

# 10 Stories High

collection

## authors

Dorene Bleeze  
Gloria Bothe  
Judy Parker  
Elisabeth Angel  
Wilma Davidson  
Mollie Bialkowski  
Terry Quinn  
Noreen Bird  
Gomathi Visvanathan  
Thi-Nha Tran

*A collection of life stories from members of the Woden Seniors Club*

# 10 Stories High

A Woden Seniors Club Initiative



Woden Seniors Inc.



Printed in August 2011  
by Kwik Kopy Phillip  
[www.kwikkopy.com.au](http://www.kwikkopy.com.au)



ACT Writers Centre

An online version of this  
anthology is available at  
[www.wodenseniors.org.au](http://www.wodenseniors.org.au)  
and [www.actwriters.org.au](http://www.actwriters.org.au)

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# Acknowledgements

*10 Stories High* is a Woden Seniors Club Initiative.

Produced with assistance from the following major sponsors:



ACT Writer's Centre through a grant from the



Canberra Southern Cross Club Woden



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Special thanks to Megan Costigan, *10 Stories High* Project Manager and volunteer with Woden Seniors Club and Susan Woolias who provided assistance in typing stories.

Thanks also to Anne-Maree Britton (Director ACT Writer's Centre) for her engagement and interest in the project; Anne Murray (immediate past President Woden Seniors Club) for her enthusiasm and positive support; and Wilma Davidson for encouraging the writer in our seniors to emerge.



# Introduction

*10 Stories High* is a special initiative of the Woden Seniors Club. It offered members the opportunity to begin the journey of writing their life story. The project consisted of a writer's workshop facilitated by local writer Wilma Davidson and held over eight sessions. Members then selected excerpts of their work to be printed in individual booklets to share with their families and included in this anthology.

*10 Stories High* captures the wisdom, creativity, spirit and rich life experiences of these senior writers – seniors who continue to actively contribute to their families, communities and the arts.



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# Of Celery and Winkles and Winter Chill

**Dorene Bleeze**



Memories of Sunday afternoon tea-times nip at my mind as I descend a ramp from the Eastbourne Promenade leaving behind its regular spaced and tidy garden beds; geometrically patterned at this time of year with scarlet salvias, gold and yellow marigolds. For, on the next level just above the pebbly beach, bleached by pounding waves and mists of salt spray, was a spanking white hut proclaiming, “WINKLES, WHELKS AND COCKLES FOR SALE”. The delectable whiff of sea food has found me already and I stop; even though it’s only 10 o’clock in the morning and I’m usually sniffing out coffee scrolls or Chelsea buns to quell the hunger pangs.

I dither a bit, until I choose a tiny ‘pat of butter’ plate filled with plump cockles and sprinkle them with vinegar from the counter, before I make my way to a chunky wooden seat facing out to sea. It is here, that I fill my eyes, taste and sense of smell at last with the glorious sensations of the English seaside. The cockles are everything I remember; tough and chewy, each bite distinctly of the briny, and I am soon delivered; in memory, unto my mother’s house in London, in winter, where there were always, winkles for Sunday tea.

The white damask table cloth, starched and ironed, was laid with the best china tea-service; eggshell thin cups, saucers and bread and butter plates, each piece decorated with long stemmed forget-me-

nots. We hear again, my mother telling her guests how she had won this fine china by submitting correct answers to a crossword puzzle run by 'The People' Sunday newspaper. Thousands of enthusiasts would have competed with her, "God knows," she would say, her rosy face beaming "how I ever did it."

A Bohemian glass vase always stood in the centre of the table, in lieu of cut flowers, displaying crisp, white sticks of celery topped by green and yellow leaves of poison (it was said). The word celery was etched into the glass vase to escape wartime taxes that fell upon such luxuries as fancy flower containers. Oh, how we loved to get one over on the Chancellor of the Exchequer in those Spartan days. Fish paste sandwiches, cup cakes, jam and lemon curd tarts, buttered Hovis bread sliced thinly, bowls of shrimps, cockles and winkles, purchased on the day from a barrow outside the firmly closed doors of the Swan Hotel; all were spread before us.

It was our regular routine to pick up the seafood on our way home from an after dinner stroll that might have taken us along the Putney towpath, Bishops Park or Barnes Common, or maybe a gallop in chill north winds toward the windmill on Wimbledon Common. "Anyone coming for a blow?" our eldest sister would breeze in and ask, just as we were feeling sleepy around a nice warm fire. We all went, except our Mum, who preferred to pore over this week's crossword puzzle. She knew well that the first correct entry won the day, so there was no time to lose, each week, come what may her work had to be in by the Sunday night post.

The costermonger outside the Swan Hotel had metal cups chained to his barrow, to scoop up the fishy morsels, so recently pulled from the sea, and once measured he dropped each serve into reinforced brown paper bags. As he dug and fidgeted the metal measuring cup into mounds of winkle shells, the sound was like pebbles on a beach and the lovely smell he disturbed, rose and spread into our nostrils bringing summer holidays; rolling seas, happy beachside games and glorious sunsets when we lingered till the very last minute of a perfect day, whilst watching a huge red sun, sink into the sea and everything come to rest.

Now, warmed by a fire-lit room at Mum's tea table. We observe the dressmaking pins dug into the damask cloth, all ready for us to remove the little black hats from the winkles' heads before we prised a small body from the shell in a twisting action, and took a diminutive, metal-grey, slug-like creature to our mouths beautifully soft, moist and tasty. At the end of the meal, our bread and butter plates had a wide ring of little black beauty spots at their rims and we'd filled finger bowls with lifeless, empty shells. What a mouth watering little feast it was.

The celery would have been touched with frost; it is best in chilly climates and crisp as winter vegetables should be. We would sprinkle salt along the whole length of stalk and chomp through it making indelicate sounds that we mostly pretended not to notice; always staring resolutely at the ceiling. Yet, someone's nerves would invariably snap at the sound of a relative seated beside her, furiously scrunching on horsy teeth that seemed to be attacking the fifth frosty green apple in a row and was about to start in on another. The weak and fastidious in the family really did go under with that kind of strain in the old days, when noisy eating or lack of decorum at the table, grated on our sensitivities so much.

We washed the whole meal down with a strong cup of Brooke Bonds tea. "Anyone for seconds?" Mum would ask, dancing in with a fresh filled teapot. Only one person ever asked for coffee, and she favoured a liquid Camp coffee, decaffeinated. We thought her a bit eccentric at the time.

The ladies washed and wiped up quickly; all hands to the deck, gossiping the while, until, full of joie de vivre, we went back to the fireside where the men folk invariably stood warming their backsides, shifting and rocking on their heels to escape burning their legs on the fearfully heated material of their Harris tweed trouser legs. They parted as we entered the room to allow our turn at burning our shins to a mottled pink and rosyng our cheeks before we took off into the fogs and mists, the rain or thick frost to prepare ourselves for work on Monday morning.

Sunday was lovely back then, when labour came mostly to a standstill for the seventh day of the week. The hum of machinery and heavy traffic was stilled. Church bells tried desperately to lure our fathers from the pubs. The young people scoured every district in London to find an ancient film at the pictures that they hadn't seen before, because new ones were not permitted to be shown on the Sabbath, probably due more to distribution, than anything else.

Thus, was memory sparked while I strolled one summer day in Eastbourne on a rare visit back to my home land. On my way back, I picked up a plate of whelks for my sister, who, had been sitting in a blue and white striped deck chair looking down on the waves, from the upper promenade, where I had left her nursing a gammy leg in front of the pretty flowers.

“Ooh! Lovely” she said, as I came toward her and she'd spotted the whelks.

“I'm surprised they let you take off this far away with their best china.”

“I'm on 'Brownies' Honour' to take it back Joan, and naturally, I drew on his pity for a wounded old lady back here as well.” The plate was emptied before I finished the sentence.

Whelks have rather different memories for Joan, she craved them as a child and created terrible scenes on a day out if denied them, which continued until we boarded the train home. I speak of a twelve year old here, not a toddler, her lungs were so strong, they overcame the shriek of gale force winds to puncture the ear drums of anyone within a half mile radius. She had a very happy smile on her face when I went off to return the empty platter. I thought, if our mother could see us now, she'd have a smile on her face too, that we can remember her teatimes so easily, on the whiff of a winkle and a whelk. Of such small things is fond memory made.

# My Early Memories

**Gloria Bothe**



I want my early life's story to be preserved.

I feel it is very important for my descendants to know and maybe come to realise and appreciate more, why I am who I am and cannot stop, working, being economical and being entrepreneurial. I just keep on going.

These early years of my life had driven me to strive to be an achiever, never giving up learning and trying to better myself in every way possible – and at the same time helping and giving to others.

## THE GOOD OLD DAYS....

Through the eyes of a child.

I remember very clearly snippets of my very early childhood from about 3 years when we lived at Pudman on the outskirts of Yass. We lived in a little old house with a front gate with an archway over it, just up the road from Dad's two sisters and their families. They were married to two cousins, they lived on small farms handed down to them by their fathers. My father was not as fortunate, as he and Mum had to make their own way in life.

My Dad had a disability. He was shot in the arm at the age of 17 and spent about a year in hospital, with the doctors, fighting to save his arm and hand. This left him with tendon damage to three fingers and due to this he was unable to open his fingers out. Which must have been difficult for a man working on a farm. He often developed blisters, corns and chilblains on these fingers.

In 1935 or 36 Dad and Mum took up a parcel of land near Wee Jasper in the Brindabella ranges. They named the property Mountain Home. This property consisted of about 1200 acres of virgin land, gum trees and undergrowth everywhere.

My Grandfather was contracted by the government to build a Dingo Proof Fence - the wires were closer together than usual - it was then braced at regular intervals with tire wire. One of the terms of the lease was that they clear a designated acreage of bush land for farming each year.

Dad was a very capable man who could turn his hand to anything. He built a tin shed which we lived in and he went to work for farmers in the area. As he saved some money he went on to build a lovely two bedroom house, high off the ground in the front about two meters, and we could just walk in at the back door. It faced east and looked out towards a creek. He built a high fence around it like a tennis court. We had some animals - a milking cow, chooks, dog and honey bees. My Mum had a brother for me and a sister on the way, when disaster struck.

January 1939: Black Friday Bushfires

What a horrific day and night!

The bushfires were coming... Dad had no vehicle, as it was in Yass having some mechanical work done on it so we had to rely on the neighbour to rescue us. The neighbour came in his utility he had with him my aunty. Everyone was very upset and extremely worried. Were we going to escape?

The neighbour was driving. Mum nursed my brother and Aunty Ruby nursed me and we set off, leaving Uncle Olly and Dad to fight the fire with their bare hands. The cow was rounded up and put in the creek where there was quite a large water hole, and the chooks cages were put under the house.

What a drive and terrible night for us! We had to drive through the fire, along a bush track with the flames everywhere. The fire was horrific, burning ahead of the fire on the ground, in the treetops above us. I was just 5 years old and terrified! I didn't make it any better for Mum, or anyone else, crying for my doll, which had to be left behind because of time and overcrowding in the front seat of the utility. We journeyed some 12 miles to what is known as Narrangullen Station, a Black Poll stud.

The homestead was being demolished as they were rebuilding on the same site, there were piles of bricks and timber everywhere. By this time, night had fallen, and they were back burning to save the house. It was very hot, we sheltered beside the piles of bricks and the men covered us with grey blankets - I think they are what we know as army blankets. They then sprinkled them with water to keep us cool until morning. You can imagine how uncomfortable Mum must have been just 6 weeks before my sister was born.

I don't have to tell you the relief when sometime the next day my Dad and Uncle emerged. They had travelled through the fire, as the crow would fly, about 6 miles. And they announced they had been unable to save anything. Everything had been lost, even the poor cow had to be humanely dealt with as her udder was so badly burnt. Indeed she did go into the water, but the heat was so intense that the water all dried up. After the fire we lived with Mum's parents at Limestone. Six weeks later along came my little sister Joy.

We survived on hand me downs, clothes from charity, friends and family. Dad was later given some of the demolition materials from the Narrangullen homestead and he built us a shed to live in, even salvaging some of the iron from our old burnt out house. This was

to be our home for some time, one room with no lining on the walls. Outside everything was black, everything had been burned, it was terrible. Can you imagine what it would have been like for Mum with three little children, and everything black?

Mum was very capable, cooking, sewing, helping to establish a vegetable garden. She would unpick recycled clothes wash and press the pieces and remake them for us into sweet little outfits with all kinds of embellishments. There was no electricity or hot water, we used a little round tin bath, and water would be heated on the stove or open fire.

### The Shearers Huts

From about 1940 until 1941 Dad worked for Wee Jasper Station, cutting timber, which he then milled at his own little saw mill, to be used in the building of the Shearers Huts. We then for a time lived in a Shearers Hut, while Dad with two or three other men built the shearing shed. Dad did the whole thing, drew the plans, cut the timber, then the plumbing, sewerage and drainage.

During this time I attended Wee Jasper school.

### THIS WAS QUITE AN EXPERIENCE.

I was six years old and walked to school about eight kilometers with some other children. Walking through the cattle paddocks, they teased and bullied me. They would scare me with “the bulls are going to chase you with those red ribbons in your hair, and red flowers on your dress”.

The school was very small, with about 20 children - Grades 1-6 in one room. Most of the children walked to school, however some of the children who lived further way would ride a horse to school. A small paddock adjacent to the school grounds was used for the horses while the children were at school.

One day one of the boys was running late for school and he rode his mount up the steps into the classroom. In recent years, this was

still the topic of discussion at a school reunion.

After Dad's building project was completed we moved back home to our little tin shed. I continued my school by correspondence from Blackfriars in Sydney, supervised by Mum until I was ten.

Washing days was usually on Mondays. Mum would be up early to light the fire under the copper, to heat the water before we had breakfast. This was our only source of hot water. The copper was set into a brick fireplace in the corner of the laundry, and solid fuel was used in the fire.

All the washing was done by hand, there was no washing powder, and we used home made soap. The soap was made from dripping saved into a tin, which was usually a honey tin cut off and made into a bucket. When the meat was cooked, the lard from the beast was melted down. The dripping would be boiled then caustic soda would be added and something called resin. This was left to set and later cut into bars, in usable sized pieces. Mum would scrub the clothes, rinse them, and wring out as much water as possible. White clothes, sheets etc, would be put in the copper and boiled with caustic soda, then rinsed with Ricketts Blue added to the water, the blue would help to keep the clothes white.

My responsibility on the day would be to do a lot of the cleaning and make sure that Mum's morning tea was ready by 10am. I would put the mats out to air and wash the floor. Then when the floors dried they were polished with floor polish, I think it was bees wax, and polished off with a cloth, to give a nice sheen. This was done on my hands and knees using a little cushion to kneel on. When the clothes dried they were ironed with flat irons heated on the top of the stove or in front of the open fire.

Our supplies were from Yass. We would travel there every few weeks. The children sometimes travelled in the back of the utility. We would lie down so as not to get too blown by the wind. I can remember counting the stars or telephone poles or looking at the

moon to occupy ourselves and fill in time.

It was some years before the house was extended. Until then we didn't have a bathroom. We would bathe in a round tin tub in front of the fire, with the water heated on the top of the stove or open fire.

Aunty Ruby had her house rebuilt sometime before we did. She lived some 15 kilometres away. I can remember it was quite a treat to walk to her place and have a bath in her full sized bath. One can only laugh at this, as by the time we walked home along a dusty road we would be dirtier than when we left home!

Our home was extended by my father about 9/10 years after the bushfire, with some hands-on help from my Uncle Pat. We then had our own bedroom, before that we all shared one large room which then became our lounge room. The farm developed very slowly. Some stock was introduced and improvements made to the property. It was many years before we had telephone, electricity - which was produced by a generator and stored in batteries - or a hot water service, which was circulated through the slow combustion stove.

Eucalyptus farming became very popular, as there was an abundance of eucalypt trees. This became a good source of income for us and we all helped with this.

When I was ten I went to Yass to live with my Aunty Gladys and grandmother, so that I could attend Mt. Carmel College. I loved school. The Nuns were very good to me, and I have a lot to be grateful to them for. I finished school at fifteen, which really broke my heart as even at this tender age I realised how important education would be to my future. I also realised that financially my parents were unable to afford to let me continue as I had a younger brother and sister also to be educated.

For two years, the Nuns invited me back to stay at the college to design and make costumes for the final concert at the end of each year.

Dad's mother had her own couture business in Yass for many years. I was very interested in sewing and dressmaking and she would give me lots of tips and guidance, while at the same time begging me to peruse another career. She blamed the fine work that she had done often very late into the night for so many years, with poor lighting, for her bad eyesight.

After I left school and before I started nursing I made dresses for my friends and their mothers and friends. When I was of age I commenced my nursing training at Yass Hospital, later moving to Royal Canberra Hospital.

But that's another story ....

# Bob and Lionel or The Day The Front Door Was Closed.

**Judy Parker**



The small weatherboard cottage with its front verandah facing the street where their daughter Mauriel was born, had been home to Bob and Lyn for over fifty years. Mauriel still lived there with her husband Ben. The front door stood open day and night, all the world was welcome. Dust storms, freezing sleet and summer heat were also welcomed, the weather was to be lived in not shut out. The breeze through in summer was the air conditioning. The central heating was large logs crackling on the open fire with bricks warming on the side, to be well wrapped and placed in the beds at night for electric blankets.

Bob, Mauriel's father, had passed his 90th year when some of these events took place. He was still a very active man although slowing down and it took him some little while to walk to his petrol pumps. He still sold petrol and the pumps were about 300 metres from the house. His customers were very patient and loyal, they drove past the modern service station down the road to support him. He had built a garage very early on when he realized that cars would need fixing. He kept the pumps for himself and leased the garage to a mechanic.

Lionel was a man of around 60 or so, it was hard to say, he had probably been 60 or so since birth as he didn't seem to change. He was a very handsome man, always immaculately dressed in riding gear, with his Akubra hat, the very image of the land owning gentleman. He would arrive on his horse with faithful dogs at heel and join Bob and his blue heeler Henry on the front verandah. Lyn did not approve and made it quite clear that Bob should not encourage him. Among other habits he was inclined to put his feet up on the table after dinner. This was an unforgivable breach of etiquette. Despite this, after expressing her silent disapproval with pursed lips, she would go off to put the kettle on and explore the contents of the cake tins and if necessary scones would have to be quickly baked. No one left this cottage without being adequately fed.

During one of these chats Lionel commented that he had a wonderful flock of sheep that year. The wool crop would be fantastic, Bob should come out to the property to inspect. Bob was very sorry, this was not possible, he did not get about much anymore, the rheumatism you know.

“Oh! in that case I will bring them in” was the response. Nothing more was thought of this until on Sunday morning a large flock of sheep was seen coming up the road. This was not unusual as flocks were frequently moved through the town, however, this one came directly up the street and into the vacant land next door and eventually into Lyn's garden. Behind the sheep came Lionel on horseback. He came in and sat down to chat with Bob, quite oblivious to the chaos.

Total pandemonium ensued with Lyn screaming and waving her arms around frantically. “Get those animals out of my flower beds!” Bob sat back serenely enjoying the fun while it was all hands on deck to save Lyn's garden. Henry barking loudly and nipping at the heels of the terrified sheep, this invasion of his territory was just not on. The sheep dogs were doing their best to control the situation and at the same time defend their flock from Henry, a fierce dog fight was inevitable. Bob finally managed to call Henry to heel and somehow the sheep were eventually shooed into the next door paddock and

Lyn went off to put the kettle on. When it was time to go, Lionel called his dogs to heel and the sheep were left to roam the town. His property manager spent many days rounding them up and getting them safely back to the farm.

Lionel made things interesting in many ways for the little town. Some years previously, it was Saturday afternoon at the pictures. The usual program was the newsreel, cartoons, an ongoing serial and two feature films. The newsreels were partly news and partly propaganda as the battles of World War 2 were won and lost. A sad reminder on this lovely summer day of the misery being faced by a large number of people across the world. Cheers went up as battle scenes were played out in the jungles of New Guinea or Africa.

Then the cartoons. At least two or three times during the screening the film would break, the screen would flicker and go blank, leaving the hall in darkness until the lights were turned on. This caused much booing and stamping of feet and balls of paper to be thrown up towards the projectionist, who accepted this as a normal part of the days work.

With the film repaired it was on with this show until another interruption. Today a rather dramatic one, as the clip clop of a horse was heard, not coming from the screen but somewhere very close, then a loud crack as a stock whip whirled over head and the horse and rider came trotting down the aisle. There were screams of panic and crashes as chairs were thrust out of the way with a mass exodus through the exits to escape the whirling whip cracking over head. If this was a fire drill the chief would have been very impressed - the hall cleared in seconds flat.

Lionel proceeded to the front of the hall with a very important statement to make exhorting everyone to listen but by this time there was no one left to listen, except the cinema owner and the usher who were trying to mediate a peaceful withdrawal of horse and rider, which eventually they did and he was handed over to the police constable and taken home to a very patient wife. Although shortly afterwards he

was seen sitting on the verandah chatting to Bob, no doubt bewailing the lack of interest this town had in it's own welfare.

He would send telegrams and try to make phone calls to the Queen and other high dignitaries to enlist their help in dealing with the shire council on matters such as the blackberries that grew in wild abundance on the road leading to his property. Within his boundary he was forced to spray them as noxious weeds but the council was obviously above the law and this unjust situation must cease. His telegrams surprisingly were never answered, they were never sent.

Neither was there any attempt made to connect the telephone calls, manual exchanges do have their uses. The blackberry problem was solved by several phone calls to the Shire Clerk at 2 or 3am in the morning. These were put through, the boy on night duty sleeping at the exchange was not going to be woken up at that hour to be berated by an angry customer. The Clerk realised that if his sleep pattern was not to be permanently damaged he should make sure that the offending blackberries were sprayed. There were many other problems though that required the Queen's attention.

A very traumatized telephone technician arrived back at the post office one day shaking and white as a ghost, furious that he had been given no warning of what he was about to walk into when sent to repair Lionel's telephone. It had been ripped out of the wall in a fit of rage when the Queen could not be contacted. As he walked towards the house from his truck he had been met by one furious Lionel waving a very large shotgun. The technician did not wait to argue but ran back to his truck and made a very hasty get away. No he did not receive counselling, just gales of laughter from the staff and every one he met in the town for sometime after, so he had to just go along and laugh with them, certainly not the modern way of dealing with work place stress but maybe it worked.

Lionel was also responsible for the doors of the house being locked at night. This came about when in the very early hours, Lionel appeared at the foot of Bob's bed. "Get up, Get up" he said "it's time

to leave, I have a very good horse waiting for you and a couple of very good pack horses, they are tied up at the gate. I have some supplies but we will get the rest on the way.” The idea was that they would go to Central Australia to rustle cattle. According to Lionel there were unbranded cattle wandering around all over the place out there and all you had to do was go and round them up.

This fantasy had been months in the planning with Bob agreeing to everything that Lionel proposed and even adding a few over the top suggestions of his own. Now however, it became clear at about 3am that this little joke had backfired. Lyn was shocked into speechlessness with the covers pulled up tightly to her neck. Oh the scandal, a man in her bedroom.! Muriel rushed to see what was going on and threatened to call the police. “Oh, go back to bed you silly woman! what’s the fuss? I can handle this. Or better still, go and make a cup of tea.” commanded Bob.

Ben came to the rescue with an aggressive offer of physical force to remove the intruder. “Get out of here” roared Bob, “this is none of your business.” Bob dealt with the problem of his son-in-law by ignoring him whenever possible as he considered him too stupid and ignorant to waste breath on. As Ben was not much of a conversationalist they managed to live together quite well. Bob made sure it was very clear that he was in charge and his wishes were paramount so Ben retreated muttering that this was the last straw.

Bob persuaded Lionel to join him for a chat on the verandah while Muriel was making the tea. What was said has to be left to the imagination but I think it was reasonable to expect that Bob had a very hard time talking himself out of this situation. Fortunately, he was as good at talking himself out of trouble as into it. After a cup of tea and a long talk Lionel realized that this project would need to be put on hold for quite a while and finally rode off with the promise that he had many more ideas and he would be along to discuss them shortly.

The following morning an attempt was made to close the front door. Ben had Lyn on side so Bob’s protests were in vain. Lyn was

not risking another male invading her bedroom. The door was firmly jammed against the wall. It had to be removed and re hung. A new lock was fitted and so the little cottage was now firmly secure.

I wonder, does it still stand with the memories of all those past years seeping from its walls or have the bulldozers been in and leveled it to make way for a brick fortress with central heating and air conditioning and not only locked doors but also windows. The world and the weather kept very securely out, the front verandah now a patio out the back, away from prying eyes.

Where are the Bob's and Lionel's? Have they disappeared altogether or are they sitting in some lonely room, being so well cared for that the wonderful fantasies of their minds are deadened by pharmaceuticals.

We can't have people like that making a nuisance of themselves, can we?

# An extract from... My Life.

**Elisabeth Angel**



In 1937 Dad decided he would work for himself so he bought a shop and Mum, Betty (my Aunt), my brother Jeff and I went to live over it. The shop was at 311 Hook Rise, Hook on the Kingston-by-pass in Surrey, England, some miles from where we lived at the time. A brand new shop - to be a newsagency, tobacconist and confectioners. Mum and Betty got it going with little stock, which they built up. Dad left his job in Colindale and joined us when enough money was being made to keep us all.

The flat over the shop had a small balcony outside the back door with metal stairs leading down to the garden. I remember my mum scraping the toast over the balcony when it got burnt, which was often.

Soon after moving to the shop my health troubles began. To find the cause, I had a stay in Middlesex Hospital in London 1939 for allergy tests. There was an injection for each test. Eventually it was decided to remove my tonsils. I also had to go to Surbiton Hospital to have an infected gland drained as antibiotics had not been invented.

One day Jeff and I were asked not to go too far away, but still went as far as Cedarcroft Road with our friends. We were soon to be found 'bawling our eyes out' - the first siren signalling the start of the war had sounded. It made a weird sound, quite spooky and

frightening. We panicked and were taken home in tears. It was 1939.

When the German bombers flew over Britain to bomb important targets, people were warned by a siren so they could take shelter. The siren made a wailing sound going up and down, which still stirs stomachs when heard. When the planes were on their way back to Germany, and danger was passed, the 'all clear' was sounded, this time a siren on an even note.

Everybody was allocated an identity number to be worn at all times. Our family wore ours engraved on a disk, which we hung around our necks. We were allocated CNIJ5/1, CNIJ5/2 for Mum and Dad, then mine CNIJ5/3 and Jeff CNIJ5/4.

Gas masks were given to everybody. These were rubber masks with a metal filter which one would wear over ones face for protection if and when the enemy dropped gas bombs. The masks had a horrible, rubbery smell. They were kept in a cardboard box, like a square shoebox and carried over our shoulder.

Because ships and supplies were being bombed, everything was in short supply. To enable everyone to have a fair share of food and clothing we were issued with ration books. Each book contained coupons indicating how much of each item you were allowed to have per week. As you bought items such as eggs, butter, bacon, meat, clothing, petrol, lollies, the shopkeeper took coupons as well as money. Parents had a book for each member of the family and became very good at producing meals without many ingredients. Clothing had to last a long time - we wore our school uniforms on weekends as well as to school.

With food being scarce people were encouraged to grow their own and keep chickens for eggs and meat. A neighbour of ours kept a goat for milk.

The danger of bombing at night meant all lights had to be hidden so the pilots couldn't see the cities to bomb - vehicles had their head lights masked.

Many homes had bomb-proof shelters. There was one in the backyard of 311 Hook Rise where we would sleep. It was made of concrete and brick and was large enough for our family and friends, and any pets. Stories would be told, supper would be eaten, games played, and eventually sleep - noise permitting.

Hook was 15/20 miles out of London and therefore on the fringe of any raids made by the Germans. So for safety reasons in 1940/41 it was decided that Jeff and I would be better off in North Molton, Devon with an elderly Aunt. This turned out not good for my health, so we returned to the shop. The next move was to a family by the name of King in Llan Ffestiniog, Northern Wales. We attended a Welsh speaking school which was not easy. I recall Mr King making what were called faggots (a type of large meatball) made out of boiled sheep's heads and sold in his shop.

I again had health problems so we eventually went back to Hook before being sent to my father's sister Dorothy Williams. She was married to a doctor, David, and was living in Gilfach Goch, Glamorgan, Wales. This was a valley with a mine running down the centre. I was told the miners use to go home at the end of their days work and freshen up, getting rid of the coal dust in a tin bath in the scullery.

The Williams had a big house called Dan-y-Craig, where we and other family members - 2 aunts, our cousin Tony and grandfather Benn - took refuge.

It was here that the planes bombing Swansea and Cardiff decided to drop their loads (just anywhere) before departing. One of the landmines with a parachute attached fell on Dan-y-Craig while we were inside. A lid of a landmine fell on the hill behind us, adding to the blast. It was night time and we were in our beds. With cousin Tony's guidance we all walked out across rubble and through glass without a scratch. David was visiting a little boy when the bombs dropped. He was reassuring his patient that the bomb was nowhere near them, therefore they were not in danger, little knowing that it was his own home that had been hit.

Cousin Tony is now living in The Channon in NSW Australia. Sadly he had a stroke in 2008, leaving him with garbled speech.

The bombing of Dan-y-Craig meant another move for Jeff and I, this time following Dorothy and David to Killay near Swansea.

Eventually all this moving around ceased, and Jeff and I resumed what might have been called a normal life with our parents and aunt at 311 Hook Rise, 'the shop'.

Jeff and I attended Tolworth Infants School for a few years. Mum usually walked us to school but sometimes Dad took me on the back of his bike in a little seat or later in the sidecar of his motorbike. I went on to St Matthews School, also in Tolworth. Mum was in awe of the principal, apparently a bit of a dragon. I only remember her as Lotty Penzer. Sorry Miss Penzer.

When Mum and I went shopping we would walk to Sainsbury's, which was in the area called The Ace of Spades, named after a roadhouse nearby. While walking we would play word games. Mum would say a sentence and I had to answer with any of the following – yes, no, nay, black, white or grey. It sounds so simple but I did make mistakes. We would then reverse the process and I would ask the questions.

Occasionally Jeff and I would go and stay with our Grandparents Weare in 16 Station Road, Crawley, Sussex. A little terraced house with no electricity upstairs, we took candles with us at bedtime. The toilet was out the back next to the coal shed.

The railway passed at the end of the road and Jeff and I use to go and stand on the pedestrian bridge when the steam trains went underneath. We were covered in steam and probably soot and enjoyed every minute. If we went to Gran and Pop's in the month of April we were taken to the Hawth in Three Bridges, near Crawley. The Hawth then was a wooded area with primroses growing in it. As it was Mum's birthday on Primrose Day, 19 April, we would pick some and take them home to her.

I visited Dave and Dorothy again when I was about 11 yrs old. They were then living in Gwbert, near Cardigan. This visit was to assist with my health and I seem to recall I did not wheeze at all while there. Grandpa Benn was still living with them as was Snoopy. It was a delightful spot over looking an estuary where salmon were caught.

The fishermen off Gwbert, Cardiganshire would watch a certain home on the Gwbert Cliffs - washing hanging on the clothesline meant the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries were on the prowl. The fishermen were supposed to remain stationary once their nets were out.

Towards the end of the war Mum's sister Betty went to live in Canada. She developed breast cancer in the 1950's and had a mastectomy. From that experience she inaugurated the Mastectomy Supporters group, branches of which spread across Canada. Betty developed cancer for the 2nd time towards the end of 2001 - a tumour in the bladder. She died from this on 28 October 2002.

Betty had a great influence on my life and always corresponded with letters of copious number of pages. I regret she had no computer, no emails, to communicate with me. It would have been good to have 'talked' to her this way.

We left the shop and moved to The Haven, Eastwick Drive, Great Bookham. It was here my brother Richard was born in 1942, later we moved next door (literally) to Little Warren.

When the birth of Richard was imminent, Jeff and I were sent down to our Grandparents Weare in Crawley. I was so naïve I was quite unaware that my mother was pregnant.

While in Eastwick Drive, when Richard was still very young, the bombs (known as doodlebugs, V1's and V2's) would come over from Europe and Richard would warn my mother, who was very deaf, that a doodlebug was coming - 'doodlebug Mum!'. They would take cover in the indoor air raid shelter made of metal. The drone of the doodlebugs could be heard on their approach, it was when the noise

ceased that one feared for one's life as it was not known where they would land.

From Little Warren, Jeff and I were sent to Mrs Shipley's school for the remainder of our primary education. Being a small school we got the individual attention we needed after our disrupted education. I have my reports and the receipts for school fees.

Post primary school I attended 'St Martin's in the Fields', which was evacuated to Leatherhead from Streatham. We shared St John's, a boys school. Some lessons were held in the Wesley Hall elsewhere in Leatherhead. I remember French and music lessons there - Je m'appelle Elisabeth! I played the triangle in the school orchestra. Such musical talent.

Anne Coomber (nee Brian) and I met at St Martin's and later when the school returned to Streatham/Tulse Hill we were transferred to Dorking Grammar. At St Martins we wore a brown uniform at Dorking a blue one. But as clothing was rationed we were allowed to continue to wear our brown. We were called the 'brown confederates'.

When I transferred to Dorking Grammar, a bus and a train journey away, I sometimes walked to Leatherhead station instead of taking the bus. This would take me past the Mill-Ponds that were full of water birds and I saved the bus fare to spend in the 'tuck' shop by Dorking Station.

At Dorking Grammar, at art I drew ducks with scarves, in a creek – it came back with a large NO written on it. My masterpiece was not appreciated. I was also in the choir which I enjoyed and which I have followed up in recent times (2010) by joining the Gospel Folk in Canberra.

My liking and talent for art has evolved and continued over the years.

# The Sisterhood

**Wilma Davidson**



## **Foreword**

A few months ago, I discovered a photograph – Jenny Callander with her daughters. In the photograph there are three adults, a girl and a toddler. This photo revealed to me that I grew up not only surrounded by women – I already knew this – but surrounded by the love of women. I looked in other photos and there I was, the little one who came after the struggle and the war and the grief and was in the centre of whatever happened in our family's life.

There were men in my life also. My brother Jimmy was 21 when I was born and arrived home from the navy and there I was, surprise, surprise – or so the family story goes. And there was my Dad, a quiet man in many ways. I adored my Dad but our contact was more one to one. We would walk together up the farm road to visit the cows or I would sit on the shed roof as he pruned the arch of rambling roses. Or we would feed the fantail pigeons together or watch Cuddles the guinea pig play on the grass. There was another brother who died four years before I was born, my mother's firstborn, for whom she mourned as long as I remember.

But this story is not about the family as such; this story is about the women that are my sisters.

It is a story of family myth and legend – by legend I mean stories I remember, of which I have no proof or source, but they are good stories - peppered by memory. It is a story of women who probably helped shape my life and to whom I have, until now, given little credit. It is time to honour these women and acknowledge their care and love of this little person in so many photos.

This is a thank you story.

### ***Frances***

As I look through old photos, the first thing I see is that Frances is beautiful. Her skin is soft and fair while her hair is a mass of dark silky curls.

My strongest memory of Frances is her playing the piano while we all sang. We hummed a few bars and that was all she needed. And on her last visit to Australia, a few months before her death, she still had this ability, albeit limited.

The family legend was that Frances stopped work when I was born to look after Mum and me after a harrowing birth. She would take me out in my pram and she was constantly mistaken for my mother.

I was little when she married Albert Grindley and seven years later she gave birth to George and then a few years later along came Rosemary. I went to stay with her and Albert in school holidays and Margaret and I would visit her on Wednesdays – Margaret's half day off.

One special memory is being hugged by her by the kitchen fire while the funeral for her namesake, Mum's youngest sister Frances, our Aunt Frances, was happening in the front room. I would have been about five and in those days children didn't attend funerals. I can remember the smell and softness of her black jumper and my face pressing against her ample breasts, her tears and sad voice.

1992. This was my first visit to Scotland after leaving for Australia in 1968. The family met me at Edinburgh and while we drank copious amounts of tea at the airport café, Frances hardly took her eyes off

me. That was the first time I was aware of how much she loved me. In her heart, I was her first child.

Frances was four when her father George William Attwell died. The family story is that he wanted her to be called Rose Marie after the popular song at the time but Mum was aware her youngest sister Frances probably wouldn't marry so Frances it was. (Another family story is that doing this Mum ignored the Scottish tradition of naming the first daughter after the maternal grandmother, and Mum's sisters would occasionally call Frances by my grandmother's name Ina, then say oh dear I forgot). I only discovered a few years ago that this little four year old witnessed the asthma attack that killed her father. Frances experienced what we would now call post natal depression following her daughter Rosemary's birth and clinical depression much of her life – which may have been linked to the trauma of her fourth year.

### **Georgie**

Georgina was born some months after her father's death and so the only father she knew was our Mum's second husband and my Dad, Bill Davidson. I was twelve when Georgie was 20 and travelled by boat to Australia – in the midst of the Suez Canal crisis – and that's when I decided I'd go to Australia when I was twenty – and I did.

What I remember about Georgie was that she had had lots of curly red hair. I don't have many memories of Georgie in my childhood and can't remember her living at home, but I can remember her coming home at weekends and that she always brought me a present until Mum put a stop to it because my greeting words would be what did you bring me? Or so I've been told – often!

Georgie attended a domestic college and trained as a cook. I remember a story about her being expected to light the kitchen fire in the morning and finding it just wouldn't light for her no matter how hard and often she tried, and came home and Dad took her back again. She did eventually master the fire.

When Georgie finished her training she worked as a cook for a grand family of sugar refiners who lived in a large house. I have a vague memory of visiting a woman who was in bed and spoke beautifully – like on the wireless - and had on a very frilly pink bed-jacket, and she said nice things about Georgie. Apparently this was the woman she worked for and she was very ill.

What I do remember is that in her absence, Georgie represented for me adventure and possibilities. She was a Woman of the World. And I was going to follow in her footsteps.

When I came to Australia Georgie was there waiting for me with her daughters. For twenty year old (going on three) Wilma this was a dream come true – and the beginning of life's adventure.

## **Margaret**

Margaret and my relationship - What a pest I must have been! There are seldom photographs of us together where I'm not pulling, pushing, talking to or sitting on her.

In a photo, taken at Nairn (with pebbles and windblown hair – visiting the beach in Scotland), I'm guessing I would have been around five and Margaret will have been just starting high school.

I remember Margaret as the peacemaker, the carer, the fixer. And this continued until my parents death in their seventies. Most of my growing up we were the two still at home and shared a tiny room – which I still sleep in when I visit Scotland. And being the practical sort, Margaret ensured it was papered and painted regularly.

As I was growing up, I saw Margaret as everything I was not – house-keeper and decorator and peacemaker, while holding a responsible job and looking smart and fashionable. And most importantly, she pleased Mum, something I felt I could never do – not in my teens anyway.

She would work Monday to Saturday and do the books for the shoe shop she managed on Sundays, listening to Johnny Mathis and Nat King Cole.

On her half-day Wednesday she would help clean the house before she and I visited Frances. The bus stopped and the bottom of the hill and we walked up the country road and along beside the fields until we reached Frances and Albert's little cottage. After dinner we reversed this walk in the dark, lit by stars and the moon.

I do remember many Saturday afternoons at the cinema with Margaret – she loved musicals and still does. My strongest memories are; Doris Day jumping off and on a trolley in a pajama factory (this was *The Pajama Game*), dressed in a beautiful red full skirt and singing her heart out, while the other women looked quite drab, Doris Day again, this time on a stage coach, again jumping around and singing in *Annie get Your Gun*, and a room full of bunk beds and (I assume) seven women, brightly attired and again lots of singing in *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers*.

Margaret and her partner Matt still live in the house where I was born and still has her wonderful dry sense of humour – and still looks after me when I visit.

When I look back on her life I see the born carer – me, Mum in difficult times and Mum and Dad in their ageing, and then her own family. I admire her peace and the sense of contentment that surrounds her. It took me many years to harness this feeling.

### ***Afterward***

Who am I writing this for?

Yes, my sisters – and I am sad Frances isn't here to read it also - but as well, I am writing for nieces and nephew, the children of my sisters. You have special, unique, mothers. These little pen sketches may help you view her from a different angle.

And I'm writing this for me. As I am writing, I see pictures of times long forgotten; I feel the memories of fun and love that have been overshadowed for many years by the not so good memories. And as I age, this process reminds me I still have sisters, who will always be, my big, sisters.

When I look back, I see I was not an easy sibling. My expectations were high and I do think I was led to believe I was the centre of the universe - to my shock and sorrow when I stepped out of the big red door and into the world.

However, I did take with me Mum's strength in adversity – and also; Frances's unconditional love, Georgie's sense of adventure and Margaret's sense of place and ability to keep grounded. These are precious gifts for which I am indebted to you, my sisters.

# Populate or Perish

**Mollie Bialkowski**



'Populate or perish, Populate with tradespeople' was the call in 1949 from Arthur Caldwell the Australian Minister for Immigration. This encouraged my father and mother to take the extremely courageous step to emigrate to Australia from England.

I still believe my mother did not want to leave her two sisters and mother even though we were sponsored by an unknown Aunty Ruby, my mother's names sake and Aunt's husband Uncle Reg. They were also emigrants from England. In the post World War One period my great aunt Ruby and great uncle Reg were given what appeared to be a soldier settlement of land at Glenorie on Cattai Road near Castle Hill N.S.W.

This was down Parramatta way and just like the early settlers, they were encouraged to grow oranges and lemons in their citrus orchard. The family also managed to maintain a cow, horse and chooks in the time our family spent there. I grew to love riding on the horse with my male cousin David aged 14.

Our ship took six weeks to transport us to Oz and was called His Majesty's ship the Georgic, a converted troop ship. So at the age of nine I was on the high seas. Most of the other passengers were sea-sick during the voyage in the Bay of Biscay off the coast of France.

My father and I were not sea-sick which was a relief, and I spent a lot of time exploring the ship and setting tables for the two sittings of the communal meals. The constant cry from the migrants was 'give us bread or even toast' as we only had bread rolls to go with all meals!

It was a disappointment to us to find the anticipated swimming pool on board had been filled in with cabins for the soldiers returning home from World War Two!

The ship also had the dreaded school which I did not attend much. I should have as I was 9 at the time. Maybe I wagged it! My sister was only three so did not have to go! My future bent to drama may have something to do with watching the free films, including the tragic drama written by Charles Dickens called 'The Tale of Two Cities!' I think I watched the famous head chopping scene at least eleven times!

Our family enjoyed "Crossing the line" an aquatic festivity in which the crew and passengers celebrated with water, food and being subservient to a dressed up King Neptune/ Poseidon King of the Sea. This was enacted as we crossed the Equator in the Indian Ocean. My tragedy was that owing to the hot weather in the tropics I developed a huge carbuncle on my elbow and was hospitalized! Maybe it was punishment for wagging school I thought.

Dark comments were made in hushed tones behind my back - to which I strained to listen. "She may not be able to go to the crossing the line party if it does not burst!" Fortunately it did and I was able to be presented with the customary certificate and partake of the goodies.

In the Tropics it became as hot as an inferno and the poor passengers had to try and sleep up on the top open deck as their sleeping quarters were far down below on C deck. They needed to go back to their hot cabins at 5am when the crew needed to hose down the decks!

After traveling down the Suez canal I saw pyramids in the distance and great gentlemen sitting on their verandas whilst being fanned by their servants.

Sharing cabins with other female passengers and children was another new experience. For husbands and wives it was hard, especially for our new friends Bill and cabin mate Jean Bishop who were recently married. But covered-in life boats make for other uses as my mother later told me.

After navigating through the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean we finally arrived in Fremantle Harbour W.A. And still we had not been given leave to get off the ship!

Finally we arrived at the Melbourne docks and my father and I managed to escape the ship where we visited a sweet shop. When my father asked me to choose any sweet I liked I simply couldn't! We had not had many sweets in England during the war. It could have been a plethora of jewels for all I knew and was a magic moment. (Some rationing still continued in Great Britain till 1952.) My long suffering sister had contracted chicken pox and so could not indulge in the lolly hit although we brought her back some later.

Our ship arrived at Berth 9 Woolloomooloo docks at nine-thirty am on the 18<sup>th</sup> May 1949. We were met by our smiling relatives in a T Model Ford. It was a sight my father could hardly believe as we had never owned a car. After all Carless was our name! Our Plymouth Brethren turned out to be very generous in giving up their bedrooms and sleeping out on their covered verandas. A huge sign greeted us which said 'Welcome to Australia Will, Ruby, Mollie and Wendy' impressed us as a family. But what didn't impress my parents were the relative's constant harping 'it's the work of the devil' talk when my father turned on his wireless, read the paper and horror of horrors smoked his own roll your own cigarettes!

The devil never appeared when the rellies listened to *their* citrus reports on our wireless! Plymouth Brethren are a Christian religious group with lots of restrictions. They are a little like the Amish religion who are in America. Everything was prepared for their Sunday Sabbath on the previous day including the pig's head brawn! That was also quite a shock for us.

Our short hair was encouraged to grow long and rolled up in tight white cotton strips to form ringlets on Saturday night for the next day. Needless to say this painful ordeal was objected to by my little sister and I.

Also, on my arrival home from my new school at Hillside on Cattai Road, Glenorie, I was subjected to cross examination from the relatives. “Did you speak to anyone? Did you tell them anything?”. This was to a nine year old migrant child who had just arrived in a strange land. I also had to learn to ride a bicycle 2 miles to my new school. When I saw a three foot brown snake along the side of the road it didn't help my fears. Food was also very different and I was fed butter milk to fatten me up as I was very thin after the war time rationing in England.

Parcels from England from our darling Aunty Foll, my mother's sister, excited us immensely. She missed us very much as she had no children and I had spent many school holidays with her. We also missed our Grandpa and Grandma, our beloved Aunty Win and David our cousin. But to compensate somewhat we had four lovely little girl cousins our age plus our new older cousin also called David aged fourteen. It was hard to induce him into the communal bath as he was way down the list after the ‘new girl cousins’. Early habits such as watering the garden with the house grey-water I learnt at the age of nine. We still save water from baths and sinks as our family had arrived during a drought and the relatives only had tanks.

My bricklayer father, who was one of the tradespeople that Australia needed, found work in Auburn near Sydney. He had to board during the week with some religious friends called the Mansells. In the school holidays I sometimes went with him where I was often taken to a Mission tent. There we learnt every hymn off by heart. Our relatives also ran a Sunday school in their lounge room and showed little bible stories shone by a magic lantern onto a white sheet placed upon a wall. Again we learnt more hymns and choruses!

Life went on for nearly six months but through her misfortune we were ‘rescued’ by Aunty Nancy Watkins from Hill Top in the Southern

Highlands. She had shared a cabin with my mother, sister and I on board ship and was expecting another baby. Already she had three boys and was showing the eldest how to chop wood. Unfortunately a chip flew up and hit her in the eye. She wrote to my mother asking could we come and look after the children whilst she had the baby and then a glass eye inserted!

We quickly packed up and traveled to Hill Top from Sydney Central Station to Picton on a steam train and then by small motor train via the Loop Line to Hill Top. This was through other little villages. We were awed by the sandstone cliffs. The famous Saddleback Bridge still straddles these famous landmarks. It is located on the Mittagong to Picton side road (not the old Hume Highway).

We washed and bathed in tank water heated by a chip bath heater. My father was very happy digging in the huge vegetable garden at Glen Coppin, owned by Charles and Nancy Watkins. Dad had a huge vegetable and an allotment garden back in Essex England to help the war effort so was very experienced in vegetable growing. We stayed with the Watkins for some time to mind the 3 boys. So both the families had 'rescued' each other!

My mother joined the fledgling Country Women's Association and was very happy to find good friends there. Our first rented house on our own was called Sunray, a tiny fibro cottage where I had a Milly Molly Mandy bedroom painted daffodil yellow.

Then we moved on to Drayton Lodge in Rosina Street, a larger house with wonder of wonders, a motor house! This contained a generator, which ran the electrified house -the only one in Hill Top at the time! Electricity finally came through to the village in 1951. Up till then it was kerosene for lamps and fridges and wood for fuel stoves. An interesting toilet arrangement existed in this house- in an indoor septic separator, an added extra as there was already an outdoor toilet of 'The red-back on the toilet seat' variety'!

Mrs Hillier was our landlady at Drayton Lodge and a more generous lady you could not meet. I had to start at another school. This was old and cold and built in 1884. Here I was very unhappy to begin with as the children were not friendly to the little migrant child with an accent. Mother went up to the school to see the headmaster Mr. Maloney, in the one teacher school, and asked why when we were English were the children belting me around the legs with a wattle bough and calling out "Little Pommie, Little Pommie!". He replied "The best thing you could do is to get rid of those accents!" Thus came assimilation in the late forties!

But I could sing well and so sang at the opening of the new school in 1952. It came with a new teacher called Mr. Winley. The local P and C. Asso had arranged this Blake Pelly and Jeff Bate local C.P. politicians. I can still see my mother as secretary of the Parents and Citizens Association slaving over her kitchen table desk and sending numerous letters to the Liberal Country Party government of the time in NSW.

We were sent to Sunday school at the little Anglican Church. Loyal Miss Felgate cycled each Sunday to teach myself, my sister and the head master's son Vernon Winley. We three were often the only pupils.

# A Nest in the West! Why?

**Terry Quinn**



## ***East Nest (X) ~ West Nest***

With someone like you, a pal good and true

I'd like to leave it all behind and go and find

Some place that's known to God alone

Just a spot to call our own

We'll find perfect peace

Where joys never cease

Out there beneath a kindly sky

We'll build a sweet little nest somewhere in the west

And let the rest of the world go by.

Words & Music by J. Keirn Brennan & Ernest R. Ball, 1919.  
Recorded by Gene Autry, Dick Haymes

<http://lyricsplayground.com/alpha/songs/letterestoftheworldgoby.shtml>

Sung around our home by Dad, Don Quinn

'Dad! Why are we leaving?' I found myself wondering, just as any four year old might, trying to make sense of a changing world. I was in the process of getting my mind around moving from the only home I'd ever known. We were headed out West from Sydney's Eastern Suburbs to acquire our very own railway station labeled in foot high black capitals, MERRYLANDS. We moved from a three story terrace built in the 1850s in Woollahra (meeting place) then a dormitory suburb of Sydney Town. The semi-tropical bush along the Southern cliffs overlooking Port Jackson had, for five millennia, provided shelter in caves and good camping for the local Eora clan of Cadigal people of the Dharug nation.

After the Botany Bay bound first fleet abandoned its original site, it sailed north into what Governor Phillip called the finest harbour in the world. The first fleeters first contact with locals was probably the ringing 'Cooee' call of locals for friends to 'come and see', carrying clearly across the sparkling waters of what came to be known as Sydney Harbour. What merriment the Cadigal would have taken watching the subsequent daily parade of soldiers marching along the South Head track to tend signal fires at South Head lookout station. 'Cooee' come and see.

Every flake of paint in that old terrace held hidden memories for my mother and her mother before her, for they had been born and raised there. In her youth the rising arch of the Sydney Harbour Bridge was the first sign visible of Sydney's growing CBD. Following WWII her large family of eight siblings each benefited from the sale of her family home, financing the building of individual family homes with the proceeds. Some built South across Botany Bay and others North on the Hawkesbury.

We built West and were moving to a new square-ish fibro house with bare wooden floors. Dad's homely singing echoed through the house. Floor coverings and curtains were added later, and insect screens as well, following our first fly-infested summer. Our new house, built on a quarter acre block, was surrounded by grass more than a yard high as measurement went in those days. Long stalks

of paspalum forming a dense growth, provided us kids with hours of fun as we crisscrossed the back yard with wombat sized tunnels through the grass. The tunnels lead to a dungeon hideaway among the piers underneath the elevated front of our house. At the back of the house was a step down from an open verandah to a laundry and semi-attached outside dunny.

The backdoor was highway to our house and it was hardly ever locked. Our front door was only ever used by salesmen or new visitors on their first visit. Services were home delivered in those halcyon days of the fabulous fifties. Around breakfast time the ice man would invade the very core of our home in boots and bagging apron, lugging an ice block half the size of a fruit crate, swinging from an enormous set of calipers. He also sold fish and to this day I still carry a deep loathing of fishy smells.

Even earlier in the wee hours while we slept a shady rambler visited our darkened neighborhood, the dunny can man. His truck called the dunny cart, carried cans of 'night soil' securely stashed in clip seal cans. But it could still be smelt a mile off. After sunrise our milkman ladled milk from a metre high multi-gallon pail in the back of his horse-drawn wagon. Carrying our full billy he entered by the front gate to hang our billy of cow juice from an enormous nail on the shady side of the fence. Good timing for breakfast. No chance then of birds pecking through silver bottle tops. No bottles, no tops, and never then a sign of a milk carton.

Our Mary Street milko arrived in the early morning before the heat of the day, clip-clopping up the brick cobbled rise outside our house then along towards the railway line half a mile to the east. The baker's bread cart, also horse drawn, was more of a midday feature in our street. Our baker however travelled west down our street bringing a rich aroma of freshly baked bread wafting on the still sunny air. Leaving his horse to mind the cart in the street, he would enter each house in turn with a large basket of bread to provide choice for each householder. His horse would respond to his tongued 'Gee up!' and follow him down the road. One day we kids tried the 'Gee up!' trick on his horse and

gee it worked. A grassy patch below a disused tennis court stopped the horse on what was later the curb side, when concrete curbing eventually reached our suburb. We remained well and truly hidden amid the piers in the keep under the front of our house.

Before curbing, rain would turn our street into a morass of ochre mud and claggy red clay. Gutters ran a banker as the runoff headed down a clayey muddy gutter to a culvert at the bottom of the hill. Shortly after rain petered out, or even while it showered, sun and kids came out to play. We dammed gutter run off with magnificent constructions that sometimes reached across the road. Clay was manually molded and smoothed to form walls across the open drain. Elaborate dam constructions of multi-arched spans and sinuous spillways built from our superior sticky gluggy local clay formed ponds at various levels down the hill.

Our local clay was probably used for millennia as daub by local Indigenous peoples, decorating their bodies for corroboree. We certainly used it as war paint in our childhood reenactment of battles involving aboriginal nations. Dad called our neighbourhood gang the BTH but mum explained that to us as 'Plurry Thundering Herd". Post settlement, clay provided a valuable raw material exploited by enterprising colonials who used it to manufacture bricks and tiles to build the growing colony. From the early days of the colony this was a pioneering industry in the Western districts of Old Sydney Town.

Merrylands sported one of Sydney's biggest clay pits, an enormous yawning hole left by nearly a century of open cut mining. Excavation to supply local kilns removed nearly half of Pitt Street hill. The cavity stopped at Pitt Street as it climbed away from Merrylands heading north towards the colonies first Government House built, 1799 in Parramatta Park. The kiln flourished after the introduction of rail to the area in the 1880's for it stood on a flat next to the railway station. Behind it loomed a growing gaping hole, all that was left of the southern side of the hill.

Heat from a row of kiln fires, glowing in the gathering dusk,

would warm our imagination as well as firing bricks. We weary train travelers, westering home, were warmly welcomed on returning from the city or a visit to Nana's and Bronte beach. Slowing to stop at the platform, our train would pass a dozen glowing furnace fires, each greeting us with an inviting blast of warm air.

I think production was cutting back when we moved West, probably because local tiles could not compete with imports from India after WWII. Unglazed imports, like on our roof, eventually lost their terracotta redness to a creeping black haze of lichen. Cheap imports have often sounded the death knell of local industries and fueled national debate around protectionism. A half century earlier, following Federation in 1901, Dad's Grandad, Hugh Quinn, in his local Glen Innes news paper, vehemently decried free trade. But that's another story. Maybe he, the first of our clan born in the colony, was turning in his grave. For Dad supported imports and overseas trade though he disliked our discoloured cheap imports.

'Why *are* we leaving Dad?' my brother Paul cornered Dad with his innocent insistence that few could rarely if ever resist. My brother had an alluring way with words coupled with very expressive eyes that endeared him to all he met. That was until he was killed in New Guinea by a renegade Highlander, someone who did not want to meet, or even know him.

The same Chimbu killed two others that fateful night in 1971 and forever changed our world. My sister, desperate to help him off the floor, felt with her hands how deep he had been cut as she slipped in the dark, in a pool of his still warm blood. The shock to her was not recognized, as post traumatic stress was not diagnosed in those days. With the resilience of her artistic soul, Maryanne treated her PTSD by completing an Art Therapy course decades later. Shock waves shook the crowd of friends of all colours who gathered at Port Moresby airport to send him off on his final journey to Rookwood cemetery. Those milling multi-racial mourners testified mutely to his openness to all.

Paul's oversized air cargo coffin seemed almost too big to squeeze into the limousine hearse that transported it from Kingsford Smith airport. Why are you gone from our life? And even Dad had no answer to that question. Mum was defiantly angry 'Of course God wants me to be angry! I am his mother!' she agonisingly declared in the lull before the funeral of her first born. Parents just never expect their children to die before they do. I escaped the haze of sorrow by hitching to Darwin and visiting Australia's neighbors in Timor and Indonesia.

Rookwood, the dead centre of Sydney for over one hundred years, was first established as the city necropolis in the horse and buggy days of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Westward snaking rail provided Sydney with a unique method of conducting funerals. Frequently or even weekly, a funeral train would chuff out from a sandstone mortuary chapel on the Chippendale side of Central Railway carrying several mourning parties and associated coffins. Its destination, an identical mortuary platform built as a twin chapel, also in Gothic style, on a siding near the cemetery.

In the 1950's the platform at the Rookwood end of the line was dismantled block by block. Reassembled in the National capital it is now All Saints Church in Ainslie. Here, my wife to be, JJ, grew and fostered her interest in the public practice of religion. When we met I worked with the Australian Museum train touring NSW with museum exhibits. The train, decorated with a dinosaur skeleton painted along the sides of both carriages, was parked during summer school vacation in the twin mortuary chapel, still located intact near Central Station. Bones of museum specimens, loaded via the same mortuary platform were carried to the furthestmost regions of NSW to delight rural residents and the young at heart. And to provide a nifty premier with a nifty political tool.

Paul's moving "Why?" stumped Dad. His hesitation left us expectantly awaiting an answer. But why is it that only with age we become wise about some of our queries in life. 'Whys?' can arise following bolts from the blue with not an iota of apparent reason.

“Why are we leaving!” exclaimed Dad as a prelude to answering five year old Paul’s question. We had watched our uncles juggle our Great Aunt’s piano through the front door of our terrace. Slung by ropes from the top floor balcony, it took the strains and struggles of a morning to safely navigate it down the front steps on to Uncle Pat’s truck. No doubt about it, we were well and truly on the move. And Dad’s answer sparked immediate agreement, even though it was to a place we did not even know and a future we could hardly guess at.

‘Well!’ and he paused. All ears, we waited on his wisdom and an understanding of why the move from Woollahra to the West.

‘They’ he commenced, and us with not a thought as to who ‘they’ were. ‘They are going to build a railway line under our house. It will tunnel right through from Town Hall and end up at Bondi.’

And they did. Thirty years later I was back living in the East and working near Circular Quay. And I had the option of training to the city as well as busing, biking or running.

Cool! would probably be my grand daughter’s response to such a revelation. But maybe we said Wow! Already we could see the possibility of our house falling down like a castle of cards.

In ominous tones Dad detailed our fate if we dared stay put.

‘Trains will rumble through the underground tunnel day and night’. Dad could see we were growing sympathetic to the move so he enlarged on the catastrophe.

‘Windows will rattle and walls will crack!’ You could guess that by then we were all for joining him to avoid such devastation.

‘Gee we better move... , and quick...!’ we chorused. Anticipation showed in our eyes as we signaled our agreement in chorus.

My brother was really the most agreeable person I have had the pleasure of knowing.

Why on earth did we leave?

Looking back now over what then had been unseen, a melancholy mist descends.

Whys in life may lead one to wisely turn to gratitude for the present slice of life now lived with joyful anticipation of what the future holds.

That was how it was when we went west.

# Charlie

**Noreen Bird**



There was man, probably around his early 20's. Charlie was his name. He was from another country far away. He came to Australia from Hungary during the Hungarian uprising. Hungary was a Baltic Sea country. We were told they were the "Bolts". The "Bolts" were the first New Australians, or refugees as we call them today.

A small thin child of around 10 years of age was confined to bed because she had the measles. Her name was Noreen and Charlie brought her a book to read. On the front cover was the picture of a fairy. She looked and looked at the picture and longed to be that fairy and thought, one day I will be a fairy. The picture was of a nymph, a little person with light wings. She was wearing a pink, blue and white dress. She was sitting in a bed of flowers with a butterfly fluttering above.

Charlie and a team of his fellow country men were sent to Noreen's tiny country town called Snake Valley to work on a water construction site near Ballarat, called the White Swan Weir. They all lived together in a camp nearby.

Noreen's dad was the Head Master of the little country school. There were about 30 pupils from preparatory grade through to grade 8. Living in a small country community the teacher was paid by the

Government to help teach the “Bolts” to speak English. One of the methods he had was through repetitive words while singing. He had a good singing voice.

Noreen remembers with amusement how they all sang one of the songs:

*10 green bottles hankink on de vall*  
*10 green bottles hankink on de vall*  
*If 1 green bottle should accidentally fall*  
*There would be 9 green bottles hankink on de vall*  
*9 green bottles hankink on de vall*  
*9 green bottles hanking on de vall*  
*Etc.etc*  
*Till no green bottles hanking on de vall*

Noreen’s mum and dad helped these people lots and Charlie learnt to speak English really well. The men often visited Noreen’s house at weekends and Christmas. They brought very rich foods, recipes from their country, nic-nacs made from paper and other crafts we had never seen before.

Charlie was very theatrical and had been a ballet dancer before he left his country. Noreen’s dad’s hobby was photography and he liked to use Charlie as a model for his portraits. Charlie was always very willing to oblige and would make up his own headgear and props. Some of the photos won prizes in competitions.

After Charlie and his country men had finished their work on the weir and had given two years of work back to Australia in return for living here, they left Snake Valley all to go their own ways and to find work wherever they could.

The little girl who thought she would be a fairy, lost track of Charlie after that because her family moved on to live in Ballarat and themselves to start another new way of life.

# The Boy from Sankarankoil

**Gomathi Visvanathan**



## ***HIS EARLY LIFE***

Sankarankoil is a small village in Southern India. Just like most villages in the area the temple is situated at the end of the main street. In the 1930's there was no electricity and kerosene lamps hung on the corners of the streets and surrounding the village were farms growing rice and a variety of lentils. Sankarankoil is a very dry place that only receives water during the Monsoon season and the local Thamarabarini River has water. At that time, the children would swim and play in the river.

A family living close to Sankarankoil had a son as their 12th child, named Visvanathan. He was given the name of the God in the local temple. The mother was a housewife and the father was a criminal lawyer. This family had lost three children, two teenage boys from cholera and a girl aged 16 in the previous year, from some type of infection.

As a result of this tragedy the father became very depressed and decided to quit his job. This meant the family was forced to live with the money he had already earned up to that stage in his working life.

At this time the wife's parents invited the family to settle in Sankarankoil. Visvanathan's father then took up the job as

headmaster in the local high school. However he was not in the job for long. The school board wanted him to pass a student who was the son of a prominent person in the village even though he did not acquire enough marks to proceed to the next level. The father did not believe the student should be given special treatment.

Frustrated with the pressure from the school board, he resigned from the job. The mother was forced to find a way to feed, clothe and educate their 5 sons and one daughter. She began making small loans to people in the neighbourhood and requesting it be returned with some interest. In that process the family was able to get a house in the main street close to the temple. During these years, the father spent most of his time reading and discussing theology with friends and writing classical (Carnatic) music.

### ***CHILDHOOD MEMORIES***

Visvanathan grew up in Sankarankoil until age of 16. His mother's hard work kept the family's finances intact. They eventually were able to purchase some farmlands in the outskirts of Sankarankoil. Sometimes Visvanathan helped his mother with the house repairs by mixing and pouring the cement to fix the cracks on the floor. At the age of 9, he was the eldest son living at home as his older brothers had already left home for university.

Visvanathan was given the large responsibility of collecting rice and lentils from the farmers who were cultivating their land. This meant he had to go in a bullock cart to the farm once every 6 months. Although it was only 10 miles away the trip took about half a day. This experience indirectly taught him how to communicate with individuals from different backgrounds at a young age. Additionally he became very street-savvy because he had to ensure that the farmers did not cheat him by using various tricks including filling the rice measure with imli, a sticky food substance that falsely increased the weight.

Like other young kids Visvanathan also got involved in childhood mischief. One time his mother was asked to help one of her sisters in Madurai, a city in Southern India. She took Visvanathan and his

younger brother with her. They spent most of the day playing with their cousins. One day the children decided to build a temple out of a cardboard box and decorate it with colourful fabrics and dolls to resemble the temple they went to. Usually in the temple a lamp is lit at the end of the function.

The children remembered this and decided to light an oil lamp in front of their cardboard temple. As they lit the lamp the fabric caught fire and the box went up in flames. The children saw the fire and were so scared and dropped everything and ran. Luckily a neighbour came and put out the fire. The children were scolded because the parents felt that the burning of the cardboard temple was seen as an ill omen. Coincidentally, one of their relatives died the next day.

In high school, Visvanathan was very good in mathematics; always obtaining top marks in the exams, perhaps that is something he inherited from his father. Visvanathan became close friends with Padmanabhan a big and tall boy. This relationship proved to be extremely advantageous to Visvanathan's survival as Padmanabhan protected him from being bullied by other boys. In return Visvanathan would share his sweets and mango pickles with him. During summer the boys would spend time on the banks of the Thamarabarani River that was lined with mango trees. They became experts at hitting the ripe mangoes with stones so they could eat them when they fell to the ground. On one occasion, a stone missed the target and hit a police inspector by mistake.

All the boys ran as fast as they could away from the scene of the crime. Unfortunately the police inspector recognized the boy who threw the stone. As punishment after talking to the parents the police inspector paraded the boy around the village on a donkey decorated with cowbells in a rather harsh punishment. However, within days the boys were back throwing stones at the mangoes.

While in high school, Visvanathan also became very interested in learning classical (Carnatic) music. Despite his father's interest in writing music Visvanathan was not encouraged to pursue this as

a career, as musicians were not paid well. Visvanathan still found unorthodox ways in which to continue to follow his interest. He would go to the temple during festival times when famous Carnatic musicians were invited to give free concerts for the town and try and memorize the songs they sang and would then practice when he had time. He would also sing with his mother regularly. This early passion for Carnatic music continued throughout his life.

When Visvanathan was 12 years old his second eldest brother decided to join the army to fight in the Second World War. He and his friend secretly signed up for the military without telling their parents. Visvanathan's father suspected that his son had signed up with the army and he confronted his son about it but it was too late. Visvanathan remembered the whole episode of his father and his brother arguing and it stayed in his mind over the years.

## ***POST WORLD WAR II***

Once World War II ended, Visvanathan's brother came home to see his parents. He brought a gramophone record player and some old records for his father. From that time onwards in their house, music was heard all the time. By this time the elder brothers were also in a position to support the family financially.

Visvanathan completed his high school and wanted to go on to university but his father said he could not afford to send him. Fortunately one of his elder brothers stepped in and offered to help fund Visvanathan and his younger brother's university education. The father agreed and the whole family moved to Thiruchi where the university was located, and rented out the house in Sankarankoil.

In Thiruchi, Visvanathan used to sit on the roof and study for the examinations in the glow of a street light, as there was not enough space inside the house. He excelled at University with first class honors including 100 percent mathematics. He never forgot the generosity of his brother and other family members for providing him the opportunity to complete his university studies.

Visvanathan took his first job as a temporary tutor in a private school in Madras (now known as Chennai). His job was to help students to learn chemistry through laboratory experiments. One day on the radio he heard that Kodaikanal Observatory a few hours from Chennai, was willing to allow high school students to visit and learn about astronomy.

He made arrangements with the observatory and took the students by bus to the hill station of Kodaikanal. He was so thrilled to see the celestial objects through the telescopes that he decided he wanted to become an astronomer. He left teaching after a year and eventually applied - and was selected - to complete training in meteorology. A job then became available at the Kodaikanal Observatory he had visited a year ago as a scientific assistant.

The new director of the observatory Dr Vainu Bappu had recently graduated from Harvard. Dr. Bappu was impressed with Visvanathan's work and began to train him in astronomy. Visvanathan also demonstrated great enthusiasm and capacity as a leader. One of the first things he did when joining the observatory was to hire a cook to prepare meals for all the bachelors (including himself) working in Kodaikanal observatory, knowing many Indian men were never trained in cooking when they were at home.

Secondly, Visvanathan started a tennis club. With the help of Vainu, a sand tennis court was made and the staff began to play tennis regularly. He also conducted tennis competitions yearly and arranged trophies for the winners. Visvanathan also started a film club. As there were no entertainment facilities in the observatory, with the help of technicians, he built a projector to run the films. He wrote to many Tamil movie producers in Madras asking them to donate Tamil films to the observatory community and they sent many films. Once a month he would show a new film. The community was very happy. In the month of November Visvanathan organized a religious get together in the early mornings with his colleagues. They would get up early morning and have a shower and go around the streets

singing religious songs. He had lots of close friends who shared his interests in all kinds of music. In the evenings Visvanathan played Bridge with his friends.

Visvanathan rented a house in Kodaikanal as he wanted to bring his parents over to stay when the weather was warm, as Kodaikanal was an ideal summer resort. Visvanathan wanted to show his father the observatory and share the success of his job. Unfortunately that dream never came true. One night he got a telegram from his younger brother who was studying in the university in Thiruchi that his father had passed away. Visvanathan was only 22. After the funeral, the sons found out that their father did not leave any will and so they together created a will to leave everything to their mother. Visvanathan took his mother to Kodaikanal to stay with him.

Eight years later in 1962 he married Gomathi. Within a few months of the marriage Prof B.J. Bok from Mount Stromlo Observatory in Canberra, Australia was visiting Delhi, Bombay and Madras to interview potential PhD students in Astronomy. Despite not having a Masters degree Visvanathan was selected to come and study under a full scholarship that including tuition and stipend at the Australian National University (ANU). Prof Bok also gave money for Gomathi to accompany him to Australia. The couple came to Australia in April 1962 a day before ANZAC day.

This was the first trip outside India for both of them. They landed in Sydney and then came to Canberra. They were met by one of the faculty members in Sydney and Prof Bok and his wife in Canberra.

The plan was for them to stay at University House. To their surprise there was no vegetarian food at University House. They only had salad and toast for breakfast lunch and dinner. Rice was only available in Sydney and Melbourne and there was only 3 vegetables available pumpkin, potato and beans and particularly no spices! This was also the first time they were exposed to a Canberra winter. Over time they made many friends, and learnt a lot about Australia.

During his studies Visvanathan built his own instrument (the polarimeter) and finished his thesis in flying colours within 3 years. He was appointed as a research fellow in Mt Stromlo observatory. In April 1966 he was awarded prestigious Carnegie fellowship to work at Mt. Wilson observatory, California, USA. He was the fourth person to have won the award from Australia. The family moved to US in 1966.

To be continued...

# Vision of Eden

**Thi-Nha Tran**



## **Preface**

Once upon a time, fairies lived in the gardens. They came from spirits of plants and animals, the loving ones who wanted freedom and independence from the hardship of living lives. She was one of those until the day she fell in love with a butterfly and flew out of the Garden of Eden to the real-life world in search of him – from that time on, her journey began.

She was just a tiny dot of light compared to his magnificent giant pair of colourful wings – so she wished to be re-born into a body. The God of Destiny heard her story, smiled knowingly, then with a sense of humour, sent her to be a female human. He also made the butterfly a male one. But they were sent to different parts of the world. She was to find him and make him love her without being aware of it – butterflies were like that, mindless and heartless. She asked herself why wasn't she made a butterfly instead? Life would then be much easier for her. But Destiny was not an easy God.

Human life was hard work – work, work, work and more work. She thought she would work hard until the day she met her maker. So she wasted half of her human life in hard work, until one day in the autumn of her life, she realised the purpose of her human existence.

She was to live, learn, love; and through her loving heart she would search her dreams and make them happen.

Finding the quest for her human identity, she then looked for the answer.

First of all, she had to find her butterfly man, see for herself his own nature, not just a pair of colourful wings, but also his wormy body and his flighty short life.

In science where she worked, there was no place for such people like him. Therefore she turned to Art, the world of theatre, cinema and television.

What did she find? The same intoxicating feeling at the beginning; then came the reality – mindless, heartless betrayal, then separation. She met more and more of those social butterflies. Where was her own butterfly man? Or were they all the same? Sometimes she came close to her original image, only to realise that it was only an illusion, the reflection of her own image – for she was then a spirit of a flower, resembling a butterfly in shape and form. She saw her reflection and fell in love with it, her own beauty that Narcissus, by the pond of life, falling in love with love itself. She then identified herself with the look-alike butterfly and thought it was her soul mate, and wanted to be with it.

She then learned that she had freedom of choice and was responsible for the consequence of it – she might as well make the most of her life on Earth. She decided to love more, making her world a better place to live in. She re-created the Garden of Eden where flowers of Hope and Vision grow in love and wisdom.

### ***CHILDHOOD: 1-7years old***

She was born with an abnormally large heart. This was shown on X-rays and confirmed by her doctors. Her parents told everyone in the family so – that she was very special – and she believed them all. It was her first remembrance - life is all heart, love, happiness, joys – and possibly only safe in the family circle where she was well protected.

As a child she was very much loved and cared for, like a porcelain doll – so easy to be broken and so hard to heal and mend. She was a beautiful little princess; her family was at her beck and call, centre of attention. She was spoilt rotten - stories told till now. Her second remembrance was an image of a poor rich girl, the entire world her oyster; everything and anybody were good and waiting; life was seen through a rose-tinted glass – “la vie en rose.”

Her world spun around her mother everywhere and in every way – her Queen of Hearts. Her mother was beautiful and young, only 19 when she gave birth to her, a second child; her elder brother one and a half years her senior and a very much loved boy, too.

Her mother had silky long black hair and she told her, “Mummy, I love your hair long” to get her to loosen up her big ball of hair and let it down. It flowed like a stream of black velvet, thick and smooth and shiny, down past her knees. Once a friendly French army officer with his troop passed the village and took a picture with his camera to send home to his own family in Paris – a young mother of two toddlers (two and three years old) with her hair long. She still has that image with her forever.

Till the day her mother died at 80 years of age, she was still very protective of her porcelain little princess. She said, “Nobody should ever upset “it”, “it” could be killed. If you break her heart she’ll die.” She learned then that one can die of a broken heart – sadness killed. Then came her third remembrance – be happy and don’t worry, things would be taken care of by others. Just be beautiful and loved.

Her father, on the other hand, was a serious man. He was 13 years older than her mother; and was a French teacher at high school, then head of administration at a seaside tourist town in North Vietnam. Her mother learned second hand from her mother-in-law that he had been married before, to a beautiful actress singer. She had left him and moved south, never to be seen ever again. She learned, too, from her own women’s intuition that he was still in love with his first wife, with no feeling to her mother, only duty.

Then came the fourth remembrance – an actress, a singer, and a famous one. Not a dutiful, hard working, life giving, just a housewife who'd be used and abused and still not loved.

Before she was 2 years of age, a new sister was born, then one and a half years later another girl. At 5 years old she had two more girls to compete with for her mother's attention. Oh dear, what would she do to keep her position secured? Playing a sickly puppy's game, so even her two younger sisters had to come second behind her own needs. Remembrance five: be manipulative, putting herself first and all others later in life.

At 7 years of age, she had yet another younger brother – five children, too crowded for comfort and for securing the best life; and two more boys came later. By the time her mother was 28 years old, she had given birth to 8 children, had suffered two miscarriages and had had an operation to tie her tubes. She became a successful businesswoman, bringing wealth and prestige to her family. Her husband felt less secure as a man and divorced her.

Lesson Number 6: love or money? Can one have the best of both worlds – and how? Not in the traditional way!

Her early childhood education was based on situational approaches of living being's instincts. Family life was her first and utmost social constitution that gave her beliefs and values, the making of her personality, its all rounded, wholesome effects. For that she was forever grateful, acknowledged and treasured.

## ***GROWING UP***

She wanted to have an easy life. She loathed complexity, difficult people and hard work. She needed simplicity, clarity and goodness. How could someone say, "Life was not meant to be easy?" Not what she desired.

She loved luxury. Having a good life to her was being wealthy.

A life of plenty – wealth in money, love, friends, opportunities, good time, good fortune, good luck; much to be enjoyed and nothing to endure. So she needed good health too. Her daily mantra, “Good health, good time, good luck were mine to enjoy”, became her first and utmost affirmation. She wanted the best she could get and decided on choices that fitted her desires.

Her childhood dreams were fairy tales where she was a little princess, growing up beautifully then getting married to a prince charming and living happily ever after relishing her good blessed life.

On growing up she learned first hand that life was not just moonlight and roses. Nobody promised her a rose garden. She had to plant it herself.

To have what she wanted, she had to work at it. Good health she needed most of all. She needed a healthy lifestyle, good nutrition; exercises, refreshing sleep and relaxation and excellent self-care to be in top condition for a good day’s energetic work done. Earning a living by herself was not in her plan. She wished to have a wealthy husband to take care of her like her parents did. She still called on her good luck and wished for good times to come – life it seemed had a way of disappointing.

Till now she learned her lesson well. An easy life was a simple, effective life. Take life easy and as it was and make the most of each situation. Her daily serenity prayer “God grant me the courage to change the things I can, to accept what I can’t and the wisdom to know the difference.”

My childhood dream was to be an artist. I loved fairy tales, the mystical metaphors in Greek mythology. I liked being creative, active, intuitive.

On growing up into adulthood, I learned to be a scientist – practical, experimental, knowledgeable, inspirational, ambitious and career focused.

At mid-life, marriage and motherhood brought certain degrees of satisfaction and senses of fulfillment in life gratification. Living more fully as a real woman, using my capacity and ability to be a wife, mother, home-maker, plus earning a living for myself and supporting my child gave me pride and personal fulfillment. I did it all. My way.

Now, on retirement, I wish to sail through the transition the best way I can; to replace employment with enjoyment, making it a golden time of my life. With basic needs met, I can reach forward towards self-fulfillment – socially, emotionally, intellectually and spiritually.

It is the time to review childhood dreams and aspire to fulfill them; to reflect and nurture the inner child within, towards the purpose and meaning of my life – to complete that ultimate life mission.

I still have a lot ahead of me to accomplish and achieve. The end result will be self-realisation, reflection of the inner image. Transformation is the key issue here – life is about growth and flowing. I create my own reality by choices and taking actions.

To make my life a work of art scientifically, methodically, rationally, I know that knowledge is power. Physical strength, clear soul mind-power over matter.

I am well aware of what I want and how to get it. I choose and act carefully, practically and realistically. I decide to live a simple but effective life. I focus on beauty and goodness. Create only what is appropriate in moderation and just enough in my ability for my needs, wants and desires. I focus on important issues and activities. I am specific, optimistic in taking actions towards goals.

I make my work a labour of love. The artist's way.

# Contributors

## **Dorene Bleeze**

I love writing, reading poetry, novels, and of other peoples' lives. I do play reading, computer studies and belong to The English in Australia to keep some of our traditions alive. I have spent much of my life enjoying gardening, dancing, swimming, cycling and hiking/bushwalking. These more robust activities have gradually wound down as I have progressed through my eighties. I am continually on the look-out for other things to keep me interested. This project was one of them.

## **Gloria Bothe**

Gloria Bothe nee Kershaw lives in Isaacs ACT, next door to her daughter and two grandchildren.

## **Judy Parker**

My motivation for writing is just a way to amuse myself and to try and improve my literacy. I have lived in Canberra for the last 45 years and my children were educated here. Canberra is a great place to live and I have no desire to move elsewhere. The sketch in *Bob and Lionel* is by Enid Herring.

## **Elisabeth Angel**

Elisabeth was born in England, travelled in Europe, married in 1959, had a son in 1961 and a daughter in 1963. Lived in Singapore 1965, and moved to Australia 1967. Lived in Frankston, Victoria, then Mt Eliza. On to Canberra where I pursued my art and started to write.

## **Wilma Davidson (Facilitator, 10 Stories High)**

Since emigrating from Scotland to Australia in the late 1960's, I have been a preschool teacher, community worker, public servant, crisis counsellor, overseas aid worker, massage therapist and adult education facilitator/teacher. I currently operate a private massage therapy and counselling practice. I write songs, essays, articles, short stories and poetry. I have published 3 collections of short stories and a collection of poetry. Currently I am working on two unfinished novels and a new collection of short stories.

### ***Mollie Bialkowski***

Mollie B short for Mollie Bialkowski has always wanted to write. However being a wife, mother, grandmother, great grandmother and singer storyteller puppeteer somehow got in the way.

However now with the expert help of Wilma Davidson, and the generosity of the ACT Writer's Centre, the Southern Cross Club and the Woden Seniors she has managed to construct little stories of her youth.

### ***Terry Quinn***

I was born in Paddington, Sydney 65 years ago surprising my mother at the ease of my entry into life. Childhood excited me growing up in Sydney's West. My students have educated me during 40 years in education K - 12. Music, Family, Mahikari and Interfaith are my retirement passions.

### ***Noreen Bird***

I am now 69 years of age. My husband and I are retired, living in Canberra for now 44 years. We have 5 children - 4 boys (one deceased) 1 daughter and 4 grandchildren with one on the way. Life is busy with many interests and now doing many activities we have been looking forward to.

### ***Gomathi Visvanathan***

Gomathi Visvanathan arrived in Canberra from India in 1962, accompanying her husband. She subsequently graduated from University of Canberra in statistics. After 10 years abroad, she returned to Canberra in 1975 where she worked as a computer programmer until retirement. Her hobbies include. painting, walking and playing table tennis.

### ***Thi-Nha Tran***

Thi-Nha Tran was born in Vietnam and came to Australia in the 1980's. She now lives in Canberra and is now a retired ex CSIRO Officer. She has enjoyed writing since she was a little girl – she writes poems and short stories, mostly about children and women's issues. Her hobbies include gardening, playing the piano, singing in a choir, reading, painting, dancing, and of course, writing.

