

# Amy's Story

Amy Elizabeth Brown (Osterfield)

Born 27<sup>th</sup> July 1922

to Elizabeth & Charles Osterfield



39pp. for

Only p.c  
relevant  
ones to me!

My Mother's name was Elizabeth Ann Watson. Her Mother and Father were James & Maryanne Watson.

Her siblings were:

James - married Alyce Absolem. They adopted a little girl.

Mary - married George Pengelly. They had five children, four girls and a boy.

Susan - married Tom Kirby. They had three children, two girls and a boy.

Alf - never married

Charles - never married

Florence - married Allan Currie. They had one girl, and adopted another girl.

Walter - married Gertrude Buchanan. They had a girl and a boy.

Grandpa worked on the Railway as a Line Repairer and later as the Gate Keeper at Myers Flat. They lived there in the Gate House until Grandpa retired, then they moved just a few hundred yards up from the Gate House. That is where I remember going to visit them. Lots of happy memories of the times spent at their house.

Mum's brothers all worked for the Railways for part or all of their working lives. Mum was an Infant Teacher in Watchem and other country towns in Victoria. She also taught Sunday School. Her sisters were all in domestic service - just a polite way of saying house work - until they got married.

The very worst I ever heard said about my Mum's family was that Uncle Jim's wife didn't always tell the truth, Uncle Walter's wife was a bit stuck up, and Aunt Mary's husband wasn't much good as he drank a bit. I think my Dad would have been counted with Aunt Mary's husband as not much good, only that Dad didn't drink. They were all good living, nice people.

My Mother was all things to me. She was good, kind, caring, true - she was love. I always knew that she had great faith and that she loved the Lord. She always put every-one before herself.

### My Dad's family as I knew them when I was a child

There was Uncle Fred and his sons and daughters, who we were told were our Uncles and Aunts. I didn't know the ladies, but the men would come to our house sometimes - we never visited any of their homes.

As we were to find out many years later, my Dad just grew up not knowing much about where he fitted in the family, and he didn't seem to care.

Dad wasn't a bad man - he didn't drink or do anything bad, but he just didn't seem to care much for anyone. He was a very stubborn and selfish man.

I don't think he knew the Lord, or the meaning of love. He used to make fun of us when we prayed.

Looking back now I think it was very sad. As a boy Dad had gone to work for a Mrs Annie Tippit in the Welsford Forest. She had a son Alf who was about the same age as Dad, and the boys used to help with the woodcutting and all the other jobs around the place. Dad got a few shillings and his keep. Mrs Tippit's husband was a very sick man. He died some time later and when Dad was twenty one years old he married Mrs Tippit. They had a daughter, Myrtle. She was a bit older than Mum's children.

To say that Dad's life was a strange mixed up affair would be an understatement. His stepson, who was about his own age, married May Osterfield. She already had two sons, Fred and Bill Osterfield. We think May was Dad's half sister but cannot be sure. They had three children but we were not allowed to speak to them. We did speak to them of course. Some times we would meet them in the bush when we would be out looking for the cows, but we would never say that we had been talking to the other kids.

My Mother had been married before to a man who was much older than herself. He had two grown up sons. Mum had two children to him - Jim and Rene. After their Father died, Mum took in washing and used to do sewing to support herself and the children.

About three years later she met my Dad. I don't know how they met as Mum lived in town and Dad lived in the bush. However they did meet, and were married in July 1921, and Mum went to live in the bush.

I was born in July 1922 and my brother Les was born in October 1924. As well as being my brother Les was my best friend as we grew up, and he remained my best friend until his death in 1982.

Dad used to cut wood in the Welsford Forest. I'm not sure how that worked, but I know that Dad would have a permit to cut the wood in a certain part of the forest. It would be cut in 5 ft lengths and stacked in stacks 5 ft. high. Dad would cart it to the Bendigo Pottery using a horse and dray, and stack it in their yard. They would pay him 2 Pounds (\$4) a week, and at the end of the year they would measure the stacks. If he had more than he had been paid for he would be paid the extra. Sometimes he would get 10 Pounds, (\$20) or at other times he would have to cart some more without pay.

In the wet weather he would just stack it in the forest until he could get the horse and dray out with it. It had to stand to dry anyway so it didn't matter where it was. They had a stamp to put on it to show who owned it.

The tops of the trees would be cut in about 8 ft. lengths and Dad would sell them to people for fire wood. He would get 10 shillings a dray load (\$1). Jim & Les would go out with Dad and help him with the cutting of the bushes and burning them. You had to clean up all the rubbish and leave the forest tidy.

That was when I was quite young and things were not too bad then. Dad had two horses and drays. Sometimes he would tie one on to the back of the other dray, but most times the old horse would just follow along behind.

When Dad had a load on the dray he would walk alongside most of the way - the horses knew what they had to do. I remember when one of the other men who did the same work as Dad did was getting on to his load when his horse moved off and he slipped under the wheel and was killed.

Dad said "that wouldn't happen if you knew your team and were careful!" That was my Dad - full of sympathy.

I used to love to go in the dray with Dad when he was going to work. It would be three or four miles from home. We would just go out in the dray and then walk home through the bush.

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Dad had  
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I guess they were the times it was good not going to school. We had lots of time to play in the bush. It was lovely on a frosty morning. We used to run and slide on the frost, and throw stones to break the ice on the dams. It didn't seem to be as cold then and it was a lot of fun.

On one of these mornings I was running as fast as I could to try to slide as far as Jim could, when somehow I fell over and twisted my leg. Jim had to carry me all the way home. I was always in trouble for trying to do the things the big kids could do. I was in bed for two weeks over that one.

I still have a mark on my leg from a rope burn. Jim would put the rope around his foot to lead the horse in the second dray, so of course I thought that was a good idea, but when the horse pulled back on me I couldn't hold it and the rope pulled across my leg and burnt it. Dad just yelled at me for being so stupid – nothing new!

I just didn't seem to be able to stay out of trouble for long. I did do some dumb things but I did get the blame for some things that I shouldn't have. Like one time we were told to go straight home – instead we stopped to pick some wild flowers. When Dad came to look for us I got the whip around my legs- I didn't think that was fair as we were all doing it.

Our nearest neighbour was about half a mile away – that was the Norman family. Another mile down the gully were Mr & Mrs Wilson – they had no family. About two miles in another direction in the next gully was Mr Goldsworthy. He lived by himself and was very good to us kids. Dad used to say that he was mad. I guess he was a bit odd, but certainly not mad. He had been to the first world war and he suffered shell shock. He was never able to work as a result of the war but never the less he was a very good, kind, man. Another mile away was the Shadie family.

Each of the family homes was on farms if you could call them that. They were all about sixty acres and were in gullies in the bush. There was a creek that started at the top end of our place – known as Sandy Creek.

Some of the land along the creek was good to grow things when we could get water but you were never sure of a regular supply. The rest of the land was just bush and scrub. The fences on our place, like every thing else, were very poor. The cows used to get out and wander off in the forest. There were lots of gullies where they would find good feed. We would have to go and look for them. That was fun because there were always lots of things to see and hear in the bush. It wasn't hard to find them – they all had names and when we called them by name they would bellow at us.

They were the things that were best about being in the bush. There was always an eerie feeling of not being alone. I still feel that in the bush, but it's not a bad feeling.

We had an old jersey bull that used to get out some times and he would go down to Mr Norman's place and fight through the fence with their big red bull. Mr Norman would come up to our place and yell at Dad and say that he would shoot the thing if it went near his place again. I don't know who made the most noise – the men or the bulls, or for that matter, who I was more scared of!

The Norman's had four sons and two daughters, all older than us. I always thought that something was a bit scary about them.

Mr Norman was very deaf and he would often say that you had said things that you didn't say. Of course it was because he didn't hear what you had said, but I used to think he did it to get us into trouble. One son used to hide behind things and peer around corners all the time. I didn't know then but he was very sick. He shot himself some time later. Poor Mum had got a ride home from Bendigo in the car with Mr & Mrs Norman and he was dead when they got home.

It was a very bad time for them. One of his sisters never spoke again and she couldn't do anything for herself. Some times when we went to see her she would smile at us but that was as good as she ever got. They said it was the shock.

Mr & Mrs Wilson were very nice. They had a nice house and garden. Even their cows and horses were nice and fat. The gig and harness were always shiny. It seemed to me that was the way things should be. They didn't have any family.

I liked to go to their house. Mrs Wilson always had nice little cakes and biscuits to eat and she would make a cup of tea for Mum and the cups and teapot were all good china with pretty rose patterns on them. She would give us cordial in a pretty glass. We all behaved very well when we visited her house - somehow she made you feel very special.

Mr Goldsworthy would ask us to his house and he would also ask Roma Shadie to come too. He would cook tea for us. It was a bit funny but we would eat everything in sight and just giggle a lot. He bought a gramophone and records to have for us to play when we visited. He did so many kind things for us. I remember one time when he bought blue silk to make a dress for Rene and myself, and some white sandshoes.

Mum made our dresses and I thought they were the most beautiful things that I had ever seen. My Dad said that Rene looked nice, but blue didn't suit me. That was one time when I was hurt by something that Dad had said. Most times I would just think he wouldn't know what was nice or not. Mum was a good dress maker but our clothes were made from old clothes which people would give to her to make over for us, so it was a great treat for us to have something new.

Mr Goldsworthy would take us to his sister's place sometimes. We had to walk four miles to White Hills to catch a bus to Bendigo, then a tram to Golden Square, then walk another mile to her house. She was a nice lady. She had four children, one girl was about my age, and the others were older.

They took me to the only Sunday School picnic that I ever went too. I was about eight at the time. We went from Golden Square to Kangaroo Flat on a hay wagon, pulled by two horses - that was great fun too. Everyone was so good to me. I think that was the first time that I knew what it meant to say they were sharing the love of God. There was more food than I had ever seen, and the children made sure that I was not left out of anything. I even won a blue pencil case. I know that they let me win because I couldn't run for nuts. That day has always been one of my most treasured memories.

Another special day that I remember was the day that Mr Goldsworthy took us to One Tree Hill. Again we walked to White Hills, caught a bus to Bendigo, a tram to Quarry Hill, then walked about four miles to One Tree Hill. Mr Goldie, as we called him, had packed a lunch of sandwiches, fruit, lollies and cordial. He even climbed the Tower with us. He did so many kind things for us.

Later when we all grew up and stopped visiting I had to pass his place to get to work. On my way home I would get his mail and papers for him. He gave me

the old gramophone and records – said there is no-one to use them now. I used them for many years. I still have fond memories of that funny old gentleman. He was a true gentleman. I felt sad when that time in my life was over. I have been to One Tree Hill many times since but it never seemed to be as big, and it was never an adventure like the day that we went with Mr Goldie.

## MYRTLE

**Dad's daughter** Myrtle went out to work when I was very young. She had gone to school – used to ride a horse, and later got a bike. I never knew how old she was. I only remember her coming home on her day off from work. I would go to the end of the lane and wait for her. I used to look forward to her coming home. She was always good to me, but she didn't like Jim and Rene. She would fight with them all the time. I remember one time when she hit Jim over the head with a big serving spoon. We were at the dinner table at the time and there was a big row – even Dad got in on that one.

**Myrtle worked in one of the better class homes in Bendigo as a cook.** One of the Norman girls also worked in the **same place as a housemaid.** They both lived in of course. That was the way it was done, as I was to find out for myself later on.

**Myrtle was engaged to Mum's brother Charlie.** He used to come to our house sometimes when she was home.

**When I was about six years old she came home very sick.** She stayed in bed for two weeks and Mum looked after her. We were never told what was wrong with her, but when she got better she went back to work and never came home again.

Not long after that she **broke off her engagement to my uncle.** She just sent him a note saying that she didn't want to see him again. They had been engaged for about four years. He never married and died in 1989, aged 91 years.

We used to get a bit of news of Myrtle from the Norman girl who was working with her. About seven years after we were told that she was getting married. Dad was not asked, but he said he would go to the Church to let her husband know that she had a family even if she didn't want to know them. He did go, and introduced himself to Jack when they came out of the Church. Mum was so embarrassed. She didn't think that Dad should do that, but if my Dad made up his mind, that was it, no matter how anyone else felt. Myrtle never had any children.

Myrtle spoke to me and later she sent me a wedding photo. I was about 13 at the time. When I was about 19 she came to see me and stayed the night in the hotel where I lived and worked as a housemaid/ waitress. I was going out a lot to dances and trying to make up for all the things that I had missed out on along the way. I used to go out with boys but most times I went with my brother. Of course I didn't tell Myrtle that.

She told me she was not very pleased with my behaviour and I should not be living in a hotel. I didn't think it was any of her business so I did colour the story a bit. I thought she was behaving like an old maid. If she had only known how strict the boss was, but I didn't tell her that either. It was more fun to let her think what ever she liked.

The next time I saw her was just after my first baby Margaret was born. I met her in the street. She looked in the pram and said "where did you get that?" I

did think of telling her another story, but I was so happy with my baby and my life at that time, that I was nice about it.

The next time she came to see me was about five years later when my Mother died. She said that she was sorry I had lost my Mum but it didn't mean anything to her. I felt that it would have been better not to come if she felt like that. She didn't go to see Dad. She said that there were a lot of things that I didn't know, and wouldn't understand, and it was best to just leave it that way. I have always wondered just who it was best for!

So yet again Myrtle's visit left me not caring what she thought, having just lost my mother, who by that time in my life, I knew was a wonderful lady, not just a good Mum.

Some six years later Dad was in hospital. He was living by himself in a little place in White Hills that Jim, Stan & Rene's husband Fred had built for him on some land that Jim had bought when he came home from the War. When it was time for him to leave hospital they said he would need someone to care for him for a while. I said that he could stay with us for a while, but by the time he was to come out of hospital I had three children of my own, my niece who was expecting a baby, and her 2 year old son, all in bed with the flu. They were all very sick and I had a bad throat and was unable to speak, so of course Dad couldn't come into a household with so much illness, and with Rene's husband refusing to have him at their place, the only thing I could think of was to ask Myrtle to have him until I could cope.

That put the cat amongst the pigeons. Dad got the huff with me, and his lady friend of whom I knew nothing at that time, said I was no good, and Myrtle said that I had no right to have one of Rene's kids and her brat at my place anyway. I couldn't see why not as I was always very fond of Muriel and she needed help at that time.

Anyway, Myrtle did have Dad at her place for two weeks, then he married his lady. They didn't tell me that they were getting married. Some time later I got a letter from his wife to tell me that he was in hospital again, and that I should go to see him, and what a poor sort of daughter she thought I was - and then had the cheek to sign herself Mother! That did it - I wasn't going to be told what to do by her, and he used to go past my door on his bike but wouldn't call in, so I saw no good reason for me to go to see him. It was about 15 years later that I read in the paper that Dad had died, aged about 86 years.

When my dear brother Les died, Myrtle came to see me again and she said we must keep in touch, and that she would come to see me again. That was in 1982. It's now 1989 and I still haven't seen or heard from her. I think she is still alive.

### **More about Myrtle and her impact on my life later**

Looking back now I'm not sure what was real and what was a nightmare. As I said before, Dad was a woodcutter in the Welsford Forest where we lived. I hated the place - it was so lonely. We never went to school. It was just over four miles to the nearest school and the law couldn't make you go if you lived four miles away.

It seemed to me that Dad only did what the law made him do. Every year someone would come to see why we were not going, but it was always the same

answer – too far, and we never had shoes to wear. It seemed to me that there was one excuse after another why we couldn't go.

Now when I think about it, it was because we were so poor that we didn't have very good clothes, and didn't have any shoes. I think Mum was scared that the Welfare would take us away. I remember hearing her talk about how the Welfare people used to go to her house and look through the house and drawers to see that the children were being looked after. When her first husband died, there was something about the Welfare. When they gave assistance for the children, the Mother had to show that she was earning the same amount or more.

I am sure now that there had to be a good reason or Mum would have made sure that we went to school. She did try to teach us, but she didn't have the time to put in to make it worthwhile. I don't know why I didn't try harder as I wanted to read so badly. The others didn't seem to mind not being able to read and there did seem to be lots to do with our time, even if it was just to go rabbiting.

All I wanted to do was to go to school and be like the other kids. I wanted to read and learn about the world, so that one day I could go and see what was beyond the bush that we called home. Jim and Rene seemed to be happy just to let each day go by the same as the last, and Les was only little and he always loved the bush.

I guess we did have a lot of fun. Like the time we were playing hide and seek. Jim hid in the big feed box in the shed. I lifted the lid to look for him. He jumped up to give me a fright and I banged the lid down and knocked him out cold! Of course, guess who got into trouble for that, but it was funny afterwards.

Then there was the time when the boys were putting glass jars on a post and breaking them. I put my foot into one to pick it up to save bending down. Of course I had no shoes on and a point of broken glass went into my instep. I still have the scar to show for that one. Jim carried me about a mile home. There was no-one home so he thought it should be cleaned up. He put my foot into a dish of hot water and I passed out. I was in trouble again for showing off and trying to do better than the boys.

I was always in trouble for something or other. Dad would say – "if you don't behave you will be sent to school, they will soon straighten you out." As going to school was my big wish, I would set about making them mad at me. I must have been the naughtiest kid in the world, and I must have been very stupid too, because it took me a long time to wake up that it was just a threat, and they were never going to send me to school or anywhere else.

To tell you how dumb I was, I put some marks on the wall in Jim's room with a little lead cannon, then wrote his name on the wall to get him into trouble, but as I was the only one of the kids that could spell his name – guess who was in trouble gain?

We all did dumb things. I don't know how one or more of us didn't get killed or badly hurt. We always waited until Mum and Dad were away for the day and then got into mischief.

There was a dam near our house and it had a lot of fish in it. Dad used to bring home any little ones he caught in the river and put them in the dam, but he wouldn't let us catch them when they got bigger. One day when they had gone away, Jim said "let's ride the horse up and down in the dam. When the water gets muddy the fish will come to the top and we can see how many there are in



the dam." But of course it killed the poor fish! Dad was getting dead fish out for days and wondering what they had died from. No-one said a word. We knew that we had gone just too far this time. It was many years before Dad was told what had happened. We had all left home before he found out. He was mad even then.

Dad was always telling us things that were silly, and often we would try them out to see if it was true, so when he said that pigs would cut their own throat with their feet if they swam much, we decided to find out for ourselves. We put a big pig into the dam and got one on each side of the dam and wouldn't let it out. He didn't cut his throat, but we were not game to tell Dad that he was wrong because we would have had to tell him how we knew.

We would play **Cowboys and Indians** and **build huts out of scrub** and the Indians would burn them down. **I don't know how we didn't start a bush fire** or something.

Soon after my **sixth birthday** I went to my **Grandmothers for two weeks**. **That was the only time that I was away from home**. It was great having my Uncles and Grandpa to myself, but there just had to be a but. I had long plaits which I was very proud of. I was a skinny kid and not much to look at as my Dad was always telling me, but I was proud of my plaits. My Aunt Flo came home and she said that long hair was a nuisance so she cut it, in what she called a bob with a fringe. She said it was very fashionable. I hated it and I wanted to go home. I didn't like my Aunt any more.

Grandma took me to my **Aunt Sue's house** for a visit one day. I thought it was lovely. The **beautiful white sheep skin rugs** – I just couldn't believe that any one would put them on the floor. **I had never seen anything like that**. We had **wheat bags for mats** which **Mum had bound with coloured material**. Mum also unpicked bags and stitched them together and covered them with bits and pieces of coloured material to make **rugs for our beds (patchwork)**. They were clean and warm. Everything in our house was **very poor but it was clean**. Mum would say **"it doesn't cost much to be clean"**. She used to make soap and sandsoap. It was awful but it did clean things and woe betide anyone complaining about it or not using it.

Just having a **bath** was a story in itself. It wasn't so bad in winter when there was enough water in the tank. You just had to put a tin on the open fire to heat, then bring in a big tub and if you were lucky you could put it in front of the fire, but in the summer when the tank water had to be kept for drinking, we had a box on wheels which was big enough to put two four gallon tins in. We had to go about a mile in to the water race, fill the tins and pull the cart home with the water and go through the whole thing with the tub. The one who did the most work got the first bath, and if you didn't like that arrangement you could go and get more water for yourself. Somehow I think poor old Jim got the worst of that deal because he was older and was expected to help us, and usually got the last bath.

**Washing the clothing** was on the same lines. Mum had two tubs and a copper that stood on two bars on some bricks in the yard. You would light a fire under the copper to boil the whites and the other things would be scrubbed on a washboard in the tub. Of course us kids would get the water from the race for that too. I guess we had a lot of fun doing it. We would get into the race and play around a bit. We would be dry by the time we got home. No one would know why it took us so long to get the water (we hoped). One day as I was about to get into the race a dirty big goanna was sitting in the water. I still think

WHY??

it was as big as me. Jim laughed at me for ever about that, and he loved to tell people about it. I don't think we ever did anything without getting up to some sort of mischief. I think it made life more bearable.

Friday was always a good day for us. Mum and Dad used to go to Bendigo and they would be away all day so that gave us lots of time to get up to all sorts of mischief. Like riding Dad's bike. We would carry it out of the yard so that he wouldn't see the tracks. We also had a big pig that we could ride. We could make him go where we wanted him to by pulling his ears.

Alas, about this time things didn't seem to be going so well for us. Mum seemed to find out too much about the things we did while they were away. She would say "never mind how I know, all you have to worry about is if it is true."

Some time later when Aunty Flo got married and it came time for us to meet our new Uncle Alan, it all became very clear – surprise, surprise, he was the Mr Currie that we had been talking to in the forest for a long time. He worked for the Forrest Commission and of course knew all about us. After that it was a bit hard to get away with anything, and it didn't seem like much fun anymore.

Some time after that we found a box in Mum's room with a lot of nice baby things in it. We knew Mum had made them. We never asked her about them but we were sure that she must have been going to get a baby. We were so excited about it. Dumb kids! Aunty Flo got the baby. I don't think Mum ever knew that we found the things or what we thought.

Jim was getting older by now and he liked to spend most of his time in the forest with the men.

Rene wasn't much fun, she wouldn't play, so I had to find a way to fill in the time. I think that must have been when I started talking to my little doll. I had my special place under a big tree at the back of the shed. I would just day dream about all the things that I was going to do one day. I was going to be a great dancer and travel all over the world.

A little later I changed my mind. I was going to be a Nun and save the world or something. I was going to bring all the children to Jesus. I had heard Mum say so many times that Jesus said "suffer the little children to come unto me and forbid them not." I think that must have been where I got the idea that I would tell the world of His great love.

Everything seemed to be changing. I was about eight and I was waking up to the fact that no matter what I did, I wasn't going to be sent to school. I would day dream a lot and pretend that I was going to do all sorts of wonderful things and have nice clothes.

One day two ladies and a man came to our house in a car. That was something special just the fact that they had a car, and they were dressed in nice clothes. One lady had a fur coat on and the man was in a nice suit and he had a gold watch and chain and a big gold ring on his hand. I had never seen anything like that.

Alas, they hadn't come to see me. They were Rene's Aunties, her Father's sisters. The one with the fur coat and the man were from Canada. They were visiting the other lady, their sister, and they wanted to take Rene home with them. They said she would go to school and have everything she needed. She didn't want to go and Mum said no. I hoped they would take me but of course

Our House with Mum & Dad, Les, Rene/Fred & 4 children & Violet & Child



Mum

they wanted their brother's child. I was so unhappy about that and Dad didn't help. He said they could have me! It was silly of course. Dad was just joking, but I was always looking for a way to get out of the bush and go to school, and have nice things. I thought if only I was pretty it would help.

We would go rabbiting in the bush a lot. Jim had a ferret. Sometimes it would stay in the burrow and it would take all day to get it out. I could kill, skin, and gut a rabbit as well as the boys could. There were times that I wished that I had been a boy. They seemed to have the best side of things. They didn't want pretty things and they seemed to be happy just doing what they were doing. No one ever said they were rough or tomboys when they climbed trees, or killed rabbits, but I got it all the time. The boys would take the rabbits to the Ice Works. They would get three pence for 2 rabbits, so they never got much. Sometimes they would be out all day and get two shillings. (20cents)

Sometime after Tom Norman died, we used to go to see his sister. They had got a girl to live in to help Mrs Norman. I liked to go to their place then. She was the only young girl in the bush apart from Rene and me. They had a gramophone and a lot of country and western records which I loved to play.

We used to make a big fire in the lane between our place and the Normans. There was lots of scrub and bushes to burn. We would sit around and sing until late at night. Dad said our singing was why there were no Aborigines in the Welsford Forest. The truth was that not even an Aborigine would live in the place.!

Contractions  
It is lovely on a very cold, moonlit night if you have a good fire. If you are quiet you can hear all sorts of sounds. Sometimes when Jim was late getting home, Mum would go outside and just listen. She would say "he won't be long, I can hear him whistling."

My Uncle Alf used to visit us sometimes. He was an invalid pensioner. We used to look forward to his visits. He was a nice man. We all liked him, but I think it was the boiled lollies he used to bring that was the big thing at the time.

Uncle Charlie and Uncle Wal grew tomatoes and other vegetables for market for a while and they used to live at our house. That was good too. The Uncles used to give us some money for helping with watering and picking tomatoes. When they left and went away to work somewhere else we didn't see them much. I think that was about the time Uncle Wal got married.

## OUR HOUSE

I think the cartoonist that did the comic strip Footrot Flats got his inspiration from our house. It was very old and some of the boards had fallen off the back wall. Dad made some mud bricks and put up a new wall on the back of the house. That was fine but then Dad got a bright idea! He would make lots more bricks and make the house bigger. He would put the front wall out about 3 ft. and make the rooms bigger. He would put up walls inside before he took the old one down. That was just as well, because when he got them up to about 4 ft. inside and one right along the front verandah, making it quite useless, he ran out of ideas!

I think the problem was that when he got that far, he realised that he couldn't make a roof fit, so it was just left like that until we left the place about eight years later. (My Dad was a woodcutter, not a builder.)



When it came to **underwear** that was another story. Flour used to come in calico bags. When they were unpicked it was about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a yard in each. Of course it had a lot of writing and a big wheel printed on it, but with a lot of **boiling** with some of Mum's home-made soap most of it would come out and the calico wouldn't be quite so hard. Mum would then **make bloomers and bodices (singlets) and petticoats**. The bodices would have little tucks and **crochet** edges to make them as nice as possible. **Unbleached calico** was cheap to buy so it got used for a lot of things. **Aprons and table cloths** were two things I can think of and of course everyone wore an apron.

Again, because Mum was so creative she would dress them up by drawing things on them and then embroidering or appliquéing coloured material on to the calico. She would then work pretty little **crochet** edges on them. Just looking at my Busy Needles book I find that nothing is new, just more sophisticated and more expensive.

Mum could do almost anything in the way of **sewing, knitting and crocheting**, therefore our clothes didn't look too bad even though they were made over out of other people's cast offs, and calico.

The only thing Mum had to work with was an **old Singer machine, treadle job**, no frills, none of your zigzag and fancy stitches, not even a light on it.

We only had **kerosene lamps or candles**. Our lamps were just the wick type, not much of a light.

Not like Mrs Wilson's – they were big kerosene lamps that hung from the ceiling. They had a mantle that covered the wick. It was a very good light, nothing like ours. They had **pink shades with glass prisms hanging on them**.

I used to dream about having nice things like that. **Mrs Wilson's and my Auntie Sue's homes were just beautiful. I thought that was the way everyone's homes were except ours**, and they were nice ladies too.

**They were always dressed nicely. I thought that we were the only people in the world that were poor and didn't have a nice home and clothes.**

How wrong I was – **things were to get much worse. It was a depression and a lot of people had it worse than we did.**

Living in the bush as we did and **not going to school**, it didn't matter much how **we were dressed** and we **didn't wear shoes any way**.

We had **cows** so we had **as much milk as we wanted**. We also had a separator and a butter churn so we had lots of **cream and butter**.

Sometimes Mum would scald the milk and leave it to cool in a wide dish. When it was quite cold the cream would set on top. Mum had a thing that looked like a plate with holes in it to let the milk drain out, then you would have lovely **thick cream**. It was great on home made bread and jam.

We also had an **icecream churn**. We didn't get icecream very often as you had to have dry ice to put in the outer bowl of the churn, and it was a lot of work to make it. It had milk, eggs, sugar and vanilla that I know of in it. I often wonder if it was as good as I think it was.

We also had ducks and chooks so we had lots of eggs and chicken and ducks to eat, and of course there were always rabbits. I think Mum knew at least ten ways to cook them.

Dad would go fishing in the Campaspe River. He always got some Redfin so we would have fish to eat as well. Dad also got honey from the forest. The bees would make their hives in hollow trees. Dad would strain it through muslin. The honey was put into jars and sealed, and the honeycomb was melted and put in a tin. I remember my Uncle Alf using beeswax on hemp to stitch boots and on the harness.

Uncle Alf was a lot like Mum when it came to doing things with his hands, even though he was a semi invalid he would mend boots and the horse harness, and he rigged up a lathe out of an old treadle machine, lots of bike cogs, chains and things. It must have been the only one of it's kind but it did work. He made all sorts of little wooden things including a little dancing doll for me, and all sorts of wooden handles for chisels and other tools.

We had pigs and a few lambs but Dad wouldn't kill them. The lambs were pets, but the pigs would get sold. Some of them were pets too. I remember one that I had when Dad was taking it to market. I ran after the dray crying my head off but he still had to go.

In the garden we had all sorts of plum trees, quince trees, lots of rhubarb and white turnips. They seemed to be there all the time. I didn't like them. In season there were cabbage, cauliflower, carrots, onions, potatoes, peas, beans, tomatoes, marrow, pumpkin, water melon, rock melon, cucumber, lettuce. About a mile from our house there had been a house many years before and there were some big old apple, fig, and pear trees. We used to get the fruit from them too. It was very poor quality fruit, but Mum could cook anything and it would taste good. I remember the Pear Ginger that was out of this world, but she made all sorts of jams, pickles, chutney, sauce, and tomato paste to make tomato soup in winter time.

By this time Dad was out of work. He got some sort of money order from the Government. You had to go to the same Butcher, Baker and Grocer. You didn't get any money. It was paid to them. I think it was about One Pound, 5 shillings Grocer, 6 shillings Butcher, and 4 shillings to the Baker.

Because we had all the things on the "farm" - I use the word lightly - we were not too badly off. Mum used to sell some eggs and butter to the Grocer. I think it was more of an exchange for other things. The Baker was good too. He would let Mum have some flour instead of bread - that way she could make things go further - like rabbit stew with parsley dumplings (yuck).

Mum made very good bread, buns and all sorts of goodies when she had yeast and things to use. Looking back at that list of things we were a lot better off than people living in towns. They didn't have as much as we had.

Dad had all sorts of farm machinery - all horse drawn of course. He grew wheat and oats for stock feed. A man used to come with a chaff cutter once a year to cut the hay into chaff.

That was always something to look forward to. It was one of the big events in our year. The men would camp in the shed and Mum would cook their meals. We didn't see many people at our place so it was great to see them (just more

work for Mum) but we loved to watch the hay being cut into chaff and the men would talk to us – that was great.

Then came the drought. Mum and Dad got into debt and lost everything. I remember very well the day that Mr Smith the Policeman from White Hills came to make a list of things that were in Dad's name. He did the very best that he could for us. He put the bike down as belonging to Jim and the drays and all the furniture in Mum's name so that they couldn't take them. Everything else was Dad's so a few days later another man came and took the lot. It was a very sad time for us all.

Most of the animals died. There was no feed for them and no money to buy any, and the drinking water had to be carted in a tank on the dray. Of course there wasn't any water for the garden. The only things left seemed to be quinces and the old apple and pear trees which still had some poor quality fruit, and rabbits. Even the fish died as the river dried up, and the poor old chooks had given up laying. They weren't getting enough to eat, so they got killed. We seemed to get a lot of chicken soup for some time. I think the poor old things were too skinny for anything else.

I often wonder just how Mum fed us with the little she had and still remained sane as well as being a loving Mum and wife.

That was a very hard time for everyone. We each had our own pet cow. They all had names. Mine was "Betty". Us kids used to milk them. Les was the only one who couldn't milk a cow. We didn't mind him not doing it – we all thought he was too little. When he grew up he used to say that he was just smarter than us, he didn't learn how.

Things just seemed to get worse every day. The cows were getting so poor that they would just die or Dad would have to put them down. I can remember crying when ever we heard a gun shot because we knew it meant that another one was gone. Dad would skin them and sell the hides. You had to lay the skin out and put salt on it, then fold it to cover all the raw bits, and take it to the skin merchant. If it was clean and didn't have cuts in it you would get a few shillings for it, depending on the weight.

My cow was a big red one. Dad came home one day and said that she had got caught up in the fence trying to get out of the paddock and that she had fallen in to the creek and drowned. I wouldn't let anyone touch her. I got the big knife and set about skinning her myself, crying all the time. I loved that poor old thing. She had been like a friend to me. But no matter how I felt, she was dead and I had to accept it and get on with what had to be done. I knew that if I skinned her myself I would get a few shillings for her hide and I could buy some material and some wool. When I got one side done I had to put ropes on her feet and get my brother to help me turn her over so that I could do the other side. Then I salted and folded the hide. It was awful but I had lost so many pets over the years that I just got used to making the best of what ever came my way. I was about nine years old at the time and I was learning the hard way that life wasn't going to be easy.

Things were really tough by now. The bread was made like a big scone that you would slice (there was no yeast now to make real bread), toast spread with dripping, the meat was mostly sausage mince, rabbits and even hare with lots of dumplings.



Sweets were boiled rice, sago, quince dumplings, jam roly poly - made of a scone like dough rolled out thin and spread with jam, rolled up and put in a calico cloth and boiled. Some times we would be lucky and have golden syrup dumplings.

All these things are nice when they are made with butter, eggs and milk, but by now it was dripping, flour and water. A spoon of golden syrup in place of an egg helps, but when you are hungry they taste pretty good.

Dad used to do a bit of digging for gold. He never found much, but when he did find a bit he would sell it and buy extra food. I don't know if it was because it was cheap or if he liked them, but he would buy a big barracouta fish, and some black and white pudding. That was supposed to be a treat but I didn't like fish much and the black and white puddings were awful. Dad said the black one was made of pigs blood - there was no way I would eat that, then or now.

The old horse that Mum drove just died so Mum would have to walk the 4 miles into White Hills and catch a bus to Bendigo. Rene, Les and myself would walk over about the time that she get back to White Hills to help her carry the shopping home. We would go early so that we could sit on a seat at the bus stop and have a rest and wait for Mum then we would walk home.

There was a shop near the bus stop. Sometimes when Mum got back if she had any money, she would let us buy an iceblock each. They were one penny each, but there were many times that she wouldn't have even that much. She would just go to a nearby tap and get a drink of water for herself. There were three kids at the shop and they would talk to us while we were waiting for Mum. One day we were told that one of the boys was in hospital. Some time later we were told that he had died. He was only eight years old and had had diphtheria. I think that was why I was so scared when I went to hospital years later.

Another of the relief schemes Dad was in for a while was looking for gold. I think it was run by the Shire Council or something. They gave him a pick, shovel, and a mining dish (on loan), and a permit to dig for gold. You could only do that in wet weather because you had to have water to wash the dirt away. He never found much but it did give him something to do.

At one time Dad made a thing he called a cradle. It was a big box that had lots of ledges in it and holes in a tray at the top and a rocker like thing on the bottom. You put the dirt in the top, run water over it and rocked it back and forward. The gold was supposed to stay on the ledges. Dad used to say "the trouble is there is too much dirt mixed with the gold." Dad made a little cradle for Les and he would put them on the wheelbarrow and head off into the gullies to look for gold. He would dig shafts in the bush that looked like graves and always not far from this would be a little one that Les would dig. He was only a little kid but he used to work hard as long as Dad did. I often wonder what people would think when they found the holes later.

Another time I remember Dad was away with a relief gang. He was away for three months at a time working on repairing railway tracks. We didn't like him being away but it was good having some money. He got his keep on the job and they sent his pay to Mum.

Then things seemed to get a bit better again. Dad was cutting wood and carting it to the Pottery again.

## JIM & VIOLET

Jim used to get a few odd jobs helping on some of the other properties in the district, cutting scrub and cleaning up rubbish. He would get a few shillings and a meal. About this time Jim started going with a girl that no one liked much. She would come to our house some times and she would always fight with Jim. One time she threw her engagement ring at him outside in the long grass. It was almost dark. We all had to look for it. Another time she ran off into the bush and got lost. We were all out for hours looking for her. It was dark when we found her and she was hysterical by then. Just to make things worse she was part Chinese and a Roman Catholic. Mum didn't want Jim to marry her but of course no-one could tell him anything.

It all looks pretty funny now. Violet's family were worse off than ours if that was possible, but they did go to school. They lived just on the edge of the forest near White Hills. It was a corner of land that belonged to the Water Commission. They built a hut out of flattened tins. It was a real shanty town.

When Jim and Violet got married they built another two roomed hut, and lived there for some years. Jim was cutting eucalyptus leaves for the forest plant. Later he had an old truck and saw bench. He used to cut wood into blocks and sell it for fire wood. He wasn't making a bad sort of living out of it at the time.

Everyone liked Jim and said he would work very hard, but never believe anything that he told you. I don't know why he was like that, but he was the same right up till his death aged about 76 years. But he did live a very hard life, and no matter how you tried, you could not change him, and you couldn't help but like him.

His wife used to manage things for him and work with him too. I went to work for them. I was to get paid threepence a heap for what ever I cut. You had to cut the bushes down with an axe then strip them down to small twigs with a hook sort of thing called a sickle. The heaps would be about 3ft. by 3ft.

It was hard work but all went well for a while and I got a few shillings, then one day Violet said that they didn't get paid for the last lot so she couldn't pay me. I didn't believe her (I still don't). She owed me six shillings - that was a lot of work. We had a big row and I kept away from her from then on. I had spent a lot of time with them until then.

Jim & Violet had a little girl Cathleen. She was about two years old when Jim went to the war. When he came home he ran the wood yard again in shanty town. I didn't see much of him. He drank too much and I didn't trust the pair of them any more. He told me I was worse than Mum. I told him that was a compliment. He said "yes, I suppose it is at that." He was a tough man. He got his hand caught in the saw when he was cutting the wood, and mutilated it quite badly. He picked up a dirty old towel, wrapped it around his hand and asked a friend who had just called in to drive him to the hospital in the old truck. Sometime later I was talking to the friend and he told me that on the way Jim remembered that he didn't pick up his smokes so he said to just stop at the shop and he'd get some. His friend said worry about that later, but Jim said "hell I'm not going without some now." By the time they got to the Hospital his friend was in a worse state than Jim. Jim had lost three fingers on his left hand, not that it



everyone was so good to me it did help a bit. The nurses were wonderful. I didn't think they were real. I thought they must be angels or something. I was about 11 years old at the time. Some of the ladies in the ward were very nice to me. Most of them were old. I think they felt sorry for me. They would give me lollies and nice cakes some-times when their visitors would bring them in. One lady about 28 years old died while I was there. That scared me. They thought she was dying three times before she actually did. All her family would come in and sit near her bed behind screens. You could only see shadowy figures behind the screens. My imagination was working overtime. There was a girl in the next bed to me. She was only 19 and was a great help to me. She had grown up in an orphanage and didn't know much more about the world than I did but she could read. She wanted to be a nun but she said she had a lot to learn before she could. The Sisters from the orphanage used to come to see her every week and they would talk to me too. I thought they were lovely.

Not long after I got out of hospital a young man who was working for Mr Norman was looking for somewhere to board. Jim knew him so Mum took him in. I didn't like him. He was only a little man. I only liked tall men - my uncles and my brothers were all tall. It wasn't long before Rene started to go with him and they got married about a year later.

Rene and Fred were married when I was 13 years old and I was in the wedding (a photo I would like to forget). They stayed home for a while then went to live in White Hills. I never got on very well with Fred. They had a baby girl about a year after they were married. I loved her and used to look after her a lot.

Two Japanese men came to live about a mile from our place. They asked Dad if they could lease the land to grow tomatoes. He let it to them and they became very good friends with the family, and were very good to Les and me.

It wasn't long before I woke up that if I could get them on my side I could get around Mum and Dad, so I would get them to say something was a good idea then it was easy to get Mum to agree. Some of the things I used to tell Mum were a bit stretched but I was careful not to over do it and for the first time in my life I seemed to be getting things to go my way a bit. I told Mum that the men said that I could get a job looking after children or doing housework as I was so good with my niece. It was nearly true. They did say that but I had asked them if they thought I could get a job. For some reason Mum and Dad seemed to believe anything if they thought these men said it. I think they had been in the bush too long. But as always, I had a price to pay.

The older one of the men asked if I would like to go to the football Saturday afternoon and to the pictures afterwards. I said I would like to go with him so he asked Dad if I could go. I think it was the first time that anyone had ever asked Dad's permission for anything and he said yes I could go.

That was fine but then the younger brother got the huff with me. He said that he was going to ask if I could go with him. He wouldn't talk to me after that. The older brother was many years older than me. I think that was why Dad thought it was a good idea for me to go out with him. It was the only way for me to get out but it was also the end of my hopes of meeting any boys and going to dances, so the next six years saw me going to football, tennis, and golf, just as a spectator. I was never asked if I would like to learn anything. I would have loved to try, but that was out. I just watched and listened to his friends talk and just said yes or no if I was asked anything. However I did meet a lot of nice girls. They were all older than me, but were always nice to me. That was something to be thankful for.

← 2 x Jap-  
men

I did get work looking after two children. Their Mum ran a coffee shop, and their Dad went out to work. They lived in rooms at the back of the shop. It was my job to be there by 7.00am to get the kids up, give them their breakfast, clean the rooms and keep the kids out of the way all day. When they had a sleep I would do their washing, bath them after tea, then I could go by 7.00pm. I had to ride the bike 8 miles to and from work. I got paid 7 shillings and sixpence and had my lunch – that was for 6 days a week.

Les was only 11 years old but he was working on the tomatoes in the summer, and in the forest in the winter. He was getting paid 10 shillings a week. He used to ride his bike to White Hills to meet me because it was dark by the time I got there and he knew that I was scared in the bush at night. He was a very special brother – he had been working all day. He used to laugh at me for being scared but he was always there for me!

Getting my bike was another story. I had to borrow 10 shillings off Dad and that took some doing because about two years before I had got two shillings from Dad to buy some wool and I was to cut some scrub for it but I never finished it because when I got the wool I started knitting and didn't have time to cut scrub. Dad didn't think that was a good enough excuse.

Anyway he lent me 10 shillings for the deposit on the bike. I had to give him two shillings and 6 pence a week, and the same to the bike shop. I was supposed to give Mum the same a week but she let me off until I had paid Dad his 10 shillings, as I was only getting 7 shillings 6 pence (75c) a week. We knew that Dad had some money. We had found a tin he had hidden in a hole in the bedroom wall. It had 8 pounds, 10 shillings in it when I last looked.

That was more money than I had ever seen. Of course Dad didn't know that we had found it. We didn't even think of taking any of it or of telling Mum about it. It did make us mad knowing that he would hide it from her – she never had anything for herself.

The bike was 10 pounds and with interest it took me a year to pay it off.

I didn't stay in that job very long but I did learn one good lesson- to think what I liked but to be careful what I said. I had got another job lined up just helping a lady with the house work, washing, ironing, and anything else that she needed help with. She was a very nice lady and I didn't start work until 8.00am and finished at 2.00pm, and was paid 10 shillings a week!

I did what I thought was the right thing and gave notice at the first job and on the last day I took the kids to see their Dad play football as I did every week. Their Dad had his shorts pulled off him in the game and I in all my righteous indignation said "that won't worry him, he isn't too fussy." I had said this to an older woman who I thought was my friend. She left the game before I did and when I got back with the kids she was there and had told the boss what I had said about her husband. I was ordered out there and then. What I said was true, he wasn't a very nice man, but it didn't matter that it was true. I learned to keep my thoughts to myself – I was 13 ½ at the time.

I never forgot that, and I saw and heard lots of things that I knew were wrong after that but I just did my job the best I could and kept my mouth shut.

I got on very well with everyone else that I worked for. The second job I had was for a very nice lady who had been in hospital and couldn't do much for sometime

after she came home. Her husband was a nice man too. I learned a lot from her. The first thing was to eat bacon. I would not eat any part of a pig. My Dad said that I was a Jew. I didn't know what he meant by that at the time.

The first morning when I got to work at 8.00am Mrs Sargeant was just getting breakfast. She had cooked bacon and eggs for me too. She said I needed something after riding the bike so far. I didn't like eggs much either but I was to scared to say that I didn't like it, so I ate it all up and found that I loved bacon.

Then came all the cleaning. I knew how to sweep and scrub board floors, but I didn't know how to use a **carpet sweeper** or to polish linoleum, and to **polish** brass door knobs and taps and the silver, and to do the **washing in wash troughs** and a copper that was in a stand in the laundry which you put a fire in. I had never seen things like that. They even had **taps** over the troughs and the copper - cold water of course.

I had to learn to sort the clothes and what had to be boiled and which ones had to be starched, then came the **ironing**. I had never seen a box iron and that was what I had to use. It was a big thing with a chimney on the top. You had to put coals in the box part and keep changing them to keep it hot. You had to be very careful not to get ash on the clothes, then how to iron at least seven white shirts a week, along with all the other things - starched tablecloths and pillow slips. The shirts had separate collars which had to be put into raw starch to make them very stiff. I didn't know how to do any of these things.

I often think about that dear lady. I don't think I was much help for her at first - more of a worry I think, but she never said so. She was so kind and showed me how to do everything. I owe a big debt of gratitude to her. I'll bet I never told her that though.

I remember her sister coming to stay whilst I was there. She had been to Lorne for holidays. I thought she must be very rich. She had a full length silver mink coat - that's what she told me it was. I put it on one day when they were out. I thought it was just what I would like to have one day. Of course I never did get one. I don't even like fur coats anyway, but I was a dreamer when I was young. She was a nursing sister and that made her special to me.

Once Mrs Sargeant didn't need my services anymore, I went to work at Noonans. I would get up at 6.30am, get the husband's breakfast, pack his lunch, milk the cow, feed the chooks, get in the fire wood, give the wife breakfast in bed, get the older kids off to school, attend to the younger ones and do what ever else needed doing.

The Mother would be up by this time and I would work with her, washing, ironing, cooking, and all the other jobs. No washing machine, vacuum or any other aides. No electricity in most homes.

Most homes were like that but it was OK. No one ever said that I was stupid or lazy and I was always welcome to go to visit when I left, and I did in most cases because I got to love the kids and it was good to see them. **I had had ten jobs by the time I was 16** because they were with Mums who had new babies or had been sick, and just needed help for a few months. I got 15 shillings a week and lived in. I was just like one of the family in most jobs.

Dawn was a girl about 10 when I worked for her Mum (Mrs Mitchell). She had been bitten by her cat and nearly lost her leg. I still see her sometimes and think

Equip taps



The Lawyer who fixed it all up was so touched by our story that he didn't charge anything for his work. If there was stamp duty, transfer fees or anything I don't know who paid for them. We didn't know anything about things like that. We didn't know anything about buying or selling and we could not read or write more than our names at that time.

Up to this point Mum and Dad didn't know what we were doing. I guess my friend must have had to guarantee the payments for us, if so he never said anything.

We did pay it off and I look with much pleasure and gratitude to whoever helped us in any way.

Now to tell Mum and Dad. Mum felt that it was a bit ungrateful to Mr Rasmussen. She didn't quite know how to tell him. Dad wasn't pleased at all. He couldn't see anything wrong with what they had. When you think about it, that was nothing. Mr Rasmussen owned it and he wanted his money. That was fair enough. After all he had been waiting for years for it!

Anyway, we told Dad that we were moving all our things and Mum was coming with us and he could come if he wanted to. He never gave us the satisfaction of saying he would, but when we got the last of the things loaded up he came along. He never complained once we got there, and Mum was very happy and that was all we wanted anyway.

The house wasn't anything to get excited about. It didn't have electricity or town water but it did have a good wood stove and an open fire place that you could use, not a bad garden, and a sort of fernery where Mum could have her pot plants. There was a tap from the dam. Just at the back of the house was a brick path. You just couldn't know how good that seemed after the old place, but best of all, just a five minute walk away, was a nice couple who also had a grown up family. Mum had known them when she was a girl. We hadn't known who lived there when we bought the house but we were very happy for Mum when we found out.

Mum was able to keep one cow and a few chooks. The baker used to call three times a week, and it was only about a 20 minute walk to a shop or to catch a bus to Bendigo. I will never forget my Mother's gratitude and the pleasure she got from so little.

We were both living in on our jobs by then. I was getting 15 shillings and my keep working on a bit of a farm for a family called Smith. I had to look after two school kids, do the house work, milk cows, separate the milk, feed the chooks, collect the eggs and wash and pack them. I didn't mind all that. Somehow it all seemed OK. The boss and his wife both went out to work. She could earn more than they were paying me and I could do my job better than she could anyway. That's not a modest thing to say but it was true, even my employer said it! All was going well until one day the boss let some chickens out in the yard and a hawk came and took three of them. The boss went off at me. He said if I had been looking after them it wouldn't have happened. That was just too much for me so I gave notice. He apologised later and asked me to stay. But no, I had my pride. That was about all I had and no-one was going to blame me for something that was not my fault, when it was his own stupidity. Any fool knew that you can't let chickens out when there are hawks about. It made me so mad. I knew how to look after the animals better than he did. I had been doing it all my life and he was just a dumb office worker. That is the way that I perceived office workers at that time.



1938  
Les had been working on the tomatoes ever since the Japanese men came to our place so when they left they said if he wanted to go on working for them at Fosterville. he could live at their place and they would pay him 1 pound a week. He was about 14 at the time so that is what he did. Les said he couldn't understand a word that the Mother said but she was a good cook, and the men were good to him. We each gave Mum a few shillings to help her with the housekeeping. By now the war had been going on for some time and a lot of the boys we knew from football had gone off to war and some had already been killed. I never felt very patriotic. I felt that the people who started the war should have to fight it, and I was scared my brother was getting nearer to having to go.

I remember when one boy, John Edwards who I liked a lot, joined the A.I.F. He came to where I was working to tell me. He was very proud of what he had done and he did look very handsome in his uniform but I wasn't about to let that change my mind about the war. I told him he was wrong to be going off to fight in a war that had nothing to do with him. He told me what he thought about it and how proud he was to be able to fight for his country.

I think I had the idea that if no-one would fight, there would be no war, and I took myself very seriously at that time.

So now was the time for me to stop helping with new babies or women who wanted to go out to work, and get myself a better job in one of the big houses in town. I was remembering Myrtle. She had lived in a big house, got well paid, and they used to give her a lot of things to bring home.

Fortunately for us, but as I was to find out in a hurry, that all the big homes and better class people were not like that. I got a job with no trouble. It was hard to get girls to do house work by then, with all the boys off at the war, girls were doing all sorts of jobs that they would never have done before, and lots of girls were in the Army too. By this time I would have joined too but they wouldn't take girls that couldn't read or write.

From Smith's I went to visit a lady about a job. If I had been a bit wiser in the ways of the world I would have woken up to her right away when she looked at my references which were very good, even from the job that I had just left because I was mad about the chickens. Anyway, she just looe d at them and said yes, but none of these people are of any importance!

The nerve of the woman. The worst of them were better than she was. However I didn't see that at the time. I had the job. The house was a big two storeyed brick one right in town. The kids went to a church school. All mod cons. of the day. I had a nice room. I was to get One Pound a week and my keep.

The first shock! I had to eat in the kitchen after I had taken their's into the dining room. The mistress would serve mine and ring a bell for me to go and get it, then she would ring the bell when I was to take away the dishes and take in the sweets, and again when they were ready for coffee.

The kids were the worst kids I had ever met. They would say "you are the maid. I don't have to do what you say." It put me off two storeyed houses, church schools and better class people.

I had to start work at 6.30am, get the boss off to work, take the mistress her breakfast in bed upstairs, then take up breakfast to the two school kids, get the

two little ones up and feed them, see the other two off to school, clean up the kitchen, make the beds, do the washing, house cleaning, help with the cooking and anything else she could think of. After tea I would bath the kids and get them to bed, and do the ironing. I never got finished before 10.30pm. I didn't mind the work but to be treated like dirt didn't go down well.

The Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbour during the six weeks I worked at Halls. My friend had been interned because he was born in Japan. He was two years old when he came to Australia. His brother who was ten years younger was in the A.I.F. in the Middle East.

I was 19 by now and I was not sure about God and his love as I had been as a kid, and I could see that the war was going on and Les was getting nearer 18 and that meant that he would have to go too. I wasn't very happy at all. In fact I wasn't sure about any thing. I didn't understand why they would have to put someone in a P.O.W. camp when he had been here all his life, and I didn't know what I was going to do. I had done whatever he told me too since I was 13 years old, now I would have to think for myself. It didn't take me long to get over that. I had never been allowed to mix with kids my own age. The only friends I had were his friends, all about 20 years older than me, nice people but not much fun for a kid. He said that he would marry me when I grew up. Somehow I didn't think I had any say in it. He seemed to own me. Les was still working for him too, but that was about to change as well. Les didn't like working for the old Japanese mother, so he got himself another job with better pay.

He had just taken what this man said as being right but now he was thinking for himself too. We started going out together and just enjoying life. We were still paying for the house and Les was living home. He was keeping Mum and Dad. Dad didn't work at all now. He grew vegetables so that helped a bit. I used to give Mum some money for clothes. You couldn't get much because they were rationed. We were so flat broke at times we would pool our money to pay one shilling (10c) to get me into the dance. Les would climb over the wall into the men's toilet then come into the hall, but we were having fun.

My indignation at the behaviour of the boss and their friends got the better of me. I knew enough by now not to say what I thought, so I made an excuse about wanting to go home. The mistress was most annoyed. She said that I wouldn't get as good a job in a home like that again with my limitations - a nobody.

After that experience I had had enough of life in private housework. I got a job in a hotel as a housemaid/ waitress. I got two pounds a week and my keep and a nice room of my own, and there were two other girls there. The cook was a bit older than I was, the waitress was the same age as me. We had a day and a half off every week. I used to do the cook's job on her days off. I didn't like that much but that was the job. I was the waitress on her days off too. We would start at 7.00am and finish at 7.00pm but we had three hours off in the afternoon. I hated drink in any shape or form (I still do), but kept my mouth shut about it and they were very strict about the staff drinking so it was easy if anyone asked you to have a drink you could just say the boss wouldn't allow us to drink. We were not allowed to go into the bar when it was open so we didn't often have anything to do with drink.

One old guy used to come into the kitchen sometimes when he had a bit too much to drink. There was a big bed of plants just outside the kitchen door and one day he was staggering in just as I was going out "not too carefully" I might say as I never liked drunks. He staggered back to get out of my way and fell head over, right into the garden (no sympathy from me). The yard man who had seen what happened waited for the old guy when he wasn't drunk and told him that the big girl in the kitchen (me) had picked him up and threw him into the garden. The poor bloke didn't know if it was true or not, and kept away from me after that.

I had never had it so good. The work was hard, the boss was a mean old loud mouth, his wife was mean and narrow minded, but that just made it more fun trying to put things over them. I think I was a rebellious person from way back, but I knew enough by now not to go far enough to get into trouble, but I did enjoy bucking authority.

The boss and his wife had two sons and a daughter. She was a bit older than me and she thought she was a lot better than us. One of the boys was a bit the same but the other one was the rebel of the family. He was good fun and had a nice girlfriend. We would all meet at the dances and the coffee shop after the dance or pictures and he would tell us anything his parents said about us or what we were doing, so we had an ally on the inside.

We would start work at 7.00am. The cook would go to the kitchen, the waitress would clean the stairs, a rotten job. They had a carpet runner down the middle and brown boards on each side. The carpet had to be swept with a carpet brush and the boards polished, all on the knees. At 7.30am she would go to the dining room to set up for breakfast at 8 o'clock. The rest of the day would be spent cleaning the dining room, polishing silver and helping the cook. I would start polishing the bar and two big rooms they called bar parlour and corridor, all brown linoleum. It all had to be done on hands and knees. At 7.30am I had to take a tray of tea and grapefruit upstairs to the boss and wife. They would come down for breakfast just before 9 o'clock.

I had to be finished my polishing by 9 o'clock, then we would have our breakfast. We would have 30 minutes for breakfast. I would go upstairs, make beds, clean and polish rooms and more corridors with carpet down the middle and boards at the sides. All rooms were linoleum with mats by the beds. I had to clean toilets and bathrooms and anything else the boss could think of. At 2 o'clock I went to the kitchen to wash dishes, pots and pans, and help the cook, have lunch on the run and finish up at 2.00pm. Back at 5 o'clock, cook and waitress, back to the kitchen. I would go upstairs, do ironing, white linen tablecloths and serviettes for the dining room and household ironing. Six o'clock back to the kitchen, more washing up, tea on the run and finish at 7.00pm if you didn't get some clown come in late for tea.

Like one night when I was waitress and a man came in drunk, slopped his tea on the tablecloth which meant I had to change the cloth and set up again before I could go, then he staggered back to ask me how he could get into the place later as he was staying the night. As I was not known for my patience with drunks, I snapped "through the door of course, how else would you get in, through the dam window?" The old pig reported me to the boss, but lucky for me, the boss believed me when I said that I knew better than to speak to a house guest like that. With my very best innocent look I said the man was drunk, he must have misunderstood what I said.