

Musings

I'm feeling a bit sentimental today. I had a call from Eddie (my eldest grandchild) last night. He thought that I wasn't going anywhere for Christmas, so he rang me up last night and said: "Now you're not going to spend Christmas on your own, Nan. I'll come down and pick you up and bring you up here." His invitation was so warm. It made me feel very good. He told me he loved me and that he wanted me to go up there, and his wife Tanya did too. It made me feel a bit sentimental to think he really wanted me to go and spend the time with them. I could tell he really did want me to go, and it made me feel good. The old cockles of the heart were very warmed. And I started to remember the night he was born, and how I sat up and waited for his birth. It was a good thing when the call came through. We had to take him back to the hospital seven days later to have him circumcised. He came out howling after it was all over. That's a barbaric, cruel thing to do to a little baby - to anyone, for that matter. You'd think in this day and age they'd find another way of doing that operation instead of being so cruel. Anyhow, every child doesn't *have* to be done. It was just a fashion, I feel, from the past.

I was looking at my garden today, and I got the old photo album out that had photos in it of what Nambucca Heads was like when we first went there, after I'd started a bit of a garden and Cec had his vegetable plot going down the bottom of the yard. Everything was so good. That was one of the nicest parts of my life. If only Chris' marriage had've been working it would have been great. Then I looked at my little garden around here, and looked at the photos of the garden up there and how big it was, and I knew I couldn't have continued to maintain it the way it should have been maintained. I couldn't have got out there and done the gardening in such a big yard. Even this garden here is starting to get away from me a bit. But Eddie's call just made me very sentimental, and I started thinking about the past and all the nice things that had happened to me. And there have been some nice things.

Bill asked me once if I thought the world was getting better or worse. When I think of all the wars that are going on in other countries I sometimes wonder if it's not worse. And then I think of the way the people are becoming really aware of environmental ideas and the importance of looking after the planet. It seems to be getting stronger and stronger.

Sombody does something bad and you get annoyed and think things are not so good, and then something else happens to make you think that no, it's probably getting better. I think when my generation dies out it is going to make a big difference in the world - in the western world that is, I don't know about overseas in the third world. My generation seems to keep things back in the past. They want things to be the same all the time, like it was when they were young. They think it was good when they were young because you forget the bad times and the awful things that happened when you were young. And that's what people of my generation are apt to do. I think when my grandchildren and my great grandchildren start to grow up the environmental movement will be a lot stronger than it is now. I could be wrong, but I still feel that it's going to be all right.

I often wonder about the countries of the third world - the poor little babies and the people that are dying over there. I think of India - I'm not an educated person, but they've got rich men over there, rich families - why are people like me supposed to send money over to India when the rich people there could get off their butts and do something for their own country themselves? Why can't they advertise to the men that they're not to have so many children? They say they have lots of children so that their children will look after them. How can their children look after them when there's such overpopulation? Something needs to be done.

I was listening to a woman on the television - I think she's Indian - and she was saying that the Bible should be looked on now just as a book - that it's the Bible and the Koran that's stopping a lot of third world countries progressing, that it's religion that's holding them back. I think she might have something, but it makes me laugh when I think of me, and how I still can't get past the fact that my mother and my grandmother used to go into a trance. Why did my mother go into trances? She wouldn't have done it as a put-on - especially the night down at Narrabeen when she told Jack to go to this Dr Bigge. She didn't know about Dr Bigge in advance! She didn't know anything like that - she wasn't even as educated as I am. (Mum always used to say that she met the scholars coming home). She could read and write, though.

What else? (*Pause*)... I feel as though I'm a pampered sort of a person, living in this little capsule here that is so comfortable. In fact it's so comfortable that it's a bit of a drag to get out of it and go somewhere and be uncomfortable. You can't take being uncomfortable when you're old like you can when you're young. You can curl up on a mat when you're young and that's OK, but if you're curled up on a mat when you're old you wouldn't be able to get up or walk the next day!

I feel I am pampered though, when I think of some people who have only one little room somewhere down in the city. Most of the people here in the Village are fat cats, I find. They've all got money. That's something else I occasionally wonder about: When your husband goes to war, if you're his wife, from then on you're looked after. I used to know a lady up at Nambucca Heads, and her husband lost his right arm in the first world war, so he was a TPI. When he came home from the war he was able to buy a small business and run it successfully, and they built their own home. His wife had a good job and when she eventually retired she took out a fairly big superannuation payout. Her husband's dead now, and she's got property down in the city. She could sell that, but she's got it rented because she can't get the price she wants for it. Funny how greedy you get. On top of that, once your husband has been in one of the Armed

Forces the Veterans' Affairs looks after you, and Legacy, and you don't have to go into a public hospital ward. If you get sick, Veterans Affairs pays all your bills and you can go private.

Now Cec didn't go away to the war. He applied to, and was rejected because he was making rifle sights for the guns at the time and his job was considered essential. But he certainly did his bit towards the war - he used to work a twelve hour shift six nights a week. Why are Veterans' Affairs so choosy about who they decide to give a helping hand to? He didn't seem to find the shiftwork too much of a bother. A lot of the men who work shiftwork go straight to bed when they came home. Cec never did that. I used to cook him a meal when he came home in the morning and he treated that as his tea - it was usually meat and vegetables. He'd go out in the garden for a while and wouldn't go to bed until about eleven o'clock in the morning. And he slept like a top. He just turned his day right around. He used to get up about half past six at night and I'd give him breakfast then - his "beetle's wings" as he called his corn flakes.

I think the best times in my life were when the children were little. I enjoyed all the rearing of kids. I liked them at all stages. I liked them when they were teenagers too. I suppose we had our rough spots, but not ever bad spots. Now and again the kids might give you a little bit of cheek, but not much. It was just easier in those days to rear your kids - there wasn't drugs and all that like there is now. I think the worst time in my life, naturally, was when I lost the two boys - going through that period.

I was quite happy at home bringing up the kids. I never ever wanted to go out to work, and anyway the rag trade was always a sweat shop. Even if you were a designer it was always go, go, go. And the money was never really high. I think machining and pressing were the worst parts. You had your head down always - though you were allowed to sing while you were working.

I liked working at sewing, but I think if I had my time over again I'd like to work in a nursery. I don't mean working in a nursery just selling things - I'd like to go into the scientific side, where you graft things, and go into this new way of growing things - I just can't remember the name for it. I have a friend whose daughter goes in for this way of growing things with your flowers and your vegetables all in together - permaculture I think they call it - and her mother thinks this is a terrible way of growing things. She just totally dismisses it. I don't know if the daughter has a communication problem with her, or whether she just has an old person's closed mind, but you'd think if the daughter sat down with her mother and explained it all to her that her mother would see that it's a better way to go. I know that they could hardly do it this way in parks and gardens, but for growing your own stuff at home this is the way to grow your plants. I'd go in for it - though it's only lately since I've been looking at some of these science programmes that I've thought this way.

Getting back to the raising of children and how I enjoyed that part of my life: I wouldn't mind that part of my life over again because I think I know more today than I did then. And I think when children are small and you don't know much about what's best for them... they're your first real experience of children. But as I look back from now, I wish I hadn't taken them so much for granted. When I say this I mean that I'd take more notice of their little ways. They'd come in and say something to you and you'd perhaps be in the middle of getting tea and you

wouldn't really take a great deal of notice of them. If I had my time over again I'd take more notice of their little ways as they were growing up. I always appreciated the cuddles I got. On some of the ads on television you see little babies that snuggle into your neck or suck at your cheek - also suckling at your breast, and I love to see that. I always enjoyed feeding my babies myself. I really and truly felt at one with them. It was the loveliest feeling when they were at the breast, and their little hand would come up and hold you, and they'd look up right into your eyes when they're feeding off your breast like that, and there's a communication between the child and yourself. No experience in the world can come up to that particular form of loving. That lovely little child looking up, and... oooh, it's a *beautiful* feeling!

But then as they grow up, there are little things that they do, that my children did, that I'd chastise them for, that I wouldn't chastise them for today. For instance, when my children were little, if they did something wrong I'd say something like: "That's a naughty boy," or "That's a naughty girl", and you might give them a little smack or something. But now I think that's a terrible thing to do. Now I'd say: "that's a naughty thing to do, why did you do that?" but you don't say that *they* were a naughty boy or girl, and you speak quietly to them and don't roar at them. If you roar at your kids, when they get to be about fourteen or so they start to roar back at you. I think a gentleness in the home is better than people roaring at one another. When I say roaring I don't mean really rowing - just raising your voice unnecessarily. And the child isn't something that's naughty, it was experiencing something and learning while it was doing it. I have a memory of my little Bobby, the first little boy that I lost, that even now can put me into tears. I had a whole lot of Iceland poppies in the garden, and when they're in bud all the little round things on their long stalks just look like they want to be picked. He went out and he picked a little handful, and he brought them in to me and gave them to me in love - to show me that he'd done this and to show me what he'd done, and he was proud of what he'd done. And what did I do? I slapped his little hand and told him he was naughty, and said: "And don't you ever do that again!" And what else did I do? Dusk was coming on, and I put him in the bathroom - I didn't lock him in there, the door was just closed to, and that poor little kid went in there and cried his eyes out. I had the light on in the kitchen and he was trying to come out into the light from the gloom of the bathroom (it wasn't dark) and where was he trying to get out? Through the little crack on the hinge side of the door where there was a light showing through! I went in to him when I realised what was happening, and I cuddled him... and I've always been so sorry that I did it. That was a real lesson to me. It still brings me to tears. (*Long pause.*) I never ever slapped my children for anything like that again. After all, poppies will grow again. Bobby won't.

I was disappointed as the kids were growing up that Cec didn't take more part in the social side of their lives. I can remember Bill wanting him to go to a Father and Son night at Fort Street, and he wouldn't go. He was quite adamant about it, and I know that it hurt Bill. Why didn't he go? Because he had a big inferiority complex, and because it was going to be held at Fort Street he knew that the other fathers would be lawyers and solicitors and politicians and people like that. Cec felt that he wasn't successful in those terms. He was good, even though he didn't have the tickets behind him, but he felt he wasn't good because he didn't have the qualifications. Like me, he grew up with an inferiority complex. So Cec wouldn't go to things like that, and didn't take part in social things much at all. I used to go to church and to the Sunday school

anniversaries, and he'd never go with me. He never supported me in that sort of thing. The only time he went to church was to christen the kids and to get married himself. I wonder was it that he was raised in a family of three boys and no girls that he was always so uncomfortable socially? It was hard for me, him not supporting me in that way. I'd want to go to a party and I'd want him to come with me, but if he didn't like the people he wouldn't go.

I used to wash on a Monday, iron on a Tuesday, mend on a Wednesday, and I think on Thursdays I used to go to the Clinic. On Fridays a man would come to your door to get your order - he'd write it down as you told him what you wanted. He'd take the order away and it would come back on the Friday afternoon with a bag of lollics in it for the kids because you'd paid your bill. And when you went to the shop there was a chair for you to sit on, and you sat there and you told the bloke behind the counter what you wanted and he got it for you. No pushing of trolleys around and trying to find what you're after - that's all geared for the people at the top who own the business - it's not geared for the ordinary people. But I have to admit that it is faster today, and I suppose that the stuff's cheaper because of it. It's a shame that every second trolley seems to have a mind of its own though.

If I had my two eyes now and I could see to sew, I sometimes think that it would be nice to make some little samples, some examples of some of the beautiful work that used to go into a frock that you never see today - just to show people what was once put into frocks. You take the lace on a wedding gown that has a nice long train. Lace in those days was only 18 inches wide, and to make a train you'd have to have a seam in it. You don't put a seam in a big train so you can see it, so what do you do? You place your lace side by side, fitting all the pattern together, and then you oversee all that pattern together by hand. Today you'd crossstitch it I suppose, by machine. (*Laughs*). You'd put perhaps three panels of lace together, and you might waste a bit of lace trying to match the patterns. Just think how much time that would take to do! (That was just an aside that occurred to me. I'll get back to the bringing up of the children.)

When Bill was a little boy things were pretty tough financially. Cec used to ride a pushbike to work. I made his shirts, he bought his singlets and shorts, and he never wore socks - just his bike shoes. He used to wear a cap, a leather cap, and he used to buy that. I used to knit his jumpers, and his mother used to knit him some jumpers too. I made the haversack on his back out of old flour bags - he used to carry his lunch in that going to work. When it was a very wet day he'd get the bus in to work, but so he could still go to work on the bike when it was raining - (he used to ride from Drummoyne over to Chalmers Street on the other side of Central Railway) - he got me to make him a cape. Plastic had just come out then, and it was a bit thicker than what you get today - quite thick compared to a shopping bag, say, and it came only in one colour, a sort of translucent creamy colour. He wanted me to make him a cape like the telegram delivery boys used to wear in the wet in those days. (Telegrams were often used to contact people since so few people had telephones at that time). The cape was worn fastened round the neck and was held out like a tent fly on to the handlebars. I made the cape and it was a huge success, and Cec became a regular sight wearing it as he rode down Victoria Road hill on to Iron Cove Bridge. The fellows from Elliott's, a big chemical company in Rozelle, used to see him as they waited for the tram, and they used to shout out: "Watch out! Here comes the Flying French Letter!" Cec said he laughed all the way home the first time he heard them.

When I was pregnant with Chris, Cec was working night shift and he used to put his tobacco up on top of the kitchen cabinet when he went to bed at about eleven in the morning. While I was carrying Chris I had this fascination with peculiar smells and tastes. I ate a whole India rubber while I was carrying her - in little tiny bits I ate it. It took me a long time to get through, and it wasn't a big one. I used to swallow it - it'd go right through me. I'd carry a mothball around in my hankie so I could sniff it, and if there were men putting fresh tar down on the road I used to go into raptures at the smell of tar. So I got this idea that I liked the smell of tobacco, and I thought that I'd like to smoke a cigarette myself. I got his tobacco down from the cabinet, and his papers, and I rolled myself a cigarette. Well! It was a bobby dazzler! You've never seen such a cigarette in all your life! I didn't do the drawback, but I'd blow it out through my nose just to get the smell of the smoke. (And to think I hate it so much today.) I suppose I made about three over about three weeks, and one day on his way to bed he said to me: "If I'm going to make this tobacco last me a week, am I going to have to take it to bed with me and put it under my pillow?" I don't know how he found I was pinching it from him because I used to be so careful to leave everything exactly as I found it, and he never told me, but after that I never had any inclination to smoke again. That was it for me.

If we'd just had that little bit extra in the way of money it would have made life a lot easier. It would have been good not to have to worry if you could afford to get the doctor when your child was sick. They'd be running a temperature and you'd wait and worry and not call the doctor till you really had to. Some of the doctors in those days were good. If the doctor came to my place and I had both Bill and Chris sick, say, he'd only charge us for one consultation, even though he looked at the two of them, whereas in those parts of Drummoyne where the flash people lived who had more money, if they had two children sick they'd be charged for two visits. Doctors took that sort of thing into consideration then, but of course the whole system's different today. We were in a hospital fund. It didn't cost us a great deal but it was always a strain to find the money to pay into it. Once you have kids you really had to go into the scheme - you'd pay it at the chemist's every week. At one time I had to go into hospital for quite a big operation, and when Cec went to pay the bill they gave him money!

Life was easier in some ways back then, but it was harder in others. I'd say that the ordinary working man is better off today than the working man was back then. Most working people bought on the never-never - on time payment. And rents were very high. When we first moved into South Street you had to boil the copper up to get hot water, so we saved up and bought a chip heater, and we got very good at working it so that we could each have a shower with two screwed up pages of the *Herald*.

I think Bill was happy growing up in Drummoyne. Down the bottom of the street there was a big reserve - around the waterfront. It was wild and overgrown (not all tailored like it is today) and had lots of lantana and bushes. Bill used to play a lot down there with his mates. They'd make tunnels in the lantana and have caves under the rocks. It seemed to be safe to us for them to play there in those days.

When I was pregnant with Chris, Bill and I had a fight. I can't remember what it was about, but he would have been seven at the time. He decided he was going to leave home, so he packed up some clothes in his school case and went off in the direction of the reserve. I let him go for

about an hour, but I was a bit worried by then. I was big with Chris and it was a hot day, but I went off down to the park to look for him. I'm walking around aimlessly, wondering what to do next, when I hear his voice: "Hey, Mum! Look at me! I'm right up this tree!" and I looked up and saw him right up the top of this huge Moreton Bay fig tree. No trouble to Bill - he'd forgotten all about his row with me. We went back home together and we were pals again. Little kids are funny.

He was a good kid, Bill. Never had any trouble with him. He used to go into Bow's and play after school. They'd come to our place too, but they had a much bigger backyard, and mostly he was playing with them at their place - or down the park.

Cec got Bill a pushbike when he was about twelve, and by the time he was fourteen or so Bill and his mate Michael Bow used to ride their bikes from Drummoyne to Narrabeen on a Saturday morning, stay overnight, and come back on the Sunday. Of course the traffic then wasn't anything like it is today, but that was a long ride for kids that age.

While Dad was living with us he went to be tested at the Mobile TB Clinic that used to come around, and he tested positive. He had to go into Randwick Hospital, and that left me looking after his dog Lassie. She was a dear old thing, Lassie - a very gentle dog. She was very fat and we didn't realise it at the time but she had a bad heart. I'd take her up the street with me when I went shopping. I had one of those trolley things on two wheels that you pull along. I'd leave it outside a shop and I'd tell Lassie to stay with it, and she would. I used to go off and get all my shopping and Lassie would guard the trolley.

I noticed as the weeks went on that she'd get terribly puffed with the walking - it was really quite an effort for her to go the full distance. But if I walked out the door and left her at home she used to get this look on her face and I couldn't take it because it used to make me feel so sad for her. She used to make me feel a heel for not taking her with me. So, when I wanted to go shopping I'd have to sneak out the front door with my wagon, put the wagon over the verandah balustrade and then over the front fence, then walk up to the shops the long way around the block - just so Lassie wouldn't look at me with those sorrowful eyes! (*Laughs*) The things you do for dogs and kids!

We used to visit Dad at the hospital every Sunday, and we used to take Lassie with us. Dad would always save up a bone for her, and we'd visit him on the verandah outside the ward. She used to be pleased to see him. It was nice to see them together.

Lassie used to sleep in front of the fridge in the kitchen - she never went further into the house than the kitchen, but this day she came right into the bedroom and laid her muzzle on the edge of the bed. She did it very gently, but it woke me up. I said to her kindly: "What are you doing in here, Lassie old girl? You know you're not supposed to be in here." and she turned those sorrowful eyes on me and very slowly she walked out of the bedroom. When she got out into the hallway she looked back at me for a moment, then proceeded back to the kitchen. When I got up a bit later she was quite distressed and her tongue was all blue. I was worried and didn't know what to do. The man next door suggested a dissolved aspirin in her water but Lassie wasn't interested in anything - she didn't know what to do with herself. After I'd got Dad and Bill off to work and Chris off to school Lassie came into the kitchen and lay down in her place

in front of the fridge, and her legs started to jerk as though she was running. I went up to her and stroked her head, and she made one big convulsive movement and stopped - and she was dead. She'd apparently had a heart attack. Jack was working at Rozelle then, and I rang him there, and he came over at lunchtime and buried her in the backyard close to the fence along Hewitt's garage. We planted an Arum lily over the spot and you never seen anything like that Arum lily the way it grew! About two years later it shot up with a big thick stalk higher than the paling fence and bloomed with a great big lily - it was enormous!

The next week we were all due to go down to Narrabeen to spend Christmas there. Jack was going to fetch Dad from the hospital and there was the rest of the family - Bob and Lil and their kids, Jack and Nell, and us. Jack said he couldn't tell Dad about Lassie, so I had to - after all, it was me that had her at the time. Jack drove into the back yard and Dad got out of the car and said: "Where's Lassie? I've got a bone for her." (*Pause*). I cry every time I think about it. I took Dad inside and we sat on the front verandah and I broke the news to him, and he really really broke down. (It used to be funny when Mum was alive. She'd say to Dad: "Why don't you take me for a walk? You're always taking the dog for a walk but you never take me! ")

Bill was working by this, and he'd saved up and bought himself a trumpet. Cec used to hate to hear him practising on it - after all, a trumpet can sound pretty crook when you're just starting on it. Bill used to have to practise sitting under my eiderdown quilt with a sock stuffed down its bell! The night that Lassie died I was sitting at the dinner table after the meal and you could just hear the sound of Bill playing his trumpet. When he came out I said to him what a sad tune he'd been playing, and he said that it was a lament for Lassie. We were all sad when she went. Poor old Lass. She was a very very well-loved dog. When she was down at Narrabeen the little kids used to dress her up in a bonnet and shawl and wheel her about in the baby's pram - she used to let them do anything! She was just a lovely dog. Once when Mum was alive she took Lassie with her down to the butcher's shop at Narrabeen and left her sitting outside as usual. For some reason Mum left the butcher's shop by the back gate because she'd gone inside to talk to the butcher's wife, and she went off home. Come tea-time that night Dad gets Lassie's dish and puts her food out for her, but there was no Lassie. Mum said that the last she'd seen of her was down at the butcher's shop, and Dad took off in a panic thinking she'd been run over. When he got down to the shop there's Lassie still sitting outside, waiting for Mum to come out! That's the sort of dog she was. She had a lovely disposition, like my little Corgi Taffy did.

We used to go prawning down at Narrabeen. We used to go prawning at night with a big illegal prawning net. Dad used to be always a little bit on edge in case we were dobbed in or caught, but one Christmas we were down there prawning at night on the shallows off the island just off Mum's place when Dad called out that something was in the net and we all lifted the net up. There was a huge mullet in it - it was so big that when we put it in the laundry tubs its nose was in one corner and the tail went a little bit up the side of the corner diagonally opposite. That'll give you an idea how big it was.

Breakfast was nearly always fried fish. The lake was plentiful with fish then. Dad always had a trap out in the lake, and he used to nearly always get fish in them, or blue swimmer crabs. And he'd put set-lines out - he'd often get eels on them. He caught a fourteen pound eel once in the trap. It was beautiful to eat. If you boil the eel before you fry it it's tender and the flesh is white,

and it tastes just the same as fish. A lot of people won't eat them because they look too much like snakes, but they don't, really - they've got fins like a fish and a fish's mouth.

Cec used to get gout as he got older. About February each year he'd come down with this colossal attack of gout. His foot used to swell up, and the pain was apparently something shocking. He tried all sorts of things to cure it (like bathing it in sea water and boiled marshmallow leaves) but nothing seemed to do any good. Cec was one of those blokes who wouldn't go to the doctor, but finally he had a really terrible attack and I got the doctor down to him. The doctor gave him a list of all the things he shouldn't eat and guess what was top of the list? Anything from a pig - and shellfish! And there we were eating prawns and shellfish at Narrabeen every Christmas till it was coming out of our ears! It explained why he got the gout in February every year.

When all the family would go down to Narrabeen at Christmas, to manage the food and all that we'd each throw in a quid - each couple - and then we'd go down to the shops to do the shopping. There was Nell, Lil, Iris and me - the four of us would get stuck into peeling the vegetables and that. Mum always did the cooking, and us girls always did the washing up. There was never any trouble about anyone not pulling their weight or anything. Sometimes somebody might have to go and do something for their children or something, but on the whole it worked really well. The place used to be so full of people! We'd all sleep on the front verandah - bed after bed after bed after bed, like a great long dormitory. Dad used to keep all the fold-up beds in a little shed out the back between seasons. The kids used to put on little concerts for us - they'd do little recitations and things they'd learned at school. The kids got on well. They didn't seem to fight or anything.

I tried to carry on this tradition of everybody going home for Christmas when I moved up to Nambucca Heads. Chris and Ted would come up with the three kids, but I think Bill and Gill only came up once - Bill seemed to be making a life for himself then - I also think it was a bit far for him to come. Chris would stop several days with me and then I'd keep her three kids for the rest of the school holidays. Jack and Nell lived at Narrabeen, Bob and Lil were at Ryde, and we were right up at Nambucca Heads. So the family had become all scattered - we weren't so clannish as when Mum and Dad were alive.

I've always kept in touch with Jack. Jack's been the one that's kept in touch with everybody. He still contacts all the different cousins, and goes to all the funerals. He's getting on now, and I daresay he'll have to stop doing that too, after a while. Once a man loses his car he seems like he's had his legs cut off. The people here in the retirement village who have cars certainly get about more than those who don't. (There's a few of the old boys from here meet every Friday afternoon and go down to the Leagues Club for a beer or two, and I think that's good to see the men get together like that. I think men need men's company now and then.) Cec was never one for visiting, as I've said. I don't know whether he used to get bored, or what. But I used to love to go and spend the day with my brothers and their families. After a while though it seemed to just fall apart, and we didn't see a lot of one another after our children grew up and after Mum and Dad died. The mother and the father seemed to hold the family together.

Bill always seemed to have initiative as he grew up. When he was twelve years old he wanted

pocket money, so he got a job delivering newspapers. It was pretty tough - he had to get up at half past five every morning, rain or shine, summer and winter. He did it for a couple of years till he organised a better deal delivering medicines for a local chemist on his pushbike.

When he was a young teenager Bill started going to the Presbyterian Church. Some of his mates went there, and I didn't care which church he went to as long as he went. We'd been sort of nominal Church of England up till then, but not very serious. So not long after Bill started going there I joined the Guild there, and made a nice lot of friends. They used to have fetes. We'd all have our own stall. I used to make aprons, and our fetes were always a success. But they did away with the fetes and brought in what they called the Wells system - where everyone put so much in an envelope each week. Tithing I think they called it. In some ways this was a fairer way of doing it, because it was always the same few who worked like mad for the fetes, and bought from the fetes, while the envelope system made everybody contribute. A lot of people didn't like it, but the only disadvantage as far as I was concerned was that we no longer had fetes and that meant that we didn't have the fellowship of the fetes, which I didn't like to see go. Bill went to Sunday School there and played soccer with the church team when he went on to the Fellowship. He taught Sunday School for a while there too.

After he'd been out working for a few years Bill decided to go to university part-time at night. While he was there he met Gill Grayson from Kempsey, who was an Infants School teacher at the time. They fell for each other and were married within the year - (this was 1960 I think). Soon after, they went overseas and lived in Canada for a couple of years.

A few months before Bill and Gill were to be married I had an event in my life that stirred me up a bit one way and another. I used to go to the Women's Hospital each year for a pap smear, and this year the doctor who gave me my result told me that he thought I had 'a precious child' there - that I was pregnant, in other words. Now I was forty eight, and I nearly had a fit! I went home and sat on the front verandah step and waited for Cec to come home. When he came in the gate he said, smiling: "Ah, a welcoming committee! And very nice it is too - as long as you're not in trouble!" "That's just it," I said, "I am in trouble!" And I told him that the Cancer Clinic thought that I was pregnant. Well! Did his ears click back! He sat down beside me and put his hat on the back of his head and said: "Oh, the buggers're mad." Cec was funny. Rather than be concerned, he seemed to throw his chest out, as much as to say Gee! I can still do the trick!

My period didn't come that December, and I was thinking that the doctor was right. I broke the news to them all when we went down to Narrabeen that Christmas. Young Jimmy Windeyer's wife Sally said: "Gee! If that was me I'd be jumping off the roof!" Everybody was a bit concerned because of my age. And there was Bill thinking about getting married in the May. I counted up and realised that I'd be going down the aisle as mother of the bridegroom with a big tum.

When I went home I went up to the local doctor to see about the missed period. (I hadn't yet told him what they'd said at the Cancer Clinic). "I don't know," he said, "It's a bit too soon yet to tell, but your uterus is very swollen. You could be pregnant." So I went home and told Cec, and he said: "Oh well, it looks like it's on." A lot of my friends asked why I wouldn't have an

abortion, but I just couldn't bring myself to do that. I think it was because I'd lost the two little boys, and I thought that their life was so precious. I just couldn't do it. But I did add a reservation there, and decided that I'd have a test to see if it was a Down Syndrome baby and if it was I would abort, but if it was healthy I'd carry on - and love it.

When I got home from Narrabeen I found a letter waiting for me asking me to go and see Dr Cummings who was head of the Cancer Clinic to talk about my pregnancy and age. The sister-in-charge said to me on the way in that she'd seen millions of pregnant women pass through, and that I didn't look pregnant to her. Dr Cummings examined me, and confirmed that I wasn't pregnant, and suggested that it was probably change of life that caused the missed period.

With this news I don't know whether I was relieved or sorry, because by this we'd pretty well made our mind up that we were going to have another little baby. I think Cec was a little bit disappointed, too. Anyway, my period showed up right to the day the next month and I went on menstruating till I was 52, so none of them got it right, really.

(Long pause) I dunno. The spice has gone out of life, really. All you live for now is just to see and listen to your kids and your grandkids. I'd love to see more of my grandkids than I do, but as I said before, we're a scattered nuclear family now and not an extended one, and they live too far away and can't afford to come down and see me - and anyhow, what's in it for them to come and see an old lady? I think that my grandchildren are fond of me, but they've got their life to lead.

There's not a great deal to look forward to when you get old. If I had my sight it'd be terrific. If I could sew and do things, that'd be great. But I'm getting over this fall I've had and I'm getting up and doing things. I've been out in the garden and pruned the hydrangeas. As long as I can do little things like that I'm OK, but I seem to have lost the will to do things like go to the View Club and mix with people. I used to get a kick out of that, but I rarely feel that I want to go now. I feel that I must go to keep my life going and not become a recluse and get all tied up with my own little petty ills and that. I've got to start going out again so I won't be miserable and a pain in the neck to everybody, because once you go out you've got things to talk about and things to take your mind off yourself. If you sit at home all you think about is how sick you are, so I think I'll start going to View Club next time they have something on. I think I can manage it. I'll go down in a cab. That's about the only thing I do now - View Club. Stan, one of my neighbours here at the Village takes me out sometimes. We went to the pictures last weekend and out to dinner. We have a few laughs. I suppose while you can still have a good laugh your life's still worth living.
