tends to cloak a very deep, sensitive nature, one which is capable of extremely strong emotions. Like her father, life touches her often with painful barbs on exposed raw nerve endings, resulting in an outpouring of her soul in moving poetry. She is beautiful enough at 20 to turn every male head in any room she enters, but life for her is not simple and straightforward but a constantly difficult struggle to meet the challenges it throws her way.

Four branches springing from the same two limbs of the family tree, but each one a completely different individual.

Multiply this number by millions and, if it were possible to produce so many children, each child would still be unique, so that the wonder of a baby's birth will never diminish but will continue, as long as life on earth exists, to be something of a miracle.

## **Chapter 23**

### **Death**

The only absolute certainty in life is death.

The first gulp of air and the first feeble cry set the seal of death on every baby at the moment of its birth. The final breath may not be drawn for a century or more, or it may be that the first breath will also be the last, but it is inevitable that it will be drawn and that death will claim another victim.

If birth can be described as a mystery, then how much more mysterious is death? It is not surprising, therefore, that every society on earth, be it primitive or advanced, has surrounded death with age-old rituals, religious ceremonies and taboos in an effort to explain the ultimate mystery.

In modern Western society where a large number of deaths occur in hospitals, few people beyond the periphery of the medical profession encounter it often in their lifetime, so that it remains even more of a mystery.

When death claimed my father at 72 years of age it was the first time I had ever seen a dead person. He looked so natural as he still lay in his bed that it seemed incredible that he would never again open his eyes, that he would never again speak, that he would never again enjoy a good book whilst sitting with his feet up on the lounge in the next room, that I would never again smell the aroma of his after-dinner cigar or that I would never again listen to his sudden explosive outbursts at the dinner table, outbursts that sent a fine spray of breadcrumbs shooting from his mouth in all directions as he recounted some happening of the day in his own inimical way.

What had taken place when he crossed this unbridgeable gulf from life to death?

He was still recognisable as my father. His appearance had not altered except perhaps for an unfamiliar pallor, a stiffness in the upturned feet, and skin which was icy when I laid my fingers on his cheek in a gesture of farewell. But he had passed beyond my reach. One moment he was living and the next he was dead, the victim of a second heart attack. He had cheated death six years earlier when his initial attack had given him a preview of what was to come, but was unable to cheat it this time in spite of a painful struggle lasting for almost three hours.

When it was my mother's turn to cross the gulf nearly five years later it was even more difficult to understand the transition from life to death.

For almost three months following a crippling stroke she lay in a sort of twilight, limbo world of neither life nor death. She remained in a deep coma where she was completely unreachable and so, to all intents and purposes, she was already dead, but, because her heart still continued to beat and her lungs still breathed, she was technically still alive. But the brain which had been capable of memorising page after page of poetry was damaged to such an extent that it was unable to comprehend anything. The voice which had held audiences spellbound was stilled for ever. The arms which had cradled three children and the hands which had worked untiringly to care for a home and family lay useless at her sides. She was kept alive by feeding her nourishing liquids through tubes inserted in each nostril, but the quantity she was able to absorb failed to keep pace with her bodily needs so that she gradually weakened and lost weight.

After more than two months with not a glimmer of consciousness she was transferred to a hospital for terminal cases, where it was explained to my brother and me that it was not the policy of this hospital to persevere with tube feeding unless it was specifically requested by the patient's next-of-kin but that every effort would be made to feed her by mouth. We were placed in an unenviable position. By agreeing to the removal of the tubes we knew we would be hastening the inevitable end but would we be helping her by insisting on a continuation of this method of feeding? After a couple of sleepless nights in which we came to grips with reality, we agreed to the removal of the tubes and prayed that the end would come quickly. But it was a further ten days before her body at long last slipped without protest across the gulf into death, and it was with profound relief that Don and I received the news. For us she had already died three months earlier and this was just the final crumbling of the shell which she had occupied for 80 years.

But the questions still remain. What is the deciding factor that determines when death occurs? At what point can a doctor decide that life no longer exists? Is a person dead if his or her body can only continue to operate with the aid of mechanical means? When natural functions cease should a person be allowed to slip peacefully into death in a dignified manner without mechanical intervention or would this constitute mercy killing?

These and many other questions have only arisen in the past few decades in societies where medical technology has advanced so rapidly that moral dilemmas follow naturally in the wake of such advances.

But the fundamental riddle of death itself is as old as man. Millions over the centuries have turned to religion in an effort to find the answer. For many, an attempt is made to allay the natural fear of death by regarding it simply as a stepping stone to eternal life, a door through which one must pass in order to gain an eternity of happiness. Others, like the millions of Buddhists in the world, believe it to be a transition to a better life with the process to be repeated many times until perfect happiness is achieved in the 7th Heaven, or Nirvana. But millions without the comfort of religion see it as the final ringing down of the curtain on life, with nothing beyond the grave but oblivion.

There are as many differing beliefs about death as there are human beings living on earth, and as long as man exists he will continue to question death.

## **Chapter 24**

### **And Birth Again**

"It's a boy Mum, and he's a beautiful baby!"

Julian's voice on the phone betrayed the fact that, in spite of his intense excitement, he was very close to tears. Only ten minutes before he rang he had witnessed the birth of his first son and he was still choked with emotion. He had insisted on being present in the labour ward and the delivery room, a practice modern hospitals encourage today in contrast to the complete exclusion of the husband and father-to-be in the past. Cathy had found his presence a tremendous comfort throughout the long ordeal, and together they had shared the wonder of the first cry and the awesome realisation that this helpless little creature was their sole responsibility.

The wheel had gone full turn and now it was my eldest daughter who had been initiated into the joys of motherhood.

It hardly seemed possible that 23 years had passed since I had first held her in my arms and marvelled at the miracle of creation, and yet, here was the same drama repeating itself with her cast in the leading role.

Craig was only an hour and a half old when he was introduced to some of his family for the first time through a glass window of the hospital nursery. He was still unwashed as he was being allowed to rest completely in order to recover from the shock of a difficult birth, and our initial impression of this first grandchild was of an elongated head which looked as if it had been squeezed through a toothpaste tube, with the hair still damp on his puckered forehead, and with unseeing eyes peering out of a face which was a miniature replica of his father's.

His beauty lay in the wonder of the fact that he was alive, perfect in every detail, and that he belonged in our family, so that he was someone very special and very much loved from the moment he had joined us.

The joy, the wonder, the thankfulness and relief that had been a part of the birth of each of our own four children was just as intense with the arrival of this grandchild. He has provided us to date with four and a half years of love and joy as he has developed from an unknowing infant to a bright, appealing child., with a nature every bit as beautiful as his striking physical appearance. His likeness to his father is so marked as to be almost

ludicrous. With deep blue eyes, hair the colour of cornsilk, and an engaging smile, he causes comment wherever he goes.

He was joined almost three years later by his brother Mark, and, although at the time of his birth we were living nearly 500 miles away, something of the excitement of his arrival travelled along the telephone wires the morning Julian phoned to break the news of his birth four weeks prematurely.

Despite his early struggle to gain a firm footing on this planet, he has grown into a lively, healthy, lovable toddler who, at 18 months, is rarely out of mischief. His nature is so much like his mother's was at the same age that it sometimes gives me an eerie feeling that history is repeating itself and that it is not Mark but Cathy who is constantly being rescued from some perilous perch or prevented from hurtling headlong down a flight of steps.

In less than two months another child is to join the family and the miracle will be enacted all over again.

What will this child be like? Will it be a boy or girl? Will it be dark or fair? Will it be placid or lively? Only time will tell...

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With the death of both my parents it had come as something of a shock to realise that there were few branches left above Keith and me on the family tree. Today even these few are no longer there. The imperceptible passing of the years has caused them to age and wither until they have died and fallen from the tree, and we now find ourselves the topmost branches.

Beneath us are growing a number of young, strong, vigorous branches still bursting with the sap of life drawn from the parent tree.

Still lower on the tree are two tiny branches, Craig and Mark, who at this stage of their lives can hardly be likened to anything larger than twigs, and it is to these two youngsters and their as yet unborn brother or sister that the future healthy growth of the family tree is entrusted at present.

And so, in the words C.J. Dennis immortalised in his classic book. "The Sentimental Bloke"... "Life Mooches On."



*Dorothy's daughter, Cathy, with Dorothy's mother, Stella. 1948.*