



Mary Bottomley remembers...

*Transcripts of taped reminiscences recorded by
Mary Bottomley at Bushland Place, Taree, NSW
during 1994 and early 1995*



Mary Hilda Bottomley (née Herwig)

Wife, mother and home-maker

Born August 21, 1911

Introduction

This is a collection of transcriptions of tapes made by Mary Bottomley, my mother, during 1994 and 1995.

By the time she had reached her eighties Mum's eyesight was what Dad would have described as 'on the blink'. She has a condition of slow deterioration of the retina known as Fuch's Disease, which means that, although she can still see things in a blurred sort of way, fine visual discrimination is no longer possible without the use of a strong magnifying lens (and even then reading is a chore after half a page or so), and even watching television is difficult. The main effect of this was that Mum could no longer see well enough to sew, which had been one of her mainstay creative and productive activities, and most of her other daily activities had become either very difficult or impossible. She has always been a very active person, and taking it easy or lying down has never been her idea of a good time. She is always happiest when she is doing something.

Because the range of things that she could do was becoming increasingly restricted, she was getting bored and frustrated. I suggested to her that when she was stuck for something to occupy her she might dictate some reminiscences into a tape recorder. Initially she was a bit reluctant to do this, feeling that nobody would be interested in her life, which she saw as 'a bit ordinary', and that she probably wouldn't do it very satisfactorily anyway. I managed to persuade her that I, for one, would be interested, so she began taping various fragmentary memories. I think she did it more for me - because I was enthusiastic about the idea - than for herself, in the final analysis.

When I went to visit her early in 1995 she handed me half a dozen tapes that she had recorded in the latter half of 1994. She hadn't kept a note of what was dealt with on each tape, so I took them away to listen to them and list on their covers what each tape was about. I felt that the tapes would gather dust on a shelf and never get listened to unless this was done. At this stage I was thinking that my daughter, (and perhaps any kids that she might have) might find it interesting to listen to their (great)grandmother's voice and her stories in years to come. (I've often wished today's recording technology was available to our forebears. I'd certainly find it fascinating to have access to what life was like in everyday times in past eras.)

It was while I was listening to them that I realised that the tapes are interesting not only as a chronicle of what life was like for one person and her particular family, but at a broader level as well. They are a colourful and honest account of what things were like if you were working class and grew up in Balmain between the wars. Mum's way of relating things, her side remarks, her idiomatic expressions, and the accounts of everyday life in those days speak volumes between the lines about the social values, mores, habits of mind and assumptions about the world that held sway at the time.

I had originally intended to include a conventional genealogical chart here to locate the kinship position of the people referred to in the text, but the number of gaps that would have to be researched if the chart were to be comprehensive made this idea impractical.

Bill Bottomley,

Wirrimbirra,, March 1995.

Chapter One: Early Days

Grandma Turner and her sister Auntie Annie were born in Maryborough, Queensland. Their origins were Scottish. How Grandma met her husband, Bob Turner, I don't know, but I can remember my mother and father talking about old times and saying that Grandma Turner was put out to service when she was so young she had to stand on a butterhox in the scullery to wash the dishes. She and Auntie Annie were orphaned very early in life. I don't know anything about how they grew up. Grandma married Bob Turner, anyhow. He was an Englishman who had come out here and he came from a fairly comfortable family - in fact they owned a lot of property in Poole, near Bournemouth. Papa Turner had a lime and cement store in Victoria Road Rozelle and they owned their own house - completely paid for, which was something in those days. They were quite well-off. Grandma had four children - there was Auntie Liz, Uncle Bob, Ethel (my Mum) and Hilda - in that order. When the Depression hit at the end of the eighteen hundreds Papa had to go to England to get some money for some reason or other to do with his business. He had a mate who he'd made a partner in the business who was supposed to look after it while he was away. When Papa got back he found that this bloke had diddled him out of the business somehow - I don't know the details, but the bloke's name was Goodwin. The lime and cement business must have been a thriving one because it supplied all the lime and cement needed to build St Joey's College in Gladesville, and practically all of the buildings going up in Drummoyne at the time, I'm told. This would have been late in the nineteenth century.

So Papa was out of a job. He had a bit of money behind him - the money he brought home from England, and he had a roof over his head. But while he was away getting this money, Grandma was practically destitute. There was no money coming in at all, and she had four children to keep. I can remember Mum telling me of the time that a horse and dray full of potatoes went up Victoria Road and one of the bags fell off. Uncle Bob came running in to Grandma and told her, and out they all went and dragged the potatoes in. According to Mum they lived on potatoes for weeks. My grandmother got a job with a local grocery store, and this helped her out while Papa was away. While she was there an old gipsy came in one day and told my grandmother's fortune. She told Grandma that she'd be telling fortunes herself one day and Grandma just laughed at her, gave the fortune-teller a quarter of a pound of tea and some butter, and the old gipsy went

on her way. Of course in the end Grandma did end up telling fortunes, and she made quite a hit of money out of it too, just quietly.

When Papa came back and found out he couldn't take up his business again he got a job with the brewery. He used to drive a cart pulled by big draught horses delivering spirits and he became a bit of an alcoholic while he was driving this. They lost their home - I don't know whether that was due to his alcoholism or connected with the business going bung. I don't know where they went to live then, but it was somewhere in Balmain. (This is what I can remember hearing about, mainly from Mum, as I grew up) They did live in Double Bay for a while and Mum and Auntie Liz and Auntie Hilda all became tailoresses. Auntie Lizzie worked the button-hole machine, my mother was a coat hand, and Auntie Hilda was a trouser hand - they all worked at the same place. Uncle Bob was something to do with clothing too because he ended up, when he was grown up and married, in Elizabeth Street in the city with his own dry cleaning shop. I think it would have been one of the first dry cleaning shops that came out at that time. He married Auntie Linda who helped him a lot, because she was a tailoress too, and an excellent one. He used to do alterations along with the cleaning, and he'd take them home to Auntie Linda (she had to stay at home because they had children) who would do them and he'd take them back perhaps the next day.

Mum and Auntie Hilda and Auntie Liz used to walk to where they worked - I think it was in Eddy Avenue. It was a penny in the tram from Double Bay and they used to walk to save the penny. I don't think they stayed at Double Bay for very long. After that they moved to Riley Street Surry Hills. It was while they were there that my mother met Dad, who was from Queensland. They met and they were married when Mum was just nineteen. Auntie Lizzie didn't get married early - she seemed to be a spinster for a while. Auntie Hilda married Jim Windeyer.

Mum and Dad went to live in a little house in Strawberry Hills after they married, but Mum went home to Riley Street when she got pregnant with my brother Jack - (she was pregnant with him when they got married, though it wasn't known till it became obvious later). Anyway, she went home to Grandma's to have the baby. Grandma was telling fortunes by this, (I don't know how she learned) and Jack was born in the upstairs balcony room. It was an enormous room - Grandma's bedroom. When he was born, the doctor that they got to him was drunk, and Mum had a bit of a bad time with the birth and Jack was a long time in coming. When he finally was born, the doctor just tossed him onto the single bed that was next to the double bed, saying: "He's no good." Bedside manners have improved a bit since then I suppose. With that Grandma grabbed the baby, massaged its heart with brandy, and I don't know what else she did but the next thing the baby cried. With that, the doctor turned around and said: "Hello! He's alive!", and Grandma turned around and said: "Yes, and no thanks to you!"

Mum left the place in Strawberry Hills and went to live in Newtown. While she was there she fell pregnant with me. There's only fifteen months difference between Jack and I. She'd had a row with Dad in the morning and she wouldn't tell him that I was on the way. Jack was only a little fellow, and she walked up to the top of the street to get a Hansom cab and there was a young man there who saw her plight and felt sorry for her. He hailed a cab for her and put her and little Jack into it, and she went back home to Grandma's in Riley Street to have me. By the time she got there I was that close to coming that as my mother walked up the stairs Grandma

held her skirts underneath her so I wouldn't fall down! I was pretty quick in arriving. While she was carrying me, when people asked her if she was having another baby so soon after the first she would say: "Oh no. I'm only high-stomached." She was ashamed of herself for having another one so quickly. Not that there was any contraception or anything in those days.

Grandma brought a lot of babies into the world - she was a sort of midwife. She never sat for exams or anything like that - she just learned how to do it by being with a midwife and doctors and that, and watching. She used to lay people out, and she used to massage people. Of course she never charged for any of this. She had become a Spiritualist when she started to tell fortunes, and she reckoned that the spiritual guides used to tell her what to do. People would come to her to be massaged - she'd put them on the dining room table to do it, and she used to speak in a funny language, you know - a sort of funny foreign pidgin language while she was doing this massaging. (These are all tales that Mum told us as we were growing up. We thought it was great to hear all this sort of stuff').

The night I was born, when Mum arrived Grandma was holding a seance in the front room. When I was born I wasn't even washed, I'm told, and I was taken down into the front room and dedicated to the Spiritualist Church. Then I was taken back up and washed and all that. In those days you used to be kept in bed for about ten days before you were allowed up after you'd had a baby. Anyhow I thrived, and Mum went back home to Newtown and Dad. I don't know where Dad was working then - but we lived in Newtown for quite a while.

I started school from Riley Street, from Grandma's house, because Mum happened to be staying there for one reason or another - I don't know whether she was carrying my younger brother Bobby and needed to be near Grandma or what. Anyway I was pretty young, and they started me at a little pre-school thing - I can still remember the school. I can remember it because I wet my pants. It was time to come home and there was a circle in this little room and we all had to toe the circle and say our prayers, and say goodbye to the teacher and to each other, and I couldn't wait any longer and I wet myself. I can still remember how awful I felt. There was a little boy who was standing next to me who was very dark, with a ribbon around his neck tied like a tie. It's funny how you can remember things like that from your early life.

I didn't stay at that little pre-school for very long because Mum went back to Newtown - 6 Bray Street, Newtown was the address. Mum didn't have a baby the next year - Bobby was born two years and a couple of months after me - at Grandma's house in Riley Street too. Grandma was really young. There's a photo of Uncle Bob's wedding which was when I was only three, and Grandma's only a young person in that. She looked a little bit buxom, but gee she looked young.

Down from where we lived there was a glassworks and they used to make bottles. They used to have bottles made of white or light green glass with marbles in them for stoppers. As we grew up not far from there in this little terrace of houses we used to go down there after school, Jack and I, and we used to stand at the door and watch this fellow put this rod into the fire with a blob of red on the end of it. There was a row of iron moulds lying open and he'd put this rod into a mould, press it with his foot so it would close up and he would blow like mad and make a bottle, and we'd see the red hot bottle come out.

The first day I went to school Mum took us along, and she left Jack and I together. Jack was put

into a different class to me, and when it came eleven o'clock it was playtime, and I told Jack I'd had enough and that I was going home. But I lost my way, and I had to turn around and go back to school. They were all back in class and I was crying because I was lost. The teacher took me in and I ended up going home at the proper time when Mum came to pick us up.

Jack and I would go to school together, and there used to be a house we passed on the way. It had three storeys, with an attic right up the top, and in this attic you could see something hanging up. We were told that it was the silks and cap of a jockey who had been murdered there, and we used to run past this house like anything! I was terrified of that house! Jack was too - we both used to run like hell.

While we were living at Newtown, Papa Turner was living with us. Grandma and Papa had parted. He was still driving the delivery cart for the brewery. The horses used to know their way around - they used to know where to stop and everything. It was a sort of a tabletop cart with no sides on it. At the back of the houses over the road was a paddock, and that's where he kept his dray. I don't know where he kept his horses. On a Saturday he used to hitch up his horses and dray and he'd give all the kids in the street a great long ride on the back of his dray. And us as kids, we thought we were terribly important because it was our grandfather doing this.

It was while we lived in Newtown that the big 'flu epidemic hit Sydney and we all went down with it - the whole lot of us. Everyone had an SOS card put in their letterbox so that if they needed help they could put it in the front window. Dad struggled down and put the SOS sign in our front window, and people going past would tell the authorities where the help was needed, and the nurses and the doctors would come down and see to us till we got better. It was quite an emergency. After I got married, Cec told me that his uncle, his auntie, and three cousins were all wiped out with this 'flu. The whole family died. Everybody had masks on - everybody. The conductors on the trams, everyone you met, everybody had white masks on so you wouldn't catch the 'flu. But of course by then we'd had it, so we were probably immunised against getting it again.

Some time after that, still in Newtown, Jack caught pneumonia. Of course in those days there was no penicillin or anything like that, and Jack was a very very sick little boy. Grandma came over and nursed him. I don't know how much truth is in this, but I can remember being told that Jack was "dying from the feet up" (*falls about laughing at the thought*). But this is what we were told. His feet were so cold, and Grandma put hot bricks at his feet and brought him back to life or something, or so we were told as kids. We were also told that putting him in red flannel was supposed to have saved him, too. They had to wait for The Crisis in those days. With pneumonia you built up a very high fever, and when the fever reached its highest point (and this bit I think is true) you either died or you lived. The fever broke and you lived, or else you died, and there were a lot of people died of pneumonia in those days. Anyhow, Jack got over it.

He was always Grandma's favourite, Jack. He was the firstborn, and very dear to Grandma's heart, especially so because of the dramatic part she'd played in his birth. She always had this soft spot for Jack. She used to dress him up - she'd send nice clothes over for him. I can remember him having little boots with buttons right up over his ankles and a little white suit with a Panama hat, and so he wouldn't lose his hat there was a little black cord clipped to the brim and

then clipped to the lapel of his jacket, so that if his hat blew off he wouldn't lose it or it wouldn't fall in the mud. But he was always the favourite - he was always "her Jackie". And he was the favourite until Grandma died, too. Bob and I always came second. After the pneumonia, Jack was always "delicate". Instead of having an ordinary cotton singlet like we'd have, Jack always had to wear red flannel.

Still in Newtown, and I can't remember the name of the place where Dad was working. It was down Clarence Street or Kent Street somewhere, down near the wharves, and he was humping wheat bags, and they were heavy. Because there were rats running all around the place where he worked, Dad ended up with quinsy of the throat and he was very sick. Whatever the disease was it seemed to close his throat off or something, and we had a doctor, Dr Loxton his name was, and I can remember Mum and Dad thinking this man was a saint because he didn't charge them for his visits. In those days there was no sick pay, and if you were sick you were sick and that was it, and you just had to get along the best way you could. We would have starved if it hadn't been for Grandma. Grandma was always giving money to Mum to keep going. And all through Grandma's fortune telling! Anyway, poor old Dad was in bed for a whole week and after that he was very very weak. After he recovered he got a job at Wunderlich's the tile people, but what he did there I don't remember.

Dad's sister Sophie, by the way, lived for years down at The Rocks in a terrace house at 88 Kent Street. That would have been in the days of the razor gangs. I got a letter recently from one of my cousins saying that she'd been walking around the area not long ago and the house was still there and in the middle of being renovated.

Just before we left Newtown the First War ended and our street was decorated with bunting, with a big "Welcome Home" banner for the boys who were coming back home to our street. During the war Mum used to send Jack and I one after the other to buy sugar and tea, which was rationed. I'll bet the grocer knew we were brother and sister, but he still used to give it to us, even though strictly he shouldn't have.

After we moved from Newtown, as far as I remember we went to Balmain then. By then Grandma was living in Balmain. She'd moved from Riley Street. She lived in the flats on the corner of Cameron Street and Rowntree Street. They weren't really flats - Grandma had the whole building - but they looked like flats. A square, horrible-looking place. Mum and Dad and we three kids went and stayed with Grandma until we got a house, and we got a house in Rowntree Street, just up from Grandma. Grandma didn't like living in those flats much because the tram used to stop right outside and people used to be waiting there to catch the tram and it was terribly noisy. So she moved further up Rowntree Street to a house right opposite us - No 100 Rowntree Street, it was. I don't remember the number of our house now, but we lived there for a long while. We went to school from there - to Birchgrove School.

Ballast Point Rd wasn't far from the corner where Grandma's first Balmain place was. It went from Yeend St wharf up to the main road, then it went down again to the water on the other side. We used to slide on a piece of tin down the rounded stone gutter beside some steps going down to the tram terminus. Our mothers never knew. We just used to go out for a walk and do it. Kids

were allowed to walk around the place in those days, and nobody would molest them or anything. Near the steps was all lantana with passageways through it and we used to play a lot there because it was much more interesting than at home. (We had a paddock beside us at home but it only had grass on it.)

Then we moved down to 27 Cameron Street because it was cheaper. It was sixteen shillings a week. Dad was the only one working, of course, but he only made a labourer's money, so we were pretty poor. I can remember when we were kids at school my mother had an old school friend get in touch with her and came to see her. Our place was all lino and there was no fancy stuff in the house at all. I can always remember poor old Mum - she went over to Grandma's and got a lend of Grandma's plush red tablecloth to put on the table, and mats and cushions to put all around. All just for the afternoon when Mum's friend came to see her - so she wouldn't be ashamed of her house, you know, because it looked a bit poor. But what does "poor" mean, really'? No boots'? No food? We had boots, but we often had to go to Grandma for a couple of shillings for food. Of course, as soon as the visitor had gone, the stuff all went back up to Grandma's.

Grandma's house was a double fronted cottage. Papa lived there with her. He'd moved back with her after we left Newtown, where he'd been living with us. But he didn't move back in properly. Underneath the kitchen was a room off the yard. It was quite a nice room, and that's where Papa lived. He was retired and he was sick when he was down there. He wasn't all that old, I don't think. He used to look like Father Christmas - he had a mo - he didn't have a heard - but he had lovely rosy cheeks and white hair. There's a photo of him somewhere. He died in that room. I don't know what he died of. Jack reckons that he sat with him until he died. We were still going to school - somewhere around ten I'd say we'd have been. Grandma was still telling fortunes. She didn't make enough that you'd say she was rich, but she bought nice clothes and she used to always help Mum out when she got in circumstances where she couldn't buy a meal. Often I can remember going to Grandma's and asking for two shillings for a meal. Two bob would buy you a meal in those days. Anyhow, she used to still hold seances, and down in Grove Street Balmain there was a beautiful big two storeyed house set in a beautiful garden - all overgrown. As kids, especially when Jimmy came over - Jimmy was Auntie Hilda's boy. (He was a year older than my brother Bobby, and they were great mates). They were bloomin' little crims when they got together, gee! they used to do some awful things. Pinch things. Cars had come out by then and they used to pinch hub caps. They weren't very old - about eight or so I suppose. Anyhow, we kids snuck into the yard of this house. The story went that in this house there was a blackfeller who murdered a whole family in it and nobody would live in it. All the houses around it were occupied, but no-one lived in this beautiful home. You could tell that nobody had lived in it for ages because the garden was really overgrown. Anyway, Jack and I picked bunches of flowers from the garden, and I took them back and gave them to Grandma.

Grandma was holding a seance that night, and the story goes that while she was holding the seance she went into a trance, and a man's voice came through her and said: "Pray for me. I'm in the dark. Please pray for me. I followed a little fair-haired girl who picked flowers, and I followed her up to here. Please help me and pray for me." Now this is what was told to us as kids. I don't know how much truth was in it, but he was supposed to be the murderer you see,

and he couldn't get to heaven or something because of what he'd done - he was chained to the earth. But can you imagine what that would do to a child? I was scared stiff! The spirit of a mass murderer following me about! Gee whiz!

There were some people who lived next door to Grandma in Rowntree Street in a two-story house whose layout was exactly the same as the one we lived in at 27 Cameron Street. There was a bedroom half way up the stairs off the landing where the stairs turned round, and at Cameron Street that was my room. In the Rowntree Street house, that room was used by a man who was very ill with cancer of the bowel that they couldn't fix up, and he was in a lot of pain. He wasn't married - he'd have been in his mid-forties, or something like that. He committed suicide with a cut-throat razor. His mother found him, and he must have been lying there for a fair while because there was blood everywhere.

Now these days, in a case like that you'd get in touch with the authorities or someone like that, but back at this time they went to Grandma for help. Grandma went in and got the undertakers to come, but they couldn't face the blood. (I was sitting on a sofa under a little verandah affair outside Grandma's kitchen and heard her telling this). She said: "Look, the blood was squelching through my slippers." His head was only hanging on by the vertebrae, so she got a pillow slip and put it over his head and tied it under his arms and sort of tied it on. Hearing all this made a huge impression on me - all that blood and everything - I think I would have been about fourteen or fifteen. And after that I used to get terribly frightened going up to my bedroom, especially at night. I was very frightened of the dark, and even as old as sixteen I used to go and get into bed with my younger brother Bob. I'd be trembling under the blankets - I'd put my head under the blankets and all. Bob was my mate - we used to fight all the time, but he was the one that let me get in bed with him at times like that. Jack wouldn't. Though at other times Bob would tease me, knowing that I was scared stiff, and when he'd see me going upstairs with a candle he'd taunt me with things like: "Watch out for the bleeeeding hands! They'll reach out in the dark and get you!"

As well as being the person that people seemed to turn to when they needed help, Grandma used to be the one in the neighbourhood who used to lay people out after they had died. She'd take us kids with her when she did this sometimes. And because they were dead, she'd say: "So you won't remember them any more, you must kiss them." And we were made to kiss the corpse! So you won't remember them! I could never forget them! When I think about it, it was a strange thing to have us do. I've talked to Jack about this and he can remember all this too. I think that's a terrible thing, to make young kids kiss a dead person!

And I mentioned earlier that she used to be a midwife and bring children into the world. She brought all three of us into the world. There was a doctor there, of course, but he never had a nurse, it was always Grandma. This, and the laying out and all that - I think she enjoyed it, and I also think she enjoyed being a person of some note in the area as a result. She wasn't paid for doing any of this - I think that from her point of view it would be part of what you do as a true Christian, as well.

(I never had enough in common with Grandma that I could go and talk to her and confide in her - she wasn't that sort of a grandma to me at all. When she got really old - in her eighties, and she

was just sitting at the front window watching the world go by - she used to love Bill going over to see her. I can remember him riding his pushbike from our place at Drummoyne over to Balmain to see her when he was about ten, I suppose. On the way over he stopped at Mick Simmons sports store at Rozelle to put a lay-by on a football that he was going to pay off with his paper run money. When Grandma learned of this during his visit she gave him the balance of the money owing, and on the way back home Bill got the lay-by out! Seems like Grandma was always bailing us out. But she did love boys, though - she always seemed to take to the boys.)

One day when I was a kid I was at Grandma's and I was making a cup of tea for her. I dropped the heavy cast iron kettle and scalded my foot. It was one big blister. Grandma threaded a needle with white cotton, then boiled them both up to make them sterile. Then she put several stitches here and there in the blistered skin, cutting the thread after each stitch so the water under the skin seeped out through the thread. The skin sagged back over the raw flesh so no air got in. I didn't have any trouble with it healing. What I find interesting in retrospect was that I wasn't allowed to read anything while I was recuperating with the foot elevated on Grandma's back verandah. I picked up a comic and Grandma snatched it out of my hand - she used to rouse on me for reading and say: "When you get married and have children they'll be waiting to have their nappies changed and you'll be there with your nose in a book!"

Grandma had a boarder that lived in one of her rooms, and his name was Vincent Jeratowich. He used to play the steel guitar - a real Hawaiian-type music, and it used to fill my romantic little heart and I used to think it was lovely. He was a good-looking young man - he was a signwriter. He would've been about 22, 23 I suppose. I was just a schoolkid. Anyway, this boarder was engaged to be married, and his intended lost her engagement ring, and he told Grandma about it and Grandma gave him a reading and told him where to find it. And it was where she said it would be! Of course, I really can't tell if this was all true or whether it was made up just to show how good Grandma was. People used to come from miles around to Grandma to have their fortunes told.

My father's sister Sophie, (the one from The Rocks) had a daughter, her eldest, and her name was Minnie. She was Dad's niece. She was the skeleton in the family cupboard. She was a prostitute. She also had an illegitimate baby to a jockey and it was adopted out, and that's when she became a prostitute, after that. Minnie went the wrong way, anyway. I remember her well, she was good. I was grown up enough to be at work when Minnie started going with this fellow called Mick, who was a gangster, and she was his moll, as they used to say. This is really true. This Christmas I went away on a holiday up to Berowra Waters with a girl from work, and Cec came with me - we were courting at the time. While we were up there we got the Sunday papers, and here was this headline blazoned across them: "Gangster's moll nearly killed" and all this. And her boyfriend had been shot and killed. I didn't let on to anyone that the gangster's moll was my first cousin! But I knew it was her. This would have been around 1929 or 1930 at a guess. Afterwards, she came to Grandma to get a reading - to get her cards read, and all that. The story that came down to us was that she came to Grandma and Grandma went into a trance, and that she could hardly talk, she was in so much pain. She was supposed to be the medium for this gangster who was coming through her to talk to Minnie. That's all I can remember about it, except that Grandma was absolutely exhausted when she came out of the trance. She used to go

into trances a lot. She used to talk in almost another language. I used to see her in trances quite often and hear her do this speaking in tongues, so I know that much for sure.

They're very religious, the Spiritualists are, and Grandma used to be very religious. She would go out to a local hall, and people would come and sit on seats like in church and they'd all say prayers, and they'd put a flower on the table and Grandma would pick this flower up and say something like: "Whoever owns this flower, somebody comes to me through this flower and their initial is, (say), M." then she'd give them the message.

Nida, (my best friend at the time) and I used to go along when we knew Grandma was "on the platform" as they used to say, and if anyone went in there and giggled, or thought it was funny, or didn't take it seriously, then they were ordered out. It was just a public hall, not a church hall. The churches wouldn't let you do any of that! But she also operated from her house - and don't forget that telling fortunes was illegal in those days. She moved from 100 Rowntree Street up to 62 Rowntree Street - a big two-storey house - and I'm not exaggerating when I say this, I often saw people sitting both sides of the hall up past one room and all around the open dining room on chairs, waiting to have their fortunes told. I never saw her doing it in private sessions with strangers, but if she was doing it with someone we knew I'd walk through in the middle of it - and Grandma wouldn't even look up. It was just commonplace to us. She didn't have a crystal ball, but she used to read cards - ordinary ones, not Tarot cards - and tea leaves and palms, but mainly trance. She'd hold your hands over this little table and she'd shut her eyes and go into a trance.

Later, when I got married and moved to Drummoyne, the people next door were named Hewitt. When Mrs Hewitt heard that Mrs Turner was my Grandma she was that pleased! She wanted me to make an appointment for her, but Grandma wasn't doing readings then. But Mrs Hewitt swore by her. She reckons that when her husband went to New Zealand she went to have her fortune told by Grandma, who told her that she was going to get word that her husband had had an accident with a horse, but that he was going to be all right. She did get word from New Zealand, that he'd been riding a horse and it threw him and kicked him in the head. He had a scar for the rest of his life on his head, and I saw it myself when he got back from New Zealand. He thought Grandma was great too, but Grandma wouldn't see Mrs Hewitt - she said she was too old. I sometimes wonder if she wouldn't see her because she lived next door to me. Auntie Liz told me in a secret sort of way that Mrs Hewitt had a "fancy man". Grandma wouldn't have told you that sort of thing. (I think Auntie Liz used to listen in to a lot of Grandma's sessions - it wouldn't have been too hard to do since the front room and the room where Aunt spent a lot of time were on each side of big double doors that divided the room in two).

Grandma wouldn't do Ouija boards, but I had experience of them. When we were young, before I was married, Jack had a mate called Bertie Manton. I was going to work then - I was a young teenager. This Bertie Manton had a crush on me. I quite liked him as Jack's mate, but I didn't like him as a boyfriend. He was a nice looking fellow with nice teeth and lovely wavy blonde hair, but he just wasn't my cup of tea for some reason. He was courting a young friend of ours called Ivy Hunkin - I used to go to work with Ivy and with Maude, her sister. They lived in

Rowntree Street as did Bertie Manton. We'd meet up at the tram stop where Grandma used to live and get the tram into work together.

One night we were up at the Hunkins'. Mrs Hunkin was very interested in spiritualism, and they got together with a ouija board. This was when Ivy was keeping company with Bert (Manton). We all had our fingers on the glass on the board, and I always felt as though somebody was pushing it - but I never pushed it - I was fair dinkum. But it kept spelling out B-A-B-Y, time after time. In the end we put it away because we couldn't make head or tail of it, and that was it. Well, a few mornings later I went to work, but Ivy wasn't at the tram stop. I asked Maude where she was, and Maude said she was at home in terrible pain. "Mum's sending my young brother down to get your mother to come up and have a look at her." Maude and I went to work, and after coming home that night Mum told me that the young brother (I think his name was Les - poor devil, he had a terrible death later on) had gone to get Mum, who went up to Ivy and found that Ivy had been carrying Bert's baby and she never

told a single soul! So she didn't even have a singlet or a nappy for the baby. She was a plumpish girl and she somehow managed to disguise it, because none of us knew. Mrs Hunkin was a real straight-laced old lady - well, she wasn't that old I suppose, but she was old to me. When Mum went to see Ivy she could see straight away that she was in childbirth and she said to her: "You're having a baby, aren't you Ivy?" and Ivy said yes and told Mum who the father was when Mum asked her. So Mum had to tell Mrs Hunkin, who nearly fainted, and Mum went and got clothes for the baby, then she got the doctor, and Ivy had the baby at home. We got the shock of our lives to come home from work and find Ivy with a baby! Bert married Ivy, but he didn't seem to have any real feelings of responsibility I don't think. He was working, and came to live with the Hunkins then. He came down to see us in 27 Cameron Street one morning, and we said to him: "Why don't you bring the baby down for us to see!" "All right" he said, "I'll bring it down this afternoon." And do you know he brought the baby down wrapped up in newspaper! As though he was ashamed of it. I'm laughing now about it, but it really wasn't funny. We had a bit of Bert and we shamed him into taking it home unwrapped! Anyway, we were great friends with the Hunkins and we saw a lot of the little baby later. Incidentally, when the Second War broke out Bert went to war and ended up a prisoner of the Japanese, and came back a broken man. A drunkard and... oh, he was a real mess. He didn't live long after he came home.

I mentioned before that Ivy's brother had a terrible death. He worked at the box works in Balmain, and they had this big sort of machine there. He got caught on the belt and the whole of his genitals were torn from him. He died there and then in the factory. A terrible death. His foot and his leg and all went. We were all very upset by that.

When my brother Bob was born (at Grandma's in Riley Street like the rest of us) somebody came to the door with a beautiful brooch. Thinking about it now, it was a funny way to sell jewelry - so it was probably stolen goods. It was made from an English five shilling piece and had the cross on one side and Queen Victoria's head on the other. Somebody had given Mum some money as a present for Bobby - you know, the "cross his palm with silver" sort of thing, and Mum bought this brooch with it. Lil, Bob's wife would have it now. She still lives in their

place at Ryde, in Malvina Street. Because it was bought with Bobby's money Bob got it when Mum died. I was always jealous about it - I treasured that brooch, and while Mum had it while she was alive I used to keep getting lends of it if I was going anywhere special where I wanted to look nice. It was set in a little rim with all little knobbles on it and it spun inside the rim. On one side it was all gold with Queen Victoria's head on it and the other side was a cross in all enamel work with the lion rampant done in gold on a sort of wine coloured background. I reckon it'd be worth a good bit today. It would be interesting to see it again.

We used to see a lot of Auntie Hilda, Mum's sister. She married Jimmy Windeyer, who was supposed to be, as they say in some old books, a "fly blow" of Judge Windeyer. (I don't know the truth of that of course, because if he was, how would he keep the name? It might have been just someone's joke to him because he had the same name for all I know. We could have picked up things as kids that weren't true.) Anyway, Uncle Jim was a presser. He worked in a tailoring firm - funny how so many of us used to work in these tailoring firms - he used to press the seams. But then he left that and went into dry cleaning and was a presser there. In the olden days everything was washed, and I don't know how they cleaned things, but dry cleaning stores must have come into fashion about then. Hilda and Jim only ever had the one child, and they seemed to have a charmed life - they didn't ever seem to get sick like our family did. Uncle was a bit of a cut above us because he had a trade, being a presser, and my father had no trade. Uncle Jim's mother and relatives all lived in Surry Hills. He always went to work in a collar and tie because his job was a clean one. He was always talked about in our family, in a quiet way, as a bit of a numbskull because he couldn't hammer a nail in, but that could have been a bit of superiority on my Dad's part though, as Dad was handy. Of course only having the one child would have made a difference too, because every child you had was another rung in the ladder of being poor, wasn't it?

I often wondered what it was about Auntie Liz. She was the eldest of the children, yet all her life she was never away from Grandma. All through her married life she was a tailoress, but she always lived with Grandma. Grandma was a very strong character and I think she used to rule Auntie Liz. Auntie Liz was a nice person to know - but she was a bit on the lazy side. Maybe that's why she stopped with Grandma. Grandma did all the housework and was always the cook - always had the dinner on the table when Auntie Liz came home from work. When Auntie Liz married Bill Kenzie (her first marriage) Auntie stayed home, but Grandma still did all the work, and was still the lady of the house. Then, after the marriage broke up, Auntie went back to work and it was the same thing again.

Then they moved from Ballast Point Road up to the cottage in Rowntree street and while they were there Auntie met Ernie de Belin, who was a tram driver. He'd been away to the war, and they had known him before he went. He had been reared in an orphanage and sent out as a foster child to a lady up in Hornsby called Mrs Innes, who was a spiritualist too. Grandma used to go up there to see her. Hornsby in those days was semi-rural and there were lots of little farms up there and Grandma used to take us with her sometimes. We thought it was great to go to a farm. Ernie was working on the farm and that's how we knew of him. When the war came Ernie joined up - he had to put his age up because he was only 16. He was the kindest man I

think I ever met. I don't know when he got married after he came back from the war, but when Auntie met him he had four children. There was Freddy, Dorothy, Billy and Jackie. He and his wife had bought a house at Lidcombe, and one night when he came home he found her 'enter-taining' another man, and that was it. He walked out and took the kids with him. He had to put them all into Burnside Homes and that broke his heart because he really was a loving father.

Anyway, after Auntie and Ernie met, the next thing we knew they were getting married, (in Ernie's case to get a home for his children I imagine - Ernie was a fair bit younger than Auntie). They all came to live with Grandma, and Auntie stopped work again to look after Ernie's kids. The youngest (Jackie) was only eighteen months old. It was at this time that they all moved from the cottage in Rowntree Street to the great big two-storied house with lots of bedrooms and things at No 62.

Grandma and Auntie reared the children. They all turned out to be good scholars at school and really good kids. Jack and Bill used to box with the Police Boys' Club and Fred played rugby league with Balmain and represented Australia. When the war broke out Fred enlisted and became a navigator in the Air Force and flew all over Europe, and dropped bombs on Berlin and came through it all. He's still coaching football today down at Cootamundra. And we all loved Ernie - he was such a kind, kind man.

One day when Ernie's children had grown up to be teenagers, the boys' mates had come around to see them, as mates do, and Dorothy was up in her room sick with the 'flu. All Freddy's and Bill's mates were like brothers to Dossie, as we used to call her. Auntie Liz didn't let Dossie go out to work, she kept her at home to do the washing and the housekeeping - she was the general dogsbody in the house. She was a lovely girl, though - as I said, they were all exceptionally nice kids.

Anyhow, when all these young boys went up to see Dossie while she was sick in bed Grandma took great exception to it. Ernie stuck up for his daughter, and I don't know what else must have been going on to make things escalate, but it ended up that Ernie and Liz parted and he left with the kids ...again. He got a house and Dossie kept house for the boys and him. I don't know how Grandma and Auntie got on after that because it must have been a big blow to have them go after rearing the children up to their teens. We were all on the de Belins' side - we thought Grandma and Auntie were out of the stone age with their attitudes to the whole thing. They had no contact after that, though Ernie paid Liz maintenance for the rest of her life.

When Auntie died she had some money in an account which she left to me, which I worked out had come from Ernie's maintenance money. I went up and saw Ernie with Jack and offered him the money, because I thought that he deserved it because he shouldn't have had to keep Auntie for all those years. But he wouldn't take it. And I never saw Ernie again - or any of the kids. Bill went on to the trams like his father, then later to the buses, and I'd bump into him occasionally if he was on our bus. If ever this happened he always gave us back our fare and was always friendly. I suppose another reason we lost contact was not having cars - you weren't at all mobile in those days and it was a lot more trouble to get about. We didn't have phones either, of course.