

Growing Up

I always had the feeling that Grandma didn't like me very much. We'd go over to stay with her, and we'd get into bed with her and have a cuddle in the mornings before she got up. She always had Jack and Bob near her, and I was always the one on the outside. I was terribly conscious of that. I could be wrong about all this but that's the feeling I got. I was only quite young.

I was only about three when Auntie Liz got married the first time. Up till then she always lived with Grandma. She married Uncle Bill Kenzie, (who they used to call Cocoa because of his colour). He used to like me. He'd sing me a little song: "Mary, Mary, dainty as a fairy", and I used to think a fairy was a lovely thing to be like, and I loved him for saying that. He used to lift me up and sit me on his knee and talk to me. Grandma never did anything like that. I can never remember her putting me on her knee and talking to me, but I can remember her rousing on me. I can't remember Mum sitting me on her knee either, for that matter. But she probably did because she was a very loving mother. (Dad was a bit stern, though.)

The night Auntie was married they were having a little do for her wedding. I was standing at Auntie Liz' knec, and she put her arm around me and lifted me up onto her knee and said: "You're my girl, aren't you?". She always seemed to love me, and I always felt that she did. When finally she came to live with me when she was 80, I still got that feeling of love that she had for me. It was never a burden to have her live with me. She was a great old girl, really - she never lost her marbles, though she had some funny ideas.

When we were kids we'd all go down to Narrabeen for our holidays every year. We'd go down to put the tents up, and Grandma would stay down there with us children - Jack, Bob, Jimmy Windeyer and myself. We had six weeks holiday from school and Grandma would look after us down there while Mum and Dad went back home for the week. They'd come down each weekend. The tents used to be put up at Christmas time and they'd stay there till Easter. It was treated as a weekender, that camp. It was on a piece of private ground. My father and Uncle Jim saved the house of the man who owned the ground from a bushfire, and he gave us permission to

camp each year on this nice piece of private ground out of gratitude. The land stretched from Green Hills all over the lake from where Jack lives now at the foot of Narrabeen Street down to Deep creek. We always camped over the lake from where Jack is now. Now it's all houses, of course.

Grandma was never cruel to me or anything when she was looking after us - she never hit me or anything like that, but she seemed to pick on me. It might have had something to do with me being the only girl. We learnt how to swim and row a boat down at Narrabeen as children. Grandma used to take the boat - a rowing boat - by the week. On weekends young couples would come down and get in the rowing boats and go out to the different islands in the lake to have picnics. The lake was pretty shallow, and because we were there all the time we knew all the channels and we'd wade out and guide the boats through the sandbanks. They'd always give us threepence or something like that. And the picnickers used to leave their soft drink bottles on the islands and we used to collect them. We got a penny for each bottle, which wasn't bad for in those days - and it kept the place cleaned up too, I suppose. We used to take them back across the lake to the little shop - there was only one shop there then - Brysons. But I can never remember having any money of my own to spend. Possibly I did, but I can't remember it. Seemed to be the boys got it all the time.

The boys would get in the boat and go round the islands on Monday and collect all the bottles, but my job was to clean up the porridge pot. Grandma used to make us Uncle Toby's on an open fire and you can imagine a big iron pot full of porridge that didn't get stirred all the time - it used to get a real thick bit on the bottom. But Grandma knew how to work that fire, and it never got burnt on or anything. But after breakfast, Muggins was the one who had to take it down to the lake to the nice little sandy beach and clean it all up. Now if I'd been allowed to simply leave the pot in the lake the little fish would have eaten every bit out, but no, I was made scrape it with a spoon and take it back to Grandma all clean. Meanwhile the boys were out gathering the bottles and getting their pennies while I was the girl, and I had to clean the pot. And that went on every day on weekdays. Little and all as I was I had this feeling of resentment that the boys were allowed to go out and I wasn't. But I never thought of saying anything about it. Not even to Mum.

Uncle Jim used to sit on the bank and watch us whenever we went into the water to swim. We taught ourselves how to swim - dog paddle. Then I suppose somebody must have shown us how to do overarm and breast stroke and all that, and how to float and tread water. I never consciously had anyone tell me how to swim, yet I can swim. I think Bill probably learnt to swim at Narrabeen the same way.

But despite the fact that I had that resentment towards Grandma, it was a happy childhood. I can look back and really say that my childhood was a happy one even though we were pretty poor. And if we did things wrong Dad would give us a hiding, but he was never cruel. Mum'd give us a slap if we did anything wrong, too, but we never doubted that she loved us. But if we did something really bad Dad would get the razor strop to hit us with - and I can always remember as he did it, that each time the strap came down he'd go: "Sssss! Sssss! ", and hit us really hard - he'd leave us with a red bottom. But I can't remember any real cruelty. To digress right back to when we were living in Newtown for a moment: I would have only been about three. It was

really wet weather, and poor old Dad only had one pair of shoes, and he'd taken them off. He said to me: "Take these out and put them beside the fire to dry, love," and what do I do? I take them out and put them right in the fire! But he didn't give me a hiding for that. (This is a family event that was talked about, and I'm not sure if what I remember is the actual event or the talking about it over the years later, when it was told as a funny thing - though it wouldn't have been that funny at the time. I don't know what Dad did for a pair of shoes the next day.)

And the schools were sort of poor, too. I can't remember much before third class, but when I was in third class, when you went into the room you had to step up a step to go to the back of the class. On each step there was one big long desk, and beside that to sit on there were high stools with no back on them, and inkwells in front of you and a blackboard out the front on an easel. That was at Birchgrove School. It was next to the Balmain coalmine. We never took our lunch to school - we always went home for lunch, but we were given some playlunch. The third class was right down the very back of the school. The buildings up the front were brick, but the buildings where I was were timber, overlooking the Parramatta River. You'd go down under some trees and there was a fence dividing the school off from the coalmine. The little pit ponies used to come up - they'd be resting underneath these trees, in the shade - and we used to give them our playlunch over the fence. We got a kick out of that. They were nice old things. They were blind from being so long underground.

I can still remember some songs that I learned in third class. Miss Culhane was our teacher, then we went up to fourth class to Miss Anders. I always loved reading, but I was never very good at maths - I always seemed to be behind the eight ball when it came to maths. But maybe that had something to do with Mum keeping us home a lot for various reasons. We learned everything by rote. And I was too timid to dream of ever putting my hand up and saying: "Please Miss, I don't understand this. Would you explain it more please?" And the teachers were tough on the kids, too. You only had to do the slightest little thing and the ruler would be wrapped around your legs, you know.

I used to be good at reading, and I wasn't too bad at spelling. We'd get our school magazine every month and we used to look forward to that. The kids at the back of the class seemed to be the scholars and the ones at the front seemed to be the dunces. I was in the middle. For reading, they'd start at the back and everyone had to read out a sentence in turn. For spelling they'd do the same thing, with everyone having to spell their word out loud in turn. I don't remember all that much about when I was in the Infants in between kindergarten and primary.

I can remember that in Primary school we didn't have uniforms in those days, and we were poor enough that my mother would unpick grown-up frocks, and Auntie Hilda would make me a dress out of one of Mum's old dresses. I'd be sent to school in these dresses and I always felt that the others were dressed in pretty clothes and I was dressed in dowdy ones. I was always very conscious of that when I was a kid. They were always awful colours, khaki or brown, or navy blue serge or something like that.

I went to sixth class. I would have been fourteen in the August, but I left school in the June before. Mum had to go up to the school and sign papers so I could leave before I actually turned

fourteen. I was away from school a good bit, looking back - but I can't remember why. I was supposed to have got my QC (that was the qualifying certificate to go to high school) at the end of that year but I didn't sit for it. Dad was sick at the time, Jack was already at work, and I suppose they just needed the money. I wasn't a terribly good student. Mum and Dad used to encourage me to learn all I could because they felt their lack of education. They were always short of money.

One time when Dad was off work sick Mum took in washing. She felt that we couldn't expect Grandma to keep staking us all the time - (Mum never paid back the two bobs she used to get off Grandma - Grandma just gave us the money.) Mum used to do the washing in the old copper down the back. All the clothes were put through this great big mangle that she had. The laundry had a cement floor and all the water from the mangle would run onto the floor and out the door into the yard. There was no drain arrangement for a mangle. And a mangle had a double purpose, too, because when the sheets and other flat things had dried you'd bring them in, tighten the mangle down, and run them through it again. That would be like ironing them. They had big wooden rollers on them. They were a wonderful thing, a mangle, but they took up so much room.

When we were young you tended to take your parents with you everywhere. Or rather, your parents came, and sort of organised you. When I was a teenager Jack and Bob used to have all their mates come to our place, and Mum would often have half a dozen extra. I don't mean they were there for meals, but they were in the house playing cards at night, or in the yard. Dad always seemed to be one of the boys - I suppose he would have only been about 45. Not that they'd play cards every night, but there always seemed to be mates popping in and out. Nida always came to our house - I seldom went to hers. Her elder brother was studying to be an accountant and their place was very quiet. It was more fun being at our place.

After tea Mum and I would wash the dishes and then go up to the corner fruit and vegetable shop to buy fruit for the lunches. The boys never washed dishes - I can't remember Dad or my brothers doing dishes ever in my life. Dad would do little maintenance jobs like fixing a tap washer or soling our shoes - he always had a little workshop. As Jack grew up he'd make his own bed though - he took a pride in the house. After Jack had been working at J.B. Sharpe's for a while he made a single bed each for him and Bob and a lowboy. He bought a masculine sort of cottage weave material for curtains and for throw-overs for the beds, which Mum hemmed up. It was the smartest room in the house.

It was an awful old house, though - full of bugs. Our beds had a spring mattress, and Mum would haul them downstairs and out into the yard and pour metho onto the springs and set it all alight to kill the bugs. The bugs would get in the cracks of the window sills and Mum would do something there too, but the bugs would just retreat next door. The people next door and Mum should have got together and done it all at the same time. I can't remember Dad ever helping Mum with the mattresses. The old joint was full of cockroaches too. As kids we'd play on the street on summer nights - Hide and Seek, or Statues, or Tipped You Last - and I can still see the big cockroaches on the pavement. We used to stomp on them to see who killed the most.

Mum was easy - she's always been easy about us having friends in the home. She never minded the place getting untidy. While she had people around her Mum was happy. But Dad used to like to... when they were out in the yard they were always doing something. It was a smallish dirt yard, so Dad would make one of those little boards with hooks and numbers that you tossed little hoops onto, you know, and they'd have a competition. They'd put in a Sunday morning like that.

I'd be in helping Mum get the dinner ready if it was a Sunday. I'd have liked to be outside with the others but Mum was on her own and I was the girl - I was the only girl - so I was always in with Mum peeling the spuds and helping her to get a baked dinner ready, which was a ritual on Sunday at lunchtime. Mum was a bit of a messer when it came to cooking. Things were cooked and the pots were just left there and it was always a hard wash-up after a baked dinner. It'd be three o'clock before we were finished. The boys never did anything, but I can't say I was resentful at the time - I just accepted that that's the way things were.

I had several friends but Nida was the one that was always coming to my home, or I was going to hers. It was more or less open sesame - you never said you were coming, you just went. She'd come up and we'd go for a walk down to the park on a Sunday afternoon, and Nida would be always sitting waiting for me to finish the washing up. (Her mother was more organised than Mum was). So we'd go down to the park - we'd have been 17 or 18 - and we'd go down to barrack the water polo team at the swimming club and get to know the boys there. Sometimes we'd run into a couple of other girls we knew and we'd all sit in the park in the sun and talk to the boys. But it wasn't... what shall I say?... it wasn't a lover-like thing. We were all just friends. The same boys used to take Nida and me and some other girls in their truck when they used to go playing water polo elsewhere, like the closed-in baths at Coogee, for instance. They used to take us along to barrack for them. But there was never any pairing off or anything like that. They were a nice crowd of boys and they seemed to respect us, and on the way home we'd have community singing together. They'd dump us at Elkington Park near the baths there and Nida and I would find our way home - unless somebody asked could they take you home.

I remember one night: Nida was a bit struck on one of the boys called Stanley Tillbrook, and he asked could he take her home. Opposite her place there was a little shop with an alcove as you went into the door, and she went in there with Stan to have a snog. I'd gone to bed - when Nida's mother came down and knocked at our door. It was about ten o'clock, which wasn't terribly late when you consider that we'd been out to Coogee and back. She wanted to know if Nida was there. I couldn't produce Nida, so I had to say no, and she wanted to know if I knew where she was. She seemed pretty worried, so I said I thought I knew where she might be, and her mother insisted that I take her there. Reluctantly I threw something on and went with her up to her place and sure enough here was Nida and Stan in this little alcove in the shop across the road. She got hold of Nida and smacked her across the face and sent her home. They were only just kissing. I vanished, and so did Stan, without saying anything to each other. I've forgotten how Nida got on after that - I think she got out of it, but her mother read the riot act to her. But she had to be mother and father to Nida and the rest of the family because she didn't have a husband. I feel pretty certain that nothing much was going on in the alcove, because if ever any

of the boys tried on anything to do with sex then we'd tell one another. It was all pretty innocent, really, though we found it romantic and nice. And these boys were just casual friends - they weren't your boyfriend or anything. And even then, when I was going with Cec for all those years before we got married it was still pretty innocent.

I can remember one boy who took me home, and on the way he farted. He stamped on the pavement as though to stomp it out, then said: "Where's that cat? Did you hear that cat'?" and made a joke out of it. It was considered a bad thing to fart in front of a girl, you know? That's how proper things were in those days. Occasionally you might get a crush on one of the boys but you'd soon get over it.

Going to the pictures of a Saturday night was a ritual. There weren't a lot of places to go to like there is today, and there wasn't the sport about - especially for girls. There was tennis, but I was never any good at ball games - that's probably because I didn't get the opportunity to play much. I didn't go to Sunday School or anything so I didn't belong to a group like that where that sort of thing automatically came with belonging because they had the tennis courts there.

I don't know much about my parents' religious beliefs - I think they believed in God but Dad certainly never went to church, and Mum didn't either. I can remember them repeating the saying "There's better men out of the church than ever went into it" or something like that. They just never bothered about religion like that. But my mother used to love going to funerals. Cars had come out, and there'd always be cars at a funeral, and my Mum was a professional funeral-goer. (*Chuckles*). I still think she mainly went for the ride in a car! She loved it, and she loved talking to people too. Mum's life must have been very humdrum and something like that would have been a bit of a buzz for her.

Wherever Grandma went, it always seemed to end up that Mum moved to the same suburb. At one stage we moved to Kogarah, right away from Grandma, but we didn't last very long there and we were soon living back in town where we could get to Grandma easily. I think a lot of it was because Grandma was our backstop. As well as the money she made from telling fortunes she also used to get a remittance that came from England from Papa Turner - money from what was left of the Bournemouth properties that I mentioned earlier. Politically, Dad was a great Jack Lang supporter and an Evatt supporter too. Dad used to talk politics in the home and he couldn't understand why us kids weren't interested too, but we were going to dances and all that and not thinking about politics. But my father was so political-minded that he had a sort of dresser up outside the bathroom that was full of Hansards. If an argument came up with someone, he'd go up and find the Hansard and read out the relevant bits to support his argument. He was in the Labour League, too. He used to get hot under the collar about the Nationals, as they were called in those days. Mum used to go along to the Labour League with him sometimes.

They joined the Starr-Bowkett, hoping that they'd get a draw and he able to get a home. The Starr-Bowkett was a club where you used to pay so much money into it every week or every month or whatever it was, and once in a certain time they'd have a draw. Whosever name came out of that drawer was given the money to pay for a house, and once you were living in it you

started to pay the money back to the Starr-Bowkett. It was a scheme for working class people to have a chance to get a home.

I was fifteen at the time, and had caught scarlet fever and been out at the coast hospital while I had it. I came home on Christmas eve and there was a terrible row on because Mum hadn't kept the Starr-Bowkett payments up. At the time I thought Dad was terrible to be going on and ranting at Mum the way he was, but looking back now I can understand how he must have felt, because he was an unskilled labourer and this was his only opportunity to get a home of his own for the family. Mum used to have to use the money for us to live on, and she couldn't keep up the payments. And she wouldn't tell Dad because he was one of those people that you couldn't tell things like that, you know. As far as he was concerned the StarrBowkett payments came first and you did without for the rest.

It was an unholy row - they were really having it out, and I was feeling awful because I'd just got back after six weeks away in the hospital. It affected me, that row. It must have been hard for Mum then because us kids were teenagers and eating more, and the men in the family were often out of work, and they had to pay sixteen shillings a week rent out of Dad's wages. (I don't know how much Dad got back then.)

Friday night used to be shopping night in those days, (it was on one of those Fridays that I first met Cec, up the street). As I said, Mum couldn't seem to manage on Dad's wages, especially when the boys were out of work, and looking back Dad wasn't all that understanding about this. Mum would always run out of money for food before the next pay came in, so she used to go up the road and pawn Dad's watch and chain on a Monday to get the money to see her through the week, then go up again on the Friday night and get it out again before he found out, because he used to wear it on the weekends. It all had to be done on the QT.

This particular night I'd gone up with her but was standing outside the pawnshop while she was inside. (It was funny the way they had them set up in those days. It was just a little shop counter, and in front of it they had partitions to give some sort of privacy to the transactions - but whoever stood in the partition next to you could hear everything that was going on! Some privacy!) Anyway, who should come along this night while I'm standing outside but Dad! "Where's your mother?" he asked. "In there." I said. "What's she doing in there?" Thinking fast, said: "I don't know. I'll just go and see." With that I ducked inside and said to Mum: "Dad's outside and he wants to know what you're doing in here." So quick as a flash Mum said to the man: "Could I have a look at that jardiniere that's in the window, please?)" Poor old Mum! Talk about catch 22! There she was, couldn't make ends meet and having to buy a jardiniere that she didn't want or need, to take home to explain being at the pawnshop, (which was what she did. I suppose she was so flustered that she didn't think to say that she didn't like it and had decided against it.)

But if Mum was short of money, she should have been able to go to Dad and tell him, and work out what to do. It's not a good way to be between husband and wife. Dad used to get his tobacco for his pipe. He was never a heavy smoker - I think he used to have a pipe after tea. Well gee! that's not much for a man to get in luxuries that worked hard five and half days a week! Sometimes he might have a beer on a Friday night, but as far as having beer in the house - he couldn't afford that. It's not as though he was keeping it and spending it. He had his little shed out the

back and he used to mend things and make things. He had a vegetable garden and tried to eke things out a bit that way. (This is still in Cameron Street). When you walked down the four steps to the laundry there was a window down the far end, and that window looked out onto Dad's little shed. Then the dunny was right up the end of the narrow back yard. Mum would grow a few flowers, but Dad grew the vegetables. The yard was quite long and narrow, and the toilet was right down the end of it, past the washhouse and Dad's little shed.

Dad's idea of looking after his children was to go to work and have them fed. But always on a Saturday morning he'd take us out into the yard and give us either licorice, castor oil, or senna powder - to open our bowels, whether we needed to or not. We used to like the licorice powder best - out of a very had bunch!

My bedroom was halfway up the stairs. You'd go up one flight of stairs and then there was a landing. The bathroom ran off there, and my bedroom looked over the yard at the back. I could climb on the fence, then onto Dad's shed, then climb onto the laundry roof and get into my bedroom window. I can remember one time there was a boy who'd come to see me while I was out, and I didn't want to see him. I'd been out with another boy. The kitchen window overlooked the back gate, and I saw him sitting there waiting for me as I came in the back gate. I quietly crept in, went quickly past the window, and climbed up to my room and went to bed - leaving poor old Mum down there with this boy! He went home without seeing me and I didn't see him again. I didn't like him very much - no particular reason, he just didn't appeal to me, that's all. He was a clean, nice boy.

When we were living in Cameron Street, Mort's Dock was in full swing. The tram would come down Rowntree Street and stop at Cameron Street, just before turning the corner into Grove Street to go down to Birchgrove and the Terminus. (That's the stop where Grandma moved from.) All these men would get out there and walk down Cameron Street to the Dock. The street would be black with men! It was a big dry dock, and big ships were built there. (Later on, when Bill was little and we'd moved to Drummoyne, my mother used to get a cab over to get him and take him down to Mort's Dock to stand on the street there and look through gaps in the fence to see a ship being launched. The sun just rose and set with Bill as far as his Nanna was concerned, and he adored her too. Bill would have been about three, then.)

When Nida and I were out of work we used to sit on our front verandah and the young apprentices going past would whistle at us. We'd yell things back to them - when I come to think of it we must have looked real common - and after a while they'd stop for a bit and talk to us. (They ended up taking us out to the pictures a couple of times.)

All the workers would go down early to their jobs, and at about ten o'clock a very thin, tall gentleman used to get off the tram and walk past. He had a black frock coat on and a sort of a top hat, and a nice white beard trimmed to a point. I don't know what he was, but he was something big at the Dock.

We used to have a dog at Cameron Street - a fox terrier. We loved him - Toby we called him. He got knocked by a car not long after they came out, and his eye came up like a balloon. Toby was really Bob's dog, I suppose. Bob absolutely loved animals - he was always bringing strays home and at one time we had five dogs in the back yard. Mum and Dad got rid of them somehow. Bob used to de-sex the cats around the place - he learnt from Dad. He'd put them in a sugar bag and get a razor to them then squeeze out the 'land oysters'.... Anyway, here's Toby with his bung eye, and Dad said to Bob: "It's no good. He'll die with that eye like that. You'd better take him up to the police station and get him shot." Fancy saying that to the poor kid! So Bob left home - with Toby. He didn't come home for tea, and of course Mum and Dad had a fight over it all. In the end we found Bob under the house with Toby that night real late. They'd gone out looking, and were thinking of going to the police, but they found him under the house at the last minute. Toby had scratched at his eye, and over that night it went down again, and just ended up pink. He ended up blind in that eye though. Everybody used to call him Lord Nelson after that. So Toby wasn't shot and Bobby got his way. But gee I thought my father was tough over that.

There used to be a cupboard under the stairs where Mum kept a clothes basket for all our soiled clothes. I remember Bob had a toothache one time and Mum gave Bob a little bottle of brandy to take a swig from to hold on his tooth to ease the pain. We didn't know that under the stairs was one of Bob's haunts, and he went in there and took the brandy bottle with him and got himself quite drunk, and it took us quite a while to find him. I'll always remember - years later when Bob was living at Malvina Street in Ryde he used to have a big macadamia nut tree in his backyard - this was before they'd been promoted and become popular. He was always full of fun, Bob. He said to me when I was visiting him once: "Mary, have you ever tasted these nuts? They're beautiful." And with that he pulled two off the tree and put them in my hand and said: "There! And don't say you never felt my nuts!" (*Laughs*). I've still got them, and every time I come across them I think of Bob.

Narrabeen was always a second home to us because we'd gone there so much in our childhood. When we were teenagers, Jack and Bob and some mates went down to a place called Griffith Park at Collaroy. There were about six of them. After they'd gone, Nida and I asked our mothers if we could go down too and they said we could, so we did. We just arrived - didn't even take anything with us to eat or anything. The boys had ridden down on their pushhikes and we found where they'd pitched the tent. They were browned off with us for going, but they were stuck with us. There was a man and his wife and two girls camped nearby, and Nida and I were talking to the girls and getting on with them - they were nice girls. That night, Nida and I and the six boys all slept in the one tent they'd brought, and the next morning the woman camped nearby wouldn't let her daughters have anything to do with us. It wasn't until years later that it dawned on me that it was because we'd slept in the same tent as all the boys. Yet it was all very innocent. We were just all mates together. The boys never even swore. They didn't drink - couldn't afford to even if they'd wanted to. They all just treated us like sisters.

Before we were married, Cec was out of work for three years. He had been working in the office in a boot warehouse called Enoch Taylor's, and he was training to be a shoe salesman. If ever anybody would have been misplaced as a salesman it was Cec! (I was 13 when I started work, and I would have got my QC at 14 if I'd stayed at school. But by the time he was 14, Cec

had been to Petersham High School and done his Intermediate!) The Depression was coming on, and he was put out of work. So was Jack and so was Bob - my two brothers. Both Jack and Bob had been apprenticed to J.B. Sharp's furniture factory and Jack learnt to be a cabinet maker and french polisher; Bob learnt to be a wood machinist. They got laid off and not long later Jack and Bob and (I think) young Jimmy Windeyer "went on the wallaby track". (Jack has done a tape about his experiences being on the road.)

It was a pretty tough time for everybody. In those days you didn't get money for your dole, you got coupons. You'd have a coupon for the grocer, the greengrocer, and the butcher. In those days most young people seemed to live at home - they didn't seem to go out on their own like they do today - you couldn't, in those circumstances. You had to go and work for those coupons. (I can remember Cec having to go and chop rock outside the asylum at Callan Park for his dole coupons. It was sort of make-work. I can still remember him saying that the inmates in Callan Park would look over the fence at them chopping rock, with all the time in the world to themselves, and Cec said to me that he found himself wondering just who were the loonies.

Cec's father had been married before. His wife died, but he had two children to her - their names were Dudley and Hilda. His wife's parents took the children when their daughter died - they were only small. Then he married Pearl Sinfield, Cec's mother, and the children from the previous marriage used to come over to visit their father from time to time. Pearl's sister Ina would tell me how they'd send the children to visit with hardly any clothes, and Pearl would sit down and sew clothes for them and buy clothes for them and send them back with nice clothes. Auntie Ina thought this was terrible - that Pearl was being used.

Auntie Ina was a very big, fat lady. Her husband was put into Gladesville Asylum because he couldn't stand the pace of the world. He must have had a nervous breakdown or something. She had a boy and a girl, and a second boy who had something the matter with him - he wasn't the full quid - and he was affectionately called Trotters. He always wore sandals, (I don't know if there was any connection with his nickname) and Auntie Ina kept him pretty much at home as he wasn't able to be educated. He was definitely retarded. When he got to be about eighteen, Auntie Ina reckoned that the men in the hotel would take him in and buy him beers and get him drunk, and when he got a few beers in him he'd go outside and start talking to everybody and waving his arms about. Everybody in Balmain and Rozelle knew Trotters - everybody knew him, and in our family everybody didn't like to own up too readily that he was a relative! You know. I often wonder if there was any connection between Trotters being like that and Uncle Will being in the asylum.

Pearl and Ina came from an old English family - their maiden name was Sinfield. They were reared at Richmond, out near Windsor. There was very little in the way of social welfare schemes in those days of course, and because her husband was in Gladesville Asylum she used to have to go out and do washing to survive. Cec's mother Pearl was the baby of the family, and was supposed to be a bit delicate or something, and Auntie Ina used to do her housework and washing for her. Pearl used to give her a few bob for doing it. She certainly wasn't rich, Pearl, but they did own their own home. If you owned your own home and you didn't have to pay rent - that was a big advantage. She had a carpet runner in the hallway - in those days you were considered to be comfortably off if you had carpet. When we got carpet in South Street it was a

definite move up the status ladder - in fact, it was a move up the status ladder for me to marry Cec. He'd been to High School where neither my brothers nor I went to High School - we left school as soon as you could. But though we might have been poor and not very well educated, we were respectable people. I know that in Balmain as I was growing up, we were all very respected as a family. I think that it all came back in the end to the fact that my father was a labouring man - he had no skills, so he never earned very much money. And in those days, when you got sick and couldn't go to work you got no money, but you still had to find your rent and money for food.

Cec's father had two sisters. One was Dolly, who lived in Gladesville with rather a large family, and then there was Auntie Sis, who lived in Mortlake with Uncle Harry, and they never had any family. Their father was an alcoholic, and he used to beat them up. My Grandma knew of them, and knew about how they used to get beaten. Cec was terribly fond of Uncle Harry. He'd been brought out from England to work on the big gasometers at Mortlake, and Auntie Dolly lived across the river from Mortlake - you could get a punt across in those days - and while they were younger they used to visit each other quite a bit. But as time went on Auntie Dolly had this big family, then lost her husband, and Auntie Sis got a bit unfriendly with Dolly when she stopped visiting as she got busier.

Cec used to go up and visit Uncle Harry - especially when he was out of work. They lived in a two bedroom weatherboard home situated on two blocks of land on a lovely big level block. When the house needed painting, Uncle Harry supplied the paint, and Cec painted the whole lot - inside and out, including the roof. After he'd finished painting each day, Cec and Uncle Harry would go up the pub and have a beer, and that was Cec's payment for the job - he'd take no more payment than that. Then we got married, and after we had Bill I used to take him up to visit them too. (Auntie Sis had crocheted a pair of booties for Bill, and because I went there to visit once and I didn't have her booties on Bill, she got offended. She was a bit thin-skinned I think, which might help explain how she fell out with Auntie Dolly.) Auntie Sis and Uncle Harry were pretty old, and when I went to visit I used to go through that house and scrub it from the front to the back. Although we weren't doing all this with any gain in mind, after some time Auntie Sis and Uncle Harry began saying that when they died they'd leave the house to Cec and I. Dolly was the only living relative Sis had, and as I said she had no time for her any more because she didn't come near the place.

As time went on, Uncle Harry got cancer of the prostate. In those days they didn't operate for some reason, and he kept having to go back to the hospital and having something done - Cec used to say he went back in for a re-bore. It slowly got worse and worse till in the end Uncle Harry put his head in the gas oven and took his own life. Auntie Sis found him. After that she started to go downhill, and she got delusions, and she used to lock herself in the house and keep a broom in the bedroom to take to anyone that came in. After Uncle Harry went Cec didn't go up as much, but I used to go up and visit with Cec's mother sometimes. We'd take something for lunch because Auntie Sis always cried poormouth because she was on the pension. It was a nice trip up there and I used to quite enjoy going.

In the end they put Auntie Sis in hospital, and by that stage she didn't know anybody when they visited. I suppose it was Alzheimer's she had though we didn't call it that then. When she

eventually died she didn't leave a Will, and it was put in the hands of the Public Trustee and of course the Trustee then had to find the next of kin. When the house and contents and the land were sold Auntie Dolly got half of the proceeds. The other next of kin were Cec and his two brothers, but so also were Dudley and Hilda from his father's former marriage, so the other half was split between the five of them. It turned out we didn't get very much. If we'd have got the lot the way Auntie Sis and Uncle Harry had intended we'd have got a home of our own a lot quicker than we did, but as it was we had to wait till we were well into our fifties before we got a home of our own, which was the unit in Tranmere Street, Drummoyne. Even to get that we borrowed eleven thousand dollars from Auntie Liz and paid her back into a separate bank account, every Monday morning. We'd almost finished paying it back when Auntie died, and as she left everything to me we got it back again, which was probably the only break financially we ever got.

When Cec had his motor bike it was often hard to find the money to buy petrol for it. As it happened, he had some mates who used to work on the punts that took the petrol over to the different oil companies around the harbour. When they pumped the petrol out of the drums there was always a little bit left in the bottom, and the fellers on the punt used to let Cec siphon the dregs out into a can, and he used to run his bike on what he got this way. In the end, he was found out doing this, and someone higher up put a stop to it - even though the dregs in the drums used be wasted anyway.

Cec and I hadn't got married at this stage. In Cec's family Mrs Bottomley had Eric, who was working; Cec, who was out of work; and Gordon, who was still at school. There was nine years' difference between Eric and Cec and six years' difference between Cec and Gordon. That's a lot between kids. Their father died of a heart attack when Cec was nineteen and out of work. He was a boilermaker. His fingers were all scrunched up into a sort of claw, and Cec used to say that it was from hitting things with his ten pound hammer or something - riveting, I think it was. Yet Cec's hands went like that when he got old. Cec reckoned that his dad only worked six months of the year, because his heart was so bad. I never met Cec's father.

As I said, Cec was working at Enoch Taylor's when I met him. I used to go down to the Elkington Street Baths and barrack for the Balmain water polo team. Cec was a pushbike rider, not a swimmer, but because he was in sport, I suppose, he knew all the water polo team. He probably went to school with them, come to think of it. On Friday nights the shops were open till about eleven o'clock - grocer's shops and all, and in those days the young people used to go up the street to "pirate". You'd walk along the street and you'd meet boys, and you'd stop and talk to them. This was all harmless fun - there was nothing romantic or anything about it - it was just talking to them, you know. The swimming club boys always met on a Friday night outside the milk bar on the corner of Rowntree Street and Darling Street. There were two Tilbrook brothers in the water polo team and Cec was terribly like the Tilbrooks to look at. My friend Nida and I would walk along eyeing the boys off, and they'd eye us off. That was our Friday Night Special: we'd go into the sundae shop and have a banana split or something. Then when we'd come out the boys'd be all there and we'd talk to them. You know, it was like one of those street corner scenes out of the movies.

I was introduced to Cec by the boys who were in the water polo team. They were a beautiful bunch of boys. And they appreciated us going along to barrack for them and we got to know them really well. I never used to go to the baths to swim except at night, because with my skin I couldn't take the sun. And Nida never went either. (I didn't have much of an opinion of myself, but Nida was worse. She wouldn't do anything without me. She never even finished a career in sewing she was so unsure of herself). I went to school with Nida, Nellie Bailey, and Amy Barnes - there were the four of us and we were great mates at school. After we left school, Nellie and Amy were great mates and Nida and I were mates too. We'd visit each other's place, and sometimes we'd sleep overnight. Nellie and Amy were the same.

I went to the beach at Maroubra with Cec one day. He had a cousin who lived at Randwick and we went there for tea afterwards. After being on the beach all day you can imagine how I felt - not being able to take the sun I'd spent the day under an ordinary umbrella fully clothed. From what I can work out Cec hadn't had any girlfriends much - he was always racing his pushbike with the Bicycle Club. After tea they got onto the piano and everyone sang and then Cec got onto the piano and played, and I got the biggest shock of my life because he'd never said anything to me about being able to play. There was a piano in his home at North Street - the three Bottomley boys played, and Eric used to have a little dance band when he was young. Not long after we found out that Cec could play, Mum bought a piano. She went up to Fountains, the music store in Balmain at the time and she bought a great big black piano. The boys were in work at the time, so that must have had something to do with how she found the money. To have a piano in the house was the acme - it was like having carpet.

Cec used to come down every Sunday night and play the piano and Nida and I used to dance with Jack and Bob's mates. That's how we learnt to dance - in Mum's front room with Cec playing the piano. Then I went up to Quayle's after that on a Saturday afternoon and learned proper ballroom dancing, and I loved it. I used to go up to the local dance hall - it was only sixpence in. Nida usually came with me - I never went anywhere on my own and nor did she. You'd go into the dance hall and sit in the corner and boys would come up and ask you to dance. If you were a good dancer you'd dance nearly every dance, but if you weren't you didn't get a lot. I just loved dancing! I used to love doing the quickstep - I loved the rhythm of two bodies moving together and doing the same thing. I suppose there might have been something sexual in it, but it never felt like that to me. But Cec never learned to dance.

After Cec and I were married we went away for a weekend to Woy Woy, to where we'd spent our honeymoon. And Mum and Auntie Hilda and Jimmy and Sally and a whole crowd of young ones went up there, including Mrs Bottomley - they all went up this weekend. I was seven months pregnant with Bill at the time, and Jack didn't have a girl to take. So I went around to Nellie Bailey's place and asked her would she come away on a blind date with Jack. Once the weekend was under way, whenever we couldn't find Jack we soon knew where to look, 'cos wherever Nell was, Jack was. They just fell for each other hook, line and sinker that weekend. They went together from then on, got engaged, and got married, and there they are now at Narrabeen in the house that the boys and Papa built for him and Nanna. Nellie is still close to Amy Barnes, but my mate Nida died from kidney trouble some years ago when I was living up in Nambucca. I made Nell's wedding dress, and dressed her for the wedding. I did the same for

Amy. And Nida. They were nice weddings, too. They say “three times a bridesmaid never a bride” and I was a bridesmaid three times, and disproved the saying. I used to enjoy being a bridesmaid.

Anyway, we were all up at Woy Woy and we had a beaut weekend. There was a mob of us, and Jimmy used to play the mandolin and somebody else would play a comb and a bit of tissue paper and we’d all sing, and I had girls from work there with their boyfriends. And I reckon that my mother and Auntie Hilda were the biggest sports out. They used to cook for all of us. We used to peel the vegetables and run the messages, but they did all the cooking for us. And chaperoned us. It was all chaperoned. We all slept in our own beds - there was none of this mixing up - it was all by the book. I’ve got a snap from that weekend somewhere - with Cec there and me with my big tummy. And it was the anniversary of my wedding that weekend, too.

Mum and Dad’s block of ground at Narrabeen was next to the lake except for a public reserve between. There was another vacant block next door, and when Auntie Hilda saw it she immediately put a deposit on it. (There were hardly any houses in the street at that time.) So the two sisters were living alongside one another - they were great pals. Hilda and Jim were able to have a builder come and put their house up because they seemed to be that bit better off than Mum and Dad - only having one child would have made a difference, I suppose, as every child you have costs you money.

After buying the ground, but while we were still living in Balmain there was an ad in the paper about a house being sold for salvage, but it had to be demolished by the next weekend. Dad and Jack bought it for very little, and Jack and his mates rallied around and they hired a lorry and pulled the place to pieces, piled it on to the lorry and took it down to Narrabeen where they stored it up on chocks off the ground. All the building materials were lying in ordered stacks all around the block of ground. While it was like that, we had a terrible lot of rain. The mouth of the lake happened to be closed, so the lake began to rise, until it was a full scale flood that came into the block, and all the timber started floating about all over the place. Auntie Hilda was there watching this happen, (her house was already completed and she’d moved in) and she could see Mum’s future house literally drifting away! Poor old Auntie (we didn’t know it at the time but she had a bad heart) had to get into the rowing boat, and I don’t know exactly what she did but she stopped the wood from all floating away. Mum and Dad always used to say that they’d never forget Auntie for that, because she’d done them a very good turn.

The house was built mainly by Dad and Jack. Bob used to go down now and again, and Cec went down and did a bit of concreting and some plumbing. When Mum and Dad died the Will was made out so that Jack was to get first refusal of the place. Of course it was fair that they should get it, because it wasn’t only Jack - Nell went down there with him every weekend as well, and as young marrieds they didn’t have much of a life, only working through the week and building for Mum and Dad on the weekends. Jack’s got some nice snaps of it during construction.
