



Gwen Burgess - Thomson - Savage

My life

Dispela stori bilong mi. Mi tink tink u laikim planty tumus.
(This is the story of my life. I think you will like it a lot!)

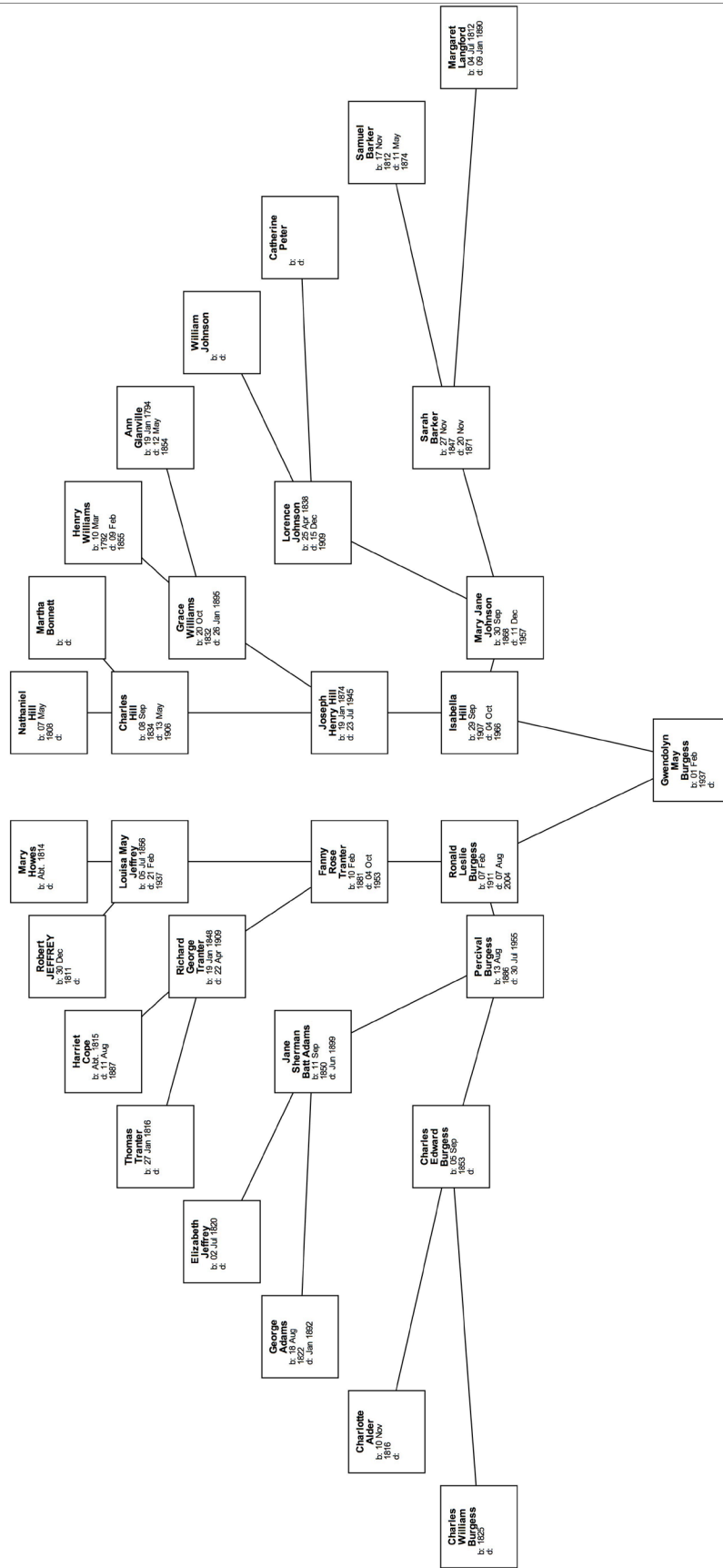
All in all, I feel I have been lucky to have had loving, caring parents and a good home life as a child. My marriage was good, we had some wonderful times together, particularly in the early days and yes, there were some rough spots, but I think most people go through some tough times.

I have raised five wonderful children to the best of my ability and capabilities, and have loved each and every one of them for their own special qualities. There are many things I can't do, but for my children I have an over-whelming, unconditional love that will never change. I have lived to see them reach their potential, to see my grandchildren grow up, and that's something my dear Mum never got to see. I have enjoyed the love of two good men and the friendship of so many people, from childhood, school, Papua-New Guinea, Darwin, Adelaide, Daly Waters, Lilydale, Kilsyth, from trips and tours, through my Dad's and your Dad's work and the Village, even from those dreadful times in the shops. It has been my good fortune and pleasure to enjoy their company and friendship.

I have lived in a lot of different places, experienced many different ways of living and been to places I never dreamed of seeing, let alone visiting, all over the world. To me, my life has been interesting, varied and rarely boring. Yes, there are some regrets, the disunity between my children being top of the list. If I have disappointed any of you, I apologise. I know I have faults and weaknesses but then so do you and you can't blame me for all of them! I hope when you reach the later years of your lives you can say as I do, "I am happy."

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My great, great grandparents on my father's side were:

George Adams, born on 18th August, 1822 at Chawton, Hampshire. He is listed in the 1841 census as an Agricultural Labourer. Elizabeth Jeffrey was born on 2nd July, 1820 at Medstead, Hampshire and they were married in January, 1842 at Alton, Hampshire. George died in Alton in January, 1892.

Thomas Tranter, born on 27th January, 1816 at Henley on Thames. He is listed in the 1851 census as a Brewers Drayman at Rotherfield Greys and in 1861 as a Beerhouse keeper at Henley. He married Harriet Cope about 1840 and died on 25th May, 1877. Harriet was born in 1818 at Hungerford, Berkshire, and in the 1881 census she is listed as a Publican at 35 Duke St, Henley on Thames. She died on 11 August, 1887.

Robert Jeffrey, born on 30th December, 1811 at Dinton, Buckinghamshire. He married Mary Howes, born 1814 in Dinton, in 1832. He is listed in the 1851 census as a Tea Dealer at Monks Risborough, in 1861 he was living at Aylesbury and in the 1871 census he was still a Tea dealer and was living at 257 Cotmore Cottages, Thame, Oxfordshire.

1

My great, great grandparents on my mother's side:

Nathaniel Hill, who was born in Horncastle, Lincolnshire on 17th May, 1808, and Martha Bonnett, baptized at St. Andrews, Middlesex, on 22nd Dec, 1809. They married on 15th May 1833 in Alford, Lincolnshire. They both died in England.

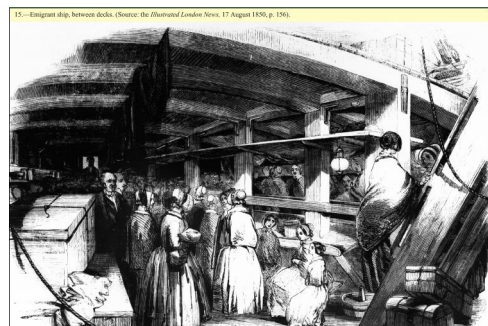
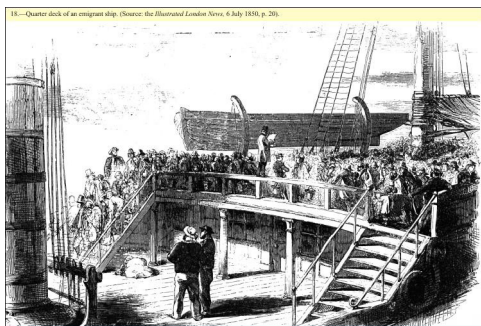
Henry Williams, born at Crowan, Cornwall on 10th March, 1792 and Ann Glanville, born in Camborne, Cornwall, in 1704. They married on 13th November, 1814 in Camborne and lived in Crowan. Henry was a copper miner before migrating to Willunga SA, to work in the tin mines there. They came to Australia as assisted immigrants on board the *Pakenham*, which arrived at Port Adelaide March 23, 1849. Henry died at Skillagoe Creek in 1855, Ann at Allens Creek in 1884.

William Johnson and Catherine Peter. I have no known facts about them and only their names on Lorence's application for naturalization in Australia to go by. They were apparently Danish.

Samuel Barker, born at Oldham, Derbyshire and Margaret Langford, born in Mottram in Longendale, Cheshire. Margaret and Samuel came to Australia with their children as assisted migrants in 1849 aboard the *Maitland*.

Margaret's brother, William and his friend John Barker, had been arrested for highway robbery and, at Lancaster Assizes, were sentenced to transportation for life. They spent some time aboard the hulk *Retribution* and sailed for Van Diemen's Land on the *Medway*. At Hobart it appears William was not a model prisoner, three times he was ordered punishment of fifty, fifty and one hundred lashes and was sent to Maria Island soon after it was opened as a penal settlement. He must have changed because he earned his unconditional pardon and moved to Melbourne, where he married Emma Hale in 1839.

He bought up several blocks of land in Bourke Street opposite the GPO site at the second Melbourne Land Sale and also owned various hotels. When arrested William had given his mother's maiden name, Sidebottom, as his name to avoid disgracing his parents. Over a period of years after the death of his mother, he brought his father, eight of his ten siblings, their spouses and families to Melbourne. Some of the family became Sidebottom, some were Langford and some were Langford-Sidebottom and it remains so today. He helped all his family as they arrived with land, housing and farms. Later William and his brothers took up land along the Merri Creek at Coburg, [then known as Pentridge] and later again selections at Mickleham. William died on 7th June, 1849 at Pentridge.



Sketches from the 1850's show conditions aboard the emigrant ships

My great grandparents:

Charles Edward Burgess, born Reading, Berkshire 5th September, 1853. He was a cabinet maker and lived at 6 Oxford Place, The Fair Mile, Henley on Thames. Jane Adams was born on 11th September, 1850 at Bentworth, Hampshire and they married at Reading on 24th December, 1877. They had four children, Ronald Charles in 1881, Nellie in 1883, Albert George, in 1884, and Percival in 1886. Jane died in June, 1899 and Charles died in October, 1932.

Richard Tranter was born on 19th January, 1848 in Henley on Thames and was a Railway Porter, boarding with Robert and Mary Jeffrey in 1871. In 1877 he married their daughter, Louisa May Jeffrey at Thame, Oxfordshire. He is variously listed as a Brewer's Drayman at 35 Duke St, in 1881, a Carrier at 2 Gladstone Terrace, Rotherfield Greys in 1891 and a Mineral Water Carrier at 10 Friday St, in 1901, before his death on 22nd April, 1909. Louisa was born on 5th July, 1856 at Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire. They had seven daughters and one son: Harriet, 1873, Annie, 1874, Thomas, 1877, Jane, 1880, Rebekah and Fanny [identical twins], 1881, Olive, 1889 and Louisa, 1897, and in the 1901 census, Richard and Louisa also had Albert and Percival Burgess living with them, and Ronald Charles as a visitor. She died on 21st February, 1937, in Camberwell, London.



Left: Grandma Tranter, Middle: Aunty Rebekah, Right: Aunty Louisa

Charles Hill was born on 8th September, 1834 at Alford, Lincolnshire and migrated to Australia. He married Grace Williams in 1867 at Geelong and died at Euroa on 13th May, 1906. Grace was a widow with three children. She was born in Camborne, Cornwall, on 20th October, 1832. Five more children were born to Grace and Charles: Francis, 1867, Martha 1871, Charles and

Joseph, [identical twins], in 1874 and Eliza in 1878. Joseph and Charles were born in Wensleydale, Victoria.



Lorence Johnson

Sarah Barker was born on 27th November, 1847 at Hyde, Cheshire, and with her family she migrated to Australia in 1849 and the family settled in Mickleham. She married Lorence Johnson and they had three children, Robert Barker in 1865 at Donnybrook, Mary Jane in 1868 at Bullarook and Margaret Emma in 1871 at Barkstead. Sarah died shortly after Margaret's birth in 1871. Lorence went on to re-marry and over the next twenty years had nine more children with his second wife, Mary Ann Pascoe. Lorence Johnson was born in 1838 in Kiel, Schleswig Holstein in Denmark, [now Germany] and said he emigrated to England when he was 12 and then to Australia at 16, and we were told he still spoke with an accent late in life. He lived in Violet Town and was naturalized on the 24th September, 1909 so he could get a pension, as he had gone blind. He died on 15th

December the same year but Mary Ann lived till 1934.

The ones I remember - The Hills

I was fortunate that I belonged to a large extended family and that my grandparents all lived long enough for me to remember them well. My grandparents on my mother's side were Joseph Hill and Mary Jane Johnson.

Mum was the second youngest of twelve children; five were from Nanna's first marriage. All the Hill children were born illegitimately as their parents did not marry until their youngest child was three, and they are variously registered in the births register as Bickerton or Hill.

Nanna was born at Bullarook on 30th September, 1857. She was seventeen years old and pregnant when she married Alfred Bickerton at Boho in 1885 and she subsequently had five children to him: Henry [Harry], William, Robert, Daisy and Arthur. In the depression of the 1890's work was scarce and almost nonexistent for Bickerton as he was a sawmillier and farmed his father's small holding with his brother Henry. They lived on the 320 acre property at Marraweeny, in a "house" that has been described to me, [by Uncle Wyn] as little better than a hovel.

In 1893 he decided to go to the goldfields in Western Australia to seek his fortune and then return or send for his family. Nanna was 25 years old, with 5 young children. The eldest, Henry, was 7, and Arthur was not yet two months old. Along with that she had a smallholding to manage and her only support was that she could obtain necessities from the storekeeper, George Thompson, who was a relative of Alfred Bickerton.

Her father could not help, he had married again and four of the nine children born to his second wife were still under the age of 10. Bickerton said in the divorce action that he sent her five pounds [estimate between \$1000 and \$5000 on today's currency] a month but I find this extremely hard to believe as that was a large amount of money in those days and Nan could have lived quite comfortably on 25 shillings a week. He eventually saved enough money to send for her and the children and his sister to accompany them and about 1896 sent word that she was to sell the chattels and animals of the farm and come to WA.

She wrote back and said she could not come as she was pregnant to a neighbour, Edward John Renfree. [Bet that set him back on his heels!] Edward was his [Alfred's] brother Henry's brother in law. He then instructed her to give to Henry, all the animals and chattels of the farm and leave the property at Marraweeny immediately, which she did.



Joseph Henry Hill

With the five children she moved to Euroa to live [briefly] with Renfree. Hedley Barker Bickerton was born in Euroa in 1896. Nana lived only a short time with Edward as he had already fathered another child and he married the pregnant mother, his brother in law's sister, later that year. He really knew what keeping it in the family meant, didn't he?

About this time Nanna met my grandfather, Joe Hill, and must have moved to Yea where he was working in the Switzerland Ranges, [part of the Strathbogie Ranges] nearby and Yea is where Bert, the first of their children was born.

Bickerton said he continued to support his children until this second illegitimate child was born, at which time he came back to Victoria and sued for divorce. He returned to WA and later sent for the children and they went to West Australia to live with their father and his new wife.

We next know of Joe and Mary at Yarra Glen and the other children were born at Tarrawarra or Yarra Glen. Joe and Mary married in 1913 - I guess they waited till Bert and Joe were old enough to take care of the younger children as they were married quietly in Carlton, after all, no one in Yarra Glen knew they weren't married!. The house they lived in was out on the Healesville road, on the right hand side you will come to Lubra Bend Station - Nanna and Papa's home was on the right at the top of the hill.

Mum was born at Tarrawarra, a small railway station, or siding, one stop past Yarra Glen on the Healesville road, on 29 September, 1907. She spent all her young life here, a part of a large and happy family, which was increased in 1919 when her brother Harry Bickerton's wife died in the Spanish Flu epidemic and Nanna took in his five children and raised them for several years, they were a bit younger than Mum and Wyn but Mum felt closer to them than her sisters Ethel [Effie] and Grace.

Mum attended Yarra Glen State School until grade 8 and often told me tales of her schooldays. She had long dark brown curly hair and for the girls it had to be worn long and loose. Girls never had short hair until the late twenties. The boys sat behind the girls and they used to dip the ends of Mum's curls into the inkwell. Nanna became fed up with having to get ink out of the ends of Mum's hair and sent her to school with her hair in plaits. The teacher sent her home with a note to say that girls in his school did not wear plaits. [Wouldn't he have problems today?] Nanna went to the school the next day and I don't know what she said to the teacher but from then on, Mum wore plaits!

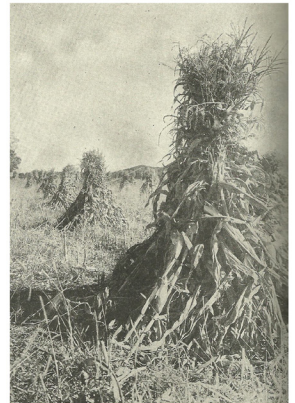


Yarra Glen State School, 1919. 4th from left, standing, Uncle Wyn. Mum is the girl in the second row, behind the girl in the dark coloured dress third from the tree.



Mum left school at the age of 14, as was usual in those days, and then got her first job, working at the “Dolly” Peg Factory in Yarra Glen. She told me of one worker who slotted his finger instead of the peg in the slotting machine. Ouch!

Mum told of “stooking”. As there were no pick-up bailers, after the hay was cut it was gathered into a bundle and tied with a piece of hay and stood up with two or three others into a stook to dry out. Stooking was an unpopular job as the cut hay scratched arms and legs even through long sleeve shirts and long pants.



And it was always December and without sunscreen all and sundry became very sunburnt. The stooks were pitchforked up onto a haywagon and taken to where the stack maker was working, this was a specialized job as, if not correctly built the stack could spontaneously combust or the hay could rot.

In those days before mechanical aids to farming, it was hard, dirty work, long hours and backbreaking labour and children worked from the time they were old or strong enough to do the necessary work, starting young on the more simple jobs - bringing in cows etc.

Mum was a country kid and work was part of their lives from a very early age and she had done all the jobs, milked the cow, fed the chooks and other animals, she knew all the bird names and could mimic them, she knew the names of plants and weeds. Many years later I said to the boss at the farm - my Mum would call that weed “fat hen” and he said that’s what it’s called today.

Papa had a bullock team at one stage and he carted wool from stations to railway stations, Mum had a picture of him and his mate sitting at a campfire, beside their wagon and team boiling the billy for smoko with the dogs under the wagon.



Papa's bullock team



The Hills: Joseph at the back, Bert on the right, Grace and Effie (front). Right: Wyn and Mum

Nanna and Papa must have been hard pressed to provide for their extended family and as he was only a labourer. He took on anything, he was the gravedigger at Yarra Glen and also had the “night soil” contract, in other words he was the dunny cart man!

Nanna did the washing in four gallon drums over an open fire most of her life, it wasn't until they came to Coburg that she had a copper, she cooked on a wood stove and she was a good cook. She raised [in all] seventeen children, her five Bickertons until their father sent for them, [and how hard it must have been for her to lose them?] Hedley and the six Hill children, then Harry's five after Eva died.

Everyone lived a much harder life and worked longer hours in those days and it was difficult for children to get an education of more than a rudimentary type and Mechanics Institutes were built in almost every country town. These were to help people who had little or no basic literary and numeracy skills, to become better educated. They functioned at night as that is the only time people could attend and taught reading, writing and basic maths. Few children got even an adequate education; if they were needed at home that's where they stayed. Girls were required to take over households at relatively young ages if the mother died and many raised families of siblings and often marriage passed them by, so they spent all their lives looking after parents and siblings, becoming the maiden aunt who was always there in times of crisis.

Boys were at work as soon as they were old enough or strong enough to do a day's work. Yet Mum always spoke of her childhood as happy and good, they always had plenty of good, plain food to eat and Nanna was a good cook. I still remember her scones and jam tarts and her Cornish pasties were to die for. Before the First World War the railway line from Yering to Yarra Glen was a very long wooden trestle

bridge, the longest wooden trestle railway bridge in the Southern Hemisphere, but during the war there was not enough men to maintain the bridge so embankments were made along the length of the bridge leaving only spaces for the creeks, drainage and the Yarra river to flow through. That year for the first time, the township of Yarra Glen flooded.

The railway track to Healesville ran along the back fence of the farm and when the Melbourne train was due about 7.00 PM one of the boys would go down and shout out "Paper" and someone would throw out a rolled up Herald, [the afternoon paper] out of the train window. By then they would have finished reading the paper as it took over an hour to get to Lilydale and then the first three carriages went on to Healesville and the last two, to Warburton.

The family played cards or "I spy" after tea by lamplight and when Wyn was little and before he went to school he would beg to play along with them. His I spy was always "S on S on Double S" and they all knew it would be "lamp on table" or "big lugs on Bert".

The children as they grew to adulthood were all part of the Yarra Glen community, and Joe and Harry were axemen and sawyers of note. Years later we went up to the Boxing Day gymkhana at Healesville and Mum and I were watching the wood chopping and the two-man crosscut saw events. There were a couple of old guys sitting at the front and when the saw event finished, one turned to his mate and said, "I bet that be Harry Bick's old saw!" Once, Uncle Joe had been handicapped out of the running in the cross-cut saw event [or so they thought] and he was running down the line waving his arm over his head and everyone else still sawing away: he'd finished well ahead.



Uncle Joe Hill - finished! (Left)

Mum's family were all great yarn spinners, I remember sitting spellbound on winter Sunday nights around the fire and they'd start off reminiscing about times gone by when they were all children and young adults. I wish I could have written them down but I was only a small child and Mum didn't live long enough for me to get her to write them down. I know one was that when their parents went out for the day they would make toffee, eat it all before Nan and Papa came home and once had to hide the saucepan as they couldn't get the hard toffee from the bottom of the pan.

Harry and Joe were also good footballers. Uncle Joe played for Yarra Glen, [they wore black and red jumpers, the reason Mum barracked for Essendon when she came to Melbourne to live, that and her cousin Joe Hammond played for Essendon] and was part of their 1921 premiership team. I guess that's where Uncle Bert learnt how to stud boots. One year the football ground at Yarra Glen was flooded [it was next to the river] and they had to postpone the Grand Final. The next week the ground was still very wet but it went ahead, one guy was amazing, he kept his feet when all around were sliding and falling over. At the end of the match my grandfather complimented him on his game and he held up his foot and he had several two inch screws sticking out the soles of his boots. Easy to see there were no stop inspections or moulded soles in those days.

Uncle Harry was the only one of the first family that I ever knew, I remember him as an old man yet he was probably only 50 or so. Of course, I knew his daughters Edna (b1912) and Gwen (b1913), their husbands, and Edna's two children Helen and Ron. Gwen's three I remember only as babies they were much younger than me. Helen shared several holidays with us at Dromana, Inverloch and Torquay. Gwen and her husband, Harold Gilson lived near us at Mont Albert so we saw a bit more of them until they moved to Warburton. Uncle Harry's other children were Alfred (b1914), Christian (Chris, b1915) and Lawrence (b1917).



Yarra Glen FC Premiership team, 1921

Papa second from left in hat, Joe first from left in white "shorts", Bert in back between 2nd & 3rd from left in white shorts

Laurie Bickerton, Uncle Harry's son, played in the last Fitzroy team to win a Grand Final (1944), and before he died in 2009 he was one of only two left alive from that team.

Edna and Colin Milner lived at Warburton and Col owned Warburton Motors and they lived over the road from the garage, near the railway line. Colin owned a charabanc, a big old tourer bus, built in the twenties. It had bench seats and a door for every row of seats and a top that could be erected in case of inclement weather. The bus was nicknamed "Big Bertha" and used to do tours to Mt Donna Buang. It had solid rubber tyres and the seats were made of wood so not a comfortable ride over gravel roads!

Uncle Bert was born hemiplegic, in those days it was called "spastic paralysis" but he received some sort of disability pension and he lived at home with Nanna and Papa. When I think back to him he was really was remarkable for his disability and the times he lived in. He certainly was clever and intelligent in his own way. He was also as tight as a fish's backside. He owned a pet shop in Elizabeth St Coburg, a cul-de-sac that went from Sydney Rd to the railway line. Geoff and I loved going down to the shop and "helping" Uncle Bert to run the shop. This was long before plastic and sticky tape still had to be invented. He had this little device, you put a spool of gummed brown paper tape on a spindle and it had a little trough with water in it and a roller to push the tape down and as you pulled the tape it went through the rollers and water and got wet and if you were lucky it stuck up the packet of bird seed you'd just packed!



Your Dad's sisters bought him a puppy from that shop. He had an amazing stamp collection and bred budgerigars and showed them and won countless prizes. Dad made all his "show" cages for him. He and Uncle Bert had built three big cages on one side of the yard at Bell St., he made a beautiful fernery all around where the outside toilet was and in the middle of the yard he built a complex arrangement of fish ponds and a succulent garden. The lantana at the front fence was trimmed within an inch of its life; the lawns were always neatly mown.



Mum, 1920s. With Wyn (1925), with Nana (rear), Maisie Skinner and Great-Grandma Johnson (Mary-Ann Pascoe)

Dad got him a job at the SEC working on a machine and it was the proudest day of his life to write to Social Services and tell them he no longer needed a pension as he had a job. While he was there he designed several modifications to the various machines he worked on, they were accepted and he was given awards for them.

Bert joined the Coburg Football Club [also black and red guernseys] as their bootstudder and gave many, many years of service and was awarded a life membership for his work. He lived with Nanna and Papa all his life and when Papa died in 1945 he continued to live with Nanna. A couple of times we took Nanna and Uncle Bert to Yarra Glen Show, long after they had left the area and there was so many people came up to speak to Mum and them, they were all well remembered. We visited Don White who had the farm opposite Mum's old home.

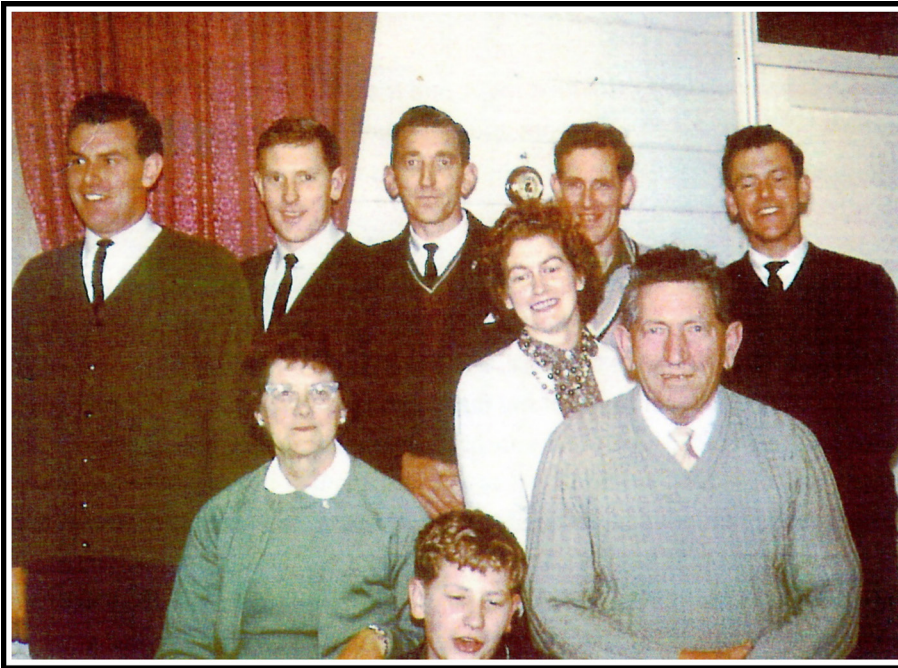
After Papa's death Mum and her brothers and sisters signed over their share of the estate to Bert as he would be there for Nanna, so when she died he got the house in Bell St, sold it and bought a house in Richmond. When he died it was left to be divided equally between his six nieces and one of his nephews.



Uncle Tom, Laurie, Aileen, Colin, Aunty Grace



Uncle Joe



From the back: Ken, Mervyn, Tom, Ivan, Eddie, centre Irene (Babe) front, Aunty Peg and Uncle Joe with Neville in the middle at the bottom

Uncle Joe and Aunty Peggy had the pub at Digby for many years, they stayed in Digby after they sold it, as her parents lived near them and she could help care for them. Their family was Tom, Eddie, Ivan, Irene, Merv, Ken and Neville. Most of the boys became teachers, Ivan was the odd man out, he started with the Merino garage as an apprentice mechanic and ended up

owning it. Merv lived with us for a year in his last year at Melbourne Teachers College. Aunty Peggy was a great cook, she would make ten different things for a meal so that everyone had what they liked. Ken had Debbie's cards and gifts shop at Chirnside Park for many years till he retired to Healesville.

Aunty Grace married Tom Goodrope. They had three children, Laurence, Colin and Aileen. Colin and Aileen were at Coburg State School with your father and my father went to that school also.

I don't remember anything of Aunty Eff, she and her girls went to South Africa to join her husband Bert Cox when I was very small. Her three little girls, Shirley and Valerie, [the twins] and Betty had been flower girls at Dad and Mum's



Annty Grace, Aunty Effie, Mum



Aunty Grace

wedding and I suppose I was about 4 when they sailed. Years later when we lived in Adelaide, Aunty Eff came back to visit the relations in Victoria. As the ship was stopping at Port Adelaide we arranged to pick her up from the ship and bring her to our place for a meal. On the way out to Outer Harbour, Bob asked how I thought I'd know her as I couldn't remember her and I said she'll look like Mum. We went to where the ship was docked and I just looked over the passengers and said, "That's her!" and we walked towards each other and hugged. On the way home Bob asked Aunty Eff the same question and she said she knew I'd look like my mum. Val and her husband Bill came over once but haven't seen or heard anything since.

Uncle Wyn was the family success story. He began work at A B Crabtree General Store at Yarra Glen at 13, for 15 shillings [\$1.50] a week. He realised that in the country towns section of the "Age" there was no news of Yarra Glen, so he wrote to the editor offering his services and became a reporter with press badge, etc. He was paid twopence [1c] per line. He made as much from that as he did from Crabtrees and the "Age" never realised their reporter was only sixteen! In 1927 the family sold out and moved to Melbourne and he got a job at Crofts' Store in Bell St. Coburg, doing deliveries and weighing spuds. He worked very hard and did jobs around the store that no one else wanted to do and he caught the eye of Archie Croft, the owner. He was promoted to manager of their Bendigo Store in 1931. At a dance in a nearby town he met Mavis Kemp, who actually came from Coburg also. She had her own business, "Mavis Kemp's Dancing School" in Coburg. When Wyn was appointed manager of the Mildura Store, she gave up her career and they were married in a quiet ceremony in Mildura in 1937.



Wyn out the front of Croft's, boating, with Mavis, and playing footy (fifth from the left in the back)

Wyn worked his way through all the managers jobs and then through the managerial ranks at Head Office. He became known as a trouble shooter, he would take over a store that was underperforming

and in the red and by weeding out corrupt staff and the lurks and perks they were allowing their friends, he could turn the store to profitability again. In 1967, when Woolworths bought out the Croft name but Crofts retained ownership of all their premises, he was made Managing Director of Crofts Holdings Ltd. He was a founding member of the Victorian Food Retailers Consumer Council and their President in 1960. He worked for Crofts for 68 years and had a company car long before they became common. Aunty Mavis lived in the same street as Dad and her brother Ron was Frank Burgess' mate. I thought she was wonderful, very talented, she played and taught piano and dancing, even tried to teach me how to play a tune on the piano [without any luck I might add] she DROVE her own car the only female in the Hill side of the family to ever hold a drivers licence. They had three children, Noelle, Margaret and Alan. Uncle Wyn was a keen golfer and joined the Yarra Yarra Club when they lived in Warrigal Rd, later becoming President of the club.



Top left: Papa with Shirley & Valerie, Papa & Nanna, left Mum, bottom row: a cousin Bert and his wife on left, Papa at front, Mum behind him, Joe, Effie & Bert Cox on right. Middle Papa and Nanna, Shirley, Valerie and Betty, Right: Grace & Mum

When Mum grew up it was the same story then as now, no work in the country towns, so she came to Melbourne and worked as a “presser” at the Domino Shirt Factory in Richmond. She boarded in Richmond, at the same place as her sister Grace, probably sharing a room. Nanna and Papa decided to move to Melbourne, sold the property at the Glen and most of the locals were amazed to discover they actually owned it, so they did very well to pay off a farm as well as raise all those kids. They bought the house at 149 Bell St, Coburg, so finished up where Nanna’s great uncle had settled all those years ago.

Mum was working in Richmond and living at home in Coburg when she went to an Oddfellows meeting and met my Dad. One of her friends encouraged her to go out with him but when they became serious about their relationship she became very jealous and Mum got many taunts about “cradle snatching” as Dad was three years younger than she was. They were married at Holy Trinity Anglican church in Sydney Rd, Coburg on 11th March, 1933 and Nanna and Papa paid all the expenses for their wedding and reception.



Mum & Dad's wedding

Uncle Percy then Shirley Cox, Auntie Kath, Dad, Mum, Papa, Betty Cox in front, Auntie Doris, Valerie Cox, and Uncle Wyn seated.



Dad and Mum’s honeymoon was spent touring around Victoria in Dad’s “Essex” car. It had a drop down seat, [bucket seats were in sports cars only] and they ate under a strip of canvas. Dad sold it and bought a Harley Davison when Geoff was little, it was much cheaper to run but when I was imminent there wasn’t enough room so Dad sold the Harley and bought a “Swift” car. [It wasn’t!]

In a line along Sydney Rd was Pentridge Gaol, then the Catholic Church, then Holy Trinity C of E, then the Methodist church on the corner of Bell St and around the corner was the State School and the Town Hall. Across the side door of the Town Hall for as long as I can remember was a neon sign saying, “TALKIES” and Mum had to explain to us that films didn’t always have sound. Unbelievable! We spent a lot of weekends in Coburg at one stage we had Grandma, Grandpa, Uncle Frank and Uncle Percy at Richards St, Nanna, Papa and Uncle Bert in Bell St, Auntie Doris and Uncle George in Murray Rd, Auntie Grace and Uncle Tom in Walsh St and Auntie Hilda and Uncle Floyd in Mt Pleasant Rd, West Preston just across the Merri Creek.

Dad lived in Coburg for all of his early life. He went to school there, he and Mum were married and started married life there, Geoff and I were born there, before we moved to Boronia and subsequently Box Hill.

During the latter days of the depression, Dad would take Papa out to Warrandyte with his swag and his gold pan, shovel, some tucker and he would stay out there on his own for a week or so. He always came home with a small amount of gold, enough to make him feel as though he was making a contribution to the family. By then years of hard labour in poor conditions had ruined his health and there was no old age pension. Mum and Wyn's wages and Bert's allowance kept them going, Effie and the three girls lived there and she would sometimes get a packet [I don't know how often] from Bert with three pieces of cardboard, the middle one having holes the size of the sovereigns which he sent, the other pieces went each side to hide the fact that there was money inside.



Papa (Joseph) left, Charles right

The Burgesses

My grandparents on my father's side were Percival Burgess and Fanny Rose Tranter.

Grandpa was the youngest of the four children of Charles and Charlotte Burgess, born in Henley in 1886. He sang as a choir boy at the church in Harpsden, where his friend Tommy Tranter also sang.

Charles and Charlotte's first child, Ronald, was born in 1881 in Rotherfield Greys, Henley on Thames. He is listed as a draper's clerk in the 1901 census and then a brewer's clerk in the 1911 census, but enlisted in the British Army in 1916. While on leave from the army in 1918 he married Marian Volkins, to whom he had fathered a child earlier that year. We've not been able to find any trace of the child after this. He was demobbed from the army at the end of World War 1, in 1918, and died in Warwick in 1947.

Second child Nellie was born in 1883 at St. Giles, Reading, and married Arthur Eggleton in January, 1908. They had two girls, Florence and Alice, and Nellie died at Reading in 1960.

Albert was born in 1884. He went to live in USA, returning to marry Eleanor Serls at Maidenhead in 1907 and then returning to the US. After Eleanor died, he married Mary Cooper in Cuyahoga, Ohio, USA in 1920.

Percy was born in 1886 in Henley on Thames. His mother died in 1899, and things became difficult for the family.

Great Grandfather Burgess apparently hit the bottle pretty hard after his wife died and as a result, both Albert and Percy were boarding and Ronald visiting with the Tranter family in the 1901 census. Grandpa was a lifelong teetotaler, [he had a small sherry at Christmas!] he said he never wanted his boys to have to fish him out of pubs and get him home.

Grandma was the fifth child of Richard and Louisa Tranter, born in Henley in 1881. She was one of identical twins: her twin Rebekah never married, just spent her whole life looking after parents and her nephew Lloyd.

Grandma's eldest sister Harriet Tranter married Frederick Booker and their children were Freda and Lloyd. After Harriet's death, Fred hanged himself, apparently, on the bedpost and Lloyd, who was only a small boy, lived in the house with the corpse for several days until it was discovered. Lloyd repeatedly asked Aunty Reb, "Why did Daddy have a sausage in his mouth?" Freda died young, it is rumoured from a botched abortion.

Next eldest sister Annie married Harry Whatley, their children were Richard, Kathleen, Olive, Ronald and Doris.

Grandma's only brother Tom married Alice Vaughan and their daughter was Vera, I stayed with her and met her daughter Ann and son David at Henley while I was in the UK.



Percy Burgess

Jane Tranter married Adam Clarke, they had one daughter, Janet and emigrated to Australia, I remember them quite well. I think Adam had sons from his first marriage.

Olive married a black West Indian, Dr Harold Moody, who was one of the first people to fight for civil rights and the emancipation for coloured people in England; his brother Thomas was a well-known sculptor.

The youngest daughter was Louisa, mother of Dorothy and Catherine. Catherine married Michael Cockbill and was grandmother to Lynne, Jill and Steph.

Grandma's parents must have been a bit upset with the girls, with Olive marrying a West Indian and Grandma becoming pregnant before marriage. I met several of Dad's relations when in England in 1991. Both inter-racial marriage and unmarried pregnancies were very much frowned upon.

Rumour says that Grandma had her eye on Ronald but he wasn't interested so she settled for Percy, who was several years younger than she was. They did their courting and a bit more in Harpsden Woods. The local bigwig was Sir John Hodges and he took an interest in the poor boys of the parish. Nowadays one would wonder why always boys and nothing for girls but perhaps it was above board.

When Percy got to leaving school, Sir John asked what he would like to do to earn a living. Great grandfather was a cabinet maker and Percy didn't fancy that so he decided on engineering and Sir John had him apprenticed in Henley. When Grandpa and Grandma "had" to be married he was called up to the big house and told that his behavior was not what was expected from "his" boys.

He gave Grandpa 50 sovereigns and said perhaps he should seek a new life in the colonies! Which they did, leaving England in 1909 on board *Pericles* with baby Katherine, and with the 50 sovs bought the house in Coburg, which was then really out in the boonies.

My father, Ronald Leslie Burgess, was the first child to be born in Australia, at Coburg on 7th February 1911. Percy was next in 1913, Doris followed in 1916, Marj in 1918, Hilda in 1920, and finally Frank in 1922.

The house in Richards St. was not large but it didn't really matter because no one slept in it! It had a large and a small bedroom, sitting room, dining room, kitchen, bathroom, laundry and a toilet out the side. Grandma and Grandpa slept on one part of the back verandah with heavy curtains around the three open sides, there was a big bungalow in the back yard, it was divided in two and the boys slept at one end and the girls at the other. The small bedroom was used as a dressing room and Grandma and Grandpa kept their clothes there. They had --wait for it--a refrigerator and hot water service! The dining room table was huge, I reckon you could fit about 18 people around it, Nanna had a similar one.



Pericles, 1909. This is the boat that the Burgesses came out on. Shows the boat at dock and emigrants

We loved Grandma to bits because she always made icecream when we visited. This was before the days of commercially made icecream bricks or tubs, all one could get was a dixie, a wafer or a cone, I well remember when chocolate coated icecreams [Eskimo pies were the first] came into being. There was a sign that flashed up before the picture show started and it said, PROHIITED IN THIS THEATRE-INTOXICATING LIQUOR, CHOCOLATE COATED ICECREAMS, BUBBLE GUM AND PEANUTS IN SHELLS.

Dad's older sister Kath had an on again, off again romance with Edward [Ted] Schaefer, Kath taught High school in a country town and came home on weekends. Sometimes Ted would come up to Dad at work [SEC] and ask if he would pick Kath up from Spencer St station as they'd had a bust up over the phone. They eventually married and had two girls, Jennifer and Margaret.

Uncle Percy was a bachelor for many years, he married Yvonne Oldis when I was about 15. He was a lovely quiet, gentle and patient man, very like Grandpa in looks and ways. They had a son, Charles and two girls, Janice and Frances. He was a plumber and later he and Vonnie opened a shop and non- official Post Office at Coburg.

Aunty Doris met George Reynolds when she was a lady cubmaster and he was a scoutmaster. They had a very "posh" wedding, the reception was held at the Oriental Hotel [I think!] in Bourke Street, Melbourne. I remember Dad saying that Grandpa had paid the drinks bill and it came to eight pounds! George paid for the reception. They had three girls, Patricia and the twins Leone and Judith.

Aunty Marj was a herd tester and went around farms testing the quality and quantity of the milk produced and advising the farmers which cows were most productive. She met Carl Fischmann on his parent's farm and they married and had eleven children, Joyce, Betty, Keith, Alan, Nancy, John, Suzanne, David, Bruce, Gary and Judith.



Uncle Percy and Aunty Von

Hilda married Floyd Myers and as he was divorced they could not marry in the Anglican Church, and married in the registry Office in Melbourne. They had two girls, Elaine and Helen and a son, Robert.

Frank joined the RAAF in 1940. From Darwin he was sent to PNG and was stationed at Madang. I didn't know that when I lived there, I thought he was stationed in Lae. I still remember his last leave, we were at Richards St and Geoff and I were mucking about out the back and he came around the corner of the house and said, "Giddyay kids, what are you up to?" After lunch, Dad, Grandpa, Geoff, Percy and Frank went off shooting up at Donnybrook. When he was reported missing, presumed dead, everyone sort of hoped he'd been captured and was in a POW camp somewhere and would come home after the war was over. He didn't of course, I know now that neither side took prisoners. He was shot down in 1945 - in 1997 they found his plane and body and he got a full military funeral.



When Geoff was living with Bob and me after Andy was born we were talking one day and I said to Geoff, "You know the guy who drives the Board of Works grader?" and he just looked at me and said, "Yeah, he looks

like Uncle Frank, doesn't he?" But of course Frank would have been twenty years older than when we last saw him.

Dad's parents were much younger than Mum's and we had a lot of great times with them. Also Dad's siblings were much younger also and were not above a game with us. When Geoff was little and they lived at Boronia, Mum dreaded the weekend visits from the family. Marj, Hilda and Frank were still in their teens and would race Geoff about all day and Mum would have to try and get an over excited, overtired baby to sleep after they left.

Grandma loved picnics and we often met somewhere for a wonderful day with them, sometimes just us but usually other family members as well. There were two favourite spots, Fernshaw up past Healesville on the Marysville road and a little park at Kalorama. We really loved Fernshaw, it was always shady and cool with the huge trees and the creek running past. I wasn't keen on the long drop toilets; Geoff told me they sucked people in and they were never seen again. There were card tables and steamer chairs, starched white tablecloths, silver cutlery and nice china plates. [No plastic, wasn't invented] We'd sit there like toffs and tuck into enormous meals, cold meat and salads, or cold bacon and egg pies, or ham or chicken followed by fruit salad or fruit pies, cream and custard. Thermos flasks of tea for the adults and cold soft drinks for the kids. There were cakes and biscuits to eat before and after and plenty of extra



the Burgess family outside the house Dad built in Boronia. Rear: Percy, Kathleen, Dad, Front: Doris, Marjorie, Grandma, Frank, Grandpa, Hilda

cups of tea. Dad and Grandpa and any stray uncles would set up a cricket match and we all played, except Grandma. No wonder we adored them. We'd finally pack up the baskets and load them into the cars, Grandpa would put Jock, his little fox terrier into the kennel attached to the running board of his car, [it had a round hole at the front and Jock's little head would pop out!] and off we'd go home.

Years later when Bob and I were married we'd be driving along a road somewhere and see a family picnicking with tables and chairs. Bob [who hated picnics with a vengeance] would say, "Look at those stupid twits, if they wanted tables and chairs why didn't they stay at home?" and I never did have the nerve to tell him that that's how we always picnicked. One year Mum and Dad gave Grandma a big fitted picnic basket for Christmas and she squealed with excitement when she opened it, saying, "Father, it's a basket, it's a picnic basket!"

During the war Auntie Doris and Pat lived with Grandma and Grandpa while George was overseas, they occupied the small bedroom and Pat didn't remember her father, she thought the sketch on the dresser was George and wouldn't have anything to do with him when he came home.

Dad and Percy strained the truth a bit with Grandma, one day they shot a turkey and Percy calmly told her it had been coming out of a rabbit burrow and he'd thought it was a rabbit. Dad told her once that he'd built a floor so flat that when he tipped a bucket of water on it, it stayed in the bucket shape because it didn't know which way to run!

Dad was never more than an average student, he said when he went to sit the entrance exam for Technical school he read the paper and handed it in and went home because he couldn't do it. Yet he was clever and inventive even as a child, he made a mini penny-farthing bike from an old trike and a cat trap to catch and then asphyxiate with coal gas, some of the many feral cats that roamed Coburg. He was knocked off his bike one day and the bloke put him in his car. When Dad came to, he asked where he was going and when told the hospital, opened the car door, jumped out and ran home. They took your tonsils out in hospitals! Someone had run to tell Grandma and she was out walking the streets looking for him. When a small boy, he was going to a party and Grandpa said, "Bring me home a cream puff, Ron" and he did, in the pocket of his suit. [All boys wore suits for best even when Geoff was young.]

He learned to swim in the Merri Creek and in the summer holidays spent most of his time there with his friends. The All White poultry farm was nearby and wasn't fenced and the chooks roamed around in the paddock. The boys would collect a half a kerosene tin of eggs, catch half a tin of yabbies and cook them over a fire for their lunch. They played cricket and football, in the ground next to Pentridge prison which had huge farm attached to it then, if the ball went over the wall they'd get one of the tower guards to go down and throw it back to them.

Auntie Marj had an Austin 7, a biscuit tin on wheels Dad called it. She'd drive home and park the car around the back between the house and the bungalow. Dad and Percy would pick it up and turn it 90 degrees and she'd go mad at them until they put it back. Dad became a superb craftsman, his work was beautifully done, and some of his work still is in the family. He made spinning wheels for Peg, Sue and me, and the cradle that all his great-grandchildren came home to.

Auntie Kath was a high school teacher, but Doris was a brilliant dressmaker, easily the best freehand cutter I've ever seen. She could spread out a piece of fabric for a wedding dress on the floor, look at the measurements of the person and with just the odd measure from the tape, cut out a wedding dress. She was a very attractive woman, bright and bubbly, she dressed well and made all her own and Pat's clothes. And yes, I adored her.

As I get older I went to the pictures with Hilda sometimes. After work on Saturday I'd catch the train in to Flinders St then the tram along Nicholson St, get off at the Swing Bridge and walk the couple of hundred yards to their house. After tea Floyd would mind the two girls while we toddled off to the flicks. Dad and Mum came down on Sunday and picked me up, I felt really grown up. I was probably about fifteen.



Rabbits were “underground mutton” and if you bought them from the butcher or the fishmonger, they were 2/- [20c] a pair but free if you shot them yourself. Dad and Grandpa went out shooting many Sundays and we ate a lot of rabbit, baked, roasted, stewed, potted or any way you could find to cook it. There were no domestic freezers, and very few people had refrigerators, so it had to be cooked and eaten quickly.

We kept chooks for eggs and Dad fenced off half the back yard and put it under vegetables. We put down eggs when there was plenty and

Mum bottled and jammed, we could always get cherry plums from the two huge trees near Dixons farm and jam melons were cheap. We ate a lot of melon and ginger, melon and lemon jam and the everlasting plum jam. The blackberry and apricot jam was strictly rationed but it still never lasted long. We bottled apricots from our trees, Mum bought “Golden Queen” peaches and William pears from an orchard and of course, we bottled plums. We rarely had cream, and icecream wasn’t available and anyhow we had nowhere to keep it frozen. We drank homemade ginger beer, but Burrows’ had Loys deliver soft drinks every week, I envied them the status but as I didn’t like fizzy drinks it didn’t matter much.

My only sibling, Geoffrey Ronald, was born at home at 88 O’Hea street, Coburg, on the 28th July 1934. Mum and Dad were renting a place there while they were saving to buy a house. Geoff spent his first year and a half there. In the late afternoon Mum would feed Geoff and prop him up in the pram in the vestibule. Every night Dad would ride home on the bike and Geoff got to know the sound of the bike [it was a big Harley Davison] and dad would poke his head around the back door and say “Giddyay” to Geoff. One night when Geoff was about six months old, Dad stuck his head around the door and Geoff said “Giddyay”! On the next page is a photo of Geoff standing with his hand on a cane chair. This was the first time he’d stood up, so Mum wanted a photo,. She had to take it very quickly as she could see the chair sliding across the floor and knew Geoff was going with it!

Later they moved up to the house at Boronia and were still living there when I was born. They planted wattle trees all down the left hand side of the block. They were only small when they lived there but huge later on, they looked wonderful in flower. Grandpa finally had to remove them so that he could get the car into the driveway. Dad made Geoff a rocking horse from pieces of dead gum trees that were all around the block, he opicked pieces that were already sort of the shape he wanted the when he had all the pieces he wanted he made it into a rustic rocking horse.

Dad couldn’t take Geoff with him when Mum was in hospital when I was born [two weeks, not allowed out of bed for the first week], because it was too dangerous to take him alone on the motorbike. One night, Aunty Eff was coming in with Dad so they brought Geoff in to see Mum and me. All was fine until it was time for them to go. Geoff asked if Mum was coming as well and Mum said no, she had to stay in hospital until little sister was big enough to come home with her. Geoff plonked himself on the bed and announced “Well I’m staying too!”. He wouldn’t budge, clung onto Mum and yelled the place down when Dad tried to get hom off the bed. After they had calmed him down, Aunty Eff said “How about we go and get icecream, Geoff?” She took him off and Dad gave Mum a hasty kiss goodbye and collected Geoff and Aunty Eff from the shop. He didn’t go again!

Geoff was always outside with Dad when Dad was home on the weekends, riding in the wheelbarrow and “helping” Dad all the time. Mum made all his clothes and knitted his jumpers, and years later when Andy was little I was making him a pair of “good” pants and remembered Mum saying that you could sew them so that no seams showed and you only had a small piece of lining seam to sew up. It took me about three days and umpteen unpicks, but I finally found a way to do it. When we came down to Melbourne next time I told Mum how I’d struggled to found out how she did it, and she sid “Oh, I always had to sew the top around afterwards!”.

Geoff was almost four when we moved to Box Hill.



Grandpa, Grandma and the twins

My early life

I was born on Monday, February 1st, 1937 at Vacluse Private Hospital in Moreland Road, East Brunswick. I was a week early, should have arrived on Dad's birthday, the 7th Feb. It was on the Australia Day holiday and Mum, Dad and Geoff were staying at Grandma and Grandpa's house, so Grandma could mind Geoff while Mum was in hospital with me. Mum's labour pains started about ten PM, just as they were going to bed and Grandma, having had seven children told her not to be silly as I wasn't due for another week. However Mum decided she was the better judge of that and Dad took her to hospital where I was born at 11.45 PM.

We were living at Grandpa's weekend house at Boronia at this time (photo earlier). Dad had built the house when he was a 16 year old apprentice cabinet maker at the SEC. The house had only two rooms, a bedroom and a large eating/living room. There was a large kitchen at the back at one end and a covered verandah with a bathroom/ cum wash house of sorts at the other. There was a tin bath I remember and the toilet was a thunderbox way up the back yard. Mum had a copper to boil for the clothes and a trough to wash the rest of the stuff in, all in the "bathroom" She cooked on a wood stove and we had a big open fireplace for heat, and kept the butter etc. in a coolguardie safe which swung from the ceiling. The rooms were lined with hessian stretched tight and newspaper pasted over that and then kalsomined. The kitchen and bathroom were unlined. It was just as well Mum was country born and bred! She coped with everything.



The house was in Normleith Grove, off Mountain View Ave. There was an old house next door and nothing else until Albert Avenue. Dad would walk to Boronia Station, catch a train to East Richmond, walk to the SEC buildings then reverse the process at night. I guess he would leave early and catch the first train to work about 6AM and get home about six at night. He worked Saturday mornings too. One afternoon Mum had me in my pram and was walking along a little track to the main road to meet Dad. Geoff was running ahead and she saw a snake right near him on the path. She knew she'd never get to him so she shouted "Geoff, run" and he took off like a rocket and she quietly went up and killed

the snake. Grandpa always had several “snake sticks” [thin, whippy sticks with a thick part at one end outside the doors and Mum, being a bush kid, never walked without one.] We learnt as we got older and went there for holidays that it was a sensible thing to do.

Grandpa had a “mo”, it started off when he came from England and no one would believe he was qualified as he looked too young, so in the photo of Dad as a baby he had a magnificent moustache. As the years went by he slowly whittled it down from the sides until he had a little Hitler style mo, and a bit more went every now and then until finally there was only a couple of dozen hairs on the top lip until one day the razor slipped and Grandpa became clean shaven!

When we were young we always did the visiting as we had a car and the only people who came way out to the wilds of Box Hill were our Burgess grandparents and Uncle Wyn and Auntie Mavis. Grandpa had a 1937 Ford V8 and during the war we had petrol rationing and to get around he towed a “gas producer”. Don’t ask me how it worked I have no idea, but I don’t think it did the engine of the car a lot of good. Anyhow nearly every weekend we would visit one of the rellies. Uncle Percy had a garage in Sydney Road called Dads Service Station, it did servicing and repairs work and sold petrol. Geoff and I used to go there with him sometimes and muck about with things but he was a very gentle man and never went crook at us. We used to hide his tennis shoes and he’d pay us a penny each to find them!

We often went to the Boronia house if Grandma and Grandpa were staying there and when we were little



Grandpa always gave us a penny or two as we left. I put an end to that when one night I refused to go because “Grandpa hasn’t given us a penny!” and that put paid to that.

We went blackberrying in the summer and mushrooming in the autumn. There were paddocks full of blackberries and we filled buckets and buckets of them for Mum to make into jam and jelly and blackberry pies. One day I was running ahead of Dad, Grandpa and Geoff and jumped over what I thought was a piece of black rubber tubing. When I turned round Grandpa was holding up the big black snake he had just killed. Grandpa had a huge vegetable garden both at Boronia and Coburg and sometimes he must have hated us coming as we would eat his raspberries and strawberries as well as the turnips, beans and peas, but he never stopped us. We used to build Mia Mias in the bush next to the house and Grandma would bring out cordial and biscuits to eat there.

Dad and Mum had saved while they lived at Boronia and decided it was time to build their house. They paid 50 pounds for a block of land in Nelson Road, Box Hill and 450 pounds to get a house built. It was a very basic house, four rooms, 2 bedrooms, sitting room and a kitchen, with a bathroom, and INDOOR toilet and laundry, both built on to the back of the house.. It must have seemed like a palace to Mum. We were the only people in the entire neighbourhood with an inside toilet! There was no hot water system and we had the obligatory open fire. When I was about ten Dad got a discounted sink heater from the SEC and we actually could have a warm wash on a cold winter morning. And they were cold, no such thing as insulation. The dog's water bowl froze over regularly. We had a chip heater in the bathroom, you lit a fire with chips [hence the name] and when the water got hot you ran it out into the bath and added cold. If the heater boiled then the water ran out brown and rusty we never cared because it was hot. We went into that bath in order, me first, and then Geoff, followed by Mum and lastly Dad topping up the hot water as we went. It was the only bath we had all week. We changed our undies, singlet and socks on Monday morning [bath night was Sunday] Mum changed the bottom sheet every week and we only had 3 pairs of knickers, singlets, jocks and socks, one on and one in the wash and one for "best". Mum washed every Monday, as did most of the women in the area. We also did not have deodorants or shampoo, but then everyone was in the same boat.

Mum boiled up the white things in the copper, lifted them with the copper stick, the rinsed and put them through the wringer. All the white stuff was rinsed in 'blue' water as it was supposed to make whites "whiter". [See, advertising made its mark even then] Then she would make up a basin of starch and starch the tablecloths, Dad's good shirt collars and cuffs, doilies etc. She then bucketed the water into the troughs and cooled it and did the coloured things by hand next. It all had to be hung on lines stretched across the yard and held up with clothes props so the washing didn't drag in the dirt. By afternoon, [hopefully] the washing would be dry and Mum would bring it in, fold the stuff that didn't need ironing and damp down the rest. Monday was wash day, Tuesday was ironing day, Friday was cleaning day, Saturday was baking day and as we only had an ice chest, [don't get me wrong it was much better than the coolguardie safe!] Mum and Mrs. Burrows walked up to Box Hill almost every day for perishables.

Mum taught me so much without me realising it, small things that I still do and I suspect so do my girls, [the scones in the tea towel in the colander when they are hot from the oven?] the names of birds, trees, flowers, breeds of cattle and weeds. She taught me how to knit and sew and cook, I loved Saturday afternoons with Mum, just us together, Dad would be outside or in the shed and Geoff would be off with his mates. Mum would do the baking for the week, scones for afternoon tea and enough cake and biscuits for a week. I used to make little cakes out of scraps of sugar, flour, milk and margarine, learning without realizing it how to make a cake, and then she'd show me how to bake them. Geoff and the mates made short work of the scones when they arrived back at our place.

She could pluck and clean a chook and kill it too if Dad wasn't about to wring its neck. We always had chooks, they provided eggs and manure and when they got too old to lay they were eaten. Mind you they were as tough as old boots and Mum boiled them for ages then baked them but they were still pretty tough. She fed the chooks wheat, bran and pollard, she mixed the bran and pollard with hot water and feed it to them on the cold winter mornings, Geoff and I loved to eat a handful of it, all hot and yummy! We always had a dog, some mutt that would turn up and be taken in but I must have been about 13 when Dad first let Mum have a cat.

Mum loved her sport, football was probably her first love but she also loved cricket and had inherited her father's love of horse racing. She always listened to the footy [Essendon, of course] on Saturday afternoons and complained bitterly if they weren't on 3KZ as all the other stations crossed to the races and interrupted the footy. She loved Spring Racing Carnival and though it wasn't like now, it was always

a huge event. She knew every race in the whole ten days or so of the carnival and never put a bet on a horse in her life, but when she was single she went to the Melbourne Cup every year with her girlfriends.

It was Mum who said to Geoff and I when Don Bradman retired that there will never be another Bradman and took us to the Testimonial when it came to Melbourne. So I got to see Don Bradman bat, from memory he made 108 and was caught by Neil Harvey. She would have loved colour TV. John Coleman was my hero.



John Coleman



Don Bradman



Dick Reynolds

Although Geoff and I were not born during the depression, our parents were married in 1932 and times were really bad. This was the defining factor for many decisions that were made. Jobs were paramount; you had to have a trade, you had to hang onto your job. Saving things, unfranked stamps, brown paper, string, beer bottles, soft drink bottles, anything that could be sold or used again was. It still affects my life today.

When we were both at school every second Friday Mum would walk to Box Hill, catch the train to Flinders St Station, the tram along Elizabeth St to Coburg and do her mother's house out as Nana was getting old. [Take note, children!] Sometimes Mum and Mrs.B used to go "town" [Melbourne, Box Hill was up the street] and have a day out. One of the highlights of our young lives was, during the school holidays, to go into town on the train and have lunch at "Coles" cafeteria. To us, this was the ultimate dining out experience! There was no such thing as fast food outlets, only fish and chip shops. The fish and chip shops were usually run by Greeks and the fruiterers by Italians or Greeks.

The neighbours on each side of the new house were elderly and their houses were old and not in good condition. They both owned a horse which was stabled in the back yard of each house. There was of course fodder as well and Mum blamed them for the rats we got occasionally. They kept jinkers and used the horse and jinker as their only means of transport apart from Shanks's pony. "Hoppy" [he had had a leg broken falling from a horse and badly set] and Mrs. Weir lived in 136 and Mr and Mrs Sedgman lived at 130, there was no 134.

The baker, grocer, greengrocer, butcher, iceman and the milkman all delivered. Some once a day, some twice a week and some once a week. The postman rode a pushbike and there were two deliveries a day. We used to put a billy out at night with a note of how much milk we wanted and the note and the money went in the billy. The milk came out of a big can and the milkie had a ladle that held a pint and he would

take out the money and the note and tip in the required amount of milk. There used to be a big two storey store on the corner of Tram Road and Doncaster Road [where Doncaster Shopping Town is now] and across the road was a paddock where the Coridas dairy horses lived when not working, probably twenty to thirty of them. The baker's and the milkie's horses knew the rounds as well as their drivers, they would walk on to the next stop while the delivery was being made and wait for the baker/milkie to catch up. All the shops used horses and carts to deliver and it was a free service. The iceman delivered ice in summer and wood in winter. Our iceman was Jock Logan and on his weekends off he ran marathons for fun. He always ran in and out of the houses and he would always chip off a bit of ice for us kids on a hot day. He'd run into the house with a block of ice on a hessian bag on his shoulder and he would chip the block to fit in the space that was there. Obviously no one locked their houses. On the railway stations were chocolate machines, you put a penny in and a small bar of Cadbury chocolate came out when you pushed the button. But there wasn't any chocolate during the war.

There were no supermarkets, just strips of shops. The butcher's shop always had sawdust on the floor, [presumably to soak up the blood] no machinery to cut up the meat, all done by hand. The butcher and fishmonger always had cold water running down the inside of the window to keep it cool.

The Box Hill council collected the rubbish in drays pulled by horses. We didn't have a bin, the chooks and dog ate the scraps and I don't know what we did with tins and stuff. Bottles could be re-used or returned. Eventually we got a truck for rubbish and we did then get a bin. A long while later we also had a briquette HWS that Dad had made and put in and one day he set the council truck alight from briquette dust that wasn't quite out! We had a "gutter man" all our roads had bluestone cobblestones from the edge of the bitumen and the kerb also was made from bluestone, and the council employed two men who would work their way around the streets of Box Hill and with small triangular picks, knock out the weeds that grew in the cracks. They'd pile them up on the side of the road and a horse and dray would come along and pick them up. It was the ultimate honour for us kids to get Mum to boil the water for the gutter man's smoko or lunch. The council also employed a man to walk the streets of Box Hill and put a note in the letter box of anyone whose hedge or plants were growing over the footpath, to tell them to get them cut back within two weeks or the council would do it and add it to their rates.

We moved to the new house when I was about 15 months old. A couple of months later Mum decided



132 Nelson Rd, Box Hill

to mow the front lawn before Dad got home from work. Geoff and I were tidied up and Mum put on a clean apron, she got the lawnmower out of the garage and Geoff was pulling the mower behind him down the path. With the old hand mowers if you turn the mower over and push it, the blades don't turn but if you pull it, the blades turn. We were all at the gate, Geoff with the mower, Mum, me and Spot, our little pup, when Geoff, the mower, and the dog got all tangled up. Mum had her head down trying to free the mower and hold the dog out of the way and I became impatient and put my right hand on top of the mower and started to climb over it. Mum

finally got the mower clear and the dog under control and said "Gee up, Geoff". Geoff geed and two of my fingers were almost severed by the blades. So, the dog's barking, Geoff's howling 'cos he's killed his baby sister, I'm screaming blue murder. There's blood everywhere and there's no one to call for help. Mum took off her apron and wrapped my hand

in it, she saw Harry Burrows coming out of his driveway, remembered she had chops under the grill, and ran back to turn them off and by then Harry had gone. Dad got home and took me to the doctors [Judkins] who sewed my tiny fingers back on. No microsurgery in those days, but I guess I was lucky he didn't just cut the bits of skin that my fingers were hanging by and say "too bad" but to my eternal gratitude, he patiently connected everything back as best he could. Because I was in a lot of pain with my hand, Mum could not get me to sit still while she brushed my hair into curls and pinned them, so one day she cut it short and that was the end of my curls!

Dad worked for the State Electricity Commission at their East Richmond Depot, where he had done his apprenticeship. Grandpa also worked there, he was an engineer, Uncle Ted was in the office and Uncle Frank before he went into the air force, and so family information was passed around between them. As I've said, later on Uncle Bert also worked there.

Geoff and I would stand at the front gate and watch for Dad to turn out of the park in Nelson Road at night and on Saturday mornings. We could always pick Dad out even from that distance by the way he swung his Gladstone bag. And he wore a cap [we called it a "Pommy Stetson"] in winter as working class men did not wear hats. The 8 hour day/40 hour week came into being on January 1st, 1948 so no more Saturdays to work!

Dad had a big vegetable garden and we had chooks for eggs. They planted a lemon tree, [everyone had a lemon tree] two apples, a granny smith and a delicious, two pears, a packham and a buerre bosc and two apricots.

We had now progressed from the motor bike and sidecar which was OK when there was only Geoff but no good once I arrived, to a "Swift" panel van sort of thing It had a bench seat and I was on Mum's knee and Geoff was in the middle. No such thing as seat belts or car seats in those days. Although I would hazard a guess and say the top speed of the swift was about 25KPH. He made a garage for our little car,



Dad fishing on the Murray River, Easter

erected a frame and made a skin for it from flattened four gallon kerosene tins, with a corrugated iron roof. I know he had scrounged the iron because it had nail holes from its previous usage. I was about two when we went on our first holiday to Cowes. Dad packed everything into the back, tent etc., and made a little seat for Geoff among the blankets. The black sand in the camping park drove Mum crazy as she couldn't keep me clean.

I'm sure all the camping gear was borrowed that year, but we bought a tent [second hand, nothing we ever had was new] the next year. The "new" tent had three sections and a flap that could be lifted to make extra room. Mum and Dad unpicked potato sacks and Mum sewed them together by hand to make a floor from them. She also made a mosquito netting piece to go around the front flap, sewed hessian on the bottom to keep it in place and we had a dining room, two bedrooms and a kitchen! Mum cooked on a couple of primus stoves. Dad made collapsible cupboards, table, chairs and we had stretchers and Mum and Dad had an old double kapok mattress and Dad had found an old wire spring to which he added legs and we were all very comfortable and cosy.

We were lucky that we had a car and Mum and Dad liked camping so we always had a holiday in the long school break. We tried out most of the bay beaches, Dromana, Rosebud, Mt Martha and Rye going back to Dromana several times before changing to Inverloch and then Torquay. Besides enjoying camping, and Mum and Dad were good campers, it was the only way we could afford a holiday.

We went to Dromana that year and the next year we went to Rosebud where for the first week it rained endlessly, Dad had to dig drains all around the tent so the water would not get in under the floor, we couldn't get out, even to the beach and we were bored. So we played cards, we had been taught the simple games, Old Maid, Donkey and Snap before, but Mum and Dad got sick of them and taught us to play Euchre, so at not quite 5 years old I learnt the intricacy of bowers and joker in relation to the other cards. On the first weekend Grandma and Grandpa came to visit and Grandpa hung his big leather overcoat on the peg in the tent and said, "I'll leave this here for you, Ron" and from then on the sun shone and the weather was wonderful. Uncle Frank and his mate Horry Medlicott came down one day, Frank was on leave before he left for Darwin. One night we were all in bed and a guy came round with a lantern, and called to wake Dad up. His message was, "The Japs have bombed Pearl Harbour, the Yanks have entered the war and I have to lock my bowlers at midnight. If you need petrol to get home you had better come down and fill up now". So that was the 7th December, 1941. Several weeks later in February, Singapore fell and Darwin was bombed, Uncle Frank was lying in the gutter outside the Post Office when the bombs hit the building, killing all the people in the air raid shelter.

While the war was on and for a couple of years after we were rationed for basic necessities, butter, tea, sugar, clothes and fabrics and of course petrol. Mum was OK with most things but butter was always short. She used margarine to cook with, not the marg. you know but dreadful white stuff. However it saved us using meat fat for cakes etc. We ate that on our bread.

Geoff was now at school and learning to read and write. He would bring his slate home with his days work on it and I would half rub out the words and write over them, then ask Mum what the words were, so by the time I was four I could write and read Geoff's school readers. The slate wasn't the only thing he brought home-- measles, mumps, chicken pox, scarlet fever and whooping cough all came with him over the next two years! Whenever Geoff ran a temperature he became delirious [Andy did too] and saw all sorts of things, i.e., a white bedcover became "millions of pills" And of course as he got better I would go down with whatever he had. When we had scarlet fever it was a very serious complaint and most kids were carted off to Fairfield Infectious Disease Hospital, but because Mum had done a nursing course as part of the war effort she was allowed to nurse us at home. Geoff was ill and quarantined for three weeks and the day he went back to school I went down with it. So Mum saw no one except Dad

and Mrs Burrows for six weeks. Nowadays scarlet fever scarcely exists as it a staph infection and is cured by antibiotics. We were at Dromana the year I got chicken pox and Dad's sister Kath and husband Ted, with their two little girls came down to see us. We went to the beach, Auntie Kath stayed back to feed Margaret, who was only a baby and to Mum's horror when we came back she had put her to bed in my bed. Relations were rather strained for a while.

Dad had very curly hair and about this time he would sit patiently on his chair after tea while I separated each curl and tied a bit of wool around it and told him he had to leave it in to go to work, but they were always out when he came home next night! Mum also had very curly hair and when I was 15 or so she would get me to cut it as that saved money. In those days it was considered unhealthy to wash your hair more than once a week, if that. She'd get two mirrors and watch everything I did, saying, "Be careful I don't want it too short" every time I went to snip. Then she'd have a bath and wash her hair and it would curl up because it was clean and the weight was removed. Then she'd say, "I told you were taking too much off!" We used Velvet soap to wash our hair and Palmolive for me and Mum, Lifebuoy for Dad and Geoff, there was no shampoo, conditioner or deodorants.

Because of the war and teacher shortages the school commencement age had been raised to six by 1942 when I was due to start school. As I couldn't go to school Mum enrolled me in a kindergarten, a very new idea at the time. It was held at Merton Hall in Linley St, Box Hill, behind the Fire Station and it must have been free or almost because we'd never have afforded more than a token amount. She walked me up to Kindy then walked home and went back about two o'clock to pick me up. This was also the Guide Hall and at one time, a small independent school. I remember very little about it, it certainly wasn't like any of the kindies my children attended, but I recall the doctor's son Graeme Judkins biting me on the wrist, I had the scar for years.

Starting school - at last!

So, in February 1943 I finally got to go to school. There was no prep class but we had the baby's grade or "bubs" as it was commonly called. On the first day it was discovered that I could read and write so I promoted to Grade 1. On the first of July I was put up again into Grade 2, Miss Wyse's class. Miss Wyse had been teaching Grade 2 at Bocky State for about a hundred years and could have done it in her sleep. She had a black mole on her chin which sprouted hair and it was both fascinating and completely repellant to us kids. We had a boy in this class, Gilbert Wilson who was retarded, he must have been 12 or so and was still in grade 2, his twin sister Barbara was normal and was in grade 7 or 8. Later, [after the war] he went to a special school, also a fairly new idea. Because of the war there was a huge teacher shortage and anyone who'd ever taught school was brought out of retirement and dusted off and shoved back into the workforce. So all our teachers were very old or the younger ones who could not get into the forces because of physical problems. We had one teacher who had fought in WW1 and if we could manage to get him diverted to that war, he would rabbit on for the rest of the period and we just sat back and listen to his quite interesting stories.

When I was in grade 2 and Geoff in Grade 4 I had two huge styes, one on the inside of my eyelid with two heads which were rubbing against my eye. It was very swollen and very painful. At lunchtime I was feeling really ill so I put on my coat and went home. Mum wasn't home so I went to Mrs Burrows and she cosseted and spoilt me [she thought the teacher knew where I was!] till Mum got home. Of course the teacher had sent for Geoff and he didn't know anything so when he and Mum got home I was in trouble. As I was next day when I went back to school. I can still remember the pain of those styes and my swollen face.

In the older part of Box Hill, [up as far as Tyne St] there lanes for the night man to come along in his horse and cart to collect the "doings" All the old dunnies backed onto the lanes from the days when there was no sewerage. It was the same in most places across Melbourne, even though there was now sewerage, the lanes remained. They were either cobblestone or red brick. The bottle-o went along with his horse and cart, calling, "Bottles, bottles, bottle-o" We saved beer bottles, they were worth a halfpenny each, but Box Hill was, and still is a "dry" area and our parents didn't drink so we didn't get many. We walked to and from school in the lanes, much more interesting than the roads, it was an adventure! When it rained the centre drain filled up with water and we paddled home. We went from Tyne St to Medway, then behind Taylors [where I met Lois and we walked on together] and up between the houses on Medway and Severn Streets, turned right and went between Sawyers Dairy and their horse paddock, across Thames St to school.

The houses then were small, about 10 squares with two bedrooms. The people next door [Jewsons, Sedgmans had shifted] had several adult children as well as two girls my age. They also had their eldest daughter, husband and baby living with them. They did have 3 bedrooms, but one son Jack slept on a 10'x10' tent up the back yard in all weathers, Bobby, the other boy, was in gaol, then the army. Hughie Gilmour slept on the front verandah with canvas blinds on three sides. He couldn't have the back verandah because Mr Gilmour's parents had a room built on that. Sharing a room, if not a bed was par for those days.

When I was 7 it dawned on me that Mum was sewing and knitting baby clothes. I was so excited and pleased as I always wanted a little sister or brother, but they were for Mrs Burrows. Six weeks early, on the 25th September 1944, Michael Scott Burrows was born at Lynwood Hospital in Mont Albert. He was very premature for those days and the survival rates were not good, [this is pre resuss cots and incubators] and he was wrapped in cotton wool for a couple of weeks. But he survived and thrived and

my favourite Saturday occupation was to go down and watch him have his bath and bottle feed. Every evening he would be put in his pram and Mr Burrows, accompanied by Mr Cocking with Graeme in his pram would walk around the block, usually with me tagging along. I adored Michael; everything he did was wonderful to me. Mum made all his clothes until he went to school and knitted his jumpers for many years.

Mrs Burrows had had Dad make a chest of drawers for Michael's room. It was made from Silky Oak and had two shallow drawers at the top and a deep one for nappies on the bottom. Mike gave it to me when Mrs B. died and I passed it on to Margaret. Of course he was thoroughly spoilt, he had his Mum and Dad, his grandma, who lived with them, John, his older brother who was as jealous as hell because he'd been an only child till he was 13, my Mum and Dad, Geoff and me, all dancing to his tune. He didn't talk till he was 4 or 5 because he had no need to; we all anticipated his every need! He called his mother Mummy, his father Da, Mrs Scott was Gran, my Mum was Binny Mum, Dad was Binny Dad, Geoff was Bertie and I was Binny. He stuck to the names for mum dad and Geoff until they died and even now he still calls me Bin.

One term holidays Mum Geoff and I, together with Mrs Gilmour, Hughie, Margaret and Nipper all went to the Boronia house for a week, Dad drove us up there and we had a great time. I know Geoff and Hughie slept in a double bed on the verandah that Dad had added to the house, Mum and Mrs Gilmour must have slept in the double bed in the bedroom but where the rest of us slept I can't imagine. Perhaps we had stretchers in the living room? Nipper thinks the floor. One day we set out to climb the track to One Tree Hill lookout, it had been raining and the track was very muddy and slippery. We loved it, we were all filthy by the time we got to the top and worse when we got to the bottom as we just sat on our bums and slid. Dad and Mr Gilmour came up on the weekend to take us all home, can't imagine where we all slept that night! Or how we all fitted in the car to get home as Gilmours didn't have a car.

Grandma and Grandpa sailed to Tasmania on the old "Taroona", one of the two ships that did the trip across Bass Strait, the other was the "Narooma". They took the Ford, it was driven on to a big net, the ends were hitched up to a crane and it was lifted into the hold. Bit different to the ferries of today! They spent several weeks there, the back seat of the car folded down and they slept there, with a strip of canvas to eat and cook under. It was very exciting waving them off and then going in a Hansom cab along the wharf when they came home, several weeks later. I think it was probably Grandpa's long service leave. We still had double decker buses in Melbourne then.

Mum and Mrs B took Michael and me to the pantomime in the city each Christmas, we always sat in the centre front row of the dress circle, so I guess Mrs B. footed the bill for the tickets. The pantos were wonderful, perhaps they are the reason I have loved live theatre all my life, I thought it was all so wonderful, but Mike used to get bored. One time when the leading lady had finished a beautiful ballet solo, he remarked, "Who couldn't do that?" and another time said, [audible over the whole theatre] "Bin could do it better than that, couldn't you Bin?" Mum and Mrs B would be in stitches trying not to laugh and encourage him.

When Geoff was about ten, he became ill with stomach pains. The pain was constant and intense and he was rolling round the bed and crying from the pain. Mum went to Burrows' and rang Dr Judkins to do a home visit. We had to be very sick for the doctor to visit as it was more expensive; he said he would be there about 5PM. About 3PM Mum gave Geoff a dose of castor oil and he vomited and evacuated his bowels simultaneously. The pain lessened and if we had had a phone on Mum would have cancelled the doctor's visit. When he arrived he put Geoff into his car and took him to a private hospital in Canterbury Rd, Camberwell and operated on him straight away. Geoff's appendix had burst and he had peritonitis and was seriously ill.

Juddy came to our house later that night and told Dad that there was a new drug on the market and if Geoff was to have any chance of surviving he would need quite a lot of it. It was Penicillin, the first antibiotic. The doctor could not get it, but he knew where he could send Dad to buy it on the Black Market. Dad took a day off work and went to Melbourne by train and came home with a newspaper wrapped parcel containing small vials of the magic stuff. I shudder now to think what he must have paid for it. He then drove straight to the hospital and the change in Geoff overnight was miraculous.

Geoff was never more than an average student and much to everyone's astonishment, [and I suspect, his own] he was one of only four boys who passed the entrance exam for Box Hill Boy's Tech.in grade 6.



Aged 8

I made it through State School, finishing up in Miss Davis' composite 5/6 grades. She had also been there for a long time, [actually taught Jack when he was there] She was a fairly good teacher the only one I remember much about, perhaps because I spent two years in her classes. One lunch time I was playing chasey with Marg Gilmour and some other grade 7 and 8 girls from her class. One girl ran into the annex, a separate classroom at the back of the school and slammed the door and locked it. Unfortunately Marg had her hand around the door jamb on the side of the hinges. I was right behind her and she had leaned back to give me her quince core to put in the bin. She screamed and the girl inside panicked and couldn't get the door unlocked. Eventually someone came and sorted out the crying girls and got the door unlocked but Marg had funny flattened fingers for quite a while.

The girls were taught to knit, [Mum had already taught me,] a kettle holder in grade 3, a pair of bedsocks in grade 4, a scarf in grade 5 and a baby singlet in grade 6. We studied [I use the word loosely] twelve subjects...English, Reading, Writing, Composition, Speed and Accuracy, Processes, Problems, History, [English, of course] Geography, Drawing, Poetry and Craft. We got ten marks for each subject and my

big ambition was to get a perfect score, but the best I managed was 116 out of the 120 available in grade 6. I was awarded a scholarship of twenty pounds a year for 4 years but it was rescinded when they found out Dad had not been in the armed forces. Anyhow I was "recommended" for Box Hill Girl's Tech and did not have to sit the entrance exam. I found schoolwork easy, I had a retentive memory and never had to work very hard, should have been pushed a bit harder I guess. My best friend at State School was Lois Taylor, who lived in Nelson Rd and she was just 4 hours younger than me. We walked to and from school together for many years. When we went to secondary school she went to Camberwell High, then MLC and then on to Uni, she was an only child and her parents both worked. We still spent a bit of time together at calisthenics but she finished up about the time she went to MLC. I continued on till I was about 15 when work and other things became more important and I lost interest in it.

We always went away on holidays, usually in January, sometimes December, and in 1942 we went to Mt. Martha. Dad and Mum were trying out the bay beaches one by one. We were the only people in the council park, so it must have been early December and we were camped beside Balcombe Army Camp which was occupied at that time by American soldiers on R&R. It was 1942 and on August 7th they had been the initial invasion force landed on the beaches of Guadalcanal.

Hughie Gilmour was with us that year and one day after we'd swum and played hard all day we were exhausted and in bed and asleep at 6.30PM. We woke up about 8.30PM, convinced it was the next day as it was still light, [daylight saving was in]. We heard voices and popped our heads out from behind the

curtains that divided the tent into “rooms” and there were two American soldiers sitting talking to Mum and Dad. Now every year Mum would bake tins and tins of biscuits to fill us up as were always hungry and bought biscuits were too expensive. She had made coffee [actually coffee and chicory essence from a bottle, yuk!] and put out a plate of biccies for the soldiers. They had been sheltering from the rain, under the awning and Dad had invited them in. They ate all the biscuits and asked for some for their buddies. They came back next day with chocolate and chewing gum, two things we’d only heard of [chewing gum] or didn’t remember [chocolate] and cigarettes for Dad. I was almost five and that was the first chocolate I ever tasted. We used to grab a handful of biccies and go to the back gate of the camp and swap them for chocolate. One time the guards smuggled us into the camp and took the boys off to see all the guns, military hardware, etc. and me to the hospital to talk to the wounded guys there. Every night the sky over Melbourne was lit with dozens of searchlights and we had what was called a “brownout” we had blackout curtains and the street lighting was subdued by having tubes put on each light so that it only shone downwards. And cars had hoods on their headlights. Dad would hear all the news about the war and he’d come home and tell Mum and so I knew quite a lot about what went on. [Little pigs have big ears!]

During the war, Dad was in a “reserved” job and couldn’t join the services, I know he tried several times but as soon as they got to where he worked they’d just hand him back the form, it hurt him badly when Frank was killed. He joined the Volunteer Defence Corps. Mum did a Red Cross nursing course, mainly of course treating wounds and war type injuries and laying out the dead. Dad made a gadget for winding bandages and Mum took it to their meetings as that’s a lot of what they did, the bandages were made from old sheets torn into strips. We had to prepare for invasion, luckily it never came.

The soldiers would go past our tent to get to the beach and they argued about the year of Dad’s A model Ford; [all cars were imported from either England or America] there’d be half a dozen of them round it arguing, “It’s a 27” “No, it’s a 28” and finally someone would slide underneath it and have a look but they still argued. One day a large group of tanks were brought ashore from a landing barge and we went down to the beach to watch. The army had laid thick planks across the road and as the tanks moved onto them the planks tipped up and the tanks “walked” up their caterpillar tracks until they reached the balance point and then crash down to the road. It was quite spectacular! The Lord Mayor had funded a holiday camp at Portsea, for underprivileged children and on the last night of each camp there was rocket show. The gun emplacements at Point Nepean would be loaded with rockets and then they would be shot out over the bay. Geoff and I would try to save enough money from our weekly two bob pocket money to have a malted milk every morning we were away. They were four pence each and we’d be away about fourteen days so we needed about five shillings each and we’d try every flavour the shop offered.

Dad had bought the Ford V8 from Uncle Percy, the Swift was getting too small for us and Dad had asked him to keep his eyes open for a bargain. He bought the Ford from a “cow cocky” up in the Mallee somewhere and it had been used to cart hay around the farm and the chooks nested in it at night. It was filthy, covered in a thick layer of red dust and dirty inside from the hay [and the chooks]. It took ages to wash the outside and reveal the navy blue paintwork. [The first Ford, the T model only came in black, Henry Ford said you can have any colour you want as long as it’s black, but had lashed out with the A and you could get black or navy blue]. Dad had the upholstery replaced with red leather and it was a good car and we had it for many years. It was a Tourer, i.e. soft top, and Dad drove with the side curtain on his side off all the time, he liked the fresh air! Also one had to signal with your right arm for a right turn or stop to let the cars behind know roughly where you were going. When it got dark, Dad would pull over to the side of the road and Geoff would get out, run around the back and turn on the single taillight. There were none of the things we expect from modern cars, the driver had to operate the one windscreen wiper by hand, [Dad soon scrounged a small electric motor and attached it to the wiper,] and no heating. Coming home from Coburg on a winter’s night, it was bloody freezing. Geoff and I

had a pillow each and a rug we shared and we'd burrow under the rug and cuddle up together, Mum and Dad toughed it out in the front, [with the side curtain down]. And Mum never wore slacks! It had to be bucketing down rain or hail before Dad would put that curtain on. That Ford saw many years work and after it we had a Wolsely, which Dad didn't like [it had, I quote Dad, a bloody overhead camshaft] and then a 1936 Ford V8 and we had that for many years.

Dad built a trailer to take camping so we would have room to stow the gear. Every piece of equipment we took away had its place in that trailer and he could lay his hand on it immediately he wanted it. Dad was an excellent scrounger, everyone was, before, during and in the early postwar years and he managed to scrounge or swap most of the stuff he needed. I guess there was a bit of stuff that came home from the SEC and perhaps a bit of work from the machine shop when you needed a metal bit. When we were sick, Dad made us toys, "foreigners" at work, I remember a peg that tumbled down a ladder, soldiers with hemispherical bases and a cannon which shot small round balls, We'd line the soldiers up and shoot them down and they always came back up to shoot at again. We were indoctrinated, there was a war on and they were all Jap soldiers we shot.

Mum made everything that she and I wore. She made clothes for Mrs.B, neighbours and friends and had quite a little business. She was completely self-taught. She had an old Singer treadle sewing machine and Dad scrounged a small motor and made it electric. I made things from scraps of fabric, cut out and sewed alley bags or dolls clothes. One of Dad's fondest memories was of me at about four, turning the flywheel of the machine with a finger in the spokes because I couldn't reach the foot pedal. The sewing machine in the kitchen was always open with work cut out to sew. Mum kept herself and me clothed with money she made from sewing for other people. She unpicked clothing for the fabric and remade it into a garment for either me or herself. She unpicked woollen knits and washed the wool and knitted it up again for one of us. When the sheets wore out they were cut down the centre turned "sides to middle" and we went on using them. Our blankets were very thin, passed on from someone and Mum made "Waggas" for our beds. These were woollen fabric, usually old jumpers, skirts or parts thereof, that could not be used in any other way, sewn together and covered in a cheap fabric, floral [me] and checks [Geoff] They were really warm and made a huge difference in our unheated, un- insulated and partly unlined house. Dad by now had extended the back porch and made a bedroom at the end for Geoff as we were getting too old to share a room, and this was not only unlined, but had flywire only for the windows. Obviously he couldn't scrounge any glass. It stayed like that until I came down with three little kids and Dad decided he'd best glaze the windows. We had lino on most floors which Mum polished every week, with a carpet square in the sitting room. Eventually we got "Feltex" a sort of Clayton's carpet in the hall and their bedroom I guess it was better than bare boards but only marginally. When I was about 13 or 14 Dad made and installed a hot water system. It had a briquette firebox on the extended back verandah and I'm sure Andy remembers "helping" Dandan stoke it.

I was always a poor sleeper, even as a small child. I reckon I heard Mum and Dad go to bed every night and they were night owls. I went to sleep late and woke late and Geoff was the opposite and on Christmas morning he would get up and go through his stocking, [they were pinned on the end of our beds] then he'd go through mine, appropriating anything he fancied, repack it and wake me up. One Christmas I was still awake when Santa [Mum] brought my much longed for Cyclops scooter and when I rode it out next morning Mum said "what a lovely scooter Father Christmas brought you" I am reported as saying, "Mother Burgess more likely"

We were lucky that Dad was a handyman and Mum pretty good at anything she tackled and they could "do up" toys that were either free or cheap second hand. They did a beautiful job of my dolls pram but I always envied my Hill cousins their beautiful cane prams. Dad made a bassinette for my dolls one year and several of my small cousins slept in it when visiting us.

The top shelf in the linen cupboard was reserved for jam [keep it out of the way of little fingers?] And the bottom of the cupboard was the bottled fruit. We made jam from apricots, blackberries in season and plums, lots of plum because there were always cherry plum trees and fruit that could be had for nothing. When the “nice” jams were all gone we’d eat the melon jams then the everlasting plum jam until the next fruit season. I still don’t care much for plum jam. I say “we” because Geoff, Dad and I all were expected to peel and slice fruit and we learned how to pack it into bottles for sterilization.

I did not realise until I was a much older adult, just how hard life was for my parents- most people were in the same boat and as we never knew we were poor, it didn’t matter. We had food and clothing, a house to keep the weather off, even a car, so we never felt deprived. When I look back to the way of life of some of the State School kids, I realise we weren’t poor. Julie and Gordon Goodman came to school in winter, Gordon in shorts and Julie in a thin dress, an old jumper, no coats and barefoot. All I had to complain about was that it was a bit of a bummer having a February birthday, we’d have school holidays, Christmas, our beach holiday and back to school, between the middle of December and late January, then my birthday. There was not a lot of spare cash about by then. Julie and Gordon didn’t have warm clothes let alone presents.

Dad got hold of a big old refrigerator, cleaned it up and painted it green to match the kitchen. He put a shelf in the top and a pipe from there through the bottom of the case and bored a hole through the floor and piped the waste water under the house. The main hazard of the dish under the icechest was a flooded kitchen if you forgot to empty the water a couple of times a day. He also built a beautiful radiogram, Mum saw one she liked in Clausen’s store and Dad had a look at it and copied it. It was about 900mm by 1200mm and had a radio and a wind-up turntable. We only ever had two records, “The Whistler and his Dog” and “In a Country Garden” When LP records came out, he bought a new turntable and we had records then, but that was much later. He put a wire through to the kitchen and we could flick a switch and have the sound there as well as the sitting room. He was an excellent cabinet maker, his work was beautifully finished and he French polished everything. There was no Estapol in those days. I remember him sitting by the fire on cold winter nights and sanding a jewellery box or some other small item, staining it and then the coats of polish, sanding between each coat. Ten or twelve coats and the sandpaper was so fine it felt like silk. He was always the one asked to make a new desk for the new chairman or section boss at the SEC. When he was dovetailing a drawer he always allowed a couple of inches in case he mucked up the first set. One day he forgot he’d allowed extra and the finished drawer was 2 inches too long!

Dad decided to enlarge the garage at some time to have space for his woodworking machinery. He built all the walls on the ground and, after a decent windstorm erected them saying, “If anyone asks questions, I’m repairing what the wind blew down” We built a boat and three caravans in that shed. Again “we” because Geoff and I were expected to help and we got the job of stopping up the screw holes in the bondwood boat, and I reckon there was a couple of thousand at least. Later on he added another extension beside the original garage to store the caravan.

We kids played cricket all summer, usually in our back yard. We measured 22 yards and from the far side of the house, angled across the yard, to the garage door was just the right length for a pitch. So the bowler ran up the blind side of the house, turned the corner and bowled. Both batsman and bowler were unsighted but it made for interesting cricket. Unfortunately the batsman stood right near the Delicious Apple tree and we knocked apples off. I recall one year, Dad ceremoniously cutting the lone apple that survived the cricket season into four and sharing it between the four of us.

We had six weeks off school at Christmas/ New Year holidays. It always seemed to be hot and sunny, and we had very few restrictions placed upon us: be home by five was about the only one. A bunch of us, the

Gilmours, Wrights, sometimes Johnny Burrows and later Kevin Ingleton, whose parents had bought the chook farm opposite Burrows place from Tucks, and Geoff and I would roam far and wide and would be gone from early morning till five at night. No one worried about us, but then they didn't know what we got up to! We all lived within 100 metres of each other. Hughie had a white horse named "Silver", he and Don Wright were horse mad, and sometimes he would put it in our back yard to crop the weeds before Dad put in the next lot of veggies. Free manure to boot! We would go out for the day, ride our bikes to Warrandyte and swim in the river, although we all swam after a fashion, Geoff and I were the only ones who could swim well and Dad taught us early never to dive into a river, always walk in and depth it first. The Yarra was notorious for drowning deaths at that time. We rode to the river at Heidelberg, we swam there too, up Springvale Rd, [one lane each way] to Dandenong, down to Koonung creek where we made fires and cooked baked beans and snags for lunch. The boys made a bike track to race on and they used to tear around it. Over the creek on a single plank bridge, up and down the steep gullies, don't know how none of us were killed or injured. But apart from the odd cut or a few scratches from going into a blackberry bush off the bikes, we survived and never started a bushfire.

We swam in dams, the area around us was all orchards and they all had dams. First in Ferris's dam, next to Taylors place and when that was filled in we went to the next one, in Woodhouse Grove. The owner did not like kids swimming in his dam but the boys said, "If he comes down and yells at us, just swim into the middle of the dam and he won't come in after us" Of course, he came down, I swam to the middle of the dam and all the others went out the other side, grabbed their gear and lit out. I was in the middle of the dam bawling my eyes out and I think the owner got just as much of a fright as I did. He left. Eventually all the dams were either filled or became off limits, so we dammed the creek, which got us into more strife. The swimming pool was 2Km on the other side of Box Hill but eventually we had to go there. Adjacent to the pool was the Surrey Dive, a disused quarry which, according to local legend filled overnight when the workmen hit an underground spring and there were drays and shovels etc. under the water. It was very deep and dangerous, quite a few drownings, so that's where we went, much more attractive than a 30M chlorinated pool! It has been filled in now. We'd go out sometimes and just mooch about, might go into the Sparks's paddock and make daisy chains from cape weed flowers. We made one, a combined effort, which was the length of Shannon St., we swam naked if we were hot and didn't have togs with us but we were only kids and it didn't matter. Living with orchards from Shannon St to Heidelberg we would nick the occasional [?] peach. Jack Ferris reckoned that we broke some of his trees but we didn't, we were always very careful, but all the boys had to front up to the cop shop for a lecture.

At Russell's orchard Mum could get her big shopping basket filled with peaches for 1/- [10 cents], These were too ripe to go to market and we had to lean over the sink to eat them and the juice ran off our elbows. I can still taste those peaches in my mind. Mrs King, from 117 had a cow and she made and sold clotted cream, 1/- a jug full. Golly it was good with fresh bread and homemade blackberry jam. Mum always said fresh bread was bad for our digestion, I am sure because we ate too much if it were fresh! We had no preservatives in bread so our school lunches were made from day old, hand sliced bread, [no sliced bread either] and were thick and dry. Bread and butter pudding was invented to use up stale bread. If we had to get another loaf from the baker, [Vials at the end of Nelson Rd] it would just have a 15cm wide piece of tissue paper wrapped around it. Not stuck, sticky tape wasn't invented yet, and we always ate the hot fresh bread from the broken end. And swore blind to Mum that that was how we got it. A loaf of bread was about 75cm long and a half loaf was just that, the baker broke the loaf in two where it joined. Our favourite "piece" after school was a slice of bread spread with fat from the weekend roast and sprinkled with salt. Well may you shudder but I can still taste how good it was. We also ate fried bread and fried scones and it was all fried in animal fat (only Italians and Greeks had olive oil!).

Mum's childhood friend Winnie and her husband George Mills lived at Healesville and we'd leave early in the morning and go up for the day, getting home about ten at night. They had a huge block of land,

probably 5 acres, five kids and we loved being with them. As we got older Bobbye, Shirl and I would light a fire down the back and cook vegetable soup in a billy for our lunch. We'd go mushrooming in season and have fried mushrooms for brekkie the next day.

In 1945 when the war ended we had a huge "peace bonfire". All the kids collected anything combustible, the neighbours went through sheds for burnable rubbish and cut down scrubby bushes, Harry Burrows donated lots of worn out tyres and a couple of four gallon drums of sump oil from the garage and Mum, Geoff and I made a "guy" to go on it, only it was Tojo with a Japanese flag. On Saturday night we set it alight and watched it burn, cheering and singing songs and generally running wild. It was a wonderful night, As the fire died down we chucked in big potatoes and baked them, then peeled off the burnt exterior and ate the centre, [no alfoil] We did not have fireworks as such, just crackers and we'd undo the strings of Tom Thumbs and small crackers and light them singly to make them last longer. We had big ones we called bungers, jumping jacks, rockets and Catherine wheels. We had a bonfire every year after that in fact two, one on Empire Day [May 24th, Queen Victoria's birthday] and one on Guy Fawkes Night. We loved "Bonny" nights and would collect stuff to make a bonny for weeks beforehand. By then we'd started to be able to get roman candles and other fireworks. At this time here was a cricket ground opposite our place, but later they cut it into blocks and built houses on them.

When I was about ten, [1947] Mum and Dad decided to accept a long standing invitation from a friend of Mums who had married and gone to Gundagai to live, for the January holiday. This was not long after the war and petrol rationing was still in force, Dad saved, scrounged and begged coupons far and wide and sent some up to Jim and Maggie so he could get enough petrol to get us home. This was a huge adventure; we were going 312 miles, interstate to boot. We left at about 2AM and Geoff and I were in our jamas for a few hours and asleep for a few hours. We went via Albury and the Hume Highway a two lane road, actually the only way we could go, there was no alternative routes. We picked up a hitchhiker outside Albury and he sat in the back with us kids, smoking a cigarette with a 4 gallon drum of petrol between his knees. I don't recall this but Mum told me when I was a lot older, she had visions of us all going up in an explosion. Why didn't she or Dad tell him to put it out?

We got to Gundagai late in the afternoon. Mum told us later that they were horrified when they drove up to the house; it was on the road, not back as most farm homes are in the country, no trees in sight and 4 beds were lined up on the open verandah. We just accepted it but the whole set up was anathema to Mum. There were only two rooms, a bedroom and a sitting room with a verandah on three sides. The kitchen and bathroom occupied one side, a wired in dining room the second side, a wired in room where Uncle Jim and Auntie Maggie slept and at the other end with the 4 beds Geoff, their two boys and I slept. Mum and Dad got the bedroom in the house. Maggie washed outside and they had an outside dunny. Geoff and I had a great time.

Jim had a WW1 soldier settlement block, part of it was an island formed by a billabong on the Murrumbidgee River and he used to grow millet on it. He only had a good crop every five years or so but it was worth a lot and kept him going and as he had a bad knee from war wounds the rest of the land was not farmed at all. He leased out a couple of paddocks to a neighbour [Mr Ellsworth] and he grew wheat on it. It was harvest season so we had the joy of being allowed to ride on the harvester as they brought in the harvest. Very exciting for a pair of city kids. Every morning Geoff, Brian, Kevin and I would walk a mile or so to a neighbour's and collect a billy of milk. We would swing the billy around to demonstrate centrifugal force, as the milk would stay in the billy. Well, mostly it did. Geoff was chasing a rabbit down a gully one day and fell and knocked himself out. In the deep, dry washaways and watercourses there were bottle swallows nests and if you tapped them gently the swallow would fly out. Dad saw snake tracks across the track we used to go to the billabong we swam in, so he started to take the rifle with him. One day he shot a hawk right overhead and he reckoned we kids had it plucked before it hit the

ground. The rabbits had never been shot at and we could pick them off easily, Geoff and I would go with Dad and drive the rabbits into an apex and Dad could take his pick. We stretched the skins over wires, but as no one knew how to tan them I guess that's as far as we got to the rabbit skin floor rug that Mum thought she'd like.

Maggie was not a good or imaginative cook [we had stewed plums and custard every lunch time] and Dad got sick of the monotonous meals and after shooting several rabbits he picked out the best three bunnies and wrapped them in wet hessian and hung them overnight in a nice cool spot to be ready for dinner the next day. Maggie fed them to the dogs and dished up camp pie, [which Dad loathed] for lunch. Dad picked up the tomato sauce [which he also loathed] and poured it over his meal. Geoff and I piped up, "Dad's got something he doesn't like, he's putting sauce on it" Geoff and I had a great holiday [apart from the stewed plums] but Mum told me later on that she and Dad almost decided to ring Mrs B from a public phone and get her to send a telegram telling us to come home for some reason. The farm was about 10 miles from Gundagai, Jim and Maggie didn't have a car so while we were there we did a bit of sightseeing. We swam at Brungle Bridge we saw the Dog on the Tucker Box and fished at the junction of the Tumut and Murrumbidgee rivers, where I first caught a fish. Dad nearly fell over laughing as I ran backwards with the fish bouncing up the pebbly beach, shouting "I caught a fish, I caught a fish" I don't remember anything about the trip home yet driving up was different. On the way up we drove Mum and Dad nearly crazy singing "The road to Gundagai." On the way home we stopped off at Euroa for a couple of hours and visited Uncle Charlie and Aunt Margaret,

We often visited Charlie and Eva Dixon's poultry farm at Bayswater and we would help [?] collect the eggs and when he was a bit older, Geoff was allowed to run the chaff cutter or the motor mower. Charlie had put a wooden rail track through the sheds so they could handle quantities of feed etc. and Geoff and I had such fun with it. One of us would get in and the other pushed and we'd race down the tracks with the chook all flying up in the pens as we flew past. And it had a turntable which just added to the fun! I bet the chooks didn't lay as well for the next couple of days! Most times we stayed for tea and as it was a chook farm there was always eggs on toast for tea. Mrs Dixon bought high tin white bread from Peglers in Bayswater she'd plonk about four eggs on a slice of toast and that was tea. Delicious! I can shut my eyes now and be back in that kitchen with the wood stove going and the entire world a mile away.

They had a cow and we watched it being milked and the separating done, took a turn with the churn when some of the cream was made into butter. Eva made the best sponges I've ever tasted, about 30 cm high and loaded with homemade jam and cream from the cow. There was never a shortage of cracked eggs to make cakes! Charlie Dixon worked at the SEC with Dad before he left to raise chooks for a living. They had only one child, Joan, [now Horsburgh] who could do anything as good as or better than a boy. She had a big doll that I really coveted. I did get that beautiful doll for my birthday one year and I loved it to bits. Joan, Geoff and I would go off with the horse hitched to a sledge and collect manure around the farm and Joan would bring us home on top of a couple of spud bags on top of the manure, and it wasn't all nice and hard. We never cared, just loved the difference in our daily lives. One year, Charlie had not been well and Eva and Mum decided it would do him good to get away from the farm; she and Joan could manage easily. So he came to Cowes for our holidays, he had put a bed in the back of his covered Ute and slept there and ate with us. He was great fun and had a very dry sense of humour and we had many happy times with him. One night Mum heard a lot of spluttering outside and called out to him, "Charlie, are you all right?" In the dark, he was cleaning his teeth with shaving cream. He came with us for several years until they sold out and moved to Swan Hill, where Joan still lives. Charlie built the milking shed first and they lived in two rooms he built as part of the shed for a couple of years, then he built half the house and eventually when Joan was home and prodded him enough, the other half. He never did get around to putting cupboard doors on. We often went there at Easter, we'd fish and shoot and swim in the river, carefully supervised. We also went to Glen Cromie Park in Gippsland.

When Geoff was about nine or ten Dad planted a patch about 3m square with commercial violet plants. As they grew Geoff picked the violets every Saturday morning, bunched them up with leaves around the bunches and sell them around the neighbourhood. He got a shilling (I think) a bunch and that was his pocket money. As he got about ten or twelve bunches each week, he was quite rich. When he got older and worked for Vern Arnott in the orchard, I inherited the violet patch and the income from it. We never had any trouble selling them and they kept me in pocket money even after I started work! I think it was Dads way of teaching us that you have to earn money to have it to spend.

A bit about telephones. Most people did not have a landline phone and mobiles were something from science fiction or Dick Tracey comics, he had a two way wrist radio. After the war it took about two years from the time one lodged an application to perhaps getting a phone approved and maybe even connected. We didn't have automatic exchanges in some areas of Melbourne, Hawthorn and the CBD were still on manual exchanges. For a number in the CBD you dialed Y and a telephonist put your call through. If you wanted a country number you rang the exchange and BOOKED a call for a specific time. About that time the exchange would ring you and then the number you wanted and put you through. Every 3 minutes a voice interrupted, "3 minutes, are you extending?" and they had to record the time, the number and how many extensions and that went on your bill. In the country one had a "party" line where up to say, twelve families would share a line, no privacy on what you said as everyone on the line could pick up and listen to the call. To call overseas, you booked the call at least a week in advance and sometimes the line was so bad you couldn't hear what was being said from the other end of the line. And it was a line! Actually your call went along the transcontinental line to Darwin, then the undersea cable to Indonesia and across landlines again to Calais then underwater again to England, with a person to go through at every exchange. No satellites! Our number was WX7228 and Grandma's was FL2467, Nana and Papa never had a phone. Our phones were big black dial phones and in the country you had a wall phone and you lifted the receiver and cranked a handle to alert the operator that you wanted to make a call and she would connect you.

In 1948 I started at Box Hill Girls Tech. School; in form 1A. I was a few days short of my 11th birthday and was the youngest girl there. The girl who had the locker next to me was Betty Derrick [Broughton]. I had known Betty for many years, but not as a close friend. Her father was the superintendent of the Tally Ho boy's farm [later village] a corrective school for boys in trouble with the law, run by the Methodist Church. Dad's lodge gave a Christmas party each year for the boys and Betty and her brother Neil attended. Betty sat in the front with the boys and I sat with Geoff on the billiard table at the back. I always envied her sitting at the front and found out later that she would far rather have sat at the back with us. Mrs Derrick always put on supper at their house, after the housemasters had carted the boys off to bed. Mrs Derrick was a marvellous cook, she made sponges to die for and the best date scones I ever tasted. So Betty and I knew each other a bit and we were in the same class, so we became good friends. We chummed up with two other girls, Lorraine Collins and Joyce Howlett and the four of us spent all our spare time together. Betty was a lone guide and she came once a month and stayed at our place and went to guides with me. I am still in touch with Lorraine and Betty.

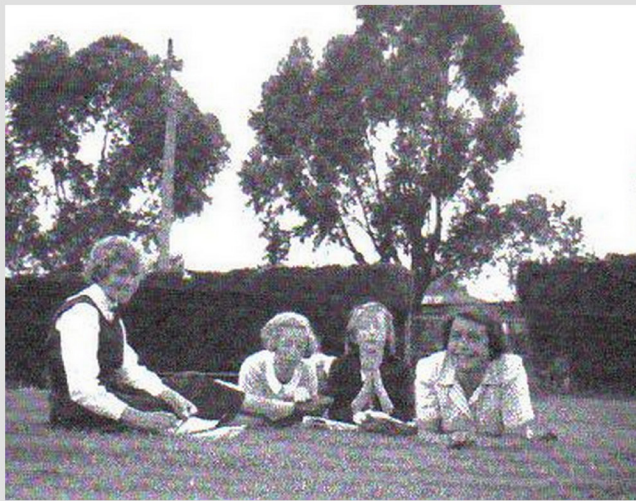
The first day we had an election for class captain and as no one told me you could vote for yourself I became vice captain. I was a reasonably good swimmer and at that time few kids could really swim so my house captain had me swim in every event I could, which was all of them as I was only 11, I was in the under 12,13,14,15 and 16, the individual medley, one leg of the relay and the diving. There was a wading race for non-swimmers! We had an Exhibition about September every year and the first year Lorraine and I were designated to do the form 1 exhibit was to be stewed apple, beautifully presented in a cut glass dish. We were carefully peeling the apples, [knife, no peelers those days] and one of the form 4 girls who was watching us remarked sarcastically that we weren't going to waste any apple, we

were peeling it so very thinly. I only found out at school that you could make custard from eggs, I was looking for the custard powder. In the fourth form Lorraine Ousten and I had to make, ice and decorate a wedding cake, so we did progress a bit.

We weren't taught how to think, we were taught to learn what was put in front of us. I was lucky enough to have a reasonably good memory and I could knit and sew and Mum had taught me basic cooking



School days - Box Hill Technical school. Bottom right: Me, Lorraine, Evelyn Boyd, Joyce Howlett, Betty Derrick



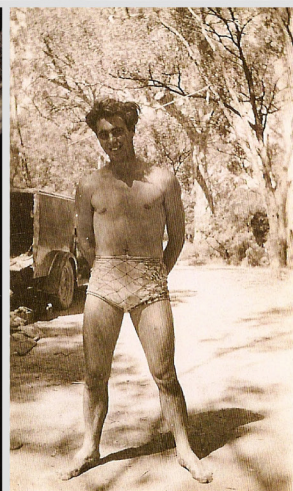
Above: Lorraine, Betty, Joyce, me

so school was easy and I usually managed to be in the top couple of students in the class and year. We still had mostly older teachers but we did get the first of the new graduates from the newly established Toorak Teachers College and we had two: Miss Vowles who was our form teacher and Miss Moore, a gorgeous redhead who taught cookery and science. Years later I went to Margaret's speech night at Lilydale Tech and the Inspector of Technical Schools was Faye Moore. I spoke to her afterwards and she said she always said she'd give it up when a kid came up and said, "You taught my mother!" At the end of

year 8, we separated into two sections, one commercial and one domestic science. There were 12 in the commercial and 8 in the D.E. Most girls left when they turned 14, usually at the end of year 8. I became a prefect in my last year. Most kids went to work at this stage- the general idea was, we have kept you for 14 years and now you are old enough to contribute to the family. Geoff and I went to year 10, which was the intermediate standard and we both passed that exam. I couldn't have left much earlier as I was too young. Lorraine and Joyce both left at the end of year 9 and Betty went to MLC.

We went to Inverloch for our holidays several years running. The first time we were camped next to some people named Matthews, they had a war surplus US army tent. If you have watched M*A*S*H you'll know what I mean, but we had never seen one before. About 25' square and 6' sides, very roomy. As they were farmers they just loaded everything they needed into the truck, even a fridge! In 1950 when I was 12, I won the "Miss Inverloch Junior" beach girl title, Mum was tickled pink, Geoff's comment was, "What a cup to give a kid" About the third year Dad had built the boat and then had to make a trailer for the boat, then work out how to fit all the gear into a boat shape instead of a nice square box trailer.

Dad went to a lodge meeting at Wonthaggi one night and made friends with a guy who was the blacksmith at the Wonthaggi State Coal mine. So next day we had a tour of the mine, starting on the surface all the workshops and, of course, the blacksmith's forge and all the above-ground places that are necessary for the mine to run efficiently. Next we went to the shaft and took our numbers, into the cage and down



we went, about 400 feet. Out at the bottom of the shaft and started to walk, we went about 1.6 Kms underground, saw the miners at work, lying on their sides in a seam about 60 cm deep. They used pit ponies and we gave them a pat as we passed them. Tough little fellows that were spelled up above every couple of weeks. We walked under the Powlett River and our guide said, "you are now at the deepest point of the mine, 495 feet from the surface" and he handed Geoff and me a miners pick and told us to chip out a souvenir. I had that piece of anthracite for many years. We went back to the shaft and the cage and the surface, hung our numbers up and left with many special memories.

My cousin, Helen came with us and Geoff, Spud, Georgie and Checker were there as well, in their tent. Checker was 6'4" tall and his feet stuck out the end of the stretcher so he put his overcoat sleeves on his feet to keep them warm, We had a great time together, we'd go out in the boat fishing or swimming, [it's very shallow when the tide is out] using the boat as a raft. Checker could not swim and we untied the anchor rope and tied it around him and he would jump overboard and pull himself back to the boat.

One morning Geoff was sitting at the table and said, "Chuck us up some cornflakes, Dad." Nothing happened and then a shower of cornflakes descended on the table. We were stunned for a few seconds, it was so unlike Dad and then all burst into laughter.

This was the year [1953] that Sedgman and McGregor who had won us the Davis Cup the previous year, turned professional. The Davis Cup was a strictly amateur event in those days and two youngsters, Lew Hoad and Ken Rosewall had to defend the Cup. They were only kids, 18 years old, and most people had waved the Cup goodbye. Hoad won the first match against Vic Seixas, 6-4, 6-2, 6-3. Rosewall lost to Tony Trabert, 3-6, 4-6, 4-6, We then lost the doubles, 2-6, 4-6, 4-6. Hoad played Tony Trabert in a marathon 4th rubber, 13-11, 6-3, 2-6, 3-6, 7-5. Harry Hopman was the team captain and manager. There were no tie-breaks, every set was an advantage set. The game went so long that they could not play the 5th rubber [no lights] and played it on the Monday. The Cup ball could not be postponed so it went ahead on Sunday night, with no one knowing who the winner would be. Rosewall needed to beat Seixas and beat him he did, 6-2, 2-6, 6-3, 6-4, it was magnificent and we listened to every ball of it. No TV. The "open" in the name of today's tournaments originally referred to the inclusion of amateurs into these competitions, but they were not allowed to receive the prize money.

There was a small [7 seat] bus that ran in a circle from the station, down Nelson Rd, up Tyne St, and along Station St back to the railway station. It was owned by Mr Widdows, his son Ian [Widdle] was at school with us. Later Mr Widdows bought a bigger bus and it went up as far as Clyde St. He had a driver named Percy and he and I were great mates, he was such a nice man. I was on the bus one day and reading "Seven Little Australians" and had got to the part where Judy is killed by a falling tree and apparently I was sobbing. I was deep in the book and didn't realise that the whole busload of people were having a giggle at my absorption in the story! Percy later told Mum about it.

Mum often sent me to the Fairhalls, on the corner of Thames and Station Streets on my bike to get odd things she needed, often pork sausage, sliced, for lunches. I always stopped on the way home and took out a few slices, ate it, and rewrapped the packet. No sticky tape to give me away! The butter came in a box about 2' [60cm] cube, it was taken out of the box and put on a marble slab to keep it cool, and the grocer would cut the amount you needed with wet wooden paddles, and



then add or take bits away till he got the right amount. There were damp muslin curtains around the slab to keep the flies off. Biscuits came loose in tins and you could ask for six of those and a dozen of something else. And the broken ones at the bottom were bagged and sold for a penny. During, and for a couple of years after the war, tea, butter, sugar, petrol, clothing and fabrics were all rationed. Cheese came in a big wheel and was skinned by hand and cut with a wire. The grocer always put a bag of boiled lollies in the weekly order when it was delivered. The sweet shop made paper cones and put the lollies in them. When the butter boxes were empty you could make a chest of drawers with three of them. Knock up a frame, glue fabric to the boxes, add knobs on the front and your chest of drawers was ready to use. I think everyone had one.

We started to follow local football as Geoff had started to play with the Adelphians. The captain/coach was Jack Savage and we became friendly with him and his wife, Bet. When my other mates left I became good friends with Lorraine Ousten at school and she lived next door to Bet and Jack. Dad became President of the football club and Jack was secretary. Lorraine told me a secret one day- Mrs Savage was having a baby!

With the footy club functions, meetings card nights etc. were held at various people's homes to raise money to run the club. One of my more embarrassing moments was when there was a footy meeting at our house. Mum always put on supper, pikelets because they were very popular and cakes. She had put some biscuits and cheese on a doily on a plastic plate. As I offered the plate to Frankie Deuchar [the captain] I added a small flourish and the whole lot finished up upside down on his blazer!

Grand Final day in Melbourne was a bit different in those days. There was no bookings or presold tickets, one went to the ground, [some people camped out for the whole week!] and lined up and waited for the gates to open. A lot of the ground was standing room and the footy started with the under 19's at 9.00AM, the seconds ran on as that game finished and the firsts started at 2.30. As the people poured in and the ground filled up, the officials would close the gates, with several thousand people still outside. About one o'clock the crowd would break down the gates and swarm into the MCG. After they filled the available spaces they jumped the fence and sat five and six deep around the boundary. They were packed so densely that you couldn't have fallen even if you fainted! They got over 100,000 people in that ground, even in those days.



Box Hill Adelphians: Geoff second from left back row, Jack 5th from left, bottom row

Geoff became an apprentice carpenter because Dad knew Bert Cuthbert in Clyde St, probably through the Lodge. As he got older, Geoff had worked in the school holidays at an orchard in Doncaster owned by Vern Arnott. When he left school Geoff wanted to work full time for Vern, but Mum and Dad had lived through the Great Depression and they said he must do a trade first. He probably would have finished up owning the orchard as Vern's boys were not interested in it.

Geoff cleared out one year and the police picked him up at Beechworth. I never knew the story and now I never will. I don't think he hated his job or anything, we just all did the jobs our parents found for us.

The depression had a huge effect on our lives, even though we weren't alive then, but our parents were. I still do things that saved money for our parents during that time. [Save the unfranked stamps, Karen]

When I was about 14 I started to go out with Geoff's mate George. We'd go to the pictures in Box Hill on Saturday nights, George would walk from South Box Hill to North Box Hill, and we'd walk to the pictures and then reverse the process afterwards. Anyway I finished school after the end of year exams and I was dux of the school, [it wasn't hard there was only twenty girls in year 10] collected a couple of prizes at Speech Night and that was that. I came home on Friday a week later and Mum said "You're starting work tomorrow" and so ended childhood. I had wanted to do Mothercraft Nursing as I loved babies and small children, but when Mum made enquiries at Berry St Foundling Hospital, she found that I would get uniforms and keep free but did not earn any actual wages until the third year of the 3 year course, that was the end of my dream.



Geoff at 15

Life after school

I started work at The Astor Florist next day as a trainee florist. My boss was Edward Howard Roberts Mitchell, Bob to his friends. He was a nice man and had been at one stage the head gardener at Burnham Beeches, the Nicholas [Aspro] family's home in the Dandenongs. There was another girl, Joyce Morgan, who lived in South Box Hill, an older lady, Mrs McKean and Mitch in the workroom and several more in the shop. Mitch was a good boss and it was a pleasant place to work. I was a quick learner and soon graduated to doing corsages and wreaths after I learned how to wire flowers. Joyce and I would do one whole window out with corsages on a Saturday morning for the boys to come in and buy a "spray" for their dates that night. My most hated job [and I always got it because I was the newest there] was wiring pansies for wreaths on a cold winters morning. The pansies were damp and because of the flowers there was no heating in the workroom and my fingers almost dropped off some days. It was very cold in the workroom, the floor was usually wet and we just cut the excess from the stems and threw them into a box under the table and when that was full and we were busy, on the floor. No such thing as oasis then, the wreath frames and baskets had to be stuffed by hand with moss and they had to be packed just right or the pegs wouldn't stay in. That was another very cold job on a winter's day and it was done outside in the open. If there was a couple of wreaths to go to, say Richmond, Mitch would give me directions and some money and send me off to deliver them. I got most of my knowledge of that part of the city from a bus or tram delivering flowers. There were several weekly orders that I got to deliver, on a Friday and on Holy days someone always sent flowers to St. Joseph's convent and sometimes I would go out with big orders with Lyle Williams, our carrier. I was a member of Box Hill horticultural society and exhibited at their shows, winning quite a lot of prizes for my corsages and bouquets.

My starting wage was, (I will decimalise) \$6.00 per week, and when I came home on Thursday night I would give my pay packet to Mum, she would take \$2.00 for board, \$2.00 for my bank and give me the remaining \$2.00 for myself. From that I had to pay 75c for my weekly train ticket, so I had \$1.25 to buy clothes and pay bus fares if I didn't want to walk the 1.6 kms to the railway station! We were all into lay-by, I always had clothing or things for my glory box on lay-by.

As we got older and drew more pay our board rose with the increase and it was usually less than \$2.00 each year, Dad started what he called a " Suit Club". We had to have twenty people so beside us - we had sixteen of the neighbours and Geoff's mates to round out the numbers. We each put in \$1.00 per week and we drew names from a hat and every week one person drew \$20.00, an enormous amount of money at one time, enough for a guy to buy a really good suit, hence the name. The women could buy a nice costume, which is what we called a matching skirt and coat. You could spend it on anything you wanted, it was great to have ten quid to spend. It was a sort of permanent fixture, we'd finish one and start the next the week after. It went on for several years.



In 1953 Dad decided to build a caravan, prepared plans and started on the framework. It was clad in bondwood and lined. It took longer than he had bargained for and it was only just finished in time for Christmas. We had decided to go to Torquay instead of Inverloch and Geoff had opted to go with his mates so Cousin Helen came with us. The caravan was a two berth and Dad had the car seat made into a camping bed and Helen and I slept there.

Mum hadn't had time to sew an annex, we just had a strip of canvas stretched from the van to the car as an awning. It was pretty primitive as modern vans go, but we thought it was great. Helen and I loved the surf and we'd smother ourselves with baby oil and lie for hours in the sun at the top of the sand dunes and sun bake.

Geoff was playing football with the Adelphians so there was a heap of other young people [mostly male] around the place. Years ago Dad had bought a dining/billiard table which was very popular with the boys. It was 8'x4', a 2/3 size table, and they almost wore the carpet out walking around it. Geoff had a nickname, "Nesty" which originated from a radio personality, Jack Burgess who was known as Jack Birdsnest. So Geoff started out as Birdsnest then it got shortened to Nesty. The funny bit was that Mum and Dad became known as Mr and Mrs Nest to people who didn't realise it was a nickname!

Dad had been a mason since he was 18, Grandpa belonged and later Percy and Frank. Dad started at Lodge of Equality, which was Grandpa's lodge and then to Lodge of Rhythm. No 419 in Box Hill., In 1946/47 he arrived at the top of the heap and became Master. He went out a lot with a group of men also Masters of their respective lodges, "visiting" at other meetings. There were also "Ladies Nights" which was a ball held by each master and his lodge and all the men and wives attended. I don't know how Mum and Dad managed financially as there was quite a lot of costs involved. They had to provide paper napkins, which were not cheap as they are now and flowers for the tables. Dad dug over the back yard and planted it with flowers which helped and sometimes we'd go down to Ernie Albers flower farm in Burwood road and buy some. Ernie of course was a mason. There was a meeting once a month. The wives did all the preparation of the food and set the tables with starched white cloths [mum had to wash, starch and iron them after] and vases of flowers. It was usually just a simple supper, sometimes meat and salad, or sausage rolls, sandwiches and cakes, tea, coffee and soft drink. As I said Box Hill was dry. Mum catered for the lodge for many, many years. She had to have a few long dance dresses and that must have been a problem. I know she had a black skirt and several different tops, much cheaper and Dad had to have a new evening suit. Then there was us, but that was not a problem. Charlie Cochrane and Tommy Austin loved the billiard table and Mum always left a lovely supper for them so they were available anytime they were asked. On the 25th November 1955, Dad became the foundation Master at a new Lodge, Melody No.776, that he and a group of his close friends started.

In November it was installation of the new master and a dozen or so cars would head up to Chandlers Nursery at The Basin. Bert Chandler would take them around his several hectare gardens and point out which of the huge rhododendrons they could cut from, so we took back several carloads of rhodies. Rhythm was noted for its floral display at installation time. The guys were issued with a brick and a hammer and they had to crush all the stems before the flowers were put in water. The stage always looked magnificent and I've seen men singing "God save the King" with their hands firmly around a vase of rhodies! There were many Chandlers in the Boronia area and The Basin including the local MP. Mum and Dad were at a fete in Boronia once when they lived there and the raffle winners were read out, first A Chandler, second B Chandler and so on. Mum remarked to Dad that it must have been rigged [they hadn't lived there very long] and standing behind her was Chandler MP. He wanted to take Mum to court for making slanderous remarks about his family!

When Geoff was about twelve he was walking with the other boys along the top rail of the fence at Wright's place [a pastime that requires skill and balance] He was wearing overalls, all the boys did and as he jumped off at the end, his trouser leg caught at the top of one of the old palings, which were pretty rotten. The paling broke at the middle rail and it came down and he landed on top of it caught in his crotch. He never said anything to the others and came home. As he walked in Mum could tell something was wrong. The overalls were torn and when he showed her what was wrong she could see a big raw blunt cut between his legs. She took him straight to the doctor and as he was trying to sew the

edges together he realised that a thick piece of flesh was missing and he was having trouble drawing the two edges of the wound together. He cobbled up as best he could and later that afternoon Mrs Wright came round to see if Geoff was OK as she had found the paling with a large piece of flesh embedded on it. I have often wondered if it damaged him sufficiently to prevent him fathering a child and I know Mum did too.

All our toys, bikes, scooters, prams in fact everything we had was second or third hand, Dad was a whizz at “doing things up” and Mum was good at anything that needed a feminine touch. Geoff and I never lacked for much in that way.

The Weirs lived at No 136, next door and old Arthur Weir, [Hoppy to us kids as he had one shorter leg] sold hot dogs at the footy at Hawthorn every home game. I got the job of riding my bike to Vials Bakery [bakeries just made bread and rolls not fancy like bakers are now] on the corner of Whitehorse Rd and Nelson Rd on Friday afternoon to collect a chaff bag of rolls. [The bakers didn’t bake on Saturday or Sunday] He drove his horse and jinker to the ground and set up his stall. He had a little burner and a boiler on that to cook the saveloys. Once he said to Mum that people always bought from him because he wore a clean white coat. Mum said later the customers obviously never looked at his hands. Mrs Weir kept cats, not one or two but dozens. Now Dad hated cats with a passion and would knock them on the head or drown them if he caught them in our place. Their house stank inside of cat pee. One of their daughters, Hilda, her husband and four children and one son Freddie lived with them and Mum hated me to go in there to play, she always said, “Ask Rita or Betty or Judith in here to play.” One day Mum had seen Hilda making tomato sandwiches and she said the only clean part of her hands was where she’d held the tomatoes to slice and got juice on them! I think she was afraid I’d get sick if I had much to do with them.

Dad’s section at the SEC went out on strike one year and Dad got a job with a local builder, Les McCredden. He bought an old bike which he rode to work as the work was all around Box Hill. He was “out” for about three months but because he worked we didn’t miss out on wages.



Geoff's Maxwell set up to camp

When Geoff was 16 he bought Charlie Dixon's old Maxwell ute. Of course he could not get a licence until he was 18 and the idea was that he wouldn't drive it until he was 18. Ha! Ha! Not only did he drive it but if needed I did too and I was only 14! I recall driving down Station St with Geoff lying on the running board trying to locate a rattle. Dad had begun to teach me to drive when I was 13. We used to go out shooting rabbits quite a bit and when Geoff no longer came with us, Dad said someone beside he should be able to drive in

case of emergency and as Mum refused to learn that had to be me. So I learnt to drive that year on rarely used country roads. One evening Geoff was driving me to Guides and the car conked out right outside the police station. We were sitting there trying to start it when two uniforms and two detectives walked out of the door. “What’s the matter, son?” “Car stopped, sir can’t get it going.” “Hop in and we’ll give you a push” So we hopped in and the four of them pushed us up the hill as far as the Catholic Church and it wouldn’t start. “Shove her in reverse, son and let out the clutch when we tell you.” We did and they shoved and the car finally coughed and started and we thanked them profusely, drove around the corner

into Lynley St and collapsed into each other's arms, in between crying and laughing, with relief at our lucky escape. Geoff was 16 and I was 14.

Geoff and the guys had a great time with his old car. He and Dad made it into a panel van, that way he could get more into it. One Easter they had so many bodies and baggage that the mudguards were scraping on the tyres. They did not, of course, do the sensible thing and lighten the load, they just unbolted the mudguards. One night Geoff, George and Checker were in the front seat and the others were in the back and they were off to the flicks at the Balwyn Theatre. As Geoff came up to pass a guy in front, the car did a right hand turn without signalling. Geoff turned with him but could not avoid a scrape to the side of his car, you couldn't hurt the Maxwell. The man got out of the car and he began to march back to take Geoff to bits. [Young bloke, old car] Checker and George got out of the front, and the back doors opened and Hughie, Lefty, Spud, Billy and a couple of others piled out of the back. The chap said, "She'll be right mate, no damage done," and back in his car and off like a rocket!



When Geoff was 18 he was called up to do his National Service at Puckapunyal. He spent three months in the army and when he finished his camp training he had to do two years in the reserves, Citizen Military Forces. His unit was the Victorian Scottish Regiment, the Gordon Highlanders. He'd go to the drill hall at Surrey Hills once a fortnight and some weekends. And he wore a kilt, which at first embarrassed him dreadfully. He would back his car up to the back gate, open the car door and leave it open, leave the gate open, get ready inside and then when [hopefully] no one was looking he'd run out and hop in the car and shut the door. But after a while he got used to it and never worried about being seen in a skirt. We all went to see him and the Regiment do the Trooping of the Colour at St. Kilda Footy Ground. There should be an 8mm film that Dad took somewhere. Shortly after Geoff finished his "Nashos" the Regimental Band was coming back from a parade in a bus and was involved in an accident at the railway crossing at Boronia. About 15 of the guys were killed. There also should be a National Service medal somewhere in Canberra with Geoff's name on it.

One of Dad's apprentices at the SEC, Roy Barnard, came back from the war, became engaged to Margaret Abbinett, and started to build a house in Blackburn. The road was not made and just after the war materials were very hard to come by. He built the garage first and fitted it up as a tiny flat and they lived there while he built the house. After the war houses were not allowed to exceed ten squares [about 93 square metres] as there was a severe shortage of building materials; it often took a couple of years to build a house, even to lock up stage. Baths, basins and sinks were almost impossible to obtain. Margaret and Roy's wedding was the first we had been old enough to attend, children didn't go to weddings in those days, so when the invitation included Geoff and me, I was very excited. It was very special occasion. They were very close to us as Margaret did not have a happy home life, her mother was a bit of a martinet and the two children Margaret and George were terrified of her. George was in the merchant navy and yes, when I was older, I went out with him for a while whenever he was in port. Marg would have loved to have my mum as her Mum and we spent a lot of time together along with Robyn and Alan as they arrived. Dad and Geoff worked on several working bees on Roy's house.

When Geoff started to play footy with the Adelphians, we also became close to Jack and Bet Savage. Dad and Jack were president and secretary of the footy club and we exchanged visits often. I saw Bet and Jack on my own as well and remember Mark and Greg being born. When I married and went to PNG, Bet was one of the few people who continued to write to me in the years we spent in PNG, Daly Waters and Darwin. She became my closest friend and the nearest thing I got to a big sister. While I was working in Camberwell, Jack and his team were painting Surrey Hills Station and he knew which train I came through on, I'd roll the window down and stick my head out and yell "Jack" and his head would appear and we'd wave. When we came back to Melbourne to live I began to cut Jack's hair so we saw each other every six weeks or so when they were not away. Actually I had my first kiss in their kitchen at Kangerong Road and don't believe Jack when he tells you I was down at the chook pen with Allen Woolley, that was Jeannie Wright, I was in the kitchen with George.

I stopped going out with George and did not have a boyfriend for a long while. On Saturday nights I used to hop on my bike and ride down to Abbots, the shop next to the school and get the Herald and the Sporting Globe for Mum to catch up with the sport and Dad to read the news. I'd get about ten bobs [\$1] worth of lollies - a big bag full and they'd last for a couple of days. Liquorice blocks and aniseed balls were 16 a penny and nothing was less than 4 a penny. Mum, Dad and I would sit in front of the fire, eat lollies and read the papers. Abbots made homemade iceblocks in summer and these, especially the raspberry and cream ones, were just so good. As it was next to the school we used to buy them at lunchtime, they were threepence each. There was another shop opposite the school, Oldfields, and they sold pies, four pence [3cents] for a big one and tuppence [2 cents] for a small one.

Anyhow we gave Inverloch away and started to go to Torquay for our holidays. It was a great place, a very small country town, hard to imagine when you see it now. We had a good holiday there in 1952, met a nice lot of young people and in 1953 Dad asked Bet and Jack if they would like to go down after we came home. That year I was lucky and won the "Miss Torquay" section of the Sun Beach Girl competition. Also that year Helen and I met a group of boys and girls at the beach and one boy was a guy who had been in Margaret Gilmour's class at Box Hill State. His name was Des and I started to go out with him. Mum wanted me to make my debut and basically to please her, I agreed. Des was of course, my partner and we went to classes every Sunday morning for about two months, Mum paid for a lovely frock, all the girls had the same dresses and the great night finally came around. Grandma and Grandpa came as did Aunty Hilda and Uncle Floyd and my very proud parents. It was the Masonic Ball and was held in the Box Hill Town Hall.



*Holidaying at Torquay, 1954.
In the group photo are Dad and Mum, Bet, Mark as a baby, Bob Haskell*

Des lived in Port Melbourne with his parents and younger brother Ian. He'd come out to our place and we'd go out, so after a while he would stay over at our place, as it was a long way to Port Melbourne and the last train left at midnight, so he slept in the caravan in the backyard. We would often visit Bet and Jack on a Saturday night as Des was as tight as a fishes **** and didn't like to pay for outings. He'd sit there in Aunt's chair and smoke Jack's cigarettes and drink his beer and Bet and Jack were struggling and here he was bumming cigs and beer. I used to get really mad at him. And in those days supper was obligatory, one set up the card table with an embroidered cloth on it and have a couple of savoury things, some small cakes, biscuits and a sponge cake, all with one's good china teaset and silver. We got engaged when I was 18 and actually started to build a house in Bulleen.

But I knew when Mum started to talk about booking a wedding reception that I wasn't going to go through with it, so after a few weeks I plucked up the courage and told him it was all over and also Mum and Dad, but I don't think they were at all disappointed. I guess he was OK but not in hindsight, what or with whom I wanted to spend the rest of my life. If I had married him it would never have lasted.



We sold the block with frame on it and as Dad had done most of the work, the plans and set out, I bought him a car radio as a thank you gift with part of my settlement money. It weighed about 25 Kgs and came in three sections and had to be fitted by an auto electrician. And it was classed as a portable because you could actually take out and use the radio part separately!

Geoff and I belonged to a large group of people, mostly our own ages, with whom we'd grown up with or met through footy and although we never made arrangements to meet anywhere somehow we'd all

turn up at the same flicks or dance. There was probably twenty odd and when you the boy and girlfriends we made a large group. Talk about safety in numbers! The Football club ran dances once a month at the Rechabite Hall in Surrey Hills and also bus trips as well as the end of season trip away for the footballers.

One time the bus was going to the snow at Donna Buang, I had never seen snow and wanted to go but Geoff said it was only for the guys so Mum wouldn't let me go. After I found out that all the girlfriends went and it took a while for me to forgive him for that.

We had a pontoon school at Gilmours every Friday night, we played with pennies, thrrippences, don't think we got up to sixpences. We'd all sit round their big kitchen table and play for hours, no one lost or won very much but we had fun. One night Mrs Gilmour decided to have a cigarette [she didn't smoke] and she was puffing away and the boys were trying to teach her how to blow smoke rings. Hughie said he could make smoke come out of his eyes. She didn't believe him so he told her to keep looking into his eyes. Well she's looking at him and he's slowly moving his cigarette closer to her hand, he nearly got there and she said, "If you don't watch that cigarette Hughie, you'll burn my hand." So perhaps she was a wake up to the trick and not as gullible as Hughie thought!

I went to work and home on the train, same time every morning and night and George and Checker were always on the afternoon train and we'd go around to the milk bar at the Rialto theatre and have a milkshake before heading home. I worked at the Astor for a few years then applied for [and got] a job at a florist in the city, in Rundle Arcade, right below the big clock which has Gog and Magog striking the hours. It was awful and one lunchtime I just took my coat and bag and walked out. I rang Mum from the station to tell her what I'd done [we actually had a phone by then] so she was prepared when the woman rang her. She knew I wasn't happy there.

Dad and George Mills always went away each year at trout opening season, and then he and Mum would go away for a week somewhere. While they were away that year I found a job working at a fruit shop in East Kew at the end of Mont Albert Road in Burke Road. I went from four pounds [\$8] a week to twelve pounds [\$24] and I got half a day a week off for working Saturday mornings! God, I was rich! I didn't think I had a chance at the job as there several older women all full of self-confidence were ahead of me, I nearly didn't stay. Anyhow when Alec came home from market he started doing interviews, I was about fifth in line and when we'd talked for a while and he'd asked what I'd been doing, then said "Can you start tomorrow morning?" [Saturday] I said yes and I must have been satisfactory as I stayed on. He just walked out and told all the women waiting that the job was filled. Dot Mills, his wife told me later that if I hadn't been any good I wouldn't have been back on Monday! I liked working there; the job was a soda, all I had to learn was how to stack the fruit and vegetable displays and that took about a full day working with one of the longtime employees, and pack orders.

They were a good bunch; the men did all the heavy work but they were all much older than me and much more world wise and sometimes I wouldn't know where to look and was red with embarrassment. Of course they all enjoyed my confusion. I'd been there about a year when Dot and Alec bought land in a nearby street and started to build a house as Dot was sick of living over a shop. Alec was not good with money and they got into financial trouble [no easy loans then] and ended up selling the shop to Amalfis who had a business in Camberwell. They wanted it as a wedding present for their daughter and future son-in-law, Theresa and Vince. They also had a very personable son [Joey] a bit older than me and he asked me out several times, but the thought of what Mum would say as he was not only Catholic but Italian rather put me off. He was really nice though and I was tempted. Theresa asked if I would like to stay and work for them but Jim Pope in the delicatessen next door had offered me a job so I went next door. I stayed there until I left to get married.



I had turned 18, got my licence and bought a car after Des and I split up. It was a little Standard 8, pale blue and a soft top, number HX184. When I passed my test the cop asked if I had a car and when I said yes, he told me to drive it as much as possible as I was still only a learner, so every weekend Michael Burrows and I would go out and drive somewhere, we must have driven every road from Box Hill to Warrandyte and across to Lilydale and beyond. I now drove to work. Because of its position there was many well-known people came into the shop and Mont Albert Road was second only to Toorak for expensive homes. So on my 21st birthday I had the opera singer Glenda Raymond sing "Happy Birthday" to me in the

shop full of customers. Her husband was Hector Crawford an early and prolific TV producer; he did Homicide and Cop Shop and many other well-known old series.

We had a grocer's shop next door to the greengrocer and I got to know the lady who worked there, Nell. She walked with a bad limp and one day Lorna told me she had an artificial leg hence the limp. I was telling Mum about it that night and she said "I know her, she worked with me once and she lost her leg when she fell under a tram" I spoke to Nell about it and Mum came down and they had lunch together and caught up on old times.

I went out with a couple of the delivery guys, Michael who was 6'4" and a bit of a hunk, but a bit too casual for me although he really did like me. After we split up he used to ring Mum every now and then to see how I was getting on, stopped when I got married. But I bet his family were relieved, they were wealthy and lived in Mont Albert Road in a big double storey house. His only sister had been sent to Switzerland to finishing school and she didn't work, just did charity work and spoke French to the waiters at the Australia Hotel. Michael had been to Melbourne Grammar and his two younger brothers were at Geelong Grammar so I think I was a bit of a comedown for them. They had a permanent reservation at the Australia Hotel for Saturday night and we were always welcome to join them. I liked the grub but felt a bit out of my depth.



I broke it off with Mike and started to go out with Ken, one of our milk delivery guys. I liked him a lot but discovered after a few months that he was married but separated. This was a big no no in those days as far as my family was concerned. Even worse than going out with a Catholic! The religious boundaries were very evident when we were young, the first question mothers asked their children when a new boy/girlfriend appeared on the scene was, "Is he/she a Catholic?" I guess the first question a Catholic mother asked was, "Is he/she a Protestant?" You really have no idea how strong the bias was. We didn't have to deal with drugs, apart from the legal ones, alcohol and tobacco, but boy! we had prejudice. We had never heard of smoking pot or heroin or cocaine but our parents told us way out stories of Opium Dens in Little Bourke St and white slave traders but I don't know that we really believed them.

I went on a radio quiz show [it was at Box Hill Town Hall] and got through all the preliminaries and the question for the final prize, [can't remember what the prize was,] was, "How many columns at the front of Parliament House?" I guessed ten but it was eight and I won a consolation prize a set of kitchen table

and chairs. I should have known, I stood at the front of them for hours and hours the day the Queen arrived in 1954!

Geoff got engaged to Delys Murdoch and, shortly after his 21st birthday, decided to go to PNG to work as you could save \$4000 in a year. Well you could if you didn't drink or gamble, but of course, there's not much else to do. Geoff went off to PNG and the footy boys would meet Delys at the flicks or a dance, always with a guy who would be introduced as her cousin. After a few times they'd just say, "Hello Del, hello cousin," Word got back to Geoff and the engagement was off and she was engaged and married to someone else when he got home. Mind you, she tried it on again when he came home, unhappy with the husband and he treated her badly etc.etc, but he didn't fall for it this time.



Above: Geoff (3rd from right at back) and Bob (4th from right) playing for Boroko Football Club

In September 1957 PNG sent a representative AFL team to North Queensland for a three game series against a North Queensland Rep side and Geoff was in this team. Mum and Dad hadn't seen Geoff for nearly two years so they took my little caravan that Dad and I were building and drove up to Townsville to meet them. The guys had played two games in Cairns and were to play one in Townsville. They watched the footy and spent time with Geoff and his mates [and I bet that was an eye-opener for them] from PNG. His best friend was Bob Thomson, another fanatical Essendon supporter who, with Geoff and a couple of others equally as keen had started up the Boroko Football Club whose colours were, yes you guessed, black with a red sash! There were only three teams in the Port Moresby competition so you played each other every 2 weeks and the third week was a bye and they had a top two instead of a four. Mum and Dad liked Bob and kept telling me what a nice boy [?] he was. I was heartily sick of the sound of his name.



PNG Representative Football team. Bob 3rd from left, back, Geoff front row first left

Geoff was home for Christmas that year and after Christmas he and Bob took my little van and went to Broken Hill to see Bob's mate George McGreehan who had married and settled there. From there they went to Sydney to pick up another PNG mate Kevin Gardner. The three of them went on to Queensland [all sleeping in the little van bed] and came back to Melbourne for my 21st birthday party. At my party Bob gave me two 8mm films [I had an 8mm movie camera] and said, "These will come in handy to film our wedding" As I'd only met him a couple of times I didn't take him seriously.



Geoff and Kevin flew back to PNG on the Tuesday after my birthday and Bob stayed on as he had to have a series of allergy tests at Royal Melbourne Hospital. Because his parents lived at Rosebud it was more convenient for him to stay at our place. Mind you, he did have five sisters who lived as close or closer to the hospital as we did. He invited me to go to a friend's [Bob Lewis] engagement party with him on the following Friday night. We went and Bob Lewis was in the doghouse because he hadn't picked up the engagement ring from the jewelers, Bob said perhaps he could borrow ours. He got very strange looks of disbelief from Bob Lewis and me.

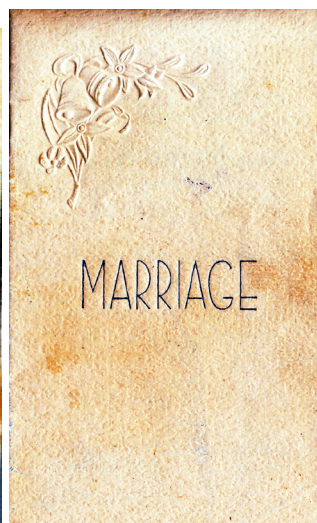
On the way home we stopped and he asked me to marry him. I was not “in love” with him, [how could you be after knowing someone for such a short time?] but I was very attracted to him and at the time I was not particularly happy and I guess this offered a way out. I thought he was completely honest and straightforward and I felt I could trust him implicitly. After demurring a bit I said yes and we became engaged on the 8th February. I went off to work the next day, leaving Bob to tell Mum and Dad and buy an engagement ring.

He was helping Dad move the chook pen and when they stopped for a smoke Bob asked if it was alright for us to marry. Dad asked if he was sure he knew what he was doing. Then they told Mum. Bob’s brother-in-law Reg Mates had a jewellers shop in Dandenong and Bob walked in and Reg said, “I don’t know what you’ve come to buy but it won’t be an engagement ring!” But it was and after lunch we set off to tell his sisters, their reaction was all the same, “I haven’t got anything to wear” We visited Gwen and Tony first, then Nance and Bill, Betty and Jack, Dot and Alf and lastly Jean and Reg. Reg of course, knew but at Bob’s request hadn’t told Jean and he swore all the girls to secrecy as he wanted to surprise his parents on the Sunday. Which we did, I’m not sure Pop was pleased, it happened too quickly for him, but Ma was thrilled to bits.

I loved her from the first time I met her, she accepted me without hesitation, one of nature’s loveliest ladies.

We decided to get married on the 22nd February 1958, three weeks away. I went to work on Monday and gave notice that I was leaving the following Saturday and Mum set to, to arrange a wedding reception. She was fantastic, rehired the hall we’d had for my 21st, organised the invitations, food, drinks etc. rang all the ladies who helped her at lodge to prepare and serve the food, wait tables, wash up and generally leave her free to enjoy herself. She borrowed a carpet square from Mrs.B. made up a backdrop, had a tall wooden stand with a huge vase of flowers on it and that was where our formal photos were taken. We went to “town” together and bought the stuff for my frock and the bridesmaid and flower girls dresses. We all had the same white flock nylon but theirs had lemon underskirts. I made my dress, Shirley Mills [Lord] was bridesmaid, her sister-in-law to-be made hers and Jean made Robyn Barnard, the flower girl’s dress. Bob rang his friend Jim Davern to be best man.

Weddings
THOMSON — BURGESS
 Gardenias and stephanotis were carried by Gwendolyn May, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. R. L. Burgess, of 132 Nelson road, Box Hill, for her marriage with Robert Gordon Thomson, of West. Rosebud.
 The Rev. A. W. Guy officiated at the Balwyn Methodist Church.
 The bride chose a gown of white flock nylon. Her bridesmaid, Miss Shirley Mills, and flower girl, Robyn Barnard, wore white nylon over lemon taffetas and carried frangipani and water lilies.
 Best man was Mr. James Davern.
 A reception was held at the Scout Hall in Elgar road.
 Mr. and Mrs. Thomson will live in Port Moresby.



Mr. & Mrs. R. L. Burgess
 request the pleasure of the company of
Mr. Robert Thomson.
 at the Marriage of their Daughter
Gwendolyn May
 to
 Robert Gordon Thomson
 at the
 Methodist Church
 corner Burke and Mount Albert Roads
 on Saturday, 22nd February, 1958
 at 4 p.m.
 And afterwards at
 Scout Hall, Elgar Rd., Box Hill
 R.L.B. 132 Nelson Rd.
 19th February Box Hill





We used Dad's white Zephyr for our car and Arthur Goodall drove it, and Reg had a pale green Customline for the bridesmaids. Bob's Uncle Fred did the service and we "borrowed" the church opposite where I worked on the corner of Mont Albert and Burke Roads, Camberwell.

Geoff was back in PNG and the Saturday before our wedding he was playing two-up and was winning over a thousand pounds and there was only twenty pounds left in the school. So he decided he'd have it all and he and Kevin could fly down to the wedding and buy a decent present. Of course he lost the lot and another 120 quid as well!

Bob had fixed up a tape recorder to tape the ceremony and half way through the tape broke and it was going, flick, flick, flick, and Bob's whispering, "Uncle Fred, Uncle Fred" and pointing to the recorder. He finally got the message and switched it off. My Uncle Wyn proposed the toast to us and Bob responded and proposed the bridesmaids toast to which Jim responded and then read out the telegrams. I had gone through them and made sure there were no smutty ones, I always hated the embarrassment of the bridal couple over some of the ones read out. I was an awful prude, even if working with older married women in Mills' fruit shop had broadened my mind somewhat.

We went to the caravan at Torquay for a week for our honeymoon. We stood in the annexe and removed our clothes shaking the confetti out of suitcases and clothing. Bob had had the foresight to put a pair of wire cutters in the car to cut loose the collection of shoes and tin cans that were attached to the car.



On our honeymoon

The Thomsons

I'll put in a bit about Bob's family here. Pop was born in Broughton Rd, Surrey Hills, the house is no longer there as it was one of several demolished to make way for a private hospital to be built. I had seen it because one day when Pop was in the car with us we drove down the street and he pointed out the beautiful Victorian, solid red brick house where he was born. He was the second youngest of eight children: Mary, Adam (who died before he was 1), Muriel, Matthew, James, Andrew, Robert and Allan.

His father died when he was 8 and his mother when he was 11, and are buried at Box Hill cemetery. Pop was always angry with his sisters (they also were long dead when I married Bob), he said they had spent his inheritance, all the money that had been set aside for the younger boys. They possibly had to dip into the trust, it would not have been easy to feed, clothe and educate them, even to the standards of the day without extra money.



Thomsons c1902 outside the house at Broughton Rd: Andrew, Muriel, Mary Withell Thomson with Allan on her knee, Matthew, Mary, James and Robert(Pop) at the front

Mary married Frank Williams and they had four daughters and a son. Matthew married Alice Cooper and he lived in Laburnum St Blackburn. Andrew went off to WW1 as a Sapper and was killed, with others, while working on a bridge not long before the end of the war. He is buried at Harbonnières War Cemetery in France. James went to New Zealand, married and raised his family there. Brother Allan went to Sydney to live. Pop went to work for the railways and became a signalman, now the job is redundant as it is all controlled by computers. Bob said he literally grew up without a father as Pop was either sleeping during the day because he was on night shift, or working during the day, or they were at school when he was awake. Years later a psychologist remarked that Bob was following a pattern, his grandfather was sent to sea when he was twelve, his father was orphaned young and Pop was never around when Bob was a child so none of them had a father figure.

Ma was born at her parent's cottage at Staffordshire Reef, near Ballarat. She was much younger than all her siblings and weighed only about 1kg when born. But she survived and was the darling of the entire family. Her father and two brothers were miners and when they returned from work there was a race to see who could pick her up or make her smile first. Her brothers were Frederick and Alfred, her sisters May, Betty and Lucy, known as Nana. She lived in "the Reef" all her life, met Pop when she was sixteen and



Ma's siblings outside the old house at Staffordshire Reef; Alf, Fred, May, Betty, Lucy, Elsie (Fred's wife)

he was twenty six and they were married after a short courtship. They moved to Melbourne and bought a house in Harriet St, Coburg near the railway station. This house has been demolished and it is now part of Safeway carpark. Jean was born in 1922, Betty in 1923, Nancy in 1925, Dorothy in 1928, Gwen in 1930 and Bob in 1933. At the start of the Great Depression they had four children under seven and by the end, six children under eleven. During the depression Pop's work hours were reduced, many thousands of men were out of work and he had a wife and six kids to

provide for. Ma miscarried another boy about twelve months after Bob was born and she told me that Pop became impotent after that, poor bugger, it was probably the only way he could stop having kids.

Ma's standby was mutton stew, she could buy 5 pounds of forequarter chops for 2/- [20c] vegetables were cheap and she could make a large pot of stew for about 30c. Pop went to work by train, he would get out one stop before Coburg on the way home and walk along the track, picking up bits of wood, coal, briquettes and bottles. During the depression people lined up at bends in the railway line from Yallourn to the city and the train drivers often went a bit fast around a bend and tipped some extra briquettes on to the track. Once a year he sold them to pay the council rates. The rest made the fire at night in the winter and during summer were bagged up and stored in the woodshed. Pop never passed a bottle by, they were worth a halfpenny each to the bottle-o. He stopped smoking as tobacco cost 2/- a week and they could not afford the luxury. He always licked his plate clean and finished every scrap that the kids left on their plates. I think probably he often went hungry.

Everyone saved unfranked stamps, bottles, brown paper, brown paper bags, string and rubber bands. We made "lacker" bands out of worn out bike tyres. When the war was on we were asked to go through cupboards and donate to the collections for the war effort any aluminium utensils, pots or pans to be melted down to make aeroplanes.

Jean married Reg Mates, and they had four children: Graeme, Geoff, Robin & Julie. Betty married Jack Wilkinson and they had two children: Phillip and Glenda. Betty and Jack later divorced. Nancy married Billy Murray, they had two children: Jennifer and Ross. Dorothy married Alf Rainsbury, they adopted Heather. Gwyneth married Todor Lolich, they divorced, then Murdoch McDonald, who died just a few years later. She didn't have any children.

Ma and Pop lived in that house till Bob moved out and shared a flat with a mate while he finished his DCA technician training course. About the time Bob went to PNG they sold Harriet St and moved to Rosebud to The Avenue. They bought one house and then bought the house opposite and sold the first one. They had chooks, a huge vegetable garden and Pop was in his element, he had Ma to himself. Pop

learned to drive and had bought a Morris Minor and when Bob came home on leave Ma said to him, "Come back to Jean's place with us, Pop wants you to see how well he drives." Bob said he thought on the way, "I've flown 4000 miles and I'm going to get killed in the fifteen miles to Jean's." Pop was a terrible driver, he couldn't turn his head so when he wanted to back out of the long driveway at Rosebud, he'd line up the gates in the mirror and plant his foot. Scary. He'd hog the middle of the Nepean Hwy, [it



Pop, Bob and Ma when Bob left for New Guinea, at Essendon Airport



Ma & Pop's house at 1 The Avenue, West Rosebud

was only two lanes] as he wouldn't take his car out on the sides, the edges were too rough. Bill replaced clutches at an alarming rate as he rode the clutch all the time and wore them out. If I was out with them I closed my eyes and tried to think of something other than imminent disaster.

At Rosebud Ma kept records of how much they spent on seeds, seedlings, fertilizer, chook food etc. and how much yield they got in eggs, beans and carrots etc. Karen has her cookery book with the tallies in the back. Ma did all her own jam and bottling, [my Mum gave her our Fowlers bottling outfit and bottles] she froze surplus vegies, made pickles, tomato sauce, chutney, mint jelly, lemon butter, cakes and biscuits.

While Pop was happy Ma wasn't as she was too far away from the girls. When she was ill in PNG when Andy was born it was a perfect time to get Pop to move as she had to be near a specialist. They bought a nice little house at 9 Green St, Ringwood and settled down there.

Across the front windows of the new house there were a couple of flower beds about 60cm wide. When Pop went off working for a day or two she would haul out the rocks across the front and dig up another foot or so, plant some seedlings and replace the rocks, adding extra rocks from the pile at the back. It became a joke as those beds finished up two metres wide and I am quite sure Pop noticed but was happy that she was happy and thought she was pulling the wool over his eyes! Pop collected lost handkerchiefs, this was before tissues came into our lives and he'd pick up any lost hankies he found, soak them in salty water then Ma would wash them. When she died we found drawers full of hankies.

Pop was a difficult man, very much a loner. He was devoted to Ma, she was the only thing that really mattered to him.



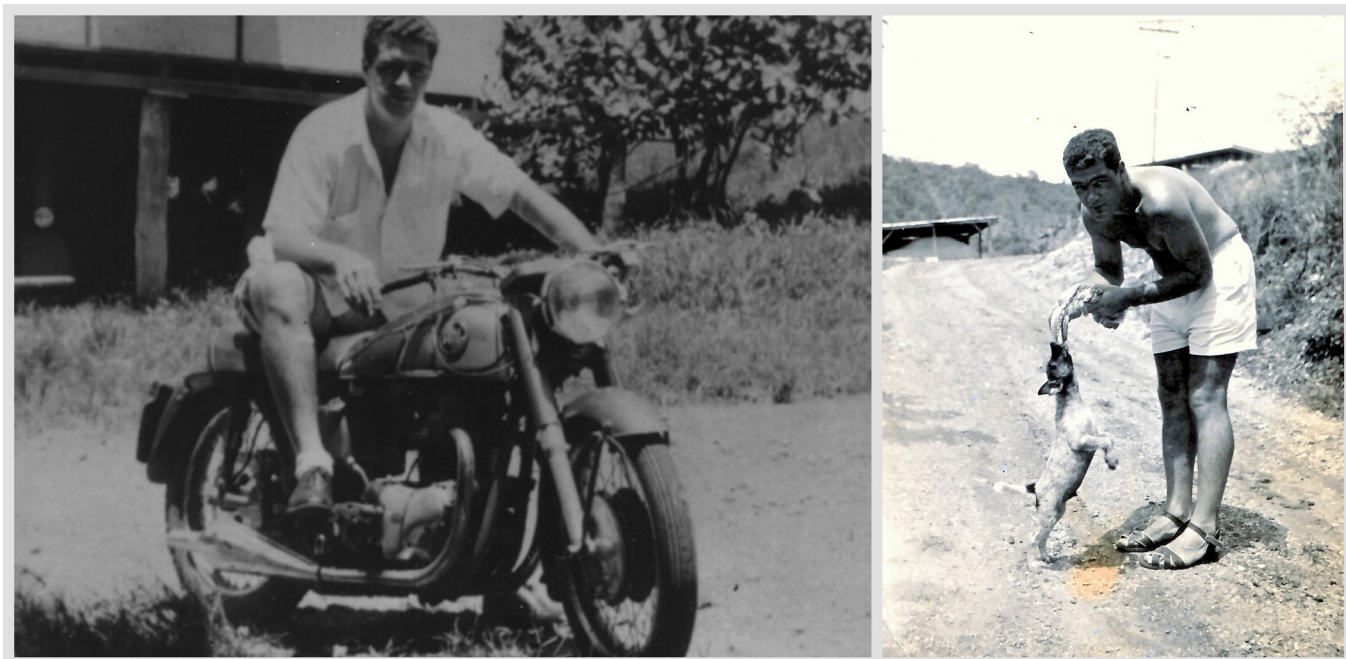
Thomsons: Left Ma and Pop, Top middle: Bob 3rd from left, outside house at Staffordshire Reef; top right Jean, middle left Betty, right Nancy, bottom centre Dorothy, right Gwen

Off to New Guinea

After our honeymoon we were home for 6 days and then boarded the plane [a Viscount] for Sydney. One of Bob's PNG friends met us and took us for a drive round Sydney to fill in time before our flight to Port Moresby. Our next flight was on a DC4, a four engine plane, we did not have to worry about customs, immigration or passports, only outward passenger cards, as Papua was an Australian Territory and New Guinea was a UN mandated territory. We needed a tax clearance from ATO and enough money for a fare back to Oz. We had two suitcases, Bob's typewriter and my sewing machine, our worldly possessions. We were travelling on the "new" Tourist class, the fore runner of economy travel. For lunch we got an apple and a cup of coffee, for dinner we got an apple and a cup of coffee, for breakfast, yes we got an apple and a cup of coffee. We landed in Brisbane and refuelled for the long hop to Port Moresby. Just past the point of no return between Brisbane and Townsville, we "did a donk" i.e. one engine failed. And this is my first plane trip! Bob was busy assuring me that these planes could fly on one engine if necessary but somehow I didn't feel very reassured.

The captain made an announcement that we would fly on to Townsville. As we had left Brisbane in the late afternoon and these were not your fast modern aircraft and they fly slower on 3 not 4 engines, we arrived in Townsville about midnight. Qantas then had to find hotel accommodation for more than 100 people, we were lucky we got into the Strand Hotel which was very nice, but not till about 2AM, we sat around and waited while they found the accommodation and then busses to get us there. They had to fly an engine up from Sydney and fit it before we could continue. We had a great day walking round Townsville and enjoying ourselves. Went to bed, woken at midnight and bussed to the airport, then sat around till about 4.30AM before emplaning once again. Landed OK at Jackson's Airfield at Port Moresby, met by Geoff and taken to our new "home" a converted "boi" house. It was quite comfortable; we had a fan, fridge and a shower. Bob had a Norton Dominator motor bike and that was our transport until Sue was born, Bob riding, me on the pillion seat and the dog, Chinook, on the tank.

We lived there for several months. Geoff was not very happy about me marrying Bob, he lost his best mate and he thought I'd write and tell Mum what he got up to. She probably wouldn't have believed me anyhow!



Bob and a friend Des Francis had started a radio repair and sales business as partners. When Des married there was not enough work and money in it for two so Bob went back to DCA. He only joined APC to go to PNG and DCA wouldn't transfer him. I became pregnant and was sick most of the day every day. We had to move as the house was sold and were then in one room with a bathroom shared with about 10 other people and very limited cooking facilities. Bob went into Regional Office and said if we didn't get a house ASAP we were going South. We had a house two days later, it was a "Hawksley" prefab built in England and shipped out in hundreds after the war, in Fourth Street, Boroko.



Friends in Port Moresby

I was a bit lonely and a bit homesick, as well as morning sick and when the spring flowers came out in Melbourne, Ma would put a freesia, a piece of boronia or daphne in the envelope and when the mail arrived I could smell it and know that once again it was spring in Melbourne and I wasn't there!

I was a rather shy and very awkward person when we married but I soon lost that in Port Moresby. It didn't matter if you dropped or broke something or spilled your drink; everyone was usually a bit tipsy and did not notice or concluded you were. When it ceased to matter I got over most of it though I am still apprehensive if I have to do something new on my own. We had quite a large circle of friends, the boys that Geoff and Bob played footy with, workmates and their wives or girlfriends. Several couples married while we lived there; Lyn and Vince Sharland, Bill and Win Dolan, Reg and Joy Morkham and Bev and Kev Gardner. There was always a party somewhere or we'd meet up at the Boroko pub and party there.

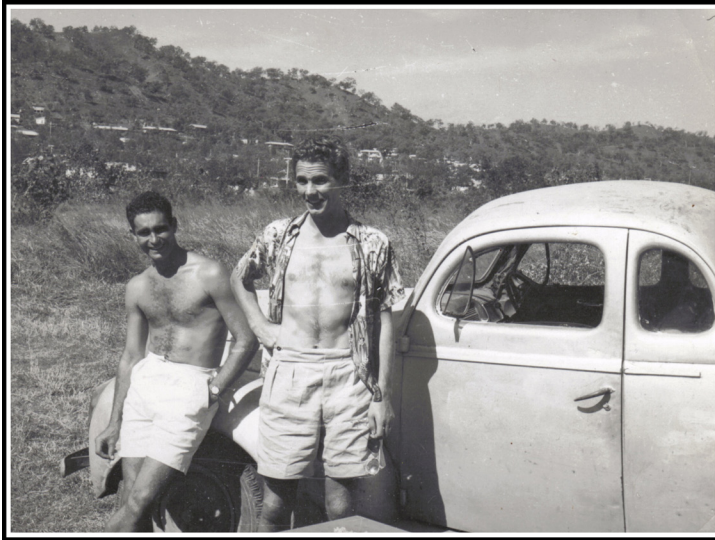
Geoff ran a "swy" (two-up) school at his donga which was opposite the Boroko pub. They always ran short of glasses because the guys would be drunk and smash them. On a Saturday morning Geoff, Bob and a couple of others would go to the pub with their footy bags and, as you always got a clean glass as they drank they'd put the glasses in the bags. When they reckoned they had enough they would go back to Geoff's place.

One time the pub was running short of wine glasses and the publican, Wally Morrissey, told one of the bargirls to, "run across the road and ask Mr Burgess if we could borrow some of our glasses" Geoff provided supper for the swy game. He cooked cocktail frankfurts in his electric jug, you lift the lid, cram in as many as you can get in, add as much water as will fit and turn it on. They cooked really quickly! With stew it was easier, open the tin, pour it in and switch on, a hot meal in a couple of minutes. The tea tasted awful though.



Geoff at his donga

Geoff had a hot stick fridge and when he ran out of something to eat and was a bit short of cash, he'd defrost the fridge and frozen in the ice he could always find a packet of snags or some chops. One Saturday night Billy Dolan was plastered, he'd come on his motor bike and got drunk, won several hundred quid and passed out. Geoff took the bike keys off him and drove him home. Bill woke up next morning and couldn't find his bike. No bike and pockets full of money, he concluded that he must have sold his bike. Pleasantly surprised to find he still had the bike and all that money. Of course all this happened before I went there. I still did not drink at this stage it took me many years to drink alcohol and I never liked beer.



Geoff and Gus

Moresby at this time was a very small place, two pubs, [the Top and the Bottom] a picture theatre, three stores, [Burns Philp, commonly called the Pirates of the Pacific, Steamships and Kriewaldts] a few other shops and the Post Office. The wreck of the MacDhui was still in the water from the war and the Catalinas still landed in the harbour. Koki beach was where a lot of the Papuans lived and Ela beach was the town beach. There was a big market at Koki every Saturday. Kone was the administration centre; Hanuabada was where the Papuans lived out over the sea in houses on stilts. We lived at Boroko, formerly just the four mile, and the Murray Army Barracks were there also. At Six Mile was the airfield and that was as far as it went.

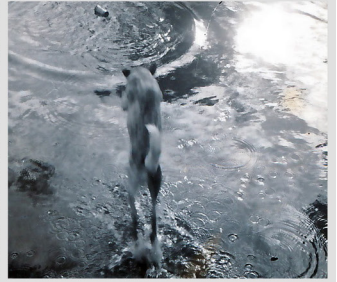
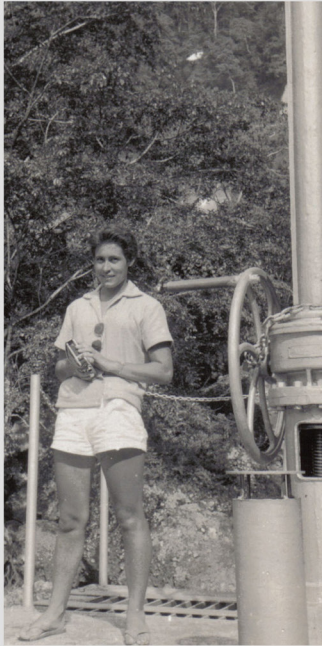
When one of the mob was going "South" [on holidays] or "finish" [not returning] we'd all go out to the Qantas terminal at Jacksons. This was a glorified shed with one side open to the weather but shaded by a large overhang with seating, counter and scales. The guys would take a couple of "hotboxes" tin chests full of ice and beer and there would be a farewell party at the airfield. When the plane left, [there was only one a day] the staff would pack everything away and lock up and go back to town and we'd party on till the beer ran out. As long as we didn't wreck anything, left the place tidy and cleared away the cans and bottles no one minded. Geoff had a girlfriend in Moresby, her name was Joy [Jingles] she was a lovely lady and she wouldn't marry Geoff because she was several years older than him. I often wished she had, she would have been so good for him.

A mob of us would often go up to Sogeri or Rouna Falls on the Sunday, just to swim or party in the cooler atmosphere in the mountains. We'd go as far as the Kokoda Trail monument and then come back through the rubber plantation to swim in the river above the falls.

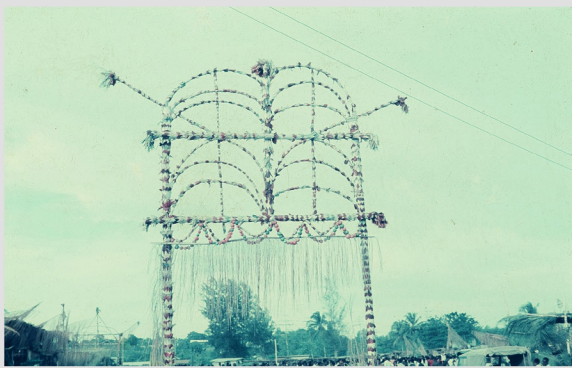


Kokoda Trail monument

Rouna Falls

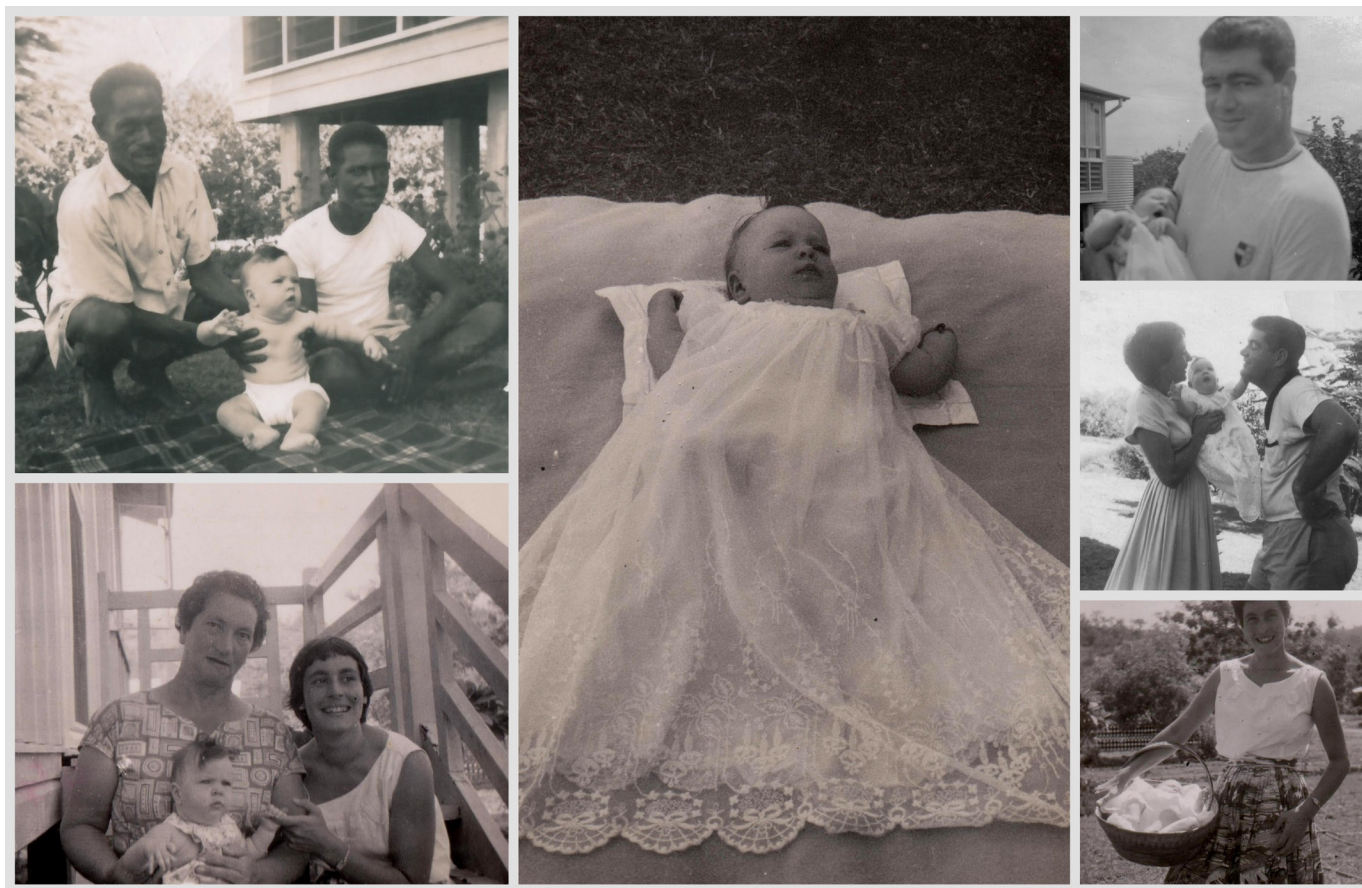


Sogeri Show



We sold the bike before Sue was born and bought a tiny Fiat Countryman. It had wooden panels on the sides and a wooden back door. [It was a miniature station wagon.] Unfortunately the back door had rotted in the tropics and it would not stay on so we had plenty of fresh air. Also the choke didn't work if it was on the dashboard but went OK if you just let it hang down. The three of us, plus dog, went everywhere in that car, up into the Owen Stanleys, the Sogeri show - when it bucketed down rain as only the tropics can and every other car except ours got bogged and had to be pulled or pushed out by the natives ours came up the embankment like the great little car she was - Boumana War cemetery, Rouna Falls, The Kokoda Monument, Wards Airstrip and anywhere else you can think of around Moresby.

When I was getting stuff ready to go to hospital for Sue's arrival I had to have two pairs of woollen bootees, god knows why, it was the middle of the wet season; the temperature was about 35C to 38C and about 95% humidity. After Sue was born Bob brought the washing back to the hospital and the bootees were missing. When I asked him about them he said they looked "funny" so he didn't bring them. When I got home I found that Biki had boiled, starched and ironed them. Bob was right, they did look funny. I should have kept them! Mum and Dad came up on the "Bulolo" the little boat that ran the route between Sydney and Port Moresby, to visit us and meet their first grandchild, when Sue was about 3 months old. Mum brought up a lovely pusher for her. Sue was christened at the Anglican Church in Port Moresby while Mum and Dad were there. Geoff was her godfather [what a laugh] and Bev Gardner was godmother. Of course we had a big party which went on and on, Sue wouldn't go to sleep and Dad wheeled her around the town for ages before she dropped off.



Sue with Biki & Haihi, bottom left, with Mum, middle, in christening gown I made, with Bob and me, and in the Buka basket

The Bulolo

During the 100 years commemoration of the D-Day landings, in 2013, when we were putting this book together, we found out that the little boat that sailed between Sydney and Port Moresby was more famous than we ever knew.

The Bulolo is a ship with history – she hosted Kings, Lords and even Winston Churchill. She took Britain's wartime Prime Minister to Casablanca and from her decks, the King reviewed the invasion speech two days before Normandy.

In 1938 it was the calm before the storm. The little ship with an unusual name ferried passengers from Sydney to Brisbane and onto Papua New Guinea. Named after a small PNG town famous for its gold, the Bulolo, with her unmistakable checked funnel, was the toast of Sydney society.

Unknown to most, after just eight voyages she was recruited by the British Navy and converted into an armed merchant cruiser. In fact, the Bulolo was the command ship for the D-Day landings – and prior to those events HRH King George VI stood on her bridge to take the salute from passing invasion ships.

It was a crucial role in an event that changed the course of history. "Being a headquarters command ship she was right in the thick of the action of the invasion beaches and that put her in real risk," added Mr Smith.

As D-Day unfolded, she was fired on by a German Battery at Longues-sur-Mer, as well as from the air. Mr Smith added: "It was actually attacked by German Luftwaffe bombers and a bomb exploded over the ship and killed four people on board."

After surviving the war, the Bulolo was refitted and served out as a headquarters ship for the Allies in South East Asia. She was presented with a special sword after the Japanese surrender in Singapore in 1945.

After the war she was back in service and became the main passenger liner for voyages to Papua New Guinea – even a fire threatening off Sydney Harbour could not sink her, until 1968.



Sue was a good baby, a very satisfactory first child, she ate well, slept well, put on weight regularly, teethed, sat up, crawled and walked a bit ahead of most of our friends' babies. We had some people living behind us, [Thompsons] they had a daughter about my age with a baby about Sue's age. But the father had a few pages stuck together, he reckoned he had been abducted by aliens and had travelled on their spaceship and lived on their world. And he really believed it, he worked at DCA and used to bore the guys at lunchtime and he was deadly serious.

The house at Boroko had polished Masonite floors, which the houseboi had waxed to a wonderful shine but they were like glass, slippery as hell. The house had a full width room at each end, [the bedroom and the lounge-dining room] with a room that one walked through, Bob would throw a ball along this space and the dog would chase it, he'd take 5 or 6 steps before he got traction then as he neared the bedroom he'd put on the brakes and crash into the wall. He never learnt.



Our house in Port Moresby - right, the boi house

When Sue was 6 months old we were transferred to Madang. DCA sent up their work plane, VH-CAR, a DC3, and we packed up and loaded everything on and off we went. Our little Fiat was lifted onto the plane by a dozen or so bois. VH- CAR was the plane that always came up to flight test the electronic equipment at the airports. It was flown by Bob's cousin Wes Guy, who had been the chief test pilot for the RAAF before becoming Examiner of Airmen for DCA. We had a house, one of three, about a mile past the airport. At this time Madang was the second busiest light aircraft airport in the Southern Hemisphere [after Moorabin] as all the flights to the highlands originated and terminated there. Most of the light planes were flown by missionaries or priests. One we knew well was Father Joe, I never knew his surname, he could put a plane down on sixpence.



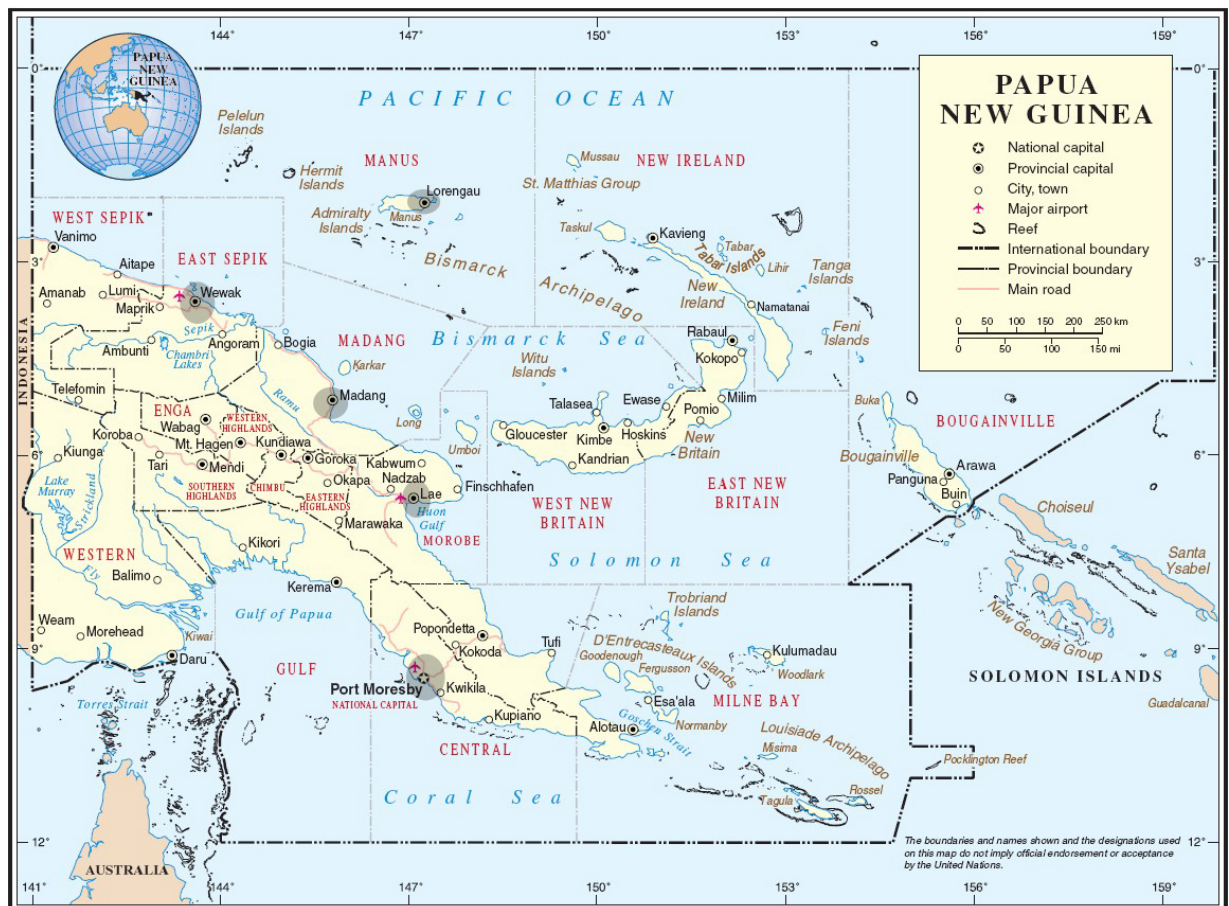
Loading our little Fiat onto VH-CAR in Port Moresby

The flights in and out of Madang were extremely dangerous, the mountains are precipitous, the valleys narrow and deep and rain and clouds come in without warning and vision is easily lost. I was never happy when Bob had to fly into Wau or Goroka. The day Joe flew into a mountain in fog and was killed really put me off light aircraft forever.

Madang was a very small town, a couple of trade stores, a Burns Philp, a Post Office, a photographers shop, [Bob's downfall, he just had to have a new camera!] and a couple of government offices. The road from our house wound back past the airfield and around Binnon Harbour and it was made from pounded crushed coral. It was blinding in the sun. As we were now in New Guinea which had been part of Germany, as we drove along the road all the natives would go to the side of the road and stand at attention.

Our house was one of three that faced Binnon Harbour, it was in a nice spot, with an hibiscus hedge all round. DCA kept a small motor boat at the jetty in front of the houses with a boi there to take any of us women across to the shops on the other side of the harbour. I was sitting on the verandah one day and saw a native standing on top of the water. It took me a few seconds to realise that he was actually standing on a flattened tree trunk and his weight had pushed it under the water.

We had a new houseboi here. He had often seen me sewing clothes for Sue and myself and of course patching the clothes Bob got issued from DCA, shirts and shorts. His old ones were in a sad way as I had patched them and patched the patches, as he ripped them on bits of equipment. He came home with two new sets and I gave them to the boi to wash and iron. He came back a couple of hours later with the newly washed and ironed clothes and asked, "Missus, you fixim?"





In 1959 the Coastwatchers Memorial Lighthouse, at the entrance to Madang Harbour, was dedicated and switched on for the first time. *“The Memorial is, without question, the most beautiful and magnificent design to commemorate the work these men did. As they watched the coast, so now does their memorial. The design was surely inspired. Its simple classic lines sweep from a four-finned base to a fuller top surmounted by a bronze guard in the shape of a flame (narrow strips of bronze which outline the shape of a candle flame) and within this guard swings a 1,000,000 candlepower searchlight.*

The construction is of dazzling white cement. The lighthouse, 90 feet high, stands on a base of red terrazzo tiles, and on this circle, between each set of fins, is a bronze plaque. The plaque between the two front fins is the Honour Plaque with the names of the fallen, on the left side is a plaque which reads:

“In honour and grateful memory of the Coastwatchers and of the loyal natives who assisted them in their heroic service behind enemy lines during the Second World War in providing intelligence vital to the conduct of Allied operations. Not only did they transmit by means of teleradio from their jungle hideouts information which led to the sinking of numerous enemy warships, but they were able to give timely warning of impending enemy air attacks. The contribution towards the Allied victory in the Pacific by the small body of men who constituted the Coastwatchers was out of all proportion to their numbers”. This Light can be seen by any small ship 15 miles out to sea and by aircraft 50 miles away. This Light is a memorial to the work of all the Coastwatchers but only the names of the 36 men who died during operations are inscribed on the Honour Plaque.”

We had pawpaw growing in the yard and Sue loved it and ate it every day. One day Bob asked what the orange stuff in her ear was and remarked it was probably pawpaw coming out of her ears as she ate so much of it!

We were there when the Coastwatcher's Memorial was opened. It was a huge event for the district as there were many dignitaries brought up from Australia, including some of the so very brave men who volunteered to do this dangerous work.

We did a lot of exploring out of Madang, we'd load Sue into the car and head out towards the Sek River. This was 1959 and although the war was over fourteen years ago there had been very little clearance around Madang. We drove past old landing fields, part overgrown, where planes had been shot up on the ground and just bulldozed to the edge of the road. One plane we passed had crashed, nose first into the ground and there was vines growing up the fuselage.

When we crossed the Sek it was on a barge made from old water tanks welded together with a steel bottom and pulled across a wire by about a dozen natives. Sometimes we'd get a puncture and sometimes two, the road was very bad. If we got two [only one spare!] Bob would stuff the tyre as full as he could with grass and vines and it got us home each time.

We were only at Madang three months when trouble erupted at Momote. The Senior Tech [Lex Patterson] who had been sent there was a hustler of the first order. Bob had known him in Melbourne and he was always making money on the side and in semi legal ways. He would go to auctions and prowl around

before the sale started. If he found any radios that looked OK, he'd try them out and if they worked he'd take out a valve and lie it down inside. When it came up for sale, he'd ask, "Does it work?" and the auctioneer would plug it in and surprise, surprise, it didn't work so he'd get it for next to nothing. He'd take anything he bought home, replace the valve and give it a clean and polish and sell it for five quid or so. He became so well known that the police told him he'd have to stop or take out a second hand dealer's licence. When DCA took over Momote from the RAAF there were a dozen or so Nissan huts filled with surplus stores and Lex started to pinch it, ship it back to Australia and sell it off. He must have had a couple of helpers, probably from the navy base. I don't know how he thought he'd get away with it but he did for almost twelve months and it became blatant. The population of Momote was 12, Lorengau, the administration Centre, had about 50 residents and there was HMAS Tarangau, the navy base on Manus Island. The police went to the OIC and told him that if Lex and his family were not removed within three days, he would be arrested, charged and imprisoned. So he had to be quickly replaced and Bob was offered the position.

So up came Wes with VH-CAR, the crew and packers and we packed and loaded it up with everything we possessed, loaded the car again and off we went once more. Bob knew most of the crew from Melbourne and flight tests. We landed at Momote and the OIC, Doug Malyon, was waiting to greet us and took us for a drive around the base. The RAAF had pulled out 1500 men and DCA put in six! The base was largely disbanded but they had left housing and facilities for us. We had the OIC and his wife and son, he was the Air Traffic Controller, a groundsman, Ron Meeker and his wife Dot, daughter Dawn, [who had a mouth a sailor would be proud of] a single mechanic, Barry Vesper, who occupied the entire single quarters, two Met guys, Murray Weaver, wife June, children Penny and Scott and John Tester, wife Elaine and son Brenton and us.

The RAAF had left the Sergeant's Mess for us to use as a recreational facility. It had a huge walk-in cool room, a bar with fridges, a full size billiard table in a room of about 10 squares, a kitchen and huge dining room and all the furniture for it, plus cane tables and chairs in the bar/billiard room. Big verandahs all round and it overlooked the ocean. Our house was timber and had two bedrooms, Lounge/dining, kitchen and bathroom. Bob had a Land Rover and as he worked within a mile of home he came home for lunch every day.

Once a week one of the guys would take a Land Rover and drive anyone who wanted to go to the navy base at Lombrun, where there was a canteen and a library. They sold groceries and meat and we read the library out of books in the twelve months we were there. On the way home we would detour out to a Chinese trading store, [all the trading stores were Chinese] that sold some very nice stuff. That is where the Noritake dinner service came from; Bob bought it for me the Mother's day before Margaret was born. They also sold trade store stuff, fabric and rations for the housebois. We "scaled" our houseboi, i.e. gave him the rations that the government said were standard, so much flour, tea, sugar, rice, tobacco, soap etc., plus [I think] ten bob in wages. I can't remember exactly what or how much. Our boi was



Markus and one of his jobs was to feed the dog. One night after he'd fed the dog and cooked his own rice, I came into the kitchen just as he was stirring the hot rice around in the empty dog food tin. And we bought the cheapest brand Tucker Box and it smelt terrible. He adored Sue and she called him "Marsee" he called her "Soosie". She could talk to him in place talk, any other native in Pidgin, and us in English when she was 20 months old. Sue had two teddies and a blanket that she carried everywhere with her and when I had to wash them, [and they had to be washed occasionally] she would sit under the clothes line and cry until they dried and she could have them back.

We swam at Porpoise Beach, hop in the Land Rover and drive past the airfield, through the jungle for a couple of miles, down a track to the beach. A beautiful little horseshoe bay, white sand, with a coral reef protecting it. At low tide we could walk out to the reef and watch the little fish swimming in the coral. It was a fascinating, wonderful place. Murray discovered that a large proportion of the beautiful shells of the world washed into the reefs around the island and he collected and sold them. He also caught butterflies as they were everywhere and so many different colours.

I bought a lot of fabric there, it was dirt cheap and some of it was lovely. I made all our clothing, I had plenty of spare time and June and I were both fond of sewing so we exchanged patterns and she gave me lots of tips. At one stage I was even making Bob's shirts and shorts. Sue had lots of clothes and we were both pretty well dressed.

Sue learned to walk here at 10 months old, she had been crawling since she was 6 months old. Bob made her a sandpit and she spent hours in it. We were at a native market one day and saw a cuscus in a cage and as we knew he'd be eaten by the natives if left there, we bought him. Got a cage and he lived with us for



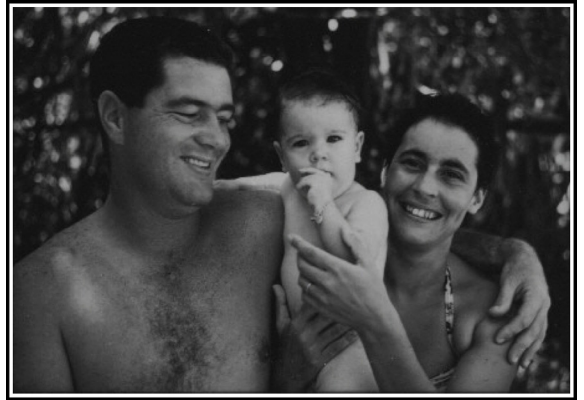
Sue and me at the beach

a while. Sue loved to feed him and one day she wasn't paying attention and the cuscus ate along the banana and finally bit her finger. We washed it and put a Band-Aid on it and that night at the club she went around telling everyone, "Look at Susie's poor sore finger, the cuscus bit it!" One day Bob was coming home for lunch and he screeched into the drive yelling "Come and have a look at this" so we hopped in the truck and went the 100 yards or so to the headland that overlooked the sea and there was a pod of two or three hundred dolphins frolicking in the water. It was quite magical to see them and we watched till they all passed on. Another time the same thing happened and it was a waterspout about two hundred metres from the shore where we were standing. We watched that till it sank back into the sea.

Occasionally the groundsman wouldn't pump enough water up into the main tanks to give us pressure for the shower, so we'd get Markus in to stay in the house with Sue and drive to the transmitter station, about a mile away and use the showers there. One night I had had my shower and was sitting at Bob's desk when I noticed a snake coiled up at my feet. Needless to say I screamed and Bob came out half showered and naked and said, "It's only a python, it won't hurt you" I had a few choice words and he found a large glass jar and edged the snake into it and released it into the ceiling space next day.

About this time the OIC's wife and son went south on leave, but when he came back from seeing them off he found a note saying that they would not be back and she was suing for a divorce. He went crazy, drank a whole bottle of scotch and passed out on the floor. Of course we had all heard the shouting and foul language as he got drunker and drunker. Bob and Ron went in to make sure he was OK when he passed out so read the letter from his wife while they were there and knew what the problem was. About 9AM the next morning the two Met guys needed some information about something and went to his

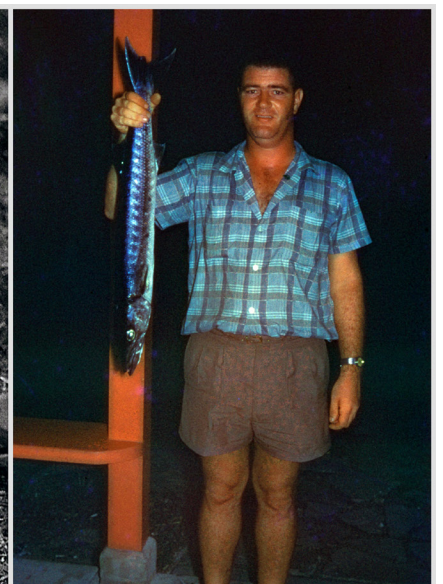
house. He came out with a revolver, swearing and hurling abuse at them, and then fired a shot that went between Murray, who was standing with one hand on their Land Rover, and the vehicle. They very quickly jumped into the truck and departed. Bob radioed the doctor at Lombrum and Regional office, he and Ron subdued Doug and the doctor knocked him out, put him in a straightjacket and DCA sent a doctor and an assistant over on VH-CAR and he was out of there the next morning. Bob and Ron both had to make out statements as did Murray and John. Bob was helping Ron write out his statement and had to spell about every second word as well as prompting him with what to write. Ron came to the bit where he said, "He called me a bastard" and he says to Bob well that's one word I can spell," b-a-r-s-t-a-r-d," Bob never said a word. A couple of the navy guys were taken out in straightjackets while we were there.



Bob, Sue & me

The dividing line in the Navy was every bit as bad as it was later at Amberley. Someone had an idea that it would be good to start a sewing class and women who could sew would teach those who couldn't. June and I were asked if we would help out and we were willing, but the whole idea fell through when Captain Tapp decided that there would have to be separate classes for the wives of officers and the wives of enlisted men. Our guys were automatically made members of the Officer's Club and also the Chiefs and Petty Officer's Club but all preferred the CPO's club.

We had a 40 foot workboat that the RAAF had left us and the guys went out fishing two or three times a week. They caught mostly mackerel but occasionally a marlin would take the bait, but they never landed one, they were too big for the lines they were using. They used cunjevoi lily stems as bait! We had a lot of fish BBQ's at the club and they were delicious.



Sue with Chinook 2, and Bob with one of the fish he caught



Map of Manus Island Bob found



Chinook 'playing' with the cat

We often spent Sunday afternoons exploring Los Negros Island. There were countless tracks between the villages and roads and tracks left from the war and grown over with creepers and cracked up from disuse and the tropical weather. Bob found an old wartime map in his office and we found out there was a huge old airstrip at the other end of the island. Los Negros was shaped like a big inverted comma and the "tail" of the comma was an abandoned airstrip. So of course we set out to find it which we did. It would have been about two miles long and a couple of hundred yards wide but the trees and the jungle had encroached in from the edges and slowly broken up the bitumen, it was only about fifty yards wide when we went there.

The actual airstrip we used was a concrete runway put down by American Seabees. It ran from one side of a promontory to the other. At one end where the road ran past to the airfield was a sign which read "Please give right of way to approaching Aircraft." One Sunday when we were on our usual exploration, we came across a small clearing with about 20- 25 huge aeroplane engines sitting in it, with all the creepers cleared away from them. At the time we had a Japanese ship at our wharf and they were collecting war scrap metal and the natives obviously knew where the engines were and sold them to the Japs. They [the Japs] collected ammo and threw it into a fire they lit in a 44 gallon oil drum to burn off the charge and leave the brass cases and after it cooled overnight they'd tip out the non-ferrous metal and light the fire and start all over again. All day long was the bang

bang of exploding cartridges and shells, sounded like the war all over again. We had several meals on board their ship, first time I tasted raw fish!



The air strip at Momote

I was expecting again and as with Sue was sick from morning to night. I'd love to have one of these people who say morning sickness is all in the mind experience what I had. Nothing helped and I was once again losing weight rapidly. Then Sue developed this awful nappy rash and we couldn't seem to cure it so Bob decided it would do me good to go home to Melbourne for a while. [It didn't] But it was nice to see Mum and Dad, catch up with friends and rellies and spend some time with Bob's parents. I stayed at Box Hill for a couple of weeks then went down to Rosebud and stayed with Bob's folk. Ma just loved having Sue there, she loved all her grandchildren but Bob's children were special. She played with Sue, took her for walks in her pusher and down to the beach, she was a lovely, lovely lady. I loved her very much. Pop drove us around; as I said, he was probably the world's worst driver. Ma and Pop had a huge vegetable garden and chooks and Ma jammed and preserved fruit. She was a great cook. I went back to PNG no better, we flew around Manam Island volcano which was erupting at the time and I was too darn sick to get up and have a look out of the window. While I was in Melbourne I bought a couple of pieces of broderie anglais edging about 20 inches deep and made a couple of lovely frocks in the event of the baby being a second girl. I also bought Bob a pile of science fiction paperbacks, an aluminum billiard cue and a case for it to go in.



Hercules taking off from Momote

Three days before Margaret was born we were at the club and Sue was wandering about, I kept getting up to see what she was doing and the guys said, "Don't worry, she'll be OK, there isn't anything in the storeroom and we're out of beer in the coolroom, but somehow she found a full bottle of beer and fell and smashed it, cutting her chin deeply, so we raced off to the hospital at the Navy base. The SBPO and Bob had to hold her down as the doctor put a needle of local anaesthetic and stitched it. They made me wait outside which was probably worse as I could hear her screaming, not a pleasant experience.

On October 11th, we got June up to mind Sue early in the morning and at about 6.45AM, Marg made her appearance into the world, sucking her thumb! I was in the Officers ward at the hospital and the

woman in the next room was a German from one of the missionary camps. She spoke no English and I spoke no German so we communicated in Pidgin. Marg was born on the day the MV “Bulolo” arrived at Lombrum and the tourists kept poking their heads in asking if they could see the new baby. I was in hospital about 4 days and then went home. Sue was not terribly impressed with the new arrival, she still had the stitches in her chin and it made her rather cranky.

Just after Marg was born there was an emergency with a baby at the Navy Base. She was only a few weeks old, bottle fed and when she didn't have poo one day, her mother added two teaspoons of Maltogen to her bottle, which brought on diahorrea and dehydration, she was very ill. The hospital asked the new mothers who were breast feeding if they could express a bit extra and supply enough to get the baby through the next few weeks. I was feeding Marg every three hours, then expressing, by hand, no breast pumps, for 20 minutes or so and not getting a lot of rest. After a couple of days the other girls gave up but I kept going and sending the milk in on the school trip each morning. When Marg was 4 weeks old

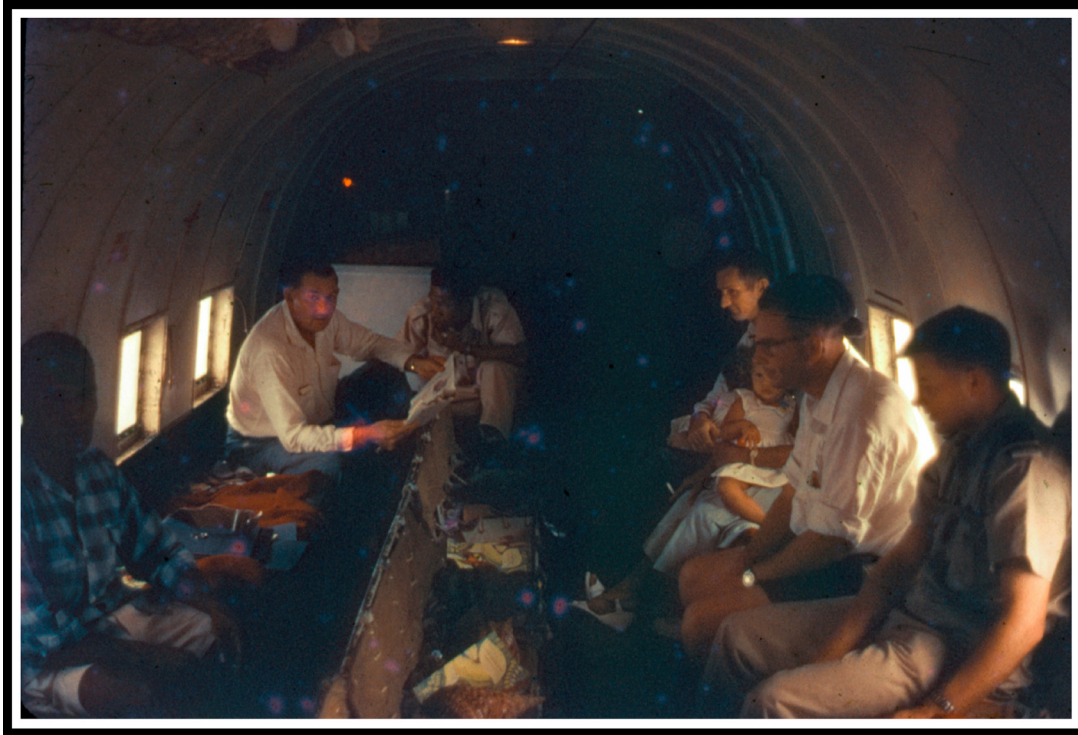


Marg as a baby

I started to run a high temperature and became quite ill. Bob took me to the hospital and I had a breast abscess and was put on antibiotics. I stopped expressing but still fed Margaret. The other baby was thriving by then, her Mum and Dad brought her out to the airfield when we went on leave to show her to me. Margaret had to be registered in Canberra as a child born to Australian parents living abroad, because New Guinea was, at that time, still a mandated territory of the United Nations. Sue and Andy were born in Papua, which was, at that time, a territory of Australia.

We were planning on going on leave and when Marg arrived we finalised our plans. The day before we left Sue fell off the verandah, about 60cm, and landed on her head. Back to the Navy hospital, she was checked out thoroughly and was OK, so we decided not to postpone the journey to Melbourne. She was a bit off colour on the next day and the pilot of the DC3 flew at minimum height all the way to Lae to keep her more comfortable. When we arrived in Lae she was really unwell and throwing up a bit, so I took her to the doctor. Bob minded Marg at the hotel. To my surprise the doctor was our neighbour

from Fourth St. in Boroko, Brian Todd. He diagnosed a virus, nothing to do with the bump on the head, and gave me antibiotics. He called Rhonda in and we had a lovely catch up chat. She was very pregnant and said, "How did you manage to stay out of trouble?" I just laughed and said, "My trouble is back at the hotel with her father!" Sue slept most of the way to Moresby and we were met at Jacksons by Geoff and all went to the Boroko Pub for lunch. At this time, without either of us saying a word Geoff and I buried our differences and became good mates as well as siblings.



Inside a DC3 - a commercial TAA flight as the inside is lined!

I will just fill you in on what a flight in a DC3 entailed in those days. The planes were unlined and there were no seats. We sat on metal storage boxes fixed to the sides of the plane, they became very hard and uncomfortable in a very short time and the flight time to Moresby was about 8 hours, we had to land at Wewak, Madang and Lae before Port Moresby. Because the plane was unlined as soon as we got above a thousand feet the air became very cold and so did the plane, if you wet a finger and touched the skin your finger would stick. So we'd go from 35 degrees and 95% humidity on the ground to freezing point in about ten minutes. There weren't any stewards, the co-pilot would make the odd coffee if the weather was good and the captain could spare him. We always took a thermos and a pack of sandwiches and biscuits with us when we flew. From Moresby we boarded a Super Constellation, the last word [to us] in comfort and luxury. It was a beautiful aircraft to fly in.

The flight was great except that I was feeling sick by now; we thought it was just a touch of what Sue had. We arrived in Brisbane to change planes running late, Sue was drowsy and cross, Margaret was crying in her carry basket and we had about 5 minutes to change planes and make our connecting flight. Sue was cranky, Margaret was just 6 weeks old, I was feeling pretty sick and Bob was cross with me telling me to hurry up and stop complaining or we'd miss the connection, but the Qantas staff were wonderful, they held the plane and we made our flight. Finally home in Melbourne but by 7PM I was really in trouble and Bob and Mum rang the doctor who arrived about half an hour later. As soon as he touched my abdomen I knew it was appendicitis so an hour later I was in the operating theatre having an emergency appendectomy. Marg came with me and she was put in the nursery. It wasn't until next morning when

I asked where she was that the nursing staff twigged that the stray baby in the nursery belonged to a patient upstairs. No one knew why she was there so they had only fed her water to be on the safe side. She was rather hungry! Sue and Marg were both easy babies but did have their off days.

While I was in hospital my lips became covered in cold sores, my usual reaction to anaesthetics. Michael came with Bob one night to see me and the pair of them kept telling jokes, all the laughter made my lips split and I was a mess for several days. Mum and Bob managed Sue and I was only in hospital for about five days. Mum took me up to Templeton's bike shop and told me to pick out a nice pram, I did and it was a beauty and I just loved that pram. It had a seat for Sue on the front and Ma bought me a lovely pram set and I really thought I was somebody! Mum and I would go down Box Hill shopping and we'd meet someone we knew. Not too hard at that time we probably knew half the people in Box Hill. We made slow progress along the street, talking to friends as we went. One would remark how like me Sue was; the next would say she must look like her father as she wasn't like me.

We had Christmas dinner with Mum and Dad then headed down to Rosebud for Bob's family Christmas there. [got into trouble because we didn't do the dishes before we went] By the time it was all over Marg would not go to sleep and we finished up driving Rosebud half the night. When we came back to Box Hill we still had a lot of problems with her not sleeping, Dad walked miles round the back yard trying to get her to sleep, she'd drop off and as soon as he stopped walking she'd start again. After I thought about it and stopped eating the lovely stone fruit she was fine. Margaret was christened at Jean's house in Murrumbena by Uncle Fred and Julie Mates was also christened that night.



Bob and I put a deposit on a block of land Mt. Macedon on the assumption that he would be stationed at Tullamarine when we eventually came back home. Little did we know how long it would be before that happened! We had a picnic up there one day, Ma and Pop, Dot, Alf and Heather, Mum and Dad and us. We were all sitting around having lunch and Dot almost sat on Sue's big plastic aeroplane. Sue piped up "Mind Susie's big barshoe, [her word for balus, pidgin for aeroplane] Dot!" She laughed about it for years. We sold the land later on when it became apparent we weren't going back for a long time, if ever.

Above: Ma with Marg, below Sue with Dad at Box Hill





While we were in Melbourne, I had my 24th birthday, and then 6 days later we celebrated Dad's birthday

While we were in Melbourne on leave, DCA had decided to close Momote and maintain it from Wewak, so they sent VH-CAR and the crew to the island and packed all out goods and chattels and shifted them to Wewak and into our new house. So we left Melbourne and flew back to PNG, stopping off at Moresby to see Geoff and anyone else who was still there. Sue did not sleep on the flight up from Sydney and by the time we landed and got to the hotel she seemed incapable of going to sleep. I went to our former doctor at Ela Beach and she gave us a couple of knockout pills one for now and one for when we finally made it to Wewak. Eventually we all four got a good night's sleep.

A couple of days later we did the milk run to Wewak and was met at the terminal by Allan Gillett the OIC and flight controller there. He took us down to our house, about two hundred yards down the track beside the airfield. Our house was the only DCA house at the airfield and we were dependent on them for power and tanks for water. If we ran out of water the groundsman and the fire crew would fill the big tanker and come down and pump it into our tanks till they were full, and sometimes through the window into the house if the bois became distracted!. Our next door neighbours were the native bois that worked on the strip and Kora, the chief fire boi was a lovely guy. Weribu, the boi who drove the Land Rover into town whenever I wanted to go loved Sue to bits. One day she climbed into the truck and said 'you tink tink lik lik was was i kom, Weribu?' [Do you think it will rain Weribu?] And after that he always greeted her with the same words, with "Susie" instead of his name and chuckle as he said it. Every night when we were ready to go to bed, Bob would have to get into the truck and drive to the engine house and turn off the generator.

This house was a “Bulolo” style house, the ones in Madang and Moresby were “Hawksley” style. It was a nice house, two bedrooms and a verandah on two sides. It was fenced with Marsden Matting, which was a war time product with which they made temporary landing strips. It consisted of steel plates which could be hooked together and laid flat. After the war it was used for many purposes, fences and paths being two of them and it survived the tropical weather well. This was 15 years after the end of the war and it was still in excellent condition. Bob was looking after Sue and Marg downstairs one Sunday and he had the movie camera with him as Marg was just starting to walk. She crawled over to the ten steps up to the verandah and began to climb up them. At the top she stood up right on the edge of the verandah. I looked through the door and saw her and rushed out and grabbed her up before she fell, Bob filmed it all and thought it was hilarious.



Looking from the road beside our house at Wewak to the airport buildings

Bob had another motor bike by now and Sue was fascinated when he “tickled” the carburetor, he found an old one lying around somewhere on the base and wired it to her trike and she used to tickle the carby to get her trike going.

We became members of the Sepik Club, a wildly disparate group of people whose only common interest was that they lived in Wewak. We became friends with a middle aged couple, John and Marie Stewart, his face and body had obviously been dreadfully burnt and he was badly disfigured. We found out later that he had been on the “Busama” which blew up in Wewak Harbour with a load of 400 empty fuel drums in 1959. The wreck had drifted close to the shore near Mission Point and when we drove past we could see fuel drums embedded in the sand and the ship was only about twenty metres from the shore. John had been thrown into the water by the blast and fished out by some natives. We also met up with a lot of pilots,



there was a light aircraft strip a couple of miles away from the main strip and it was controlled by DCA as well. The pilots just rang their flight plans through to Allan in the tower.

Wewak actually had the only cathedral in PNG. When the Catholic Church in USA decided to open a mission in PNG they settled on Wewak as the place, called up a young priest and told him to go there and start a mission there. His wealthy parents bought him a plane [he had a private pilot licence] and he set out not knowing anything about New Guinea. He had a page torn from a school atlas and you can imagine what the map was like when they put Australia, New Zealand, New Guinea and the East Indies [Indonesia] on one page! He Island hopped the Pacific and finally got to Lae, then went up the coast to Madang and then Wewak. He was still there, still flying and by then the Bishop of PNG when we were there. He was then flying a Dornier and was a master of that plane.

The hangar for their planes was about half way down the runway at the light aircraft strip and he would waffle over our house at a little over stall speed, drop the plane on to the ground and almost immediately turn right into the hangar. There was one bush strip that only the “Bish” would fly into, it ran up a hill with a bend in the middle, a huge rock at the end and was only just long enough. He would land, turn the bend and, when almost at the rock with his passenger wetting himself would shout “now” to his terrified passenger and they’d fling open both doors and stop with the prop almost touching the rock. His nickname was “Last Light Louie” as, in the tropics last light is 6.00 PM give or take five minutes and at five to six he would ring through a flight plan and that meant that the ATC would have to sit at the radio until he called up to say he’d arrived. There were several Priest/pilots at the mission, mostly Yanks but a few Germans as well.

Another mission also used the strip; it was called Mission Aviation Fellowship and their pilots flew for their keep and a few bob for drinks. Not for love of God or the church, just to get enough flying hours up to go back to Australia and sit their commercial licences. Bob did a lot of flying with Ivan Reuter [Ivo] another priest. Sue once remarked that, “Ivo and Daddy couldn’t land at Kangaroo [Yangaru] because it was too froggy”. Ivo was a great guy and the two girls adored him. One Sunday at the club, Ivo said to Bob, “Do you think you could keep the truck lights on low beam when you turn off the generator at night?” Bob had remarked a couple of times that someone was “parking” at the terminal but couldn’t see who it was even with the lights on high beam.

The single guys all lived in various single quarters in town, there was one for the Bank boys, Burns Philp guys, DCA, and so on and they all congregated at one place to party on Saturday nights. One night the bank boys were at the Aviat quarters and as they were leaving some one said, “Where’s Ted?” and the answer was, “he’s gone home” So they trooped out and piled [literally, they were all drunk] into the jeep started it up and drove forward. Thump, Thump. “Hell, what was that?” Backed up, thump thump, and found Ted, not only blind drunk but run over twice by the jeep and apart from a few bruises and feeling sick and sorry for a few days he was OK. Pays to be legless, I guess.

The groundsman at Wewak was a very broad Scotsman, Jim McBride and he would line up the bois on the labour line and in Scottish Pidgin [completely incomprehensible] would issue the daily work instructions. As he finished he’d say, “Now, do you ken, mon? Fortunately the head boi knew exactly what had to be done. One afternoon I was on the verandah with the girls and there was a small plane flew past the house, very low down over the tops of the coconut palms. Shortly after that I heard a whoosh and a column of black smoke rose up in the air. Then the fire siren sounded and the fire truck, closely followed by the two Land Rovers flew past the house, sirens blaring. I panicked a bit until I found out it was just a fire drill.

Saturday mornings we would go into Wewak and get supplies if we needed anything then do the rounds of the Chinese stores. Wewak is built on a small peninsula with a narrow isthmus connecting it to the mainland. Across the isthmus was a narrow strip of land where the shops were, Burns Philp, Ah Fong [the bakery] Chang Mow and several other trade stores. The hospital was at the end of the main street, built alongside the water and was the old Army hospital from the war years, used by both the Japs and the Australians. The school and a lot of houses were built on the hill which is the resting place for a lot of Jap soldiers. They had tunneled into the hill and when Wewak fell, they hid in them and our troops sealed the tunnels and left them to die. The stores had goods for natives and Europeans and one Saturday one of them had a beautiful Sony tape recorder, just unloaded from Japan which Bob immediately coveted. He justified the need for it and we bought it. We taped some classical stuff from another DCA guy and, if we hypnotized you kids you'd be able to hum that tape from beginning to end. It was all we had and we played it endlessly. Yes, Andy that's how you know, "Funeral March of a Marionette!"

The Japanese Salvage ship had moved from Momote to Wewak, they were raising sunken ships from the harbour there. The harbour is relatively shallow for quite a way out and then drops sharply to very deep water. One evening Bob and a Canadian guy Tom, were bombing fish and must have overdone the gelly as they shifted one wreck and it slid off the edge of the shelf and into the deep. They got out of there real fast. Tom had a little Tiger Moth and it was lovely to watch it in the sky.

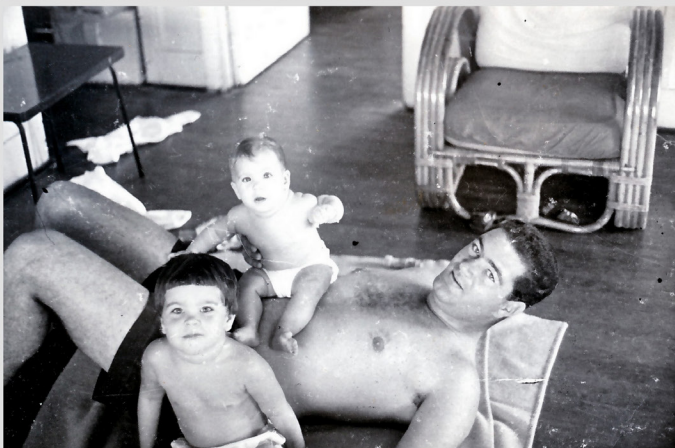
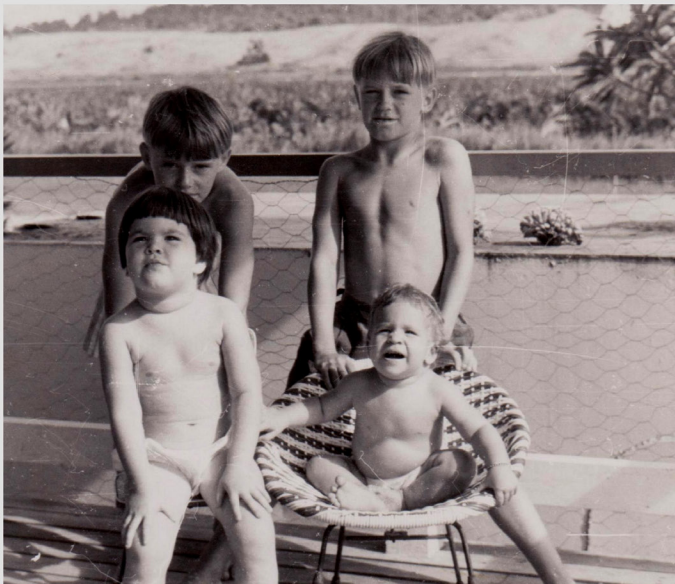
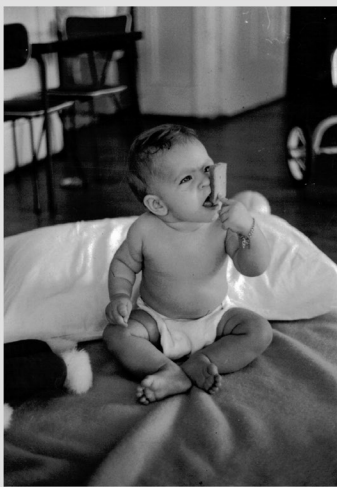
Wewak had no jetty or pier and when the supply ships arrived every six weeks they would unload into lighters and run it ashore where it was put on trucks and taken to town. The town freezers would only hold six weeks supplies and when one of the two ships was laid up they got out of sync and we'd have two ships in four weeks and then none for eight weeks. I'd go shopping with a list, a list of alternative, a list of alternatives to the alternatives and come home with mince and sausage meat. Sometimes when the meat had been out for a week or so, someone would ring around a say, "The boat's in" and we'd all go down to the beach and watch them unload. Occasionally, when the surf was up, the lighter overturned and we watched the cartons of meat washing back and forth in the surf. It didn't matter we ate it anyhow. Same as we sieved the weevils out of the flour, if we didn't we didn't have flour!



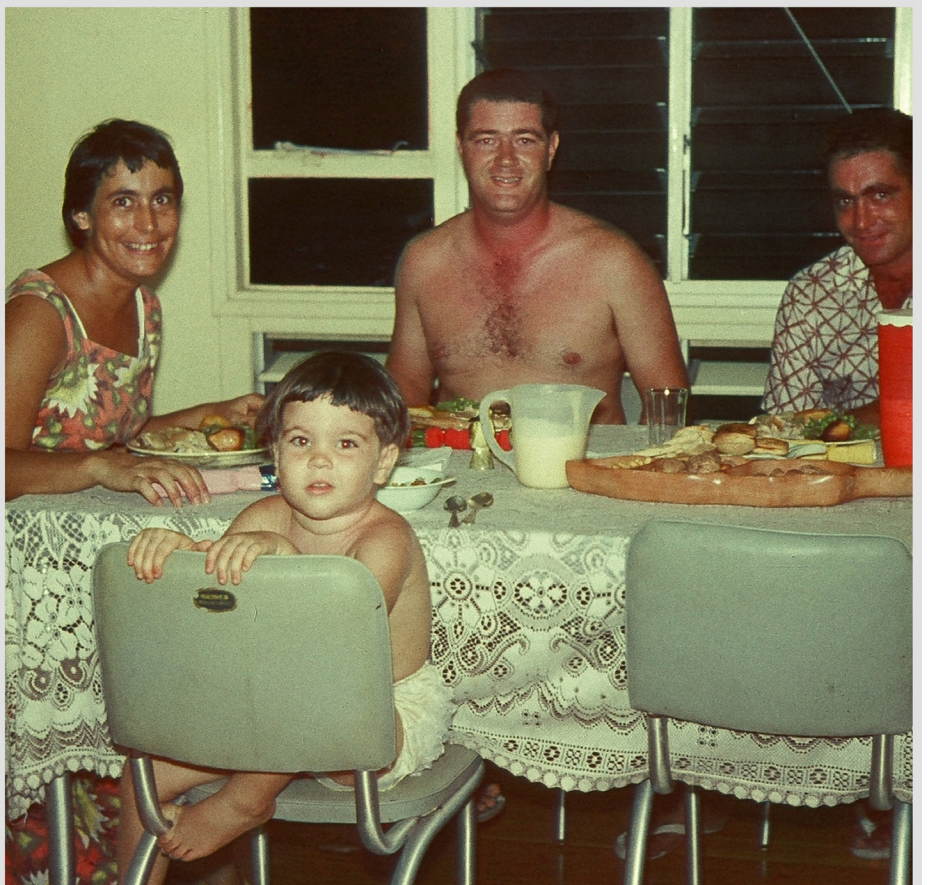
This is a lighter at the only point you could tie up at Wewak

We became friends with Jess and Jim Minnes who lived on the main road nearby. They had three children with them, Anne who was about 12 and the twins, Jim and Stuart. The twins (photo on left with the girls) spent a lot of time with us, their parents both worked and the kids got the school bus to drop them at our house instead of going home. They were about 7 at the time and did not believe I could ride a bike, I was too old, I was 24! They reckoned I was older than their mother and father as they were only 21. I could not convince them otherwise. They came swimming with us every weekend and all three came to Marg's first birthday.

Bob was now maintaining Momote as well as Wewak and he would fly across to Momote when they called and said there was trouble with any of the equipment. The "up" plane from Lae and the "down" plane from Rabaul crossed at Wewak and many times I would walk down the road to meet Bob and be







sitting in the control tower talking to Allan Gillett and hear Momote call up for him to come back. I'd go home and pack a fresh bag; he'd get off one plane, give us a hug and a kiss and get onto the other. And I'd put Marg back in the pusher and we'd walk the 500 metres to our house. I was pretty lonely, our house was about half a kilometre from any others, so it's no wonder the kids all talked early, I did not have any one else to talk to! Bob complained that I always wanted to talk when he came home from work and I said, "I've got two small children and much as I love them and intelligent as they are, they are only 3 and 1. You have adults to talk to during the day." His reply was that the adults he saw weren't very intelligent but as I said they were still adults.

They started to build a new hospital at Mission Point, but we never saw it finished, but they had a lot of problems at the old hospital. Each Native patient that was admitted had to bring a "wantok" [friend] with him to look after him. Unfortunately they were mostly bush fellas, who did not understand toilets and would light little fires under the beds to cook their kai [food]. The nurses had a hell of a job.

Just after Marg turned one Bob applied for and got a permanent STRM job in Port Moresby, so after the processes had been gone through [all jobs were subject to appeals from unsuccessful applicants] we were on the move again. We went by plane and our belongings went by ship. DCA packed us up and I have an idea that at that stage VH-CAR had been sold and the replacement was a smaller aircraft, a Piaggio I think. When the ship arrived in Moresby the storemen brought the crates to the house in Bisini Parade, [Sue called it Sinibi parade] and started to unpack them for me. Apparently while the crates were in the sling to be unloaded the sling slipped and several went into the water. One crate with all our good china and wedding presents landed on the wharf and most of it was smashed and of course was never replaced. Another went into the water, then sat in the store for a week waiting for us to arrive and it contained all the linen, including 4 dozen new toweling nappies which I had bought cheap in Wewak, so all our sheets, towels etc. were black with mould. I used so much bleach that I developed dermatitis on my hands. It was very persistent and it only finally healed when I quite literally did not get my hands wet for about two weeks. Bob had to bathe the girls and I had a special gel to clean my hands and plastic bags over them when I showered.

Geoff and a mate had gone off gold prospecting somewhere in the highlands near Goroko. He came home after several months with a big black beard. The two girls ran screaming from him and would not go near him till he shaved it off. He used to buy the girls battery operated toys because he liked to play with them. He lived with us for quite a while sleeping in the lounge. He was working Friday nights at the bottom pub and they sold cooked crayfish. He brought home what was left at the end of the night, sometimes none, sometimes a dozen or so. We had a freezer half full of crayfish and as you all know your father wouldn't eat any seafood except fish. I'd hand them out to neighbours, feed our visitors curried cray tails.

Sue became ill one night and we took her to the doctor as she had a high temperature, vomiting and marked neck rigidity. She was admitted to hospital straight away as they didn't know exactly what it was and there were a lot of nasty possibilities. They did two lumbar punctures on her and never found anything they could put a name on or what was causing it, she recovered after a few days on antibiotics.

I was now expecting Andrew and we arranged for Bob's Mum to come up and take care of Bob and the girls while I was in hospital. She arrived, Pop wouldn't come as he wouldn't fly and I took her out driving in the old Austin A40 we now had, out to Boumana and then to the abandoned airstrip at Wards. About halfway along the old runway we got a puncture and, at 8 months and 3 weeks pregnant, I had to jack up the car and change the wheel. A few days later Ma became ill and was in a lot of pain, I took her to our doctor [Shirley Clifton-Smith] who immediately hospitalized her. She had a severe attack of renal colic, [kidney stones] and was very ill that night.

And that night Andy decided to arrive. We rang another friend who came down and stayed with the children while Bob took me to hospital. We left for the hospital at 10.15 PM and at 12.15 AM Andy was born. The doctor went off to tell Bob that he now had a son and Andy went to the nursery and me to the ward. Next morning I asked how Mrs Thomson in the medical ward was and she said she'd go and see but she did not come back. I asked another nurse and she said, "Oh yes, Mrs Thomson is very, very ill" Still no one would tell me anything and the staff seemed to be avoiding even looking at me. By visiting hours [7PM] I was a bundle of nerves and thought she had died and they were waiting for Bob to tell me. Now Bob might never have brought me flowers ever but he was always first through the door when visiting hours arrived and I knew he'd want to see his new son, so when the time came and he didn't come, I was sure something dreadful had happened. He came in at 7.30 and I burst into tears. He could not understand what the problem was; Ma was recovering well and completely out of danger. So my day of worrying that Andy was born on the day that his grandmother died was unnecessary. When he left me he went to the nurse's station and let them know he was not pleased that I had been left in the dark and I know the doctor tore strips off them.

I went home with Andy and Ma stayed in hospital to rest for a week or so. While she was ill Bob had rung Pop and told him she was really bad and he'd better come up. Pop booked [wait for it] a ticket to Sydney by train and then a boat to Moresby, arriving in about 3 weeks! While she was in hospital the doctors asked if they could do some tests and demonstrate procedures to students, as they did not often have older people in there. [PNG was a place for young people] She was agreeable and they went ahead and just as well, they discovered she had cancer in her bladder. It was not possible to do the surgery in Moresby, they advised that she go South immediately. Andrew was only two weeks old and I asked the doctor if it was OK to fly down with him so small and she said she was not worried about him but she



Marg and Sue with Andy

was about me. Ma had to be accompanied so we all went South together. Bob rang Pop and couldn't get him, rang Jean and he was there. He said, "But Jean's just taking me into Spencer Street to get the train to Sydney and tomorrow I catch the boat" Bob said, "Well by tomorrow night we'll all be in Melbourne!"

So I had a brand new baby, two small girls, a sick mother-in-law and about 20 hours flying time to Melbourne! Not much wonder that the doctor was worried about me. Bob's sisters all turned up at Essendon, [no Tullamarine] they took Ma home to Jean's and we went home with Mum and Dad. We were down for a few weeks, I can't remember how long, I think Andy was 6 weeks old

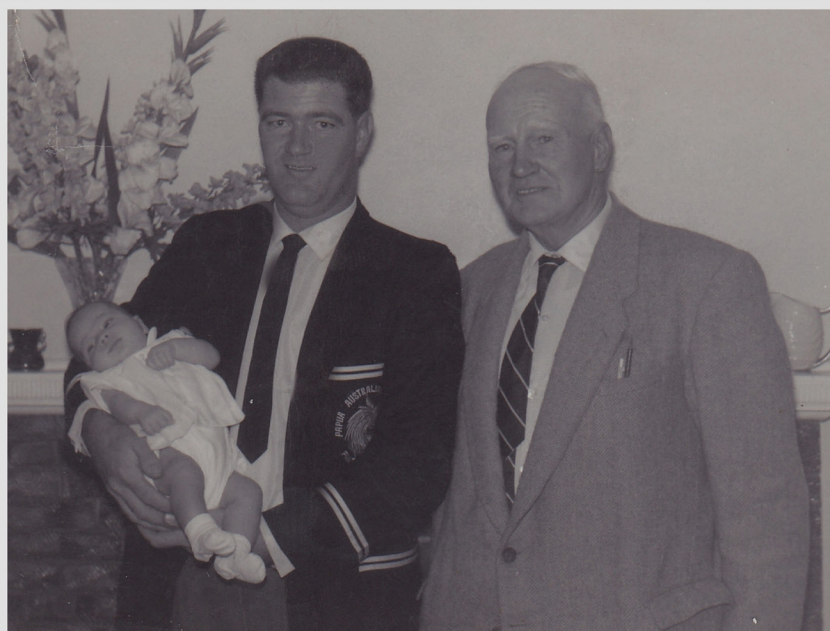
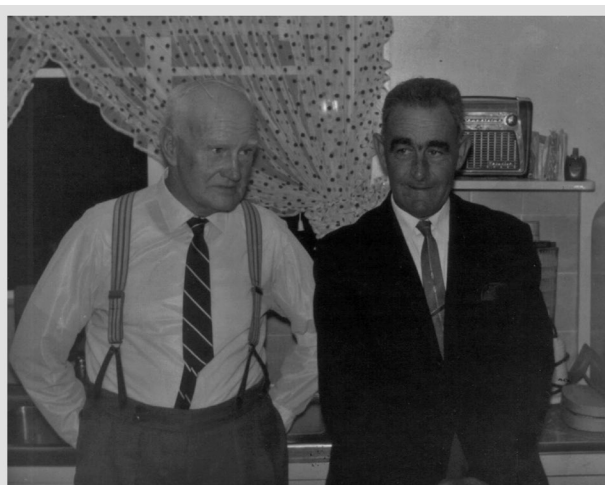
when we left. He was christened by Uncle Fred at Jean's house before we left and after Ma came out of hospital. There was no Chemotherapy, they just cauterized the inside of the bladder. Bob would not have him christened in the robe I'd made for Sue, so he had a lovely little suit that Jean gave me. No son of his was going to wear a dress! The same thing applied to rompers, too sissy.

We went back to PNG and settled back into life in the tropics once more. We made some good friends, Muriel [Moo] and Frank next door, also DCA and Mark and Rosalie Marino and their two children, Peter and Julie. Peter and Sue went to Kindergarten together. Mark was an engineer for Patair, [Papuan Air Transport] the local airline. Things were not going too well for Patair and in the finish Mark would not sign off on an aeroplane after service as he was not satisfied with the standard of maintenance, they were cutting too many corners.

Andy was always difficult to feed. When we were in Moresby our doctor, Shirley Clifton-Smith, once remarked, "If he could have a beer and a steak he'd be fine." I weaned him at about three months and he

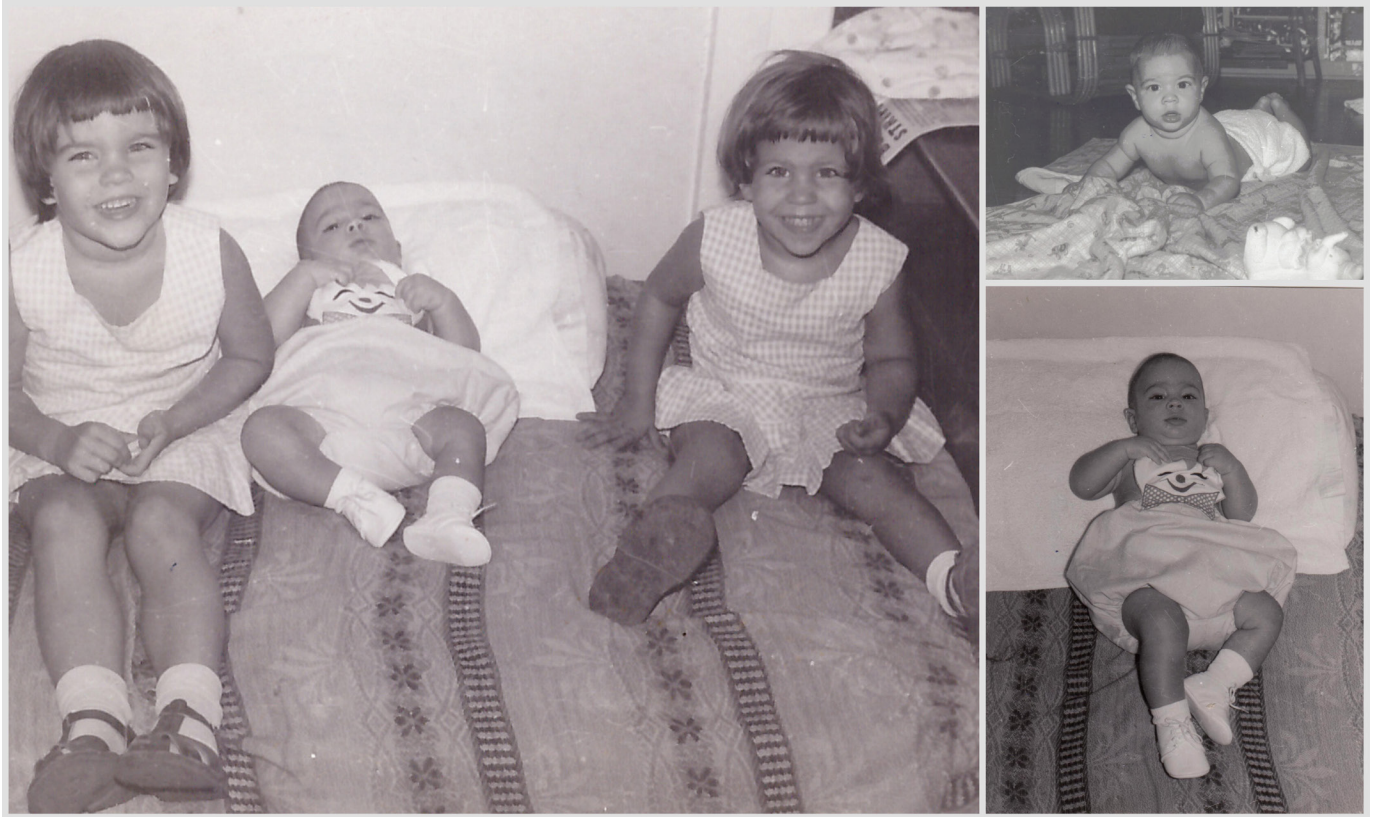
still wouldn't drink milk from a bottle either. The doc suggested "bengerising" his milk as he always spit back a bit of his feed, it simply means the milk was pre-digested. No better. At three months I had to start him on solid food and by the time he was four months old he was having a weetbix sogged in milk for breakfast, mashed veggies for lunch and stewed fruit and egg custard for tea. It was a fight to get him to drink anything from a bottle.

When Ma was ill in PNG the hospital charged her 450 pounds for her hospitalization, 300 pounds for her treatment and a 50% surcharge as she was anon-resident of the territory. We paid the bill and Pop refunded us the money when we came back to Australia. He submitted the bills to HBA who refunded the money they had paid. After we got back to Moresby Bob was talking to a guy he met at a club and in talking discovered he was the secretary/accountant at the hospital. Bob told him the story and he said as she was a pensioner she should never have been charged in the first place. He got her pension number and repaid the money. Pop went back to HBA and explained what had happened and asked to pay the money back. They said no they had paid on genuine accounts and couldn't take it back!



Andy's christening, top right Pop and Dad, lower right three generations of Thomson men ...

Since Bob had rejoined DCA in 1958 we had been shifting to get promotions and in 1964 he applied for and got Daly Waters in the Northern Territory, so we were on the move again. This time was the big one, back to Australia. The blokes from the stores came and packed us up and put most of our stuff in a big shipping crate saying, "That will make a good playhouse for the girls", so they cut windows and a door in it and boarded them over. There was another smaller crate as well, not bad when you consider we came up with two suitcases, a typewriter and a sewing machine! When it finally arrived in Daly Waters the crate had been unpacked and all our things were loose and the crate was missing. Someone in Sydney obviously liked the idea of a readymade playhouse for his kids.



Jess and Jim Minnes were transferred to Port Moresby about the time Andy was born. As they both worked, the two boys just got the school bus to drop them off, same as at Wewak. In the school holidays I had 5 children to take everywhere I went. They were great kids and as their parents were having marital problems Bob offered to foster the twins and take them back to Australia when we finally went. Karen would have been James Robert had she been a boy.

Returning to Australia - Daly Waters

We decided to go “finish” on the MV Bulolo and sailed on St. Patrick’s Day 1963. The kids and Bob were OK but I was seasick most of the time. Probably the reason I’ve never fancied cruising! When we arrived in Sydney there was a wharf strike on and we had to handle our own luggage. We went through Customs and guess which suitcase the guy had me open? The one with all the dirty clothes and plastic bags of used nappies in it! No disposables in those days. It contained four or five days of nappies that were rinsed and not washed and other rather smelly things, he didn’t ask me to open any others. When we got through customs we found a cabbie and he said, “I can’t pick up or carry your cases while we are on the wharf the unions won’t allow it.” I asked if he could push a pram [Bob had brought my beautiful pram up when he had gone to Melbourne to do his Senior’s exams] and he said he thought that would be alright, so I put Marg in the pram with Andy and Sue held onto it and he set off down the wharf with Bob and I bringing up the rear with the cases and bags. We had been going to stay a couple of days in Sydney but just told the cabbie to take us to Central Station and we caught the next train to Melbourne. Very happy to get off at the other end and have Dad pick us up from Spencer Street. It was a LONG trip! Dad had made some alterations to Geoff’s room, he had put a door through into my old room and made a couple of bunks at one end that took the two mattresses from the caravan and Andy was in a cot.

When we arrived in Melbourne we needed transport so Bob bought a Morris Oxford car. We used it for the time we were in Melbourne and when we wanted to sell it, Dorothy and Alf asked if they could buy it. But they didn’t have any money to pay for it so asked if they could pay us when they had some money and finalise it when we next came home. Bob said OK, you don’t have to pay a fixed amount each month just as long as we got some regular payments. Later when we left PNG to go to Daly Waters we arrived in Melbourne and needed a vehicle to get up there. Bob asked Dot for some or preferably the entire agreed price and she said they didn’t have it and anyway Bob had said it did not matter when they paid for it. Well it doesn’t matter how many months or years you multiply nothing by, it’s still nothing. In the end with a lot of prodding from Bob [and I suspect a fair bit from Ma] they borrowed the money from Alf’s mother, and we got paid.

We bought a blue Holden Station Wagon and a roof rack and after our holiday [?] we set out for Daly Waters via Regional Office in Adelaide. We stayed in Glenelg in a small house we rented for a week. Dad had made a “cot” that fitted in the back of the wagon for Andy. It was just a shell which we fitted over a piece of foam plastic, it kept him safe in the back of the car and he slept in it at night on the floor. I don’t think it would be considered safe today. Bob had to go to Regional Office several days in a row to be briefed on the situation there, at that time Daly Waters was the alternative airport to Darwin. Later the RAAF built Tindall airfield at Katherine. The kids and I spent the days on Glenelg beach. While we were in Adelaide we visited June and Murray Weaver who had returned to Australia and also drove down to



Sue and Marg on playground at Port Augusta

Victor Harbour for the day, before we started the trip up through the Centre to Daly Waters. We drove to Port Augusta and loaded the car on to the train; it had to be there by 9.30AM as that part of the train left for Marree at 11.00AM. We then had to fill in the rest of the day until the passenger section left about 6.00PM. When we reached Marree, sometime in the middle of the night we had to get off that train and walk across the platform and board the old “Ghan” At least we had a sleeper and we all slept very well that night. In those days food was extra and we were running short on cash so we fed the kids and had half an entrée or

the cheapest dish on the menu between us. A cyclone had been battering the North West coast and had made landfall between Darwin and Broome. It crossed the Stuart Highway just south of Katherine and the rainfall flooded the creeks and rivers as far down as Marree. The railway line was flooded in several places and we had long stoppages, mostly only a few hours of half a day, over a day in one place, food was short on the train and the crew said we'd need food drops if we got held up again. But eventually a day and a half late we arrived at Alice Springs, which was the end of the line in those days. We just bunged the kids in the car and found a motel for the night, I can't remember where. The next day we drove to Tennant Creek and we didn't have enough money to stay overnight, even though we had booked a room at the hotel. Bob went over to tell the publican and he asked, "Are you Gil Langley's replacement?" and Bob said, "Yes". "Run out of money?" "Yes" "Don't worry, stay the night, your wife and kids must be tired, just send the cash when you get paid." I know he knew he'd get his money but I could have kissed him!



Our car (the blue one) loaded onto the Ghan

The King River, just south of Katherine had flooded and the Stuart Highway was cut in several places and the police had a roadblock at Elliott to stop anyone going on further. They stopped us and when they found out we were going to Daly the copper said, "Oh, you're Gil Langley's replacement," and we were allowed on with warnings that we would have several creeks to ford. The entire population of the Northern Territory at this point was about 20,000 people and only the Stuart Highway was bitumen, the Barkly and Victoria highways were still dirt roads. It was much easier for the police to keep track of who was going where in those conditions. At Alice Springs the Stuart ran through the middle of the town, no Todd Mall then. The Stuart was narrow, about half the width of the present road, and when you saw a road train coming, you got off the road, because they couldn't. We often saw where the drivers had nodded off; there was a deep set of tracks going into the verge and back out. And so we arrived at Daly Waters.

Daly Waters is about 1 mile from the Stuart, 600 miles from Alice Springs and 400 from Darwin. It consisted of the airfield [the reason most of us were there] and a house for the groundsman at the aerodrome, hooray it wasn't us this time! In the town was a Pub, Store, Post Office, community Hall, five residences and a defunct garage.



The OIC was Algy Ackerman, wife Babs and three children, Ron Macarthur, the mechanic, wife Pat and twin boys, Chris and Trevor, then us and the garage on the corner. In a small side road that lead to the "racecourse" was the tennis courts and community centre, opposite them the Post Office with Colin and Diana Bremner and Sharon and Narelle. Colin worked for PMG at Larrimah and Di was the postmistress. Back on the main road the two Meteorological guys, Jim Telford, wife Judy and 2 girls and a boy and Bonnicis with three boys. Across the road was the store, Doug and Daph Wilson owned that, the pub with beer garden, motel units [?] and horse paddock. The publican was Stan Wilson, wife Ruth and a daughter. Their semi-permanent guests were Ben Hall, who had had a station

at Tibooburra, wife Kathy and daughter Karen. Ben and Kath later bought the store at Mataranka.

We had four days in the "motel" units before Gil and Pauline moved out of the house and it was pretty grim. The room was about 3M X4M, had four bunk beds and no facilities at all. We had to use the showers and toilets at the back of the pub and they left a lot to be desired. Corrugated iron walls and roof, concrete floors with more iron to divide into two showers, the water just ran out on to the mud outside and the toilets were Yuk.

Our house was reasonably comfortable, two bedrooms, lounge, kitchen, bathroom and a laundry under the house in the open air. We had a slow combustion stove, a gas stove and an open fire in the lounge. We were very glad of the SC stove in winter as it was freezing at nights. Of course I had to do all the washing, ironing and housework which was a bit of a comedown after having a hausboi for 5 years. The kids all got chapped faces and the women got chapped hands from the icy winds. The flying Doctor sent Barrier Cream down in gallon jars! Actually despite its size, or perhaps because of it, we had more social life than in other of the places we'd lived.

A few days after we arrived we drove out to the swamp to have a look at the birds. There were plenty there including two pelicans. Bob went too far in, too close to the edge and bogged the station wagon. In trying to push it out he hurt his back. I finished up running [I ran all the way, it was getting dark and

there was no way I was going to be going through the bush in the dark] and got help from the pub. His back was so bad he had to be airlifted to Darwin and was in hospital there for a week or so. This was the start of all his back problems.



One day I got completely fed up with trying to get Andy to drink from his bottle and tipped the milk into a cup with a lid and spout, [new invention!] and when I turned around he'd drunk the lot and never had another bottle. After that it was easy as he ate everything that I put in front of him. There was always a BBQ at the pub on Sunday nights and the whole town went. Ben

Hall killed a steer about once a fortnight and supplied fresh meat to the pub and the locals. The guys doing the barbie would pick out a nice tender piece of steak, cook it carefully and let it cool, then give it to Andy. He would chew and suck at that bit of meat for about an hour, until he got all the juices and goodness out of it. His highchair must have been very stable as he would climb in to it over the tray at the front and it didn't tip over.

The Daly Waters Race Committee had fallen to pieces due to arguments, not long before we arrived, so shortly after we got there Bob was roped in to be secretary. This tied in well with his management and coordinating skills, as well as the fact that he could be boss of the whole show. The races were held only a couple of months after we came and it was the most successful and well run races they'd ever had. The DCA guys ran the DCA grader over the "track" a couple of times to clear away the scrub growth from last year, cut some small trees down and roof the secretary's office, the bar, the afternoon tea "room" with them. The town was a buzz of excitement, especially when the trophies arrived, were unpacked and displayed behind the bar of the pub. [pic of trophies and the races]

The local station owners trucked in loads of stock horses in from the stations and on race day they were "auctioned" off. The money went to the race club and that horse was yours for the day. There was never a shortage of jockeys, all the ringers reckoned they were the next Darby Munro and jumped at the chance to ride in a "real" race. We bought a nag of Joe Dowling's and the lad that rode it managed to get it to third place and we won an ice bucket. Even the station owners had to buy their own horses back if they wanted to race them. Joe Dowling paid fifty pounds for one of his horses, more than a week's wages for Bob at the time and of course, the horse was good and won the DW Cup. Race Day was a big day for the area not just the town. One year Joe Dowling's wife Nancy was thrown from her horse and hit her head on a tree, she died before they could get her to Katherine Hospital. Joe eventually "ran off" with the publican's wife Ruth and they married and lived in Darwin. She must have been desperate to get away because Joe was a very rough diamond but then again she was pretty rough too.

At the second race while we were in Daly Waters we wanted to give Joe Dowling something as a gift, so I ordered up some emerald green and white satin (Joe was Irish) and made a set of racing colours, green with white hoops. He was speechless with delight. I made the leftovers into a set of white and green quarter panels and every race a ringer would come up and shyly ask if he could wear the "racing silks" - they were so proud to wear the real thing!

Bob only liked one brand of beer, [Carlton Draught] and the pub didn't stock it so he would have it shipped down in cartons from Darwin. The publican, Stan Wilson, stored the beer in his coolroom and



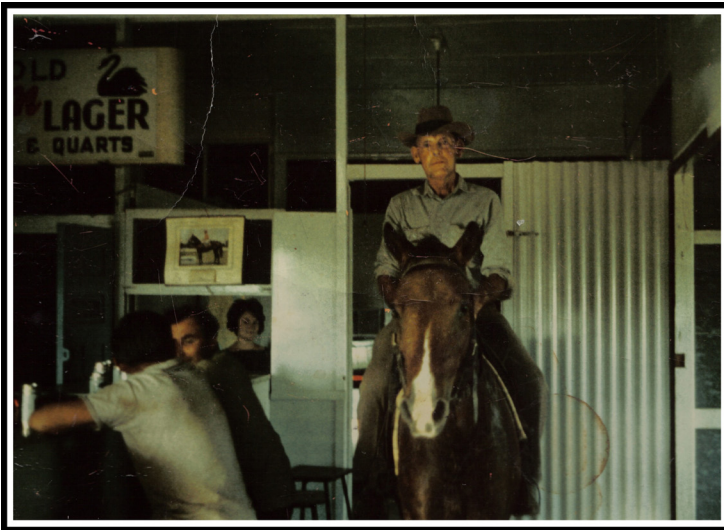
one carton went into the bar fridge and Bob just drank his own beer. It was funny when tourists asked for a Carlton and Stan would say, "I don't stock Carlton" and they'd say, "But I can see it in the fridge!" and Stan replied, "Oh that's not mine, it's Bob Thomson's beer." Exit puzzled tourist. We had our parties in the pub. The women set up supper in the dining room and afterwards push the tables back and reset them for breakfast. One time we were having a "do" at the pub and by the time it got around to 10PM or so the guys were all "ticking" nicely and the space around the bar was very crowded. There was a couple

of small rooms partitioned off in the corner and some bright spark thought if we knock the partition down we'd have a lot more room. They were only used for ringers when they got too drunk to go back to the station, anyhow they could sleep outside on the ground. Stan said OK and the walls came down and we had room for a couple of tables and some chairs for the women. Every half hour or so when we had a party one of the guys would walk the length of the house and listen to see if the kids were all asleep and Ok.

Joe Dowling owned the closest station to DW and he was often in town and always in the pub, he was the original bush hick. He did not comprehend how a tape recorder worked or how the voice came to be coming from the speaker. Bob taped him singing "Tennessee Waltz" and when it was played back to him, he'd hear Bob's voice saying, "and now we'll have Mr Joe Dowling singing "Tennessee Waltz" and he'd put his beer down and get out his big white handkerchief and shake it out and by then his voice would be coming out of the speakers. He never did work it out. Yet he was an astute business man and ran his station well. One afternoon he rode his horse through the bar, Bob said, "Hang on Joe, till I get my camera" so he obligingly did it all again.

Andy turned one in September and as the yard was well fenced the kids could play downstairs and under the house safely. One day, unbeknown to me, Bob had left an extension ladder leaning on the roof at the front of the house. Andy was now about 18 months old and when I walked out on to the porch to check on the kids I was just in time to see him climb off the top of the ladder on to the roof, about 7M from the ground. Talk about heart in mouth! I said to him, "That's a clever boy; now show Mummy how you can climb down." I said quietly to Sue, "Go and get Daddy and don't yell out" As Andy climbed slowly down, rung by rung, I held my breath and finally he came level to where I was standing on the porch and I grabbed him. I had a few words to say to Bob about leaving ladders against houses when small boys

[or girls] were around. He actually thought it funny. Andy was a climber from his first steps, he would climb anything.



*Joe Dowling riding his horse through the Daly Waters
Pub bar*

Mike and Maria Bonnici wanted some photos of their three boys to send to relatives so they asked Bob (he had the only camera in town) if he would do some. So Maria dressed the boys in their best clothes and Bob posed them together and separately and took a heap of photos. Then our kids turned up and he took pictures of them with you and Marg just as you'd come from a days playing. You did look pretty bad didn't you?

Over time Algy was replaced as OIC by Derek, wife Sonia and two children, Carolyn and Patrick. She was most upset one day when she heard them called Caro and Pat as that was

not the done thing in England to shorten names. Derek was universally disliked in the town; he would walk into the pub at one end, have a drink with each group at the bar and walk out the other end never shouting a round. Now as we know there's nothing Aussies hate more than a bludger who won't stand his round of drinks and he was a pommie into the bargain. The Bonnici's were also replaced by Mal and Bev Glover and their small daughter.



Margaret turned three and we went to the Post Office and there was a huge parcel from Mum and Dad, [about 60 x 30 cms] for her. I wasn't allowed to carry it for her and as she was struggling home with it I asked her what she thought was in it. She looked up at me with her cheeky little grin and said, "Lollies!" Actually it was a teaset and a little kitchen dresser. It was funny watching the three kids at this stage, if they were playing and something got stuck, say the doll's pram, Sue would have a go at freeing it and if she didn't she'd go off and play with something else. Marg would get mad at it and bash it back and forth till she got it free or really stuck. Andy would walk around and move the obstacle and proceed on his way.

On the 23rd November 1963 we were listening to the morning news and word came over that President Kennedy had been assassinated. I opened the kitchen window and yelled out to Pat next door, [her bathroom window was opposite] and told her the news. Next morning was a repeat as the assassin had been assassinated.

We had the town Christmas party for the kids out at the airfield and Santa arrived in the bucket of the front end loader. In the wet season the creek would rise and flood the road and we had to ford it to get out. Once a week one family would do a supply run to Katherine, 180 miles up the track, to replace gas bottles and buy any groceries or goods that anyone wanted. Once on the Stuart, you just put your foot flat to the floor because the old Holdens only did about 70 MPH flat out. The main road at Katherine was at that time lower than the footpath and one day, the girls and Andy were watching something outside while I went inside and Andy's pusher went off the path onto the road and grazed the side of his face quite badly. Don't know where Bob had got to. We often went after shopping, down to the low level ford, the only way out of Katherine going north at that time. When the Katherine River flooded [an annual occurrence] we used the railway bridge to cross and if that went under the town was cut off. The same thing happened at Adelaide River, if you stand on the ford today and look up at the railway bridge you can get an idea of how much water was flowing down to the sea, enough to fill Sydney Harbour every hour, I think.

I made flynets for the kids, Pat MacArthur showed me how and gave me enough nylon net to start off. We had half a dozen at the front and back doors and the kids knew that they had to put one on before they went outside. The flies were horrendous, sticky little beasts that had to be wiped off your face and out of your eyes, [No Aeroguard then] if they landed and there were millions of them. Lots of animal manure around, if you got up at sunrise the whole grassland looked black and as the sun rose, so did the flies in massive swarms. But in the time we lived in DW none of you kids got “fly eye” an infection that caused lots of pus to form in the eyes.



I became good friends with Diana at the Post Office, she and Col and Bob and I got on well. Colin could keep the kids amused for hours, he made his hat “talk” by ventriloquism and it fascinated the children. He could recite any Banjo Patterson or Henry Lawson poem and I fondly remember his rendition of “The Bush Christening” at his new baby, Colleen’s christening. Col and Di moved to Tennant Creek as PMG closed the DW post office and Col went to work at Peko Mines as a linesman. He walked along the lines looking for faults etc. and when he saw a speck of gold he would wet his finger and put it in a vial he carried for that purpose. He had several filled vials when we stayed with them at Tennant Creek one time.



Sue & Marg at Mataranka Thermal Pool

On the weekend occasionally we'd do the 102 miles up to Mataranka and out to the Homestead and swim in the thermal pool. This was way before it was sold and developed as a tourist resort. We'd go to the homestead and ask permission for a swim, have a cuppa with the old folk who owned the place and then drive through the paddock to the hot spring. The house was built on tree stumps and boarded in around the sides. The owners [can't remember the name] had lots of wedding photos of children, nieces etc. and I was admiring them one day and realised I was looking at Rhonda and Brian Todd's wedding photo. Rhonda was their niece and every now and then we'd get news of Brian and Rhonda through them, so we knew when their twins were born. We had many happy days in that pool, it's a pity as it's so spoiled now.

Mataranka Station was a bit further on past Mataranka town on the way to Darwin. The managers there had a son, Perry who was about Sue's age. They were having problems losing kids [goats, not children] and one day the aborigines found a huge python in the kiddy yard. The manager's wife had a stockman kill it and slit it open to show Perry the kid, still whole in its belly. Perry was a tough little kid. We had several snake tales, one morning a truckie ran over and killed a death adder just as he came into the town, another time the groundsman let down his sunblind and a 2 metre King Brown snake was warming itself in it. Another night we were coming back from the supply run and Bob braked suddenly as we thought there was a tree across the road and as we stopped the tree slid off the far side. I know the Stuart wasn't as wide as it is now, but that snake had its head off the road on one side and its tail had not cleared the growth on the other side. As we came into Mataranka one afternoon a flight of red tail black cockatoos rose up in front of us, I've never seen anything so breathtakingly magnificent.

One of the nearby stations to DW was Hidden Valley owned by Dick and Kath Scobie. They had a tribe of kids from about 10 to 25 years old or so, I never worked out how many, but boy were they feral. They were the wildest kids I've ever come across. Kath died of cancer one year and Dick married the governess, he said he might as well as she couldn't do anything with the bloody kids anyhow.

The guys got up a cricket team and challenged Elliott to a match. They played on one of the bitumen taxiways at the airstrip on a day when the temperature reached 108 degrees Fahrenheit. Bob bowled and batted most of the day, he was a good all-rounder and when he got home he was a mess. His feet were covered in blisters and his body temperature was very high. I tied to the sprinkler on the verandah rail with the spray downwards and he sat under it in a chair. The dewpoint was so low that in half an hour he was shivering but it brought his temp. down quickly. We had air-conditioners but they were expensive to run and Bob worked out that if you unscrewed the meter board and rotated it 90 degrees the meter stopped working. So every month we would run the meter to approximately the right amount and then rotate the board. Bob showed the others how to do it and we all agreed to run up a reasonable bill so Head Office wouldn't suspect. Les Melempre, Bob's boss, came up to do an inspection and we asked him to dinner as that's what you do when the boss arrives in the middle of nowhere. While we were eating our roast dinner I realised that Les was looking straight at the meter which was sideways. He never said a word, he was a really nice guy and Bob liked and got on well with him.

There was a construction company building a road out to Top Springs Station, from Dunmarra, to bring beef to DW to be flown to the USA. Top Springs Station had a contract to fly boneless beef to the USA in [guess] 50 pound cartons and they were shipping 100 cartons a week. The road company was C.R.Keath and they came to town frequently. One of the men played a guitar and wrote songs; Bob taped two "The Daly Waters Races" and "With Keath on the Dunmarra Road". That road is now called the Buchanan Highway now extends to Victoria River Downs and on to Kunnanurra. We also became friends with Lorna and Gordon Dayes who managed Nutwood Downs Station. We spent a couple of weekends out at the station, nice people with two small boys who enjoyed the company of other children. Lorna was and ex nurse, many of the station managers married nurses, and it did come in handy when there was a mishap on the run. She took stitches out of Sue's chin when she cut it for a second time.

One day Bob came in from the pub and said, "Doug Wilson's been in gaol!" and my reply was, "What for? Cattle duffing?" And he said, "How did you know?" It was only a guess, I mean what else could you go to gaol for in those days and in that place. Doug and Daph had the store and only stocked things that they would eat or use on the assumption that if it went broke they could eat all the stock. I asked for strange things like soy sauce [?] but they never had it or got it in for me. It was common to be in the shop with a few tourist and ask for a can of lemonade and charged 1/6 and the tourists complained that they had just paid 2/6 for the same drink and were smartly told that we were locals and they weren't! I'll finish the rest of the Doug and Daph saga that Col Bremner told us. In later years long after we left, Doug was working away from home and came back unannounced and caught Daph in bed with a bloke. He picked up his gun and shot them both but it was written off as a murder- suicide. Di and Col had no doubts about what happened.

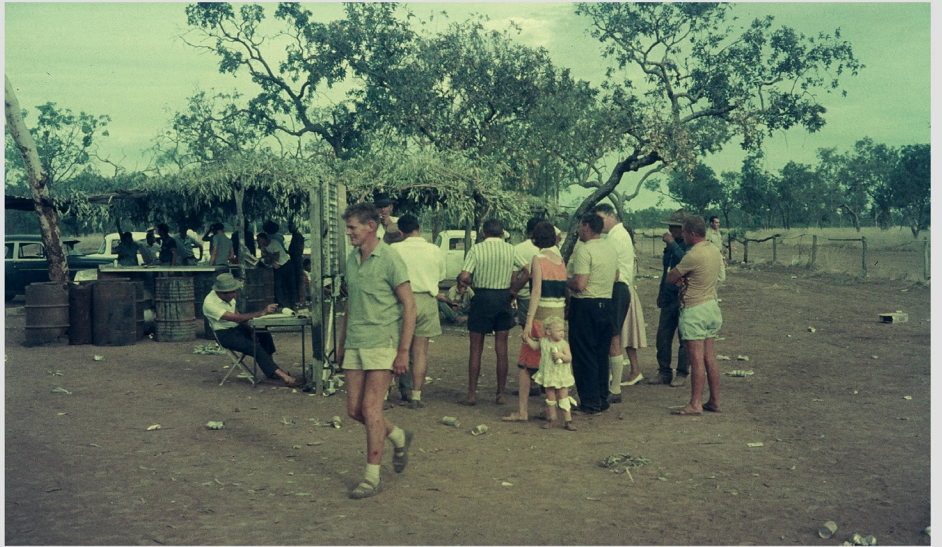
We got the odd tourist bus through and a few cars but we were a couple of kilometres from the highway and not many people detoured to the town. Years later [1987] Bob and I sat in the bar of the pub and there were more cars through in an hour than we saw in a couple of weeks. This was due to the sealing of the Alice Springs, Port Augusta section of the Stuart Highway.

One of the highlights of the week was to go out on Sunday morning and meet the milk run plane, it stopped at every place along the road from Alice to Darwin. We got a weekly order of greengroceries from a store in Alice.

That Christmas Sue got a chain drive trike from Santa and Marg got a slightly smaller trike with a little seat at the back. Wrong thing to do, we should have bought two chain drive trikes as that's what she decided she wanted and should have had. The publican's wife, Ruth was of German descent and they celebrate Christmas Eve so there was a party at the pub. Unknown to me Stan was topping glasses, [we were drinking sparkling Burgundy] and I had an awful hangover the next day. We did not get to bed until about 2 AM and the girls were up at 5 AM. It was not much fun cooking a full roast dinner at night and it was a long, long time before I ever had too much to drink again.



On Christmas Day the whole town plus a few extras were gathered at the pub and one of the Telford kids had also got a chain drive trike for Christmas. Someone put up a challenge and Judy Telford, Col Bremner and I had a race along the main street. Col didn't stand much of a chance as he only had an ordinary trike, but Judy and I were neck and neck all the way, she cut me off and crossed the line first. Bob said I should have just run into her and won, but we made the news in Darwin that night!



Sue started school in Daly Waters, we enrolled her with the South Australian Correspondence School. It was a bit difficult to teach her, apart from the fact that she wanted to be outside playing, Marg wanted to be inside doing school work and Andy wanted to be with me. The hardest thing was to draw 10 birds or eggs or mice or something in a space the width of the paper and about 1 1/2 cm deep. She drew pictures, [they had to write stories and illustrate them] so I showed her how to do stick figures, because her stories were always about things that happened in the town. One day Bob was glancing through her work and said, "Have you looked at these pictures?" When I had a good look, all the boys had willies so I had to teach her to differentiate girls from boys with skirts and shorts.

I never did find out how Sue burnt her foot after the guys had done a reduction burn across the back paddock. As her shoe and sock weren't burnt I have to conclude that she had them off and was barefoot, an assumption she always vehemently denied.

We did have a genuine remittance man in the town. He was a ringer and an alcoholic and as all the stations had a strict dry policy he couldn't get work. His parents lived in Brisbane and sent a fortnightly cheque to the post office on the condition he never came back to Brisbane, even to visit. Such a waste, he had been educated at Nudgee College, then the top boys' school in Queensland and Queensland University. He could spout Shakespeare's plays by heart and poetry by the hour.

One of the local ringers was hauled up on a cattle duffing charge, his name was Morrie and he had ridden a horse for us at the races that year. He ran a dismal last and said after that he could see it wasn't going to win so pulled the horse [and you can see that on our film] before the finishing line. The cop who was giving the evidence was not a fan of Morrie's and the defence lawyer was trying to make out that it was a personal vendetta against him, by the police. The lawyer asked, in cross examination, "Weren't you heard to say to Morrie after the Daly Waters Races, by Jove Morrie, you've got strong arms?" Anyhow Joe Dowling manufactured some evidence and he got off. Morrie was one of his ringers.

In June 1964 Marg and Andy picked up a gastric bug and became very ill overnight. Early in the morning we asked Fran, a friend from C R Keath, if she would mind Sue and set out for Katherine hospital. When we arrived at Larrimah the ambulance, doctor and a nurse were holding a clinic there. The doctor said to get to the hospital ASAP and he would ring and alert them to expect us. The policeman's wife, Pat Farmilo filled a water container with water and ice and off we went. About 10 kms north Andy had a febrile convulsion, his eyes rolled back and he convulsed. This was the most frightening thing I had ever seen. We turned the car and headed back to Larrimah. The doctor gave Andy an injection and remarked to the nurse that he was a very sick child. It shows how much esteem in which doctors were held, we did not question his word or ask why Marg didn't get a shot also, or why he didn't put them in the ambulance and treat them on the way to hospital. I know now that I would jump up and down and do whatever was necessary for them to be cared for by a professional on that awful trip.

When I think how close we came to losing both of them I am appalled that we were so stupid not to realise how ill they were and demand better treatment. With the accelerator flat on the floor we set out again arriving at Katherine hospital with both of them now suffering heat exhaustion and dehydration as well. The nurses were wonderful, Marg was by now the sicker of the two and the only way they got her temperature down was to put her in a bath of cracked ice. She spent the night in that bath, too apathetic at first to complain, but screamed the place down when she had the energy. The shot the doctor had given Andy had helped him. The nurse sent us home to be with Sue and to come back next day. We went home, it's a three hour trip and fell into bed, exhausted and never slept a wink all night. Fran stayed over so we could head off early next day. When we rang in the morning both the kids were coming along OK and were out of danger. When we got back the doctor said to give them a week or so in hospital to make sure they would be all right and then we could bring them home. When we went to pick them up, their

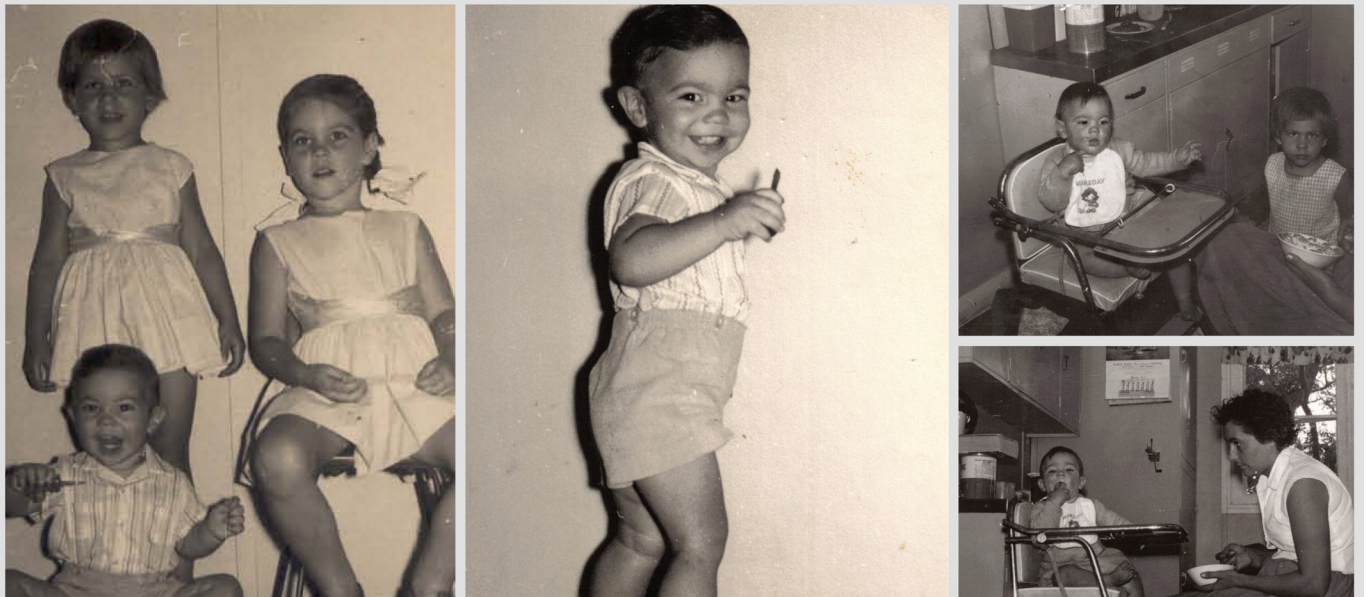
cots were empty. Margaret had spent the whole week in the nurse's home being thoroughly spoilt and only sleeping in her cot at night. We finally found Andy, the orderly carried him around all day while he wheeled oxygen cylinders and beds about and generally did his work. He said to us, "How could I not pick him up, he stood in his cot and held up his little arms and the tears were running down his little face, but he never cried." I still and always will credit the nurses at Katherine for the lives of Marg and Andy.

Bob tried desperately to improve Daly. He reorganised the races and ran them and they were the best and most profitable that were ever run. He cleaned up the tennis court and we all played tennis. He arranged a set of purloined lights (DCA surplus) and wired them all up. He needed a couple of blokes to give him a hand to put them up but when he went down to the pub no one could be bothered to come so he left them lying all over the court and they were still there when we left. He ran various money raising things and bought playground equipment and we had a grand opening and he invited Tiger Brennan to officiate at the opening. It made the paper in Darwin, probably because Bob took a photo and wrote an article. He ran the projector for the picture nights and set up the screen and seats.



He corresponded with Tiger Brennan the MP for the area, and they talked about a school. There were problems, had to have a building to house it, desks, and the big problem, pupils. When we arrived in Daly there was 9 or 10 kids who could be classed as school age but it dwindled as personnel came and went. But it got the go ahead with several aboriginal children from the local tribe. It was set up in the hall which served as what would be today a community centre. I had left by the time it started but it did run for a term or two, the teacher was supplied by the education dept. His name was Gordon.

I was expecting Stuart by now and although I was not as sick as I'd been with the girls I wasn't as well as I was with Andy. We were both scared and worried about all the children, [paranoid!] that they might catch something else. We had leave owing and decided that I would fly to Melbourne with the three kids. We knew that we'd be moving to Darwin and not returning to Daly so thought we'd arrange a nice surprise for Mum and Dad and arrive unannounced. I had made the kids winter clothes, knitted jumpers, etc. for them and we knew the beds and a cot were there, the plan was I'd fly down; Bob would follow by car when his replacement arrived and Fran and Ray [C R Keath] would pick us up at Essendon and drive us home. I duly flew to Melbourne and Fran and Ray were there to meet us but the luggage went to Perth instead of Melbourne. We waited an hour for Qantas to locate it and they promised delivery next day. Bob had decided he would ring Mum and Dad and see how it all went, but we weren't there when he rang and he had to fudge his way out of that by saying we'd booked a call but it was early and I was in next door.



I rang the bell at the house and Dad came to the door, he just stood there looking at us, not a word came out. I had made the girls lovely suits, pleated skirts, [professionally pleated in Adelaide] jackets with Peter Pan collars, Andy had long grey pants and a zip front jacket and they all looked just so good. We stood there while Dad did the mental leap that we were not in Daly Waters. Finally Sue said, "Can we come in Dandan, its cold out here?" Said thank you and goodbye to Fran and Ray and came in from the cold. Eventually got the kids to bed, I had an overnight bag with pajamas in it, and hit the sack. It had been a long day. Next day I was told in no uncertain way never to do anything like that again, they did not like surprises. [I bet it would have been different story if it were Geoff.] And all we'd thought of was how nice it would be to open the door and find your only daughter and only grandchildren on the doorstep, when you thought they were 2000 miles away! Wrong.

We settled down to wait for Bob to come down on leave, I was still not well but not too bad and worried sick that something would go wrong with one of the kids, but they were fine. They waited each night at the front gate and Dad would stop his truck and they'd ride up to the garage with him. He and Andy would fill the briquette HWS firebox, Andy handing the briquettes one by one up to Dad from the wood box. The job took about five times as long as it would take Dad on his own but they both loved it. When the heater was full, they'd go to the bathroom to wash their hands. Dad deliberately spun out the washing process; he'd do Andy's hands then give him a towel to dry them while he washed his hands.

When Andy finished drying his hands he say, "Tum on Dandan, it's time for our tup of tea" So out to the kitchen where Mum had a large and a small cup of tea on the table. Dad gave Sue a bucket of salty water and told her she could take the snails for a swim, ridding the garden of some pests and keeping her happy at the same time.

Mum got a really bad cold and took to bed with it. I had to get up and cut Dad's lunch, get his breakfast and see him off to work. Wash, iron, cook and clean as well as looking after you kids. I'm not complaining but I was tired and not terribly well and I even had to iron underclothes! One morning Mum had been out to the toilet and came in and sat down and was waiting for me to get her breakfast and she said, "There's something I have to get you to do right now." I couldn't imagine what it could be and she went on, "The girls have shoved their toast crusts under the back step, for heaven's sake get them out before someone sees them." I really can't imagine anyone important coming to the back door at 8.30 AM. Andy helped [I use the word loosely] Dad to wash the car. He had a lovely blue and white striped jumper, grey overalls and a royal blue reefer cardigan over it all. I came out one day and here he is, up to his armpits in soapy water and having a lovely time "Helping Dandan" He wore a sleeping bag to sleep in as he pushed the blankets off, [it was winter,] and he could still climb out over the rails of the cot. I'd go in before I went to bed and the two girls would be curled up in bed fast asleep and Andy would be lying asleep on the floor just inside the door.

Mum got over her flu and decided she would go to work full-time for Bob's brother-in-law, Reg Mates. Reg had a shop in Dandenong and had opened one in an arcade in Box Hill and Mum had been doing a



Mum in Reg's shop, 1964

couple of days a week there and as she and Dad were planning a trip overseas some time and she had to save her for her half of the trip. Dad was OK he had enough money, he could be very hard on Mum sometimes. She had to work to save her fare to PNG to see Sue when she was a baby and she would have to earn her own money to go away. When Dad decided to change cars for a much newer model, he bought it on hire purchase, [the forerunner of CREDIT!] and the payment was, say, two pounds a week so he decreased Mum's housekeeping by that amount. Mum had to up our board and cut a few corners to make up that extra money. Even ten bob [\$1] was a lot of money in our house. I often wonder if he would have traded Mum in on the newer model [Peg] if Mum had not died when she did.

About this time Bob arrived down with the dog. I thought we'd be off to Darwin in a week or so but he had rented out the Darwin house and we had another six weeks to stay. Mum and

Dad were both at work and we were doing all the work around the place, mowing lawns, lighting the fire at night, keep the HWS stoked, cooking, washing and ironing, shopping, cleaning etc. etc. and paying 20 pounds [\$40] a week as well. The week's groceries, meat, fruit and vegetables for four adults and three children came to less than that! One weekend we left the dishes after the Sunday roast for Mum to do and got a very stern lecture from Dad the next day about finishing the work before we went off gadding about. We were going to see Bob's parents, who had now moved to East Ringwood but only had a small two bedroom house and as they slept in separate rooms, there was no room for us to stay. After we went back to Darwin, I get a letter from Mum saying how much they missed us and how miserable it was to come home to a cold, empty house with no nice hot meal prepared and the fire going etc. etc.

We had enrolled Sue at Box Hill State School and she had gone from Dick and Dora to John and Betty, but apart from that she was right up with the grade 1 class she was in. Then the dog decided he didn't want her missing and took to scaling the 6 foot fence and going to school and waiting outside her room. We had to tie him up as he kept on doing it. Sue developed tummy pains and after several trips to the doctor he diagnosed a grumbling appendix and said we should not consider driving back to Darwin as she might need a doctor when we were far from a hospital. So Bob set off with the dog in the car and a week later we got on a plane and flew up. I swore to myself as we left that I would never come and stay with Mum and Dad again, it had been a very difficult few months. Be careful what you wish for, I never got the chance. I also realised that a lot of the time Dad was making the bullets for Mum to fire.

While I don't say Bob and I ever "fell in love", we had come to love each other deeply - we had a stable, happy marriage.



Mum & Dad, 1962

The Darwin Years



4 Knight St, Fanny Bay, 1964

We arrived in Darwin and settled in to 4 Knight St. Fanny Bay. Sue went to Parap Infant School, Grade 1. The swimming pool was in Ross Smith Avenue and we spent a lot of time there on weekends. Sue had swimming lessons and swam in the big pool with Bob; I sat by the wading pool and watched Marg and Andy. We found a doctor, [Margaret James] and booked into the hospital which was still the old wartime hospital. When I visited the doctor for checkups, Marg stayed with Doreen McGorey over the road, Andy was always with me and the doctor was always late, sometimes two hours and the waiting room really was the waiting room! I'd bring a couple of Matchbox cars, a book and his teddy and he'd sit on the floor at my feet, happily playing with his toys. One day he was humming a tune and the woman next to me leaned over and said, "That's a pretty tune dear, do you know what it's called?" Andy looked up at her and in his gruff little voice said, "Funeral March of a Marionette" That shut her up! At that stage we only had the tapes we'd taped in Wewak and my musicals which Mum had sent up. As the music played from dawn till bed time, you kids got a steady diet of classical and musicals. It got to the stage that when one piece of music or song finished you'd automatically start on the next. Which was funny when it was playing on the radio.

Stuart was born in the early hours of 8th December, 1964 at that old hospital. I thought we were so clever having two girls and two boys. When I came home from hospital, Andy looked at me and Stu and said, "You got a baby, Mum?" so obviously all the talk and discussions we'd had about the coming baby had gone straight over his head!

Sue started to go to the library with Bob after tea and Marg clamoured to be allowed to go also. Bob told her very firmly that only people who could read could go the library. About six weeks later she picked up the local paper and read the headlines to him and said, "Now can I go to the library?" Andy had been talking well since he was 15 months old, he had some great words for things, loumidge for lounge, doddyyonge for orange, hair coler coler for helicopter, whee oey oey for horse and many more. He got stuck on one question, "Why do cars go on the road?" We must have tried a thousand different answers to that one and I still don't know the answer. He'd look up at me with his big brown eyes and say, "It's very dangerous on Gregory Street" We must have emphasized that a bit.

Marg started school in the July before she turned five, so she did 6 months Prep and then to Grade 1 at Parap. One of her teachers, Cheryl Habner told me she had to watch very carefully otherwise it was Marg running the class and not her. Bob made friends with Bill Lavender, he worked for DCA and lived nearby, so his wife, Francie and their children, Anthony, Debbie and Caroline became our friends as well. We spent a lot of time together. Towards the end of 1965, Bob and Gloria Tyler and their three children, Tony, Sheryl and Garry moved in next door on one side and Jim and Alma O'Reilly moved into the other side in 1966 with seven, soon to be eight children. We had lots of friends and felt part of the community and thought we would settle and stay in Darwin for the rest of our lives.

I got a letter from Geoff one day and he said he was curing a cold by drinking a bottle of rum; it was as well he addressed the letter before he started because it took him a whole page to sign his name at the end.



Geoff arrived in Darwin from PNG when Stuart was six weeks old, having decided to leave PNG when they gained independence. He had the current lady, Gwynne, with him and her son Terry. They rented a flat in town and got jobs and Terry started at the High School. He was about 16 and a right proper pain in the nether regions. Geoff had made a little caravan to sleep in and they had come up in that, towed by a little Simca. He parked it in our backyard and when he finally moved it, the dog had dug a huge hole under it, about a metre wide and one and a half metres long. There was no soil around it so it must have come out on the dog and been spread around the yard. Geoff bought a block of land at Rapid Creek and built a double garage, fitted it with a kitchen, bathroom and beds and they lived there while he built the house. It was a nice neat two bedroom house; he made a beaut job of it. He made all the beds from packing cases, on our lawn and did an extra four beds for our kids.

Myra Goodall had given us a small two wheeler bike and with great patience and perseverance, Sue learned to ride it. Same story, if Sue can do it so can Marg, so about a week later she could ride it also. No training wheels in those times. Andy decided he wasn't going to be left out and a couple of weeks later he mastered it as well.

Bill Lavender worked as an electrician at DCA and as Bob now had a motor bike, he and Bill would burn off on that every morning. Francie had the car and to get her kids to the Catholic School passed by our place only she didn't pass by, she'd stop for a cuppa. That was fine but sometimes she'd still be there when the guys came home for lunch! We actually had the odd barbecue with Bob and Gloria while we were there although Bob never really liked them, as you well know.

We decided to buy the house in Knight St from the government for the princely sum of \$8,400. We had about \$200 and had to save the 10% deposit in three months, \$840, not easy with four small children and living expenses. Prices were very stable and we'd work out exactly what we needed for the week and the cost, add two bob in case anything was a bit more than we'd allowed and that was the housekeeping for the week. If we'd forgotten something, too bad we went without till next week. Tom the Cheap had just opened up in Darwin and I shopped there. Mind you, although Bob stopped buying a carton of beer he still had a carton of cigarettes and beers at the Aviat Club. But we did achieve the deposit and bought the house and slowly as we saved we did a few jobs around the place. Not much, we were still very short of cash. If I had money left over after shopping I bought a packet of lifesavers and divided it in three and that was the kids' sweet ration for a week, Stuart missed out, he was just a baby.

One day we had all been out to do the weekly shop, it must have been school holidays and the girls had lovely new yellow and white check dresses with white daisies around the bottom of the fabric, with matching yellow and white check ribbons. I was sitting on the bed feeding Stuart and heard a crash and Marg came up to the bedroom crying, saying Andy had knocked the ladder over and it had hit her on the head. Actually she was in a cardboard carton and Andy was pushing her along the passage and hit the edge of the ladder. We had been doing some painting and Bob had knocked up a latter from 2"x 2" hardwood. I couldn't see anything wrong with her so told her not to be a sook. As she turned around I could see blood dripping off the end of her plaits. I didn't panic as I know how much the head bleeds, so directed Sue to take off her dress and ribbons and run the bath half full of cold water and put them in it. I put Stu in his crib and had a look at the cut on Marg's head and nearly passed out when I realised I was looking at her skull when I parted the edge of the cut. Rang the doctor and she said to bring her straight in. She put 5 stitches in Marg's head [without anaesthetic] and sent her to the hospital for X-rays, [no CT or MRI scans in those days] and she was kept there under observation till the next afternoon. She was OK, no concussion or anything, and the dress and ribbons survived also.

Bob sold the bike and bought a Holden Ute, we ordered a lounge suite from Le Cornu's in Adelaide and they put it on the train for Alice Springs. Bob drove down in the Ute and collected it and we sent back another few bits of government furniture. We only had low, sheep wire fences between the houses so not



a lot of keeping out properties. The people who lived next door to O'Reilly's, O'Connells, kept turkeys which roamed everywhere including our yard. Andy was frightened of them, they are darn big birds, they made loud gobble noises and there was quite a lot of them, I admit I wasn't too keen on them either. The youngest child, Patrick was a nice kid, probably about four years older than Sue and he spent a fair bit of time at our place, especially when we found him hiding under our house, from his drunken father. We were appalled and from then on he came upstairs and stayed and usually had a meal with us, until he knew his father was asleep and it was safe to go home. I have a good idea that his mum copped a beating quite often as the old man was drunk several times a week. Anyhow one day I was in the yard with Andy and the turkeys came over the fence so I picked up a rock and threw it at them. You know I can't hit the wall of a barn from the inside, but I hit one of the young ones on the head and it keeled over. I lit the incinerator and chucked it in and destroyed the evidence. That night Patrick was at our place and Andy says very seriously, "My Mum killed one of your turkeys, Patrick" I could have hit him on the head.

When Stuart was about three months old Bob's sister Gwen came up to stay with us for about 6 weeks. She had had a bad romantic experience [she had divorced Tony a while ago] and tried to top herself. So the family in Melbourne decided it would be good to send her up to Darwin to Bob and me, as she was always close to Bob. She would go to bed and read until three or four in the morning then sleep until eleven or twelve. I was terrified that she would have another attempt at suicide, she now knew how many pills she needed to take and she had a big bag of them with her. I used to dread waiting for her to wake up in case she didn't and I would find her dead. But it was OK and we had quite a good time together. Gwen nearly drove me mad sometimes, if one of you was playing with a toy and left it to go to the toilet or your room by the time you came back it had been put away. When the girls came home from



Berry Springs: top Stuart; group top centre: Gwen (back), me (front), Geoff & Gwynne, Terry at back; top right me, Gwynne and Terry. Other photos - Geoff & Sue, and kids flaked in car on the way home!

school she would take off their hair ribbons, wash them and peg them on the louvres to dry for the next morning. We always slipped our shoes off at the top of the stairs and they were lined up under the window. When Bob came home from work, by the time he'd greeted you kids and come into the kitchen to say hi to me, Gwen would have cleaned his shoes and put them in the bottom of the wardrobe. And you reckon I'm anal retentive! But there were some good times - we went to Berry Springs one Sunday with Geoff, Gwynne and Terry and had a lovely time.

At this time the town clerk in Darwin was a guy Bob had known as a kid in Coburg, Laurie something, [Bob's Mum called him Edna Grove as a surname as that's where he lived] Gwen and I rang him up and asked he and his wife out to our place for the evening. We didn't say anything to Bob as we wanted it to be a surprise, so we prepared supper and bought a couple of bottles of beer from the pub. That night we were having tea and Andy pipes up, "Mummy bought some beer today Daddy." "Did she" said Bob, "Where is it" "In the fridge" says Andy. Bob went to the kitchen and looked but fortunately we'd hidden it pretty well and he didn't believe Andy, [who could have shown him where it was in the fridge] later the evening there was a knock on the door and Bob went down to see who it was so we got the surprise right.



Geoff had got a job with a building construction company and after the house was finished he decided he'd build a boat which we launched down at Fannie Bay Beach. He and Gwynne were together for a couple of years and bought into a coffee shop on the Stuart Highway at Stuart Park. It was only open in the evening and Gwynne made sure I didn't think I might get a job there by saying things like, "we only want smart professional type people to work here" a bit unnecessary as I wasn't looking for a job. So they hired Kathy, nuff said. Which is how Geoff met Kath and dumped Gwynne. One in the eye for her! Bob went to the Aviat club several

times a week, he played in their darts team and later I played in the women's team. Friday night was chook raffle night, they had 26 boards with a playing card stuck on each side, \$1.00 each. Then the deck was cut and whoever had that card won a chook. It was a rare occasion when Bob didn't come home with at least one chook. Through the club, Bob had met up with Ronnie Blackmore and Neil Jones, aka Flub, the last three letters stood for lazy, useless bastard so I will leave it to your imagination as to what the first one was. Together with a young couple Jan and Geoff Mullins, from DCA, every Wednesday night they all came to our place and we had a big roast meal, then played cards or darts afterwards. We provided the food they all brought grog. We had some bloody good nights together.

One day Alma O'Reilly had taken the two eldest, Janet and Bill and the youngest child to town to buy new togs, leaving the others, Brendan and Gabrielle in the care of Maureen, Patricia and her twin Peter. I was in the kitchen when I heard a sickening thud as Brendan's head hit the concrete below as he fell from the balcony. I yelled out, "Don't touch him" ran downstairs, leapt over the fence and here he was unconscious on the concrete. I know now I should have rung and ambulance but I put Brendan, Stuart [too little to leave] and Maureen to mind Stu into the car and the others all in our house, threatening to murder the lot of them if they misbehaved or went outside, and drove to the hospital. I had to wait till they'd X-rayed [no scans then!] and hospitalized him. One of the doctors had a go at me for allowing my child to climb over a balcony and when I told him it wasn't my child, he then went off at me because I should have minded him more carefully. I hit the roof and told him I was the next door neighbour and wasn't in charge that the kids were alone in the house. When I got home here was Alma sitting in my lounge having a cup of tea, [made by Sue] so she could recover from the shock!

Bob's Mum and Dad came up on the bus to visit us. We went into Darwin to pick them up, but the bus was a couple of hours late. We waited and waited, Marg was not very well and was cranky so I decided

that I'd take her home and Bob could ring when the bus arrived and I would come back and pick them all up, or he could get a cab. Just as I was walking to the car with Marg, the bus arrived. It was lovely to see them and once more we put the four kids in one bedroom and they had the other. Next morning it became apparent that Marg had the measles, followed a day or so later by the two boys. Sue had had them in PNG so she was OK, but they had them badly. Eyes gummed shut every morning, had to be gently bathed open, really sick little kids. It took all my time to care for them and do the housework and prepare meals, etc. Ma was great, she looked after Sue, they would head off to the beach in the afternoons and walk along collecting shells and bits and pieces, quite happy in each other's company. Ma was wonderful with children, she loved all her grandchildren to bits and was so proud of them and Bob's children were special to her. Pop was always OK, he found little odd jobs to do around the house and could amuse himself. Geoff was building his house by how and Pop was very interested in it, he worked out the size of the house by pacing out the dimensions.



Geoff & Pop, Darwin

Early in 1966 Mum and Dad set out on their world tour. Mum was so happy and excited before they sailed, this was something she had always wanted to do and never thought she would. We rang and spoke to them before they left and she just could not contain her excitement. They sailed on the Southern Cross from Melbourne to England and both enjoyed the six week trip enormously. They met up with most of Dad's relations there, went touring in Europe and England, then crossed the Atlantic on the Queen Mary and then by Greyhound bus all the way across USA. They then sailed from San Francisco to Sydney, arriving on the 27th September.

We had leave due at this stage and talked over whether we'd go to Sydney and meet the ship, then travel back to Melbourne with them on the train, but remembering the last surprise we tried decided we'd better not. I regret that decision so much, it would have

been worth disapproval to have seen Mum and have her see Stuart. They caught the train to Melbourne and Goodalls picked them up at Spencer Street. It was Mum's birthday on the 29th and although I tried to call several times I couldn't get through.

While they were away they had rented the house to Graeme and Beth Mates and the ceiling in the lounge was very dingy with smoke and a few days later on the 4th October, Dad decided to wash the ceiling down with Tricleanium. Mum had a bit of a cold and she sat watching him as he was cleaning. She got up about 3PM and went to make a cup of coffee and they sat down to drink it when she brought it in. Dad said that as she sat down the coffee cup rolled off her lap and she had died. Dad rang the doctor who came straight away, then Aunty Mavis and Uncle Wyn, who came over too. After the doctor left, he rang me. I heard his voice on the phone and was excited to hear from him, but the first thing he said was, "Sit down somewhere, love" and then he told me Mum had died. I can't remember anything else after he hung up I rang Bob and he came home from work and we went to find Geoff. By then Bob had already arranged for compassionate leave and had booked us onto a Qantas flight to Melbourne leaving 2.00AM Thursday and Geoff on to one leaving Darwin early on the 5th October. Arrived in Melbourne and someone minded you kids, [I have no recollection of who] as Dad wanted us to see Mum. So we went up to Le Pines and were shown into a room with a coffin in it. I looked at Mum and it wasn't anything like her, I almost said to Dad that there must have been a mistake, that wasn't my Mum. She had gone very grey since I last saw her and I really thought it wasn't her. But when I looked at her properly of course I could see it was her. She had been home a week on the day she died and although she had her wonderful trip [for which I am eternally grateful] she never had the pleasure of the "remember when" times afterwards when you have shared a trip.

The next day, Friday, was the funeral and I remember very little of it except the service was at Le Pines in Box Hill and the committal at Springvale. And the minister, Harold Chambers, a close Masonic friend of Dad's was late! On the following Monday we took Geoff out to Essendon [Tullamarine wasn't built then] and put him on the plane for Darwin. Dad got a huge amount of sympathy cards every day the kids would come in from the mailbox with a pile of cards and Dad and I would sit and open them and cry. Marg, whose birthday was only a few days after the funeral was heard to say rather wistfully, "Dandan gets a lot of birthday cards"

When Bet and Jack weren't at the funeral I guessed they didn't know. In those days one didn't ring around as we do now, you relied on the newspaper notice and word of mouth. So on the day after, Saturday, we went to Springvale Road to their home. Bet opened the door and said, "What a lovely surprise, I guess you've come down to see your Mum and Dad" I don't know what we said but she and Jack were so upset at not knowing and having missed the funeral. We had only been back at Dad's place a few minutes when they came around. Jack said to Dad, "What can I say Ron, we didn't know." They had been going along Thames St on the day before and when they crossed Nelson Rd they looked up and saw a lot of cars at our place and remarked that Mum and Dad must be home, but it was the people coming back after the funeral.

Mum had written to me once a week all the time they were away and I had kept all the letters. Geoff asked if he could borrow them and read them. That night Gwynne and he had a row because he was reading letters and she wanted him to do something else, so next day she grabbed them and burnt all my letters.

We stayed a couple of weeks and then Dad drove us out to the airport, I hated leaving him, he could make a cup of tea but that was about the extent of his culinary capabilities. I was upset at leaving him and a bit depressed over Mum and was in floods of tears when it came time to say goodbye and we left, I was still crying uncontrollably by the time we landed at Adelaide. I strongly suspect that Dad was quite happy to see us go, he probably went to see Peg on the way back from the airport. The flight left Adelaide for Darwin at about 9.30PM and landed at Darwin at 1AM. I heard Sue ask the steward, "Could my sister and I have another glass of orange juice, please?" Such a seasoned little traveller was she.

Dad came up to Darwin for Christmas and told me that he and Peg were getting married, [about 9 weeks after Mum died] I was happy for him but my heart ached for my Mum. He must have decided to make a clean sweep because before he came up he lit the incinerator and burnt all the family photos except two and he didn't even give those to me, Peg destroyed them later on. I know they survived because I saw them in a cupboard in 1968 and I wish I'd nicked them before she had the chance to destroy them.

He and Peg were married in April 1967 and she proceeded to give all my baby stuff to Janice along with the things from my glory box that was still at Dad's house. Mum and Dad had been using my laminex table and chairs from when they remodeled the kitchen and I was to get a new set when we finally returned to Melbourne. We were also to get a washing machine as a belated wedding present. All Bob's sisters said they would wait and buy us wedding gifts when we came home too, so we never saw anything from any of them. When Peg wanted new stuff, nothing of Mum's, Dad asked what I'd like him to do with it and as it couldn't be brought to Darwin I asked him to give it to Myra Goodall next door, who had been very good to him when Mum died. He later informed me that he'd given it to Janice for their BEACH HOUSE as Myra had enough. This is the Janice and Peter that Peg was always so fond of telling me, could buy and sell us a dozen times over and had a huge double storey house in the best part of Heidelberg!

When she and Dad came up the following Christmas she told me that she would see Geoff and got nothing from our father when he died, [I bet she was snaky that he lived so long!] Dad told me not to talk about money as it made Peggy think that we would think she was doing us out of his money. Well she was, love is surely blind. He also told me I wasn't to mention Mum as it might upset her. I did really try, when it came time for their wedding, I knew Dad had always wanted a soda siphon, to add soda to his whisky so I looked around the shops in Darwin and found the one I wanted to give him, [the nicest one!] and took down the details. I bought a lovely wedding card and sent it to Myers in Melbourne, [we had an account there] with a letter asking them to gift wrap it specially, attach the card and deliver it to Peg at her flat. And she didn't even wait for him to be there to unwrap it!

It's funny but the last time I was home Mum had hinted that something was going on between Dad and Peg, but I of course, could never see anything wrong with Dad and didn't take much notice. [Sorry, Mum] Mum and Dad were very good to Peg when Len died, she was lonely and wanted to go back to England, [pity she didn't,] but Janice had a boyfriend and wouldn't go and Ian wasn't keen either. Ian was unfortunately caught in crossfire, Dad really didn't want him and Peg only wanted what Dad wanted. He was a very lonely boy, a bit of a mummy's boy and was still sleeping with his mother, so Dad really messed things up for him. I remember him first as a cute two year old, very blonde. I often wonder whether, had she lived, Mum and Dad would have stayed married or whether Dad would have opted for a divorce. I guess Peg was younger and more attractive but it is hard to be objective, even now. Mum did all the hard yards and the tough times, and Dad could be very hard, and Peg got it all so easy. When she wanted new clothes or shoes she'd just say I'll have to get a job and Dad would hand over a cheque for it. She never paid a cent towards her travelling expenses; Mum had to save for all hers. She kept at Dad till he changed his will and included Janice and Ian in it.

Anyhow life goes on and we had settled [we thought] permanently in Darwin. After Mum's death we had second thoughts, I was worried about Dad being on his own, [how naïve was I?] and also Bob's parents weren't getting any younger.

On the 17 December 1967, Bob mowed the lawns, we used to make all you kids stay upstairs for safety and that day he had on a shirt that was literally falling to bits. I ripped it a bit more and soon was chasing him around the yard ripping his shirt off in bits. You all thought it was funny, but weren't sure Bob did too so it wasn't until you saw him laughing that you knew he thought it funny too. I can fix the date exactly because it was the day that Harold Holt, the Australian Prime Minister went missing from Cheviot Beach.

Geoff, Bob and I concreted all the space under the house, a huge job that took several weekends to finish but you kids had a dry place to play when the Wet came. Bob put swings and clothes lines under the back part. The boys had little ride on plastic tractors with trailers that hooked on the back and they played with them all the time. Stu was belting around one day and hit a rock, tipped up and went over the handlebars and skidded on his face. He skinned his forehead, nose and chin, looked a mess for a week or so, but it didn't stop him. Sue got a full size bike that Christmas and on Christmas Day was proudly riding it up and down the newly metalled road and fell off. She was gravel rash from head to foot and spent several days just lying on a deck chair until it healed up a bit.

Stuart used to suck the two middle fingers on his right hand when we were shopping I'd say, "Hold my hand Stu" and he'd sort of turn his hand up so I could grasp a finger. When he went to bed at night he'd turn his pillow so the envelope was up, lie on his right side with his fingers in his mouth and "slip" the edge of the pillow slip with his left hand. He also slipped his shirt collar if nothing else was available and would pull my collar out and slip that if I was holding him. For all the experts who say children never hurt themselves when having a tantrum, I would like to have introduced them to my darling Stuart!



He would flop on the concrete and bash his head till it bled. One day we walked to the post box on the corner of Knight St. [about 20 metres] and he posted the letters and when we turned to walk back he said, "Carry me" and I said, "No, you can walk" at which he went down and bashed his head on the bitumen footpath. But he always was a tidy child, he liked his things in order, Billy was always in his barrel and the male threads were always on the same side and all his stacking toys were in the right order.

I would start to lay-by Christmas presents for the kids in July and in 1966 had put away a climbing frame with a slide and tent attached a quad swing and a quad seesaw. Dad was up that year, it was the Christmas after Mum died and Dad told me he was marrying Peg. So on Christmas Eve we had to get four very excited kids to bed and to sleep before the guys could start erecting the gym equipment. Geoff, Ron, Flub, Jan and Geoff were there as well as Bob and Dad. By the time you were all asleep the guys were "ticking" nicely, well primed with beer and Christmas spirit. We did get it together eventually and it was a huge success. The kids would hang their stockings on their beds and one year when the girls were about 6 and 4 they put them there and we sat waiting, waiting, waiting for them to go to sleep. Finally about 2AM they accidentally went to sleep. We ran around and did the Santa thing and fell into bed exhausted, only to be woken at 4.30 AM by and excited Marg saying, "Wake up Susan, Santa's been" Could have killed them cheerfully!

We spent a lot of Sundays at the pool, the girls and Bob in the big pool, the boys and me in the wading pool. It was a good time of our lives; we had a bit of social life with Francie and Bill, Jan and Geoff, Ron, Flub, Bob and Gloria and Geoff. We worked on the house whenever we got some spare cash, did a bit of landscaping and altered the driveway, planted lawn etc. It was funny to watch the neighbourhood children when the dry season finally broke and the rains came. They went completely feral, run outside in just shorts or togs getting soaking wet, screaming and yelling with excitement and delight, roll in the gutter and any mud they could find and eventually come inside with chattering teeth and blue with cold!

One day when Bob had finished mowing the lawns, he poked at a flat rock in the lawn and got the pick because it annoyed him when he mowed. We started about 11AM and finished about 5PM with a rock about 1 metre in diameter! Then we had to smash it into usable size rocks as it was too big to do anything with it. It took about two weeks to reduce it to smaller pieces.

Andy started kindy when he turned four and I had big troubles. He loved it.....as long as I was there. As soon as I made to leave he would panic and the teacher had to peel him off my leg and I'd walk out with his screams ringing in my ears. After a couple of weeks I couldn't take it any more so told the teacher that I'd bring him back after Christmas. Next year he was no better but I knew I'd have to tough it out or I'd never get him to school. So I did fruit and milk almost every day and Stuart went to kindy for the year without having to pay for him. Stuart loved it and Andy finally came to accept it but he was happier if I hung around. As long as I was visible he was quite happy, even at birthday parties, but I had to be there or he'd follow me home as soon as I left.

One year, just before Easter, an RAAF Canberra Bomber did an emergency landing as his undercarriage was stuck. He did a belly landing without, of course, brakes. He slid the entire length of the runway without doing too much damage, but went off the end and wiped out the DCA Instrument Landing System, [ILS] which was on the grassed area near the fence. The RAAF does not use ILS so they were OK, but it makes landing large, civil aircraft more difficult and hazardous. DCA dismantled the ILS at the training school in Melbourne, loaded it on to the DCA plane and shipped it to Darwin. The guys worked all over the Easter break to get the replacement system installed, tested and flight tested by the DCA plane. Stretchers and meals were brought in and none of the guys went home, when they were hungry they ate, when they were tired they slept, got up and went back to the job. It took four days of almost nonstop work to get it up and running again.

Another day Bob was in a DCA vehicle waiting to cross the main runway and he was watching a 747 on final approach. The control tower controls all vehicles and people on the airport as well as all aircraft. As it drew level with the car, the pilot “wrapped” i.e. full throttles and up as close to vertically as a 747 can, he must have been almost at the committal point past which he cannot lift quickly enough and is committed to land the aircraft. When Bob looked in the other direction, an RAAF plane was trundling down the runway from the other end. He had called in a “mayday” and said he was almost out of fuel and must land, but when they dipped his tanks after landing he still had 10 minutes flying time left. This is a huge offence and had he been a commercial pilot would have been in a lot of trouble but because he was RAAF nothing more was heard of it.



Another incident occurred when one of the comm. Officers had been calling the ATC tower for ages. He called and called and no one answered and he said “Mayday, mayday, mayday” into the mike and they sure heard that. All hell broke out, fire sirens, fire trucks with horns blaring and emergency vehicles all screamed out on to the tarmac, the whole works. Boy did he get into trouble over that, but everyone got a good practice run.

When we looked at the education system in Darwin and given that we had four reasonably intelligent children for whom we desired the best and that involved university if and when they wanted. There was only one High School and opportunities for further education at tertiary level were non-existent and to attend University would mean Melbourne or Adelaide. Job opportunities were also very limited and not what we wanted for our children. A clerk in the government, a hairdressing or mechanic apprentice or a job behind the counter in a shop. If you were lucky, because there was more kids than jobs. Couldn’t send a child to Uni in Melbourne now Mum was no longer there. Bob’s parents were too old and I wouldn’t have trusted my precious children to any of his sisters. Adelaide on their own? Scary stuff for people who’d shared literally their children’s entire lives, they had never been away from us for even a night.

So Bob started to apply for jobs in Adelaide and was promoted to Regional Maintenance Inspector for South Australia/ Northern Territory. Because Bob did not have Leaving or Matriculation [year 11 or 12] he could never get any higher than he now was in the government. He always resented this and I think it was the reason he aspired to University for his own children. In 1968 we moved to Adelaide. We rented the house out, couldn’t sell it until we’d owned it for 5 years and had to leave most of our furniture there. We had repainted the house inside, brushes [before the days of rollers,] and put in a HWS. Oh how we’d have liked that while we were there, no more cold baths for the kids or cold showers for us! We did the outside paint work, mainly the steel columns that the house was built on, with runway paint, which was white so Bob bought stainers and coloured it green, otherwise [he said] planes might try to land there.

By the time we finished I really didn't want to leave it. There were 396 louvres in that house, Ma counted them while she was there. Bob sold the ute and we got Ron Blackmore, who was a mechanic at Fanny Bay Motors, to overhaul the station wagon for us. He came to our house the night after he'd done the car with a handful of worn out bearings and steering bits. He really got stuck into Bob for allowing his wife and kids to drive around in a very unsafe vehicle, I could have lost the steering at any time.



4 Knight St, Fanny Bay, 2012

Down to Adelaide

We set out with you four kids, the dog and enough clothes to get us to Adelaide and a short distance down the track started to have problems with the car, the spark plugs were oiling up. At Adelaide River we bought another set of plugs and kept changing them as they oiled up and I washed the spares in a billy of kerosene as we drove. Apparently Ron had given an apprentice the job of replacing the oil and he'd put detergent oil in instead of ordinary motor oil. We stayed that night with Di and Col Bremner who were now in Tenant Creek, and then a few miles south of the Devil's Marbles something went really wrong. We had broken part of the steering, we pulled over and had a look. Bob got a piece of fencing wire [cut it from a property fence] and roughly wrapped it around the [I think] wishbone and whatever else you can wrap it around. We arrived at Barrow Creek and told our tale of woe to the publican there, he rang the mine and the mechanic there said bring it out and I'll see what I can do. Bob and the publican drove out to the mine and the kids and I ate the most delicious corned beef and tomato sandwiches I have ever tasted. Of course we were very hungry and it was easy to see Bob wasn't eating with us as there was tomato in them. The problem with the car was not repairable the best he could do was weld something to something else and thought that would get us to the Alice. It did. The only way we could drive a straight line was to keep the wheel on hard right lock. Left turns were easy but the right ones were difficult to say the least. Fortunately the Stuart is fairly straight. We finally made it into Alice Springs having had about 20 creek and river crossings as well as the mechanical problems, not bad for the old girl. Fell into bed in a motel that night and loaded the car and ourselves on to the old Ghan next morning and had the trip to Port Augusta to relax. We then had to get from Port Augusta to Adelaide but after the previous day this was easy.

Stuart always said, "I never had turkey" and I don't know what the attraction was because I don't think any of us had had it. So that night on the train Bob ordered turkey for him and when it came and he was told that this was turkey, he hoed in. After he said to Bob it tasted like chicken. We did the change at Moree again and into Port Augusta next day. Set out right away for Adelaide reaching there just on dark, drove in to the first motel we came to, [Scotty's] and booked in. While Bob and I unloaded the car and got fish and chips for tea you kids had settled down to watch your first ever episode of "Star Trek"

Our good friends Rose and Bert Ellis had moved to Adelaide by now and first thing next morning Bob rang Bert and they headed off to see Bert's brother-in-law who, providentially, owned a car sales place. So Bob arrived home about lunch time with a 1964 EH Holden station wagon. It was a column shift automatic and, wait for it, it had lap seat belts in the front, bench seat. We went to the Commonwealth Bank to get a loan to buy a house. We didn't anticipate any problems; we had banked at CBA all our lives. Wrong! Because we already owned a house, albeit the house was in Darwin and we were to live in Adelaide, a second home was speculation and they could not possibly lend for that. Their advice was to put \$4000 in the bank, add to it each month and come back in two years.

Bill and Francie Lavender had moved to Adelaide and Bill's uncle was selling his house in an inner suburb of Adelaide and Bill took Bob over to see it. It had a big bungalow out the back beautifully set up with a full size billiard table, which alone would have sold Bob on the house. The house itself was old but well maintained and Bob did a handshake deal with the uncle. I hadn't seen the house at this stage; Bob took us over next day. Bert Ellis took us to the Bank of New South Wales in Hutt St. Adelaide, where he knew the manager and we left with approval to borrow the money necessary. Bill's uncle got a better offer and the deal fell through. I wasn't rapt in the house, but it would have been OK and it was close to the city and would have done us. So we began looking for a house, we were living in Ron Blackmore's beach shack at Maslin's Beach and came up every day to search for a suitable house to buy. We looked at several and each time we came out of the house we were inspecting four heads would pop out of the



Marg and Luath outside Ron's beach house

car and shout, "Are we going to buy THIS one?" We finally found 46 Angas Cres, in Marino and decided it would do. It had 4 bedrooms, kitchen, lounge-dining room and a good sized bungalow behind the house. We bought it on a 30 day settlement for \$10,000. Then we had to find somewhere to live for 30 days as the beach shack really wasn't adequate. Dad said we could stay at their place, they were going away for two weeks anyhow, so we went there.



I asked Dad if I could have Mum's cups and saucers, they were very special to her and I reckoned I deserved something of hers. Peg was wearing Mum's jewellery, even the earrings that Geoff and I had sent for their pearl wedding anniversary. Peg made Dad go out and replace what I took and I hadn't taken any of Mum's beautiful crystal, things that had been wedding presents to her and Dad, I strongly suspect they went to Janice as I never saw them again. Jan and a friend came over one day to take Peg shopping and they walked into the kitchen and totally ignored Bob and me, talked to Peg and then the three of them went off.

We rang the agent and settlement was scheduled for 9AM on the following Tuesday. So we went back to the shack for a couple of nights and Bob arranged with DCA stores to deliver our things on that morning. When we arrived to collect the keys from the agent, he said, "There's a bit of a hitch, she won't move out till the weekend." After I peeled Bob off the ceiling, the agent rang the woman and said that as from 9AM the house was no longer hers and she should have been out the day before. We were outside the house, with the agent inside explaining the basic facts of life to her when the DCA truck pulled up. She couldn't see what all the fuss was about; after all it was only four or five days. The agent said we were from interstate and had nowhere to live and she said, "Well, that's their problem not mine." He told her that no, it was actually her problem and she had to get out NOW. He rang a firm of removalists and she ranted and raved to all the neighbours about being thrown out of her own home and when it was pointed out that it was no longer her home she said, "Where am I to go?" By this time I really didn't care, we just wanted to move in. We finally got in about 4PM, the packers had started at one end and as they cleared one room we moved our stuff in.

It was a nice house, I really liked it and we could have done a lot with it when the finances eased up. Well actually when the five years was up and we could sell the Darwin house. It had lovely kitchen windows that overlooked to ocean and it was bright and sunny. There was a carport beside the kitchen under the roof line so we could have extended the kitchen out and made a lot more space. It had a circular built in table and we visited the second hand shops and bought 6 mismatched wooden chairs, painted the room and chairs in a pale lime green put in a big pantry cupboard and tiled the floor in white. The hallway was very dark and we bought an 8 pane glass door for light. Rose and Bert gave us a huge wardrobe for the boy's room and we had to actually cut it in half to get it into the room, mainly to get around the bend in the hall. After a while I noticed that there was a piece of the plastic building set at each doorway, one to each room. Then I realised that Stu was too short to reach the light switches and this was his way of overcoming the problem.





Kids all dressed up for a fancy dress competition

We started the kids at the local school, Seacliff Primary, Andy for the first time, he was in Grade 1, Marg in Grade 3 and Sue in Grade 5. They wore nice uniforms, the girls had McBeth tartan pinafores, white shirts, McBeth ties and royal blue jumpers. Andy had grey pants, royal blue and white striped shirt, McBeth tie and Royal blue jumper. They looked so smart going off to school. I bought Andy a sleeveless jumper but he wouldn't wear it because it was broken! If I bought him something new it had to hang around the bedroom for a few weeks until it wasn't new anymore.

Stuart was very good at amusing himself. He no longer had an afternoon sleep but I'd settle him on the floor in the lounge, with his jigsaws and a Disney tape on and he would play happily for ages. He got so good at the puzzles he could do them with the cardboard backs up instead of the picture, he knew where each shape fitted. He played a lot with Trudy from next door and once when Marj, Trudy's mum was having a cup of tea with me, we remarked how good the kids were only to find out the reason later, they'd been under Sue's bed and had eaten a whole box of chocolates that she had been given for her birthday. He'd watch for the baker and the postman and run out and get the bread or mail. After one school holidays I said to him the day before they went back, "You'll miss the big kids when they go back, won't you love?" "No," says he, "I won't have to take turns with postie and the baker!"

One Christmas holidays the kids all got chicken pox and, as we couldn't go to the beach, we bought a 12' wide by 3' deep pool. It was a huge success. One morning I looked out and saw the cat balancing on the edge of the pool trying to fish something out of the water and she fell in. I had never seen a cat doing freestyle, but she did, the whole way across the pool and got out the far side. We had got Sam as a kitten and she was a dear little thing. We had a paddock behind us and a lot of field mice. The first time she caught a mouse she came running back with it in her mouth to show us and the dog, Luath, got excited too and he grabbed the mouse from her and ate it! Also one holidays I took you all to see "Camelot" at the Glenelg Theatre and in a quiet moment when someone was creeping up on Lancelot, Andrew shouted, "Behind you, Lancelot!" and brought the house down.

We saw quite a lot of Murray and June Weaver whom we had known at Momote. Murray bred and raced pigeons, Bob knocked up a cage and Murray gave us some pigeons. We had eggs and baby pigeons and I have never seen anything quite as ugly as a pigeon squab. One morning we found that cats had got to the cage and that was the end of the pigeons.

We settled in, we had several nice neighbours, Joyce Baxter next door, Wendy Castle over the back and Pat Woodhouse up the road a bit and a mob of kids around as well. Ma and Pop had been over and we'd put up a double metal garage and Pop dug me a huge vegetable patch and we planted it with veggies and herbs. He planted a couple of fruit trees as well. Bob had bought a motor scooter to ride to work, easier and faster than the train. At this time Bob was responsible for radio maintenance inspection over SA/NT region and he enjoyed driving or flying around to all the towns. He usually flew one way and drove the other, there were always cars needing to be shifted around. One of the guys, Graeme Currie had been to Antarctica several times and had been awarded the Queen's Antarctic Medal, but it was a standing joke in DCA that whenever the current girlfriend became serious, Graeme would disappear to Antarctica for twelve months. At that time it was an isolated post, no mail, no phone, just ice.

Ma's problems were getting worse; she went in once a year to have the bladder cauterized to remove the growths from inside it. Eventually the wall of the bladder became too thin for this procedure and it was discontinued. The bladder filled up with the growth and it got to the stage that she could only hold 15mls of urine before she would have to go to the toilet. Measure 15mls into a glass and see how little it is and your body makes that in about 5 minutes. So then there was a catheter and a bag, but it made her life a misery. Nancy rang us one night to tell us that she'd been operated on and cured, the doctors had put a tube from her bladder to her bowel. We knew this could not be true, we weren't doctors but it was blindingly obvious that this was only a temporary thing to give her some relief. Bob decided we'd have to go to Melbourne so we farmed you kids out for the weekend. Sue to Joyce, Marg to Wendy, Andy to Pat and Stu to Rose and Bert. We set out Friday after work and drove all night. When we got Bob's sisters together, none of them had any idea that she was terminally ill. She'd gone from about 90 kg to 40 kg but they didn't realise it was because she was ill. Bob tried to tell his father but he wouldn't listen, "the doctor told me she'd get better." We got home Sunday night, knowing we'd be going back fairly soon.

About this time, Les Melempre, who was Bob's immediate superior at DCA was transferred to Melbourne as Regional Director. He asked Bob to come over as RMI for Vic/Tas region. Les wanted Bob and as he was the new boss he could put whomsoever he liked in the job as long as they met the criteria and Bob certainly did that, probably more than any other STRM in DCA. But Bob knew that if he got the job someone in Melbourne would miss out and that it would cause a lot of ill feeling among the men who'd be working for him. He had already applied for a job with Collins Radio, he knew Reg Morkham there [from PNG days] and after being flown over to do an interview, he had got the job. He went to Les and explained his position and Les agreed to keep the job offer open for 6 months. So we took a big breath and the plunge and went from the security of the government to private enterprise. Bob applied for all his leave owing plus 3 months LWOP and gave himself 6 months to find out if it was what he wanted.

When we were in Adelaide, about once a month, Stu and I would drive into the city and have lunch or morning tea at John Martin's cafe. I'd look around and there'd be a family group of Grandma, Mum and a couple of children and I was sad and envious because I never got to do that with my Mum.



Back to Melbourne - Lilydale

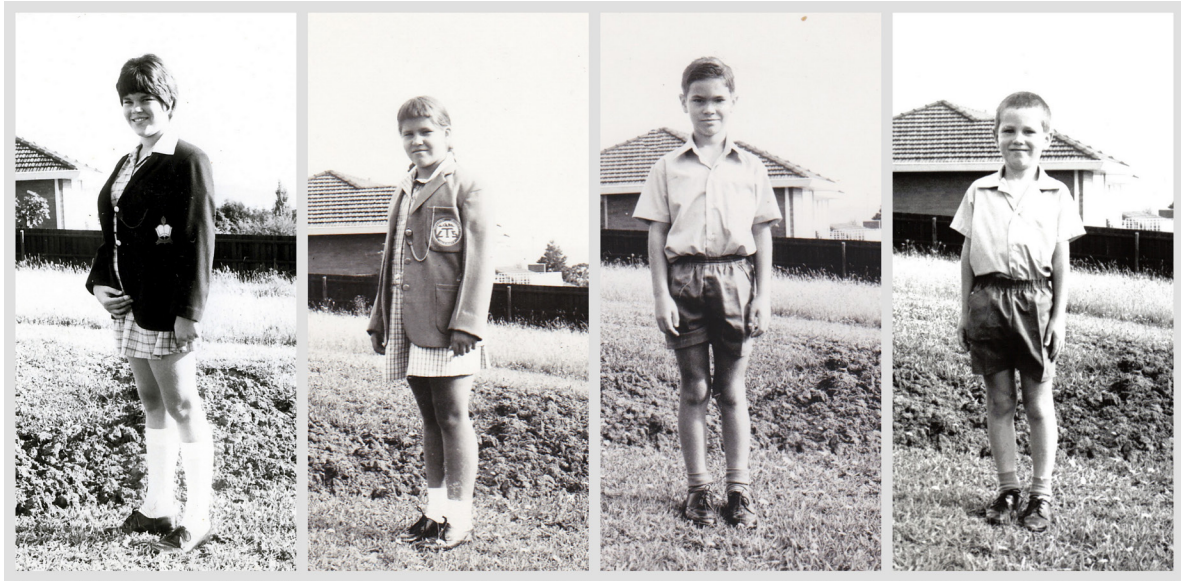
We put the house on the market, sold it for \$15000, packed and moved most of our things to Melbourne. On the day of settlement the buyers pulled out of the contract. Bob had to start work in Melbourne the following Monday so he had to go. We had mattresses on the floor to sleep on and basically nothing else. Bob sent the fridge and washer back on the railway and we continued to try and sell the house. We eventually did sell, I think for \$13,500 and this time we would not sign a conditional contract. We had learned that lesson very well. Bob took a couple of days off work and came over on the Friday and we packed the rest of the things and a carrier took them off and we set out for Melbourne. Bob had looked at several houses while he was there on his own but none really appealed, we found a nice house in Victoria Rd Lilydale, signed a contract and went to the caravan park at Healesville to wait out the month of the contract. We moved in in early June.



55 Victoria Rd, Lilydale

Two weeks later Ma died. Pop had steadfastly refused to believe she was dying and was inconsolable. He really lost the will to live at this point. Ma had been in Prince Henry's Hospital for some weeks and she had developed septicaemia. We saw her a few hours before she died, she was very flushed and whatever medication they were giving her had made her face puff up a bit and she looked quite good. She was in a coma by then, Bob and the doctor took Pop off to a quiet room to try to get him to realise she was dying and Bill and I stood at the end of the bed just holding hands and watching this dear, dear lady slowly relinquishing her grip on life. In the end it was a blessing, she had struggled for so long and endured so much and at last she was at peace. She died a couple of hours later. All the way home in the car and for months after Pop's cry was, "The doctors told me she'd get better, she'd be all right and I believed them!" He never got over her death and I think if could have swapped the lives of his children and grandchildren to have her back he would have done it willingly. He had an argument with Aunt Betty, he reckoned she'd said something derogatory about Ma, [she had been pregnant with Jean when they married] he had more disagreements with Aunt May and even had dear Uncle Fred in the gun. He was agin the whole world and it was agin him. About the only time I saw your father cry was when Pop got stuck into him at one stage. We were clearing away things from the house in Green St and [I think] Gwen came in and said that Pop had reduced Bob to tears; I don't know what it was over as Bob would never tell me. Uncle Fred was too upset to conduct the funeral service and Alan Thomson, Bob's cousin did the service and it was nice to hear him speak of Aunt Mabel and Uncle Bob, much more personal.

1970 was not a good year for Bob's family, Uncle Alf Guy died about the time we came across to Melbourne, then his mother in June and also two of his aunts. Two of my rellies died also and all we seemed to do was put on our funeral clothes and go to yet another funeral.



Anyhow, we started the kids at their new schools, Sue at Lilydale High, Marg, Andy and Stuart at Lilydale Primary. There were 4 kids next door and their parents were Peter and Doreen Reed. Doreen and I became good friends and about this time I realised that I was pregnant again. I was pleased, because despite the morning sickness I liked being pregnant and I love babies, Bob not quite so happy. When I told Dad and Peg she said, "I suppose you'll want your cot and high chair back from Janice, it's not fair, she's expecting too, you know." I said to her that I had never given my things away, she had. They were building the house at Healesville at the time and went up on the weekends so Dad could work on it. They had a bed in the little shed he built first and slept there. They called in at our place on the way home every Sunday night, about 5.30 PM just in time for drinks and tea.



Bob and I at the Collins Radio Christmas Party, 1970

Peg told me when we came back to Melbourne not to expect her and Dad to babysit the children as that was not her thing. When we wanted to go to the Collins Christmas Dinner, we talked it over with Sue and Marg and with Doreen popping in several times they managed to keep the boys in line. We had a lovely night out and the kids were really good. We had had a mixed reception when we told them about the new baby, Sue's comment was "People your age don't do things like that!" Stu was very excited and pleased but wanted twins.

The boys got bikes for Christmas that year and it was a very wet time and Andy clocked up a hundred kms in the garage, round and round and round. February was very hot and the back of the house faced west, even with the bamboo blinds we put up outside it was still hot in the kitchen late in the day. As you all know, Bob would not eat salad and by the time I'd cooked a hot meal I couldn't eat it, so I usually had a pine-lime splice ice cream. I'd sit on the front verandah with the sprinkler playing over my feet and legs and try to keep cool. It was a long hot summer and I thought it would never end. We had booked tickets for the Great Moscow Circus for about the 20th March, as Karen was due on the 26th February but it got later and later and I began to think I wouldn't make it. She was born on the 12th March an hour after I got to the hospital and before the doctor arrived. I had chosen a private room, as I didn't want to be bothered with a lot of other people around. I was talking with one young girl in the showers one day and she remarked how lonely I must be on my own and they'd all come up with their babies and keep me company. I had a hard time making her understand that with 4 children already at home I really liked the peace and quiet. Karen was a good little baby [actually, you all were] and things were settling down nicely, I was due to go home the next day when John Middleton, our doctor, wandered in and sat on the end of the bed. He hummed and haahed a bit and finally said I couldn't go home for another few days as Marg had developed a gastric wog. I finally got home two days before the circus which was bloody wonderful. [The circus, not getting home! Although that was pretty good too] Doreen had a lovely time minding Karen. When Karen and I came home from hospital it was still very hot and the next Saturday Bob went out and bought an air conditioner to keep the baby cool!



On the 15th June, the first anniversary of Ma's death, Stuart and Karen were christened by Uncle Fred at his little granny flat behind his daughter's [Gwen Brockhouse] home. There were just us and Uncle Fred and Auntie Elsie and Gwen had made a lovely afternoon tea for us. Karen looked beautiful, she had the Christening robe I had made for Sue and Marg, little frilly lace socks and a pair of tiny lace trimmed shoes, actually they were the only thing Peg and Dad gave her. Uncle Fred died a week later, his funeral was on the Tuesday and Auntie Elsie died on the following Friday.

When we were first home from hospital things were a bit grim about 5.30 -6.00PM as Karen was tired and restless and I would be getting tea cooked. I'd hear her grizzling in the bassinet in the bedroom and then there'd be silence and when I peeped in Stu would be rocking her and talking to her. When she was about

3 months old and in her bouncinette, he'd sit beside her reading an encyclopaedia to her, always holding it up so she could see the pictures. He was so good with her. I would have liked to have had another baby soon after Karen so she would have company and not be at the end on her own. Bob did not want another child, by now work was becoming his first priority. It's a shame, when he was with DCA we had a lot of good times all together, he seemed happy and enjoying life and he was well on top of his job, did a fair bit of travel up and down the Stuart Highway in his capacity as RMI/ SA NT division. I often wonder if we had stayed there and he had less pressure whether he'd have lived longer.

Pop became ill and was diagnosed with cancer, I think he'd had it for a long time but it didn't show up much while Ma was alive. It took him about 15 months to die, but if they had invented a cure he wouldn't have wanted it, without his wife he just wanted to die. Bob eventually had to make the decision to stop treatment, the doctor said he could be kept alive indefinitely, but he would not get better. This was before Chemotherapy and radiation treatment. Bob and I discussed it and decided he did not want to go on living, [he told us so enough times] and he died peacefully at the nursing home in Boronia. We did not consult with Bob's sisters; the decision was hard enough without them complicating matters.

Pop had buried money in the garage which had a dirt floor. He did odd jobs, painting and gardening, a bit of concreting, anything that earned him a few bob, for anyone who asked him. He saved that money and that paid for their trips to the West, Darwin, Queensland and Adelaide when they wanted to go away. Fortunately he had told Bob where it was or we'd have had to dig up the whole floor! When Bob got it out he divided it into 6 and gave one sixth to each of his sisters. Pop had made Bob executor of his will and all went well until Dorothy and Nancy both wanted the same two lounge chairs. Neither would relinquish their claim and nor would they split and take one each. After a month or so of getting nowhere, we loaded the chairs and some other furniture and took them to the auction rooms at Croydon Market and sold them at auction. That, of course, was also wrong and they had Bob firmly in their sights and made life pretty bad for a few months. At this time the installation phase of the Tels 49/66 started and we had drawn Townsville and Amberley and we were glad to get away from the family disharmony in Melbourne, for which we got the blame. Don't know why; we were the ones who had to take out a loan to pay for Pop's funeral.

Blackburn South

By now the Lilydale house was a bit small and we talked about extending the house but eventually decided to move. We found a lovely clinker brick, five bedroom house in Blackburn South and bought it first time we saw it. I loved that house, it's the only one that I cried over when we moved on. We started the girls at Blackburn South High and the boys at Mirrabooka State School.

When it looked like he would have to go to Queensland for a job for an extended period of time, Bob wanted to go up on his own, re-assuring me he'd be home every six weeks for a week's break. His excuse was that because of the cyclone which had damaged Townsville that Christmas there was no accommodation to be had, [although the Wests and Olsons found places to rent]. I knew what would happen- the job would run late and he would be required to work through. I flatly refused to take sole responsibility for 5 children for nine months at least that the contract would run. I knew I'd be lucky if he got one leave!

After a lot of fairly heated discussion and disagreement, we settled for a caravan. We went out early on Sunday morning to look at flip out vans at a place at Moorabin on Nepean Highway. We got there just on nine and the place wasn't open. We waited and waited and finally Bob got so mad he took the afterhours number from the sign and went to find a phone box to ring and give the bloke a piece of his mind about not opening on time. He came back a bit shamefaced and said it was the end of daylight saving and he'd



2 Grenville Crt, Blackburn Sth

put the clocks forward an hour instead of back and we'd arrived at 7AM instead of 9AM. We finished up at Croydon and bought an 18'6" Franklin van. It had a double bed at the front, kitchen/dining area



in the middle and four bunks at the back, with just enough space for a small collapsible cot between the bunks. I know it wasn't fair on you kids, but I didn't have a lot of confidence in my capabilities then and I thought it was more important for us to be all together. We packed all our belongings into two of the five bedrooms and rented the house as a three bedroom for the nine months.

Gypsies - off to Queensland

We set out on the 15th March, 1972. Stopped at Franklin as Bob didn't think the van was towing well and on their advice, went to a garage in Croydon North and had a new drawbar, overload springs and stabilizer bars fitted. It cost \$49.10; we filled the Ford Fairmont Station Wagon for \$4.75. We finally left at 11.30 arrived Yea 12.30 and Jerilderie at 5.10PM. Went to a café where the boys and Bob had steak and eggs, the girls and I, chicken and chips. Next morning we went through Narrandera, petrol at Ardlethan on to West Wyalong where we bought food and ate it at Bland Creek. Stopped at Parkes for car parts and had to pull over 17 kms south of Peak Hill for a long, wide load. Stopped at Tomingly for fuel and then into Dubbo for the night. We had Chinese food for tea and Andy was sick all night. It

was 9 years that day [17th March] since we sailed from New Guinea. Next day we got bad cross winds but made it to Gilgandra OK. Coming through the Warrumbungle ranges we lost the transmission fluid and had to stop, luckily we were at the Wallumburrawang Creek Rest Stop, complete with waterfall! Bob hitched a ride to Coonabarrabran, came back with a mechanic and transmission fluid and we got to Coonabarrabran Caravan Park. The car and Bob went to the garage and they fixed the leak so we could get on our way next day. \$10.00 for the job and the car and mechanic, transport back to our car and replacement fluid. Off again next day to Goondiwindi, we had stopped at Moree and bought sandwiches and drinks but no place to stop till Goondi. We had 18 miles of unmade road, hard, rough gravel before Goondi, on again to Moonie and another 40 miles of rough, gravel, pot holey road. When we finally arrived at Dalby about 7PM, we were all tired and dirty, and all the clothes I had so carefully ironed were in a heap at the bottom of the wardrobe. I cried, Bob got cross. Departed Dalby next day, low in petrol, no service stations open, none at Bell either, got some standard fuel from a private pump and crossed our fingers we would get through. [This was before petrol stations opened long hours or all night and in Queensland they closed Saturday arvo and Sunday] The chap told us the road was very bad. Got food at Kumbia and had to pull off the road to eat. Arrived Maryborough about 4PM and, as it was raining hard in Maryborough, we decided to go on to Childers. At Childers we had our first introduction to sugar cane and cane toads.



Fueled the car and checked the water etc., nice to see the tropical plants once more, frangipani, poincianas, hibiscus and crotons, so I guess there's one good thing to be said for living in lots of different places, one feels at home almost anywhere. Had lunch at Rockhampton and then over some very rough, unmade roads to Barmount, where we made the acquaintance of about 60 million small black beetles and Sue learned that green tree frogs like to live in toilets. From there to Ayr, through Mackay, Proserpine and Bowen. Only 57 miles to go tomorrow. Bob rang Rows Bay Caravan Park and they promised us a site even though they were full up. Then we hit the first snag, no dogs. Had to find a kennel pronto, which we did. Then they told us we could only have two weeks as there was such a shortage of accommodation in Townsville.

We started you kids at school, the boys at Garbutt State School and the girls at Pimlico High School. When I went to enroll the girls they wouldn't accept them as [A] Sue was too young to be in Grade 9 and [B] Margaret was too young to be in High School at all. We had to go to the Education office in town and they had to sit tests, at which it was reluctantly admitted that they were actually at that standard,

even if the testing officer was heard to grumble that they were the youngest children in those grades in Queensland. Garbutt must have been the most poorly equipped school I have ever seen, if the teachers didn't supply equipment then there wasn't any. I was talking to Stuart's teacher, George and mentioned that we were having trouble finding somewhere to park the van and he offered his back yard. If I'd known then what I found out later when we saw the place, I would have packed up and gone home at this point and put up with the loneliness. But of course, we had rented out the house.

Before I would let any of us use the toilet I scrubbed it and disinfected it from top to bottom, it was outdoors and unlined, with a small attached shed, also unlined. Bob put up a bucket shower in the small shed and rigged up a light and that was our ablutions. George had a bath and he filled it with a hose and when finished just pulled the plug and let the water run out over the floor as it wasn't plumbed in. that was also the solution for his little Hoover washing machine you just pumped the water onto the floor and it ran out through the cracks on to the ground about 120Cm below. The neighbours hated us and complained to the council several times but for some unknown reason we were allowed to stay there. George's house had been badly hit with the cyclone and his front verandah was blown clear away, not that the house was great to start with. It was very dirty and I hated the boys being there. He bought a car and as he didn't like the colour he also bought a tin of green paint and handed the boys a brush each and got them to paint it. As they were 7 and 9 it was not a very professional job. The big Townsville Bakery was just down the road and the smell of that fresh baked bread was wonderful. I learned how to make Pavlova from Dot, in Pat Olson's kitchen. She used to make them for a Pavlova kitchen at Croydon.

Bob came home one day and said that Bob Snowdon and his wife Carole had arrived from Sydney and were at Rowes Bay Park. Karen and I went around to the park and found out the site number and knocked on the door. Michael came to the door and told Carole there was a lady to see her. Carole's reply was, [typically], "I don't know anyone in Townsville, tell her to go away" After this inauspicious start we became good friends. Carole was expecting Daryl and was not well; it was only a few months after her second baby had been born at seven months and died. We spent a lot of time together. She was appalled when Bob brought her to George's place to see us, couldn't believe we were living at that dump. Bob and I went to a parent/teacher night at the boy's school. Stuart's report was good, [he was George's pet] but when we got to see Andy's teacher the story was different. She was most disapproving, he wouldn't write copperplate and that was the writing style in Queensland. When I pointed out that he would have to revert to cursive on our return from Queensland, the answer was that while he was in this state he would write copperplate. Also he did not sew his puppet nicely. At this point I thought Bob would explode, he remarked very loudly that Puppet sewing was not high on the list of achievements that he expected from his son. It was not a happy interview.

I would watch the boys coming out of school, Andy with his head down dragging his bag behind him and my heart ached for him, he looked so lonely and unhappy. Stuart on the other hand was in George's class and was his favourite so all the other kids were nice to him. When we did the second stint in Townsville I kept the boys home for about six weeks, George kept telling me the truant officer would come to see me but he never did and I wouldn't have cared if he had. We swam most afternoons either at Tobruk Pool on the Strand or Kokoda, near the girls' school. Most times we had the pool to ourselves it was far too cold for the locals to swim! I'd go to collect the kids from school with Karen already in her togs and me in mine with a shirt over it and we'd go to the shops and everyone else was in track suits and jackets and scarves, it was winter and therefore cold. Karen had learned to walk in the back of the station wagon coming up and now found if she jumped into the pool one of the big kids would catch her, but she took it for granted that if she jumped someone would catch her. A couple of times I had to jump in and grab her but she finally realised that she had to see one of the others there before she leapt.



The kids were swimming well by now and one afternoon Andy decided he'd swim a mile, 32 laps of the pool. He got out one too soon and when he realised he should have finished at the other end, just jumped back in and swam the extra lap. Sue should have done her Bronze one sports day but I didn't know and she didn't tell me. I kept her home that day to mind Karen so I could attend a lunch to farewell Pat and Neil. I'm sorry, Sue.

By now our time at Townsville came to the halfway mark and we left to go to Amberley for our first stint there. We got as far as Mackay the first night and Sue and I had cut a heap of sandwiches for lunch along the way. George had bought a big bag of lollies for the kids so we got there without anyone starving to death. Lots of unmade road between Mackay and Rockhampton, we stopped at the Country Club Park. As soon as we stopped the kids flung themselves into togs and into the pool. We set up the van and organised tea for us all. Parked next to us was a tiny little van with a tiny little car pulling it. As we watched, two very old, very small, very stooped people got out. Bob grinned at me and remarked, "I wonder if travelling in a little van made them look like that?" we started to giggle and finished up inside trying to control our laughter.

Next day was a long trip, dark when we arrived at Forest Glen, all very tired and very hungry. He had to go to Nambour, but Bob got fish and chips and for the first time Karen shared our meal. Next day to Ipswich, late leaving as we had trouble with the jockey wheel and we spent an hour fixing it up. Got to Brisbane and found our way to Ipswich. No space in any of the caravan parks. Went across the back way to Amberley but it was the wrong way and we ended up at the back gate of the RAAF base. The RAAF police arrived and escorted us through the base to the Main Gate. Got directions to the van park which is on the Cumberland Highway, [it's still there] Enrolled the girls at Bremer High School, [the bus passed the gate] and the boys at Amberley Primary right outside the base. Merv and Dot were here, so with Carole and Bob and Kerry and Judy West we had company. The park roads were not sealed and were made of red clay, very little grass about. Judy always dressed her kids in white so you can imagine what they looked like by the end of the day, even after a change at lunch time. When we were in vans in Townsville, Judy and Kerry really looked down their noses at us, they wouldn't live in a caravan, but they had to at Amberley. They had hired a 12' van and had to put the table down to sleep at night. Michael

Snowdon walked in and looked around and said, "Couldn't you afford anything better?"

Carole and I watched as the RAAF permanents as they came from another base. Up would go the annexe, out came the carpet and lounge suite, [with antimacassars] the garden would be unloaded and set up around the van. They had Tupperware parties and card days and morning coffee mornings, things every week. I guess it gave them a sense of normality and permanence in a life of constant moves.

After a few weeks at Amberley school the boys kept asking, "What's Dad do?" and I didn't realise what they meant. It wasn't until they said was he an Officer or an Airman that I twigged that they didn't know who to play with as the two groups played in different sections of the school yard. Andy still remembers the day the F-111s broke the sound barrier over the school and broke all the windows at the school plus, I suspect, all the windows on the base.

We returned for another 3 months at Townsville, back to George's back yard, it wasn't any better. Bob got a cut on his elbow at work and it became infected and developed septicaemia. Of course he would not go to hospital as I wanted and the doctor recommended, he would stay home from work and I would look after him. Which is the way it happened, but difficult given the situation we were living in. We received a telegram to say Murdoch, Gwen's husband had died and Gwen wanted Bob to go down for support at his funeral, but he was not well enough. I rang her from Pat's place and explained but she somehow worked out it was my fault he couldn't come. I finished up in tears, because he was really sick and everything that happened was my fault and if I'd just done what I was supposed to do and stayed home in Melbourne none of this would have happened. I think that was my one act of defiance and I really paid for it. [No, I had my ears pierced without his permission and against his wishes.]

Mum was the dominant person in our house and all I did when I married was to change who did the domineering as Bob liked to get his own way. One of my little outbursts was over the fact that while we had just enough money to cover food and bills, there was always enough for cigarettes and beer. When I, very tentatively suggested that I might have a few dollars allotted for myself, I was told that he was the man of the house, he earned the money and I was provided for and didn't do anything anyhow. Perhaps he was right, but it would have been nice to be able to buy something without being made feel guilty.

Pat and Neil headed off back to USA and we went back to Amberley to finish off the job there. Bob came home late one morning and said, "We're pulling out today" We had to get back to Melbourne ASAP so he could fly to Sydney and do the finish there. We packed the van, I collected the kids from their schools earlier than usual and we set out that afternoon along the Cunningham Highway. Over Cunningham's Gap and on to Glen Innes for the night. It was freezing, never very hot it must have been several degrees below zero. The next day we went to Dubbo, a long day and then we were to go from there to Tocumwal the next day, then home. We got to Tocumwal and it was only afternoon so we decided to go on to Shepparton and at least we would be back in Victoria. We got to Shep and as we now had daylight saving the sun was still quite high in the sky. We looked at each other and said "Let's go home" We stopped at Lilydale, [it was Lilydale show day] and rang our neighbour to make sure the tenants had vacated the house, they had, we so home we went, arriving about 10PM. We unpacked only the necessities that night and got beds etc. from the locked bedrooms. Had to put Karen, Marg and Sue in together as Karen wouldn't sleep on her own after being in a room with the other four kids. Next day was Sunday and we unpacked the van, the bedrooms and put it all back in place. We cleaned the van inside and out and Bob drove it back to the place we'd bought it and put it in storage. This was late November. The guy rang us in December and asked if we would consider renting it out for the Christmas, Easter and Term holidays. We rented it out for a couple of years and then sold it for more than we'd paid for it, Bob had said he'd never go away in a caravan again.

... back to Blackburn South

Bob went to Sydney the next day and the following Saturday, 5th December 1972 was the Federal election, this was the "It's Time" election and Bob wanted to make sure his vote counted. He caught the train from Sydney and we picked him up at Spencer Street Railway station on the Friday night and by Sunday, when we had to take him back the train we had the first Labour government in 23 years. He was home for Christmas and New Year and away again most of January and February in Sydney and Darwin. About this time Carole was getting near to term and couldn't be left alone all day. She had to be with someone with a car and a phone so Bob would drop her and suitcase at our house on his way to work and pick her up on the way home. Bob [mine] remarked one day, "Hang on till the 26th [she was due on the 16th] and the baby will get an Australia Day spoon." Carole nearly hit him, she didn't want to last that long. Of course she did and more, Daryl was born on February 1st. Bob rang to tell me the news and I was so excited I didn't realise it was my birthday as well until I rang Bob in Darwin. He was still in Darwin on our fifteenth wedding anniversary and to my endless amazement a huge parcel came from Myers. It was 5 sets of beautiful crystal glasses, it was just the nicest surprise and so unlike him.

While we were in Lilydale we had adopted a lovely cream Labrador who just happened to turn up on our doorstep. She and our black lab Luath had done the trip to Queensland in the caravan during the day and the annexe or the car at night. Christmas 1972 we bought a beautiful seal point Siamese kitten who we named Nicholas [after St Nick as we got him at Christmas] Bob got his billiard table and we moved the lounge suite into the dining room, luckily we didn't have a dining setting. The Blackburn house was lovely and spacious, 5 bedrooms, two bathrooms and I just loved it. It needed a bit of reno work but it was still the nicest house we ever lived in. I thought we were settled for good in Blackburn, the children were back at their schools and all seemed to be humming along OK.

When Bob came back from the last of the installations in Darwin and Sydney, he was not happy at work. He did not like or get on well with his immediate boss, John Ellis, and after a while he just didn't go to work. I assumed he had time off after being away from home so long, but one day a telegram arrived asking what was his intentions regarding work. I realised all was not what it seemed but he would not discuss it with me.

Into the shops: Five Ways and Cora Lynn

Bet and Jack had bought a shop and Bob decided that that was the way for us to go. I did not want to go into a shop: I was happy, the kids had settled down in school after the last years upheaval and I loved the house and where it was. I couldn't understand him, he would not let me get a job at any time in our married life, not that I particularly wanted to work or had qualifications for anything other than shop or factory work. Yet now I'd be working twelve to fourteen hours a day and still be expected to do everything for the family. Bob went back to work and we looked over several businesses on weekends and he finally decided on the shop at Fiveways. The day we started work there I would have given anything to get out of it. We had to use the kids to work with us along with the staff we had. They were paid for their work and I'm sure helped themselves to the odd icecream or lolly! It was hard work to learn the mail routes, the post office regulations, how to run a newsagency, prices and pricing, the customers and everything that goes to running a business. I don't really think I can say much about the time in the shops, it was a really bad time in my life and is too painful even now to think about it.

But about Christmas 1974 I will talk. Dad and Peg were down at Fiveways with us for Christmas and at the news of a cyclone threatening to cross land at Darwin, I became more and more concerned. I tried endlessly to call Geoff and couldn't get through. I kept saying I was worried and Bob, Dad and Peg just kept on saying don't be stupid, Geoff will be OK, nothing ever happens to Geoff. All Christmas Day the news got worse and worse but still no one but me was worrying. By the time the first pictures came on the news I was worried sick. I started calling the emergency number two or three times an hour but could get no information. The 26th and 27th went by and I still couldn't get any information on Geoff. Finally on the 28th I got a message.....a G.Burgess, no second name or initial, no address, no NOK listed, no injuries listed was due to be evacuated to Sydney on a medical emergency later that day. I rang Directory Assistance and got the numbers for the major hospitals that were taking refugees from Darwin and then started to call. After an hour of being shunted around and getting nowhere I got a number for Win and Bill Dolan and rang them about 10.30PM. They rang back at 2.30AM on the 30th to say they [or rather the Salvation Army] had located Geoff. I heard the phone and went to answer it, it was a huge relief to know that he was alive even if not as good as he could be. Geoff was the only eye case to come out of Darwin and he had been put in the eye ward on the tenth floor at St Vincent's and sort of mislaid. I crawled back into bed and woke Bob to tell him and he told me to go back and ring the airline and book a ticket on the first flight to Sydney, which I did. He knew I wouldn't be happy till I'd seen Geoff. I rang Win and Bill and they said they'd meet me at Sydney airport. I had a shower and drove to the airport and flew up there. They took me straight to the hospital to see Geoff.

When we walked into the ward he was sitting with the left side of his face towards the door and he looked OK. But when he turned to look at me the damage to his poor face was very apparent. His jaw was broken, also his cheekbone and eye socket and he had about 250 stitches in his face and head. The optic nerve was severed and his right eyelid just hung open. He had a pair of pajama shorts on and that was all he came out of Darwin with, no money, no clothes, nothing. He didn't know where Kath and the kids were and she didn't know where he was. We stayed with him for several hours, I gave him \$50 to go on with and promised to ring Kath's mother when I got home. We drove back to Dolans and had a bit of lunch and then they drove me back to the airport. Bob had rung Dad to tell him where Geoff was and that I'd flown up to see him. Dad asked him if he thought he should go up and Bob said YES!! I got a message as I boarded the plane that Dad was coming and would Win and Bill wait for them. I asked the pilot to get a message through and he contacted the tower who then contacted the check-in desk who then broadcast a message for Win and Bill. Dad and Peg stayed a week there and how Dolans managed I can't imagine, they had 5 children in a tiny 3 bedroom house and they gave up their room for Dad and Peg. They also fed and entertained them and took them back and forth to the hospital every day. At this point of time Win and Bill were very short of money and I was appalled when Dad calmly said, "Oh, they're OK, they didn't want any payment!" I will always be very grateful to Win, [Bill has since died] for what they did for Geoff. Win had also taken care of him for weeks in PNG after he had been hospitalized for leg ulcers.

Geoff's story of the cyclone is as follows:- "I had the family settled, when the storm hit, three kids and the dog under the double bed, Kath and the two others in the wardrobe and I was sitting in the middle between the bed and the robe. I heard a crash as something hit one of the banks of louvres and I got up to have a look. One set of windows was completely gone so I thought if I got a piece of iron or something I could wedge it up against the window and perhaps stop any further damage. I went to the back door and grabbed a piece of corrugated iron as it went by and put it against the broken window. There was a space at the top but it covered pretty well. I pulled the bookcase across to wedge against it and was jamming a prop in to hold it in place when I heard another crash. I looked up and a piece of iron hit me in the face. The bookshelf hit my back and cut deep grooves across it. I went back to the bedroom and sat out the cyclone and next day Kath took me to the hospital. I would not have been surprised if the death toll had been in the thousands, the devastation was so severe."

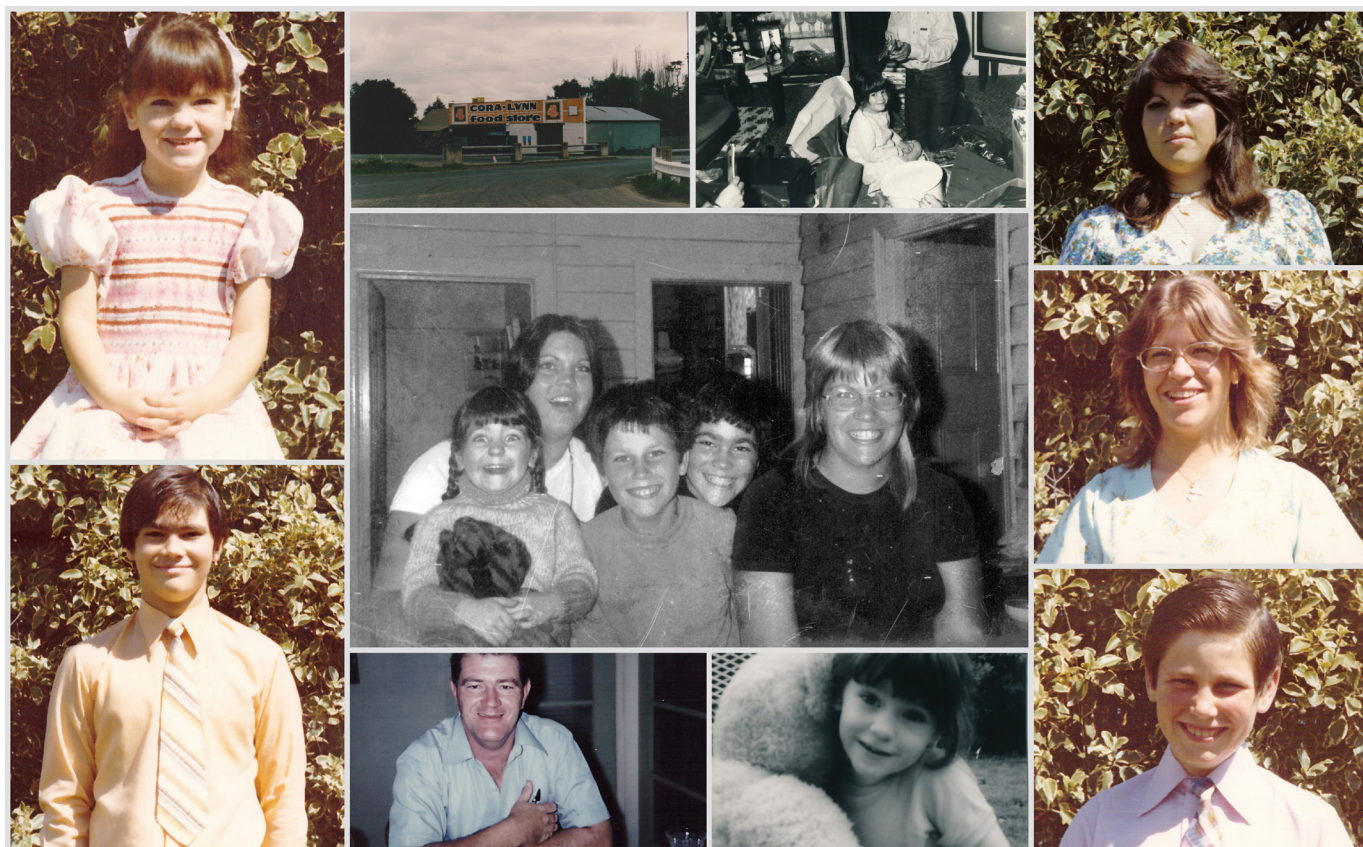
Two days after I saw him they operated on his face, lifted his jawbone 4cm and repositioned it, his cheek and eye socket were lifted and pulled out 2cm and all wired into place. There was nothing they could do about his eye, the loss of sight was permanent but they did repair most of the droop of his eyelid. This was his second close shave. He was in a hurry to get back to Darwin, afraid that looters would pinch all his equipment. He would not even wait to get a new set of teeth, just had to get back to Darwin.



Five Ways

We sold the shop at Fiveways and bought Cora Lyn. Bob had become friendly with a guy named Noel Uren who had a fruit and vegetable shop in Koo Wee Rup and would often call in on his way home from market. We started to buy a bit of basic stuff, potatoes, onions etc., for sale in the shop. His in-laws owned the shop at Cora Lyn and wanted out as they were getting on and decided to sell. He set us up and we were very thoroughly taken to the cleaners. Within three months the Convent School closed down, leaving us with a large stock of uniforms, the football team changed their jumpers and we had a couple of dozen jumpers in varying sizes and the council closed the bridge for six months to replace it with a new one. At least they were Essendon jumpers and the kids wore them for years. Of course this was all known to the locals but no one let on to us. We should have done a bit more thorough investigation, but Bob believed all that Noel told him. Also a lot of people locally took advantage of the change to shop in Pakenham where there were bigger supermarkets.

Then Mr Dillon wanted to buy the shop back and we signed contracts, found a house in Narre Warren and put a deposit on it, only to have them break the contract on a technicality so we were stuck with the shop. As the shop wouldn't support us, Bob went back to work at Rockwell-Collins as Quality Control Officer. About this time Ray came into our lives and became part of the family for many years. Bob also hurt his back badly by swinging a bag of briquettes from the loading bay into the back of a customer's Ute. It took about half an hour to help him to sit on the side of the bed, remove his pajama pants, thread his underpants, trousers and socks and put his shoes on. I then had to get one of you kids to help me get him to his feet and continue to dress him. Getting into the car was bad but for him, getting out at work after he'd driven from Cora Lyn to Lilydale would take him 15 minutes. The guys would try to help but he had to do it by himself as no one could help him. He was going to a Chiropractor in Dandenong every second day and I honestly thought he would never walk properly again, actually I thought he would be in a wheelchair.



Cora Lynn

Kilsyth



19 Terrigal Cres, Kilsyth

We put the business on the market, bought the Kilsyth house and decided we would move up at the start of the new school year. This was 1977 and Sue was now at Monash, Marg was doing year 12, she, Andy and Stuart were all at Pembroke High School and Karen had done prep at Iona and went into grade 1 at Kilsyth Primary. Bob was working at Lilydale and I drove to Cora Lyn and back every day. Without consulting me or you children, Bob asked Ray to join the family with a view to adopting him. Ray moved into the shop house when we came up to Kilsyth and everything was OK while he was there but when he move up to live with us we started to have major problems. The local louts were getting in through the house and helping themselves to icecreams, lollies, cigarettes anything they wanted, including money. I became suspicious because things weren't the way I left them. All the locals knew but as these were local kids no one said anything except the village idiot. Dad came down and put some barrel bolts on the door from the house to the shop and strengthened the door and next morning the door was almost in pieces. The local cops were useless and they finally told the older brother of Chris McMillan [the ringleader] to stop the kids. This was one of the worst periods of my life and it lasted a long time.

Unfortunately we also had several people decamp owing money which did not help us either. We eventually got a buyer, a couple who owned the store at Darnum. Bob left Rockwell and went to work for Motorola, better money. I was only supposed to do the travel for two months as that was when settlement was due, but the Dillons refused to give them a lease so it all fell through. Then the lease expired and Dillons would not renew it, so we carried on just paying the rent and for twenty two months I made the trip down to the shop 5 days a week, Bob and one of the boys went on Saturday morning. We really were between a rock and a hard place and were actually at the point of closing down and auctioning off the stock when we finally found another buyer. Dillons would not lease to him and one

of the locals, Theo van den Berg of whom they approved, decided to move his carpet business out there and his wife could run the shop. So we had to sell at whatever price van den Bergs offered, even though the others had agreed on \$5000 more. But we finally got out of that horrible place.

Sue was still at Monash and had moved out to live with Tony at Clayton. Marg was by now at Latrobe Uni. She had met John Stephenson and during the next year (1980), they became engaged. We booked a place at Blackburn for the reception and the wedding was at Schwerkoldt Cottage in Ringwood. We bought fabric at Dandenong market for hers and the bridesmaids dresses, all of which I made. I did the flowers and the cake and made my own dress, it was a busy time. Marg's frock was lovely with a wide band of lace around the hem line and she wore Carole's veil. The boys wore brown suits, the bridesmaids were in pink and it was a lovely wedding.



Bob had a very effective method of getting his own way. We were talking about changing cars and I wanted a small car as there was usually only Karen and I in it. He had his MG and later a Holden Ute but he wanted a Datsun 280C. I didn't, I said it cost too much to run, so the next thing was I had a Mobil credit card to use. I went through all the reasons and excuses that I could think of as to why a small car would be preferable. In the end after months and months of bickering I said, OK if you want a 280C go out and buy one and we had a new car next weekend. He just wore one down and outlasted you until you gave up.

After a couple of years at Motorola, not very happy ones, [but then he wasn't happy at Rockwell either as QCO he was too much a perfectionist and upset too many people,] he saw a job advertised back at Rockwell for the installation phase of the Royal Malaysian Navy project which he had worked on in the tendering process. He applied for the job and for the third time went back to work at Rockwell. He enjoyed the job, it meant going to Malaysia for six weeks and then home for a week, for about 12 months. It didn't work out quite like that as he was away for sixteen months and only home for Christmas and a couple of other short breaks. So off he went, he loved being there [I think it reminded him of single days in PNG] made friends with a couple of Chinese-Malaysian guys, Chen Kee Fong and Fong Kam Chee and all the girls at the bar where he drank with the other Rockwell guys. He came home about three

months later and had a picture of one of the girls in his wallet, which he showed me explaining that he showed it to everyone and said it was his girlfriend because it was expected to have one over there. I thought it was all a joke and treated it accordingly, but I was wrong.



Me with Dad and Geoff on Dad's 70th birthday, 1981

On the 15th November 1982, Sue had been having problems with a rash [erythema nodosa] and was staying at home with me, Andy was in the Police Force and had been on night shift and was asleep in the bedroom. A huge storm formed very quickly and a mini cyclone came up from the back of the house through our yard and house and on down the street. We heard a huge crack which I thought was thunder but was actually the big gum tree from next door tearing off and falling on our roof. It took the combined efforts of Sue, Andy [who was woken up by the noise] and me, to close the door between the house and the extension. Three of the windows at the back were broken as well as the skylight being torn off and the rain was just pouring through the hole in the roof. Pieces of tree, leaves etc. were all being plastered over the front of the kitchen cupboards, blown up from the broken windows. The skylight was found later on a lamppost several houses away. The wind lifted the sheets of roofing up and shuffled them up like a deck of cards. The brickwork on the front of the garage was blown down and the tops of trees 20' high were touching the ground. Peter Bartlett had just bought Walker's place next door and there was 6 trees lying on his roof, I rang him and he came home straight away. Andy's mate Dwayne's car was parked in front of Peter's place and had trees all over it. That night, with all of the people around us, we blocked off the street both ways and had a BBQ and party in the bowl of the crescent outside our house. One of the big transformers down the street had been hit and we were without power for a couple of days. We had the only working phone so there was a constant procession of people to ring relatives etc. Andy had gone off to work at D24, I couldn't sleep and was sitting in the dining room reading by the light of a candle when I saw electricity arcing across wires out the front. I rang Andy and his supervisor answered, I asked to speak to Andy and apologized for calling but I was a bit worried. He just said no problems; I know you wouldn't ring unless it was urgent. I told Andy what was happening and shortly after an SEC truck came along and checked and they turned off whatever it was. Bob was in Malaysia and although the insurance should have covered it, the company said we weren't fully insured. Bob and the Rockwell lawyers soon sorted that one out. Of course, there was a bit of damage done by us and not the storm. The pencil pine at the front steps which I hated was the victim of a chain saw and the wire stuff over the fishpond also went west. I guess Bob really guessed I'd done it but didn't dare ask too many

questions. We had to have the roof on the extension replaced and the front of the garage cleared and rebricked, but actually with the money from the insurance and the bonuses Bob got from Malaysia we paid the house off completely. We then did any non-urgent jobs out of wages.



I went over to Malaysia for our 25th wedding anniversary in 1983 and I really enjoyed the trip, walking around a foreign city all on my own. And I loved Singapore. The Rockwell team had to go to a conference in Singapore and we all flew down and stayed at the original Raffles Hotel. The next morning they all went off to the meeting and I took a taxi and Sue's new camera to the Botanic gardens. I had a wonderful day and returned home about 3.00PM with blisters on my feet to find Bob pacing up and down the foyer. I had forgotten to hand in my room key so the staff thought I was still in the hotel. The meeting had fallen through and we were due at Changi to fly out at 3.30PM. Of course in all the time spent waiting for me it never occurred to Bob to pack our cases. Where the hell had I been? I said well you told me to go and amuse myself for the whole day as you wouldn't be back till 5.30-6.00PM. But I really should have stayed at the hotel, shouldn't I.



We threw everything into cases and flung ourselves into a taxi and did the quickest trip to Changi imaginable. Ran through check in, immigration and outward customs and into the departure lounge. Apart from the Rockwell guys, who was waiting? The flight crew for the shuttle to KL! The inward flight was delayed by storms. We made it onto the plane, an A300 airbus, took off and the storm hit. I have flown many thousands of air miles but have never experienced anything like this. The pilot had all the wing extensions and the wheels down, trying to keep us stable. The airbus is a large wide bodied aircraft and we were being tossed around like a matchstick in a maelstrom. I had been in too much of a hurry to take my airsick pill and I sat there watching Paul Tranter slowly turn green and felt fine. I've never taken another airsick pill and I reckon I'll not die in a plane crash after that trip. We were all in a line across the width of the plane and one chap was hanging on so tight to the armrests that every time we hit a pocket his arms would finish up beside his ears. The trip should be less than an hour, you no sooner get to flight level than you begin descent, but we flew up the coast as far as Penang and back almost to Singapore before the pilot finally said he could now risk a landing.

The next time we flew back [we had to fly out of Malaysia and back in every two weeks to validate our entry permits] the storm hit just as we landed in KL and as they were still building Terminal One there was no airbridge only buses to take passengers across the tarmac to the gates. We had to sit in the plane for nearly two hours, doors closed because it was raining stair rods and no aircon, until the rain eased enough for them to get us on the buses without getting soaked. I really enjoyed walking round Ipoh on my own during the day and the food was certainly delicious. We ate out with Bob's Chinese friends several times and even went to Kee Fong's home for a meal. I was there for about 6 weeks and then returned to the real world at Kilsyth. I got a part time job at Ramset and used the money to do some alterations to the kitchen, new stove, new bench tops, a dishwasher, tiling, carpets, curtains, wallpaper and so on.



Karen and I had some great times when Bob was away, we'd go swimming a couple of times a week at Forest Hill and cook and eat all the things we couldn't have when he was home, then a week or so before he was due home we'd ease our way back into the usual way of life. On one of the maintenance trips after the project was completed Karen and I went to Singapore and Kuala Lumpur with him. We had a lovely time in the pool and at the shops and buying peanuts from the man with six fingers on each hand!

Bob came home from Malaysia for good and announced that he had tried to go through some sort of marriage ceremony in Malaysia with this Malaysian-Chinese chick and bring her back to live [with us] in Australia. I asked if he were out of his mind, was he going to set her up in one of the bedrooms and choose where he would sleep each night, he admitted he hadn't thought that far ahead, just that he loved her and wanted to bring her here. I suppose I should be grateful that he didn't just bring her with him. I was dreadfully hurt and upset and could not see any way out of this mess. We did come to a state of armed neutrality after some time and he then decided he didn't want me to work. After a couple of very heated discussions, which had nothing to do with work, I asked him if this was to do with me working at Ramset. The answer was yes. His reasoning was that he had proved he loved me [I didn't ask how the Malaysian girl fitted in with this] because all the time I drove up and down to Cora Lyn he had made sure that the boys kept the house clean and cooked the tea, but I had never done anything to prove I

loved him. When I said that I thought going up and down to the shop might have proved I loved him, his reply was that was something I had to do. In the end I asked if I could finish out the week or did he want me to ring up in the morning and tell I couldn't come in any more. He grudgingly and magnanimously agreed that I could finish out the week. I really should have called it quits in our marriage at this stage, I had really liked working at Ramset and had been offered a full time job after being there only a few weeks and had to turn it down because I knew what his reaction would be. I had also found out that I could support myself and had gained a lot more self-confidence.

In 1983 Sue and Tony were living in the school house at Emerald and decided to marry. They set the date for the 19th November 1983 choosing the Golf Club at Emerald for the ceremony and the reception. I had the cake made by a friend at Ramset who decorated cakes in her spare time. Sue sent out the invites and booked the Golf Club so all I had to do was the dresses and the flowers. Shortly before the wedding, Marg decided to take a job on an island in Queensland [she and John were divorced by then] so I didn't have to finish her frock. I did the dresses and the flowers and we all scrubbed up nicely! Sue just had Karen as her attendant, she had a cream satin dress with a blouse of cream lace over it and her bouquet



was red roses and Karen wore the same style in burgundy and carried cream roses. Peg upset a few people with her political remarks but, that aside it was another lovely wedding.

We had our usual family Christmas and then Andy and Julie came to us and said they were going to get married and could they use our house for their reception, which we were happy for them to do. They settled on the 3rd March, 1984 and the wedding was at the Police Chapel at Glen Waverley. I made Julie's dress and going away outfit, a dress and jacket for her sister who was matron of honour, the bridesmaid's dress and dresses for Karen and Kelly as the junior bridesmaids. The boys wore grey morning suits. We had the cake and flowers done. It was a very enjoyable wedding and I had asked Marg Ashton and Doreen Reid if they would help me out on the day. They were wonderful and did such a good job; it freed me up of worrying about how things were going.



The Monday after Andy and Julie's wedding Bob rang and asked if I'd like to go to USA with him as he had a four week course to do at Cedar Rapids, in Iowa. Well, can a duck swim? Of course I said yes, but my passport would run out that week. We set off for the city on Tuesday morning to get a new one and discovered that the regulations had changed and I had to have a full birth certificate, instead of an extract of entry. Left the passport office and headed for the BDM registration building. [You can all thank your father's foresight in getting full birth certificates for you when you were born] We had to wait over an hour but got it and went back and waited in line yet again for my passport. As we'd had Sue's wedding, Christmas and Andy's wedding we were a bit short of cash so we went overseas on Bankcard. Bet and Jack took us to the airport and the flight was delayed six hours by a walkout by the stewards and we didn't know if we'd get away that day. Our friends stayed until we were sure that the plane would leave, Qantas had to get permission from Air Traffic Control in Hong Kong as it had to break the curfew to land there. We landed at Hong Kong about midnight and crashed at the hotel for the rest of the night. Went shopping next morning and had to be back at the airport in the afternoon. It was Race Day and the traffic on the island was unbelievable. The taxi finally made it to the airport with very little time to spare and all their computers were down and they were hand processing passengers. The airline allowed a few more people on, mainly because of connecting flights out of Seattle and we were in that group. We boarded the flight finally and off we went to Seattle, where we just changed from international to domestic terminals and onto the plane to Cedar Rapids via Denver, Colorado arriving about 10PM.

As we were going into town in a cab we were talking and the cabbie made guessed [incorrectly] that we were English. We said we were Australians and he thought about it for a bit and then said, that's where they got them "willabies" isn't it? We agreed that in Australia we had wallabies. Bob could never understand why I always knew the cleaning staff but they were the only people I talked to! They were all interested in Australia but had no idea how big or small it was and even where it was. They were amazed at how well we spoke English and our accent fascinated them because "they don't have an accent", in Mid-West USA you can cut their accent with a knife! I found a huge shopping centre and walked there most days, also walking [an almost unheard of pastime in USA] around the town. We set off on the Thursday before Good Friday and drove down to Mt. Pleasant to catch the Amtrak train, leaving the car at the station. By the time the train reaches Mt. Pleasant, three trains, one from Seattle, one from Los Angeles and one from San Francisco have met and joined at Salt Lake City and the train is a mile [1.6km] long and the driver pulled it up so the door was exactly level with the steps to get up into the train. [No platform] Of course the station man was controlling with a walkie talkie to tell him when to stop.

The trip was great, Amtrak had a wonderful service and it was very smooth and comfortable. Bob could lay his seat back and stretch his legs out and still not touch the seat in front of him. We crossed the Mississippi River and came into Chicago. We spent several hours there some of it walking around the streets, Frazzle ice was shearing off the buildings and it was dangerous and much warmer in Union Station. On to New York staying at an hotel overlooking Central Park. We did a bus tour of the city on the Saturday, I wanted to watch the Easter Parade on Fifth Avenue on the Sunday and go up the Empire State building but we didn't do either. We did get to go to a shopping place, [Fanfare] to get a New York Yankees jacket for Sue. When we wanted to go "uptown" to Yankee Stadium to get the jacket the hotel staff were concerned, "We don't like you going up there on your own" and found a busboy who knew where we could buy it safely. While we waited for a cab they always had a doorman stand with us and make sure we got in the cab without being mugged. We left from Madison Square Garden Station, down through Philadelphia and Washington [didn't stop] to Chicago and Mt.Pleasant and back to Cedar.

Next day I caught a flight to Dallas, via Nebraska and Denver and Neil picked me up from DFW airport. I had a lovely time with Pat and Neil and after the course finished, Bob joined me and we had an extra few days catching up then, after sitting for two hours in the plane on the ground because of a bad dust storm, flew to Las Vegas, [via Denver] Because the flight from Dallas was delayed our luggage went missing, the desk rang about 3 AM to say it had arrived and Bob went down to collect it. He came back laughing and said there was a woman in her dressing gown sitting in the foyer playing the pokies. They were everywhere, in the grocery shops after you passed through the checkouts, at the airport, everywhere.

The next morning we caught a bus and went to Hoover Dam and the Grand Canyon, stayed at the big hotel on the South Rim overnight and returned to Las Vegas the next day and had a great time in this wacky city! The next day we flew to Los Angeles and took a cab to a motel near Disneyland spent the next day being children again. From there we caught the train [Amtrak again] from Anaheim to LA, the bus over the mountains to a small town called Bakersfield where we hopped on another bus and went out to Yosemite National Park, for the day. Came back and caught the train to San Francisco where we stayed in the centre of the city near Union Square. We did a minibus tour and it was great, all around the city, across the Bay Bridge and then back to the Golden Gate Bridge and on to Sausalito and Muir Woods and back. The driver was a hoot he kept the eight passengers in stitches. Every time he pointed out "Victorian" style houses he'd remark, "There's some more Victorians." After a bit Bob and I got the giggles and eventually he stopped the bus and asked what he was saying that was so funny. We just looked at him and said, "We're Victorians" On a flight next morning to Hawaii and Honolulu where we

had the rest of the day to sightsee. We finished up at the Ala Moana Shopping centre and flew home next morning, we had a fabulous time.

Not long after this Bob changed his job again and went to work at NEC. One day I was trying to clean the windows at the back of the family room which were about 10-12 feet above ground and someone had opened one of them after I'd shut it. I just did my lolly utterly and said I didn't think I wanted to live in that house or that place for the rest of my life so we bought the land at Berwick. One of the very few times I broke out of line, another was when I got my ears pierced. I was walking through Knox City one day when Bob was overseas and I thought, Damn it, they're my ears. So I did and you know, he never commented on them.

I love music and there are songs that have many happy memories for me, Mum's song was, "South of the Border" which for some reason that I can't remember, Geoff and I always called "Scooter Dog". Dad used to whistle through his teeth when he was driving, always the same tune, "Till we meet again". Geoff was tone deaf and the only thing he ever attempted was, "Goodnight Irene". When we were getting the house in Darwin ready to rent out the radio kept playing, "So much to do if I only had time", in Townsville it was, "American Pie" and when we were selling the house in Blackburn the radio was playing, "Tie a Yellow Ribbon on the Old Oak Tree" constantly.



Left: The Thomsons, at Sue's place in Emerald.

Above: Dad in Grand Masonic Regalia

Sue and Tony's first child, Jessica Meaghan Fullarton, was born on the 30th July, 1985, at Dandenong Hospital a beautiful little addition to our family.



Almost a year later Julie and Andrew produced a little miracle baby in Kaitlyn Jayne. Kait had a CVA at birth and the doctors weren't sure if she would live. She was transferred from Lilydale to Box Hill Hospital and then to the Neo Natal Intensive Care Unit at the Women's Hospital in Melbourne. About a week after her birth she underwent surgery to drain the sub-dural haematoma. She came through with flying colours and was allowed home after about 6 weeks in the hospital.



Stuart and Jen were married about six weeks later on the 5th December, 1987 at Sunshine, I only did the flowers and cake so it was very easy for me. Another pretty wedding, we booked out the motel attached to the reception rooms and after the wedding finished we partied on. The boys scrubbed up well in black tuxedos and Jen made a lovely bride. Bob and Carole, Dad and Peg, Karen and Megan, Sue and Tony and Bob and I all had breakfast together next day so it was a really good weekend. Sue had made Jess a beautiful dress of broderie anglais edging and I'd made Katy a pretty dress from blue satin and the two of them looked just beautiful, one so fair and the other so dark.



In about July, 1998, Dad and Peg sold the house in Healesville and moved up to live on Janice's farm in Gisborne. They had had to have the sewerage put on and Peg didn't want to pay for it - she had set her mind on moving up to Janice's. They moved into a "cottage" on the property, but it gave Dad space for huge veggie garden and he could use one of the sheds as a workshop.



So now we had two gorgeous grandchildren, Jessica and Kaitlyn, I found it was very fulfilling to be a granny, I never thought I could love any other children but my own, [I always felt sorry for other people - their children were so second rate compared to mine] but they bring their own love with them, and as Shakespeare said, love is infinite. I made and knitted baby clothes for them and I was so proud of them. Bob was completely ambivalent about them, they were not his children and he wasn't interested in other people's children. When I said they were our children's children and as such were part of us and therefore our visible immortality, he scoffed and said he wasn't interested in immortality.

In August 1987 we set out to fly around Australia. Bob had bought us 10,000 km air passes with Qantas and had worked out a trip that used all but 150 km and try as he might he could not fit anything in to use those kilometres. We flew first to Adelaide and Rose Ellis was waiting there to meet us so we had a coffee with her, picked up the car and drove to a motel in Glenelg. That night we went out for dinner with Francie and Bill Lavender. Moved off next day on a small aircraft to Coober Pedy, where we did a short mine tour and then flew on to Ayers Rock. We watched the sunset over Uluru, next day we walked around the Rock, as Bob had ringer boots on we couldn't climb it, the soles of the boots were too slippery. We saw Kata Tjuta in the distance later that afternoon as we caught a flight to Alice Springs. From there we went to Katherine, out to the Gorge, did the Gorges tour [following Bob and Hazel Hawke around] and next day drove down to Daly Waters. Had a couple of drinks there and reminisced of days gone by.



Top left Rose with me, below Bob measuring up against a giant tree in King's Park, Perth, Middle - feeding the wallabies at Lake St. Clair, top right the house at Daly Waters, Below, me sitting on Uluru

On the way down we had diverted from the Highway and gone out to Elsey Cemetery, couldn't believe that that narrow road was OUR Stuart Highway. They re-routed the highway when they built Tindall airport at Katherine. Back to Katherine and on to Darwin where we spent two weeks with Geoff and Kathy. We did the "milk run" from Darwin to Perth, landing at Kunnanurra, Broome, Port Hedland, and Exmouth before finally arriving at Perth. Spent a few days at Perth, went to Fremantle and walked the city, down to the timber country and the dam that supplies Kalgoorlie with water via pipeline. From

Perth, WA to Melbourne where Jen and Stuart met us with the cold weather clothes I'd packed and left with them and on to Perth, Tasmania. Had a week in Tassie and then came home.

Bob was a different person on our trips, he liked travelling and was happy doing the things he wanted to do when we visited a new place. I do wonder if we had stayed in Adelaide whether we would have been better off emotionally if not financially. There is a fair history of depression in the Thomsons. It showed up several times with Bob, and I felt he came close to nervous breakdown a few times after we left DCA. I also know he would have become bored witless after a few years as RMI-SA/NT Region, but perhaps the trips up and down from Darwin every couple of months may have helped. We were close to the football and cricket at the SA Cricket ground and he could have joined the West Adelaide Football Club [black and red of course - it was their home ground], and the Adelaide Cricket Club and seen every football and cricket match. Adelaide is a small place and the other alternative was to stay in DCA and take the job that Les wanted him to do as RMI Vic/Tas. I feel now and have for a long time that the job at Rockwell-Collins was probably more than he could comfortably handle and he had to put a tremendous amount of effort into it to keep on top.

When we were in the shops he always did far more bookwork than necessary. And he altered the estimations of the household accounts and re-did them every week, sitting at the billiard table at Kilsyth. Peg sat at our table one Christmas day, eating the food and drink that we provided with Bob's wages and proceeded to run us down, Peter and Janice were so much better and better-off than us. I could have hit her, the bloody cheek of her and Dad knew I was angry; he got her out of the house as quick as he could. Another time she told Sue and Tony that all school teachers were bludgers and I thought Tony would have a fit, he was so angry. She really was a complete bitch.

A few weeks after we got home, our first grandson, Daniel Alexander, arrived on the 30th September, 1987 at William Angliss Hospital in Ferntree Gully. It was the anniversary of his great-great-grandmother's birthday.







Farewell Kilsyth - 12 years of Christmases, birthdays, friends, children and laughter

Building the Meccano house - Berwick



So we started on the house in Berwick. Bob had decided on a Nu-Steel house as he fancied the idea of a giant meccano set. He spent many weeks fiddling with designs until he had what he wanted and I did get my sewing room. We sold the house and rented a unit that adjoined our block and Bob, Karen, Vicky, Paddy and I moved down there. Karen had turned 18 that year and as we were in the unit we decided to keep her party till we were in the new house. She had finished school and thought she'd have a year off and transferred from her part time job at Kmart at Chirnside Park to a full time permanent at Fountain gate. She and Tim Waltho, Bob and I went into a lovely Chinese place in Dandenong and had a meal on her birthday.

The Sunday before they were to set the forming and reinforcement down on the Monday we had very heavy rain and we spent the day draining the block with channels and by sweeping the water off. The slab was poured on the 20th December and as the day was going to be about 40C the concreters started at 5.00AM. The slab was, poured, leveled, the forming removed and the workmen departed by 10.00AM. We had to keep the slab damp by hosing it for the next two days to prevent it from curing too quickly. The frame was delivered and a guy came out from Nu-Steel to help with the initial set out. It all went very well until Bob cut his left ring finger at the base, a deep gaping wound. I took him up to the hospital and after one look the duty doctor said he'd have to send for a surgeon to check for any tendon damage, but all Bob wanted was to get back to work. In the finish the doctor cleaned it up, stitched it and bandaged it well and we went back to work. Work went on, the frame and roof trusses, all the stays and fixing struts and the steel work was done. Then the brickie and the roof plumber, the plasterer and the electrician and it started to look like a real house. We all remember having to take our shoes off because Dad had just



Transformation of Walsh Retreat

swept the slab and me having to vacuum out the framework and knock the “dags” off the inside of the brickwork. We finished the fit-outs and I began to paint. And paint. And paint. The kitchen went in and we made an appointment for the carpet bloke to come and measure up and give us a quote. It was about three weeks before we were due to move in and we met and chose the carpets and as it was after six I went to collect Karen from Fountain Gate. Bob came in through the garage just as we got home and said that we’d have to watch the Channel 2 news as we’d missed too much of the early news. He poured a glass of beer for himself, sat down in the lounge chair and died.

This was August 23rd, 1989, the pilots were on strike and Geoff couldn’t get down from Darwin which upset him very much, and Jim Davern rang from Sydney to say he couldn’t get down either. His funeral was held at Springvale and we had people back to our unit for drinks and food. Carole and Marg Ashton organised the whole thing all I did was make a pot of soup, it was a cold day. Marg Ashton went with me to buy a shirt, jumper and shoes to go with the Thomson tartan kilt I had decided to wear. She was so kind and patient. I don’t know how I would have got

through the days and weeks and months that followed without the love and support of my family and friends. Having Karen still at home was a godsend, it gave me a reason to get up in the morning and cook [and eat] meals.

We had reached a stage in our marriage where it seemed to be starting to come together again and I could see a future for us that didn’t appear to be there at the end of the Malaysian thing. Mind you, I still had doubts about his retirement, the novelty of listening to music and reading books would have run

its course and then what? Well, I never had to find out. When Bob died I discovered he had accounts at Safeway and Liquorland and owed hundreds of dollars on alcohol and cigarettes that I knew nothing about. I decided to finish the house ASAP, move into it and that would save the rent on the unit. I got permission from the owners to break the lease and three weeks after his death we moved. NEC sent several men out to help and with all of us we did it on the Saturday. On Sunday Carole and I cleaned the unit from top to bottom, arranged for a carpet cleaner at 8 AM Monday and at 10 to 9 I was outside the Agent's waiting for them to open, so I could hand over the keys.

That Christmas, Geoff drove over from Adelaide to spend Christmas and Boxing Day with me, they had come to Adelaide to have the time with Kath's family, but Geoff wanted to be with us for our first Christmas without Bob. He drove over on the 24th and back on the 27th December. I don't say it was a happy time, we were together and we had lots of happy memories to share. It was so good to see him.

I used to get so angry with Bob for dying just when everything was starting to be OK again and the future seemed to look, if not bright, at least more promising. I'd go over to Fountain Gate and people would be laughing and happy and I'd think, "How can they be happy when I'm so unhappy?" How could their lives go on just the same when mine was in bits around my feet? How dare he die and leave me alone to cope, after 31 years it felt as though half of me was cut off and yes, scabs form but it doesn't take much to break them open again. Music was especially hard, so many songs brought me to tears and one disc had very bad memories of Malaysia for me, I think Karen took it because I was going to bin it. I'd learn about something and rush to tell him and he wasn't there. And I suppose I was fortunate that I had some idea of how to manage on my own as he'd been away so much. It must have been over a year to come to terms with his loss and get to the state where I could function well again. I can still remember the first time I actually felt happy, I was driving home from the dentist just before Christmas 1990.

I guess slowly life returned to some semblance of normality, the garden was great therapy. Because we had a whole block of mud, the first thing was paving. I rang a contractor, he came and gave me a quote and he said he couldn't come for a couple of weeks, but he must have taken pity on me because I woke up at seven the next morning to the sound of shovels outside the window. He thought I needed him most, so had shifted other work back to allow him to do my job first. I was very grateful as we couldn't even get the car into the garage. Ray was working at Oatlands at the time and he came and stayed over once or twice a week, it saved him the trip back to Healesville every day. He showed me how to mix mortar and set out and put the edging and mower strips around the garden and I planted all the trees and shrubs that I had been buying for the house that we had brought down from Kilsyth.

My English cousin Catherine's daughter Stephanie and her boyfriend Neville came to Australia on a holiday in 1990 and stayed with me while in Melbourne. She wanted me to go to England and meet Dad's remaining English relatives.

I was advised by an investment adviser that I had too much income to get a full pension, [the interest rate was 18.75%] so I traded the 280C in on a Nissan Pulsar and considered going for trip to Europe and England. I couldn't decide whether or not I could cope on my own and must have walked past the travel agent fifty times before Sue pushed me in to at least enquire about it. I came out with a lot of brochures and spent many weeks choosing what I wanted to do and get the most for my money. I booked to go the following April but wasn't sure if it would eventuate. In January Sue found a lump in her breast and we were all terrified it could be malignant. It was a huge relief when the biopsy came back clear. We girls are perhaps fortunate in that although breast cancer is quite prevalent in both sides of our family it is all on the father's side and is not a factor in inheriting the genes. Mind you we have all the other cancers as well as well as heart attacks and strokes on my side of our family.

Dad was to turn 80 in February 1991 and, after talking to Geoff on the phone, we decided we would throw a big party for him. We made up a guest list and sent the invitations out early in January. Dad was not well and the Sunday before his birthday he was hospitalized as his heart rate was very erratic, I watched it fluctuate up and down from 50 beats per minute down to 28. No wonder he fell asleep all the time! It was decided that a pacemaker was necessary and the procedure was done on the Wednesday before the planned party.

Geoff and Kath were down and we had 100 people coming, did we cancel or postpone it? Talked it over and yeah, we'll go ahead, Dad can always sit down and people can come and talk to him. Wrong, he was the life and soul of the day, drank [or spilt] about three bottles of red and had a marvellous time. It was a very hot day and it was lovely to have so many friends and family around him. I had worked out the sleeping arrangement and as Peg said she had no interest in the footy boys or the relations, they would go home with Janice and Peter, who had reluctantly brought them down. But when Janice and Peter departed early [without saying goodbye to Geoff or me] Dad wasn't ready to go, he was having a ball so they stayed. So when we finally went to bed they had to have my room, Geoff and Kath in the spare room Karen in hers and Carole and I slept one each end of the couch in the billiard room. I said to Geoff as Dad toddled off to bed, "I'd hate to have our father's head in the morning" and do you know he never had the slightest hangover!



It was a super party, everyone seemed to have a great time, lots of yarns and reminiscing from all. And we'd bought a lot of wine and beer but as the afternoon wore on every time I turned round one of the boys seemed to be saying, "Give us another \$50 Mum we're running out of beer!" I took Dad and Peg home on the Sunday afternoon.

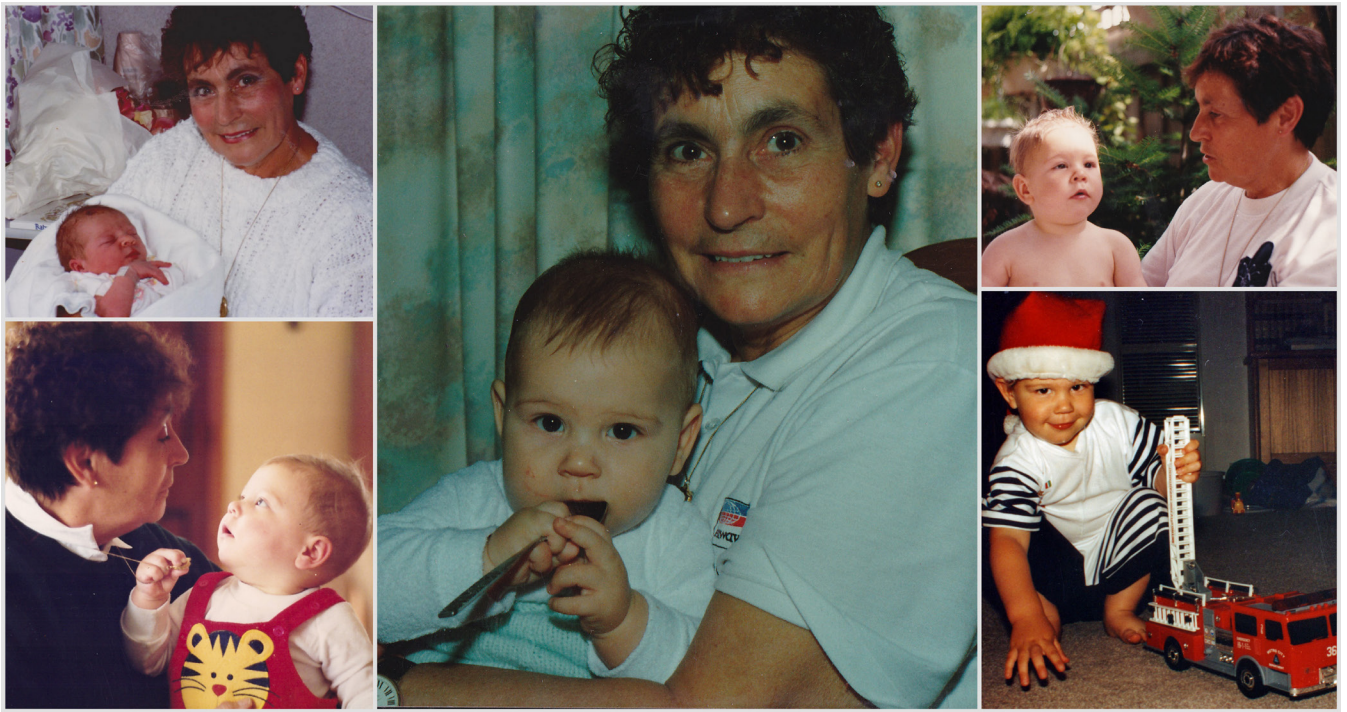
So I went off to see the world, or at least as much as I could for the money. I went to Europe on a 28 day tour and then to Ireland and Scandinavia as well as several weeks with a car in England, Scotland and Cornwall. I had a marvellous time and yes there were times I was very lonely but I'd ring someone and it wouldn't feel so bad. I am not an unenthusiastic tourist, I loved everywhere I went. Lucky I went when I did because two of the cousins I stayed with died later on that year, don't know if my visit that did it!



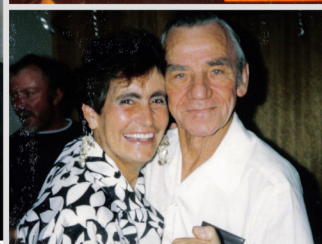
When I came home it was to learn that Marg and Tony [her boyfriend] were having a baby, and Robert was born on January 6th, 1992 at William Angliss hospital in Ferntree Gully.

When he was about 9 months old they separated and Tony eventually went to Merimbula to work. Karen had moved out to live with Terry so I had the house to myself. I got into the habit of taking scones, jam and cream up to Ian Marriott's farm every Monday morning for smoko. Leigh the contractor doing the roads found out and you could bet your life that he'd turn up as well. After Ray left I went to work in the gardens there, general weeding, pruning etc. I liked feeding the orphan calves and that was always my last job at night.

Marg went up to Merimbula to see if she and Tony could make a relationship work but was back after a short time. She and Rob came to live with me for several months. It was lovely having Rob about and he slept in the crib that Dad had made for Jessie and in which all the grandchildren had slept.



Karen had missed out on an 18th birthday party, with Bob's death, so we threw her a big 21st - all of us dressed in black and white and just her in a brilliant blue dress.



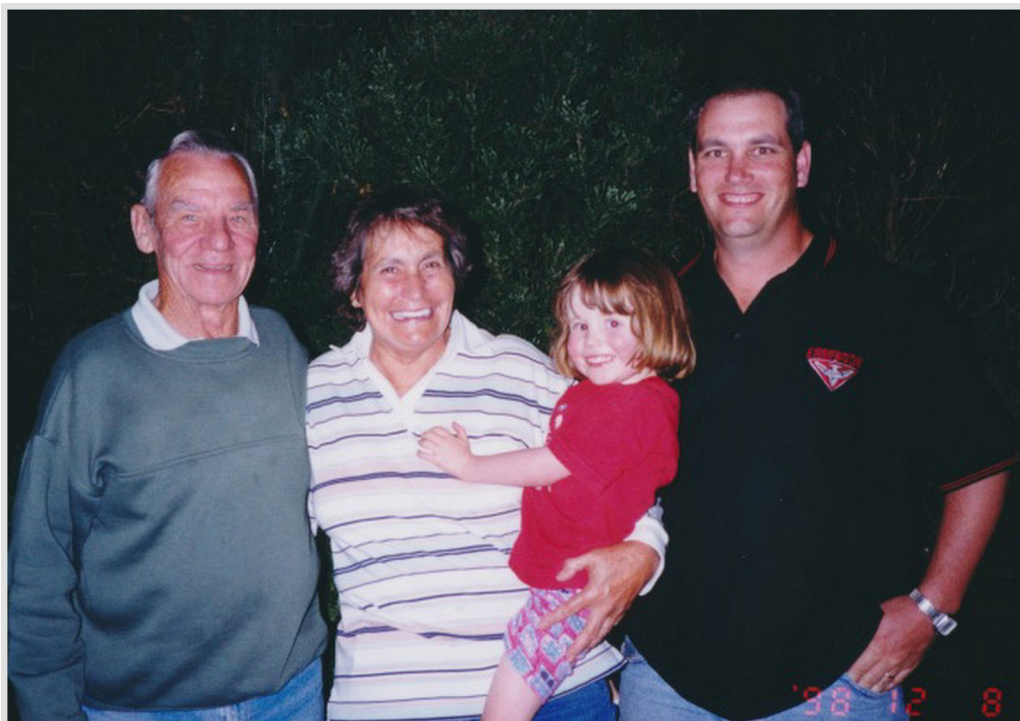


When I came home from overseas Sue asked if I would care for Jess and Danny during the week while she went back to work. I had them from quite early in the morning, then we'd have an early lunch and I'd take Jess to Kindergarten at Avonsleigh and go back to Sue's house with Daniel until it was time to collect Jess from Kindy and then Sue would come home and I would leave. I often babysat Kaitlyn at night also and I remember these times for the pleasure and the joy the children gave me.

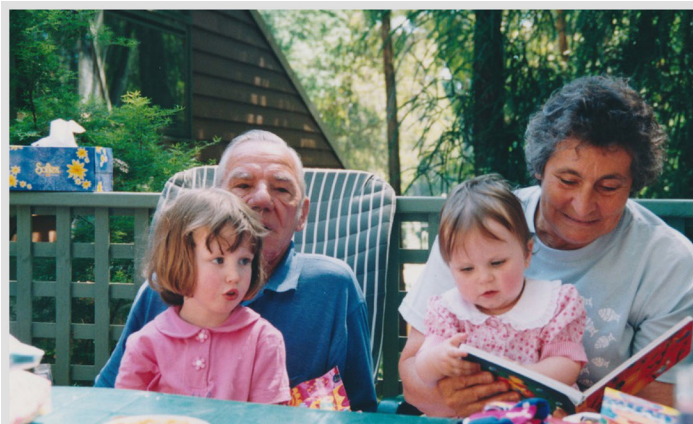
When Jess went to school I still had Danny and he organised me. When I went to aerobics he quite liked the

crèche there so was happy to go. When we got home we had to wash the car, involving lots of water and detergent and then we had a shower together. I'd get out and dry myself and he'd stay in and sit on the drain and watch the water come up the sides of the shower. After that it was lunch and back to Emerald. I just loved them all so much I didn't think it was possible, I have so many happy memories of those days. The little tea parties Jess and Katy would have with their dolls [I made the dolls] I'd make tiny pikelets and little iced cakes and the three kids would scoff everything in sight. Sitting on the lounge watching Sesame Street with a kid cuddled up each side of me, Danny naked with a hat and sunscreen playing with hose under the shade cloth at the side of the house; him eating 16 pikelets [buttered] as they came out of the pan. Robbie at the farm when Ian said, "Sit down Bess you're like a blasted bee in a bottle." And Rob [at 16 months] saying a minute later, "Sit down Bess, you're like a blasted bee in a bottle." On and on, so many happy memories. When Marg and Rob were staying with me it was very hot and I bought a little blowup plastic pool. A week or so later Jess was growling to Sue about it being hot and said could they go down to Panny's as she at least had a pool!





In 1994 Start and Jenny announced that they were having a baby, Thelma rang me up, she was so thrilled she was hardly coherent. On 7th February 1995, Sarah Anne was born on Dad's birthday. She was followed on the 10th March, 1998 by Rachel Lynn and there were six grandchildren.





Through Betty Broughton, [Derrick] an old school friend, I went off on a tour of New Zealand with a group of teachers and friends from Ferntree Gully High school, where Betty was teaching at the time. They were run by Barry and Lois Wenker and we had a wonderful time. It was well organised and we all had a great time and I really enjoyed myself. The next year we went to Tasmania, Nev had come over to marry Marg and he wanted to see Tasmania so he made up the numbers. Another great trip. The third trip was an Outback trip, up to Longreach and the Stockman's Hall of fame, across to Mt Isa and Tennant

Creek, out to Uluru and Kings Canyon and home via Coober Pedy, Port Augusta and Loxton. Another really well organised trip.



After Bob died, Karen decided that I needed to get out of the house for a bit and organised me to get a job at Kmart. I didn't think I could do it and procrastinated madly but she said, Mum if they can teach a 15 year old straight from school then you can do it. So I did and I enjoyed my time at Kmart, [mostly] it gave me a different perspective and I was mixing with people all the time, so I guess she was right.

... and then to Bellevue Drive

In 1998 I retired on Bob's 65th birthday, I reckoned he wasn't around to do it so I would. When Marg and Rob moved out to rented accommodation and Karen was living with Terry the house became too big and too empty for me alone. I put the house up for sale and settled on a nice house and land in Bellevue Drive, Berwick. Eventually Andy and Julie bought the house in Walsh Retreat as I did not get any offers that were suitable. We had some problems with the new house, the first being that they poured the slab in the wrong place. I had seen it and told them it was wrong but they knew better. So then they had to rip up that slab and pour another which put the finish date back by six weeks. Bessie and I went to stay with Bruce as Andy had to move out of his house and needed to move into mine. We moved in to Bellevue Drive on Good Friday, 1996. Bet and Jack, several friends and some of the kids helped me move and we had a sausage sizzle and champagne afterwards. This was a lovely house and apart from one bit, was exactly what I wanted, and I had another garden to do! Neville was now living in Australia and he was a tremendous help, he had a Ute and did several trips back and forth to the other house to bring odds and ends to the new house.



With Geoff on my 60th birthday

I had my 60th birthday party there in February, 1997 and Geoff, Kath, her two sisters and brother-in-law came across from Adelaide as well as family, Kmart people and friends.

About then I got a computer and set out to learn how to use it. I am still learning and hope one day to be computer literate. Karen broke up with Terry and came home to live once more and we had a good time together. We went to a Kmart friend's birthday party at Tonimbuk and she met Jeff and they started to go out together.

Early in 1997 natives in PNG alerted the authorities that there was a crashed WW2 Beaufort aircraft at a site SE of Lae and Dad was notified that Uncle Frank's plane had been found. When they received permission from PNG the RAAF sent a recovery team and brought the pitiful remains of the seven men who were on board the plane. In a tropical rainstorm it had flown at full speed into the side of a mountain and all were killed on impact. The RAAF arranged a full military service for the men and Dad, Auntie Marj. Bruce and I went up. We were taxied to Tullamarine, flown to Sydney, taxi to Richmond Air Force base, overnight there then in a Hercules C30 to Lae, stopping at Brisbane and Townsville to collect more relatives of the deceased men. At Amberley I saw a 747 doing touch and goes for the only time ever. I was quite excited and spoke to one of the crew who was near me and he said there was only two places in Australia that a 747 can practice touch and goes, Amberley and Avalon.

We landed at Nadzab and that was the first big difference that I noticed, because when we lived in PNG the airstrip was in the town and Nadzab was an abandoned wartime airstrip. When we flew over it years ago the old dispersal bays were still visible at the sides of the taxiways where the aircraft stood on standby while not flying sorties. The hotel was excellent but it had an 8 foot cyclone wire fence with razor wire on top all-round the grounds and armed personnel at the gate.

The funeral was held the next day at Lae War Cemetery, it was a very emotional time for Dad and Auntie Marj, they were not burying a 75 year old man they were burying their 23 year old brother. The ceremony was very moving, one man had lost his father when he was only three and he had brought his two sons with him. Seeing that one coffin with the flag draped over it, the flowers, honour guard, pallbearers, the bugler playing the last post,[which always wrecks me] the 21 gun salute and to know the seven of them would rest together for eternity as they had for the past 50 years was quite an experience.



They held a wake at the hotel after the funeral and of course there were speeches. Dad got a bit sick of the prayers, which did go on a bit, and was a bit scathing about ministers liking the sound of their own voices which was difficult as two were standing behind Dad's chair. After the presentation, [we all got a case with air force badges and ribbons, a certificate and a box containing things that had been found around each man's remains] I settled Dad and Auntie Marj in the bar, don't know where Bruce had got to, gave the barman \$20 and said to give them what they wanted and if it ran over I'd fix him up when I came back. I went for a swim in the pool with a lady with whom I had become friendly.

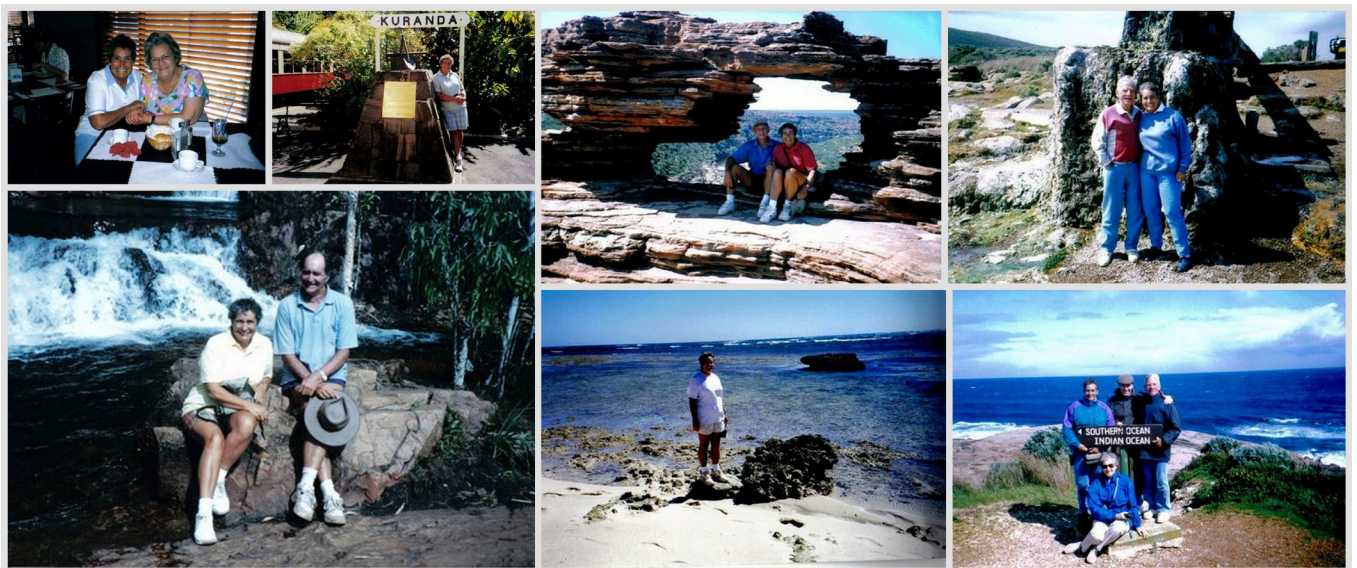
When I arrived back at the bar they were talking to the two Australians who had gone out to confirm the plane was one of ours. They had been shouting drinks for Dad and Marj and as Marj didn't drink Dad had been downing hers too. I got him up the stairs for dinner, [and more speeches] and he got stropky. I was not his mother, he wasn't a child he could choose his own meal from the smorgasbord. I tried to keep his plate level but he kept tipping it as he looked over the array of food, and the food would slide off the plate and on to the table. Eventually I took the plate from him and said, "That's it, you sit where I put you and I'll get your meal". He sat. We were eating our dinner and Dad pipes up in his fairly penetrating

voice, "You know that half-brother of your mother's?" I said, "Hedley?" "Yeah that one, well he raped your mother when she was young." As dinner conversations go it was a beauty, we had the undivided attention of the other ten people at our table and several nearby. I told him I'd really like to hear about it, but later when we are on our own, and he later confirmed that Mum had told him before they were married; she also had told him she didn't think her parents were married, but in that she was wrong.

After dinner we went to our room and Dad was rubbing his eyes and I asked if he needed his eye drops and he admitted he'd left them at home. We had a doctor and nurse with us but he didn't want to be a nuisance. I went back to the bar and found the doctor, he asked what drops Dad used and had them flown in the next morning. Dad said to me next morning, "I miss Peggy, I wish she were here" and I came back a bit strong and said, "What for, she never knew Frank, never even saw a photo of him." [Remember Dad's bonfire?] If it had been Mum I could see the point, she had known Frank most of his life. We flew home the next day. When the plane had been first found and identified Dad was not keen on going he said he couldn't even remember what Frank looked like, but changed his mind. I was pleased because I wanted to go.

In October of that year Greg Savage rang me very early on Sunday morning to tell me that my dear friend Bet had died early that morning. It was a terrible shock, she was always so well and careful to do all the tests we women have to do; she played tennis and was such a loving, cheerful, thoughtful person. Over the years Bet, Jack and I had become really close friends, we saw each other every six weeks or so because from the time we returned to Victoria to live I had cut Jack's hair! When Bob was alive we also spent every Election night together. Jack was lost without Bet and I'd often ring him when I came home from work, as I knew how lonely the evenings can be on your own. And I was lonely too, I had work but it's not the same, so if I needed a companion to attend a function I'd ask Jack.

In 1999 Jack and I went for a trip around Australia, it took us six months and we enjoyed every minute of it. We did the whole works, up the east coast to Cooktown, Atherton Tablelands, Undarra lava tubes, across the Great Top Road to Normanton and on to Burketown. Back to Cammoweal, calling in at Gregory River and Lawn Hill and on to Darwin. Back to Katherine and west again to the Bungle Bungles to Broome, then down the coast to the glorious wildflowers of WA. Perth, the SW corner, Wave Rock and the Nullarbor Plains and home through Mildura.



We had always been friends, I had known Jack almost all my life and it seemed right and fitting that we married. So in 2000, on the 25th March we were married by a celebrant at Sue's home in Emerald. Sue and Mark were our witnesses and Sue had decorated the house with balloons and flowers. We drove up to Dad's on the Wednesday before our wedding, picked them up and brought them to the unit. We fed, wined and dined them and took them and Jeannie up in the XD which was going to Brett as we had bought the AU Falcon. We got a cab home and Jeannie offered to pay half the cab from Emerald but Dad didn't say a word. We didn't take Jean's money either but it would have been nice of him to offer. Jeannie had fainted at the wedding and I honestly thought she had died, shades of Bet fainting at my place in Berwick ran through both Jack's and my mind. She was OK after a rest. I told Peg we'd take them home on Sunday as the traffic wasn't as bad and she was most upset, she'd planned on spending a week at least here and didn't have any food in the house. I really didn't care.



Somerville

I moved to Somerville into the retirement village with Jack, and we sold my house, which gave us money to buy a new car and caravan.

In 2000 the Olympic Games came to Sydney. Geoff and Kath had booked for the Softball games and Geoff was building a caravan to accommodate them there. Geoff became seriously ill with a blocked bowel due to cancer. He was operated on and was in intensive care for 11 days, a very sick man. He got a dreadful shock to wake up with tubes and drips hanging all over him, I think he thought this would never happen to him and he couldn't handle the fact that he was really ill. He wouldn't talk to me on the phone and only spoke to me because I deliberately rang when Kath was there and she just passed him the phone and walked out of the room. Dad had always worried about Geoff; he said Geoff was like Mum and he worried that Geoff would die before him, he didn't worry about me. He rang Dad and reassured him he was OK. This was his third close shave. He was only home a short time when he developed post-operative pneumonia and was hospitalised again for several weeks. Kath began to panic as the van wasn't ready and the games were getting closer and they wouldn't get to the Olympics. However they did make it even though Geoff was not really well and came on down here and Geoff finished the van here at the Village.

In 2001 we set out on our next adventure, started off going to Swan Hill where we caught up with Joan and Bob Horsburgh, from there to Mildura to see Dawn and Terry, Renmark for John and Jenny Wallace up the Stuart Highway and off to visit Woomera and on to Alice Springs. Took a tour to Palm Valley and enjoyed seven days of exploring the gorges and gaps in the area. Continued on up the track and saw Di and Col Bremner in Tennant creek and went to the "Dot" mine where Col held a little tour of his very small mine and had damper and billy tea for the people who came. Then Darwin for 12 days, staying with Geoff and Kath, and back to the Barkly highway and headed east. We made our way up to Pinnacle and after a few weeks there started the trip south. We called in at most places on the way and went out to Katoomba in the Blue Mountains, before coming home.



At John and Jennie's, Renmark

In late September, 2001 Dad became very ill and Jack, Jeannie and I went up to see them at Gisborne. I thought Peg would not make a scene in front of Jeannie, but I was wrong. She was extremely nasty and had a mean, narrow look on her face as she got stuck into Jack and me. She had had enough; she had to have a "life" of her own and her own space. Her solution was one of three things, we could take Dad to live with us, we could park the caravan up at their place and care for him all day or we could fork out \$80,000 to put him in a private nursing home. Thankfully Dad was asleep all the time she was screaming at me. Shortly afterwards Dad was taken to Castlemaine Hospital suffering, among other things, malnutrition.

Sue, Jess, Dan, Jack and I went up to visit him and I didn't think he'd survive. Peg was standing beside his bed telling me she'd made arrangements for the CWA to do the catering for his funeral and would I do the eulogy! I told her to wait until he died before she had his funeral. She just couldn't wait to get him out of her life, and why not? She'd had the good times and the travel overseas and all the clothes and shoes she wanted and he was no further use to her. I rang Geoff who was in Adelaide and said he'd best get over ASAP. As we were going up to Mildura for Col's 90th birthday we took the van up the next day

so we could spend some time with Dad. When Geoff saw the doctor that morning he was told that it had been touch and go but they had pulled him through, Geoff said, "Why did you bother?"

We went to Mildura and came back to Castlemaine, Dad was still sick but they were now talking of nursing homes not funerals. The morning we were going home we went in early to say goodbye to him. He wasn't remotely interested in us, all he could say was, "He's late, where is he, he should be here by now, it's late!" he was talking about the bloke who brought the breakfasts around and when his breakfast arrived he didn't even wait for the sugar and milk to go on his porridge he was spooning it out of the bowl and gobbling it up as the orderly was putting the milk on. Peg always said Dad didn't eat much but when we took meals up [and I always did because Peg said they couldn't afford to buy food for us] he ate everything and asked for more. Yet Peg kept saying he doesn't eat much. I think she'd say "What do you want for lunch?" and Dad would say "Oh, a piece of toast will do I'm not fussy" as he didn't want to antagonize her and they'd have tea and toast for lunch and tea, because it was easy.

Geoff and Kath always pandered to Peg, [they only saw her once a year whereas we saw her once a fortnight] Kath would take her off to the shops to do some shopping to "give her a break". They went back to Darwin leaving us with Peg to deal with. Dad slowly improved and from nursing homes the talk was of hostels and from there to him being well enough to go back home. Amazing what regular meals will do for one.

Dad had improved enormously and we were asked to come to a case conference at the hospital as he was now well enough to go home with care and help. Peg did not want him home. We collected her from the house and all the way to Castlemaine she grizzled about she wasn't well and she couldn't care for him, she needed help etc.etc. We had his doctor, nurse, physio, case worker, assessor and a council age care consultant and all Peg could say was, "Will he be able to get up and make me a cup of tea and bring it into the bedroom every morning?" She was offered home help, [I don't want anyone poking around in my things] meals on wheels, [the doctor says they aren't any good, but would have been better than tea and toast] and so it went on. Peg kept on and on about her not being well and the morning cuppa that one of the staff asked her if she had her name down for a place in a hostel, because if she was as bad as she said, perhaps she needed it more than Dad. And the silly old cow said, "Yes I do, I am much sicker than he is." All she wanted was to have nothing to do around the house, no washing ironing, making a bed or cooking and have someone to even pick up her dirty clothes. Dad came home to that horrible little house and was fine for a while but then the tea and toast started again and he went downhill once more.

2002 was a busy year for us. Karen and Jeff had decided to get married on May 4th, and we made all the arrangements. They were married in Wilson Botanic Park in Berwick and the reception was held at the Berwick Bowls Club. Jack bought Karen's dress. She did not want white and chose a very pale shimmering lilac outfit. The bridesmaids, Sharyn, Jess and Kaitlyn all wore shot taffeta dresses in blue/red which were lovely. Julie and Andy arranged for her to leave from their place and Julie had the hairdresser do all the hairstyles and the make-up lady came to the house to do Karen's make-up and Julie did the rest of us. We all looked very presentable. Jeff's parents were there, Julie had made lunch and Andy had made some wicked strawberry champagnes so it was a merry little gathering. Jack gave the bride away it was hard to tell who was the most nervous! My baby married! Dad and Peg came to the wedding, Ian and Kae brought them down and Dad looked quite good. Sue and Tony had divorced at this stage, and this was Sue's new partner Michael's initiation into the Thomson family! It was a happy, friendly wedding and I think enjoyed by all. After the wedding, Jack and I took the van and went to Bright, Echuca, Bendigo and the Grampians for a few weeks.

In June Peg went to Queensland with Janice again and said she'd put Dad into respite because she had to have a holiday. We talked it over and offered to have him at our place. We collected him from Gisborne



Karen's wedding

and I prepared meals for the ten days he'd be here and froze them. The next day we had arranged months before to meet friends from NSW off the Queenscliff ferry. We had explained all this with Dad before he came and I arranged for Jeannie to come and stay with him but he was most unhappy when we left.



We took Helen and Neil for a drive around to Flinders and then home for lunch and the afternoon, then took them back to the ferry. I had arranged to take him to see Keith and Lorna Tilley, Margaret Cole, a cousin of mine, but after about 15 minutes anywhere he wanted to go home. We went down to Heronswood at Dromana as I wanted some blue bulbs [*Corridalis Flexuosa*] and generally I catered to his every whim. We took him home on the appointed day and Peg wasn't even there, I made up the bed and did a bit of tidying up while we waited. She turned up about two hours later and said "Why didn't we just leave him on his own? He'd have been all right." As if we'd leave him alone.

In August we did a quick trip to Pinnacle and home via Carnarvon Gorge. In September, Andy and Julie took us out to the airport and we flew to New Zealand for 5 weeks, did both islands and enjoyed the trip immensely. Towards the end of this year we traded the AU Falcon for a red BA Fairmont, a lovely comfortable car.

In 2003 we did a trip to Cape York on a bus, going up and back on the old telegraph track, this was somewhere I never thought I'd go. On this trip we met Bob and Annie Voight and Joan Revell, and have remained in contact ever since. Also in 2003, Ian came home from England to basically get Peg and Dad into residential care. He got them into a private hostel at Lancefield; they had a big room and

shared facilities with one other person. The food and care was excellent and after a month's trial they were happy [?] to move in for good. Geoff and Kath were here and he decided that he had to go up and help them pack. I didn't want to go, couldn't see the point as Ian, Janice and Peter were all there. But he was adamant and if we wouldn't go, he'd go on his own. We went and Dad and Peg were already shifted up to Lancefield and there was nothing to be done so then we had to go up to Lancefield and make sure they were OK.

Peg went off to Mooloolaba again and Jack and I were up visiting Dad, we sat outside, and arranged the chairs so he could hear us both. He was most upset he said he was afraid "they" were going to split he and Peg up, he would be put in a hostel in Gisborne and Peg would live with Jan. He was devastated and when this scene eventuated, quite heart broken. He doted on that woman. I don't think I have ever disliked Peg quite so much as when she told us [boasting] that when she had had to move into the hostel while some work was done on her unit, [by now Jan was sick of having her at her place] she had hidden from Dad when he looked for her, once behind the piano other times with groups of people. She thought it was a huge joke and she ate at a different table and wouldn't sit with him or let him know where she was. Dad was legally blind by now and he would get up and wander round the place looking for her. I thought I couldn't dislike Peg any more but Kae told me that at Christmas she would not allow him brought to Janice's home, [he would spoil the fun!] and would not have lunch at the hostel with him. They had long ago stopped coming to my place for Christmas, it wasn't good enough for her, but we could have gone up and picked him up if we'd known.



In February/ March 2004 Geoff and Kath went to Tasmania and, as Margaret (Kath's sister) was going with them they left the caravan at George's place at Strath Creek and used on-site vans. They had called to see Dad on the way down and stayed with us until they caught the ferry. They also came in after their five week holiday, but Margaret went back to Adelaide.

In 2004 we went to Darwin and from there we did a trip along the Gibb River road and enjoyed that enormously. We had called in to see Dad as we were heading out, spent a couple of hours with him, he was having a good morning and understood what we were doing and where we were going, his words to Jack were, "Bloody long way, mate" and to me, "Give Geoff my love." We were in Broome when Jack

said, "We don't have to prove anything anymore, why don't we stop in one place for three months?" Got out the map book and finally settled on Alexandra Headland, we knew it was a nice park and knew the manager well. We rang from Broome and asked Les if he could book us in for next year, then rang back 10 minutes later and asked for an ensuite site.

We were swimming at Cable Beach one morning and about 1.00PM we were tired, sandy and hungry so packed up to head back to the van. The beach was crowded and we stopped to talk to a couple that we knew must be caravanners, [they had their own towels etc., the resort provides for their guests.] To the amazement of us all we discovered that they, Margot and Graham Hunt lived at Tyabb, less than five kilometres from us. As we talked on we found out that Graham grew up in Box Hill. That evening we were having drinks with Helen & Arthur Gill and Judy & Ken Lee, friends we'd made in Alice Springs a few weeks before and mentioned this terrific [to us] coincidence. Ken said, "But we live at Langwarrin and I grew up in Box Hill also." On the beach the next day we re-constructed the shops of Box Hill the way they were when we were all kids. Ken even had a list of kids who he went to school with and I knew most of them.

While we were away on this trip Jack began to have real problems with his hip and we guessed he'd need surgery when we got home. We arrived at Nannup in SW West Australia and I was writing a card to send to Dad, [I was sending a couple each week as he couldn't hear if I rang.] when, on the spur of the moment I picked up the phone and rang the nursing home. The sister who answered said Dad had had a fall, but nothing serious, but if he was not OK next day they'd get the doctor in. I tried to ring Geoff several times but no one answered. That was Thursday and on Saturday morning 7.30 AM Geoff rang to say Dad had had a fall, about which I already knew, but now his condition was serious. Half an hour later he rang to say Dad had died. We were on the other side of Australia and had to decide what to do, fly over and come back which meant storing the van somewhere or finish our holiday now and drive back. We settled on the latter choice and worked out how long it would take to get there, rang Geoff and told him to schedule Dad's funeral no earlier than the 16th August. We packed the van and headed out, by 10.00AM we were on our way. We drove all day every day and did not unhitch the van and arrived home on the Friday lunchtime. Dad was exactly 93 years and 6 months old on the day he died, the 7th August, 2004. There were a lot of people at Dad's funeral and Sue read the eulogy that I had written.

Geoff flew down and we picked him up at Tullamarine on the Sunday and on Monday we all went to the funeral. He was flying back to Darwin on the Wednesday and made up his mind that he had to see Peg and make sure she was OK. I, of course didn't give a rat's about her. If we wouldn't take him he'd hire a car, so I gave in and he rang her and made arrangements to see her after lunch on Wednesday as his flight left after 7.30PM. We were a bit early and Peg said she and Jan were going to the shops to pay a couple of bills and she was having afternoon tea with some friends. We did get a cup of coffee, [I made it] but Geoff never got his talk with her and I swore I would never see that woman again. We were left with several hours to go before the plane was due to leave, we drove to Sunbury, walked around for a while but by now Jack was in real trouble with his hip and he was not walking at all well and in considerable pain. We had a nice meal at the pub and sat in a shopping centre with me trying to teach Geoff how to do cryptic crosswords, before taking him to the airport and on the plane home. I hugged and I kissed my big brother for what was to be the last time, he gave me his usual advice, "Don't grieve for Dad, he'd had enough." He walked into the terminal and I never saw him again. Peg didn't care about Dad's ashes and as I knew he had reserved a place beside Mum I contacted Springvale and made the arrangements and the remainder Peg put in the church garden at Gisborne.

On the 16th December, Jack came out to the clothesline and said that Kathy wanted to speak to me on the phone. She told me that Geoff had had a heart attack and had died. They had been out at Wilpena Pound and he didn't feel well so they packed up and headed for Hawker. On the way Geoff said he

thought it was his heart as his left arm felt funny. As they pulled up at the hospital he had a massive seizure and died. There had to be an autopsy of course and it took several days for the coroner to release his body. To my shock and horror, Kath had his body taken from the morgue to the crematorium and cremated that day. I was very upset, I had wanted to see him and say goodbye but it was not to be.

Jack and the girls decided we'd have a "celebration of Geoff's life" as there was no funeral. It WAS a celebration, we made invitations for the 30th December and sent them to the footy boys, and a few relations, organised food and drink and on a beautiful sunny summer day in Melbourne we said goodbye. It did help. Three days after Geoff died Auntie Mavis also died; she was the last one of Mum's generation to go. It wasn't the best Christmas we've ever had but surprisingly, not the worst either.

After a quiet 68th birthday (2005, shared with Michael) we booked a day sailing on the Spirit of Tasmania and went to Tasmania for six weeks, taking the van with us. Jack had a couple of falls, not bad ones, but by the end of our trip was in a lot of pain and could hardly walk. To the doctor ASAP and he was referred to a spinal specialist for diagnosis and treatment. He had a pinched nerve in his spine.



Later that year we went down through Tarra Bulga National park, then on to the Snowy Mountains and Canberra and up the east coast to Alexandra Headland that year, stayed three months and made lots of new friends from the long term caravanners. We were camped for six weeks beside a couple from Rosebud, Marleyne and Gerald Burke. We all got on very well together and had many happy lunches at the various clubs around the Sunshine Coast. We also had

many great "Happy Hours" in each other's vans a couple of times a week. We have been close friends

with them ever since and still share meals and visits with them. In all we went there for 6 years only finishing when our travelling days were done.

Karen rang with the news that she was expecting a baby in March. We were both tickled pink at the idea of a new bub in the family. We eagerly awaited her arrival, and even though Karen wouldn't tell us what the baby was we all thought it was a girl. And when she finally came what a gorgeous girl she was! Jeff rang early morning on March 7th, 2006 to say she was here and we showered and had breakfast and went to see the new arrival, OUR granddaughter and her proud parents. She was a joy and filled up an empty place in our lives that was waiting for her.

After we got home we bought new 42inch plasma TV and a set top box and DVD player and hung the TV on the wall. We also decided to trade the van in for a conventional van. We ordered it in December and took delivery in March, 2006. We were very excited about it. We had tickets to see "The Lion



King" at the Regent Theatre then on the Sunday head off down the Great Ocean Road for a week or so "shakedown" trip with the new van. We took everything from the Gazal and bunged it all in the spare room, took that caravan over to McKenzie's and took delivery of the new van which we parked at the village. Unfortunately, Jack got sick and had to have his gall bladder removed, so we didn't get to do the shakedown trip.

We both had appointments with the ophthalmologist and Jack was diagnosed with cataracts and told not to drive, so I drove the whole way to Queensland and back that year. We postponed the cataract surgery until our return and off we went. We did the Newell Highway and from Goondiwindi, across to Warwick and "lucked" our way to Birkdale which was close to where Mark and Mel had bought a house at Ormiston and we spent a week with them. Moved on and set up camp at Alex. We had met Marleyne and Gerald Burke the previous year and they were there again and we had happy hour together at least twice a week. They have remained our good friends ever since, as have Margot and Graham Hunt who we met at Broome in 2004, as well as Joan Revell and Annie and Bob Voight ["the Yanks"] who were on the Cape York trip in 2003. When we got to Finley on the way home I was talking to Sue and when she

knew where we were she told me that Phil Wilkinson lived there. I didn't think he'd be interested but she insisted that I ring him. I did and he was pleased to hear from us. We stayed an extra day and they came and picked us up, toured the district and went for a lovely BBQ lunch at his place with his partner, Joy. They asked us to stay a couple of days with them every time we went through Finley.

At the start of 2007 I celebrated my 70th birthday at Sue's place in Boronia. While I had not wanted a party, the girls insisted, and so it was. I had a wonderful time with old friends and new.

Later that year we headed west to Kangaroo Island, which was another great place to visit, we went on a tour bus as I didn't fancy taking the van over. It was interesting being on the beach with the seals and Remarkable Rocks really are remarkable! And Admiral Arch is pretty special too. We caught up with



John and Jenny as they had relocated to Goolwa. Headed north through the lovely hills and into the Clare Valley and then on to the Flinders Ranges and Wilpena Pound. Had a lovely week there exploring all the places that Jack and Bet had seen years ago, went on to Arkaroola, stayed overnight and back home a different way, walked the gorges and climbed the hills. The scenery is magnificent. If Geoff had to die I'm glad that his last week was spent in such a beautiful and peaceful place. I'm sure he was happy here; it's his sort of place. We continued on our way, via Broken Hill and the Newell highway to Goondiwindi and Dalby, then the back roads across to Hervey Bay. Spent a bit of time with Alison and Fred and then to our spot at Alex.

Sue rang to say she had a conference in Brisbane and would come and stay a week at the park and catch up with us. When the knock on the door came we were gobsmacked to see Hannah in her arms and then Karen and Jeff walked around the corner saying "Surprise!" It was wonderful to show them all our favourite places. On July 31st, Dawn rang to say that dear old Col had died that morning, hard to think we won't see him next time we are in Mildura. We came back home along the Kidman Way, like the road much better and far fewer trucks.



In November 2007 we traded the Fairmont in and bought a Ford Territory, a great car, we just loved the size and space it provided. I tripped over the hose and broke my nose when I hit the concrete while we were in the process of buying it; I looked a mess for a good few weeks.

We had rebooked at Alex for 2008 so headed off in early May, up the Kidman way and then to Hervey Bay. Spent a few days with

Fred and Alison and back to site 61A at Alex Beach. We were welcomed by the friends that were there already as well as Margaret and Les Woodbury, the managers who we had known for many years now. We had also come to know one, [Nygho] then two, [Mavis] and eventually about half the residents of Edgewater Village at Bli Bli. We all met for coffee about 10.30AM on Thursday mornings at the Cookie Man café at the Plaza. Jack and all his women.

We came home down the Fossickers Way; it was a bitumen road and different but pretty rough. Lots of wildflowers all the way and we came down the centre of NSW to Canberra and home the "back" way. We were discussing whether we'd go on to Bairnsdale for overnight when we heard a noise in the engine. We went in to Orbost to get petrol and when Jack heard the noise outside the car he knew we were in trouble. There was an RACV place in Orbost so we saw them and they just listened and said we'd done a big end. The car went to Hastings Ford on the back of a truck and they towed the van to Karen's place. We were put up that night in Orbost, taxied to pick up bus and train tickets, then to the bus stop and to the train. We got off at Garfield and Karen and Hannah were waiting for us. Jack and I unpacked the van into the loan car and brought it home and later when Ford had put a new engine in the car we brought the van home. Thank Goodness for RACV Total Care, we didn't have to pay a cent.

2009 saw the arrival of Jakob Karl Damen on the 24th April. Jeff rang quite late and we went to Berwick and saw our new grandson. Hannah was a bit overwhelmed by all the fuss but she soon adjusted to having a baby brother. Elizabeth had bought her a T shirt with "Big Sister" on the front, it was very cute. Jake was a good baby and slept well, what else can a new parent ask for?

We headed north on the 25th May and went to Alex beach and did all the usual things, saw all the usual people until the 25th September when we moved up to Hervey Bay to spend some time with Fred and Alison, started for home on 2nd October and arrived here on the 14th after staying a few days with Karen and Jeff and the two littlies. Jack handed his driver's licence in voluntarily as he no longer felt he could drive with complete safety, it was a very difficult thing to do.



We headed out in 2010 up to Finley to stop a couple of nights with Joy and Phil then on up the Kidman way crossed the border at Barrington and on to Cunnamulla, the road was good and we made good time. Left there and the road was not good for the whole way to St. George. Went the back way to Hervey Bay and the usual caravan park, spent time with Alison and Fred and on 16th May arrived at our home away from home, Alex Beach. We went up to Rockhampton later that month to see Mark and Mel's new house, stayed a week, came back and on the 24th September set out for home, we turned at Goolgowie and went to Mildura for a week. It was the Grand Final of the footy and Mildura had switched to digital television and we couldn't receive it AND Collingwood were playing in it! We got the last bit on radio and knew that the Pies won.

Back to Finley and a couple of days with Phil and Joy before heading to Karen's place. I bogged the car and van getting in to the backyard, the ground was soft, the longish grass was wet and slippery, Karen rang Peter and he came and winched us out, turned the van around and backed it just to the hard standing behind the gate. Jake was now a little boy with a personality all his own and Hannah was shy for about two minutes. Jake would hear us come in from the van and call out to us and we'd go in, get him up and change his nappy. Then he'd put the nappy in the bin in the laundry. We stayed a few days and then made it back to Somerville.

We come now to 2011 and off we went again, did not stop at Phil's as Joy's brother had died suddenly and we didn't want to intrude so went on to Jerilderie. Stopped at Hillston, then Cobar as we thought we could get accommodation at Brewarrina and cut out the long haul from Hillston to Bourke. I had rung the van park and they were closed to recover after being flooded out but to try Lynchy's just out of town. I rang and Nicole said yes they were OK with vans. As we drove in I wondered what the hell I had

got us into but she fixed us up with a nice little drive thru' beside a dam and we could use the facilities of the cabin behind us. I was very grateful as the next place we could have camped was Lightning Ridge as Walgett has no campgrounds at all. I tried out the new camera here. We stopped at Possum Park, 30 kms past Miles, this is a few hills all with old ammunition storages built into the sides of them. Some have been converted into one bedroom cottages underground but their ensuite sites are wonderful! The campgrounds are good too. From there we went to Gracemere where I stuffed up the back jacks and then stored the van at a park on the north side, paid for two weeks and headed to Mark's place. We met Kerry and Lindy from two doors down when Mark and Mel were away one weekend; Kerry came to take us out for the day, up to Cathedral Caves and then home to their place for tea. She even drove us home, fifty metres up the hill! She took us to a big local market the next day. Went out to Mt. Morgan with Mark, had a day in the valley, photographing the volcanic cones we can see from the deck and another day went to Emu Beach and on to Yeppoon and then to Byfield for lunch.

Left there on the 23rd and stopped off at Hervey Bay to do the annual pilgrimage to see Alison and Fred, arriving at the usual spot in the afternoon. At Miriamvale on the way down we were stopped by police and shuffled round several side streets to allow a huge backlog of cars to go around three transports loaded with very wide loads for the mines. And at Hervey Bay an accident at traffic lights necessitated us being re- routed through the Harvey Norman car park, OK for cars but not a lot of fun with a caravan hanging on the back! We stayed a week and saw Fred and Alison three or four times.

We set out and made Alex Beach in good time. Marleyne and Gerald followed us in, they were coming out of Bunnings when they saw us go past. They came down as soon as we pulled up and two or three other couples came to welcome us, much talk and laughter, too much in fact because when Les had backed us in, we were not paying enough attention and it was about 80cm short of where it should be. We set up without really thinking, still too much going on around us. Had drinks with Marleyne and Gerald that night and said we might shift the van next morning. Woke up next day and decided we could not live for four months with it in the wrong spot. So Burkes came down, and with them, another guy



With our good friends: Bob and Annie on the left, Marleyne and Gerald on the right

and Jack all shifting the annexe I slowly backed into the right place. While we were there Gerald fixed up the jacks I had wrecked and shelved one of the wardrobes.

Carole had rung in February to say Bob had been diagnosed with lung cancer, we had been in fairly constant touch since then and she now rang and said he was deteriorating more quickly than they thought he would and was only given a few weeks to live. This was a dreadful shock; Bob and Carole have been part of my life for so long it's hard to think of when I didn't know them.

Karen and Jeff had booked to come up and stay for ten days - we were really looking forward to having them up and bought buckets and spades and swim rings for the two kids. The weather had improved and we looked forward to fun on the beach with the kids.

Towards the end of July I developed a dreadful cough, everything ached and I had pain where I shouldn't have had pain and knew I'd have to see a doctor. He said I had pneumonia and prescribed antibiotics and rest. I did rest and the coughing was worse at night and we didn't get a lot of sleep. Karen, Jeff and the children arrived and although I did prepare a couple of meals I really couldn't do a lot more. I was now on my third antibiotic script and had an X-ray and an ECG to check me out. Carole rang on the 20th to say that the cancer had spread to Bob's bones and he was hospitalised and had very little time to live. I rang Sue and when Karen came home from Eumundi markets, told her.

Jack and I decided that I would fly down as Mark had offered to come down and collect Jack and take him back to Rocky and Sue booked tickets for me. Karen and Jeff flew home on the 21st and on the 22nd, Karen rang to ask if I thought she and Sue could go and visit Bob. I told her to ring and ask Carole, which she did and they spent a couple of hours that afternoon with Bob, Carole, Daryl, Michael and Bob's brother John. Bob died at 12.15AM next day, 22 years after my Bob died. I flew down on Thursday and Sue picked me up from Tullamarine. I was still fairly unwell and she had taken off the time I was to be down so that she could look after me. Mark had arrived at Alex and I knew Jack was fine now, so I could relax.

I took Jessie's car next day and went home to collect some warmer clothes, bought a long sleeve skivvy to wear under my jacket and shirt. Next day Sue and I spent the day with Carole and on Sunday I had to rest. We made some things to take to the wake after the funeral and went to Lilydale on the Monday to farewell our dear friend. In bed early, very tired. Caught the flight back on Wednesday, August 31st, had a kerfuffle at Brisbane, landed at Rocky late and Mel was there to meet me. And there was my dear Jack with 8 stitches in his head from falling and hitting the edge of the table with his head! I was still not functioning at more than 50% so still slept a lot of the time. On Sunday Mark drove us back to Alex Beach, stayed the night and went back the next day. We had already made the decision that we would not re-book for 2012 before I became ill and now thought that we'd best go home as soon as I felt OK to drive. We left early on Saturday morning after packing the van with Laurie Smith's help the day before. We had a red light problem with the car but Ford at Dalby were wonderful, tested the car every which way and told us it was fine, just go on home. We arrived at noon on Sunday and Karen, Jeff and the children came and helped us unpack the van and put it away.

February 2012 was my 75th birthday. Sue and Karen had heard me once say that I wished I could go up in a hot air balloon, so, unbeknownst to me, Sue, Karen and Stuart booked a balloon ride over the Yarra Valley for me on the morning of my party. Sue & Karen came with me. We drove out past Coldstream at some ungodly hour of the morning and worked with the crew to get our balloon inflated. I was nearly white with nerves by now, but there was no way that those girls were letting me off the hook - so we all rather inelegantly got into the basket and off we went. I was pretty buzzy all day - after getting acclimatised it was pretty amazing!



In late July 2012 we flew up to Mark's, we had a quiet restful four weeks away and then I got sick again with another bout of pneumonia, it didn't take quite as long to get over this one. The registration, service and a couple of jobs were due on the Territory so on the 31st October we bought a Ford Fiesta Zetec and on Cup Day, 4th November we sold the caravan. It was a sad wrench watching it driven out the gate and know our caravanning days were over.

In 2013, we arranged to have some work done on the unit and packed up most of our things and put them into storage. We packed the little car and drove up to Rockhampton in late May and spent five weeks there, from there we stayed with Kathy in Hervey Bay for a few days and caught up with Alison and Fred, spent a week with Joan in Buderim, visited lots of old friends and did our favourite drive up through the Glasshouse Mountains (perhaps the last time) before driving home again. Stayed the last night at Sue's and arrived home to our beautiful "new" house which was completely refurbished while we were away. We took three weeks to get it all together after the furniture came back and life settled back into its comfortable, happy groove, we were home.

Well, I think I have just about arrived at the finish line of my story, I don't intend to shuffle off for a while yet, but one never knows. I hope you find this story interesting and will keep it in your various families. And perhaps the grandchildren will laugh at the way we lived, I don't know what they'll make of how my grandparents lived, but at least they'll know a bit about it. So, read and enjoy [hopefully] the story of my life.

Mum.

