

Middle Years

A couple of doors down from us in Drummoyne were the Bows - Bill's main mates as he grew up were Mick and Ian Bow. They had the biggest backyard, and we all used to go in there for cracker night which in those days was held on a public holiday called Empire Day - May 24th I think it was. We'd go in and pool our fireworks. There were four houses in a row like Bows' - all with the same plan. They had a dunny that was on the outside of the house, and one cracker night the woman next to Bows' - Mrs Sinclair - was on her toilet with the door open watching while the fireworks were going off. They had a thing called a Devil-Devil that was like a Jumping Jack sort of thing, and all of a sudden one of these jumped the fence and shot into Mrs Sinclair's toilet and jumped around in there all over the place! She was out in a flash!

Mrs Hewitt, who ran the tie factory next door to us, was having trouble getting bow ties made. They were set up to do those long four-in-hand ties, and she offered me so much a dozen to make the bow ties for her. They were cut out ready and they weren't too hard to make. I used to sew them on a little ordinary table model Singer sewing machine. I'd sew them during the day, and at night time Cec would turn them right way out for me and I'd press them. Some weeks we'd make an extra nine pounds doing this. Even though Cec would have only been sitting there anyway if he wasn't doing the ties, as the work got more and more he felt like he was working overtime at home after being at work all day, and he suspected that the Hewitts were making money out of us. I also think that he felt that it made him look as though he wasn't a good breadwinner and provider, and in the end he wouldn't let me make any more.

One night we were all in bed. I'd been down for the week to see Mum - she wasn't a bit well. She had a terrible pain in her back. I took Christine down - she was about five at the time, but Bill was a bit older and he stayed at home. On the night after we'd come home there was a

violent electrical storm, and all of a sudden in the middle of it the light went on in our hallway, and in walked my elder brother Jack. He'd come to tell us that Mum had died. Cec said he'd stop home the next day and look after Bill and Chris so I could go down to Mum's at Narrabeen with my brothers and their wives. It was awful. We had to stop halfway down because the rain was so bad that Jack couldn't see to drive. When we finally got down to Mum's there was a blackout on because of the storm, and here was Mum in the bedroom dead. It was horrible. Miserable. Real miserable. The lights didn't come on for a long time, (we had kerosene lamps), and we just sat about and waited till the morning. It's a hard time when you lose your parents. Especially your Mum.

She went suddenly that night. Dad said they went to bed and all of a sudden she started to shake, so he ran over and got Auntie Liz in from the garage where she lived with them, then ran up the street and got a nurse down who lived next door but one, but Mum was dead by the time she got down. So she went pretty quickly in the end. While I'd been down there the week before I cleaned the place up for her. I went through her wardrobe and tidied it up, and cleaned the kitchen and the stove out and all that. While I was doing it she said to me jokingly: "You know, I think you're looking for my little sock." In those days your sock was where you kept your bundle of hoarded banknotes. Poor old Mum, she didn't have a sock, of course. We had a happy time that visit, and I was always glad I'd gone down when we did. It was something nice to have as a memory.

After Mum died Dad was living down at Narrabeen on his own. By then Auntie Hilda had died too and Uncle Jim was living on his own next door to him. I used to go and visit Dad every Wednesday and cook him up some meals because he was in bed with a nasty exposed nerve between his little toe and the next one, and he was in a great deal of pain. This particular day that I went down I was talking to him and he started to cry and said how lonely he was. It must have been dreadful for him living there, virtually confined to his bed on his own. If it had been Mum in his position, neighbours would have been looking in. I don't know if it was because he was a man, but nobody much came near him. Perhaps they feared gossip - the morality was pretty strict. Uncle Jim would drop in to see if he needed anything, but poor old Dad must have been terribly bored and lonely and feeling forsaken - not used to being on his own at all, let alone confined to bed. It took two and a half hours for us to get down there by public transport and the same to get back, so you didn't get all that much time with him when you went down. This day after I'd come back from seeing dad, Cec came home from work and asked how he was. I started to cry, and said: "If you could see that poor old man down there in his bed... he can't walk because his foot's that bad..." Cec said "Put my tea in the oven and we'll get in the car and go down and we'll bring him home." I thought Cec was good. I wonder would the children today do that for their parents? I wonder. Anyhow, we went down and Cec picked Dad up just like a baby. I packed his clothes and we brought him home and put him into Christine's bed in the back room. Christine had to sleep out on the settee in the kitchen, and Bill was already sleeping out on the front verandah, behind a canvas blind. A small verandah too, it was, and it meant that you couldn't get in or out of the front door.

Anyhow, Dad was ensconced in the back room. I had the doctor down and he said that Dad would have to go into hospital to have his toe fixed up So he was put into Balmain hospital, and

while he was in there the doctor that had found out that Christine had the thyroid deficiency (apparently it was a bit unusual to pick that up at such an early age), although he had moved to Macquarie Street, he was still associated with Balmain hospital. He was passing through and he saw me with Dad and came over and spoke to me. While he was there he had a look at Dad's toe, and at this stage Dad wasn't under any doctor because he'd only just been admitted to the hospital, so Dr Turnbull seemed to take him over. They put a cradle over Dad's leg so that the air would get to it. At home I'd been doing all I could to make it warm and cosy, so I'd been doing the wrong thing. Three times a day they used to put straight methylated spirits onto this exposed nerve, and it fixed it in the end, but Dad went through a lot of pain with it.

Twice while Dad was staying with us I had to take him into St Vincent's Hospital to have what they used to call a 'rebores' on the urinary tube due to prostate problems. After the second time I'd taken him, the hospital sent him home without contacting me about it. I was up the street doing the shopping when they got him back and the poor old man had to sit there in the yard till I got back. I was so angry about this treatment that I called the hospital about it, but of course I got nowhere. I was always terribly sorry I got angry in front of Dad because he could have thought that he wasn't wanted, and that's a terrible thing for an old person to feel.

While he was living with us we often used to have a blow-up, but we always made up. I remember once after the doctor had been to him I had to go up to the chemist to fill a prescription for him. I dashed up and back as quickly as I could, but when I got back Dad went for me: "Where have you been? Talking to every Tom, Dick, and Harry and every dog with a flea on its back I suppose." That was too much for me and I rounded on him and called him an ungrateful old man. We ended up crying together and we cuddled each other and I was sorry and so was he. I suppose the poor old bloke was in pain and it seemed a long time to him.

He lived with us for about two years. He gradually got worse. He wasn't very well at all, which made it a hard time for me too, in a way. I had always promised my old friend Nida that I would make the wedding frock for her daughter Fay when she got married, and it was while Dad was with me that Fay got married. I made Fay's wedding dress, and Christine was one of the bridesmaids, so I made the bridesmaids' dresses too. My machine was in the back bedroom, (along with that damned bench), and now Dad as well! And here was me with a great big wedding order on the go and looking after Dad and the family, and cooking meals and... I don't know how I did it. However, I got through it, and we had the wedding. It was a nice wedding and Fay looked lovely, and Christine was a little bridesmaid. But it was hard for me, doing that. I didn't seem to get a spare minute to myself, and I used to fall into bed at night dead beat.

Cec decided that we needed a holiday, so he asked Jack if he would take Dad while we went up to Nambucca over Easter, but Dad stayed on at Jack's after we got back because they had a big Kosi coke stove that went all day and kept the house warm. Dad hated the cold.

I used to go up and see Dad on a Wednesday, and I went up this day and he was in bed and really sick. Through the week he was on his own (again) because Jack and Nell both worked. I went up to him with the news that his nephew had died, and he said he was wishing it was him that was dead. He'd had it. He didn't want to live any longer. He wanted to go to the toilet, and at Jack's this meant going through the kitchen and out and up the end of the yard. The poor old

devil, he lost control of his bowels, and that upset him terribly. However, I cleaned him all up, and got him into bed again. I left him there and got the bus home, but instead of getting out at my stop I went straight through to Rozelle and saw Jack at his work. He was working making caravans just across Drummoyne Bridge on Victoria Road there. I told him that Dad was pretty crook, so he knocked off early and went home. Jack had a very good friend who was a nurse, and he got her up and they got the doctor, who put Dad in hospital. He died that night, I think it was. I didn't see him again after that day, but I was glad I'd seen him when I did. Poor old Pop. He was glad to go.

It's a rotten time when you lose your parents. I remember when Mum died Dad said: "Why did God take her from me just when I needed her?" But one of you has got to go first. Poor old Dad was the one that was left behind. But Mum went too young at 67, I think. I would have loved to have had Mum a bit longer than we did.

Then Auntie Liz came to live with me after we'd moved from South Street into the block of home units in Tranmere Street. In a way I was always a bit resentful towards Auntie - and she couldn't help it - but I wished it had been Mum I was looking after instead of Auntie. Yet Auntie thought the world of me. She died while she was with me, at 82.

Through the week she wouldn't get up until Cec had gone to work. She always had a boiled egg and toast for breakfast, then she'd go back to bed and lie down all day, then I'd make her a cup of tea and a sandwich for dinner, and then I'd get her tea before Cec came home. I had to cook two teas, and she always wanted steak. Sometimes I'd do a stew or a braise as the one big meal and keep Cec's hot, but if it was steak or anything like that I had to cook Auntie's before Cec came home. This was because she wouldn't encroach on any of the time between Cec and myself. Auntie came to live with us after Chris got married, which would have been the first time Cec and I had ever had the place to ourselves. Chris got married on the Saturday and Auntie was moved in and was in Christine's bed on the Saturday night! I think she might have been trying to give us time to ourselves, because the only time she saw Cec was at the weekend. She certainly tried to make sure that she wasn't any trouble.

Jack used to relieve us now and again by taking Aunt down to Narrabeen with him for the weekend. Jack's always been good like that. Auntie was living with Jack and Nell at Ryde, and she was cracking her neck to get down to live with me. I think she was a bit lonely up there and with me not going to work she probably thought she'd have someone to talk to. I can't blame her for that: I get a bit lonely here at the Village and I've got neighbours popping in on me. She would have had nobody up at Jack's when they were both out.

So I got Auntie into the Presbyterian Church's block of units for old people down in Clements Street, Drummoyne. She was there for twelve or eighteen months. I used to go up on Wednesday and clean up the place for her and spend the day with her, and take home any washing for her. Cee and I used to do her shopping for her, then we'd bring her down to my place for a baked dinner on Sunday. She always went to bed about five o'clock.

One day a few weeks before Chris' wedding - (I had a broken arm and was having trouble finishing the frocks for the wedding) - two elders from the Church came to tell me that Auntie had taken to wandering around the grounds of the units in her nightgown. We didn't know what

to do because we had nowhere in the unit in Tranmere Street to put her, and it was still several weeks till Chris got married and moved out (I was always short of space - until I went to Nambucca Heads to live). The people from the church got me a banana chair and let me have a loan of it. Cec went and got her in the car - he was good like that - and Auntie slept in Chris' room and Chris had to sleep in the lounge on the banana chair. But we only had this arrangement for a few days when Auntie had a visit from a friend she knew from her time in the units, and seeing our predicament this friend took Auntie back home to her place to stay until Chris was married.

I'd broken my arm getting out of the bath - I slipped and broke my right wrist. I was in the middle of making Chris' wedding dress and it had all little tiny buttons down the back and on the sleeves, and they all had to be sewn on. I don't know what I would have done without Lorna Flippance who lived at the back of us. Her little daughter was going to be Chris' junior bridesmaid. Judith Bottomley (Gordon's eldest daughter) was chief bridesmaid and a friend of Chris' husband-to-be was the other bridesmaid. The bridesmaids' dresses were finished, and my dress was finished too, but all these buttons still had to go on to Chris' wedding frock. Anyway, everything that still had to be done Lorna took home and finished. She's been a wonderful friend to me, Lorna has. A real good old mate. You mightn't see her for twelve months, but we've always kept in touch with one another. Poor old Lorna, she's had her troubles too. Still, who goes through life without troubles?

The wedding went off. Bill and his wife Gill had come back from overseas and were at the wedding, and we had a lovely time. It was held in a nice old home. Cec got the gout and we thought he'd be going down the aisle on crutches but he managed to walk down. I reckon it was nerves that used to give him the gout. I don't think he liked the idea of being on show and taking Christine down the aisle. He never went to church, which is probably why he didn't feel at home. Everything went off very well and Cec seemed to lose his gout as the night wore on. Cec had a bowling friend who worked in the Sydney Symphony Orchestra and he organised a piano and violin which played soft dinner music while the supper was on, and after that they played dance music. I think a saxophone or something joined them for the dance music.

But I was glad when the wedding was over. (Auntie was at the wedding, of course). Chris and Ted went off and Auntie came home to our place, so we were still not on our own. After we got married we were on our own together until Bill was born, which was a year and a bit, but after that we weren't on our own as a couple until Auntie died. Took us a long time, didn't it? Young people don't seem to take their families into their home today. The whole world has changed. I'm not saying this is the fault of the children, I'm just remarking on how the world has changed. We're nuclear families now, and scattered all over the place. There's my grandson Eddie up at Port Macquarie and his wife Tanya's parents are down in Canberra. I moved up to Nambucca and left my family down in Sydney. Sometimes I wonder if I did the right thing there. I did the right thing by me... Oh, I dunno..., I suppose it was time I looked out for myself. *(Pause)*.

Meanwhile, back when the kids were growing up: They used to go to the Presbyterian Sunday School and I used to go to church there. The church was a great solace to me after I lost the two boys, (even though I later came to give up most of my belief, mainly through talking to Bill who

had become a firm atheist in his mid-twenties). I used to go to the Sunday School picnics and Anniversaries, and I used to follow the soccer team that Bill played with - at first for the local Presbyterian Church, and even later when he was playing for Sydney University. Going to watch Bill play football was the only thing that Cec took part in with me. He didn't support me in any other activity until we started playing bowls together at Nambucca after he'd retired. We didn't ever do anything together as a whole family except go to the soccer.

I made some nice friends at the Presbyterian Church and I'm still in touch with some of them even though I've been away from Drummoyne for over twenty years. We'd have lunch at one another's homes, or go and see a flower show or an art show. One friend, Noni Guthrie, was an artist. She painted Dad's portrait and various other paintings I have around my home. One particularly good friend I made in Drummoyne was Lyd Madden. She turned out to be like a sister to me - we've had some good times together. We could both let down our hair and confide in each other, and growl about our husbands and know it would go no further. Lyd lost a little daughter five years old - she died on the operating table while she was having her tonsils out. Lyd was passing our place at South Street and I asked her in for a cuppa. I sympathised with her and we both broke up and cried together about losing our children and we've been firm friends ever since. Her family are like an extension of my own - whatever happens to them I'm a part of it. Lyd has had some sorrow through the years and I have felt for all of them. She's lost two daughters-in-law and a son-in-law and now her eldest daughter has breast cancer. And of course we've both lost our husbands now. We still commiserate with each other on the phone.

Lyd had a sister who came out from England and I arranged to have a lunch at my place for all our friends to meet her. We were living at Tranmcre Street and Auntie Liz was living with us at the time. Aunt was a hit psychic like Grandma. Lyd took her sister in to Aunt's bedroom to meet her, and as they entered Aunt said: "Oh! There's an old man walked in with you. He has a heavy moustache and smokes a smelly pipe." Well, Lyd and her sister were amazed because that just described their father who had been dead for years. They all thought she was terrific after that. Everyone seemed to get on with Aunt - even the kids. Chris and Ted popped in one morning when Chris was pregnant and Aunt said: "I can see a little boy with you," meaning that's what sex their baby would be. Sure enough, Edward arrived in due course. Sceptical Bill pointed out at the time that it was one chance in two, which is not very long odds, but she did get it right, though.

Lyd was nuts on spiritualism too, and she used to drag me along to a clairvoyant lady called Nessie. We'd all sit around this room. There were pictures and statues of Jesus everywhere, the room wasn't brilliantly lit, and Nessie would pick someone out to give a message to. Nessie didn't know us at all, and she picked me one night. Her message to me was: "You have an elderly lady living with you. She has lots of spirits around her. You are going to take delivery of a dinner set, or perhaps you already have." Well! I'd taken delivery of one only that day, and that's the one that I still have with the oranges and lemons on it.

One Saturday night - (everything seems to happen on a Saturday night) - Auntie Liz took a stroke. I didn't know it was a stroke as her face wasn't twisted. She was sick through the night and I stayed up with her till she had settled down. She seemed to have calmed and went to sleep, and I didn't realise that that was when she had taken the stroke. She didn't wake early

like she usually did and we let her sleep through thinking it was because she'd had bad night. At nine o'clock I took her in a cup of tea and tried to wake her but I couldn't. I rang the doctor, who came straight away and put needles in her feet and hands and said she'd had a total stroke. She went to Balmain Hospital and passed away on the following Monday morning. I got in touch with Jack and he made the funeral arrangements to have Aunt cremated. Her ashes were put on Grandma's grave along with Auntie Hilda's.

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 the 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 close 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 to have the constricted urinary passage enlarged somehow or other. 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. Even to get that, we borrowed eleven thousand dollars from Auntie Liz and paid her back into a separate bank account, every Monday morning - it was just like buying the carpet for South Street all over again. 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.

We'd gone up to Namhucca Heads for a holiday, and when we got back to the units in Tranmere Street Drummoyne, all the trees around them had been chopped down to make way for more big units at the back, and it began to look like a concrete jungle. Cec was keen to retire to Namhucca, but I didn't like the idea of leaving the kids. Then Bill got offered a job in Melbourne that it looked like he would take (but didn't), and Chris' husband Ted was talking about going west, and I began to think that I'd be staying in Sydney to be near them and they were going to move anyway. So this, coupled with the way the neighbourhood of the units was going, was enough for me, and I agreed to move north to Namhucca.

The next time we went up there on holiday I went round looking at houses while Cec went bowling. The ones I liked I took Cec to look at. When he came to look at the house we eventually bought he said: "That looks too good for us." It had been built for a schoolteacher who had a small study designed into it so he'd have somewhere quiet to go to mark papers, and that became a lovely little sewing room for me. I was able to leave the machine and the ironing board always set up, and it had shelves around - it was great. And if anybody came to visit you could leave everything as it was and just shut the door on it. Up till then I'd always had to sew on the kitchen table, and it was a real luxury not to have to pack everything up every time.

I had three bedrooms at Nambucca. Oh it was heaven! And a nice big living area. A beautiful big backyard and a verandah that looked down to the bush at the back. It was a bushy front street with no kerb and gutter, and I had a nice garden and a fernery underneath the verandah at the back. Dad had his bench under the house - it was out of the house at last! Actually his bench was out in the garage when we were at the Tranmere Street units so I got rid of the bench out of the house then, but gee that bench used to bug me!

I enjoyed my time at Namhucca. I *loved* it! I really and truly loved living in Namhucca. I made friends there and they'd call for me at five o'clock at night and take me down to the beach and we'd wander along the beach. Cec never ever minded. He had his own interests, and we used to play bowls together. He was a good sport on the bowling green, Cec was. Some of the husbands and wives used to have fights on the green, but he was never like that. We used to have our fights at home when we were on our own! But it was a really great time up there. I joined the View Club, and there was bowling with Cec and bowling with the ladies - everything was nice for about ten years. Cec got ten years of retirement. It wasn't long - ten years, after a lifetime of

work. Still, I wonder sometimes... he smoked all his life till he went to Namhucca and got a touch of emphysema and had to give it up. He always used a cigarette holder, and when he died he didn't have cancer of the lung or anything like that.

While we were at Nambucca Heads Chris' marriage went on the rocks. Her husband Ted was always very respectful to Cec and I, and Ted was good to me in various ways. He lined a wall in the lounge room at Namhucca with timber and papered the kitchen for me. I don't know what was the start of their marriage breakup, but anyway it broke up. Christine used to get on the phone, in trouble, and my heart used to drop down near my boots. Poor Chris! It was a great worry.

Cec and I went down to Sydney in the car to spend a couple of days with Bert and Gert, friends of ours. On our way back we called in on Chris and Ted at Port Macquarie. Ted was out fishing and Chris was in bed with a migraine, and the dishes were piled up in the sink. We were a bit concerned because we thought that Ted should have been home helping Chris, doing the dishes and looking after the kids instead of being out fishing. And Chris got so cranky and upset when I wanted to do the washing up and clean up the kitchen. She wouldn't be in that, so we just packed up and went. We went, and left with a bad grace - we didn't want to go home, we wanted to look after Chris, but she took after her father. She was independent and wouldn't be in it. She went through a very very bad period which was a very bad period for us too. Cec had the idea that they were married and you couldn't interfere with them but I didn't go along with that. I think he should have gone down and had something to say to Ted and straightened him out. ...That's if it was Ted's fault of course - we only got Chris' side of things after all. But Chris seemed to be the one on the wrong end of the stick for all that - at least from where we looked. Anyway... they parted. Chris was a little Briton the way she stuck with the kids and looked after them, but boys need a father's hand, I think.

She had a lot of trouble, and here I am an old lady now, and Chris is with Terry and she seems happy, and I'm very very thankful for that. Terry's a nice fellow. He looks after her. He mightn't wash the dishes up either but when it comes to the pinch he really looks after her. And he looks after the vehicle that she runs about in too, and I feel she's secure with Terry. He's a good man, and she loves him, and that's great. If my time came tonight, it's nice to know that as I go out that Chris is all right. She's through all her troubles, I hope.

But to get back to Nambucca Heads. When we first went to Nambucca people from Sydney would call in to see us. Now Bert and Gert were friends of ours. Bert was Cec's friend and I got to make friends with them both too. We used to go bowling together. They used to go to Tewantin up on the Gold Coast together every year and they'd come up and spend a week with us and we used to have a great time. They'd go on up to Tewantin for about three months, and after they'd been there for about two months we'd go up there and spend a week with them - then on their way home they'd spend another few days with us.

We used to have people in to dinner, and play cards, and have fun. It was nice. We used to go down to the bowling club on a Friday night - Cec could still hear reasonably well then and his eyesight hadn't gone on him.

But once his eyesight went, the rot set in then. Before they got real bad he used to take me up to

do the shopping at eight o'clock on Saturday mornings as soon as the little supermarket was open. One day, driving home, a little boy suddenly ran out and into the path of the car, but stopped in time before he'd gone too far. Later I remarked to Cec what a close shave it had been, and he said: "What little boy? Do you mean to tell me that a little boy nearly ran in front of my car and I didn't see him?" He was devastated. I was wishing I hadn't said anything but perhaps it was best. He said: "That's the last time I'll ever get behind the wheel of the car." And it was. Well, that wasn't so hot for me, not having a car to run about in. I thought I'd have a taxi forever!

So, Cec's sight gradually went on him, and I used to have to lead him around a bit by the elbow - like Chris is doing for me these days. We used to have to get on the bus to go to Coff's Harbour to see the specialist. It used to be awful for him to have to find his way onto that bus, although he had me with him. He hated it. And they couldn't do anything for his eyes anyway. He made a life for himself at home but it wasn't much. One of his friends used to pick him up and take him down the club and they'd have a few beers of a Friday, but once he couldn't see properly he wouldn't bowl any more. He said he didn't want to muck up anyone else's game, and he didn't play bowls after that. He used to sit about home, and as his eyes got worse I contacted the Blind Society and arranged for him to have the talking books to listen to. But that was no life for Cec. He was always an active man. I can honestly say that in all the time we were married the only time I ever saw him in bed of a daytime was when he was really sick - when he had pneumonia, and when he had phlebitis of the leg (that was a clot in the leg and he had to rest up in case the clot went to his heart). I've never known him to lie down just to rest in the daytime. I used to go down the back and work in the garden and I'd come back up dead beat and get under the shower. I'd say to Cec: "I'm going to go and get horizontal for a while," and I'd go into my lovely bedroom and get a book and read, perhaps have forty winks and then get up and get tea - oh, I loved that life.

It was nice getting up in the morning and feeding all the birds. The little butcher bird would come - he used to come and sit on the verandah rail and I'd still be in bed and his piercing little tune would wake me up. It was as though he had me brainwashed - as soon as I heard it I'd get up and go out and give him his little bit of meat out of my hand. But his little call was lovely. And the maggics used to get out on the wires, carolling their song. It was great, especially compared to the busy highways of Sydney. Then all the little lorikeets and the kookaburras would come looking for a feed too. I never used to feed them a lot, but they'd come round just for a titbit. I didn't want to stop them foraging for themselves. And when the butcher bird had babies they'd bring them along too. It was good. The old ginger cat used to come up from next door and eye off the birds, but he never went for the birds on my verandah - or at least I never saw him.

Anyway, Cec gradually got worse, and in the end he had a stoppage of the water, and I rang the doctor and he put him in hospital the day before our fiftieth wedding anniversary. It was a Friday, and he was in quite a bit of pain. Bill and his daughter Fiona and Chris and Terry and Chris' three boys all came up for our Golden Wedding anniversary - and Dad wasn't there. They brought me up a lovely cake and all the party doings and they all stopped there overnight. We took a piece of cake in to Dad in the hospital but he couldn't eat it.

They operated on him and took his prostate out. He should have only been in the hospital for ten days but things didn't go right and he was in there for six weeks. When he came home he was practically an invalid. I don't mean that he was bedridden. He was stoic like that, and he'd get up and come out and sit and listen to his audio books and fall asleep just like a real old man, and he was only 76. He wanted me to play bowls. He'd say: "Just because I'm incapacitated and can't get out why should you be confined to the house?" I wouldn't go to bowls, but I still went to pottery. I was picked up at halfpast nine in the morning - I'd leave Cec's dinner on a shelf in the fridge and a can of beer. He could get up and feel his way to his dinner and his can of beer, and he'd have his lunch. Despite being blind he always tidied up and put everything away - he even washed up his plate and cutlery and put them away.

I used to be home from pottery around two o'clock, but this day I didn't get home till about three because I was dependent on others for a lift and there was a project on the go at pottery that kept everyone a bit late. I didn't want to go to pottery that day for some reason, and when I told Cec I wasn't going he asked why not. I said: "Well, you don't seem too good to me." He said: "Look. I'm all right. All I've got to do is just sit here all day and get my lunch. You go off to pottery." He had a strong will.

Well when I got back home he'd had a fall. I always kick myself for going out that day. It had been very hot and the garden was crying out for water. I do wish I hadn't gone. He was in a lot of pain with his back, and when I got back he said: "Oh, am I glad to see you, Mum. I fell over in the kitchen while I was getting the lunch." While I didn't say "I told you so", I felt like it. He'd got himself up somehow and was sitting in the lounge chair. It was a shame he couldn't get to the phone. I offered him a cup of tea but he didn't want it or anything to eat. I asked him if he'd like to go to bed, and he said no. So I sat beside him and we didn't talk much. I asked him how it happened and he said he didn't know. I said: "Are you sure you don't want to go to bed?" but he didn't, so I went out to prop the hose in its holder to water the garden. I didn't get as far as the hose before he called me back and said: "I think I will go to bed Mum, but I don't think I can walk into the bedroom." I should have got the doctor then. But he wanted to go to bed and didn't like the idea of getting the doctor. I decided to go to one of the neighbours to get them to help me. Of course they couldn't come quick enough. Cec even tried to crack a joke with them as they helped him to bed.

When I rang the doctor later his advice was to put him in hospital. I said: "Does he have to go to hospital? Can't I look after him here? When he's in hospital he can't see who's in the ward with him or who's attending him, but when he's at home he knows it's me." "Well" the doctor said, "see how you go tonight, and if you can't manage then give me a ring in the morning." So we put in a terrible night. Cec was only semi-conscious and he was in a lot of pain. I don't know why the doctor didn't give him something for the pain. And he was making funny noises and I never slept at all that night. He kept wanting to use his bottle, and he couldn't do anything. I ended up getting up and getting dressed. When morning came he came to, and said: "It's no good Mum, I'll have to go to hospital. You can't do things for me like lift me, because you're too small. If I'm in hospital and I want to go to the toilet there's hefty men there to take me, and if I want to sit up they can just wind the bed up. You can't do all that for me. I want to go to hospital. I'm more comfortable there."

So I rang the doctor and he sent the ambulance down. I went to get into the ambulance to go in with him, but he said: "Don't come. When I get in there they'll probably X-ray me and give me a needle and I'll probably just go to sleep. You've had no rest, so don't come with me." I said OK, and that I'd come in first thing in the morning. But I didn't. He died before I got there.

(Long pause). I won't say any more about Cec's death because I'll only be crying all through it. I'll leave it there.

I look back on my married life and think about Cec as a young man. We were in love, and we got married and we had our children and we'd gone through life together. And when you lose your old mate like that, you feel as though half of you has gone - as though only half of you is alive. It's like having two arms and losing one. Anyhow, I carried on up in Nambucca Heads for about three years and things seemed to start to go wrong with me a bit then. I had to have a bypass in my left leg - they put that down to me having passive smoking from all of Dad's cigarettes, but I don't know how true that is, but that's what they said. I think it was just cholesterol. I went through a bit of pain with that leg - I couldn't walk any more than eleven steps, but luckily the doctors knew what was wrong with me and put me in hospital and fixed me up. I was in hospital for about ten days, and came home and had to wear a great big white awful stocking for about six weeks. The leg's never been the same since.

And then my eyes started go on me - gradually. I didn't know what was wrong with them - I thought it was my glasses. It was after I came to live in Taree that I found out that it was a hereditary thing, passed on from somewhere. I can't remember anybody in my forbears that had bad eyesight, but then Mum only lived until she was 67 so she could have had bad eyesight after that if she'd lived. She had glasses, but they put that down to the diabetes that she had. My sight is deteriorating as I get older. It's gradual, but I hope I die before I go blind. So far I can still see everything, but everything is blurred and it gets harder and harder to do even simple little things. I get a bit bored because I can't sew, I can't knit or crochet - all the things I loved doing and looked forward to doing when you could find the time. Now I have the time to do them but I haven't got the eyes. So here I am, an old lady now, who's not long ago fallen and broken her pelvis and trying to get over it.
