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## **"My dearest Mum": a biographical journey based on my mother's letters from Australia to England 1968-1985**

Helen Ritter  
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# ***"My Dearest Mum"***

*A biographical journey based on my mother's letters from  
Australia to England 1968-1985.*

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Submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy (Writing)  
December 16<sup>th</sup> 2005

## USE OF THESIS

The Use of Thesis statement is not included in this version of the thesis.

### **Abstract**

“My Dearest Mum” is a biographical journey inspired by my mother’s letters home, from Australia to England, to her mother from the beginning of 1968 to the beginning of 1985 when her mother dies. It interweaves extracts, background and reflections on the content and context of her life at the time with glimpses from my own life filtered through her story.

The intent is to create a biographical account of my mother’s life that gives some of the flavour of her nature, the social context of the day and my place within that context, built from her letters to her mother. In order to do this I have distilled from her letters the events and attitudes that influenced her life and explored her current reflections on the times and her perspectives at the time whilst including my own recollections and observations. My original interest was in the writing of a document that would preserve a piece of family history and therefore for a readership within the family. However as my reading has included the letters and stories of people both ordinary and extraordinary I have become aware of the interest of the broader community in social history and local events. Therefore I have considered this thesis as a journey of auto/biography with relevance to West Australian social history.

### **Declaration**

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Date:

16<sup>th</sup> October 2006

### **Acknowledgements**

The writing of this thesis has depended greatly on my mother’s willingness to entrust her letters to me and to put time and energy into answering my questions. I particularly appreciate her input at those times when recalling the past events caused her grief.

I acknowledge my father’s encouragement for writing my mother’s story.

I also acknowledge the input of my siblings, Leonora for the personal material provided in the form of information from her diaries as well as her expert reading and encouragement; Erica for her unconditional acceptance; Nicola for her positive feedback; Jemima for her honesty and Mark and David for their acceptance. I deeply appreciate them all letting me journey into their pasts as they feature in my mother’s story and I accept that my interpretation and perspective on events recounted may not match their own.

Finally thanks go to Julie Goyder whose enthusiasm for my writing has provided great motivation and whose guidance has proved invaluable.

## Contents

Abstract .....	v
Declaration .....	vii
Acknowledgements .....	ix
Contents .....	xi
<b>Exegesis .....</b>	<b>1</b>
The Letter .....	2
Letters as History .....	8
Life Writing .....	10
Storytelling .....	18
Background Context .....	23
Ethics .....	38
Process and Editing .....	41
Conclusion .....	44
References .....	45
<b>"My Dearest Mum" .....</b>	<b>49</b>
Prologue .....	49
1968 .....	53
1969 .....	91
1970 .....	129
1971 .....	139
1972 .....	155
1973 .....	167
1974 .....	185
1975 .....	197
1976 .....	207
1977 .....	217
1978 .....	225
1979 .....	235
1980 .....	245
1981 .....	261
1982 .....	277
1983 .....	287
1984 .....	305
1985 .....	321
Epilogue .....	324
References .....	326



## *"My Dearest Mum"*

### Exegesis

The box was battered by its travels, covered in brown paper which itself was swathed in bright green 1d stamps in whole sheets, all portraying the severe countenance of the Queen. It had already been opened. Inside lay semi-organised bundles of predominantly blue envelopes and aerogrammes, some intact, some with the stamps casually snipped out of the envelopes. Each envelope carried the same address in the same neat hand: "Mrs P. Finch, 17 The Avenue, Huyton. Nr. Liverpool, U.K." and below a date written in an older hand. Bundles were held together with old, cracking lacky bands, green wool or an assortment of ribbons and old twine. (Ritter, 2002)

When I first began reading my mother's letters home I already had a connection. This was, after all, my mother. I had shared parts of her journey. Her family were my family, her home my home. I began reading to find myself as a young person in her story. But I was not there. I barely rated a mention. What was my life had become a gap, an empty space in my reading of this story. But as I read to fill the gap I became connected to other aspects of the story of this woman's life. I was drawn to the space in which my mother was living her mid-life. It was a space defined by the time – a mid-life begun in the revolutionary sixties, building up to the women's liberation movement, political correctness and affirmative action. It was a space defined by her beliefs – honed and constrained by the rules of middle-class English society. It was a space defined by the geography – the fish bowl of Western Australian society set in the most isolated capital city in the world. It was a space defined by politics – in a State, in a country where conservative governments had long been in power and local government was often about power as much as glory. It was a space defined by weather – the heat and storms. It was a space defined by the absence of my mother's family and the isolation of real distance when letters were still the pre-eminent form of communication.

My mother's letters tell a unique story in weekly or fortnightly installments over a period of nearly twenty years – a story told in the here and now, where no one knows what happens in the end. They would stand alone as a text and the gaps would remain absences. But I now know what happened in the end. My parents are now in the twilight of their years and my mother's attitudes and perspectives have changed a great deal over the last forty years. The letters, therefore, presented me with an exceptional opportunity: to write her story, as distilled from her letters home to her mother; to fit that story into the social contexts of the time in which it was lived; to set her story into the geographical and political space in which it was played out; to follow up with her the beliefs and perspectives dearly held back then, and track her growth and change from mid-life into old age.

Of course eventually I find some of myself in my mother’s story, some of myself in my recollection of my story as it parallels hers and some of myself in an understanding of the personal and societal beliefs that shaped my early life. So, in this thesis, biography becomes entwined with autobiography, letter with memoir. Many other lives were also shaped by the time and the beliefs, the geography and politics, the process of migration and separation and isolation that influenced my mother. I expect that others will find connections with the time, the space, the history, the process of memory and recall and the journey of growth and change that this thesis reveals.

The end result is a story, intended to be an interesting and readerly text that draws together threads of life-writing, epistolarity, storytelling and cultural and historical contexts. The journey to this objective has involved research and reading on a number of levels. The academics of life writing were a preeminent consideration – the contemporary literary view of biography, autobiography and, in particular, women’s narratives. I became interested in the structure and nature of the letter as literature and as historical document and the role of epistolarity in literature and life-writing.

How had other editors of collections of letters done justice to the task? For me the psychology of life writing was important, as was a consideration of the ethics and the risks of embarking on such a journey with a loved one. The role of storytelling and its links with memory and human connectedness engaged me, triggering an increasing interest in the family background and socio-cultural contexts from which my mother’s life grew. This, inevitably, drew in the geographical and political milieu in which her life was lived as well as an awareness of her letters as historical documents.

## **The Letter**

My mother’s letters home were the pivotal resource in constructing her mid-life story. She had a fluid and readable style and, mostly, legible handwriting. She wrote to her mother once or twice a fortnight for nearly twenty years, from the time we left Nottingham on 27<sup>th</sup> May 1965 to the time of my Grandmother’s death at the age of 92 on March 28<sup>th</sup> 1985. There was an enormous amount of information within those letters, both trivial, such as the weather, and cataclysmic; for example, world events and family crises.

With letters as the source and structural frame for the biography of my mother I became engaged in the study of epistolarity. In literary terms the letter was recognised two centuries ago as a form of literature, often best associated with, and perpetuated by, women. Janet Altman’s 1982 text, *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form* (Altman, 1982), undertakes a detailed review of what makes a letter a unique form of narrative. Her text focuses mainly on epistolary

fiction, but in her analysis of this she tackles the structure and form of the letter outside fiction in order to analyse and interpret its structure within the fictional texts of her interest. This analysis is useful as a basis for studying real letters as stories and challenging the ways in which they validate or violate our expectations, the ways in which they limit or enhance the storytelling, the ways in which they shift or intensify focus.

Altman identifies three characteristics of epistolary discourse. The first is the particularity of the I-You within the letter. She identifies the uniqueness of a written discourse where the ‘you’ is a unitary and specific identity who has an implied expectation to write back, thereby reversing the I-You of the initial text. Secondly she focuses on the present tense that is pivotal to the past/future content so prevalent in the “now-ness” of the letter. Finally she identifies the “temporal polyvalence” of epistolary narrative. That is, within the process of letter writing there are many “nows”. There is the time of the event described, the time of its reporting, the time of its sending and the time of its receiving, reading and perhaps re-reading. Within the printing of old letters there is another set of “nows”: the time of editing, the time of printing, the times of reading of the edited and printed text.

In expanding on the first of these characteristics, Altman looks more closely at the I-You relationship. In so doing she emphasises the purpose of writing a letter; that is to have it read by a nominated other. This means that the letter’s tone, content and meaning are specific to a single recipient. It assumes a shared knowledge, memories, background and common experiences that may have taken place between letters. The writing may seem coded by the shared beliefs and experience of the writer and recipient, making an outside reading obtuse or open to misinterpretation; “Epistolary discourse is thus a coded language, where code is determined by the specific relationship of the I-You” (Altman, 1982, p.120). Letters create a record, albeit broken, of events and feelings specific to the relationship between the correspondents. My mother’s letters are true to this perception. The information she shared with her mother was interwoven, sometimes with just a few sentences on a topic; other times with a whole letter devoted to one issue. Stories were in episodes, sometimes unfinished. My mother did not keep copies of her letters home so she was sometimes repetitive and sometimes forgetful of what needed to be finished. Often she was replying to news or questions from her mother. I do not have my Grandmother’s letters until late in the correspondence, from 1979, so for the first 13 years I can only guess at those questions and speculate on the other half of the stories from the UK. Sometimes I have guessed about my mother’s side of events when she does not fill in the details or has assumed a knowledge that may have been common at the time of writing but is now forgotten.

Altman’s other significant observation about the nature of epistolarity refers to the polarities it

exposes. Beginning with the obvious reader/writer polarity she expands across multiple levels; letter as bridge/barrier, distance-maker and distance-breaker, portrait and mask, here/there and then/now, continuity and discontinuity, closure/overture. It is these polarities, in particular the portrait and mask, that intersperse through, and ultimately define, the meaning of the letters in the text. My mother's letters show many examples of these polarities and as I explore and edit the themes of the correspondence it is easy to see the bridge letter writing provides across the here/there divide. It is less obvious but just as critical to read between the lines the barrier that communication only by letter creates to intimacy, the ease with which it allows a mask to be applied in times of stress and distress.

Many authors have recognised the portrait/mask polarity as a drawback in using the letter as a representation of a life, even before the reproduction of the letter as later literature. The reversal of the I/You in the context of the portrait/mask complicates the interpretation of the letter. Julie Hayes in her essay on the correspondence of the Marquis du Sade, quotes Roger Duchenne; "A true letter (is) . . . the spontaneous direct expression of lived reality written for the benefit of a privileged other" (Hayes, 1989, p.204). Rebecca Earle, in her text on the role of letters in historical terms comments: "Personal letters, particularly those written with no apparent thought to publication, have often been read as windows into the soul of the author" (Earle, 1999, p.5). But these perceptions disregard the choices the writers make about self-portraiture.

Primarily the decision the writer makes about how they will represent themselves to the reader will determine the tone, style and content of the text. The reader of the text then takes control. Hayes observes that the Marquis De Sade, his wife and her companion freely interchanged letters. Within that correspondence Hayes observes "It is they (the writers) who take into consideration problems regarding their reader(s); it is they who become sensitised to the danger posed by readers' inferences and aberrant interpretations" (Hayes, 1989, p.204). Linda Kauffman observes, in her study of romantic correspondence, that "the heroine is defined by the lover she addresses, that bond structures the meaning in ways that would not be applicable if the heroine were merely writing a diary, a memoir, or journal" (Kauffman, 1986, p.35). She goes on to reflect that the imagined response of the reader influences the way the correspondent writes and the real response of the reader influences the way the correspondent is perceived.

The letter may be less than spontaneous as the potential to second-guess its reception tempers the writing. Once the letter leaves the hand of the original author, that author relinquishes control over its meaning to the reader. Cousineau comments: "the subject of inquiry in regards to the letter should not be its truth value or contents but its effect . . . the effect of any letter is subject to interpretation, which underlines that all identities, events and destinations are matters for and subject to exchange" (Cousineau, 1997, p.31). This aspect of interpretation becomes

significant later when the ethical considerations of making public that which was intended as private opens the letters to reading by those portrayed in the letters. Their reading and interpretation of writing about them at a long distant time and with the perspective of hindsight may be quite different to the intent and perception of the writer at the time.

Spender and Clarke, in *Lifelines*, also comment on the dualities of writing, the balance between self-exploration and affirmation and the accurate sharing of news, events and feelings to adequately describe a life. ‘There was much too, in the style of writing that lent itself to the minimisation of the bad and the maximisation of the good news’ (Clarke & Spender, 1992, p. xxvi). ‘Cries of wretchedness, weariness and loneliness . . . are more often found in the diaries — the communication with self rather than with others’ (1992, p. xxvii). Their exploration of the roles of diary and letter for the pioneer women they researched recognised the importance of both “as a means of self-realisation” of “consciously constructing an identity, for presenting a particular profile, for externalising the self and looking on one’s own identity as an observer” (1992, p. xxviii). The reading of my mother’s letters and her reflecting back on them supports this duality. The maximisation of the good to her mother tempered the reflective recognition of “wretchedness, weariness and loneliness” that went unmentioned in the contemporary epistolary narrative of her life. There was an inevitable selection of material that my mother had felt was worthy or appropriate to send home to her mother.

Linda Pollock, in her study of the history of child-rearing practices, used diaries and journals, yet rejected letters as sources of information because of her belief that the intended audience of the letters would create censorship in the writer (Pollock, 1983). My mother reports that she was more open in her descriptions of troublesome events when writing to her younger brother. Unfortunately he did not keep her letters. This admission makes clear that the letters I have used are an incomplete record although not necessarily inaccurate.

What is important in my text is knowing that some of the “truths” are partial and that as the time passes both the writer and reader of the letters change and the mother my mother writes to in 1968, a fit, active, recently widowed, independent woman of 76, is not the same recipient as the partly blind, dependent, disabled and somewhat embittered 90 year old of 1982. The issues of partial truths, censorship and selection of material within the letters is addressed at appropriate times within the main text in consultation with my mother.

In this context the letters act as a basis or trigger of memory. Roger Chartier, in his study of the cultural practice of letter writing and the manuals that taught the art thereof, acknowledges both the pool of memory letters provide and the constraints letter-writing involves.

Over the long run, family correspondences create a sediment, a basis for memory. At the time they form a network that places the particular existence of each individual and his or her closest relations within the solidarities of a 'kinship front'. The exchanges of letters criss-crossing between family members is a prime means of safeguarding links that distance places in jeopardy . . . . Family letters, sometimes the work of several hands and even more often read aloud by several people, often passed on or copied out, were not the place for intimate outpourings. They demanded restraint and a strict self-censorship that could only be lifted when the person writing could count on the discretion of his or her addressee. (Chartier, 1997, p.19)

He goes on: "family correspondence did not suffocate the temptation towards intimacy: it bound it into its own forms and obligations" (Chartier, 1997, p.20). The "temptation towards intimacy" is indulged by my mother selectively, she at times freely shares issues of health including information about menstruation and contraception but marital relationship problems and issues of financial hardship are shared only at times of extreme emotional duress and then only partially. Olga Kenyon, editor of *800 Years of Women's Letters* observes: "Letters have one considerable advantage over conversation in that they are written with time for reflection, allowing choice of apt wording" (Kenyon & Randall, 1997, p.x).

P.D. James provides the foreword to Kenyon's book and is enthusiastic about letters as literature:

No literary form is more revealing, more spontaneous or more individual than a letter. Long before women were writing novels they were expressing their emotions, aspirations, hopes and fears in epistolary form, and those letters from past centuries which have survived can give us a more vivid and realistic portrait of the age in which they were written . . . .It is through letters that women, parted from family and friends by catastrophes such as war, civil strife or rebellion, or by marriage and travel, kept each other informed of those details of everyday life, those small and large satisfactions, those trials and calamities on which the interest and happiness of daily living so much depends, as well as of the great rites of passage: death, birth and marriage. (Kenyon, 1992, p.vii)

In her own autobiographical work, *Time to be in Earnest*, she comments further on the problematic nature of the letter as reflection and record of a time:

And prolific letter-writers, if they achieve fame or notoriety, leave treacherous hostages to fortune. A letter is paradoxically the most revealing and the most deceptive of confessional revelations. We all have our inconsistencies, prejudices, irrationalities which, although strongly felt at the time, may be transitory. A letter captures the mood of the moment. The transitory becomes immutably fixed, part of the evidence for the prosecution or the defence. And we adapt our style to our correspondent. (James, 2000, p.174)

The capture of the transitory is, of course, what makes the letter such a valuable historical and sociological document. Vera Brittain writes of her decision to write a memoir from the letters she had kept during the First World War:

Just as I had kept their letters, so they had kept mine, and after their deaths this correspondence had been officially returned to the sender. For years these letters had remained undisturbed because I could bear neither to re-read nor to destroy them. When I mentioned them to my mother, she remarked casually that she had kept all my war letters to her.

If, now, I could bring myself to use these letters, my new type of autobiography would become newer still. The usual retrospective view would be combined with contemporary impressions and thus create the effect of a double dimension. (Brittain, 1980, p.78)

The beliefs and attitudes shared in a letter may be those long and lastingly held but they may also be viewpoints or mindsets in passing. Either way they flag a step on the cognitive and emotional life journey of the writer. Cousineau comments; "The very time lapse that is built into epistolary exchange underlines the fact that she or he who writes is not necessarily the same as she or he whose words are read" (Cousineau, 1997, p.29). This is magnified many fold when the letters are re-read decades later. Wolff (1992, p.73) reflects that the breaking down of time is fundamental to the nature of the letter, bringing the time of writing and the time of reading together. Likewise it breaks down geographical space; it is produced in one place and consumed in a place far removed, an act repeated each time the letter is read. Yet, although the time and place of writing are fixed, the time and place of reception and reading are not, the connections between the letter sent and the letter read are multiple and the impact of these multiple connections will vary, even with the same author/reader. In so doing they map a path of changing personal ideology and social construct.

The collected letter as literary form engages at many levels, the intimate, the interpersonal, the artistic, the political, the historical, even the psychological, often all at once. Mary Favret, in her prolonged metaphor of the mail coach and the epistolary novel writes; "the mail coach and the epistolary novel, allow us to imagine correspondence as both content and vehicle, neither entirely under control but both capable of reaching some, perhaps uncharted, destination" (Favret, 1993, p.17). Kathryn Crecelius concurs:

A published correspondence, then, gives the reader an opportunity neither the author nor her individual correspondent had — that of reading a letter in context, as well as the chance to survey the correspondence with one person over a period of years. In both cases, a new text is born, assembled by the critic rather than the author which can nonetheless be considered a valid exposition of the author's thought. (Crecelius, 1989, p.259)

This new text, reaching its uncharted destination, is the story of a life as presented to a significant other in a time frame full of gaps and deferrals. It is a story both masked and unveiled, intimate and distant, exclusive and embracing, frozen in time and finished only by the later knowledge of the editor or time-traveled distant reader.

Epistolary collections echo the characteristics Altman identified. Other times insinuate into the "temporal polyvalence" of the letter; the times of reading, re-reading, editing, and in a number of texts, re-editing. Each of these times allows a shift in perspective, a movement away from the emotions and events of the original form, a gentle push backwards from contemporary to historical.

A new "present tense" appears as text and perception move from present to past. As I edit and write to my mother's letters I struggle with the choice of tense and in the end I allow the shift as it embodies the reality of writing the past from documents written in their own present, the constant mental movement from the "now" of the letter to the "now" of the story based on the letters mediated by the looking back of my mother's reflections such that the "now" of the letter transforms into a "then".

There are also other "I-You" connections, from the collection to the editor, the editor to the publisher and to the reader. The editor of collections of letters also modifies the I/You inherent in the original writings, Wolff identifies:

The distinction of the epistolary 'you' is its exclusion of all of us by the singling out of the designated reader. Yet, paradoxically, though its narrative form emphatically excludes us, the letter also allows us the most immediate observation of the balance between the two narrative persons, for the narrator who ignores us can not authorially mediate our reading of the text . . . 'You' and 'I' – locked into their own relationship – offer the nondesignated reader a narratively unmediated field for observing and analyzing the microphysics of power. (Wolff, 1992, p. 77)

This narratively unmediated field is, however, not available to the reader of an edited text, rather they are at the mercy of, or focused by, the interests and purpose of the editor.

### **Letters as History**

As I read and transcribed my mother's letters I was taken by the pieces of history that were either included or alluded to, both those on a world stage and those of a social nature. I have mentioned earlier Linda Pollock's exclusion of letters as historical source but others have been more embracing. Rebecca Earle, in editing *Epistolary Selves: letters and letter-writers, 1600-1945* comments:

It has become a commonplace to assert that letters in themselves have been neglected by literary scholars and historians. That so many scholars decry the marginalisation of the letter indicates, I think, that the letter is now recognised as occupying a respectable position in the study of the past. (Earle, 1999, p.10)

In the same book, Susan Whyman's study of an archive of family letters says:



Literary scholars have long used epistolary collections and criticism to describe the eighteenth-century intellectual world. Now historians can use letters to create cultural studies that embrace social and political themes. Far from being a marginal genre, letters can show continuities and change that usually lie hidden from view. (Whyman, 1999, p.25)

Collectors of letters also comment on their use as historical documentation. Jennifer Campbell edited *The Australian* newspaper's collection of letters by 'ordinary' Australians marking the Centenary of Federation. The original magazine was so well received by the readers that they were printed as a book, *Letters from our Heart*. Campbell describes the result:

What we had was not an arbitrary collection of private correspondence, but a living, breathing narrative of Australian social history. This was not the impersonal voice of the history books, but a verbatim account of what life in Australia used to be like. (Campbell, 2002, p.v)

Olga Kenyon believes that women's letters "give us a new type of history. The lost voices of the past are restored" (Kenyon, 1992, p.xviii). She encourages the reader of the letters to read for "historical meanings", for their "differences from the present, both historical and sexual....Such a process should help toward our understanding of the past and of gender formations" (Kenyon, 1992, p.xxi). She goes on to reflect on the use of a New Historicist approach in reading women's letters:

New Historicism . . . stresses that the artist functions within many processes, representing society to itself. The literary and non-literary cannot be divided – as we notice in these letters. This new school of criticism asks us to grasp the social presence of the text in the world more sensitively, as Black feminist literary critics do also. They both point out that history is not purely descriptive, nor static; historical documents can be considered for their discourses, symbolism, etc., like literature. New Historicists maintain that 'Literature is a primary document' and I maintain that these letters form a vital primary source, certainly for historical and women's studies. The relationship between literature and history is notoriously problematic, so a study of the synchronic text, as part of a whole culture, it to be welcomed. (Kenyon, 1992, p.xxii)

The move away from the privileging of traditionally male histories of major events and policies that women's studies and feminist revision of history has produced has created a space for the study of the "everyday" to find its place in history such that David Gerber in studying American immigrants' letters remarks:

Most historians today accept daily life and ordinary people as at or very near the centre of historical investigation. We find uses in our efforts to study family, friendship, love, travel, popular religion, or consumer habits and aspirations for the detail that in the past was dismissed as trivial. (Gerber, 1999, p.48)

My mother's letters contain much that is trivial. The constraints of space limit my representation of trivia in the text but I have endeavoured to include a balance of the trivial with the

momentous. When my mother has mentioned events of a more traditional historical import I have filled in some of the background to her comments, finding the BBC News website an invaluable tool.

Writers of biography welcome the relevance to journey and context that letters provide. Philip Horne, editor of *Henry James, A Life in Letters*, says, “If biography is literally life-writing, then whose writing better than the ones who lived the life in question?” (Horne, 1999, p.xiii). I have looked at other compilers of collections of letters and their varied reasons for using letters as a storytelling device (Grenfell, 1988; Hough, 1975; Marx Allen, 1992; Marx, 1967; Naipaul, 1999; Plath, 1975; Rouart, 1987; Stead, 1977; Yeazell, 1981), particularly in letters from one generation to another. The editors of these texts used the letters themselves as the chronological means of telling the story of famous people, revealing their ordinary humanity.

### **Life Writing**

The genre of life writing has a long tradition generating in its wake a wide and at times complex literary critique. Over the last two decades of the twentieth century feminist readings and postmodern, post-structural and postcolonial analyses have increased the inclusivity of the genre broadening the scope of both writing and criticism.

My thesis contains aspects of autobiography, biography, memoir and personal narrative. The recent shifts in critical interpretation of life-writing have increasingly allowed, and observed, the blurring of the boundaries between the sub-categories, recognising that the writer of the life cannot be totally disengaged from the subject. Susan Groag Bell and Marilyn Yalom in their introduction to *Revealing Lives* see both autobiography and biography as “fundamentally hybrid creatures of historicity and textuality” (Bell & Yalom, 1990, p.2). They observe that biography is “commonly coloured by the world of the biographer”, quoting Blanche Wiesen Cook: “For biographers...all choices are autobiographical” (Bell & Yalom, 1990, p.3). By contrast Anna Kuhn in the same collection poses that:

A biographer’s choice of subject matter and his or her attitude toward the material chosen reveals as much about the biographer as s/he seeks to reveal about the subject. Thus instead of classifying autobiography as a subcategory of biography, one could argue for an inversion of these categories and call for a reading of biography as a subcategory of autobiography. (Kuhn, 1990, p.13)

With these thoughts in mind I have explored the current theoretical perspectives with a broad brush. My thesis carries aspects of both biography, by me of my mother, and autobiography, of my mother as author of her letters and reflections and of myself as teller and participant in her story.

Historically, the academic study of autobiography, a term coined by poet Robert Southey in 1809, was initially based in the literary telling of the stories of great men. From St Augustine in the 5<sup>th</sup> century to the central works of the 20<sup>th</sup> century critics studied the genre as a way of telling ‘universal truths’, of demonstrating the paths of excellence and the roads to success within the dominant hegemony of the white male in a white male world. Over the later part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the growth of minority voices through feminist and post-colonial writings challenged this traditional view and threw new ideas into the mix. The inclusion of diary, memoir and epistolary writings as truly autobiographical, the finding of the voices of the illiterate, and the move to publish them, created a major shift in the perceptions of autobiography and the broader role of life-writing in the literary canon. The distinction between fact and fiction has become increasingly blurred and challenges to the veracity of memory and the variation in the truth according to point of view have complicated a simplistic analysis of autobiography as the story of a life written by the liver of that life.

This complexity has both enlivened debate about the authenticity of life-writing and autobiography as well as enriched the depth of the genre with variations in not only the style and presentation of the life stories but also the range of individuals whose stories have been deemed worthy of publication. No longer is publication restricted to the “worthy” or exceptional citizen or writer but rather the move has been to encourage the writing of the lives of “ordinary people” and therein finding the extraordinary in those lives. Vera Brittain publishing her first autobiography in 1933 (Brittain, 1981) and commenting on the process in 1957 (Brittain, 1980) was pre-emptive in recognising the value of a different type of life-writing:

With scientific precision, I studied the memoirs of Blunden, Sassoon, and Graves. Surely, I thought, my story is as interesting as theirs? Besides, I see things other than they have seen, and some of the things they perceive I see differently.

Then, suddenly, illumination came. I too must record my memories as an autobiography; nothing else is stark enough, nothing else so direct. I’ll write an autobiographical study of the years that I remember, and try to assess their significance.

The kind of memoir that could only be written by a Prime Minister or an Ambassador was ceasing, I believed, to be so popular. A new type of autobiography was coming into fashion, and I might, perhaps, speed its development. I meant to make my story as truthful as history but as readable as fiction, and in it I intended to speak, not for those in high places, but for my own generation of obscure young women. (Brittain, 1980, p.77)

Estelle Jelinek (1980) was one of the first female writers to specifically tackle the limitations of the previously male-dominated genre of autobiography in her collection of essays, *Women’s Autobiography: Essays in Criticism*. She looked at different ways in which men and women storied their lives and found meaning, and the consequence of this on narrative structure. Her later writing in 1986 developed this area but was critiqued by following authors for her focus on

white Euro-American writings (Smith & Watson, 1998, p.9). Domna Stanton challenged the terminology of autobiography in 1984 suggesting the term autogynography would be a better one for feminist writers to distance their process from the traditions of male auto/biography. Sidonie Smith made her first published venture into the field in 1987 with her book *The Poetics of Women's Autobiography* (Smith, 1987) which also focussed on the need for women to tell their stories differently. Shari Benstock collected a number of essays on women's autobiography together in 1988 in *The Private Self: theory and practice of women's autobiographical writings* (Benstock, 1988). She explored the themes of women's autobiography by, in her words:

Examining the reigning attitudes toward autobiography in theories and practices that often do not take women into account as writers of "autobiography," or that do so in terms that leave out of the account the most crucial features of "womanhood": how woman is situated under patriarchy; how metaphors of self and writing write her out of the account. (Benstock, 1988, p.7)

In the same year Carolyn Heilbrun published *Writing a Woman's Life* for a more general readership. This became a best seller with its recognition of the controlling narratives that had subjugated women in the past, and encouraged empowerment of women by taking their place in "whatever discourse is essential to action and the right to have one's part matter" (Heilbrun, 1988, p.18). Heilbrun's text was significant because it focused on lives, not texts, and called the attention of a wider audience to the subject.

The controlling narrative of my father's employment, political conflicts and financial difficulties subjugated my mother's life. It is clear in reading her letters that she acts repeatedly within the constraints of the patriarchy to have her part matter by her involvement in voluntary committees for social change. Nancy Miller in *Getting Personal: feminist occasions and other autobiographical acts* looked closely at "the plot of becoming" with a focus on who is the speaker in autobiography (Miller, 1991, p.133). My mother's letters and contemporary reflections on them provide an example of this "plot of becoming" providing a dual voice and therefore a doubling of the subjectivity and authorship of her life journey.

Critical collections edited by Julia Swindells (Swindells, 1995), Linda Coleman (Coleman, 1997), Tessa Broughton and Linda Anderson (Broughton & Anderson, 1997) elaborate on the movement of women's autobiography from the margins of academia and historical credibility to become a "privileged site for thinking about issues of writing at the intersection of feminist, post-colonial, and post modern critical theories" (Smith & Watson, 1998, p.5). Over the last two decades feminist writers and critics have used the genre to "write themselves into history" and make "visible formerly invisible subjects". The genre of life-writing has filled "a demand for texts that speak to diverse experiences and issues" such that "women reading other women's

autobiographical writings have experienced them as "mirrors" of their own unvoiced aspirations" (Smith & Watson, 1998, p.5). I have been asked by several people why I am writing my mother's life when my father's would have been "so much more interesting". The opinion on level of interest is problematic; is his "more interesting" only because it was more visible? Because it was male? Because it centred on the political and the worldly? Conversely is my mother's life interesting predominantly because of the turmoil imposed by my father's professional struggles? Marilyn Yalom observes that:

It is characteristic of women to write their stories through the stories of others . . . it is not unreasonable to assume that women's sense of self – for better or for worse – is intimately entwined with their relationships to others, and it is not surprising that their autobiographical texts, reflecting more fluid ego boundaries than found in men, are more relational in character. (Yalom, 1990, p.63)

My mother's sense of self was certainly enmeshed in that of her husband and children as well as her family and place of origin. A number of students of the genre have explored the areas of subjectivity and authorship, writings by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (1998, p.14), Julie Sturrock, Carolyn Steedman and Laura Marcus focus on the developing feminist criticism of autobiography as well as the genre per se (Marcus, 1994; Smith, 1993; Smith & Watson, 1998; Steedman, 1993; Sturrock, 1993). As a result there was a re-labeling of the formally marginalised genres of memoir, journal, diary and letters, the modes of private autobiographical writing as a traditional form of life-writing; a consequence that Smith and Watson deem to have "cracked literary history wide open" (Smith & Watson, 1998, p.6). The use of women's letters as auto/biographical material provides a window into the private and the everyday. So the acceptance of the letter as historical document is paralleled by female historians redirecting the study of history from the large-scale political events to the social history of everyday subjects and practices (Smith & Watson, 1998, p.6). Feminist interest in life-writing facilitated the claim that women's autobiography was a field of cultural study.

Alison Donnell comments:

The explosion of criticism surrounding autobiography, and particularly women's autobiography, over the last twenty years, has demonstrated that as a genre autobiography can be likened to a restless and unmade bed; a site on which discursive, intellectual and political practices can be remade; a ruffled surface on which the traces of previous occupants can be uncovered or smoothed over; a place for secrets to be whispered and to be buried; a place for fun, desire and deep worry to be expressed. (Donnell, 1999, p.124)

Sidonie Smith explores the debate about how narrowly or broadly to construct the field of autobiographical texts (Smith & Watson, 1998, p.11); whether women's personal narratives, as in letters, diaries and journals, should be included in the canon of women's writing. The

Personal Narratives Group’s *Interpreting Women’s Lives: Feminist Theory and Personal Narratives* (Personal Narratives Group, 1989), quoted in Smith and Watson, argue strongly that narrative forms of all types contributed to an understanding of gendered identity. Further development of the academic study in the area demanded even more; that is, a focus on women’s textuality and the history of women’s cultural production as part of the study of their life-writing. There was increasing resistance to the feminist essentialism of earlier works and Smith and Watson quote Brodzki and Schenk’s argument “for a kind of theorizing that allows the female reader the ‘emotional satisfaction’ of a referential world of women’s lives” (1998, p.13). The end point of the theorising is seen as “emotional satisfaction”. Smith and Watson note the role of Cultural Studies towards the end of the eighties in signaling a move away from privileging “high” literary forms and toward reading all kinds of cultural production as textual. With this has come a focus on the writing of the “dailiness” of life and the role of inscriptions of such in constructing narrative and experience (1998, p.32). The state of the theoretical arguments validates auto/biography that tells of the everyday and privileges emotional satisfaction as contributing both to historical documentation and as cultural study.

The field has continued to engage interest into the twenty-first century with further collections from Donnell and Polkey (2000) and Cosslet, Lury and Summerfield (2000). The central questions addressed include whether autobiography is a genre, if so of what it consists, and whether it is the product of an internal urge or of external forms and pressures. The contributors chart a movement from autobiography as genre to autobiography as cultural practice, and from the analysis of autobiographical texts to a preoccupation with autobiography as method.

Another recent text is Laura Anderson’s comprehensive coverage of the subject in *Autobiography* (2001) in which she covers the history of the discourse and explores the impact of Derrida’s theories, post-structuralist criticism and the impact of feminism and post-colonial theory on the genre.

Australian author and academic, Jill Ker Conway (1998; 1999), examines the scope, purpose and history of the genre both with respect to her own writing and with readership rather than theory in mind.

These theoretical issues are important, but they beg the question of why readers like to read auto/biography, and why individuals are moved to write their life stories . . . . The answer to the question of why we like to read it, and why individuals sit down at desk or table and begin to tell their story, lies not in theory but in cultural history. It has to do with where we look when we try to understand our own lives, how we read texts and what largely unexamined cultural assumptions we bring to interpreting them. (Conway, 1998, p.4)

Bell and Yalom concur:

In an age of daunting machines and awesome bureaucracies, when family, work and community patterns are undergoing dizzying transformations, it is reassuring to look into a human face. Portraits and self-portraits in art and literature; life stories told by their protagonists or recorded by more distant chroniclers; even life-writing with plural subjects or a strong sense of group identity effect an affirmation of individual worth. As readers entering into the experiential world of another consciousness, we move once more within the human dimension where it is still possible to believe in the meaning of a personal identity. The impersonality, fragmentation, and alienation of the postmodern world seem less overwhelming as we follow the vicissitudes of a real person – a brother or sister creature from whom we grasp vicarious validation of our own lives. (Bell & Yalom, 1990, p.1)

Though the literary theory is fascinating and informative it risks acting as a barrier to the enjoyment and instruction inherent in life-writing as indicated by Conway, Bell and Yalom. Theorising potentially distances the academically naïve reader from the journey that is intended to connect them to the story and its participants. The work of the feminist theorists is important in validating the stories of everyday subjects and practices, of ‘dailiness’. It also gives account of the value of life writing in validating personal journeys and exploring the psyche of the traveller.

Indeed, life-writing has been acknowledged as a tool used by students of the human psyche. The discovery that the examination of a life story provides a source of psychological analysis and that the telling of a life story is both healing and integrating to the human mind has contributed to the behavioural sciences. Gary Kenyon and William Randall (1997) came from the therapeutic disciplines to explore the concept that a life story can be reviewed, revisited and revised to create a higher level of psychological integration and well-being in their text *Restorying our Lives*. This provides a useful framework for my own exploration of lifestory as background to my search for my mother’s story.

Kenyon comes from a background of philosophy and gerontology. He has focused his work on the metaphors of aging and the biography of aging. Randall is an adult educator, former parish minister and English instructor. Their motivation for writing about storying and restorying is a therapeutic one. They describe their writing as about perspectives of problem-solving being human from an interdisciplinary process, it is experimental, exploring the hypothesis that:

Giving someone the space and encouragement to lay out their life story, then to stand back and assess both its content and its form *as a story*, affords them an affectionate distance on the shape of their life as they have composed it hitherto, with its many “chapters”, “characters”, and “themes”, and the several twists and turns in its plot. It thus affords them a peculiarly liberating self-acceptance. (Kenyon & Randall, 1997, p.viii)

They have written with the facilitation of personal growth in mind, hoping to offer a tool of healing in the theory of restorying. Whilst mindful of the genre and narrative devices of

autobiography and storytelling Kenyon and Randall's approach is concerned with the meaning of the story to the teller as well as the context that had shaped that meaning. Both of these are foremost in my own thesis. The academic analysis of autobiography, with its emphasis on voice, memory and representation, is relevant to my story but it is secondary to the telling of story within a context, an individual rendition of that life, at that time, through those eyes.

What we call our life is essentially a set of stories we tell ourselves about our past, present, and future. However, these stories are far from fixed, direct accounts of what happens in our lives, but products of the inveterate fictionalizing of our memory and imagination. That is, we "story" our lives. Moreover, we *re-story* them too. In fact, restorying goes on continually within us. (Kenyon & Randall, 1997, p.2)

In a similar vein, the narrative study of lives as a psychological research tool explores the power of storying to expose and explain the processes of life journeys. Ruth Josselson edits the collection *The Narrative Study of Lives*:

We had . . . been using intensive interviews with nonclinical populations to study the phenomena of development and transition in people's lives. We took this approach because we were attracted by its holism, by the richness of the data and by the sense that we were grappling with all that was missing in more distant, variable-based research. (Josselson, 1993, p.ix)

Gabriele Rosenthal, a sociologist working with narrative studies of Holocaust survivors differentiates between life story and life history. She asks how much biography presents "actual" life history and how much is it the writer's present construct of their past, present and future life (Rosenthal, 1993, p.60)? She distinguishes between life history, representing the chronological experiences at the time they happened and life story as the reconstruction of the life story in the present time of writing or narrating. In psychological analysis this difference is more critical, in storytelling for its own sake it is more observational as the life history and life story inevitably come together (Rosenthal, 1993, p.61).

It is, however, highly relevant in the selection of material by a biographer. The present perspective determines what the subject considers biographically relevant, how he or she develops thematic and temporal links between various experiences, and how past, present, or anticipated future realities influence the personal interpretation of the meaning of life (Rosenthal, 1993, p.62).

Auto/biographical writing echoes the same doubts and values as epistolarity when it comes to its relevance to history. During the 2003 Perth International Writer's Festival post-colonial historian, Brij. V. Lal, expressed his belief that he wrote his autobiography to secure history: "My grandfather's country is not mine," he observed (Lal, 2003). McCooey looks at



autobiography as "the past itself" as opposed to an account of the past as in history (McCooley, 1996, p.7). Stanley echoes this perspective:

'The past' is not a time and place that 'exists' . . . it does not go on its own sweet way whether we visit it or not. Its time is over and done with and it exists, now, only in and through representational means. (Stanley, 2000, p.6)

Jill Ker Conway prefaces her own autobiography with the observation that:

We learn a great deal about the social and cultural context of an autobiographer's life, because at every stage in the story the writer must tell us whether she or he is responding to the world around them in ways that were typical of or deviant from her or his society and times. (Conway, 1999, p.vii)

Mary Evans in *Missing Persons: the impossibility of auto/biography* also brings a historical perspective to the subject of autobiography. She notes that the autobiographical writings of the First World War allowed a shift in focus in that, although the writers of the best known accounts were still middle or upper class, the writing itself was about the commonplace and ordinary of life in the trenches or hospitals. "What they – and others – gave to auto/biography was the permission to others to write of the mundane and unexceptional" (Evans, 1999, p. 8). She goes on to observe: "The boundaries of history . . . have become wider and less exclusive, to include not just the written record about the lives of the rich and the powerful, but also the artifacts and the literature of the ordinary person" (Evans, 1999, p. 9).

Both letters and autobiography raise questions of truth and authenticity. They can only ever be the perceptions of the writer filtered through attention to the perceived or intended listener/reader. Facts can be checked at accepted objective sources but gaps in a personal life are harder to fill and opinions are only ever personal truths. Evans' *Missing Persons: the impossibility of auto/biography* embraced the increasing questioning of the authenticity of autobiography as "the truth". In particular challenging any claim of auto/biography to represent the 'whole life' of a person. She declared the notion of 'whole' person a fictional belief created from the "very form of auto/biography":

We are accustomed to classify autobiography as non-fiction, and yet it may be useful to think of it not as such, but as a mythical construct of our society and our social needs, Central to those social needs is the compelling wish of many people to experience life as an organised and coherent process, in which rational choices are made. (Evans, 1999, p.1)

As I wrote my mother's biography many perspectives, facts and contradictions were faced, and in order to contain these, I returned to the letters as the inspiration and "truth" about which my narrative was built. I expect as others involved at the time or even around the time read the text they will find areas of dispute or dissonance from their point of view, however the text required a guiding core and ultimately the letters provided the information, insights and intensity upon

which the biographical text is assembled. What is put in and what is left out tell their own story about the writer. I returned to my belief that, although the original intended audience of a letter may create a moderation of the writer’s style and intent, even a conscious or unconscious censorship of what is shareable, it is still a form of the writer’s truth and that, at the time and in her context, my mother’s letters home were her truth. Within that truth is her construct, perhaps at times ‘mythical’, certainly embracing a tendency toward the “compelling wish” to experience life as an “organised and coherent process, in which rational choices are made”. But the construct is as much her truth as the facts therein.

Josselson comments on life story as the interface between the life as lived and the social times, an interweaving of individual experience and historical reality (1993, p.xiii). It is this interweaving that structures the base from which each person builds their lives out of the journey of their family of origin and into their own life journey. The times with which my mother’s life was entwined are common to many.

So I turn from the genre to the dynamic of biographical writing, the need, purpose and pleasure in the sharing of experience through storytelling.

### **Storytelling**

When I was eleven I used to sit down at the kitchen table on a Sunday morning and my mother would dictate my weekly English essay for me. Standing at the table preparing our Sunday Roast, with apron round her waist, peeling and chopping vegetables or, most evocatively, beating Yorkshire pudding batter with an unforgettably rhythmic “blop, blop, blop,” she was very skilled at writing as an eleven year old. The topics were common for the age; “My School Holidays”, “How the Zebra got its Stripes” and “What you did at Goose Fair” stand out.

Anyone who found out about my mother’s input was appalled at the deception and concerned that I would never learn how to write myself. When I think back, I am unconcerned about the deception; my mother was happy to help me, my teacher was happy at my successful work, I was happy because I did not have to do something that caused me great distress, but more than that it gave me some ‘quality’ time with my mother. As the third of six children this was at a premium for me. Once a week we would connect through story-telling. It seems poetic to me forty years later that I am writing her story for her and once again we are connected.

Storytelling has been part of human culture since the ability to communicate began. The uses of storytelling have been multiple, from simple entertainment, amusement and the passing of time to a way of making sense of the world, the spirit and the ways of belonging to them. For many centuries stories were told and handed down by oral storytelling, with or without the aid of pictures. Wilfred Stone says:

The need for human beings to cast their experience in narrative form is probably as old as consciousness itself. Gathered about the tribal fire, bonded by their common struggle for survival, our early ancestors gave voice in story form to their fears and beliefs – and thus helped make for themselves a magic defence against the trials of life. (Stone, 1983, p.1)

Over the last few centuries the written word has overtaken the oral traditions, initially by hand, then by print and now by electronics. Whatever the purpose or method of telling tales, the end result is a connection; a connection to another person, to another time, to another place, to a subject, to a feeling, a yearning, a belief, a way of writing, a way of thinking. Without the connection the storytelling loses its meaning and fails to create for itself a place. “In the very centre of these stories, of course, is human truth. But . . . it is served up to us in different guises” (Yolen, 1986, p.3).

Marion Halligan, editor of Centenary of Federation collection *Storykeepers*, believes “Storytelling is one of the most natural of human activities” (Halligan, 2001, p.2). She is eloquent in her valuing of storytelling and keeping as social connectors and tools of intergenerational exchange:

Stories are things that exist, that must be found, that must be preserved and guarded, with respect, not stolen or usurped or rewritten. They are fragile, and may sift away into a fine powdery dust, or fragment into unrecognizable shards, or like the paper they are written on, fade under bright light. They must be saved from perishing. (Halligan, 2001, p.8)

But we keep them carefully, we nurture them, we store them safely. When we make new friends or lovers we take them out of their safekeeping and offer them as a token of affection, a gift of love. We need to recognise that we are all storykeepers on an intimate level, and sometimes on a grander scale. (Halligan, 2001, p.3)

We tell one another stories in order to learn how to live. Unless our stories are kept we will perish. There is a hierarchy to it, a sense of passing down from elders to youngsters, and also an awareness that some have special gifts for this sort of thing. (Halligan, 2001, p.10)

Jane Yolen editor of *Favourite Folktales from Around the World* observes:

Storytelling, that oldest of arts, has always been both an entertainment and a cultural necessity. Laws, news, customs, even royal successions encapsulated within the bodies of tales were passed on and on, down, through the years. As the stories were kept alive by this process of mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, the story tellers breathed life into human cultures . . . . So stories are history – of a sort . . . they look at humanity's history obliquely. (Yolen, 1986, p.1)

My mother has from time to time expressed her sense of urgency that her stories and stories of her time that she holds will be lost if she does not get them down and share them with me.

Perhaps there is also a sense of self-preservation, that if we have not got our stories written they will disappear and with them our place in history. Sturrock commented:

A human life can be brought to display a meaning only on condition of being turned into a story; once subject to the public order of narrative, it acquires both the gravity of a settled and venerable literary form, and the orientation of hindsight which alone raises the past from an aimless sum of reminiscence into a personal history. If we crave significance for ourselves as historical beings, we can have it only by an intelligent and sequential ordering of what we retain or can recover of our past – in which the autobiographer is a model for us all. A life storied is a life made meaningful, and any life, however vapid, is at least storable. I begin therefore from the assumption that whoever narrates his or her life is willing its transformation from a lived farrago into a thought whole. (Sturrock, 1993, p.20)

Storytelling and keeping are critical components in connecting, learning, healing and spirituality, in fact storying is found in every aspect of life Yolen comments: "Stories are powerful. They are a journey and a joining . . . . The story is history, for each tale carries with it over the miles and through the generations the bruises and blandishments and embraces of the society in which it has dwelt" (Yolen, 1986, p.8).

The story then is richer for the connections it engages, the "journey and the joining". The first link for my mother's midlife story was between my mother and me but the process of writing her story triggered a chain of connections to places, times, people and themes relevant to her, to my father and to my grandmother. My journey to these times led me to texts and stories, especially auto/biography, based in places or times from which my grandmother and mother came and into which my mother moved, providing context for her epistolary narratives. Other readings backgrounded my father's origins as a refugee from the Holocaust providing a context for his character and family background. As I read I felt the long dormant family connections stir and interest in my family of origin awaken. I discovered for the first time the names of my great-grandmothers and some of their stories, a search for belonging replaced a genetic curiosity.

The need to belong arises often in the writings of the authors of autobiography and family history; a yearning to know about origins and put oneself in the picture of one's genealogy. Belonging, however, goes beyond family system into the wider community, the sense of spirit and the comfort of emotional 'normality'. It is psychologically comforting to know that others who have experienced the same things perhaps reacted the same way. It is also profoundly helpful to know of other people's different life journeys and to have the opportunity to reflect on the differences and learn from the choices others have made. Liz Stanley, quoted by Donnell and Polkey writing on autobiography, states that "accounts of other lives influence how we see and understand our own and that our understanding of our own lives, will impact on how we interpret other lives" (2000, p.xxii).

Caroline Jones, renowned Australian broadcaster and communicator, presented “The Search for Meaning” on ABC Radio for seven years. During that time she interviewed numerous people and published their stories in books and tapes based on the programme, purported to be the ABC’s most popular program (Jones, 1998, flyleaf). In 1998 she drew her thoughts about her own journey together, interwoven with the stories of many of those she had interviewed over her career.

On the first page of her autobiography she quotes Michael Leunig, a favourite guest:

It seems I have this search to find my people, to find my culture, to find a place where there is some common agreement: to find a common ground, my people, my society, my village, my parish, my culture, ... I feel we live in a time when these things are scattered and cast all over the place in a great mess, and I want to keep tying it up together a bit and linking it and seeing to what extent I’m like you and to what extent you can feel as I feel. This I think is at the centre of what I am trying to do. (Jones, 1998, p.1)

In writing my mother’s story I have had the opportunity to overlay the picture of my family history onto my own. In telling my mother’s story there is the opportunity for the reader to discover some of the common ground, shared history, culture and hopefully personal meaning within a story of the time. The popularity of books such as Sally Morgan’s *My Place* (1987) and Albert Facey’s *A Fortunate Life* (1981) are testament to the role life-storying of the ordinary has in providing connection and inspiration. Sally Morgan’s journey back to the North West from where her grandmother came speaks eloquently to the importance of a sense of belonging. “We were different people now. What had begun as a tentative search for knowledge had grown into a spiritual and emotional pilgrimage . . . . We belonged now” (Morgan, 1987, p.233).

Julie Lewis, biographer of writer Olga Masters notes:

Years later remembering one call from a man for whom orange segments at half-time had brought back memories, she said, ‘I thought, gee, I’ve made that man remember something from long ago. That’s what writing is all about. It’s reaching people through words; not so much what you say but what it makes them think of.’ She realised that she had written something people could identify with – something they would talk about afterwards. (Lewis, 1991, p.99)

Caroline Jones offers her book as “quite simply, company....a companion in your own search for meaning” (Jones, 1998, p.12). She encourages the reader to record their own life journey and to value their story as worthy of recording. She recognises the role of the sharing of stories in affirming and validating the individual as they experience the meaning in their lives.

Hugh Mackay, Australian psychologist, author, social commentator and columnist undertook a study of three generations of Australians centred around the baby boomers. In the early part of his text he comments:

The creation of a cohesive and harmonious society depends on our willingness to understand each other's point of view and, in particular, to recognise that each of us is the product not only of our unique genetic inheritance, but also of the social and cultural influences that shaped our early lives. (Mackay, 1997, p.12)

He goes on to acknowledge the recognition within our society of the need for tolerance of ethnic differences and even the rural/city dichotomy but urges a further recognition of the generational differences as just as significant. (As well as often entailing ethnic-differences themselves).

My own writing provides such an intergenerational link from my mother to her mother, from me to my mother and from my mother to me. Karen Fingerman focuses on one aspect of this intergenerational relationship in her study of mother daughter relationships published as *Aging Mothers and their Adult Daughters*. She notes that geographic distance was significant in the importance different offspring had in their mother's lives (Fingerman, 2001, p.xiv). She also notes that a daughter's desire to please her mother continued even into mid-life ( p.11) and parents tended to view their relationships with their children more favourably than did their children ( p.47). She sums up her first chapter:

Mothers and daughters maintain strong ties for a variety of reasons that stem from their shared experiences as women. Their relationship is central in both parties' lives. The primacy of this bond appears to fade somewhat from early childhood to later life . . . . The bond shifts from an idealized interconnectedness in young adulthood to a sophisticated interdependence between two individuals in later life. (Fingerman, 2001, p.50)

The letter as a form exists to connect people at a distance. The intergenerational letter is reaffirming the pre-existent connections between members and preparing for future connections. My thesis is aimed to connect readers at many levels to the stories that the letters hold. Originally as the reader of the old letters I was seeking to connect to myself at a younger age. As I read I connected unconsciously to my mother at a younger age – close to my own now. But I also felt the connection to that past time, a time that shaped me without my being aware. My mother connected to herself in the past and back to the mother and father, the brothers and sisters from whence she had come. But more she connected to the struggles and styles of thinking that directed her living in those times. My siblings connected to the same times, to themselves as children, to the events that shaped our lives, their connection different to mine though the times and events were the same. Others read and made connections – to the migrant experience, the growth of feminism, the social history, the local history. In seeking context I

connected to the lives and works of other authors. So a simple curiosity to connect with my young self grew to multiple convolutions and layers that can draw readers on many levels, like a maze with multiple solutions, to an end that is not a conclusion because when my grandmother dies in 1985 the letters stop, yet my mother's life goes on, uncharted. My grandmother never knew of my daughter, born 6 months later. My mother said when she rang me to tell me of my grandmother's death that my grandmother's spirit may become part of my daughter. At the time our relationship was strained by family circumstance, financial conundrums and distance. I remember the phone call and where I was standing and I know I was unaware of the impact on my mother of her mother's death. I felt her suggestion somehow contaminating, a little spooky, weird, unwelcome, possessive even. But now as my daughter approaches adulthood, and I approach a different wisdom, I hope there is some of her great grandmother within her. Perhaps the writing of the story of the letters will provide her in time to come with that connection.

It is, therefore, from the framework of connection and connectedness that I tell my mother's story. It is a unique story, as are all life-stories, but her experience echoes and reflects that of many others. It allows company for the reader in their search for, or stabilisation of, their personal journey as well as an opportunity to understand that journey within the social, cultural and geographical ethos of the times. In its own way our knowledge about where we belong, where we come from and whom we connect with and to, in a dislocated society of nuclear families and altered perceptions of the family, is a significant part of our identity.

### **Background Context**

Christine Kenny, in her study *Memory, Truth and Orality: The Lives of Northern Women Textile Workers*, says:

It could be argued that an academic piece of work, no matter what form it takes, is creative, reflects some individuality, and informs and touches people's emotions in some way. Most of all, an academic text should show evidence of the writer having taken account the work of other writers, as a token of respect for the ways the latter has inspired him or her. (Kenny, 1999, p.37)

The biographical writings of others provided a resource for me in two main areas. Firstly, life-writing texts based specifically on collections of letters, both in their editorial decision-making and in the final presentation, provided some examples of the process of life-writing from letters, and, secondly, books based on the spaces I explored provided information on the social and cultural context, history, both personal and social, geography, politics and memory. In addition I am grateful for my mother's older brother's printed genealogies for information about my maternal grandparents and great-grandparents. These texts acted not as ordaining tomes but rather as background to the story of a life, more particularly, a mid-life.

The stories I chose to demonstrate the social contexts of my mother's time focused on the themes to which I was drawn in reading her letters, not the themes about which she has written, for those can be explored in the thesis itself, but rather those that underlay her existence. These are dominated by the experiences of the Second World War and the shadow thrown over families in the decades that followed, the way of life of Australians in the 1960's and the issue of the second wave feminist revolution led by the Women's Liberation Movement out of the 1960's.

The background of the Second World War is a powerful subconscious influence common to all those whose childhood or adolescence was set during those years. My mother describes its impact:

How can I possibly make you feel and understand the state we were in after six years of war. We had been in constant danger, we lived with death and destruction and fear, one night a munitions train was blown up and gun cotton littered the streets, we did not know what it was and were scared it was a German poisonous secret weapon. Every news reel showed more and more bombings, our friends were killed and wounded, the Germans were throwing new horrific weapons the V1 and V2 at us, many magnificent buildings in London, Coventry, Liverpool and so on had been destroyed, food was short, fuel for warmth and cooking scarce, new clothes almost unattainable (I made underwear from old parachutes which were made of silk, if you could get one). We knew if the Germans won Paul would be shot as a Jew, it was all so drear.

The war was our existence, we would not have met without it, it controlled almost everything we did and said, for example if I had failed end of term exams I would have been called up in to the Forces. When we considered the possibility of marriage where could we live, there were no houses, no furniture and it almost seemed no future. Towards the end of the war we went to a cinema to see the news reel of relief of the concentration camps and we sat in the cinema and cried together, we had no way of knowing whether those stick figures or one of the piles of corpses was a relative. The war permeated everything like a poisonous gas.

My parents' pre-war journeys were very different. My mother's was dominated by the Depression and the struggle by her mother to keep her family fed. When the Depression started my grandmother had children of 11, 10, 8 and 5, her husband lost his job and my mother recalls going to bed hungry because her mother wanted to save what little food there was for breakfast so they would go to school on a meal. Her mother was very proud and would not ask for help, she went without to feed her family and my mother recalls how thin her mother got. Money remained tight until 1935. My mother had a bare minimum of clothes, a school uniform that she had to wear at weekends and sponge down on Sunday evening ready for the next school week. During that time she learnt a deep fear of poverty.

My uncle's family genealogy and history books, *Our Finch Family and Others* (Finch & Finch, 1993), and *Our Border Johnstons* (1992), both provide factual descriptions of my mother's,



grandmother's and great-grandmother's lives, my mother has added her observations, family stories and perspectives. She related strongly to Elizabeth Jane Howard's 1990s four-volume fiction about a family in England during the war, *The Cazalet Chronicles*. These give a sense of the mix of uncertainty, anxiety and yet, paradoxically, ordinariness and boredom felt by the families at home. Vera Brittain, my grandmother's contemporary provides a succinct view of the pre-war years:

I belonged . . . to a generation which was still on the early side of middle age but had already seen almost more history than any generation could bear.

How much more of it we had yet to see, my contemporaries and I were soon to learn. (Brittain, 1980, p. 162)

I don't want to see inflicted on *any* mothers and children the constant anxiety for others which accompanied the sirens and the crashes, the dread of nightfall, the interminable waiting for dawn during the endless nights of the Blitz. (Brittain, 1980, p.347)

My mother's family were spared active service, my grandfather unfit because of malaria he had suffered as a child and my uncle injured in an accident before he could see active service. But my mother lost friends in the Blitz and was evacuated twice, her younger brother was sent to the countryside to see the war out with his grandmother, and my mother's older sisters, who had both left school at 14 to learn shorthand and typing, were active in war service, the older as a Sergeant Cook and the younger working in a munitions factory. Paradoxically it was the threatening war clouds that activated the economy and made it possible for my mother to stay on at school and eventually go to University.

My father's pre-war experience was a journey of survival, both emotionally and physically, of being Jewish in an increasingly anti-Semitic Europe. His parents divorced when he was 8 and his mother worked teaching English to finance their escape. She traveled to England a couple of times before the war. The British Council had a group of citizens trying to get Jewish children out of Nazi territories. My grandmother met a Miss White who put her in touch with a Miss Tinn, in Cleethorpes on the east coast. Miss Tinn spoke German and undertook that my father would not be a financial charge on the British, guaranteeing him until he was 18. My father was sent on one of the last children's trains out of Czechoslovakia, the oldest one in his carriage. His mother did not know if she would ever see him again. He arrived in England in June 1939. Miss Tinn met him at the port and arranged for him to be billeted with a family named the Dixons who thought he would be company for their son Peter. My grandmother got out of Czechoslovakia by agreeing to work as a domestic for two retired headmistresses in Penzance. She arrived in the UK three days before war broke out. As the war progressed the east coast became too dangerous and my father was evacuated to Penzance, cared for by two retired teachers. Only 14 he would not live with his mother again. His father had remarried and moved

to Java with his second wife and his mother to escape the Nazis; he had wanted to take his sons with him. My grandfather ended up in a Japanese camp, he did not know if his sons had survived the war until it ended and the Red Cross found them for him.

From their very different backgrounds my parents met at a meal at the University of Liverpool where my mother was studying science and my father architecture. She was attracted to him by his unusual appearance – bushy black hair, yellow shoes and green trousers – he to her by her innocent look and lack of make-up. He wooed her with an intensity that must have been very flattering, travelling long distances just to see her for a short time. He found work nearby during her holidays at her grandparents' and they met in secret because her mother did not approve of the attentions of a 'foreigner', even though she had never met him. My father served out his National Service in the coalmines. He could not go back to the frontline because if captured he would be shot as a Jew. He worked extra shifts to save for them to get married, one day he collapsed underground with severe chest pains, he was sent to a specialist who diagnosed heart strain and sent him for 6 weeks to a convalescent home. At the end of that time he went back and when he tried to get discharged from National Service was asked "Do you want to go to Burma?". So he went back to the mine but in the office. His lungs now bear the consequences of underground mining.

My writing is based on my mother's life and story, yet it can never move far from the influences of my father's background and indeed the effect of the war on the lives of their generation and the generational heritage it provides. There is a burgeoning library of books by holocaust survivors. I was drawn to Edith Hahn's autobiographical depiction of her survival of World War 2 as a Jew in Austria and Germany because it was based on kept letters (Hahn, 1999). It covered material that provided significant background to the world from which my father and paternal grandmother had escaped.

My father would often say one could not think of all the suffering in the world all at once or one's brain would explode with the pain. I suspect it was a philosophy he had to personalise very young because of the losses he experienced as a result of the Nazis. It is against this background that his approach to authority and freedom must be set for me to attempt to understand the events of the rest of his life and its inevitable influence on my mother's. Edith Hahn builds a picture of the world of anti-Semitism and Jewish pride, as she hid in the heart of Nazi Germany within a stolen identity. Working as a Red Cross nurse she could closely observe and absorb the propaganda and prejudices that were fuelling the war:

They truly believed that, as Nordic 'Aryans', they were members of a superior race. They felt that these Russians, Frenchmen, Dutchmen, Belgians and Poles who came into our clinic had been placed on earth to labour for them. To steal

a plate of soup from such low creatures seemed not a sin but a perfectly legitimate activity. (Hahn, 1999, p.4)

By contrast, she reflects on the beliefs her father taught her before the disintegration of Austria and the social changes that began the decline of the Jewish people into the Holocaust:

Papa felt that Jews had to be better than everybody else. He expected our report cards to be better, our social consciousness to be more highly developed. He expected us to have finer manners, cleaner clothes, immaculate moral standards.

I didn't think about it at the time, but of course now I realise that my father's insistence that we Jews must be better was based on our country's firm belief that we were not as good. (Hahn, 1999, p.22)

She searches in her memory for her childhood sense of identity but as she does so she is left with more absences than presences: "We had all the burdens of being Jewish in an anti-Semitic country but none of the strengths" (Hahn, 1999, p.26), adding later:

Now we were just like the other prisoners of war the Serbs, the Poles, the emaciated Frenchmen – except that we were not really like them, because we had no country. (Hahn, 1999, p.99)

The sense of homelessness pervades her life. She seeks the sense of belonging that family would bring, but it has gone forever, stolen irredeemably by the Nazis. She often yearns for her mother and feels her presence in the events of every day life. She carries the belief that they will be reunited, that she will eventually find her mother in the Jewish ghettos of Poland and have her sense of belonging restored. It is the most poignant moment of the book when, still hiding in Brandenburg she hears by chance the illicit Voice of America radio station and, literally out of the blue, learns of Hitler's extermination camp and the deaths of millions of Jews, one of whom is her mother.

I lay on the floor, unable to absorb the horror of what I had just been told. Who can imagine a living breathing, laughing mother as smoke and ashes? No one can imagine that. My mind shut down. I sank like a rock to the bottom of my soul. (Hahn, 1999, p.252)

Like many Jewish survivors of the war, Edith Hahn chose to try and close the door on her past by creating for her child a more perfect world even at the expense of truth:

Why did I surround my daughter with these pleasant, soothing lies? Because I wanted her not to feel alone . . . I tried to give Angela the things that I had lost: a family, a secure place in the world, a normal life.

Her daughter, however, wanted more and, in searching for the "whole truth", read the letters Hahn had sent to a Jewish friend throughout the war. She then encouraged her mother to write a story that Hahn herself "could easily have let . . . go untold forever" (Hahn, 1999, p. 305).

On the other side of the world Carolyn Polizzotto recorded her recollections of “wanting to know the truth”. Her memoir, *A Trick of the Light* (2001), is a story full of recollections overshadowed by the adult collusion of silence regarding the impact of the Second World War. Polizzotto explores memory and the absence of sufficient language in her early childhood to articulate and to hold the memories and perceptions so as to be able to write them later, when language became available.

In the absence of appropriate and adequate language and memory she turns to the photo albums and mementos of her parents’ past lives to piece together the picture, seeking a different view, a revelation or a way to open the door to her childhood, at least through the photographers’ eyes.

This was where my father wanted the world to begin for me, with my arrival in it. I don’t remember my parents from those times. I don’t remember those times at all. I have only photographs to tell me. But the six years of the war, the three years of its aftermath, of which I have no photos in my album, no mementos at all but those recently gathered – these I know. (Polizzotto, 2001, p. 154)

She relates the absences in her life and memory to the impact of the Second World War on the psyche of her parents and their generation;

Three or four short years afterwards, still in their twenties our parents can have had no clear idea of what the war had been and no perspective on it. They were told, they must have been – and if not they would have told themselves – to put the past behind them. (Whatever it was.) . . . . Our birth marked the end of the past. We were wedded to the future. (Polizzotto, 2001, p.114)

She interrogates her past in an effort to define her story to give it substance – to claim Kenyon and Randall’s “peculiarly liberating self-acceptance.” Yet she repeatedly bumps up against the conspiracy of silence the war has created. A silence she perceives to have been designed to give the children of the 50’s “a clean slate” (Polizzotto, 2001, p.207). But she eloquently describes not “the clean slate” but a whitewash behind which is her parent’s story “a world just out of reach, a world both terrible and splendid” (Polizzotto, 2001, p.208).

Bogusia Temple in her study of Polish immigrants in the North of England reflects:

The ‘story’ of the expulsion from Poland . . . is one that is familiar to anyone brought up in a Polish Community . . . . Although the events of that period have effected my life, emotionally and intellectually, I have not felt what it means to be thrown out of my home. Nor have I seen friends and relatives die of starvation and disease. I have been able to grow up free of these experiences, but I would argue not free of some of their effects. (Temple, 1999, p. 25)

Polizzotto is intrigued by the war and creates her own reality of it. She listened to her parents’ conversations with other adults about it and played war games imagining the puddles as

trenches, passing her days “in a state of armed readiness for the war that had ended almost three years before I was born” (Polizzotto, 2001, p.20):

I knew the word ‘war’ long before I knew what it meant. The war itself was never discussed in our house. It was a background sort of a word . . . one of those words that were important but that you couldn’t see . . . I knew it as a looming presence, not an event in time which was over. I didn’t know that it was over. (Polizzotto, 2001, p.20)

Her own recalled perceptions of the war are at odds with her father’s attitude; he would “have nothing to do with returned servicemen’s organisations or Anzac Day and he despised those who did” (Polizzotto, 2001, p.13). It was not until he was in his seventies that her father changed heart and began attending the commemorative services “which spoke to his experience of the war” (Polizzotto, 2001, p.14). Much of Polizzotto’s journey is spent reconciling her own perception of war with the real-time experiences of her father and the emotional consequences of these experiences to herself and her generation.

These are pictures from the war the girl doesn’t know about, the stories she isn’t told . . . That he lost the next six years of his life to the war; and that – yes – mostly it was boring, but sometimes it wasn’t. She doesn’t know that her father-to-be spent the eve of his twenty-third birthday in Suicide Alley, near Biak, hiding from an aerial bombardment he expected not to survive. That all he wanted to do was to live until morning. (Twenty-three would be a reasonable age to die.) (Polizzotto, 2001, p.185)

She describes the ambient fear and insecurity that was not named or acknowledged but backgrounded her childhood despite her parent’s intent to put it in the past. “We were our parents’ lost innocence. Their teens and twenties, gone to war, were set to be our future . . . We were the reward of war and our happiness was the price of peace” (Polizzotto, 2001, p.56).

Polizzotto perceives herself as part of the first generation to have childhood sanctified and indulged. “We were physically the best protected and best nourished generation of children there had ever been...But if we were so fortunate – and we were – why then is there a gap where my childhood should be (Polizzotto, 2001, p.27)?

Polizzotto’s writing gives an intensity to the experience of being one of the first baby boomers that is evocative and thought provoking. Her story resonates with my research, she is the same age as my oldest sister, her stories of childhood games and yearnings rekindle my own memories and at a deeper level, the awareness of parental wartime experience without understanding. My mother hated war movies and left the room when air-raid sirens wailed from the TV screen, thunderstorms brought dreadful fear and the full moon, a bomber’s moon, brought her intense long lasting anxiety; evidence I saw but did not understand. I relate to Polizzotto’s desire in her midlife to find out about her parents’ war and put into perspective her own world in comparison to the generation before her:

To have lived out a childhood in the very first century in which that period of life was so named cannot be dismissed. To have lived it out with two living parents is to have known luxury unimaginable to the numberless children who were deprived of even the opportunity to say goodbye to theirs . . . . To have known breakfast cereal and milk and fruit, always, as much of each as you wanted. Meat and three vegetables for every evening meal, food so abundant that you had to be encouraged, if not threatened, to finish it. Chicken and neapolitan ice-cream. To have had a house to live in with a roof that didn't leak and separate rooms for different functions and only one family in that house, however crowded, however small, with its rooms and its roof. To have had aunts and uncles and grandparents and cousins, more cousins than you could count, all living, more cousins than you knew by name. To have had all this and still to complain? (Polizzotto, 2001, p.201)

Polizzotto is acutely aware, in her writing, of the paradox of being a blessed generation, yet a generation full of a yearning, a sense of entitlement even, for more than any generation had previously enjoyed. She puts into her own perspective the irony of having so much that we could grasp easily the concept of it not being enough;

Not enough blocks, too small a sandpit: this is what it meant to be child in the fifties. The first generation in history for whom childhood was not a luxury, having toys and the opportunity to play with them, we were free to develop the concept of 'not enough' . . . . and we were less grateful than any generation before us. (Polizzotto, 2001, p.162)

Towards the end of her memoir she sums up how she sees her childhood in the context of the post war world:

What could we babies possibly signify against the weight of the camps in both hemispheres, against the Burma Road? All we could be was their opposite. We were the living hope of a different future. What had happened was to be kept from us; our slates were to be blank, a clean sweep made. We were to start afresh, to think only happy thoughts and to know only the future. The trouble was that the past was in our bones as well as in our parent's untold experience. (Polizzotto, 2001, p.207)

As she writes, she echoes Edith Hahn's daughter's need for the truth despite her mother's unexpressed determination to protect her daughter from the horrors of the Holocaust, even at the expense of that truth. For both the purpose of life-storying is to clarify one's own life and to pass the past into the future.

Polizzotto's storytelling is at times ephemeral and wistful. A story defined by what came before, defined by the story of men at war and women left to wait. A story of the first generation of children whose parents' main goal was for their children's lives to be better. Parents hamstrung by the threads of memory and unresolved fear, memory of the unspeakable. A generation wanting to leave behind that unspeakable past and build their children a future of aspiration and expectation.

My recollection of my parents' stories of war is of a matter-of-factness that allowed me to be detached from any emotional impact although I sensed it under the surface and avoided its reality. The actual amount of pain they might have felt or repressed was not appropriate for a child to endure even in the telling. It was not until my son asked me about the Vietnam War which he was studying in history, that I realised he had been born the same number of years after the end of the Vietnam War as I had been after the Second World War. Only then did I realise how fresh in their minds must have been the suffering of my parents and how the matter-of-fact was discordant with the reality.

My mother observes that if it were not for the war our family, as it is, would not have existed. From the devastation of the war sprang an energy for change that fuelled my parents' desire to make the world a better place by privileging the rights and needs of mothers and children. Determined that out of their suffering they would give their children a better lot, a better chance, a better life. "Only a broken heart yearns to heal the world" (Baker, 1997, p.177). But that desire was overshadowed by the increasing threat of the Cold War. So when the opportunity to emigrate to the Southern Hemisphere, away from the immediate threat of nuclear decimation, arose my parents grasped it.

Robert Drewe, in his autobiography *The Shark Net* (Drewe, 2000), sets a geographical as well as a social context for the world into which my family emigrated in 1965. He writes to make sense of this time and space in his own life (Drewe, 2000, cover) yet equally evokes the sense of the place that was Perth. When Drewe and his family left Melbourne in the late fifties the plane flight took 12 hours with stops to refuel in Adelaide and Kalgoorlie (Drewe, 2000, p.23). It was, his mother told them (and my father often remarked), the world's most isolated city, with Western Australia as big as India and Pakistan combined. He describes the city as a place built on the sand dunes "we were all living in bright sunlight and on dry, flat sand" (Drewe, 2000, p.33). The people looked different to Melbourne people "With their darker skins, red eyes, raw noses and permanently deep cracks in their bottom lips . . . Boys bled if they smiled too fast" (Drewe, 2000, p.34). He was impressed by the barefootedness of his contemporaries "Only mothers' boys and English kids – or Melbourne boys – wore sandals in summer" (Drewe, 2000, p. 35). His descriptions of the sunburnt, barefooted 'Sand People' evoke clear images of the heat and sunshine that, if unfamiliar to a fellow Australian, must have been alien indeed to a woman, like my mother, born and bred in the north of England. My mother was horrified, when first we set off to school in Australia, at the bare-footed youngsters who would be our classmates – in her mind to be barefoot was the ultimate and humiliating declaration of poverty.

The people of Perth grew English gardens, lawns to the road, roses and deciduous trees, intermingled with the poisonous oleanders. The owners of bores stood out with the greenest

lawns and iron-stained walls. A good green lawn out front, unobscured by a front fence, was part of being a good neighbour. Locking the door, especially the back door, was seen as inhospitable; “It could prevent friends from walking unexpectedly into your home with armfuls of beer” (Drewe, 2000, p.111).

One of Drewe’s themes is that of social constraint and the control of public opinion. He was constrained by the expectations of his father as a ‘company man’ that he would not act to sully the reputation of Dunlop as a family company. Drewe’s book ends when he returns East to develop his career, but he recognises the lure of Perth to those that come from elsewhere; “They were seduced by the light and the landscape and the promise of something as intangible as ‘a way of life’ and stayed forever” (Drewe, 2000, p.313). As Drewe leaves in 1964 the scene had been set for our own arrival in 1965 into a city with a small town mentality. It is a time of constraint and strict middle-class social mores counterpointing the freedom of the sun and surf. A place where mateship and company allegiances may take preference over integrity. But my father has been drawn to it as a new start, a place where the isolation is protection from the cold war, drawn to “the promise of something as intangible as ‘a way of life’” (Drewe, 2000, p.313).

Presenting an interesting foil to Drewe’s middle class, beachside perspective of Perth in the 1960s, Sally Morgan’s portrayal is far more insular. She writes of the suburbia of her battling parents. The theme her gradual discovery of her Aboriginality is predominant in *My Place* (Morgan, 1987); it highlights the hierarchies and racism of Perth society in the 1960s. The myth was that Australia was a class-less society, but, although the distinctions were less overt and entrenched than in England, they were still there.

John Colmer in his look at post-war Australian autobiography reinforces the theme:

The picture that emerges from Australian autobiography is of a strongly authoritarian society, intolerant of human differences, timidly conventional, highly class conscious, thoroughly materialistic and utilitarian in its values. (Colmer, 1989, p.10)

Morgan cameos other aspects of life in the sixties that resonate with life behind my mother’s letters. For Morgan chicken was a dish that was kept for Christmas (Morgan, 1987, p.29), we were lucky to have it every few weeks, roast or paprika, on a Sunday. Guy Fawkes was still celebrated with fireworks and bonfires, before the crackers were banned for causing too many injuries. Education was marked by IQ tests and streaming. The Junior exams in third year high school decided your future, all or nothing assessments – pass and you get to try for University, fail and out you go to get a job. The exam results were published in the newspaper for all the world to see, Sally Morgan was fearful of her results, not wishing to put her mother to shame if she failed, “It would be a real slap in the face if they [the neighbours] should see her eldest



daughter’s name in print with a string of fails after it” (Morgan, 1987, p.110). Students would flock to the city centre to grab the first edition so no one could tell them before they knew themselves.

Jenny Gregory, in her history of Perth City, *City of Lights* (Gregory, 2003), describes the city in the mid-fifties as:

Still a little city by world standards, not particularly modern or sophisticated despite a few skyscrapers, traffic lights, parking meters and the occasional artistic controversy, bearing substantial traces of its past, thought of as a town, and substantially British in population and outlook. (Gregory, 2003, p. 69)

She goes on to observe the impact of the “the optimism and opportunity that accompanied post war reconstruction”, the modernism which “catapulted the city into the era of the sixties” (Gregory, 2003, p.69). The Empire Games, held in Perth in 1962 helped catalyse the growth and change with the building of the Narrows Bridge improving traffic flow, the opening of Serpentine Dam improving the water supply and the new passenger terminal at the port of Fremantle and the upgrading of Perth Airport to an international standard creating increasing opportunities for travellers (Gregory, 2003, p.79). With the development came the need for orderly planning and the Perth City Council made the decision to appoint a Planning Officer. Gregory comments: “With that decision, Perth would enter a new era” (Gregory, 2003, p.111). It was a decision that would also change the direction of my family’s lives.

Gregory also provides some social background to the world into which we migrated. My mother’s letters often allude to the social hierarchy of Perth society, Gregory quotes Victor Courteny, part owner and editor of the *Sunday Times*, writing in 1962: “Perth has lost some of that close family feeling the city once had... it has developed among a section of its people a class consciousness that would have been laughed out of existence forty or fifty years ago” (Gregory, 2003, p.111). He blamed the nouveau riche, “Too many people have got rich quickly” saying:

Perth has gathered into itself a new elite, not formed of artists, writers, musicians and other intellectuals who don’t hesitate to express unpopular opinions as long as they are honest, but an elite founded on the ability to make money, own fine houses, and follow a pattern of gilded mediocrity.

He adds:

Perth . . . stands too often in awe of the sacred cows of big business and some to the tycoons who aim to set the standard of our life by the ability to make a lot of money... Beautiful Perth by the Swan, sweet Perth nestling in the shadow of mount Eliza, dear Perth with blue vistas and generous spaces, was surely destined for something more than great monuments in bricks and mortar and unimaginative citizens who grope dimly through their mediocre lives to end up amongst the richest men in the cemetery. (Gregory, 2003, p.111)

The early sixties also saw the beginnings of civic activism against development as the economy burgeoned, the population increased and pressure to modernise the city grew in the belief that "antiquated buildings had little place in a modern city" (Gregory, 2003, p.113). With the threats to the city's heritage resistance grew to its loss and protestors and activists increasingly took to the media and the streets to air their views (Serventy, 1999, p.46). One of the most determined of these protestors was Bessie Rischbieth a woman who bridged the first and second waves of feminism in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and participated in a number of arenas in which my mother would play a part in times to come.

We came to Australia as the second wave of feminism was beginning to build. Anne Summers, renowned Australian feminist journalist and author of *Damned Whores and God's Police*, provides, in her autobiography *Ducks on the Pond* (1999), a clear view of the attitudes to, and of, women of the time providing a perspective on gender inequity and the growth of the women's movement as a background to the beliefs and social structures behind my mother's letters in the second half of the 1960's.

Anne Summers' background descriptions of her mother and father's meeting and marriage and her birth provide little glimpses of that world. Her mother was born the year before mine, in 1923. She describes the impact of the war in creating a need for women to do "men's work" and her mother's employment in the men's job of bank teller, furthermore "they even employed her after her marriage, and when she was pregnant until two months before my birth – unheard of then, and unheard of again for almost forty years" (Summers, 1999, p.8). My mother likewise returned to work teaching after marriage and the birth of her first child. Summers describes her own birth, her father relegated to the waiting room and pub, and the baby whisked away to be tended to by 'experts' until the following morning. This attitude to birth and parenting riled and inspired my parents to activism.

During Summers' early childhood she struggled with her goals, envying her brother's certainty about what he wanted to be. She saw few options: "Girls just got married and had children" (Summers, 1999, p.13). This perspective did not change as she headed into high school: "Most of my school companions could not wait to 'get married' and start producing babies, yet though I did not question it I was not especially drawn to this life. Our mothers seemed pregnant a great deal of the time" (Summers, 1999, p.47). "Catholic schoolgirls knew there were only three things a woman could do: get married and have kids, become a nun or end up an old spinster" (Summers, 1999, p.69).

The social pressure for women to conform was very strong:

In the cruel argot of the period, single women were dismissed as 'old maids' or 'on the shelf'. No one mentioned restaurants or travel or the freedom to do

what you liked. In the warped logic of the Catholic religion then, single people were condemned as ‘selfish’. Dr Rumble, the great authority on all religious matters . . . criticised their ‘sheer selfishness, refusing to tie themselves down to married life and shoulder the burden of providing for a family’. (Summers, 1999, p.49)

The choice of career for a girl was limited with school teaching and nursing the “acceptable occupations for middle-class girls in Adelaide in the 1960s” (Summers, 1999, p.71). During her descriptions of the next few years Summers comments on the small gender inequities that permeated everyday society. She notes the fact that women were not allowed to handle money in the office in which she worked and the criticism of her clothing by a female supervisor because the men were upset by the way she dressed. Her frustration with these things was there at the time but it is only in retrospect that they fill out the contemporary social ambience: “In 1963 I was oblivious to the conflicts in women’s creative lives. I was simply filling in time, waiting for the right man to come along” (Summers, 1999, p.97).

This perspective began to shift in 1964 when Summers met Diana Kenwrick and their friendship became a pivotal point for her changing attitudes and increasing resistance, albeit at the time unnamed, to the status quo.

Before feminism young girls were often jealous, catty and in competition for men. Their friendships with each other frequently took second place to romance. Society allowed women few roles beyond being empty, vapid creatures who rarely had interests apart from clothes, getting married and ultimately having babies. Diana came along at exactly the right time and she was exactly the right person. Together we embarked on a quest. We were not certain just what it was, we only knew we had to do something. (Summers, 1999, p.113)

They discussed with each other the issues of dating and relationships for young women in the 1960s, “The sexual mores of the time were at once brutish and mundane” (Summers, 1999, p.115). They both experienced and recalled dates as troubled occasions where boys either avoided paying or expected, and at times enforced, sexual favours in return. Summers compares their lack of any personal power to the stronger sense of self young women in the 1990s enjoyed, seeing it as one of the “most pleasing legacies” of the women’s movement (Summers, 1999, p.115).

Summers provides an excellent resume of the state of sex education, sexual knowledge and her personal learning about sexuality in the early sixties.

It was 1965 but the swinging sixties had not yet happened, at least not in Adelaide. The Pill was at least another year away for most of us (and even then could not be easily procured by single women). We sometimes relied on a fumbled-for condom or an equally embarrassing promise by the boy to ‘pull out in time’, although often we used a crude version of the rhythm method,

trying to calculate when in the unpredictable teenage menstrual cycle ovulation might occur and during those days either avoiding sex or telling the boy to ‘be careful’. Most of the time we just hoped for the best. (Summers, 1999, p.127)

She comments on their fortune that they preceded the AIDS epidemic and looks back in awe at their ignorance, stupidity and confusion. Her descriptions of the sanitary equipment available and the attitude towards tampons would create a shudder of horror in a generation used to the ‘super-slim-winged-extra absorbent pads/tampons’ advertised with panache on prime-time television.

This delicacy of approach to reproductive anatomy also extended into sexual language; Summers describes her ignorance of any swear words stronger than bloody or bugger “these we considered too shocking to actually use” (Summers, 1999, p.134). The act of sex was mysterious and talked of only in euphemisms. Summers describes the ignorance of she and her peers as to what “going all the way” meant and the number system which systemised foreplay into a numbered series of actions (Summers, 1999, p.134). Sex was a taboo both in subject matter and action in the early 1960s:

Respectability was the social cement of the time and a girl who jeopardised her family’s reputation with a sexual infraction, especially one so catastrophic as a pregnancy, could expect to have descend upon her a wrath that is as incomprehensible today as it was inevitable then. (Summers, 1999, p.135)

The later availability of the Pill helped only somewhat because it could not immediately change attitudes and “girls did not want to look as if they were planning sex...sex was only all right if you had succumbed to overwhelming passion” (Summers, 1999, p.137). The consequences of unwanted pregnancy were all negative, abortion was illegal and therefore often unsafe, shotgun weddings and adoption were common.

Starting University in 1965, Summers was encouraged, as a woman, to do History and English Literature to prepare her for a teaching career (a suggestion she resisted). It was a time when women were not allowed to work behind a bar and hearing a woman say ‘fuck’ was startling. Summers had not yet heard of feminism or felt any need for it, instead valuing the tolerance and broadmindedness that made women resistant to the male attitudes opposition to which would come to consume her life within the next few years. She and her friends sneered at the women who came to University just to find husbands “doing Matrimony I”, yet she felt relief at finally getting married at the age of “nearly 22”.

It is in this context that my mother was bringing up her five daughters. The pressure on young women to be married by twenty-one, to avoid being left ‘on the shelf’ (a condition which implied inadequacy and rejection) was considerable. The assumption was that marriage and

children were inevitable and indispensable, a career was something you ‘could go back to’ when the children were grown.

Summers describes 1968 as the “year that marked the end of the old world and the beginning of an electrifying, but far more frightening, era” for her generation (Summers, 1999, p.225). It foreshadowed dramatic changes in social and political culture that led to her involvement in the early stages of the Women’s Liberation Movement in 1969. Protests against the Vietnam War and conscription framed her political involvement at University and the beginnings of the Women’s Liberation Movement at a Miss America Pageant in the USA in September 1968 drew her attention. “In faraway Adelaide women like me noticed they were also announcing to the world their determination to redefine what being a woman was all about” (Summers, 1999, p.241). This event created the ‘bra-burning’ myth that dogged the Women’s Liberation Movement in its early years, an image I remember from my perspective of my mid-teens in Perth. Her increasing interest in feminism began to challenge her acceptance of the status quo and in particular her marriage “I was reading about new rules for relationships; learning that being married was not (or should not be) a goal in itself. Women were entitled to their own happiness” (Summers, 1999, p. 242).

The overseas wave of women’s liberation movements and local examples of sexism motivated Summers to join friends in starting the local Women’s Liberation Movement at the end of 1969. Initially the women concerned saw the movement as “a matter of simple justice, that women be liberated from constricting domestic roles and be able to move beyond the confining stereotypes that seemed to reduce everything to sexual attraction or maternal status” (Summers, 1999, p. 259). The issues they wanted to address were those of “employment, education, fertility control, sex-role socialisation”. But it proved hard to contain the movement and over the next year resentment towards the oppressions of sexism increased with the consciousness raising process and “once we started questioning sex roles everything else unravelled” (Summers, 1999, p.262).

The manifesto of the Adelaide WLM in 1970 had nine demands prefaced by the remarkably contemporary observation “remember there is little point in claiming equality if the nature of the latter is to make us equal to unfree men” (Summers, 1999, p.265). It went on to name the equal sharing of housework and childcare, payment for housework for women who chose to stay at home, free abortion on demand, the removal of all barriers to women’s equal participation in the work force, removal of all sexual differentiation in education and an insistence that women be written back into history. The first year of WLM in Adelaide was tentative and confronting for the women concerned, who were ill prepared for the tidal wave it became. Its political extremism was at times overwhelming and Summers goes on to describe its impact and the changes that

followed from 1970. At the end of her book, Summers echoes Carolyn Polizzotto in recognising the privileged position of her generation:

But I was lucky. I had been born into a generation, perhaps the first one in history, whose destiny was not preordained by birthright, the way our grandparents' mostly was, nor by such cataclysmic events as depression and war, which had steamrollered the lives of so many of our parents. We were given the gift of education and it was that, more than anything, that created possibilities for us . . . I could make my own life, and I would. (Summers, 1999, p.413)

In 1971 *The Female Eunuch* was published. In Western Australia female teachers were granted equal wages with their male equivalents and a replica statue of Michelangelo's David aroused controversy for its portrayal of unclad genitalia (Ruse, 2002). My mother was 46, her daughters 21, 19, 17, 14 and 12, her first son 8. She was a full-time mother in a world about to bear the brunt of significant and rapid social change.

## **Ethics**

There are significant ethical issues involved in telling family stories, especially the stories of the living. In choosing what to tell and what to leave out, I was influenced by questions of whose story it was and whether I had the right to tell it. Obviously respect for the stories of others is integral to ethical storytelling and my respect for my siblings' stories has been taken into consideration after consultation with them. Interestingly, requests by two of my siblings not to mention specific events or passages in their lives were proved unnecessary as my mother had not included them in her letters to her mother anyway, an example of the self-censorship of correspondence to meet the needs of the writer or her perceived needs of the relationship with the receiver. At other times there is a conflict between the actual telling of my mother's story and an exploration of the beliefs that influenced her perceptions and attitudes to the behaviour of her children, and the respect for their privacy. I have at all times respected their choice in this matter and explored other ways of canvassing the changing social contexts. I have also acceded to the request of one my sisters to use a pseudonym for her throughout the text.

A further challenge in editing the letters was the request by a member of my extended family not to be mentioned at all in the text. Apart from the personal emotional challenge this created it also meant that the description and discussion of some significant family events had to be moderated and could not be complete. I was saddened by this request because I felt its intransigence meant a part of my mother's story and the attitudes she held to the letting go of her children as they reached adulthood could not be told. Time has proved that the relationship involved has been successful and enriching. I was disappointed that, having known me all my adult life, they did not trust me to write the journey with respect. Part of my regret is that this

person’s offspring will not have the opportunity to frame their own history in that part of their parents’.

Most of my research with my mother and her reflections and current views has been done by email. This has been a very useful tool. The advantages are several. The practical usefulness of having replies already “transcribed”, the advantage that, because she is typing, she keeps more focused and the replies benefit from succinctness, yet they are still in her voice. There is the paradox of immediacy and distance which allows emotional space. The opportunity for my mother to take time to think about her responses and review them before she replies is advantageous as is the freedom to reply in her own time and piecemeal. I have her emails as a record and can refer back with ease. It also provided me with an emotional distance, separating the finding of information from the personal dilemmas of the mother/daughter relationship. Bogusia Temple in her study of Polish migrants in England reflects:

The people in my research were not powerless, they only told me what they wanted me to know. My account was dependent on what they were willing to discuss. Another researcher may well have been treated differently and produced a different account. Who the researcher is matters in that it affects the dynamics of the encounter . . . people assumed that I knew about, and would be sympathetic to, certain aspects of Polish life. (Temple, 1999, p. 25)

I believe my mother may have felt disloyal discussing my father’s limitations with an objective researcher but knew that I would moderate my writing out of respect for her, my father and siblings.

Concerns were expressed by both academics and family that my questioning would create distress as my mother revisited difficult emotional territory. With a background in psychotherapy, I was less concerned that, should it occur, this would be necessarily counterproductive for her. Christine Kenny took the tools of narrative therapy to study the lives of northern textile workers in England, and, in her analysis of the project, reflected on the therapeutics of life-storying: “There is a great deal of evidence to suggest that in some cases, participation in interviews alone can have a therapeutic effect” (Kenny, 1999, p.39). She goes on to say:

Perhaps the selves recalled during reminiscence actually lose aspects of their authenticity during the act of ‘giving voice’, causing them to become detached and alienated from the (present) self who constructs them. And, since the self is caught in a permanent flow of time, perhaps reminiscing is a process of losing, rather than finding, one’s self. Could it be that this might be the essence of the success (in some cases) of the talking therapies, such as psychoanalysis and counselling? Is it possible that in order to move on in our lives, in order to operate in different realities, we need to ‘talk out’ old inappropriate selves before we are able to ‘speak into being’ newer, more appropriate selves? (Kenny, 1999, p.39)

There were times when my mother expressed the disturbance of long settled emotions as she reflected on the letters and the times they evoked, for example:

**May 30, 2004**

The stuff I have sent you has certainly stirred up some emotions but I feel so different now maybe there is something in the saying, what does not kill you makes you stronger.

At other times she struggled with the self-reflection inherent in looking back:

**August 13, 2003**

It is hard for me to write this because it makes me a very small person.

She also expressed her concern for my emotional well-being as she shared her deeper feelings:

**June 1<sup>st</sup> 2004**

I am glad the sometimes raw emotion did not upset or offend you, I was a bit concerned that it would be too much.

In 2002, she had responded to an email about the death of one of my daughter's friends in a car accident, describing her emotions when on two successive nights in the May Blitz of 1941, she lost two of her best friends: She followed this with:

**4<sup>th</sup> August 2002**

My apologies for such an emotional response. I had no idea that after 61 years there was such a raw place in my psyche. It was such a defining moment it led to me being evacuated for the second time, there I met Gaynor and Mrs Anderson who had such dramatic effects on my personal growth.

There was only one occasion on which we negotiated not to explore issues further. I had asked for her to comment on an excerpt from a letter in late 1975 commenting on relationship difficulties between her and my father. She replied:

**4<sup>th</sup> March 2004**

This is possibly the most difficult thing you have ever asked me, I am prepared to explore the issues with you but you have to be prepared too, interestingly enough there is a piece in today's paper . . . on research by the Pfizer company which has relevance. I leave it to you. As a therapist/historian/writer it is I think of interest to you but only you can judge.

I made the assessment that her difficulty and the relevance of Pfizer (makers of Viagra) linked the subject to issues of sex and sexuality, I think this was the only time I was torn between my role as a researcher and my role as child. I elected to set the boundaries as child. My mother replied:

I think I might try to find the time to write some more personal stuff on the word processor and store it there for possible future information.

I have since asked for more information about this time and some general reflections on the challenges she faced at the time have been included in the main text.



Toward the end of the work she provided some private writing of relevance to the time, again with care for my psychological well-being:

**29<sup>th</sup> May 2005**

I am happy to send it to you if it would help and if you feel you could cope with the emotion.

At the end of the process I checked with her psychic well-being again. She responded:

I can only say that the process has infinitely enriched this period of my life, it has laid out the journey of my life with its wonderful variety, it has shown that I have had courage when I needed it, that the mistakes I made were more of omission than commission . . . that now I should not feel so frightened of life's end. It has made me feel the link between the past and the future; it has brought me close to you. It could not have been done without the complete trust I have in you as the interviewer and for that you should be congratulated. (Private correspondence 4<sup>th</sup> July 2005)

### **Process and Editing**

The biggest challenge of writing the text has been the issue of length and the limitations of word-count imposed on a Ph D. In my two previous works on this subject I limited the amount of time covered by the work to meet the restrictions of length. This still required greater editing of my mother's letters than I would have preferred because it meant cutting out the mundane and ordinary, which give colour and grounding to her life amidst the dramas. As I returned to her journey to start my Ph D thesis, I read and transcribed the year of 1968 and I got back into her life and immersed myself in her world and the way she described it. I wanted the complete text to be more inclusive of her words, as well as weaving my life as I read her words, to create something of the journey as I experience it. I was, at that point, under a misguided belief that word count would not be an issue. I thought my mother's words would stand separate from mine and I could complete the project with due respect to the eloquence of her letters and the small things that made up her life. Unfortunately I was wrong. The final project as I had wanted to write it would have made up nearly 500,000 words – a quarter of which would have been mine. So the biggest challenge has been to maintain the integrity of the work and the charm praised by readers of the early works while bringing the story to its natural end with the end of the letters.

This became a process of compromise and I tried several ways of writing a given year to find a solution, as well as asking for ideas and suggestions from others.

Many ideas were canvassed. For example:

- To paraphrase and summarise the letters – the main journey would be described but at the cost of a loss of my mother's voice which is so integral to the flavour of her journey;

- To write a separate work based on the themes of the letters without including much epistolary text, this, however, would create a text of a totally different nature to that intended;
- To limit the time frame and leave the journey uncompleted, as with my undergraduate and honours theses. However, this would mean the majority of the words were letter transcript and therefore may not meet the criteria of the Ph D thesis in terms of my words;
- To include smaller excerpts from the letters and adding the complete text of my original editing as an appendix in a CD. The risk was a lack of continuity and loss of intimacy and immediacy. Or:
- To edit the letters more heavily and include the complete transcripts of the letters, edited with respect to the ethical concerns mentioned above, as an appendix in a CD with links included in the thesis. This allows the reader to enjoy the letters as much or as little as they choose whilst maintaining continuity.

All the options were compromises and as such compromise the result in terms of my goal. I chose in the end to paraphrase and summarise both the letters and my mother’s reflections and to exclude texts of newspaper articles and some quotations from the background information. I also excluded far more of the information about my siblings.

Furthermore, having included significant amounts of transcript from my grandmother’s letters in my early draft, I re-edited to exclude this in the interests of brevity. I had become very absorbed in reading my grandmother’s letters, especially her family anecdotes of cousins I have never met and aunts and uncles about whom I have always been aware but never actually known. My grandmother is at times bitter, at others feisty. Her loneliness stands out against her emotional self-sufficiency. I gather she was not easy to please yet she seemed to take joy in the achievements, and grief in the losses, of her offspring and their children. Her letters tell of her yearning to see my mother again and I am moved by the sadness of their enforced separation. My father traveled so much it seems unkind that my mother could not make another trip to see her aged mother. As the years went by my grandmother’s writing became more infirm, spelling mistakes crept in, yet her mind continued to show a lively interest in the affairs of the world and strong opinions about the happenings in her family as well as the wider community, but her writing signified a physical decline.

As my grandmother’s health deteriorated my mother increased the positive spin in her own letters to cheer her mother up, in so doing they became less and less useful as a chronicle of her real life, but more a Pollyannic view cultivated for her audience. In my early drafts my story shifted under the absences in my mother’s letters home to become as much my grandmother’s. It was fascinating to me as much as frustrating because I would never be able to ask the teller to

reflect on her journey. Attempts to seek information about my grandmother from the cousins who had her in their lives, and watched her grow old, fell on deaf ears. As it happens, this was fortuitous because the constraints of length would have precluded a comprehensive look at my grandmother’s life as it ran parallel to my mother’s on the other side of the world.

The end result brings my words to meet the criteria for a Ph D thesis and reduces the number attributed to others. It also leaves many gaps.

After much thought, I chose not to include electronic copy of the complete transcripts of my mother’s letters home in order to be sure I was not compromising the trust put in me by my siblings to protect their privacy where requested.

With respect to practical editing I have recorded the date of the letter in the style my mother used, which often varied in terms of the order of date and month and whether or not she included the year. I elected not to specify edited text by using ellipses between paragraphs because it created a disjointed effect. Often only a small section of a given letter is included in the text. I used a different, more relaxed font to identify the letter transcripts both for easy recognition of transition between letter and comment as well as giving the feeling of a hand written text. I used italicisation and indenting of my basic font to indicate direct quotes from my mother or siblings.

In editing my mother’s letters I had to decide whether to correct punctuation and grammar. My mother was very good at written English and a very accurate speller so the lack of precise use of punctuation is part of the flow and informal style of her letter writing. I therefore decided to leave the flow as it was and transcribe accurately, rather than pedantically, as regards grammar.

## **Conclusion**

An epistolary collection relies for its meaning on the reader interpreting the intent of the writer and being aware of their inevitable self-censorship. It also depends on the editor of the collection declaring intent and maintaining the integrity of the meaning. Documenting both the trivial and the momentous the new text is often full of more questions than answers, holding the door ajar to another's life only to have it closed. The result, nevertheless, can be unusually satisfying, a unique and intriguing recital of a lived life. I have endeavored to make my intent clear, convey my mother's intent in writing and add a retrospective view of her intent and her message. The final text is not the expanded and annotated epistolary collection I had anticipated originally, but, in much the same way an iceberg gives us a view of itself, what is there for us to see and marvel at is only visible because of the wealth and weight of what lies below.

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## *“My Dearest Mum”*

### **Prologue**

We left England on the 27<sup>th</sup> May 1965. My father was the newly appointed and inaugural Perth City Planning Officer and the Perth City Council was paying our way out to Australia. My father had fallen in love with Perth on a world lecture tour to promote his book *Planning for Man and Motor* in 1964. He came home full of enthusiasm for a sea that was not only clean but also warm, “like swimming in soup”.

There were eight of us; my parents and their six children, five daughters aged from 15 to 7 and a son aged 3. I am the third daughter. I was 11 years old and ready and happy to head off to a new life of sunshine and beaches and swimming. I had been told in my English Grammar School that Australian kids had pet kangaroos that carried their school bags for them. My oldest sister was most reluctant to leave her English life, at fifteen her friends and school were all more important than family and adventure. In fact she kept her watch on English time for many months so she would know what her friends were doing back home.

My mother last saw her mother just before we left England, visiting her in Liverpool. Her father was, by then, severely affected by Alzheimer’s Disease and she recalls him saying; “Ede what is this strange woman doing in our house?” He shrugged her off when she embraced him to say her final goodbye. My grandmother was keen for us to move to Australia, the shadow of the cold war dark in the early sixties.

My mother was less keen, she wanted to stay in the UK and pursue some television work that had recently come her way following the publication of a book, *The Free Family*, which she and my father had written. She had had several appearances including the BBC Family Affairs programme and presented well. She wanted my father to continue to seek an academic appointment in the UK. But she dutifully followed him on his dream and we arrived in Perth in mid June 1965. Within weeks they had bought a 3-acre property in Kelmscott, bordering on the Canning River, with an orchard of young mandarin trees and a huge swimming pool. The house was not much to my mother’s liking.

My father became somewhat of a celebrity quite quickly as he espoused his views and visions of the planning for Perth and my mother reveled in the social contacts and contexts his popularity and status brought. She made friends easily and wrote enthusiastically of people, events and places. Despite this she was very homesick and in every letter exhorted her mother to join us, if only for a holiday. Her homesickness was exacerbated as the first year went on. In August she suffered a miscarriage, and then her father gradually succumbed to physical ill-

health as well as the relentless dementia that had claimed his mind before we left. He died just after Christmas 1965 making the great distance between Liverpool and Perth seem all the greater. My mother was very stoic in her grief and it is, in part, the writing and research involved in this project that has shown me the depth of her relationship with him and the loss his dementia and death caused her.

To her credit she embraced life in Perth. My father's reputation and popularity grew as they became established and his forthright and good-humoured approach attracted attention. My mother took up the opportunities provided by his popularity and soon became valued in her own right. Both of them took up offers to appear on television and on radio commentating on social issues. My mother was invited to be Chairman of the Appeals Committee for the Kindergarten Union of WA because they thought the name of Mrs Paul Ritter would help, however, the people involved in the Kindergarten Teacher's College Committee were quick to recognise her organisational and problem solving abilities as well as her enthusiasm to be involved. This role took a great deal of her time and attention over the ensuing years. She began to transform the reflected glory she had gained from being Paul Ritter's wife into her own success. The friendships that began through her community involvement at this time have in some cases become lifelong.

Early in 1966 my father presented his plan for the City to the Perth City Council and it was met with great interest and enthusiasm by the media. His celebrity status meant they had the opportunity to meet many of Perth's most interesting and influential people. During the year they befriended, amongst others, Catherine King, daughter of Sir Walter Murdoch and acclaimed radio personality, and author Mary Durack Miller.

My father's star was definitely rising in 1966 and in its wake my mother shone. My father traveled quite a lot, lecturing to differing groups. His charisma and enthusiasm were infectious. He could indulge in these safe in the knowledge that my mother was keeping everything ordered and organised on the family front. She managed the transport needs of us all and, despite her own commitments, always ensured there was a meal waiting and ready in the evenings. It was a welcoming place, the home my mother made.

We had many merry times. Our meal tables were often a lot of fun. We never ate in front of the TV and, whenever possible, we all ate at the same time. There was always plenty of conversation and laughter, banter and arguments. My father was never short of an opinion or idea. He was a passionate enthusiast and it carried those around him along.

This was very evident when he led a community battle for the preservation of the Barracks Arch. Never afraid of a stoush and never as effective as when his passion was matched with a

popular cause he successfully lobbied the government of Sir David Brand to preserve this icon of West Australian history. It was a great victory, and the Arch stands today at the top of St George's Terrace. Entirely surrounded by freeway it is an odd monument to people power – the younger generations oblivious, no doubt, to its meaning, taking it for granted in its island, if indeed they notice it at all. The triumph of the Arch was just part of my father's rising popularity, he continued to go interstate to speak and received offers of several jobs over there. But he was already very devoted to Perth and not interested in moving elsewhere. My mother loved the accolades he received and likewise was increasingly happy with her place in West Australian society.

As the year went on my father's mother suffered a series of strokes and her declining health and subsequent death echoed the decline of my mother's father a year earlier. The distance from England made the upset all the worse. Combined with the simple distress was the impotence of separation and the uncertainty of communication. This was relived when my father's father was diagnosed with stomach cancer early in 1967 and succumbed very quickly.

While my mother's interest and involvement with the world and its improvement continued to expand, my father's role at the Perth City Council was becoming increasingly problematic. The employment of a new Town Clerk and ill-health of the Lord Mayor led to escalating conflict between my father and the council which came to a head in May 1967. My mother's letter of the 31<sup>st</sup> describes:

*Let's see if I can put you in the picture I think I told you that he ran into trouble from time to time well this was chiefly with certain unscrupulous big business elements in the city who wanted to use planning for their own ends. Paul told them in no uncertain terms where to go. Now this offended Councillor Curlewis who is Deputy Lord Mayor and chairman on the Town Planning committee and this is a very important position. He is a big man, chairman of the Brewery and other sorts of things and rather unscrupulous. Everything was however under control because the Lord Mayor is a very honest man and very pro-Ritter. However in January the Lord Mayor was operated on for lung cancer, was not expected to recover and has been away for some months recovering very slowly. This put Curlewis as Acting Lord Mayor and full and foul use he made of it. He brought out some very old regulations which said amongst other things that Paul must not communicate in anyway with TV press or radio. Then they said he might not take leave to go to the Architects' annual conference in Brisbane ... Paul played along with this, but of course this bloke Curlewis had offended the Press whereas Paul has always treated them in a kind and courteous manner so they all, three newspapers four radio stations and three TV stations, have backed Paul.*

*One of these newspapers rang Canberra [where my mother was attending a conference] and asked me what did I think of this muzzling (as they called it) of Paul. Well my paddy was up and I replied "They might think they can muzzle Paul but I am damned if they can muzzle me." to my amusement the kids rang me back to say there had been lots of placards with three inch high letters all over Perth saying "Mrs Ritter attacks Council." And this saying of mine was quoted in the sayings of the week. When I arrived back from Canberra I felt like a film star since I was greeted by cameras from all three stations and was asked to make a statement. This apparently riled Curlewis so badly that he put an advertisement in the local press beginning "the Lord Mayor and Councillors of the City of Perth..." which contained an attack on me as well as*

*the press. Well this has really put the cat among the pigeons because the press are more outraged than ever and what is worse the Lord Mayor has said (though he is still not fit) that he completely dissociates himself from this advert that they had no right to use his name without consulting him and that what is more he does not agree with the statements in the advert. It is of course front page news. In the meantime the Brisbane architects' conference were outraged that Paul should not be allowed to go so arranged a complete telephone link up with amplifiers so Paul gave his lecture from the sitting room and with the two way system was able to answer questions, you realise that Brisbane is two thousand miles away!!*

A series of Council meetings and ratepayers' meetings followed. It was an enormous emotional strain on my mother and her worst fears were realised when my father was sacked on Monday July 31<sup>st</sup>. There was a great deal of public support for him including a petition to parliament but the criticism that ran parallel took its toll.

It was at this time that Tom Wardle, a self-made local retail millionaire, stepped into the picture and provided financial support to keep my father in Perth. Life settled down over the next month, a time of adjusting to a new reality and coming to terms with change. My father kept busy with writing and with a regular commentary appearance on the Channel Seven news. When the Lord Mayor died my father put his energies into ensuring that Tom Wardle was elected to replace him. He also decided to sue the PCC for wrongful dismissal and specific councillors for defamation.

It was a year in which the excitement and emotion of my parents' lives backgrounded the adolescent highs and lows of my own. I remember my mother's fragility at times, my father's steadfast optimism. The waves of hope and the troughs of hardship, more often emotional than material, became part of family life. My mother's letters home over the time even out the peaks and troughs, yet in so doing they tell the story and demonstrate her ways of making sense of the storms that my father's life imposed.

I pick up the narrative as 1968 begins.

## 1968

I know I enjoyed the first day of 1968 because my diary entry describes the visit of the "Serventys, Hutchinsons and another family" as "fun" and a "beaut day", despite getting sunburnt. My memory of the day is vague; a sense of pleasure, laughter, games, good company, a day that left a long lasting fondness for the Serventys.

My mother's first letter home is written the next day. It is iconic of the many other letters home that formed the communication systems between migrant families and their homes in the "old country" in the 1960s. A word picture of family life. Special occasions, the little irritations of life, descriptions of social activities and the people involved, a little bit of Australian culture and geography explained and a bit of gossip about the neighbours, underlying it all anxiety about the well being of the far away family:

*Jan. 2<sup>nd</sup>*

*My Darling Mum.*

*I am just trying to steal a few moments between finishing getting Nicky's party food ready and the children arriving. But it has been one of those days and if the big ones had not been so cooperative I reckon there would not have been a party at all. Funny how some days seem to have the devil in them nothing big goes wrong just lots of bits of gremlinitis.*

*It was a lovely evening last Friday. It was quite a small dinner party just 8. There were our hosts David and June Hutchison, then Carol and Vin Serventy and the other pair were George and Isobel Seddon. George is a very brainy lecturer from the University with a lovely sense of humour. His wife Isobel is an American with a somewhat caustic sense of humour. You know I have met very few Americans that I have liked.*

*On New Year's Eve the children were so keen to have us stay at home with them that we turned down two invitations one to a house party and the other to a smart restaurant. I was glad we did because I was so sleepy I was very happy to go to bed at midnight.*

*Yesterday we had a lunch time barbecue for six adults and ten children. Fortunately it was a bit cooler but still the children spent practically the entire time in the swimming pool. Leonora did the cooking. Our barbecue stove which is on the lawn by the swimming pool consists of two sides of stone and a metal grill across the top. Barbecue parties are very popular here and people take their own steak, chops and sausages. The fire is either charcoal or wood and the food tastes very good cooked that way.*

*I have not heard from you since your letter written long before Christmas and I am wondering how you all are.*

Vincent Serventy was an enthusiast, like my father, a passionate conservationist who had done much to try to moderate the development of Perth prior to our arrival in 1965. His wife Carol was a warm and smiling woman and their children, whom I do not remember individually, were a lot of fun. Not long after this Vincent Serventy left for the Eastern States where he has continued to make a significant contribution to the conservation movement.

Jan 9<sup>th</sup>

*Well today Australia has a new Prime Minister. They have been interviewing him on TV. He has a much more lively face than Harold Holt I think I shall like him better but he has yet to prove himself. I disliked very much the way Harold Holt toadied to America.*

John Gorton was the Prime Minister with the livelier face. Harold Holt had died in mysterious circumstances – disappearing whilst swimming. Most believed he had drowned but there were some who enjoyed the conspiracy theories and as I recall had him kidnapped, murdered and defecting. Holt became and remains famous for his backing of Lyndon Johnson's stance on Vietnam and the slogan "All the Way with LBJ". As I write history is echoing across the years. John Howard the current Prime Minister is seen by many to have been "toadying" to America. Controversy reigns once again over whether the people are being told the truth by the politicians. Australia's relationship to the USA is being reviewed in the light of Vietnam and further back to the Second World War. People are careful that the effect of protestations about sending troops to Iraq will not be as damaging to the troops concerned as was the opposition to the Vietnam War. But that is in the future. My mother would have been horrified to think that 35 years on a politician would feel free to use language like "arse-licker" to describe the Prime Minister's "toadying".

*Thank you very much for Nicky's and Mark's birthday presents. Mark is so thrilled when he gets post so we have all posted him a card for tomorrow. Erica says she and her friend Alma will run Mark's birthday party. I rather dread these parties now I seem to have less patience than I used to and I am always relieved when the girls take over.*

I enjoyed running the birthday parties. They were a strong tradition with time-honoured party games: Musical Bumps, Musical Statues, Pass the Parcel and Oranges and Lemons, the games I remember. The parcel was always something very small, often a coin with multitudes of wrappers around it. The challenge for the person in charge of the music was to give everyone a turn and not to succumb to the temptation of fudging the results and turning the music down when a favourite child was holding the parcel. Prizes were lollies and there were always tears. These often came from the child whose birthday it was because they couldn't win everything. My father would usually come in and do his magic singing comb trick and I remember being amazed at its simplicity when I finally became old enough to be trusted with its secret. Twenty years later it continued to intrigue my children's friends – children of an altogether more sophisticated generation. Afternoon tea would be a highlight. The menu consistent over the years, sausages on sticks, fairy bread, egg on bread, fairy cakes, trifle (my mother always made two and only one would ever get to the table), jelly and, of course, birthday cake. My father developed a tradition whereby we would sing happy birthday as many times as the person was old. Luckily this tradition has not persisted as we now all mark our birthdays in decades not years.

My mother spent the next week at Royal Kings Park watching the West Australian Tennis Championships featuring Billie Jean King and Margaret Court. I joined her for the last two days and had a great time, boasting in my diary about speaking to Billie-Jean King and of all the autographs of famous international tennis stars I had acquired (I have no idea where they went). But I also got very sunburnt – an ongoing problem in my early teenage years before the advent of effective sunscreens.

Behind my mother's chat there is an underlying angst. The effects of the traumatic and disrupting events of 1967 remain, despite the clicking over of the calendar, and it is not long before my mother shares her sense of instability and the stress it causes her.

*I must say I wonder where we will be this time next year. I suppose it is the New Year that makes me feel unsettled. Paul went to see Cr. Curlewis yesterday because the more we study documents and reports the more obvious it becomes that Town Clerk Edwards has been a great big nigger in the woodpile. He tried to make him see that a legal case could still be avoided. I don't know whether it will have done any good. Otherwise life is as quiet as it can be with six kids on holiday and one of them a very rumbunctious little boy.*

Her next letter updates her mother on my father's legal wrangle with the Perth City Council. My father had taken the step of talking to Alf Curlewis and felt it was a distinct possibility that the Council would settle out of court. He also found it more apparent that the Town Clerk was causing a lot of friction:

*Jan 14<sup>th</sup>*

*In talking to Curlewis Paul found it more and more apparent that the Town Clerk has been a real mischief maker saying things about Paul that just are not and never were true. If Paul had been bitter and not tried to sort this out the truth would not have come to light. Paul has now got a whole long list of the Town Clerk's mischief and he is going to write to each Councillor telling them to ask questions about all sorts of things. You never know it might lead to his reinstatement but by Jove my lad's a fighter.*

Tom Wardle was still very much onside and declaring his determination to see things right with respect to my father's dismissal and his frustration at the timidity of Leif Nilsson, the deputy town planner.

*Well I suppose Paul's guts and integrity are rare things in this world...Well I'll write the next saga of the Ritter affair shortly. The court has given the Council till the end of January to produce documents supporting their case or the defence they made will have to be struck off.*

Her letter switches from the life-changing to the mundane:

*You thought I was lucky getting 45lbs apricots you should see my kitchen I don't know what to do with the fruit. We bought our usual lot from Mr Gwynne and this morning Cliff's Mum gave us a big box of peaches and plums. I have plums, 3 kinds, peaches, apricots, strawberries, mulberries, passionfruit, apples, grapes and nectarines to use up. The ones underlined are from our own orchard.*

She continues with news and commentary and more of her beliefs and wisdoms such as:

*I think it is most important to keep toned up when you get into your forties.*

And:

*A good burst of tears is a good therapy for grief. Look at Paul he could not give way after his mother and father died until he was at old Charles Hamilton's funeral and then he cried as a child might and it did him the world of good, the grief stopped festering inside.*

And finishes:

15<sup>th</sup> Jan

*This letter did not get away yesterday so I am adding a postscript.*

*Paul saw Curlewis for an hour again this morning and it ended by Curlewis saying he would get the City Solicitor to ring our Solicitor and arrange a meeting very shortly. But of course they don't know what Paul's conditions for settling out of court are. Sometimes I am not even sure I want Paul to go back though he must publicly clear himself of course. I sometimes think private practice plus M.P. (which is much less arduous here than in England) would be more fun. However, we will see. I think one thing driving the Council mad is that the information constantly leaks out to Paul, just after Paul saw Curlewis he apparently sent for Leif and told him not to communicate with Paul. Of course it is not Leif but all kinds of people give Paul information as to what is going on. It is like being in a corny American film.*

Communication was seriously disrupted by industrial action over the next few weeks. I remember the frequency of strikes at the time and the contrast in recent times. The postal workers had great power in the days before fax, email and internet and they seemed to wield that power often. For my mother and her mother, and thousands of others like them, it meant an absence of interaction and an increase in the anxiety that separation induced. Certainly the inconvenience of industrial action challenged any sympathy the community had for the issues.

21<sup>st</sup> Jan.

*My Dearest Mum.*

*I am starting another letter to you although as far as I know the last letter is still sitting in the Post Office and of course we have had no letters for ten days except the electricity bill. Electricity being a state project here trust that to get through.*

*There are talks going on in Melbourne today and we hope the strike gets settled because things are getting more and more chaotic. I think Unions when they first started to protect workers from unfair bosses were a very good thing but they have gone beyond a joke. A place the size of Australia is very dependent on postal facilities and the country is just being blackmailed. There is quite a lot of validity in some of the things the postal workers say but this is no way to go about getting them put right.*

In 1968 the post was still delivered twice a day and on Saturday mornings.

*Nothing more about the Ritter affair we are still awaiting a move from the Council solicitors and from what our many friends in the Council House tell us the Town Clerk is trying every way he can think of to find evidence against Paul seemingly without success.*



The Lord Mayor on the other hand was talking to my father's staff but he had limited power to change the course of the Town Clerk's enquiries.

My mother's attention was turning itself toward the new school year:

*Quite a year this year what with Nicola starting High School, Penny taking her Junior exams (equivalent to School Certificate) and Erica having her last year at school and taking Leaving Exams (equi. To Higher School Cert.) and Leo second year Uni and Mark starting school. ... I wish you could see them all they are such a gorgeous family and we have such enjoyable fun and talk together.*

She was also quite taken with Leonora's new beau:

*From first impressions I liked him very much. Nice straight look, good handshake a lovely deep resonant voice. He seemed quite at ease and comfortable here ... I hope he comes again, he borrowed a book so that is a good sign that he would like to return.*

The postal strike finally came to an end and communication resumed:

*January 30<sup>th</sup>*

*My Dearest Mum,*

*Many thanks for your letter of the 17<sup>th</sup> received this morning, very late thanks to the mail strike. I was amused in a wry sort of fashion at you calling it Mini-Britain, it really is sad. Some months ago when they stopped allowing British investments in Australia I said it would make for more Japanese and American investment here and it has. I think the Labour Government is so short sighted.*

*I must say our new Prime Minister stood firm over the mail strike he refused to negotiate until the men were back at work and student and housewife labour were taken on to get the mail moving and the unions backed down.*

They were still awaiting news from the Council's solicitors and my mother describes the three likely outcomes:

- 1) *They reinstate Paul with back pay and so on.*
- 2) *They pay him compensation and appoint him planning consultant to the city.*
- 3) *The case goes to court.*

*Curlewis certainly does not seem to want the latter partly because they know darned well that Paul will stand up better under cross questioning than they will. We are lucky in that our QC is a youngish man with a lot to gain from winning this case and he moves slowly because he likes every step tied up and documented completely first. On the other hand the Council's QC is a man who has gained everything and therefore has nothing to gain from this case and has even had a couple of heart attacks recently. When the Council's defence came out our QC thought the Council had taken leave of their senses because they so overstated their case thus making it easier to refute.*

The yearning that distance created was exacerbated by the mail strike:

*Feb. 5<sup>th</sup>*

*Your letter of the 29<sup>th</sup> sure did make me wish I could jump into my car and bring you back for a few weeks .... I am sorry you were worried about no letters I had hoped that the strike would have been reported in the English papers.*

*I hate to think of you being alone and feeling miserable and bitter it really is frustrating to be so far away. You say you could not stand the heat but the humidity is so low that 60 in England is equivalent to 85-95 here.*

*Even though Paul is not city planner all the well known people who call in at Perth come to see us. There is another American coming this evening. They are establishing what they call a World University in California and this chappie is travelling the world finding ideas for it. Someone showed him a copy of Paul's "Educreation" so he was very enthusiastic and wanted to meet him.*

*Educreation* was a book on creativity in education. My father loved to create words for his concepts. Educreation stands for education for creation, growth and change and was based on the twelve years of architectural education with which he had been involved in Nottingham, much of which was experimental (Ritter, 1966).

*You know to understand the Australian attitude to Britain now you must understand how very bitter they were a few years ago when Britain first announced they would join the Common Market. If it had happened then it would have left Australia and New Zealand in a most ghastly mess, that is why Australia has been trying desperately to find markets in Asia and other places because once Britain joins the Common Market things will be loaded against Australian produce. They felt then that Britain could not care less about the Commonwealth and that was Heath trying to get Britain in to the Common Market. It is very difficult for people in England to realise the enormous potential here in W. Australia. Look at it this way W. Australia is five times the size of the whole of the British Isles and yet here in the West there are only as many people as in Liverpool. A million square miles of country and less than a million people. Of course a lot of this is desert but there are vast mineral deposits in the desert to be developed hence the need for capital. In Perth itself there are 400,000 people but travel north and you can travel for hours and hours and never meet another soul. Even only a few miles from us you can quite easily get lost in the bush. All children learn simple bush sense and how to cope with snake bites and so on. Did you realise that Perth is the only big city in W. Australia the nearest next big city is Adelaide and that is nearly 2000 miles away. Paul is quite right when he describes Perth as an island surrounded by half sea and half sand.*

My father's work occupies her writing, difficulties in accessing reports he had written, while employed by the Perth City Council, for a book he was planning, and invitations to stand for State Parliament come in for a mention. Meanwhile my mother was busy building up a data base of courses available for women in their thirties and forties. She was also amused by her son's comments on starting school: "I am glad I am experienced with rough boys at kindergarten because we've got one at school."

A week later my father had been in the headlines once again criticising the findings of an American traffic consultant who was recommending a six-lane highway be built along the riverfront in Perth. He was determined to fight the suggestion and with a State election due in

March there was political mileage to be made. The legal battles with the council were dragging on and unlikely to be heard before April or May (13/2/68).

Domestic events were interweaved with the political:

### *Monday*

*Too many interruptions to finish the letter yesterday including Mark getting a nasty bump just behind the ear. He had been having a friendly romp with Jemima and he tripped and fell hard against the edge of the table. It raised a nasty wheal and had me worried for a bit, it is still swollen today but I think it is alright. I don't know whether it was the result of the bump or not but he kept waking during the night and crying so I have been rather dopey today*

*Penny has become really interested in sewing for herself, she has just made herself a blouse and is now making herself a two piece. I am glad she has taken it up because it seemed rather a waste having a good sewing machine doing nothing. For the two piece she found some really bonny turquoise material spotted with little flowers. Penny is a bit self-conscious about her weight and size but I keep telling her it is puppy fat and will disappear in a year or two. And of course Leo gets furious because people constantly think Penny is the eldest – she is an inch taller than Erica and an inch and a half taller than Leo and boy when Penny is pre-menstrual she is a real handful.*

I was there. And yet I am not. The me I was then was there, a self-conscious adolescent. Not blessed with beauty or even prettiness, not particularly fit or toned, a bit top heavy; sadly fashion was moving inexorably into the realms of skinniness. I loved sewing. Back then I could create clothes that fit me better than anything off a shop shelf and much more cheaply too.

Pre-menstrual syndrome/tension/dysmorphic disorder was a significant problem in our house with up to six women struggling with its toxic effect on mood and tolerance. I hated it when my angst was dismissed as having "PMT" or 'being PM' as my mother called it – even as I knew that I was. I suffered and my family suffered, but the beginning of menstruation did not end my suffering because I was always troubled by significant dysmenorrhoea and often had to take to my bed or struggle through a day of school in significant pain. Nothing helped except a hot water bottle and lying still. My mother would suggest the old remedy of Gin and I did even try it once – it was disgusting. So once every month I was at the mercy of my physiology. At that time we were not allowed to swim during a period, unlike today's girls, my daughter was told by the school nurse that it was fine to swim – the cold water would stop the menstrual flow even if she could not use tampons. Now the supermarket shelves and television adverts are full of products of 'feminine hygiene', with super slim tampons and ultra thin, dry, super-absorbent plastic-backed pads with wings, even specially designed G-string pads. We had to use thick pads, called 'sanitary napkins', tucked away in the chemist, demurely wrapped in brown paper, as if that would somehow disguise the purchase. These thick wads of cotton wool, held on with pins or awkward hooks, often leaked, necessitating the use of 'plastic pants', baggy nylon knickers with a plastic insert at the crotch. These were very uncomfortable in the hot weather.

My mother, of course, told us how lucky we were that we no longer had to use rags that would be re-washed and stored for next time.

She begins her next letter with a comparison of the Australian heat and the UK slush with some reminiscences about driving to school.

**18<sup>th</sup> February**

*I hated the mucky streets after it had thawed a little and how I hated driving the kids to school in the winter when the car wouldn't start and when you put on your brakes the car slewed all over the road.*

She goes on to criticize British immigrants who returned to the UK without giving Australia a fair go and blaming it for not being more like England.

*English migrants have a bad reputation simply because of the publicity given to the moaners. ...I reckon more young couples like John and Kath should emigrate. This is such a vast empty land and needs a white population.*

Presenting my mother with this quote now is quite confrontational for her. She urges me to consider all the facts that led to her attitude at the time. She reminds me that my grandmother was very insular, growing up and living through a time when "*Britain was might and right*". She recalls the pomp that greeted Empire Day, May 24<sup>th</sup>, when she was at school and how she grew up thinking only those who were white and British were worthwhile. She feels her comments in 1968 were pandering to her mother's beliefs, "*not wanting to . . . upset my Mother's apple cart*". Ironically, of course, my mother married a Jewish foreigner and she reminds me of this as she explores the history to her racial perceptions and beliefs. When she married my father her mother had told her to: "*go to hell with my 'damned Jew and bloody foreigner'*" in a letter awaiting her when she got back from her honeymoon. Much later her mother had expressed surprise that my mother had not gone home and begged forgiveness. My mother comments: "*I can't help feeling she did not know me as well as she thought!*"

She recalls the moments of revelation, the first in Switzerland when she and my father lived there for several months before the birth of my eldest sister and she had to report to the police to renew her residency, because she was an 'alien'. She recalls being kept waiting all morning despite being pregnant and sick and walking out into the street muttering "*These damn foreigners, who do they think they are?*" and immediately being struck by the fact that, for the first time, she was the foreigner.

The second occurred in Nottingham when, late picking children up from school, she swerved in front of a cyclist to park, realising with horror that she would not have done so if he had not been coloured. This began a conscious, and successful, effort to be aware of and challenge prejudices.

My father's life continued to dominate her letters:

*Paul laughed when I read your letter to him and said he was delighted to hear that you plan to live to a great old age cos that's how long he reckons it will take to finish the Ritter Saga. You know he was suing one of the Councillors who had gone around Perth saying Paul had "forged a leave pass" well our QC is rubbing his hands because in his defence Cr Lee says yes he said it but thought it was all right because the Town Clerk had told him so. This was exactly what we were after in issuing the writ. Next week the booklet against the new road proposals is coming out. I'll send you one.*

*The Government wants to drive a great big freeway slap through the playing fields and Government House Gardens from the Mitchell Freeway to the Bridge which would cut Perth off from the river by a six lane highway. The north of the city is badly neglected. What Paul wants is to have a road go up from the Mitchell Freeway complex and join Wellington St and then a new road go from Wellington St to the river and across the tip of Heirisson Island.*

When we arrived in Perth in 1965 Western Australia was like a blank canvas to me. I knew nothing of, nor bothered to learn, its recent history. I accepted the newly built Freeway reclaimed from the Swan River and the relatively recently opened Narrows Bridge as status quo. It was only from reading Vincent Serventy's autobiography, *An Australian Life* (Serventy, 1999), that I became aware of the battles that had surrounded the planning of Perth before our arrival. I was unaware of the fight to prevent an aquatic centre being built in King's Park, unaware of the fight to prevent the reclamation of the Swan River, battles Serventy describes in his book.

The history of the reclamation began with the appointment of a town planner to assist the Commissioner for Town Planning in 1950. In 1955 his report was presented and public unease was stirred by the Labor government's statement that more than 16 hectares would be reclaimed for roads. Public pressure led to the establishment of the Swan River Conservation Act in 1958 which limited to four hectares the amount of river that could be reclaimed without parliamentary approval. Serventy goes on "By political chicanery the four hectares was increased to eight hectares and bulldozed through in 1963. The work was praised in the press as removing 'dirty sections of the river . . . muddy and shallow' . . . Today forty-five hectares are said to have been lost by this legal 'death by a thousand cuts' " (Serventy, 1999, p.47). Serventy contested this negative view of the river and his battle to save the river is of contemporary interest as the recent concerns about the health of the Swan River revisit the effect of reclamation and destruction of the microenvironment. In a debate between planner Gordon Stephenson and Serventy he summed up his position; "In a hundred years time a more sensible people will dig out that spaghetti of roads and car parks and let the river flow in once more to recreate that old beauty." He adds in his book "It is still my hope" (Serventy, 1999, p.47).

Reading his work now I can see how he and my father would have basked in each other's viewpoints, against the domination of the city by the car and in love with the beauty that was the

City of Perth when my father first saw it, and Serventy was fighting for it, in 1964. Serventy describes:

We need to take in all the elements when looking at a landscape. What was created by nature is vital, what is added by humans can increase the beauty yet always there must be a unity. When Governor Stirling was choosing the site for the capital city it seemed an unpromising place of swampy flats yet time shows he chose wisely. In the distance was the line of blue hills, the Darling Scarp, forming a backdrop. In the foreground the Mount Eliza bluff thrust forward from the green of Kings Park. Enclosed was the city of Perth, a gathering of buildings on a human scale. Tying all together was the silver thread of the Swan River with the Reflection Pool mirroring the city. Harmony within nature! Now the thread was broken and the whole became fragmented. Perth was changed from a beautiful city to a merely pleasant one. (Serventy, 1999, p.47)

In his book he reflects on the change in attitudes over the thirty-five years. "I regret that redoubtable battler, Mrs Bessie Rischbeith, stood alone ankle deep in the water trying to hold back the bulldozers. Today she would have 10,000 companions but in those days conservationists were more timid than they are today" (Serventy, 1999, p.47).

Despite, or perhaps because of, the controversies in which my father was embroiled their social life was full:

**26<sup>th</sup> Feb.**

*We also went out to a lovely evening at the Festival of Perth. It was a banquet with two short operas between courses. Food was very good hors d'oeuvres then fish in a very exciting sauce then duck cooked with orange with peas potatoes and carrots then sweet called Bombe Festival of Perth which was sponge cake surrounded with ice cream and then meringue they poured brandy over it and brought it in blazing – it was quite delicious. Everyone was in evening dress and it was a very jolly evening.*

*My Ladies' Committee raising funds for the college building is in action again it takes up quite a bit of time, but I enjoy it.*

My mother spent a lot of her time in unpaid community work. The "ladies' committee" she speaks of was responsible for an enormous amount of fund raising that allowed for the building of premises for the Kindergarten Teacher's College of W.A. The kindergarten movement started in 1927. My mother attended the celebration of the 75th anniversary at Curtin in 2002. Professor Tom Stannage paid a personal tribute to her, as one of a procession of people, mostly women, who had seen the importance of early education. My mother had been inspired by the work of Bessie Reischbeth and Betty Lefroy. Meerilinga College in Hay Street, West Perth stands as the building for which they worked so hard to raise funds. The women concerned in these community projects did not seem to question the amount of work they did without remuneration.

My father, meantime, had decided to stand for the State Government seat of Perth as an independent. He had no chance of winning the seat in the political climate of the time but as Tom Wardle was prepared to finance him and his public profile was high and positive he went ahead. His political paraphernalia sported a psychedelic pink heart with Ritter, Perth 1.

*Paul is having lunch with the Leader of the Opposition and one of the councillors who opposed him. I have a feeling that they are going to try to use his sacking as a political move during the election because the Minister for Local Government refused to act on those 10,000 signatures that were presented to him asking for an enquiry. It will be amusing to see what becomes of it, the general election is on March 23<sup>rd</sup>. Paul just rang through to say so far so good the Opposition Leader has taken home the wodge of documents to study.*

While my father was building his political profile family building was my mother's forte.

*Mark seems to be settling down alright at school though he needs lots of attention and cuddling when he gets home. I play all sorts of things like snakes and ladders in the evening. One of the problems is knowing what to put in his lunch box because he does not come home at lunch time. He does not ever bother much with food so I have to try to think of things that tempt him. I sometimes wonder if I give him too much chocolate but I feel that nut chocolate has a lot of goodness in it. And I try very hard to have dinner ready at 4 pm so he gets a chance to eat straight away.*

I don't remember a time when we had dinner so early, but my mother confirms it was so. She gradually extended the time, as Mark adjusted, until it returned to 6pm. It is part of family myth that my mother would have the tea on the table at 6pm promptly every night.

My father's involvement in the election for State Parliament dominated our household early in 1968. With the litigation against Perth City Council stalled the election gave political focus to his passion for the City and for its planning in particular. It also appealed to his enjoyment of being centre stage in the community. My mother enjoyed the reflected glory especially when the press and public response was full of enthusiasm for my father and his beliefs. He engendered great loyalty in the staff who had worked for him at the Perth City Council and they were quick to offer practical help.

#### **4<sup>th</sup> March**

*Today is Labour Day holiday and there is a march and decorated lorries through Perth Paul is taking advantage of it and addressing people in a public square through a loud speaker system which has been mounted on top of a car. We are having a good deal of fun with this. We have some large posters which ... have written ... "Watchdog in Parliament" in both English and Italian since there are about 2000 Italian migrants in the electorate. The press does not give Paul much of a chance but everywhere he goes the people are very kind and helpful. It is quite an entertaining and educational business which is also very good publicity. Tomorrow the Leader of the Opposition is making his policy speech. There are six independents standing and the West Australian Newspaper has asked them to write 150 words each stating their case. Paul has written his as poetry. One of the boys from the office lives in a flat in the area and he has made a big poster Vote Ritter on an old sheet and has suspended it from his balcony.*

*All the blokes from the office (except Leif) have got pink stickers on their cars and there is not a darned thing the town clerk can do about it and they are parked every day in the official space behind Council House.*

*On Friday night Paul and I took Erica and Penny and four of their friends to see Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor in "Taming of the Shrew" We were very impressed by the colour and scenery and sense of period but thought that Elizabeth Taylor was just incapable of acting Shakespeare.*

I clearly remember this movie. Richard Burton an arrogant hero with the assumption that the breaking of a woman's spirit was right and fair. I felt a great deal of ambivalence about the message it carried for me. I was perturbed that repression of the spirit of the heroine was such a laudable thing. I haven't seen the film again but it might be an interesting reflection to have another look. My mother had also been to the University of WA to hear a recital by Rita Striech, which she had enjoyed despite her normal distaste for sopranos. She shared with her mother the beauty of the University grounds and her desire to win a lottery so she could bring her over for a holiday.

*Mark had a far away look in his eyes this morning and I said "what is the matter pet?" he replied. "I remember Nanny – she always had lots of chocolate." He said it so wistfully I had to laugh because of course chocolate has not come back in the shops again after the heat yet.*

I had forgotten that chocolate was a seasonal food in our early years in Australia, I wonder why they didn't think to store it in the refrigeration section of the shops much earlier.

*That Better Perth Society which we founded last week ended up with jolly good committee of eight including three Professors and me!*

My mother recalls that my father and others founded The Better Perth Society. The controversy surrounding my father after his sacking led a member of the Society, who was a University of WA lecturer in Architecture, to convince the other committee members that my father's involvement would be bad for their image. So my father was squeezed out. My mother recalls the group lost impetus soon after and folded.

My father's electioneering was continuing with some lateral thinking:

#### **March 12<sup>th</sup>**

*He is a crafty blighter that husband of mine. There is a multi-storey car park in his electorate and during his campaign he thought it would be a good idea to have a big poster on top of it. He went and inquired and was told that the other two candidates had already inquired but it was not allowed. He gave the problem a bit of thought then he asked the manager if there would be any objections if he parked two trailers on the car park for a fortnight with posters fastened to them – none at all. So two trailers were towed up there and on Saturday Paul and 4 of the blokes from the office went up there and built 'Ritter 1' in bright pink on the sides. It is visible for miles.*

*He is touring the electorate every day with loudspeakers on the car. I think he is having a whale of a time and he gets a steady trickle of publicity which helps a lot.*



*This next week will be a real push because we have 7000 leaflets to deliver before the election. I'll send you one. We have quite a lot of people who have offered to help so we will give them an area each. I still don't think Paul has a chance because party politics are too strong but that makes it all the more enjoyable.*

Over the next few years we would do many leaflet drops into the letterboxes of East Perth. I never feared for my safety as we walked those old streets, much of the area is now part of the re-development of East Perth, a modern community of storeyed town houses, parks and landscaping all with top of the range security systems.

*Leo's 2<sup>nd</sup> year at University has now started and she seems to be enjoying her lectures very much. She has a lot of time at home writing essays but she is good at studying on her own and does not need bullying. Next year of course Erica will join her. Erica has not decided what but I think she will probably do Pharmacology or Industrial Chemistry. Erica is so pretty now she has lost her puppy fat that I should not be surprised if she got married early though I hope she will qualify first. Penny very decidedly wants to be a doctor.*

The implication is that if Erica marries before she qualified it would somehow prevent her qualifying. My mother firmly believed in education for her girls so that they had something to go back to after they had raised their children. I don't remember any role models of women who were working mothers and if I had come across them I think my mother's disapproval of such a choice would have prevented me giving it serious consideration. Now it seems ludicrous to even consider that marriage might preclude qualifications. The development of secondary schools that specifically cater for single mothers of high school age demonstrates the beneficial changes in attitude that thirty years of the modern women's movement has achieved.

#### **March 19<sup>th</sup>**

*The fun waxes fast and furious with the election on Saturday. The chances are against Paul getting in (variously given as 100/1 against) but Paul has talked to many old people who say they will vote for him. It will be fun to see what happens if it comes good, don't get a shock if you get a phone call or a cable. There is one thing we know more about politics and politicians than ever before.*

#### **27<sup>th</sup> March**

*My Dearest Mum,*

*No Paul was not elected though he got a very respectable number of votes, which made everyone sit up since he was standing as an absolute independent. However, March 23<sup>rd</sup> 1968 is a day I shall not forget in a hurry.*

The date did not register with her when I asked out of curiosity whether she still remembers the day, but the events did. Her letter describes a hectic, unpredictable day which began at 5.30 am with the escape of our three sheep and donkey when a fence had been blown down.

*Paul, Leo, Erica, Penny and I in various stages of undress chased the animals and finally cornered and caught them. Then about 7am Paul and the girls left for Perth to help man polling booths and give out how to vote cards.*

A relatively peaceful morning followed but with only Mark (6) and Nicola (12) home my mother was faced with fighting a bushfire that had jumped the river and was blazing up the paddock and heading straight for our house.

*I shouted to Nicky to shut all the windows and doors and to stay with Mark in the sitting room until I came. Then I raced for the hoses by the side of the house. I was amazed how calm I was and how quickly I acted because there was no one to help. Luckily the grass is very short in the house orchard and after about half an hour I had the fire out at that place and the house was safe though it burnt to within 40' of it. But in the meantime the fire backed by the wind had swept down to my left and almost completely destroyed our orchard of young mandarin trees. 150 trees were burnt and about 3000 feet of articulated water pipe. At this point the fire brigade arrived, out here it is a volunteer service and most of the men were on election day duties and that is why they took so long to arrive. They soon had the fire under control but of course the manure round each tree went on burning for ages making quite certain the roots were destroyed.*

The fire had been lit by a weekend farmer who had ignored all the safety rules for burning off. My parents' home insurance did not cover the fruit trees and they estimated losses at \$1000 in trees, piping and loss of sales. It brought out some feistiness in my mother: "*If this damn country thinks it can beat us it has another thing coming*".

In the evening she enjoyed going to the vote counting. My father had polled a creditable amount of votes for an independent candidate at a time when party politics dominated.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> April**

*Today Leo and I went to town to watch the PROSH parade this is the students Rag week to raise money for charity. There were some very funny trucks of decorations. Quite a few of them had Vietnam as their subject it is obviously in the minds of students since all boys here when they reach 20 have to register for National Service, there is a ballot and about a tenth are actually called up.*

Vietnam was an ongoing backdrop to the late sixties and early seventies. My mother recalls that she saw Australia as an "*immature just-released Colony*". Much of the political persuasion for Australian involvement in Vietnam came from the domino theory that if the communists took hold in Vietnam their power would gradually spread from country to country until Australia was under direct threat. My mother did not believe in the domino theory and for her the horrors of war were still too real for her to be anything but pacifist.

In Australia the first anti-war movement started in 1964, even before Australian troops had been deployed there. Conscription was introduced the same year and troops, including National Servicemen, sent to Vietnam in 1965. The inequity of conscription was a catalyst for both student antagonism toward the war as well as a "Save our Sons' campaign. All men were required to register for the draft in the year they turned twenty and twice a year there would be a lottery, effectively like Lotto, where a number of dates on marble balls would be drawn from a barrel (the equipment still resides in the National Museum). Those whose birthdates were drawn

would be required to present for a physical examination to determine their fitness for military service. Theology students were automatically exempted and tertiary students could defer service until they finished their degrees. Conscientious objection was only allowed for those who opposed all wars, not just the Vietnam War. At the time twenty year olds were not yet eligible to vote, but they were eligible to die for their country, albeit involuntarily. The inequity of the random nature of the draw increasingly outraged many Australians. Some felt there was a notable absence of politicians' and policemen's sons called up. My mother reports her relief that Mark was too young to be affected and her sympathy for the mothers and children caught up in the fighting: "*They are so pathetic and obviously don't know what the war is all about*". There was no suggestion that girls be conscripted so my mother could safely enjoy the company of her daughters without fear.

*I am trying to write this in the sitting room while there are gales of laughter coming from the sunroom where Leo and Erica are trying to give Penny a bit of sisterly advice. I don't know why but she seems to be about two years older than most of her contemporaries and gets impatient with their silliness. She is such a mature child in so many ways that her occasional regressions to childhood seem very surprising. Her chief grumble at the moment is that her friends are in an older group. Still she is 15 this year and I suppose she is at an awkward age.*

My diary is preoccupied with my yearning for a "special friend", boy or girl. My peer group annoyed me and I hung out with Erica's friends but I was just Erica's little sister to most of them. My mother often told me how mature I was and I tried to live up to that opinion, I think it was a partial maturity and prevented a more normal social development that would have included a bit of healthy running amok!

*Last night was the ratepayers' meeting for our local Armadale-Kelmscott Shire Council so I went along and asked a few questions about lovely old trees that had been bulldozed down and the inefficient fire-brigade and so on. The Shire President got me hopping mad because he talked down to me because I am a woman, so I didn't half let him have it. Makes me feel I should stand for councillor myself. But it was a couple of hours of fun and games. You know one of my pet hates are men who just because they are men think they have superior brains to women. Maybe it is living with Paul but my brain is very sharp and has not gone rusty by being a housewife.*

Ann Curthoys (Curthoys, 1992), historian, observed that one of the triggers for the Women's Liberation Movement came out of the way in which women had been sidelined by Left men in the anti-war movement. I am also amused by the unintended irony of my mother's observation that it is by living with a man that she maintains and hones her sharp brain.

*One of the lovely things at the moment is that we have mushrooms in the paddock (all fields even if they are thirty miles wide are referred to as paddocks here). It is a real treat to go outside and pick myself a few mushrooms for lunch.*

When we first came to Australia one of my mother's deepest regrets was the lack of fresh mushrooms for her mushroom sauce. She did a great job with tinned ones but it was with true delight that she used the fresh variety when they became available.

*There are so many question marks in my life at the moment that I don't really know which way life is going to jump. Some of the architect and planning jobs that we get queried actually come off and some just fade away. ... Smaller things come along of course to keep the pot boiling and of course Tom Wardle remains true to his word.*

My parents celebrated my father's 43<sup>rd</sup> birthday with a party to thank all those who had helped during the election campaign. Unfortunately Mark chose the night before to be sick so my mother began the day with a complete set of bedding to wash, which, in the days before doonas were used, meant four woollen blankets as well as sheets and bedspread.

**11<sup>th</sup> April My 22<sup>nd</sup> Wedding anniversary** (Label on Envelope 22/4/68)

*The party was a great success as usual the children helped tremendously. This time there was a far greater proportion of young people because lots of Leo's and Erica's friends had helped so they really had a swinging time. When the glass doors between the sitting room and sunroom are open there is plenty of space for dancing and they had records on until two o'clock in the morning. But still we cleaned up before we all went to bed, though I found out when I got up Sunday morning that Leonora and Jane, her friend who had stayed the night, had not gone to bed at all but had talked all night. These students!*

My mother was very taken with the present the office staff had given them. It consisted of a small intercom system to use for communication between the tractor shed my father was using as an office and the house:

*A very useful and practical present, they are really good at thinking of something we need.*

*Funnily enough on Sunday evening two people turned up who thought the party was then. But they are charming company they also had a present, a lovely fruit bowl. Mark took a real fancy to Mrs Bestman. She is about 50, no children of her own but a marvellous way with children. Mark was entranced and held a long and serious conversation with her.*

Nell Bestman had become a very staunch supporter of my father's when he was in strife with the Perth City Council the previous year and had stood up at the elector's meeting to speak vehemently in his favour. She was a dynamic women who had spent many years working with swimming and young swimmers. She was tiny, she piled her hair up and wore high-heeled shoes to appear taller. When she discovered I loved sewing she gave me a black silk velvet evening dress decorated with rhinestones. It was much too small for me but I used the skirt to make a cape which I still use – soft and flowing it has a luxury steeped in its age. Much later I made the bodice and skirt overlay into a party dress for my then 8-year-old daughter. Nell's husband Bill was a gentle-spirited man and the mirror he gave us for a wedding present remains in pride of place in our lounge room.

*We had a very nice letter from Pergamon Press yesterday. They are the publishers of the big book "Planning for Man and Motor" They told him that out of the 6500 books they printed only 100 are left and they want either to reprint or do another edition. Paul does not want them to do another edition until after he has made his next round the world lecture tour in March 1969*

*so they will probably do a limited reprint. He wants to include new things from the round the world trip. I am saving furiously in the hope of saving enough to go with him.*

She goes on to describe the acquisition of a share in an office in central Perth that she hopes will provide a "respectable front" for my father. She adds: "*I hope I am right in believing this is the beginning of a run of luck*" (16<sup>th</sup> April).

She sounds optimistic but in my diary on April 23<sup>rd</sup> a week later I have written "Mummy wants to leave Perth! She blew up and was all miserable today." When my mother went looking for information about 23<sup>rd</sup> March she found in her files a letter of love and encouragement that I wrote to her at that time. I offer my unconditional love.

23.4.68

Doesn't matter how much you lose your temper or are miserable, I always will love you lots and lots and lots! Whatever you say or think, to me you are a wonderful mother and I wouldn't swop you for anything in the whole world or beyond. I do try to help and I will try harder in future to stay cheerful. I can but try! Please don't fight with Daddy! I love you both so much! You're wonderful parents even if Daddy is a bit controversial (for want of a better word),

I think it was my attempt to try and fix things, a mixture of guilt, anxiety and helplessness. The writing is surprisingly immature for a 14-year-old.

At the same time my brother was displaying a mix of suggestive language and behaviour brought home from school. It drove my mother crazy. She went to the extent of actually asking her mother for reassurance that his behaviour was not that abnormal for a small boy. I remember how infuriated my mother got with his behaviour and suspect it was partly this effect that prolonged the behaviour despite my mother's apparent best intentions to ignore it. He seemed to save it for her and did not perform when visitors were there or indeed at school. As I read my diary I wonder how much of it related to her state of mind. I expect he was 'acting out' his anxiety unable to verbalise and write it as I had.

The sharing of a parenting problem with her mother was an indication of her frustration. She often shared snippets of information about her children but rarely asked for information or advice. Given that she and my father had the courage and passion to put their beliefs about parenting into mainstream print, it is perhaps not surprising that she would be reluctant to admit that a problem was beyond her.

30<sup>th</sup> April

*I hate vulgarity and it takes a lot of strength not to get too mad with him but at the same time show that I strongly disapprove.*

She quickly goes on to balance the ledger:

*On the other hand he is learning to read very quickly and in many other ways is a very delightful small boy. Last night for example he said so sweetly “hold my hand until I go to sleep”.*

My mother was, simultaneously, trying to come to terms with the impending adulthood of her first child. Leonora was 19 (21 was still the coming-of-age in 1968) and very involved with her own life of University and table tennis. She and my father were often at odds with each other and my mother found herself a go-between.

On the world stage a speech made in Britain was making headlines across the world:

*Enoch Powell was tactless but honest. Australia still has a limited white policy that is you can only come in if you are worth having. The Asians we had at our party were all University Students they get a limited visa only if they are bonafide students.*

The stimulus to the comment in her letter would have been the infamous “rivers of blood” speech that British Government Minister, Enoch Powell, made on April 20<sup>th</sup> 1968 to the Annual General Meeting of the West Midlands Area Conservative Political Centre. The speech opposed the immigration policies that were allowing significant numbers of Commonwealth citizens into the U.K. It predicted American style racial violence (Martin Luther King’s assassination on April 7<sup>th</sup> had triggered major rioting in the USA) and domination of the white population by the black. Powell’s style was incendiary, challenging the idea that immigrants would integrate into British culture and protesting anti-discrimination laws. Kendall Phillips, in an on-line article about Powell in the context of media and public memory, summarises:

Powell goes on to warn that the notion that immigrants will seek integration into British culture is a “ludicrous misconception, and a dangerous one to boot.” Further, laws designed to protect ethnic immigrants from discrimination provide legal weapons for the division of British culture. In this context, Powell warns: “As I look ahead, I am filled with foreboding. Like the Roman, I seem to see ‘the River Tiber foaming with much blood’.” Powell concludes by observing that the “tragic and intractable phenomenon” of American racial unrest may be coming to British shores through their own actions. He calls for “resolute and urgent action” to avert the threat and, finally, notes that “to see, and not to speak, would be the great betrayal.” The speech had an electric impact and led hundreds of London dockworkers to stop work and march on Westminster chanting “good old Enoch.” A little over twenty-four hours later, under pressure from other Shadow Ministers, Ted Heath, Leader of the Opposition, removed Powell from his position as Shadow Minister of Defence. (Phillips, 2000)

The phrase “rivers of blood” became a symbol of this speech, yet ironically those exact words were never used by Powell. Enoch Powell, as I recall, was lambasted for his intolerances and prejudices but my mother recalls herself expressing the opinion to her mother that Britain’s 19th century Imperialism would cause trouble in the late 20th century, an opinion that was not met with enthusiasm.

In Australia the White Australia Policy had held sway since Federation. At the time most Australians believed that Australia should be a nation of British descent. The Immigration Restriction Act abolished nearly all non-European immigration. Because Britain wanted its subjects to be able to travel freely within the Empire it opposed limitations based on colour so the Australian Government adopted the South African dictation test. This test had to be passed on arrival by immigrants. It consisted of a 50-word dictation in a European language of the Immigration officers choosing. Effectively this meant that all coloured people could be excluded by the choice of a dictation test they could not possibly pass. Alfred Deakin said “No white men are stopped at our ports for language or any other tests . . . on the other hand all coloured men are stopped unless they come merely as visitors.” (Willoughby, undated)

Steady opposition had been building toward this policy after World War II and it was Harold Holt who, as Minister for Immigration, began work to change the policy finally removing the dictation test in the Migration Act of 1966. The cultural ethos was such that white Anglo-Saxon immigration was still valued above all other, even though there were those who thought that the inflow of working class Britons was contributing to the propensity for industrial unrest in Australia.

My mother’s letter of the 30<sup>th</sup> April continues:

*Paul is very busy getting the exhibitions ready. He is in charge of the Child’s Eye View exhibition for the Kindergarten College and also the Planning for Man and Motor exhibition for ourselves. I think I told you we are registered as the P.E.E.R. (Planned environment, education research) INSTITUTE PERTH. I am a director as well as Paul to help with the income tax returns now all we need is one big job to get us really going.*

*They had a competition at school for the design of a fountain in memory of their late headmaster. Penny won it and £5.*

I don’t remember why I entered the competition to design a fountain in remembrance of a Principal with whom I had little connection. I do remember that I felt that my father had had the idea and guided my thinking for the final design. It consisted of an inverted concrete cone with polished stones attached. Jets of water sprayed from an outer pool edge to keep the stones wet and shiny. I recall putting my friend Annette’s name on the entry initially so as to avoid the judge knowing who I was, because of my relationship to Paul Ritter, in case he had some antagonism toward him (not altogether uncommon for his professional colleagues at the time). My mother or father persuaded me that that was not a good idea because they might doubt I had done it and instead I put my initials on the back. I was happy to get the £5 (actually a \$10 book voucher) but not particularly proud because I knew it was not my idea. The fountain and I later featured not only in *The Daily News* newspaper – because of my being Paul Ritter’s daughter – but also in the *Australian Post Magazine*, a publication renowned, in part, for its raunchy photos of young women.

The fountain looked delightful when first constructed but suffered the fate of much landscaping in Perth; it became stained by the iron oxides in the bore water used to run it. It was demolished in the 1990's to make room for more buildings at Armadale High School. The fountain has been replaced by a tasteful water feature, like a small waterfall, and the plaque reminds the observer of Mr Collins' place in the history of the school. My contribution to his original memorial is not recorded.

**17 May**

*I have been wishing that Paul would apply for a Professorship of Town Planning which is advertised for Auckland New Zealand but he definitely wants to stay here and battle it out. The legal cases just drag on and on sometimes I despair of them ever being heard.*

Her life, if emotionally restless, was physically busy especially with school holidays upon her. She reports driving over 100 miles in a day in local trips ferrying us about to and from friends and activities. She shared with her mother a yearning to have her company on the drives and how lovely the countryside was. She was also busy with committees including planning for the Debutante of the Year Ball in August. Her next letter thanked her mother for the birthday money she had sent and told her of other family gifts:

**23<sup>rd</sup> May**

*I had a lovely birthday, perfume from Paul, a bottle of liqueur and a gorgeous spray of flowers from Leo and Erica, a box of glacé fruits from Penny, 4711 talcum from Nicola, 4711 soap from Jemima and some bubble bath from Mark. They certainly intend me to smell nice. Erica made me a lovely chocolate cake with cream.*

She also makes her first mention of the PCC elections:

*Paul is busy campaigning for the Perth City Council Elections which are on Saturday. These are non-political, be damn funny if he is elected – just be one of life's little ironies if he is.*

I wonder if Paul's decision to run for election was part of the reason my mother had been so unhappy over the previous month. She reflects that my father genuinely wanted to continue to influence the development of the City of Perth but he also wanted to be a thorn in the side of the other Councillors. She says he was “egged on” by a former employee at the PCC, Ralph Hibble. Over the years his passion for the City and his frustration at the decision making of others would take an emotional toll that often caught my mother in its wake.

As it transpired my father was defeated in the election by thirteen votes. Voting was voluntary and preferential. He led on all the polling booths but the absentee votes went against him. However there were discrepancies in the voting protocols and he sought a recount. The Town Clerk declined in spite of the Lord Mayor wanting one. Once again my father was embroiled in controversy and my mother got caught up in the flak.



*Undated* – (envelope date – End of May 1968)

*During the university table tennis matches, which Leo has played in against other Australian Universities, the team manager introduced Leo to the other teams as "the daughter of one of the four most famous men in West Australia" Guess who the other three were the Governor, the Premier and the Lord Mayor. Mind you it is not all beer and skittles being the wife of a famous man, you get your share of brickbats. For instance one of the radio stations this morning is having a phone poll as to whether voting should be compulsory and one woman just said "Well if I had a vote that Paul Ritter wouldn't have got it anyway." On the other hand I was telephoned yesterday to ask if I would contribute a recipe to a cookery book being compiled of favourite recipes of famous West Australian people. So the good and the bad get mixed up together.*

Likewise for his children. The size of Perth in the 1960s and the uncommonness of our surname meant that we were often asked whether we were Paul Ritter's daughters. Through most of the late sixties and early seventies this was, for me, a plus. But it did mean that when he was in the news we were more noticed and this infamy was part of the reason my oldest and youngest sisters moved east to pursue their careers.

My mother's next letter coincided with the assassination of Robert Kennedy. He had been critically wounded by gunfire on June 5<sup>th</sup> and, according to my diary, died at 4.44pm on the 6<sup>th</sup>.

*June 6<sup>th</sup>*

*They are just giving another bulletin on Robert Kennedy. What a stupid wasteful tragedy. Really that family must have been born under a bad star. I was hoping he would get in since I felt that he wanted to put an end to the war in Vietnam. Honestly Mum I think the world has gone mad what with student riots everywhere and this outbreak of assassination. I think Perth must be one of the quiet places thought I am knocking on wood as I say that. We get a very good TV coverage of world events here in spite of our isolation, you must remember the nearest city of any size to Perth is Adelaide and that is 1200 miles away and not much more than desert in between.*

*Mark has gone soup mad at the moment and the house is filled with a gorgeous aroma of veal and ham bones cooking with vegetables.*

My father's narrow loss in the election, combined with the report that one of his detractors, Sam Franchina, had mysteriously found a few extra votes which had tipped the scale, prompted Ralph, the staunch friend and supporter who had encouraged him to stand, to do some research into its management. He found that all the elections for PCC for years had been illegally run. My father sought legal opinion on the validity of the election results and the QC reported that the counting of absentee votes was invalid. On this basis they took the result to the Court of Disputed Returns. This had the options of declaring the absentee votes invalid, and my father elected, or declaring the whole election null and void and holding another one, my mother reported a relaxed approach to this uncertainty:

*It will be interesting to see what happens. I am trying very hard these days to keep calm and not to get het up about things. Paul reckons that in spite of my age I do very well.*

My mother was just 44 at the time. She has commented recently that when she was in her thirties sixty was seen to be old but when she got to 60 she was assured she was still young. Now at 80 she bemoans that she won't be given the respect of 'old age' until she reaches 90. As I have long passed 44 myself I am amused that it would rate as an “in spite of my age”.

In her next letter she responds to queries and comments by her mother and expresses again her yearning for 'home'.

*12<sup>th</sup> June*

*I was just working out before that if all the things come off that could we would earn £10,000 this year but if only the certainties come off then we will earn £1,500 – bit of a difference! If the former then I shall come with Paul on his trip round next March. I have just been watching Nelson Eddy and Jeanette Mac Donald in Naughty Marietta on TV. Took me back a bit made me feel quite weepy. On these soaking wet winter days like today I really enjoy the TV. How is your hearing now? I would like to ring you so please let me know.*

*Monday June 17<sup>th</sup>*

*What a treat to have such a cheerful letter this morning a soaking wet Monday. I feel thoroughly wicked sitting down to answer straight away but it is still pouring. I have cleaned the kitchen, made the beds and gone round with a duster and the Hoover. lit a nice fire and sat myself down to write though it is only 11 am. What makes it easier of course is that the washing machine has gone to be repaired so I don't even need to feel guilty about that.*

She was very busy with meetings including a talk to the Methodist Ladies College Mothers' Club on the need for sex education:

*In some ways they are very backward here and rather too religiously inclined so I must not shock them too much.*

She also had committee meetings for the Kindergarten Teachers' College fundraising committee and one for the committee of the Australian Pre-School Association. Socially she comments:

*Last Saturday Paul and Leonora and Jemima and I went to see a locally produced opera “Carmen”. It was absolutely magnificent. It was the first time Jemima has been to the live theatre and she was completely enthralled. She had seen Carmen before on TV but was completely taken aback by the colour and liveliness of the actual production.*

My father had decided to suspend his legal action against the Council until the election was resolved. My mother comments about how much better he looked since leaving the Council's employ, but at the cost of financial uncertainty. Council planning decisions continued to get headlines and a decision to override an architectural plan for a surf club my father had produced whilst City Architect with one costing over twice as much created yet another furor. This pitted my father's friends and enemies on Council against each other on the ABC current affairs programme of the time, prompting another round of media attention at home. Again my mother tells her mother she is trying to worry less, despite the forthcoming decision on the election outcome.

*Monday 24<sup>th</sup> June*

*I suppose what happens will depend on all sorts of irrelevant things like did he [the magistrate] have a row with his wife or did he have a good breakfast and so on. I am not particularly worried about things one way or the other. I am trying to be more philosophical about things because things happen whether you worry about them or not and worrying only makes them twice as bad and anyway it may never happen.*

The Magistrate reserved his decision to give himself time to read the Local Government Act carefully but the general feeling was that the case had gone well and the Council would be seen to be in the wrong.

My mother's activities in the community acted as a good foil for her anxiety and she was well satisfied with her talk on sex education:

*4<sup>th</sup> July*

*My major point is always that modern life has taken sex out of its proper context by making it too important and we should as mothers see that it gets back in its proper place. Makes me mad the way every TV advert no matter what for is sex angled. They were a very appreciative audience and gave me a lovely posy of violets and a box of chocolates as a thank you.*

*I have another couple of talks lined up in the next couple of weeks one on health and another one on sex education.*

*I am also now a member of the Women's Service Guild, they are a very good body ... I ever stand for public office I hope they will back me. I am also being considered as a member of Senator Dorothy Tangney's Social Service Reform Committee. I hope this comes off because their main aim is an improved deal for deserted wives and widows.*

The Social Service Reform Committee was Government sponsored. My mother had been invited onto this Committee because of her work with the Kindergarten Teachers' College Committee. Initially she was sought after because of her relationship to my father but she was rapidly recognised as having a great deal to offer in her own right.

The Social Service Committee's brief to look at the situation of deserted wives struck a chord with my mother in a time she describes in retrospect as a "*period of accelerated personal growth*". She describes her early learning about marital breakdown as being heavily focused on the wife as cause, that she had failed to "*look after the man well enough*" or was "*a bad home manager*". In 1968 she began to question some of these pre-conceived notions, perhaps information in the media about the embryonic women's liberation movement in the USA and Sydney had a subconscious influence. One of her greatest influences during this time was Barbara Harper-Nelson, wife of a local newsreader. She had been at Liverpool University (my mother's Alma Mater) and shared her perception of the inequities experienced by women after marriages ended. A further influence was her brother Ronnie, a social worker in London, who shared his practical experience as a caseworker. She recalls trying to stick to the food budget deemed appropriate for deserted wives and falling well short of what she considered adequate.

Committee involvement gave my mother an opportunity to create a more confident persona for herself. She recalls being a shy and diffident child and the committee participation was like acting, which she had always enjoyed. She was invited to chair the rents and bonds sub-committee and set about preparing a complete financial budget to show how difficult the circumstances were for many women. In a letter in July she tells of a woman who could not raise the £5 for a refresher course in shorthand typing so that she could go back to work.

*So life is pretty full and of course the children take up a good deal of time but there is no doubt that with Mark at school and this comparatively easy to run home I have time to do other things. Mind you cooking takes up an incredible amount of time and I do love to see them tuck in. Mark still has not much of an appetite but though thin he is wiry and touchwood doesn't even catch a cold. It is a year since I last had a cold – suppose I'll get one now!*

My eye was caught with this fatalistic statement because it was representative of how my mother often thought. A positive comment might be qualified with a 'touchwood' or a prediction of doom. It was as if life would punish you and knock you back into place for thinking positively. She reflects now on the origins of that type of thinking and sees it as "pre-Christian", relating it to her Celtic origins, "*one does not boast because this makes the "Old Gods" jealous and they retaliate because their power is threatened*". My mother and father were very different in their thinking: "*He says I always paint the devil on the wall, I say this means I see the wall whereas he does not see the wall before he hits it*".

She found it very frustrating waiting for the Court to decide the election outcome but busied herself with family life. She urged her mother to come and visit enticing her with descriptions of the rural scene outside her window.

12<sup>th</sup> July

*I do so wish you were here, seems daft if I come back to England for a trip when there are so many beautiful places here to show you. If only one of us could win enough for you and Ron to fly out we could have a fabulous holiday. We are only half an hour from unspoilt seacoast too you know. And I reckon if you can do all that in the house you could eat, sleep and drink a 30-hour flight away. And don't tell me you are scared of aeroplanes there are far more accidents in the home to old people than there ever are out.*

*I must say I enjoy my busy life though I enjoy too sitting quietly in the sun like I am doing at the moment the hills are so green just across the river and the sheep and horses look so peaceful grazing.*

The tranquility is disturbed by further ructions in the Council, this time involving Joan Watters and allegations made about malpractice in Council elections. My mother admired her courage in speaking out.

She goes on to comment on the excellent reports of her two youngest children, expressing her pride whilst at the same time her consternation at the difference between Mark's faultless behaviour at school and persistent inclination to stir her up at home, behaviour she describes as

"driving her up the wall". She finds solace in her garden, pruning the roses and gathering daffodils, snowdrops, nasturtiums and flowering plum for a vase in her lounge room (17<sup>th</sup> July).

The Court judgement on the election was handed down by next time she wrote. The judgement criticised the Town Clerk and made him liable for my father's costs, the election was declared null and void and a new one called. My parents were buoyed by the result because they had been told political pressure had been applied to the magistrate not to expose the malpractice.

*22<sup>nd</sup> July*

*Australians bet about everything and the odds in the City on Friday morning were 5 to 1 against Paul. The Magistrate's summing up in the case was very clear, concise and legally accurate, he said in his final judgement that if it was in his power he would declare Paul elected but that as all the absentee votes were invalid he must declare the election void and there must be another one.*

*Many of our friends dropped in on Friday evening to wish us well and we ended up having quite a party – there were twenty-eight people as well as ourselves and we did not get to bed until 2 am.*

*One way and another it has been a jolly good week, our accountant thinks that we won't have to pay tax on any of the money Tom gave us and that we should get £200 back in fact. A friendly bloke has given Paul a plan print machine for his office worth £1000 and Erica is in the State Junior Table Tennis finals on Friday evening. The sun is shining and spring can't be far away now if only you were here I would be feeling quite on top of the world. You know I think about you and Dad a lot and often tell the kids stories about what we used to do.*

The next fortnight was taken up with preparation of the Deb of the Year Ball. There had been a number of last minute hitches, not the least of which were that my mother's dress had not arrived and she had to make a new one and worse still the Lord Mayor and his wife, who were due to receive the debutantes, had been called away at the last minute on official duty.

*Aug. 5<sup>th</sup>*

*You can imagine the flap I was in, one week to go and no V.I.P. and who likes to be asked at the last minute. Well after innumerable phone calls and pother the American Chief Consul and his wife consented to come. Phew what a relief but then I had to contact all the newspapers and TV and so on and tell them the change of plan.*

*And after all that the ball was a magnificent success both socially and financially. I had a glorious time partly because someone gave me some pink champagne. Mum don't ever have pink champagne. I had two small glasses and I was squiffy but not unpleasantly so. I had to stand with the American Consul and his wife on the dais while the girls walked down the red carpet to us and curtsied.*

*Mind you yesterday it was down to earth again we had to go back to the Ballroom and clear up – such is the shortage of labour it is taken for granted that members of the Ball committees go and clear up afterwards – what a mess. Then in the afternoon I had a College Council meeting. This morning we had the first meeting of the Social Services Committee on deserted wives and I find myself Secretary of that. Then on Thursday the Australian Pre-School Association standing committee are meeting here. And to top all this I have been proof reading Paul's latest small*

book called *Perth City Planning 1965-67* which is to come out for the Australian Planning Conference which is to be held in Perth from Aug 18-25. So you can see a hectic week.

Furthermore planning had also begun for the new election to be held on 5<sup>th</sup> October, this time with the help of a number of prominent Perth men.

She goes on to comment on Erica losing the final of the State Junior Table Tennis Championships. Erica was considering Architecture as a career, my mother comments: "*I think it is a good career because it is one that can be carried on so easily after marriage*". There were many in the 1960s who did not challenge the belief that women's roles were still in the home. It was much assumed that girls worked until they were married and then settled into domestic 'bliss' supported by, and at the whim of, the men. My mother privileged marriage and motherhood, an attitude that would aggravate many younger women if held now. At the time, however, it was, to a degree, progressive. In her next letter she encouraged the facilitation of retraining for deserted wives by the provision of child-care for kindergarten age children. The women's movement would gradually overtake her position but the feminist move to full-time early childcare would never sit well with her although she now, somewhat reluctantly, bows to the right of the individual to choose.

#### **Aug 15th**

*I can't think that there can be many more beautiful places in the world than this valley at the moment. ... It is a warm and sunny and everything is fresh and green there is a scent of lavender and rosemary, a hen cackling and there are wild ducks flying overhead. In the orchard the apricot trees are in full blossom and the river in full flood is glinting in the sunshine.*

*I have been working out my food chart for the Deserted Wives Committee we want to show the Minister that these women cannot possibly exist let alone live on their allowances. I was very pleased that the committee accepted one of my recommendations which was that there should be a central government fund for giving grants for these women to train for new careers and that these should be in conjunction with properly run kindergartens so that while the mothers train the children could be properly cared for. Our aim is to get decent legislation so that the kids don't suffer while the father gets away Scot-free. It will be a hard job but it is so well worth doing and now with Mark at school there is an hour or two here and there to work for others.*

*We have just had a budget day here the only good thing is that pensioners get an extra 10/- a week but as far as I can see it will be useless because the sales tax on everything which was 12 1/2% has gone up to 15% so everything will cost more. TV and radio licences are up from Oct 1<sup>st</sup> all postage is up and so on and so on.*

Slipped between my mother's letters lies an airletter with familiar writing and as I read my little thank you note to my grandmother (she never missed sending us a pound on birthdays) I can clearly remember some of the gifts I describe.

15-8-68

Dear Nanny,

Thank you very much for the money and the card, both are very much appreciated. I had a beautiful birthday. The presents I got were all lovely. Mummy and Daddy gave me a matching petticoat and pants set, plus a short-sleeved white blouse with a ruffle around the neck. Next week Mummy is taking me to town to buy a swimsuit as the rest of my present. Leo and Erica gave me a handbag which has an extra strap and can be converted into a shoulder bag by the use of the extra strap. It is cream coloured and in a young style. Nicola gave me a pair of blue lacey stockings, Jemima a box of chocolates and Mark a box of crystallised fruit (Yum!).

I have been kept pretty busy recently by the Interact Club, because, being its secretary, I have to write many letters etc. to various people and places. However, I thoroughly enjoy the responsibilities of it all.

We have just finished the exams, me my mock-junior, I am quite pleased with them although I have no results yet. However I missed the art exam this morning because Mummy kept me home because I have a mild dose of 'flu.

I am looking forward to the holidays and the school social on Monday so I hope I'm well on Monday.

I hope you are well and happy,

Much Love,  
Penny

The little white blouse with the ruffled neck I loved especially worn under a bottle green jumper with the white collar showing. The handbag I kept until not long ago, not used but hoarded for nostalgia's sake. The baby blue lacey stockings I did not wear very often but I loved having them in my drawer!

Interact was a form of junior rotary – a club for the nerds in a way, but I enjoyed it and it became the precursor to the many committees I've worked on in adulthood. I remember developing a fearsome crush on the President of the Club – all in vain, as was the case with all my early adolescent loves.

The Australian Planning Conference was held in Perth over the week of August 18<sup>th</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> and occupied my mother with lectures, parties and receptions. It was a biennial conference that rotated through the states and thus was only in Perth once every 13 years. It attracted over 400 delegates from Australia and overseas. My mother writes of meals with the American Consul, John Oldham and Japanese Professor Yosizaha. She writes in detail about the food at the closing dinner dance held at a riverside restaurant:

*Aug 24<sup>th</sup>*

*We were honoured guests and I was certainly glad because the tickets cost £5 each. But the food was terrific first of all drinks and hors d'oeuvres of smoked salmon, caviar, prawns, asparagus, olives, oysters and so on. Then the dinner consisted of prawn cocktail, soup, fish, steak and mushrooms with potatoes peas and sweet corn followed by sweets, cheese and biscuits, chocolate mints and coffee and as much as you wanted to drink in the way of wine. Just before the sweet was served the lights were put out and the waitress came in with the 'flaming sweets'. Each one was sponge cake covered with ice cream meringue and cream and the kirsch which had been poured over, set alight. Quite a sight.*

Council politics was not far away and my mother was pleased with my father's diplomacy when he spoke as an honoured guest lecturer on the last day.

*They were all worried in case Paul let fly at the City Council and even the Lord Mayor turned up to listen. But they don't know my Paul he was magnificent and completely statesmen like. He described the work done and the marvellous cooperation under Mr Green the town clerk he came to work for and just when people were obviously wondering whether he was then going to start slaying he said very quietly "the appointment of a new town clerk was disastrous" paused did not elaborate then went on to something totally different.*

### **6<sup>th</sup> September**

*Today is the last day of the children's spring holiday from school. On Monday they go back again. I love having them at home though I don't seem to get much done I'm either giving sewing advice or baking advice or something.*

Interesting that this teaching is not included in the concept of 'getting something done'.

My mother comments further on the "sewing bug" absorbing Erica's and my attention. She herself was enjoying the early spring sunshine and yearning to get into some lighter clothes. She describes the fabrics she has bought including "some gay pink cotton stuff" for me.

Gay in the old fashioned sense of the word. It was very bright, psychedelic colours in a paisley print. I made an A-line dress that I wore and wore, it disguised my body shape that I deplored – even though I now know I was not overweight I felt I was at the time. My best friend was naturally very skinny. I learnt early the ways of calorie counting and the ambivalence of desire for fattening foods countered against the knowledge of their power to fatten. Deprivation and guilt regarding food was learnt young and well.

Despite her complaints at not getting much done my mother had been involved with another radio session and enjoyed the varied phone calls and the compliments of the sound technicians who said her voice had a very even timbre and was easy to monitor. She reflected later in the same letter that she felt her career choices had been wrong for her and she "should have gone in for child guidance or social work since I seem to be good at handling people's problems". She was also considering an offer to go into State politics:

*I have been asked if I would join the Liberal Party and be a nominated candidate at the next general election. I am still thinking it over. There is not a woman in the State government at the moment and I think there is an urgent need of one judging by the work on the deserted wives committee. The Legislation at the moment is crazy until a man has been gone for six months a deserted wife gets no pension but just assistance which amounts to the incredibly small amount of £5 a week for a woman with small children!*

*And there is no legal aid scheme here either nor are there any insurance cards by means of which men can be traced so these women are often in dire straits. It is no wonder I will give time and energy to them.*



My father was also working steadily and although they were still running an overdraft the bank manager was confident he was a good risk. The forthcoming extraordinary council election was taking centre-stage. My father had more help than the first time but, likewise, the opposition was better coordinated. My mother was on the front line of answering the telephone and enjoyed joining the limelight when the opportunity to create a family image on the media arose. The press was favourable and included an interview on the Australia-wide ABC programme "People in Depth" hosted by Ellis Blaine.

Whilst family life revolved around my father's activities my mother kept it anchored.

*17<sup>th</sup> Sept.*

*Mark is reading to me at the moment so it makes it difficult to concentrate he reads extremely well now and I am trying hard to lessen the Australian in his voice because the Aussie accent is like a very bad Cockney one.*

*I know right well that some women nag their men into deserting and that is why our concern is with the children every time. They are the ones who suffer.*

I love my mother's slip into an English syntax as she slides back into a learnt belief system that is totally at odds with that which she holds today. She sees that view now as an attempt to challenge her mother's assumptions and dogmatic assertions that it was axiomatic that women should hold marriages together.

Late September saw us cleaning and repainting our enormous swimming pool during the Royal Show week two-day school break.

*Sept. 30<sup>th</sup>*

*It is an enormous job and takes 10 gallons of paint to give it two coats. It is a very expensive job too because the special swimming pool paint costs £4 per gallon!! Still it should not need doing for at least another six years. Mark really is a marvellous little worker for 6 when it comes to this sort of a job. He keeps going all day with the other children I think he will be strong like Paul when he grows up.*

My mother goes on at this point to talk about baby bottles. One of her passions had been for breastfeeding on demand – a bit of a heresy in the days of the early fifties when Truby King still ruled the beliefs of the parenting lobby. After we had all finished breastfeeding she was happy for us to continue using a bottle. She had no problem with the concept of letting her babies and young children feed that way as long as they felt like it, with great faith that they would give up when they were ready, and it proved to be the case – one of us was nearly six years old before giving away the joys of sucking a bottle. With that background she comments:

*I had a friend here the other evening who was complaining what a nuisance her 18 mth old was trying to steal (!) the young 3 month old baby's bottle. You should have seen her shocked face when I asked why she did not let her have one of her own. Beats me why not.*

The recently released guidelines from the health department on diet recommend breastfeeding exclusively for 6 plus months, one of the benefits is to strengthen the muscles of the jaw and face. Of course now weaning is easier because children go from breast or bottle to pop up juice and thence to sports bottles – which, lo and behold involve a very similar process of sucking to that of the baby bottle!

*Well the special council election is on Saturday. I can't hazard a guess how it will go. Many of our friends are helping. The town clerk is still in good form Paul had a letter from him starting "In view of the forthcoming Lord Mayoral elections (it should have read extraordinary election for the East Ward.) Really that man is incompetent.*

*Monday*

*Couldn't get a good line to ring you so a line in haste. Paul won decisively 171 majority so it is now Councillor Paul Ritter. What a lark. Just leaving for my first lunch in Council House. Life frantic will write further details to let you know and send cuttings.*

*Oct. 9<sup>th</sup> (Written on PCC Letterhead paper titled "COUNCILLORS' ROOM")*

*I just thought I would use a sheet of this paper to show you what it is like. Today has been a very, very memorable one. We kept all the children away from school and we all went to see Paul sworn in as City Councillor by the Lord Mayor. Tom is so, but so pleased that Paul won. Paul had to take an oath of allegiance to the Queen and also an oath of allegiance to the city. He was then presented with a gold medallion of the city's crest to hang on his watch chain (pity he hasn't got one) and an enamelled crest which consists of the city's coat of arms surrounded by the words Perth City Councillor to mount on the front of the car. The town clerk had to take part in this ceremony and what a sour puss he had. To my amazement it was covered by all 3 TV channels and as the news is on at 6pm, 6.30pm and 7pm on the different channels we were able to watch all three. There were some enchanting close ups of the children especially Jemima. Afterwards the Lord Mayor and Lady Mayoress took us in the Lord Mayor's parlour for a chat and then we all went for lunch in the Councillor's Dining Room. The reactions of all the Councillors up to now has been on the whole friendly except for Councillor Harris who has said publicly that there are bound to be clashes of temperament.*

*Mind you this was the culmination of a fantastic three or four days. On Saturday election day we thought it was a bad omen because when we got ready to leave at 6.30 am it was absolutely bucketing it down and when Paul and the girls plus the stuff I had prepared were all in the big car it would not start! So they all crammed into the mini-van and set off. It rained like mad on and off all day at first I was disappointed but then I thought the rain at least will stop people from going to the country or sea for the day.*

*All the councillors apart from Joan Watters and another couple were helping Banks but we had a tremendous team of voluntary helpers with cars. I could not bear to stay in for the count so I went home and made lots of good things ready for a party which we wanted to give anyway for our helpers. It was nerve wracking waiting but at 9.50pm came a nearly hysterical call from Erica to say with one box only to go it seemed impossible that Banks could catch Paul. A few minutes later Paul called to say the count was complete and he had run out a winner by 171 votes.*

*She feels in retrospect she was ambivalent about him winning, she did not like many of the Councillors recalling; "As wife of the City Planner I had had my bottom pinched too often to relish their company."*

The count was followed by a party at our house with 75 people including the Lord Mayor. Over the next few days there were over 80 phone calls and many more congratulatory letters and telegrams.

*It is so wonderful to have congratulations instead of commiserations. It has of course done Paul a tremendous amount of good in himself I suppose the best way to describe it is that he is now as different as a statesman is from a politician. It will be interesting to see where it goes from here. It can't but be interesting.*

As my mother would now say “never a truer word spoken”.

16.10.68

*I have been wondering whether there has been any thing in the English papers about our earthquake. Meckering a small town about 80 miles from here, was the centre of the quake and was completely flattened. The incredible thing is that although there were some injuries there was not a single fatality. Many buildings in Perth were slightly damaged but the mercy was that it was the Queen's Birthday public holiday and so very few people were in the city. It was quite frightening I was kneeling on the bedroom floor trying to fix the hoover when there was a sudden high pitched shriek of wind and the whole floor moved under me. Some pictures fell down and an antique glass candlestick flew through the air and landed on the carpet without breaking. The whole place went on shuddering and I dashed for the kitchen, the children were all, except Erica, at home and they headed there. Everything on the shelves was dancing a jig and the house seemed to be rolling around... Paul was out giving Erica a driving lesson and they hardly felt it at all. They were quite derisive until they saw the damage on the TV news. It is the most severe quake ever felt in Australia. We have had some shocking spring weather makes me wonder whether it has anything to do with the H bomb the French let off in the Pacific.*

The Meckering Earthquake occurred at 10.58 am on Monday October 14<sup>th</sup> 1968. A bank, hotel, shire hall, three churches and 60 of about 75 houses were destroyed. There were no fatalities and only minor injuries, but the earthquake produced a surface fault rupture 32 km long, trending north-south and convex westwards. The land east of the fault was uplifted by up to 1.5 metres, and over-thrust to the west by up to 2.0 metres (Gordon, 1980; Gordon & Lewis, 1980).

I was studying for my Junior Certificate Exams at the time. Maths as I recall. It was a wild and stormy day and at first I thought the shaking was the storm. The movement of the room was considerable and I remember being significantly unnerved and torn between following vaguely remembered instructions from some unknown source – that one should shelter in a door frame because it would give you some protection – or high-tailing it to the kitchen to my mum. I did the latter and later we discovered the force of the event and the devastating effects it had on Meckering – a town with a population of about 300 at the time. When we returned to school the next day we had earthquake drills just in case.

In the aftermath of the election my mother was busied writing thank you cards to those who had helped and was looking forward with interest to the Lady Mayoress's morning tea to introduce her to the other wives. She was sceptical that many would turn up because she had already met

them all when she was the city planner's wife and the history of conflict was still fresh. As it was only six out of a possible 24 attended much to the chagrin of the Lady Mayoress.

26<sup>th</sup> Oct.

*I was really pleased to have a letter from you this morning it was such a long time since the last. A middle-aged couple deliver our post by car and everyday she would shake her head because she knows your writing by now and she knew I was looking for a letter from you. ... If only you could come to me for the winter you know the heat here is much easier to bear then England because it is not humid except during March.*

With letters the only effective form of communication any delay in receiving them was stressful. My mother could ring if she was really worried but it was very expensive and her mother's hearing made calls unsatisfactory. So the unexpected delays were a time of background anxiety. The glimpse of country style living with description of the posties gives a sense of the spirit of the community of Kelmscott in 1968. Service providers were real people who took some time and trouble to be aware of what mattered to whom.

*It seems to be the beginning of an up phase for us if things go as well as they promise. Paul will have to enlarge his staff. Nice perks you get as a councillor like free tickets to the first night of the Playhouse on Monday. And 500 cigarettes a month, since we don't smoke Paul passes them on to various old codgers in his ward. Also of course he and I can always have a good lunch free in Council House and free parking.*

Five hundred cigarettes a month, I suppose based around 15 to 20 cigarettes a day. As an avid anti-smoker my father campaigned frequently to be given chocolates to the same value. He finally got chocolate raisins instead in his last year in Council.

7<sup>th</sup> Nov.

*It was lovely to have a long letter from you this morning, it is a good job it rains sometimes or I would never get a letter.*

My mother was also very busy in the garden using their new self-propelled motor mower to get on top of the three-quarters of an acre of lawns around the property. Leonora was helping and they both found the exercise a good antidote to stress. She describes the roses as "*an absolutely glorious sight this year .... Truly our place could be lived in by a millionaire*".

She goes on:

*Nothing gets dirty like it did in Nottingham.... None of that awful soot we used to get. Marvellous to think the children breathe such clean air – no wonder they look healthy they live in the country get plenty of good food and fruit, rarely go to the cinema (about twice a year) and swim and walk, eat far less sweets and choc that they did in England and have a happy united home.*

I am curious as to why rarely going to the cinema contributes to good health and my mother reminds me that when smoking was allowed in cinemas the air was very poor quality. She had

suffered from catarrh as a child in Liverpool and remembered having to hold camphor blocks to her nose to help her breathe as she walked to school, so she valued air quality highly.

As I read her response I recall the sudden flashes of lighters and red glow of cigarette ends that punctuated the theatre air and the resigned tolerance of smoke-filled atmospheres and smoke-smelling clothes and hair. Smoking was allowed virtually everywhere back in the sixties, cigarettes were advertised with glamour, pizzazz and big show business names. The gift of five hundred cigarettes a month to the Councillors is in context with the times.

My mother enjoyed the receptions and free theatre tickets that were other perks of the job. Her mother had been watching the Olympics on television and my mother delights in telling her about meeting the Australian team at a Civic Reception. She is less enamoured with the other wives:

*I think the Lady Mayoress is liked by the Councillors' wives but most of them would not know what manners and breeding were. The Australian prides himself on his equality and being as good as the next man but only too often the result is a mannerless boor and women here are still classed as something less than men.*

My mother comments on the amount of effort it takes to keep everything running, including the long hours my father works. In general things had settled down and were becoming financially more stable but in amongst the chatter of the everyday some things stand out as beacons to the future. Comments that have special meaning for me as a time-distanced reader because as I read decades later I know what happened in the end:

*Paul is off East next week to Melbourne and Sydney to a conference and to lecture, keep your fingers crossed because he is showing his new concrete finish there and also hopes to get financial backing for his new book.*

This paragraph holds such meaning, it covers three subjects that will loom large in the next years; my father's travel, the concrete finish and the book. Following on is another common theme, my mother's perpetual plan to return to England for a visit, always dependent on there being enough money and things going according to plan.

*Our millionaire friend Peter Scott ... is one of the Governors of Lancaster University he is hoping to arrange for Paul to go as a visiting lecturer to Lancaster for a month possibly next year. Be good if that comes off because I would come too.*

Nothing ever seemed to stop my father's trips away and while he was in Sydney later that month my mother was very busy dealing with a bonanza harvest of fresh strawberries and the next door neighbour burning off despite her asking him to wait until my father returned.

Christmas shopping, seeing Erica and I through our major exams, making costumes for Jemima’s ballet concert amongst other things occupy my mother’s days. Leo is waiting on exam results, Mark just wants to play cricket but Nicola gets a special mention:

**19.11.68**

*It is rather sweet and funny but Nicola has an inseparable companion called Clinton aged 13 ½ he is one of the nicest most competent boys I have ever met a real credit to his mother – wants to be a geologist. I like having him about he is a real good example for Mark apart from being a big help when Paul is away.*

When I first read this extract I thought it was interesting that my mother saw Clinton as a good role model for Mark yet unconsciously discounted the influence of Clinton’s father on him.

Nicola advises me that Clinton’s father had deserted them and his mother brought he and his siblings up alone. My mother reflects she was keen to affirm the role of mothering to her mother who felt she had underused her intelligence and at times deeply regretted having taken the path of wife and mother.

**21<sup>st</sup> Nov.**

*As a Councillors’ wife of course I have to look smart on many occasions. Fortunately I usually look neat in any case. I went to a reception for the Indonesian Ambassador the other day. I reckon I looked very smart. I have a new very simple but well cut knitted suit in a silky fabric very fine knitted in a fairly bright yellow – no collar but buttoning to the neck and I wore with it navy accessories including a navy Breton hat. The same suit looks even more stunning with slightly fancier black accessories and also very fresh with white ones. I try to keep my clothes pressed and mended so that it need not take me longer than ten minutes to shower and change which is sometimes all the notice I get. It is so sweet the way Paul is so tremendously proud of me whenever we go anywhere.*

I get the feeling my mother is slightly in awe of her status in the community. She seems to be enjoying it nonetheless, taking on a role and playing the game according to long-standing rules, without any question of challenging the status quo. I get a slight frisson of irritation when she talks about Paul being “proud” of her – for me it seems very patronising.

*Kathie should not live so close to the family that is always a mistake she needs to get away from their difficulties she will have enough of her own.*

I am often impressed by my mother’s dogmatism. In my own career I have studied the role of thinking in the development of depression and anxiety and the use of cognitive restructuring as a treatment. My mother’s writing is full of the type of thinking that has been shown to lead to depression. The absolute beliefs demonstrated in the use of words like “always” and the implied “shoulds”. I remember the first time I learned that there was a psychological significance to this type of thinking when I studied medical hypnosis in my mid-twenties. It was an epiphanal moment and it has taken me many years to develop my ability to challenge and change my own thinking. As I read her letters it is obvious where I learnt to be a black and white thinker and how much, not only my, but also my mother’s thinking has changed over the ensuing decades.

*Dec. 3<sup>rd</sup>*

*I shall be thinking of you lots tomorrow 76 years young! I say young because I know many a forty year old who is older in spirit than you are.*

She goes on to describe the frenetic activity of colouring plans for a planning job my father was undertaking. It involved fourteen sets of plans which were to be submitted to the planning authorities and local government. It was often a lot of fun joining in with family and staff to meet such deadlines. On this occasion there were plans on every available surface in the house.

The \$3000 my father earnt for this piece of planning cleared their overdraft making Christmas shopping more enjoyable and allowing my mother to indulge the whims of her children including, for Mark, *"an engineering kit and it had to be 'not babyish but a bit difficult'* She also had fun with my father's present: *"since some of the fingerling trout have grown up I am giving him a fishing rod with all the necessary bits and pieces for Christmas."*

Social activity increased dramatically with the festive season and they went out every night in the week preceding Christmas *"Business parties, theatre, opera, school closing parties and the Council Christmas Dinner on Friday."* To help manage things at home she employed a rather homesick English migrant from Yorkshire to clean for her, leaving her free to make some new curtains.

**23.12.68**

*[I was] thinking to myself "my word I am getting on well" when the darned machine broke down. I sometimes think that little gremlins in machines have a good chortle at us mortals. Well the nearest Singer centre is 15 miles away so as I can't do anything further until the machine is repaired I thought instead of getting furious I'd sit down and write you a letter. I did want to get the curtains up before Christmas but if I don't I don't and that is all there is to it.*

She goes on to describe the fresh fruit currently growing in the garden *"apricots, youngberries, strawberries and black figs"* knowing the passion her mother has for gardening. But she comes back to yet another intrusion of my father's civic life on their peace of mind.

*Last week was another of those Council Rumpus weeks. Nobody seems to know what has got into the Lord Mayor he lost his temper with Paul in Council and told Paul to shut up and sit down over something which is going to cause him a lot of trouble .... Tom was quite out of order when he told Paul to shut up. We are told that what Tom wants is a knighthood and that he thinks he can only get this by keeping things quiet but people are losing faith in him because they thought he would clean things up.*

Over the years my father became known in the press as "the controversial Paul Ritter". I recall my mother feeling very hurt and betrayed when he was vilified by anyone, let alone the Lord Mayor who had been such a staunch and life-saving supporter over the previous 18 months. Fame was a double-edged sword. Significantly she goes on to comment:

*I went along to see my doctor friend Joan Trevelyan on Friday because I get such moods of depression together with a frightful headache when I am menstruating. She assured me it was part of the change and gave me some tablets which I hope will help. The depressions are really quite ridiculous because Paul is really one of 'the' people in West Australia now and this latest argument seems only to have done good because people think he is keeping his election promise by speaking for what he thinks is right. I have always worried about money and unreasonably because we have never been without and we have had good spells like now interspersed with the times of more restriction, though we have not been really hard up since Paul was a student. I sometimes wonder whether I worry so much about money because Dad was out of work during the depression. Because it is not in the least bit rational even if the worst happened and something happened to Paul not only is he well insured but I could always teach again. Did you get depressed during the change? It does annoy me so.*

My mother's depression was put down to menopause but she was only 44 at the time and well short of menopause. Much more plausible to consider all the change and stress she had experienced over the previous 4 years and recognise the cost to her mental health and strength. Over the next decades the connection between health and life events would be researched and clearly established but then, as now perhaps, it seemed easier to find physiology to blame.

My mother recalls that she has always had, and still has, bouts of depression. Some she considers just "sadness", "no life can be all sunshine", but others she has struggled to cope with and recalls the worst as the first 8 months of Mark's life (1962). Despite being thrilled with his birth she suffered afterwards with what she describes as "a black, bleak time" and remembers clearly the morning she woke to find the cloud had lifted. My mother had wanted to seek help but my father thought she could handle it herself. She reflects "*I would certainly act on my own behalf now*".

I ask her to revisit her feelings about being short of money and she reflects that she felt a strong need for the security of a regular income that she could budget to pay bills, something that was not to happen until they got the aged-pension. She particularly hated having an overdraft and waiting for accounts or grants to be paid. She acknowledges that much of her anxiety about money was born in the depression years of her childhood. At that time there was no Social Security and her mother was too proud to ask for charity or handouts from the Government. She was even too proud to tell her parents that her husband had lost his job. As a result they were often hungry, particularly at bedtime. She recalls her brother's saying of "Grace":

*It was common at that time to say 'Grace' before a meal "For what we are about to receive may the Lord make us truly thankful" but Norman started saying after the meal "Thank the Lord for what I have had, if I had had a bit more I would have been glad".*

Her mother got very thin and her father tried to use her mother's jewellery as collateral for a bank loan of ten pounds. It was refused and they were too proud to use a pawnshop. Spending on clothes was impossible and her mother cut up dresses she had been given to make school clothes. The same clothes had to do for weekends as well and any damage to clothes or property



was a disaster, she reflects: *"I guess the fear has never left and I have never been able to expunge it"*.

Meanwhile her Yorkshire cleaner had become overwhelmed by homesickness and booked a passage back to England.

*I think they are making a big mistake they have not given Australia a chance they have only been here three months and it takes a minimum of six and more likely a year to settle.*

*Paul also rang to say he had had a hilarious afternoon. Councillors are given cigars and such at Christmas and as he did not want them he decided to give them away to various friends. He also took in some lovely bowls of our strawberries for various friends but everywhere he went he got other presents given to him. He collected so much wine he gave some to other friends and got chocolates from them. He even got two bottles of whisky!! Oh I wish you were here sharing all the fun.*

Our Christmas in 1968 was peaceful and quiet, albeit very hot, with Perth having the hottest Christmas Day on record at 108 degrees Fahrenheit. The New Year was looking busy for my mother with plans to complete her report on deserted wives, formulating a new constitution for the Australian Pre-School Association and attending their conference in Adelaide in May. She reflects to her mother on my father's role in the community and what the coming year may hold for them:

**27<sup>th</sup> Dec.**

*Its really is extraordinary the way the ordinary people back Paul, he seems to symbolise to them a stand against bureaucracy and red tape. The Premier's private secretary is writing a book about Perth and it will have a full-page picture of Paul in it. Jemima reckons it is because they see Paul as a modern day Robin Hood. Also I think it is because it has got around that he always takes time and trouble for his ratepayers particularly the old people.*

*Well I wonder what 1969 will hold for us, a year ago I would have taken a bet that we would have left Perth by now. One of the main grumbles voiced to us today has been that Tom Wardle was elected as a Man of the People and yet he has just joined forces with the establishment against Paul. It's a funny old world. He attacked Joan Watters too – he really must have had an off day.*

By December 31<sup>st</sup> I was sick, sore throat and headache. The weather was not kind – the temperature 103 deg F. A plane crashed in the North West with no survivors and we slipped into 1969. Whilst my mother and father dealt with the big issues of their lives, I was absorbed with friends, school and how I looked. My time was filled with the everydayness of life.

Anne Summers, in her autobiography (Summers, 1999), looks back more broadly at 1968:

For many of my generation, and for countless people around the world, 1968, was the year that marked the end of the old world and the beginning of an electrifying, but far more frightening era. (Summers, 1999)

She notes the Tet offensive in Vietnam, the assassinations of Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King and the Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia. Students and workers were rioting in Paris and:

All around the world university students clamoured for more democracy in their institutions, occupied buildings on campuses, and celebrated the emerging culture of youth and the Summer of Love, when hippies of both sexes put flowers in their long hair and, disarmingly, in the barrels of the guns of National Guardsmen keeping order on the campuses. And finally it was the year Richard Nixon was elected President of the United States. (Summers, 1999, p.224)

As I read Anne Summers' summary of 1968 the events she identifies trigger memories, some of the times, some of remembering or reading about the time. Unlike John Kennedy's assassination some 6 years earlier I don't remember where I was or what I was doing when I heard of Robert Kennedy's death. I wonder if the excesses of the Kennedy's since revealed would have dogged his Presidency had he defeated the ultimately disgraced Nixon. I remember the sense of change for the better, the 'Make love not war' protests, the horror of those of conservative mind at the rapidly changing social and sexual mores, or at least the reports of same in the media. I remember struggling against the tide of changing music – I loved the old time rock and roll, the pop of the Beatles' early days and those that mimicked them. I struggled with the changing social mores pushing against the dogmatism of my mother's beliefs, despite her relatively forward thinking approaches to issues of sex education, and her beginning awareness of the irrationality of the beliefs about women's rights and roles with which she had grown up. But I did not notice the struggle 'til later.

This is memoir, memory, looking back. Memory; always contaminated by its overlay of newer information, changing perspective and information about the remembered that subtly shifts the meaning and the authenticity of what is remembered. Looking back includes the complexities of mature self-reflection layered with self-censoring. It overlooks the forgotten, the repressed, the seemingly unimportant that became important. It can never hold pure the feelings of the moment and the perceptions of the mind at the time. Yet at the time we do not know what will prove to be pivotal, epiphanal in our lives, so perhaps we do not record what later proves to matter.

1969

The heat of Christmas continued into the New Year and, reluctantly, my mother limited her attendance at the West Australian Tennis Championships she normally enjoyed so much. The on court temperature, she tells her mother, had got up to 120 deg F. She is grateful to Erica for doing the ironing in the stifling heat. Her letter is full of chat and fragments of life.

*Sunday, Jan 5<sup>th</sup>*

*We had a nasty time with Mark last weekend he suddenly developed an enormous abscess on his tooth overnight and of course it was Sunday. The only place open was the Dental Hospital, we took him there but they could do nothing so we rushed him off to our Dr friend Joan Trevelyan. She gave him a penicillin injection and then we had to give him penicillin four times a day until the swelling went down enough for the tooth to be removed under gas on Thursday. Driving him back from the dentist, half conscious in the stinking heat on Thursday lunchtime was fairly nightmarish – a 15 mile drive.*

Without air-conditioning we would drive with the windows down and fans on so that at least the hot air was moving. We would stick to the vinyl seats, fabric upholstery was rare and seat covers yet to be invented. A patch of shade under which to park the car was like gold, there were few undercover parking areas. As I look back at what we coped with thirty-six years ago my mother in her letter looks back even further and expresses her empathy for the early settlers:

*You know Mum I take my hat off to the pioneer women. Imagine heat like this, long dresses, no washing machines, fans, electric coolers and fridges. Unfriendly aborigines and poisonous snakes to add to their troubles. If Britain only had a bit of their spirit now there would still be an empire and it would not be beset by troubles.*

I feel as if I am reading something from the early part of the last century. A sense of alienation, born of my understanding of postcolonial writing and the "writing back" of ex-colonised cultures, is strengthened by the archaic concept of 'Empire' to which my mother alludes. But for my mother it was still relatively recent history. Her father had traveled to India with his father as part of the colonial processes and their stories had been part of her childhood. But back to basics:

*We have mostly lived on salads this week but today I made a hot roast veal lunch and in spite of the heat I thoroughly enjoyed it. Mind you I kept rubbing my arms with ice while I cooked it. My new fridge makes ice very rapidly. Nicola did not want a party this year so we had a trip to town and lunch at Council House. Mark is copying her. He says he wants to go to "Chitty, Chitty Bang, Bang" and also have lunch at Council House. I don't mind I can't bear the thought of 20 little boys at a party.*

Lunch at Council House engenders wonderful memories. The Councillors' dining room was on the 10<sup>th</sup> Floor of Council House in St George's Terrace, Perth. It had sweeping views of the Swan River, at the time almost unparalleled as it stood as one of the tallest buildings in the city. The tables were all immaculately and traditionally set with white linen and multiple knives and forks and glasses. Each table had glass bowls of nuts; plain, sugared and chocolate coated,

sitting in the middle – I loved the cashews and anything in chocolate and as we waited I would fish to find them. The waiters were also immaculate in white uniforms, always polite and seemingly enjoying the opportunity to serve children. We knew how to behave well and my mother was proud of that. Entrée as I recall was a choice of citrus or prawn cocktail followed by main meals of beautiful steaks or succulent dhufish that were my favourites, They were always accompanied by perfect little white dinner rolls. These had the special attraction of the unusual as at home we had my mother’s home-made wholemeal or rye bread. Sadly the desserts elude me other than a vague recollection of apple pie and ice cream. I know we were always much, much too full when we had finished and there would never be tea on the days we had lunch in Council House.

It became a favourite place for family occasions; birthdays, as mentioned here, were usually marked by lunch. I went there to celebrate finishing my degree, earlier to thank my tutor at the end of 4<sup>th</sup> year medicine rotation. I especially remember that occasion because he was one of Perth’s leading physicians and to be able to take him to Council House was a major coup amongst my fellow students. I can still see him sipping a brandy after lunch telling us of the last time he had a drink with lunch. He had gone back to his rooms, seen his first patient and asked her to step into the examination room and undress. He promptly fell asleep at his desk to be woken some time later by the confused patient saying she was ready did he want to see her now. The lunches would cost my father one dollar per guest.

The letter finishes on a note of concern: “*I look everyday for a letter but I expect the weather is keeping you home*”.

World events take centre stage in my mother’s next letter:

*Jan. 6<sup>th</sup>*

*No the students are not very troublesome here. Perth is really an island, water on one side and miles and miles of the Nullabor desert on the other, so they are not subject to outside interests the same. Mind you I don’t blame the students for revolting, the pious ones who complain about the rates and taxes being spent on the students should stop for a minute and think what a bloody awful world this lot are growing up into. If I were a student now I would revolt, although there was the war when I was young at least there was not the threat of instant annihilation. If the young don’t revolt and demand cooperation and love rather than competition and hate then there is no future for the world. It may have been a marvellous feat sending men round the moon but I was absolutely disgusted with the astronauts saying that competition with Russia was “good”. It is hell as like, if the Americans and Russians combined their space research and halved the expenditure which could then be spent on some of this world’s problems we might be getting somewhere.*

My mother looks back at her remarks about the lack of student unrest in Perth reflectively, commenting how the level of global communication has changed making Perth less “the

backwater” that it was. But her passion for peace and communication has not changed and she is aggrieved by the way Australia has followed George W. Bush into the Iraqi war. She adds: *“I used to talk on the need for the 3 C’s; Cooperation, Communication and Compassion, to be taught as just as important as the 3 R’s”*.

The student protests were a part of the background noise of news and world events in the sixties. The only one to spring readily to my memory as I read this was the one at Kent State University, but research tells me that was later – in 1970. So I don’t know what comment of my grandmother’s specifically triggered this response about student protests. The early part of the 1960’s in the USA saw the first of the baby boomers reaching adolescence, early adulthood and therefore university. As a consequence of the resultant overcrowding of dormitories student communities grew up, many of them near the black ghettos (Chirney, 2003). This triggered a powerful sense of injustice in many of the students and, along with the impersonal and bureaucratic nature of the College education system, incited them to oppose the tenets of the traditional American way of life and the youth counter-culture of the sixties was born. The parallel rise of the civil rights movement began to intersect with the student unrest producing a wave of dissatisfaction. Racial discrimination triggered the first of the student protests in 1960. The Greensboro sit-in by four college students was a catalyst for many others. The Freedom Rides in 1961 lent further fuel to the fire, as did the March on Washington in 1963. Martin Luther King was at the time speaking of his “dream”. Race was the main issue at Berkeley in December 1964 when six thousand students supported a sit-in for free speech and eight hundred were arrested.

The anti-war movement became part of the student protests from 1965 on and many student actions had the triple themes of peace, race and student rights. In 1968 the US had to deal with the assassinations of Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King as well as the Tet offensive in Vietnam. Columbia became the focus for a series of protests which became increasingly violent and destructive (Chirney, 2003).

Protest was not limited to the USA and, significantly, in Paris in May 1968 student protesters were joined by unionists to almost bring down the French Government of Charles de Gaulle. However protests, also directed at race, war and student’s rights, in the UK at Leeds University in May 1968 (interestingly lead by Tony Blair’s Home Secretary, Jack Straw) and the London School of Economics in October were closer to home for my grandmother (Mair, 2003). It may well have been the build up to the climax of protests at the London School of Economics that triggered her comments as Mair describes the “smashing of the gates” on January 24<sup>th</sup> 1969 as the culmination of these students’ actions. Mair comments “Add to that a youthful concern about world events, such as the Vietnam War and apartheid in South Africa, and the inspiration of “student power” demonstrations worldwide, and the radical spark soon became a bushfire”,

though, as Martin Tompkinson (one of the student leaders of the time) notes, 'It helped that Fleet Street was a stone's throw away so that the hacks could stagger along and give us the oxygen of publicity'" (Mair, 2003).

My mother's political vehemence soon subsides and she reverts to chat about the garden:

*The strawberry plants don't take too much looking after. Paul hoes between the rows and we have to put the water sprinklers on every day and manure them once a year. The biggest labour is in the picking. It takes one person two hours to do them but generally we do a family pick so it is not so bad though it must be done early morning or late evening. We don't have any trouble from birds but there is a beetle that gets at them and goannas (a bob-tailed lizard) love them but the dog keeps the goannas away.*

We have tried to grow strawberries like the ones my parents used to grow. Like so many foods there is a distinctive and delightful taste that can only be found fresh from the plant. Sadly ours do not thrive and I am restricted to eating those that come in little punnets at the supermarket and very occasionally taste like the real thing.

#### *15<sup>th</sup> January*

*The Yorkshire lass sailed back on Jan 10<sup>th</sup>. What makes me mad is that she will go back to England complaining against Australia without ever giving it a chance. She could not see that if Australians came to see Yorkshire and did nothing but moan about Yorkshire and say how much better Australia was she would not feel very friendly disposed towards them. And yet that is precisely what she did, she complained morning, noon and night that it wasn't like home and she did not make any attempt to mix with Australians but just stuck with moaning migrants. I am beginning to think English people have lost their gumption unless everything is handed to them on a platter.*

I think my mother has summed up the migrant experience quite eloquently. The attitude of mind that looks forward and builds on what is good is what creates the opportunity of success whereas a constant looking back creates only dissonance. In some ways I think my mother was lucky because she could not afford to go home to the UK to visit and my father would never have gone back to live. I have been told several times by migrant Southern African work colleagues that it is fine being here but when they go home they realise all they have left behind. My mother was able to let that past fade and focus on remodelling her life in Australia. A task she managed admirably, despite severe bouts of homesickness over the early years and the financial uncertainty that my father's lifestyle incurred.

At that time he was earning steadily, sufficient to prevent Leonora and Erica getting a living allowance from their Commonwealth Scholarships. My mother was aware that family life was destined to change as Leonora planned to travel when she left University in two years time.

*I am so glad you at last have a TV because there is so much on it that is excellent company. I even enjoy some of the old films even though I have seen them before.*

We used to watch lots of old films on television on weekend afternoons. My mother loved Errol Flynn, George Formby and Nelson Eddy. My father liked Danny Kaye, the Marx Brothers and Deanna Durban. I remember as a child having a liking for Robert Mitchum. Cowboy movies were staple fare and I can remember my mother reassuring me when I was little that those who had been gunned down were only acting and would get up and walk away as soon as the camera was switched off. The accepted wisdom was that the blood was really tomato sauce. *The Court Jester* really sticks in my mind, perhaps because I saw it, and enjoyed it, again not long ago, colourised and still as funny. But the indelible image is from the film version of Steinbeck's *The Pearl*, I think it was called, where the baby, who has the pearl in its hand, is shot and the pearl falls. I was appalled at the tragedy of it at the time and it was one of the reasons I avoided films and stories without happy endings. The rule of thumb I developed was that if a film was full of trouble in the middle it would resolve happily but if it was happy in the middle I was set for a tear-jerker. My distaste for the tragic ending was such that I would get my younger sister (an avid reader) to read books first and if they had a sad ending I would not read them.

My mother likewise enjoyed "feel-good" movies as a girl, hence the passion for Fred Astaire with Ginger Rogers and Jeanette MacDonald and Nelson Eddy "*life was tough enough, tragedy was never far away*". Many of those she watched were wartime movies designed to lift morale. Errol Flynn, now known to be a flawed character, was her action hero, she reflects that many of his movies were sexist and racist but at the time she saw them as "*high adventure when good triumphed over evil and there were no shades of grey.*" She believes that the old movies focussed on "hope" and wonders if the "darkness" of entertainment now contributes to youth suicide.

She was feeling relatively hopeful about business early in 1969 despite my father having a falling out with his erstwhile mentor and now Lord Mayor, Tom Wardle. But the hopefulness did not neutralize the worry:

*I really don't know why I worry about money at all. We don't even have anything on HP the only debt we have is the house mortgage, we are all well insured and we even have some quite valuable things. Oma's desk for example is valued here at £500 perhaps I caught the worry when I was born.*

Is there a worry gene? Some recent research might suggest so. Anxiety is a recurrent theme of my mother's and she now holds the belief that it is inherited.

Her chat turns to family:

*Mark is at least beginning to swim he can manage a few strokes with a ring now and I guess he will soon be going up and down the pool. It will be a relief because although he is very sensible I always feel I have one ear cocked for where he is when he is at home.*

Our swimming pool was very dangerous. It was a rectangle thirty feet wide and sixty feet long. The "shallow" end was five foot deep and the "deep" end six. It had ladders at each end to get in and out and rough concrete slabs edging it. There was no fencing around it, the legal requirement for such coming much later. At different times we had lilos, inner tubes and a battered fibreglass canoe floating in it, attracting any child in the vicinity. The closest we came to disaster that I recall was one afternoon when we had guests. There were lots of people around and in the pool. I was swimming under water when I saw Mark's T-shirt floating toward the bottom – unfortunately Mark was still in it, fortunately he had only just got there so I grabbed hold of him and brought him gagging to the surface. Another time a student, attending a University do that Erica had organised, fell in walking up from the river in the dark, but, apart from her dignity and a lost shoe, no harm was done.

## 22 January

*It is only 9pm but it is a very sleepy daughter here I had one of those comparatively rare days when I have felt really energetic and I worked hard in the house from 8 am till 6 pm and then put a couple of hard hours into the garden.*

My mother was an erratic housekeeper, she found cleaning relentlessly boring and bemoaned frequently that it was so futile because it never stayed done.

*You say if only I were in England well I often think if only Mum were nearer it would be perfect. If ever you want to come and live with us you know we will be delighted to have you. By the way Paul said if you had kept any of my letters to you please go on keeping them because he thinks they would make a good record of our time here.*

How prescient of him.

*We had a big Civic Reception on Monday it was to greet the new Archbishop of Perth. He is a charming man full of intelligence and humour. All councillors and their wives are lined up at these dos to meet the VIP and when he came with Tom to Paul he said "You don't have to introduce me to Councillor Ritter I know who he is." He then turned to Paul and said, "now you are an interesting man" and went on to compliment him on his "honest stand" and what he was doing for Perth. I hear there is to be a reception for the Duke and Duchess of Kent when they come. One thing about being a Councillor you meet all the people of importance who come through Perth.*

*Next Sunday is Australia Day so there are a series of functions throughout the day, a luncheon, a naturalisation ceremony and a cocktail party at the Italian Club. So we will be out all day. Monday is a public holiday and in the evening there is the final of a beauty quest to which all councillors are invited it is the Miss West Coast so I'll tell you whether I agree with the judges or not.*

This was a very popular beauty contest in the pre-Women's Lib days and held very good prizes for the bikini clad, bronzed winner. I thought feminism had taken its toll on such contests but as I transcribed this letter my daughter's friend was planning to enter a heat for a contest of the same name at the local pub. I think if the philosophy of sexual objectification is to be perpetuated then it is better on the beach than in the pub.



*I am also beginning to try to write the report on deserted wives and my word that is going to be a difficult job to tie in all the loose ends and make firm recommendations.*

Postal troubles in the UK had caused a delay in the delivery of Christmas mail but it had not affected my grandmother's letters and one of the 24th January had arrived quickly.

*Jan 31<sup>st</sup>*

*Funny how news spreads those interviews with the underfed children were widely reported in the newspapers here. There were many mums who, even when I was teaching thought that as the kids get school dinners they don't need much else. But the more I get into the deserted wives problems the more I realise that there are many many children on the poverty line.*

My mother does not recall the specific trigger for the comment about underfed children but I assume from its context it referred to first world children.

She continues in her letter to describe the grocery demands of feeding a family of eight.

*I went shopping this morning and spent £15 on food and none of it what I call luxury food. I don't buy steaks and I rarely buy biscuits or bought cakes and at the moment there is not even any chocolate in the shops. I buy enormous quantities of fruit but very cheaply from a local orchard. I reckon we eat about 60lbs of fruit a week from him in addition to what we grow. We have all eaten nectarines this year till we look like them. And as for grapes our vines are laden I wish we could send you some ... I save all my old nylons throughout the winter then we cut them up and use them to protect the grapes from the little green birds, while they are ripening.*

*That pastoralist I was telling you about in my last letter owns a piece of land 90 miles by 50 miles wide. It was fascinating talking to him and his wife. All the natives go walkabout in the hot summer months so they leave the station in charge of the senior hand they fly down to Perth for the summer. Mrs Shubert says sometimes she does not see a white woman for weeks, their nearest neighbours are still 40 and 60 miles away respectively. It is difficult to imagine that there are still such lonely places in the world. The Australian Aboriginal in his natural state is one of the kindest most Christian people anywhere they share everything. If a parent dies the children are just taken in to the next nearest family. And yet those who get persuaded to the white man's way of life in the towns frequently become mean and drunken.*

This description of indigenous Australians grates with paternalism as I read it even though it is essentially flattering, the image of the "noble savage" looming large. My mother's impressions have changed over the ensuing years to be far less simplistic. She is better informed about some of the traditions and practices that affected young girls adversely, yet she respects the cultural valuing of older women. She also acknowledges the huge diversity in indigenous culture and reflects on their antiquity comparing the 40,000 years of their occupation of Australia to the paltry 200 of Caucasian Australians.

Her letter returns to the political issues facing my father and his legal case against the Perth City Council for his wrongful dismissal. She had hoped that the election of Tom Wardle as Mayor would facilitate early and favourable settlement but this had not transpired. She felt that he was intimidated by the councillors en masse whilst still holding an admiration for my father's ability to come up smiling and never hold a grudge. The controversy over the City Beach Wall had not

subsided with two independent engineers describing the design as “*infantile and unsafe*”, supporting my father’s viewpoint.

I quite often visit City Beach for a swim or walk or to watch the sun go down when I am visiting in Perth. I have not paid much attention to the beach wall. My mother tells me that the current wall is the one built in 1969 amid the controversy that it would not withstand the, literal, sands of time.

My mother finishes with an amused self-reflection:

*I can’t help still finding it hugely amusing that little Jean Finch from Stanley Park Ave should be hobnobbing with Lord Mayors, Archbishops, Ministers of the Crown and so on. Who would have thought it eh!*

I reappear:

*Sunday* (Undated – Envelope reads Feb. 1969)

*Did I ... tell you that because of her exceptional exam results Penny had won an extra award for £50. She is very thrilled about it and quite rightly so. She has just completed making herself an enchanting party dress, it has an underslip of apricot taffeta then a floral chiffon top it has long sleeves too. If she keeps this up she will outshine even Leo and Erica mind you she will need sticking power a doctor’s course is a long one.*

As I type I struggle with my memory to remember the dress – and suddenly it appears in my mind – even the difficulty I had with the yoke – I don’t think I found it as enchanting as my mother thought it was, but it’s with a wistfulness that I hear her pride in me and wish I had shared it.

My mother was busy with preparations for the start of the school year with particular attention to the needs of her young son:

*It amazes me how many clothes a small boy can get through. Dear little Mark is a typical small boy always catching his clothes on something and apart from the beginning of the day forever grubby.*

My father was finishing the layout of Crestwood Estate which he and my mother hoped would establish him as a planner in private practice. He had decided not to go back as City Planner if it was offered to him as many of his hand-picked staff had left, unable to get on with the acting city planner. He was also enjoying the freedom of working for himself. My mother was less happy with the arrangement as she preferred the secure income that a salaried job provided.

*Well the kids are now back at school and their teachers seem alright. Mark and Jemima have a new headmaster. I don’t take to him much seems too much of the sergeant major type. They have the wackiest system in the primary schools here they seem to shift all the teachers round every year or so, so you get a constant change of staff.*

My mother was not impressed by the education system when we arrived here seeing it as "very inbred":

*Students went from school to University or Training College back to teach and then lecture new trainees often without any interstate or overseas experience. Promotion of staff in the system was strictly by seniority and whether you had done the requisite number of stints in the country, there were some incredibly bad staff, particularly headmasters.*

She also bemoaned the lack of women at the highest levels and the lack of continuity and tradition in schools as a result of the constant transference of staff. She also felt students were over-tested and over-disciplined with some teachers quite cruel.

My mother never sat back and complained, however, whatever her grievance she would be in some way addressing it. Her involvement in the Kindergarten Teacher's College gave her a forum:

*We had the first College Council meeting of the year yesterday and it was a real humdinger. The Principal had decided to admit four aboriginal girls as students and there were many protests from members of the Council. The Aborigines are really an underprivileged group and you have got to begin somewhere to help them to help themselves so I backed the Principal. Anyway the girls are accepted.*

She was having a busy time and seems to do a bit of name-dropping to her mother as she describes her social life. A chat to the Assistant Commissioner of Taxation about deserted wives, the farewell to Archbishop Appleton, who had been a great supporter in difficult times, and a cocktail party at the US Consulate, filling her social calendar.

The next letter still has its included cutting intact. Written on the 19<sup>th</sup> February it reports on my father's failure to halt the work on the City Beach wall (*West Australian* Newspaper, 1969). The antagonism from Tom Wardle at the reported Council meeting continued to perplex my mother. Her journalist friend, Lesley Anderson, had some information about some legal problems Tom had had in the past and speculated on their impact on his attitudes to a potential court case.

The council's solicitors had contacted my father's saying he had recommended a \$4000 settlement plus \$1500 costs. My parents had to decide whether they would do better financially, emotionally and morally going to court. My father was concerned that the public did not see him as selling out to the Council.

*I have assured him that they will only see this as a victory and councillors admitting they were wrong. Especially as the one Councillor that Paul was suing as an individual is prepared to write a full and public apology. I suppose we are right to settle and not put that lot of scoundrels in the witness box, sometimes I have doubts about us doing the right thing in settling on the other hand it will be such a relief not to have court proceedings going on.*

Also of course the money would come in handy at the moment though I am quite determined to put some of it in a savings bank account and forget its existence until time of real need. One reason it would be good is that we can use some ready cash at the moment since we are engaged in a land deal which, if it comes off, we should have nearly enough to pay off the mortgage on this place. Well we will see.

Feb 24<sup>th</sup>

Today we took Sir Cyril and Lady Betty Slatterly to lunch in Council House... and she paid me one of the nicest compliments anyone ever has. She met the children ...when she came out to lunch a couple of weeks back and today she said "Jean I must compliment you. your children are beautifully brought up." Isn't that nice? I was very flattered because they are such lovely, sincere, truly aristocratic people.

My mother defines "truly aristocratic" as those who *"dress simply, do not boast of their worldly goods and give quietly to charity"*:

Tuesday

Today really started off with fun and games I always tell the kids not to lock the lavatory doors in case of fainting fits or so on well this morning young Mark did lock the door and it jammed. It is a funny lock with no way of opening from the outside so it took Paul about half an hour to dismantle enough of the doorframe to get at the lock. It is a good job that it was a warm morning because Mark had not of a stitch on. He was not the slightest bit upset and when we got him out he just made a dramatic gesture and went "Dah -dah!" Kids you never know what they will do next.

I love this story, I don't remember the event but it is so iconic of Mark's personality and I see the same offbeat response to events in my own sons and in Mark's son.

We had a letter from our old friends John and Gisela White this morning. John lectures at Belfast University and he is coming here next January on an exchange trip and will lecture on medical psychiatry for a year. It will be lovely to see them again but my word he will certainly find a contrast between Belfast and Perth. John also told us that that time when Paul applied for the Professorship in Belfast he was on a short list of two, all the committee wanted him but the other bloke was a personal friend of the Vice-Chancellor who overruled his committee and appointed the friend.

On such threads are lives decided – I can only be grateful to that vice-chancellor for his cronyism – he saved us from a life in the troubles of Belfast and allowed my personal history to make me Australian, marry my Australian husband and have three beautiful Australian kids and live in a country whose geography and climate I love.

With this letter my mother had enclosed the cutting relating to the fountain competition I had won the previous year. It was headed by a big photo of me side on with the fountain partly finished in the background. I do not look very happy. But oddly I see a resemblance to my father and even more surprising to me a resemblance to my second son whom I never would have thought looked remotely like me (*Daily News Newspaper*, 1969a).

Her next letter refers to the boyfriends of her older daughters, comparing the backgrounds of each and questioning that influence on personality, Erica's boyfriend was a railwayman's son:

**3<sup>rd</sup> March**

*I love Leo's boyfriend John Arkle – he is a lovely chap, tall, fair, wears glasses, plays football but is gentle and kind he is also at University. And I liked John even before I knew that his father is a lawyer makes you wonder if blood will out.*

Her upbringing has her confusing blood with opportunity and it is ironic now to read her observations. As far as Leonora recalls John Arkle became a teacher, Erica's boyfriend a successful lawyer. Leonora recalls how my mother always perceived her boyfriends as future husbands but Leonora herself was focused on her career and education, she had no interest in settling down at a young age. Before 1970s feminism there was a dichotomy in the roles of women, the choice was to marry and be wife and mother, with career a postponed or lost opportunity for many and intellectual fulfillment depending on individual initiative and voluntary community work. The alternative was to be a career- woman, the blue-stocking of previous eras; a woman who dedicated her life to the education of others, either through lack of opportunity to marry or as an altruistic option.

In the absence of her own career holding the reigns of their finances was one of the ways my mother contained her money worries, she shares some wisdom.

*Impress on Sheila and Kathleen the importance of an insurance policy. If young couples are buying a house they should always have a policy which in case of tragedy pays off the house at least. And an insurance policy is good collateral at a bank. We are in process of taking out further policies on each other partly as an offset against income tax and of course they are always cashable and good saving, a way in fact of putting things by for a rainy day. Also of course if we had the bad luck to have an accident at least the kids would have £40,000. It is quite a heavy insurance but while the money is coming in, it is a solid way of saving. It is our intention to cash one of our policies when we are 60 and take a six month tour.*

My mother turned 60 in 1984, she could not, of course, know how different her life would be then than she had hoped or planned.

Meanwhile her time and intellectual energy was focused on her committee work with the report on "deserted wives" in its final stages. As she writes to her mother she reveals a glimpse of the stress the legal problems, and their fallout, had been having on her.

**13<sup>th</sup> March**

**Friday**

*I am sorry if I sounded depressed when I wrote to Ron, I was tired and somehow it was a shock to me to hear that Tom had been in trouble for embezzling money in his youth. I know one forgives people for their past mistakes but since he has been Lord Mayor he has adapted such a holier-than-thou attitude that it is fairly shattering to find that to some extent it is just a pious front . . . . Of course also the solicitors are still dragging their feet so although we have accepted their offer nothing further has happened.*

The studies of epistolarity emphasise the influence that destination has on the content and mood of letters and this comment by my mother reflects that her letters to her brother Ronnie were more likely to include her doubts than her letters to her mother. They would make a great adjunct to this discourse but sadly they have not survived the several moves her brother has made since receiving them, a small tragedy in the writing of this journey.

My father was heading off to the Eastern States again, this time to research his proposed book "Planning in Australia". Further trips would follow in April and May when he was giving the keynote lecture at an international conference.

While my father was away the court case regarding his dismissal was settled, but instead of bringing the joy and relief anticipated my mother felt very flat and unsatisfied in the way it was resolved:

#### **20<sup>th</sup> March**

*By rights I should be feeling very, very cheerful but I just feel flat and very, very tired. You see today Perth City Council had a meeting in Paul's absence and voted by 25 votes to 1 to award him \$4000 and legal costs. Mind you they are stinkers still they said that they had found an award that entitled Paul to six months salary in lieu of notice. This of course is just face saving on their part however Paul will not finally accept until he gets the full letter of apology from Cr. Curlewis. I suppose the strain of expecting a court case got me down more than I realised. Paul ...rang me from Melbourne last night because one of the TV stations rang him about the PCC meeting he is very pleased though I think what was getting me down was that the PCC were claiming they had won because we had agreed to settle out of court. Our solicitor Dan recommended we accept because he said a Judge might not award any more and it would have been a ten day case which would have been extremely hard on everyone's nerves and emotions. The money will be extremely useful because Paul needs time to get on with his book.*

My mother wanted the settlement money to go into the bank but instead it was used to pay for my father's office building. She now regrets they did not take the matter to court and suspects the establishment persuaded their lawyer to get them to settle. She cannot remember whether my father ever got his apology from Cr Curlewis.

This is one of the times when my mother let her guard down a little when writing to her mother. If she is telling her mother she feels flat she must have been feeling quite low. What strikes me in retrospect is the focus on what the money and apologies mean to my father, she does not mention her own need for financial security and seems to accept that the money will go entirely to meet his needs. My mother's comfort in life would have been well served by having an independent nest-egg and income to buffer her from the vagaries of my father's income and laissez-faire attitude to money that ultimately got him into such trouble. I am reminded of one of the suggestions by Relationships Australia for maintaining a good partnership. They recommend caring for someone in the way they wish to be cared for rather than the way in which you want to care for them. I think my father may not have done this well and my mother,

with her conservative British upbringing, colluded in a world not yet embracing gender equality but rather still functioning on the ‘woman behind the man’ philosophy.

My mother looks back at this as the time when her “belief” in my father began to founder and comments “*Perhaps if I had been less scared and our ideas about money had been more compatible things might have gone better*”.

### **Saturday**

*It has been a mad, mad day because all the news media had got on to the story of the out of court settlement and they have been ringing up like mad. I enclose one of the cuttings from this evening's paper substantially correct it yet gets the figure wrong.*

## **PCC to pay Ritter for lost wages**

The Perth City Council has decided to offer six months wages and legal costs to Paul Ritter in settlement of his claim of wrongful dismissal by the Council on August 4, 1967.

Mr Ritter is in Melbourne and it is not known whether he has accepted the settlement. It is thought that a gentleman's agreement between Mr Ritter and two other councillors involving apologies may have to be settled before Mr Ritter accepts the offer. The decision was made in a special meeting of the council on Thursday night.

The motion to make the settlement with Mr Ritter was passed unanimously in committee.

Referred to the full council, only one question was asked about the amount of legal costs before the motion was passed by 25 votes to 1.

The single dissenter was Cr Rod Evans who asked to have it recorded that he disagreed with the motion.

The settlement will be worth about \$3100 to Mr Ritter. He has already been paid for one month of the six months.

At her home in Roleystone, Mrs Ritter said she had heard unofficially of the council's decision.

“I am pleased that the case has ended this way, though in another sense I am not so happy,” she said.

“There were only two or three councillors responsible really for the whole business and, I can't help thinking I would have liked to see them answer for it personally.

“After all, I'm only human. I had a hell of a time then, In fact I nearly had a nervous breakdown, which we kept quiet and I simply can't help feeling a little bitter towards those responsible.

“I think it is a victory for Paul because it appears they are admitting they were wrong to dismiss him.

"I am told some councillors think it is a feather in their caps. Well I suppose if everybody feels they are the winner it is a very happy situation," she said.

Mrs Ritter thought her husband would probably accept the offer.

In the original writ issued from the Supreme Court, Ritter claimed he had been wrongfully dismissed and claimed specific damages of \$7526 and general damages. (*Daily News Newspaper*, 1969b)

She sought comfort in the company of a friend. Betty Hain was one of the few people outside the family that my mother could confide in. Hailing from Southport in England she had married an Australian at 38 and borne a son at the then unusually old age of 40.

*She has one delightful little son and has been trying to have another baby but she is 42 now and just had a miscarriage so I guess she will either have to be content with one or will have to adopt. It is good to have some good friends.*

*On Wednesday evening this week there is a meeting of the group that campaigned to get Paul in. We are now trying to get another one of the group in to the Council at the forthcoming May elections. He is a very nice guy called Denis Gillett – he has a lovely wife Val and four very delightful children. Penny is rather sweet on the eldest, Peter. I hope we get him in because he will be a great help to Paul, he is very honest and straightforward.*

*Paul's new secretary Diane starts tomorrow she seems a nice girl, takes about £1000 a month now to run our setup with staff salaries and so on. We could do with a big job to get a bit ahead of ourselves but still I suppose it is something that we manage to keep up.*

My father's secretaries were a story of their own. He seemed to be always interviewing them and none seemed to stay very long, whether it was the nature of the job, the nature of people attracted to working with him or the challenge of working with him I don't know but my mother can only recall a couple of these women now.

### **25<sup>th</sup> March**

*I feel extremely sorry for the young people of today they get sex, sex, sex thrown at them from every direction, films TV adverts all the time. It gives them such a totally false sense of values and then add to it the feeling of impermanence given by the world situation and it amazes me that there are not more illegitimate births.*

*I was glad to hear Kathie had been to the Family Planning Clinic, these days there is no need other than religious reasons to have a baby if you don't want one. I personally have no regrets at all about waiting 3 ½ years before having Leonora. I think every young couple need time to adjust and get to know each other.*

Contraception has been an accepted practice for my entire adult life. So when I initially read this extract I thought little of it. It is only since reading the biography of Marie Stopes that I can put in historical context the importance of the acceptability and availability of contraception to my grandmother and my mother. Whereas some of my mother's comments in 1969 are obviously



dated, and sometimes painfully so, these paragraphs have contemporary aptness. Australia currently has one of the highest rates of teenage pregnancy in the industrialised world (Horin, 2003). My mother has not changed her view on the prevalence of sex in the media and abhors the loss of balance and lack of valuing of such things as *"friendship, aims and ambitions, importance or not of children, even religion"* as critical in a relationship. She often said that sex was the *"essential 10%"* in a marriage and muses now as to whether the number of teenage births reflects the teenagers' need for love.

Adele Horin's article in *The West Australian* bemoans the fact that sex education is motivated by fear and focuses on the risks. She comments that the fact that sex is about pleasure – giving and receiving it – has been overlooked in the education programmes. The pleasure of sex is, however, the main media focus. So perhaps balance is achieved overall. Another recent item reported the decrease in the incidence of sexual abuse of children believed to reflect children's increased awareness of it, and of their freedom to report it, as a side effect of their exposure to sexuality. So there is a positive to the increased availability and openness of information about sex to children.

My mother continues in her letter to espouse the value of communication between people:

*You know one of the curses of this world is the lack of communication between people. There is a programme on TV here called "People in Conflict" and I always think most of the problems would disappear if the people would just talk to each other.*

The expression of feelings has been normalised and encouraged over the years since the social revolutions of the sixties. Unfortunately in general, in my professional experience, people fail to listen and validate well enough to complete the cycle of problem resolution and understanding.

#### ***Easter Monday (7/4/69)***

*Yesterday was Paul's 44<sup>th</sup> birthday and though we had not planned a party it ended up with 25 people here. Fortunately I had boiled a ham and made plenty of cakes and I always keep quite a bit of tinned food in so we coped very well. It is always a problem what to give Paul but we managed to find him some things he liked.*

*Paul certainly brought the kids some nice presents back from the Eastern states. It did seem a long ten days without him but to get this latest book *Planning in Australia* ready he will have to travel quite a lot since he likes to see what he is writing about.*

*Planning in Australia* was never completed. My mother recalls that my father collected quite a lot of money for it and traveled all over Australia collecting data. However somewhere along the line he lost the impetus for it. I remember him selling advertising space at the back. These sales were sometimes financial windfalls that kept the business solvent. I also remember feeling guilty because he took the money but the book was never produced. My mother says he tried to get other people to finish it without success. The material is still somewhere in his office.

14/4/69

*Looks like Paul will have to advertise again for a secretary because although we all like Diane – who has been with us for a month – she is even more forgetful than Paul and so completely useless. He really needs someone who can be his memory and keep tabs on all his appointments. It is a nuisance having to look again but it is no good struggling on with a half-baked one.*

The working conditions for my father and his staff were distinctly primitive, housed as they were in an old tractor shed 50 metres from the house, there was a six inch gap between the roof and walls and the wind veritably howled through it. The office built with the money from the council settlement was a great improvement. It was put up next to the house and had a phone line run from the house so my mother no longer had to answer the business calls and dash outside to call my father.

My mother was hopeful at the time that my father would be appointed as a consultant to the Minister of Transport (Ray O'Connor) to comment on a proposal to sink the railway through Perth. This would have meant a considerable financial reward as well as the kudos of the appointment.

Sunday 21/4/69

*The next few days are likely to be fairly important. The Minister of Transport has accepted Paul as his independent adviser at least on the first stage of this rail sink project. Paul had been getting lots of photos and information ready for the Minister to use in a TV programme tomorrow night. At the moment it is his intention to announce that Paul is his advisor then, however, as I always am suspicious of politicians until they actually do what they say they will, I will believe it when it happens – still it is good for £1000.*

Her next letter contains a comparison of prices between the UK and Perth and the observation of how much higher salaries, wages and housing are. It is a funny mix of information, philosophy and family news. She reassures her mother that her community commitments do not interfere with her family.

April 27<sup>th</sup>

*You need not worry about me taking on too much social work I know where my values lie my husband and children and home come a long way first. I have seen far too many examples of what happens when do-gooders neglect their homes even for the best of reasons.*

She goes on to describe, with excitement, her planned holiday of a week in Melbourne with my father when he attends a conference at the Southern Cross Hotel and reassures herself, as well as her mother, that her children will cope without her.

Her letter then takes an unusual turn:

*I will never doubt flying saucers again because ... I really did see one. I was so agitated I drove into the median strip there were several other reports of sightings about the same time too.*

My mother still recalls this event and says no satisfactory explanation was ever given despite several other people also reporting it.

She finishes with a more down-to-earth topic:

*My word, from what I read in the papers I am jolly glad Paul did not get that Professorship in Architecture in Belfast. I would hate to be there right now. I always felt that N. Ireland was like a bag of dynamite just waiting for a fuse. Wonder how that young lass will get on as an MP. I admire her guts anyway.*

"That young lass" was Bernadette Devlin, Irish activist, who in 1969, at the age of 21, became the youngest person ever to be elected to the British parliament, representing Mid-Ulster. She was an articulate and passionate representative of the Irish Nationalist Cause and was gaoled in 1970 for incitement to riot. She would witness the deaths of 13 people during a march in Derry in 1972. The following week she crossed the floor of parliament and struck the Home Secretary Reginald Maudling when he said the marchers had been shot in self-defence. In 1981 she herself was shot and seriously wounded when loyalist paramilitaries came to her house (Searc's Web Guide, 2003). Her most recent claim to fame was in February 2003 when she was barred entry to the USA, when visiting for a family christening, on "national security" grounds (Flanders, 2003), presumably because she had spoken out against the British involvement in the war in Iraq.

My mother recalls that she was somewhat shocked by her originally but in retrospect sees her as a very courageous lady.

#### **6<sup>th</sup> May**

*The big surprise of this last week has been that Councillor Curlewis did not nominate for Council – this is absolutely staggering and will I think make a big difference next term. He gave health reasons but the general consensus of opinion was that having put his entire team into action to try and stop Paul being elected last October and having failed he was afraid if he stood that our team would knock him out. His pride could not stand the thought of that so he decided not to nominate. It was quite good fun being in Council House last Friday when nominations closed, especially as some of our mates did not nominate till the last minute so some of the Councillors did not know until then that they were being opposed.*

*Money is certainly rolling in at the moment but it seems to roll out ever faster, of course staff salaries take £600 a month apart from our own and then there is the new office and equipment but it is all necessary if the business is to expand. We will have to plough back profits for some time to come. The Kindergarten for Rockingham Park is an interesting proposition too.*

Not all was going smoothly, however, their intention to develop a block of land in Victoria Park had been foiled by Leif Nilsson, who as Acting City Planner had turned down the plans. The potential profit had been eight thousand pounds. My mother put his actions down to spite. She had planned to use part of the profits to make a trip home to the UK.

*Well Mark has got his piano and starts lessons next week. I didn't half laugh: — I have a notebook sellotaped to the wall in the kitchen to write down shopping reminders I had written on it cornflour and rice and Mark had neatly printed underneath piano. So we bought a nice second hand one . . . and have put it in Mark's bedroom.*

In mid-May my mother accompanied my father to Melbourne and Sydney.

SOUTHERN CROSS HOTEL  
MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA  
(Letterhead Paper)

18<sup>th</sup> May

*Well, well so this is what it is like living in a posh hotel, we have a lovely double room with private bathroom, air conditioned with radio and TV. It has a bedside phone and room service 24 hrs a day. But it costs £10 a night without any food!! I am glad that we are not paying for most of it, but the food though pricey is fantastic, buffet lunch today costs £2 each but whole salmon, sucking pig roast whole, pheasant trout, the lot, you can eat as much of this as you like. I had this lunch on my own because Paul has gone on a flight to look at oil installations, when I have written this I am going for a walk around Melbourne and to the Art Gallery, it is fun to be in a big city again, you could tuck Perth away in to one tiny corner of Melbourne.*

In an irony of timing as I write I have just returned from a trip to Melbourne, staying in a reasonable hotel in the centre of Melbourne. So I can relate very well to the contrast my mother noted between Melbourne with its old buildings, trams and extended CBD and Perth, even given the growth of Perth in the ensuing 36 years. My room was closer to \$150 a night and meals somewhat more than she paid! Melbourne remains an interesting city to walk around. My mother reveled in the opportunity to wander through the shops and unwind as she had been feeling increasingly tense.

The holiday had been marred by industrial action and some wet weather, which coincided with her birthday, but this had been compensated for by an enormous bouquet of flowers and celebratory dinner provided by some American contacts. In Sydney they enjoyed some fine dining and a hovercraft trip over the harbour. My mother comments to her mother that she never expected to be doing such things when she had married my father.

Mark had not been very happy at her leaving him so she had explained to him about telepathy:

*[I] said to him I would think of him at bedtime and send him a kiss. He thought for a while and then said, "Do shells have telepathy?" I could not see what he meant at first until he said "Well if you hold a shell to your ear you can hear the sea." I thought that was quite a clever thought.*

On her return she found it hard to get back into a routine and despite her reassurances Mark was pale and withdrawn, had eaten little and slept badly since she left.

Things were going better for my father with four new councillors elected he was appointed to the town planning committee leading my mother to observe that he would be on the committee that decided whether Leif Nilsson would be appointed City Planner. Tom Wardle had exercised

his right to be chairman of any committee replacing the retired Cr Curlewis. My mother includes the newspaper cutting in her letter of the 28<sup>th</sup> May.

In the same envelope she has included a small cutting from *The West Australian* newspaper of May 16<sup>th</sup> 1969 entitled "Dept. is still seeking missing sparrows". The hunt for errant sparrows, unwelcome immigrants from the Eastern States, always amused her.

*June 5<sup>th</sup>*

*This last week has been such a muddle that I can't remember when I wrote last or what I said. They have been putting up the new office in the orchard and we seem to have been invaded by a succession of workmen. The major part of the building was prefabricated it is hexagonal in design and it came on two enormous trailers which had to have a police escort. Then they had to put down foundations and it was fascinating to watch them maneuver the building together with the use of jacks and rollers. Then of course we had to have roofers, plumbers, electricians and the PMG. The office now has a phone with an extension to the house, so we can talk to each other or make outside calls. The office is 28' across and Paul has designed the fittings to go inside.*

My father's office is now by their home in Kalamunda. It is full of papers, books, collections of letters, sculptures, photos and other indeterminate paraphernalia. The shelves are ramshackled and threaten to collapse at any time, and occasionally do. The contents would be a lifetime's work for a researcher and historian.

His election to the town planning committee generated a lot of interest and it amused my mother that he was now assessing the plans coming out of his old department. She continued to nurse some bitterness against Leif Nilsson. As it transpired he was not considered for the position of City Planner and declined to accept the deputy's role and returned to Sweden.

I pop back in to her narrative:

*It's funny last year Penny claimed she had nothing outside school work to do but this year she is on the interschool debating team, she is secretary of the Interact Club and she does the computer course on Saturday mornings.*

I was quite good at debating – I took the role of first speaker on most occasions. We did not win any debates that year – but only lost by a couple of points each time. Topics included "That the motor car is ruining our lives", "That man needs a universal language" and "That Democracy is Hypocrisy.

*June 17<sup>th</sup>*

*I am sitting writing this by a roaring log fire with a box of chocolate ginger to keep me company. The children are all watching "The Avengers" on television. I am pretty sleepy too because today Paul and I played truant in a very Australian fashion. One of his fellow councillors told him yesterday of a magnificent place to get mushrooms – it is the season here – but the place was*

*40 miles away!! However we left here at 11 am and were back by 2 pm with an enormous box of mushrooms. Heaven know what we are going to do with them all but it was lovely wandering round in the wintry sunshine (60 deg!) picking them. The road down to this place is first through the hills and then through rolling sheep country. I did wish you could have been with us it was a lovely little outing and so unexpected. Mind you I had to iron this evening to catch up and now I feel a bit sleepy.*

Funny I thought I did all the ironing for my Mum – I remember the enormous cotton sheets – acres of white that all needed ironing, not like the chuck-in-the-cupboard cotton-polyester-fitted variety of today – it's no wonder housekeeping was such a time consuming job back then. We learnt how to iron as part of 'home science' classes. At the time girls did home science and boys did woodwork and metalwork. Ironing was a fine art involving just the right amount of wetting down (the school did not run to steam irons). The water for the 'wetting down' would be flicked with the fingers over the material to be ironed and the goal was to have it spread thinly not in big damp patches. One would then roll the garment up for a while to allow the moisture to spread through the rest of the fabric. After this there was a routine of folding as one ironed to get to the final result of the pristinely smooth and folded sheet or shirt or handkerchief. Shirts must not have creases down the arms as I recall. Ornate folding suitable for the top pocket or party could further enhance handkerchiefs.

My mother's mention of chocolate ginger evokes the memory of this particularly unsatisfactory confectionery. I suppose she really liked them but I often wondered if she selected them because none of us really did – so she would not be plagued by her children to share them. I do remember having them occasionally and nibbling off the chocolate and avoiding the crystallised ginger in the middle. My father would surprise my mother with a boxful quite often. He would buy them at the newsagents on the way home – of course he never had any money on him so he would book them up to my mother's account so she would end up doing the paying. On one of my birthdays someone gave me a pot of crystallised ginger – a terrible let down. To make them edible I coated them in chocolate – but really I would have been better throwing out the ginger and eating the chocolate.

*June 18<sup>th</sup>*

*I do wish Kay and Gordon could get married.... Why don't they appeal to a magistrate he can overrule the Mother because she is being unreasonable and the baby deserves a name.*

I have in general excluded the stories of the relatives back in the UK but this comment on my cousin's plight is testament to the changes in society's attitudes to marriage and children over the last 36 years. In the UK at this time the age of legal marriage was 21 which meant they needed the mother's permission to marry and thereby make the baby legitimate and able to take the father's name.

*Tomorrow night we are going to be guests of honour at a dinner at Kalamunda. The other guests of honour are Frank Baden-Powell (he is also a city councillor now) and his wife actress Eileen*

*Colocott. It is a formal evening and should be a good do. Sometimes I get tired of these things but the only way of building up a practice (architects are not allowed to advertise) is by meeting people and although we hold our own there is never much in hand.*

*I reckon the whole family should have emigrated here years ago there is far more equality of opportunity and less "class" about it.*

*We are having visit from the Duke and Duchess of Kent in August. I suppose there will be a big reception and dinner. Paul's patience and courtesy to Tom is paying off he begins to be pleasant again.*

There is a touch of irony in the juxtaposition of these paragraphs.

The moving of my father's workspace into the office in the orchard was a lot of work but it had positive spin-offs in the amount of space that was released in the house. My mother found boxes that had not been emptied since we arrived in Australia and their unpacking and storage in the new office was a boon to the sense of space, and of her ownership of that space, in the house.

Whenever I ask my mother about people or issues to do with my father's office she comments on the stress it caused her especially the phone and the staff trekking in and out to use the toilet and bathroom. "*It makes me realise just how exhausting it has been having the house as part of the office (1<sup>st</sup> July).*

My mother likes her personal space and I can relate to the sense of invasion of privacy. Yet she could do little about it as it was necessary for my father to earn a living. Fortunately she continued to be involved in her own interests and the Deb of the Year Ball preparations were once again in full swing:

*We had an evening get together for the Debs. and their mothers and our committee. The first year we ran the Ball we had 14 contestants, the second year there were 19 but this year there are 30! Tom has once again given us a car as a prize and he and the lady Mayoress are going to be present at the Ball which is on Sept. 5<sup>th</sup> this year. There are some very nice girls among the Debs, they have to wear the same clothes as they wore at the Ball at which they were presented and also have to raise £70 for the Kindergarten College Building fund.*

*I also gave a talk on Sex Education to a group of Housewives last week. Darn funny, to give that talk and discussion I drove 25 miles each way, would have been crazy in England but here I take it for granted.*

*I seem to have been having a lot of emotional problems with the children this last week. Jemima had floods of tears because she came top of the class by a heck of a lot of marks and she got the usual jealousy and nastiness from some of the other kids and it upset her very much. I wish there was a private school nearer where she would not be so outstanding but it is too far for her travel everyday.*

*Then Mark had a real to do he suddenly became aware of his own mortality and trying to put life and death into perspective for an intelligent seven year old is no joke. He kept saying "I don't want to, I don't want to." What finally comforted him was when I told him that I had nearly died after Penny was born and that there was such a glorious light and such deep peace I rather*

resented coming back. He is so funny, I also said to him "You weren't afraid when you were born were you?" and he made me hoot laughing saying "no, but when you pushed me out of your tummy I did not know how terrible it was out here and now I wish I was back."

And to cap it all Leo and John had a real upset last week. I still don't know what it was all about except Leo said she needed lots of extra love. However John took her to lunch today and everything seems alright again. You know there is still National Service call up here for every tenth 20 yr old and John is one of those who has received his calling up papers, they allow him to finish his degree at the end of the year but then he has to go into the army. For two years.

And wouldn't you know all this emotion came at the wrong time of the month, I get such shocking headaches and depressions it does not help. I have tried a variety of tablets but the side effects seem worse still.

Her next letter is full of envy for her mother being able to watch Wimbledon live and a discussion about a televised interview with Prince Charles:

*July 8<sup>th</sup>*

*I must say I was very impressed by Charles he seemed to me to be both charming and intelligent. I should think he has the makings of a very good King ... I wonder if the queen will abdicate at some point or whether he will have to wait for 60 years like Edward VII.*

*Penny has had the top marks in the debating team this season. She will most likely represent the school on a TV programme called "It's Academic". It is one of these school quiz programmes.*

Our school was ultimately not chosen for *It's Academic* but it did consume a lot of school time and effort trying to establish a team. As I recall we were asked if we wanted to participate and then others could challenge for a position on the team – I was only challenged once and lost to a little chap called Leslie Harris (who sadly committed suicide in his twenties). But I maintained my place on the team. We had a practice session in which I did well – partly because I had heard all the questions before. The programme lasted many years and was resurrected in recent years for a new generation of students.

Council matters continued to engage my mother's interest: "*Last night we went to a lovely concert it was a gala Benevolent Concert and we were sitting in the posh part. I must say I enjoy being a Councillor's wife*".

She had also attended the Lady Mayoress's morning tea and comments:

*I like to observe how she does things because I have a feeling that some day I may be in her shoes. It is obvious that Paul will more and more become a power in the Council here, thank God he has the integrity to be able to cope. Tom more and more takes notice of what Paul says on the Town Planning Committee these meetings last a fantastically long time, there is one a month and it usually lasts about ten hours. How the atmosphere has changed with Curlewis's departure other Councillors are not now afraid to speak up.*

I don't know what my grandmother had said to prompt my mother's next comment:



19<sup>th</sup> July

*I think that there have always been lots of abortions only now they are being properly medically performed. I honestly don't think many students do live immoral lives. I think you only hear of the small vociferous minority that get their names and deeds in the newspapers. The vast majority are honest hard-working kids.*

Anne Summers (Summers, 1999, p.135) gives a vivid and extensive description of the challenges of attaining an abortion for an unwanted teenage pregnancy, that resulted from date rape, in 1965 in her autobiography and, later in the same text, descriptions of the battles by the Women's Electoral Lobby to have abortion laws revised. Many of those against abortion made the naive assumption that if it was illegal it wouldn't happen. That was, of course, not the case. Illegality made it unsafe, underground and expensive and the health consequences of a bungled backyard abortion were often severe and occasionally fatal. Innocent notions of adoption as an inevitable happy ending were also embraced, sociological studies since debunking this myth. 1969 marked a number of legal challenges and feminist acts that saw abortion become legal under certain circumstances usually involving the mental and physical safety of the mother or physical disability of the foetus. The landmark Roe vs Wade case in the USA was launched (although not resolved until 1971) and women in the USA spoke out through the Planned Parenthood Association, the Redstockings and the National Association for the Repeal of Abortion Laws (*Histories of Abortion*, Unknown; Planned Parenthood of Australia, 2003). The Menhennit Ruling in Victoria and the review of South Australian Laws lead the change in Australia (Planned Parenthood of Australia, 2003; Unknown). The act had changed in the UK in 1967 after an outcry that women with children affected by Thalidomide had been refused abortions. Western Australian Laws were further altered in 1998 to make the rules much clearer for the medical profession after the arrest of two doctors (Clausen, 1998).

*I had a good laugh at you saying I should have a two hour rest after lunch the only time I manage that is on Sunday afternoon when I sit and read the papers and the kids leave me in peace. You know I drive ten miles every morning taking the children to school and again ten miles every afternoon at 3.30 to pick them up again. Wednesdays are the worst day because I have a mid morning run of 8 miles to pick up Jemima and her friend up from their violin lesson and return them to school. Then after school Mark goes to piano lessons 2 miles away and Jemima goes to ballet 2 1/2 miles in the other direction. Nicola is also having piano lessons now but her lesson is on Saturday morning.*

*I even go three times a fortnight to the hairdresser now. I envy people who have nice hair with no trouble, but I have to go to keep looking nice. Everyone takes it for granted that in five years or so Paul will be Lord Mayor. He really is incredible you know that he has fought back from being sacked by the Council to being very respected Councillor, would make quite a story. Business comes in steadily and though we can't throw money around we manage to live comfortably, we have a constant overdraft of around £2000 but this inevitable because you have to pay staff to do work before you get paid for it. Mind you I am told that this is a very small amount for someone building up an architectural and planning practice. Of course Council matters take about one full day a week for which there is no pay but Paul really enjoys it.*

This is at odds with my mother's recollection that my father came home from meetings miserable. I queried this with her and she recognized an ambivalence my father felt between the sometimes dismissive and denigrating attitudes of some of his fellow councillors and the positive responses from his constituents who would ring him and declare he was the only honest councillor. My mother says now she would have loved being Lady Mayoress but would have preferred it in her own right.

*You know you can't stop Mark thinking, he plays lots of games with his mate Craig but he can read just about anything now. He is quite extraordinary at 7½ he can understand practically anything in the papers. He has read all the stuff on the moon shot and also came to me with tears in his eyes with the picture of a starving Biafran child from the paper – the caption read – this child died two hours after this photo was taken. It was an appeal for funds for the Save the Children Campaign. Mark's query to me was why didn't they give all the Moon money to the starving children all over the world. How can you answer that? I think Mark will be brilliant when he grows up, but he needs every bit of normal care I can give him.*

Her next letter was written from her sick bed where she had been laid low with a bout of Hong Kong flu but she managed to fill it with a contrast of social chat, the reception for the Duke and Duchess of Kent, and world events culminating in the first landing on the moon.

**27<sup>th</sup> July**

*What a week though Man on the Moon. The stupid education minister Mr Lewis here said that children could not have the day off to watch, they should go to school. Have you heard the like. I said to hell with that and kept the children at home till the first walk was over – it was mid morning here. I then sent them to school with notes saying that I thought certain things had greater priority.*

My mother was pretty irate about this. As it was the class I was in had watched the landing on the science room TV and I felt like I had missed out in a sense by not seeing it with them. I don't remember actually seeing the first steps, it is one of those things that has been repeated so often it tends to blur the initial memory until the memory of the memory gets so overlain with repetition its original impact is lost.

*You know really one wonders if there is a curse on the Kennedys I wonder if he is finished politically. I don't suppose we will ever know the complete story behind it.*

The event that prompted this comment was the accident on July 18<sup>th</sup> when a car driven by Senator Edward Kennedy drove off the narrow Chappaquidick Bridge killing a young woman, Mary Jo Kopechne. It did indeed finish Kennedy's possible aspirations for the presidency, he was defeated in the pre-selection by Jimmy Carter in 1980. The complete story was much debated. Kennedy was found guilty of leaving the site of an accident and given a suspended sentence.

*Aug 8<sup>th</sup>*

*Leo breaks up today for the Spring holiday from University. she has been flat out writing a big essay on origins of social change in the Victorian era but she will write you a poem during the holidays. She is a funny girl. she still goes out with John but she told him she did not want a serious relationship because there are lots of things she wanted to do and places she wants to see before she settles down.*

I asked my mother why she thought of this perspective as 'funny' whether it had something to say about the attitudes of the time or more specifically her own perspective – nowadays it would seem a wise and completely acceptable choice. She reflects that it was *"very much a sign of the times given that sex outside marriage was a bit of a no-no, it seemed unfair to John to string him along. Now I think it would be the sensible thing to do"*. She adds that she and my father were 21 when they married, *"that seems crazy now"*.

These comments bring the dramatic change in sexual mores over the last 25 years to my attention. Sex was a matter of clandestine urgency where the boys had to trick or cajole the girls into it and the girls had to resist, less they be seen as loose or promiscuous. Virginity on marriage was still valued and marriage young was therefore a license to have sex, or at least admit to having it. The freedom to wait for marriage is a reward of the sexual revolution, still in its infancy in the late 1960s. Living together without marriage was "living in sin". Sex and sin were still seemingly inexorably linked. Contraception was only just becoming available to the unwed and even for a married woman some doctors required the husband's consent to put her on the pill. Children born out of wedlock were illegitimate – a term rarely used in the 21<sup>st</sup> century – and extra-marital pregnancy a great cause for shame and a trigger for the shotgun wedding that would minimize social ostracism. Girls for whom forced marriage was not an option would be sent away for the duration of the pregnancy or confinement and the unwanted baby adopted out, often without ever being seen by the mother.

It is interesting that my mother recalls her concern for John "not being strung along" a perspective that implies it is unfair on a man to dangle a sexual carrot – making it the responsibility of the woman to caretake the sexual emotions/frustrations of the man.

*This evening at 6.30 I am on a TV panel discussing the deserted wives report on a news programme called 24 hrs. Both our cars will be out at the time so the TV station are sending a taxi to come and pick me up again a 25 mile drive. I hope I feel awake and fighting fit because there are a few points I would very much like to get over. trouble is I sometimes get dopey headaches.*

*Mark is a hoot he said to Paul yesterday "Daddy I want you to write a letter to Mrs Peaty to tell her to give me harder work. it is a waste of time going to school if I don't learn anything." I reckon school can be hard on bright kids having to go slowly.*

When my mother reflects now on the Australian education system she believes that the teaching was dumbed down so less academically able children would not feel disadvantaged and there

was no acceptance that different students had different capabilities and should be respected for those. *“What has happened is that bright children are ‘punished’ for being bright, teachers are devalued and the whole system has lost coherence and a sense of direction”*. She yearns for a time when education was for education’s sake, for *“the pure joy of learning”*.

She comments in 1968 on Jemima passing her ballet exams and my father’s successful trip to Hastings in Victoria where he is advising on planning. Her comments on his activities continue in her next letter where she describes his dream of buying the property next door to set up a planning school. They did not have the money but Tom Wardle had been taken with the idea and immediately written my father a cheque for \$5000 as an interest free loan to put towards it. As it happened the couple who owned the property separated in a quite hostile manner and could not make the decision to sell.

While my father was dreaming my mother continued her unpaid work in the community. Her television broadcast had gone well and she had also ‘collected’ another committee, the Social Services Child Care Committee. The shooting deaths of five people in Ireland brought another bout of relief that my father had not got the job there in 1965.

On August the 16<sup>th</sup> I had a party for my sixteenth birthday. It did not rate a mention in my mother’s correspondence. I recall enjoying it but with a bit of an edge. I was not ‘cool’ and ‘cool’ people did not come to my party – only one of the in-crowd came by and he left quite quickly – I think appalled by the childish nature of the event and the lack of loud music and alcohol. Peter, the apple of my eye for the early part of the year, did come and it was the beginning of the end for any relationship we may have enjoyed.

#### *Aug. 23<sup>rd</sup>*

*Tomorrow I am taking the younger ones in to town to do various shopping they badly need, including a haircut for Mark. Tuesday I have a deb. ball committee in the afternoon, I am going to the opera in the evening and then fetching Paul from the late night plane. Wednesday is the Kent’s reception. Thursday morning the Lady Mayoress is giving a lady ratepayer’s reception and in the evening I am speaking on the deserted wives report at the Annual General Meeting of the Social Services (see me in Parliament yet). Friday I have the Women’s Services Guild’s annual meeting in the afternoon and a deb. rehearsal in the evening. Would you say I was busy?*

My mother describes the highlight of the next week as the reception for the Duke and Duchess of Kent.

#### **31.8.69**

*Each Councillor was allowed to take two guests and we nominated Leo and Erica, other councillors put their children down too, but to our astonishment the Town Clerk suddenly decided if Councillor’s children were present he said people might complain. I was rung up and told my children could not come. However I rang up the Lord Mayor’s secretary and said my children happened to be 18 and 20 years of age could easily be married and they would not then have*

*known they were my children. The Town Clerk had to back pedal and say he had not known they were over 18 and that was of course what he meant.*

*Anyway at the reception unfortunately the Duchess had flu and could not come but Paul and I made our bow and curtsey to the Duke. Then afterwards the Duke mingled with the guests and talked to about half a dozen in all. The Town Clerk did his darndest to steer the Duke passed us but Tom took the Duke gently by the arm and said "I would like you to meet the two Miss Ritters two of the youngest guests here." And the Duke stayed and talked for about five minutes. I said how sorry I was that the Duchess could not come and spoke about Gan-gan and Paul told him about Lord Snowden pointing at a hole in the model when he came to Nottingham that time and the Duke said "He would do just that!" He also asked Leo and Erica what they were doing and said Erica looked very young to be at University. Altogether he seemed a very pleasant, intelligent and humorous young man.*

Australia was still a very royalist state. My mother loved the pomp of the royal receptions and loved being able to tell 'the folks back home' of her opportunities to brush with royalty. I was told a story the day before I wrote this by a lady in her late 50s about going to Perth to see the Queen in 1953. Her grandmother a staunch and vocal royalist insisted they all go to see the parade. They left Collie at 3 a.m. in their small car and arrived in Perth at 8 a.m. finding a place at the front of the barricade to await the royal wave and a peak at the Queen. They were all dressed up with her rather large grandmother wearing an even larger hat adorned with ostrich feathers. The parade arrived some 5 hours later and my storyteller says she saw the horses and the car rolling into view and the beloved royal hand in the midst of its wave but before any further view of the long awaited Queen her grandmother fell to the ground in a dead faint, all 19 stone and acres of hat. She recalls no one else would lend a hand until the Queen had passed. Her grandmother recovered consciousness quite quickly totally mortified, not because she had fainted but because the Queen may have seen her do so.

I went to the University of Western Australia with Leonora to see the Duke and Duchess of Kent and follow them around. It is odd to think it seemed so special to spot the Royals! My diary recalls that we "clocked up 4 smiles and a wave". Leo and I were quite close at that time, which, given the age difference – I was just 16 and she 20, was an odd mix. But she seemed to find solace in talking to me and I wonder if that was my first taste of the art of listening empathically that has become part of my career. I could do nothing and knew little that was helpful but just being there must have been enough.

My mother's speech on the problems of deserted wives had gone over very well and she was pleased to have had the Minister for Health in the audience. A motion was to be put to the Parliament such that a select committee could be set up to examine the problems that had been exposed.

The beginning of the school term left the house very quiet and my mother enjoyed the opportunity for some self-time. She brought several lengths of material to keep her amused

sewing, including a sundress for herself that she described as "very gay" (Sept 9<sup>th</sup>). A 'gay' sundress in 2005 would be more likely to be an ugly one as the language shifts with time. Since being annexed by the homosexual lobby the word 'gay' has been further overturned by my children's peer group to become a pejorative one. Much as 'wicked' has become a compliment (with the potential to confuse many a young reader of fairy tales).

*Oh Dear so Eve blew her top at the boys and girls, she must have forgotten what it was like to be young. I am not condoning heavy petting but Eve was not above it when she and Nor were going about before they were married.*

'Heavy petting' is another expression that is not much used now and the condemnation of it as morally inappropriate has certainly declined. My mother describes heavy petting as "*really appalling stuff*". She is happy that sex can now be enjoyed by the young in a safe unforced environment and is surprised at how stilted and self-righteous she sounds in the letter extracts. She cannot personally understand people enjoying casual sex because she values the emotional and intellectual components of a sexual relationship, but because she doesn't understand doesn't mean she condemns those that do.

The letter quote also prompts her to ponder about the stigma that was attached to being born out of wedlock. She recalls that when my father was in the coalmines during the war the one thing that would really fire a miner up and start a fight was being called a "bastard". If the woman was not married then the father's name was left off the birth certificate and my mother recalls that a cousin gave the wrong marriage date in a family genealogy so that her son would not appear to be born within nine months of the wedding.

As we are discussing this issue through email we both read Adele Horin's article in *The West Australian* newspaper about a South Australian survey that showed 86% of parents wanted the school to do the sex education. In the story it states that by year 10 25% of students had had sexual intercourse and 40% oral sex (Horin, 2003). My mother adds:

*When I was asked to give sex education lessons at Aigburth Vale High School in 1946 the Head, Miss Currie, said I had to have parental approval first. We held a parent's night; out of 70 sets of parents only one said there was no need, they had already talked to the girl, all the rest wanted me to do it since they thought I would know the right words.*

**18<sup>th</sup> Sept.**

*It looks as though the motion in Parliament to consider our deserted wives report will fizzle out because it has become a political issue and since it was proposed by labour and the liberals are in power it will be killed. However it has been quite funny having both labour and liberal M.P.s ringing me up to ask my advice. Our local Liberal M.P., or M.L.A. as they are here, is going to try to arrange for me to have a talk with the Minister of Welfare to see if there are any simple proposals which can be adopted now.*

*And tomorrow I am giving a talk to a posh women's club I am going to talk about the supporting mothers' problems because I want to shock them out of their complacency. All my old enjoyment of acting gets let loose on these occasions. I try to really make them see, one lass I talked to this week came out of hospital with her ten day old child to find her husband had dumped the other two children on a neighbour and had disappeared leaving her with thump knows how many bills and precisely 60c in her pocket. Well she is an educated woman so she will survive but she certainly was in a state of shock and no family in this country for her to turn to for help. Really some men are b's.*

The plight of deserted wives was quite severe as my mother describes to her mother. At the time divorce was still someone's fault and difficult to attain but it was easy for men to walk out of families, there was no legal recourse for the claiming of child support and many women had left the workforce to be full-time mothers. Today's newspapers often ring with complaints of separated fathers about the costs of childcare and the restrictions on time with their children. They are paying the price for the enormous hardship metered out by their predecessors that motivated women like my mother to act on the behalf of deserted mothers. My mother often talks about the pendulums of social change and the balance of access, financial support and child care for divorced parents is yet another instance of the swing of the pendulum of social justice.

*Mark remains a caution the other night I was putting him into the bath when he shouted "Stop. stop I am allergic to soap" So after his bath I said to him "what do you hate most" and he said "soap and water, it's the worst thing in the world."*

The anecdotes of motherhood and family are a highlight of her letters especially when it comes to the wit of my younger brothers. Her belief in family building as an important role for women remains strong but not at the expense of women as community builders and she continues to give her time to sharing her beliefs with other women.

She was musing in 1969 at the suggestion that she should also stand for election as City Councillor. Ironically one of her concerns in so doing was the worry that she would not have enough clothes for all the civic occasions.

**29<sup>th</sup> Sept.**

*Though heaven knows there is so much to be done especially to make women realise that they are not second class citizens but must take their full place. Talking to a group of mothers last Monday I got quite mad because I wondered what was the point of the suffragette movement if they just behave like a lot of sheep.*

**Oct 5<sup>th</sup>**

*Well the joys of country life, two nights ago a fox got in to the hen run and killed two of my new pullets and yesterday when I went to see what the flurry in the garden was I found Sweep, our dog, fighting with a five foot snake. I did not want the dog to get bitten so I shouted him to heel and the snake slithered away in to the long grass next door. It was a dugite which is a moderately venomous snake. I don't worry too much because the hospital is only a mile away and they all have anti-venene. I used to worry about snakes when we just came but we have only had*

*a few in all this time and they are far more scared of us, what is more funny statistics show that there are more people killed by swans in England than by snakes in Australia!*

I have often quoted this statistic although I have no source for it other than my mother. It sounds highly unlikely, but then again very few people die of snakebite in Australia. I was recently in Alabama in the USA and a young lady of 15 was telling me she would never come to Australia because of the snakes. She seemed not to rate the rattlesnakes and copperheads that were plentiful in the forest at the back of her own home.

It was now a year since my father had been elected to the Perth City Council and my mother commented on the opportunity it gave her to meet all the important people who came to Perth at civic receptions including, later that month, the lunar-landing astronauts. She was also looking forward to a visit from an old friend, Cedric Butler, who was on a health cruise, berthing in Fremantle for six hours.

My father's work took over the home again in early October with an 'all hands on deck' effort to finish a planning model for a big exhibition. Twenty-seven people were in and out of the house that weekend with a finale of fish and chips for twenty-five at 8pm on the last night.

The models my father and his staff made were wonderful. The first one I remember was in England when he made three models of the center of Nottingham showing past present and future. The model concerned here was one of the estate he had planned, Crestwood Estate in Thornlie. The buildings were made of balsa wood and the cars were molded out of lead and painted different colours, we would scratch the paint off for the windows. It would almost certainly be deemed unsafe now to use lead that way. I don't recall what the people were made of but the trees were sticks with sea-sponge dipped in green paint glued on the top, and textured bathroom glass made great water surfaces. My jobs were usually to dip sponges or scratch windows. He had a gadget called a modelscope that was like a reverse periscope whereby you could look down it and it would seem like you were walking through the streets of the model thereby getting a sense of human scale in the design.

### **13<sup>th</sup> Oct**

*Even I have spats with my children occasionally. I find 18 is a trying age and Erica seems so touchy at the moment of course she has exams now which does not help. I often think back to when I was eighteen and realise just how impossible I must have been. I told this to Leonora yesterday and she said she was looking forward to reminding Erica of her own behaviour when she has a child of eighteen. Leo is such a good friend at present we get on very well together.*

*Jemima was running in the school sports last Friday when she pulled a muscle in her thigh and had to drop out. She was very disappointed because she is very athletic and had hoped to do very well.*



*I have finished Nicola's dress and she looks quite enchanting in it she is so polite and sweet.*

**23<sup>rd</sup> Oct.**

*I wish I had known you were going to Scotland I would still like a genuine Johnstone Kilt. Tell Peggy to stop worriting there is more danger on the roads in England than on the streets in Ireland. We have had letters from John White our friend in Belfast and he says there has been a great deal of exaggeration of the isolated acts of violence. Mind you there are a few over there I would clap in gaol for a start one is that Ian Paisley bloke who is no reverend since he had no recognised qualifications but only from one of these crooked American colleges where you can buy them. He is a troublemaker if ever I saw one, calls himself a free Presbyterian – why is that so many religious people are so much less tolerant than everyone else. They always seem to me to be the very opposite of Christian. If they only went back and read Christian words they would realise that they are not Christians but are living by the God of the Old Testament.*

My aunt's concern about Ireland would have been prompted by her only son, a soldier, being sent to serve there. Ian Paisley was a Northern Irish religious and political leader who had been ordained by his father in the Presbyterian Church in 1946. He started the Free Presbyterian Church of Ulster, in 1951. It became noted for its virulent anti-ecumenism. In the late 1960s he led numerous anti-Catholic marches, and he was jailed in 1966 and again in 1969 for heading demonstrations that ended in rioting. I assume that it was the latter one of these that prompted my mother's vitriol against him. He still heads the Free Presbyterian Church and is still in Parliament although his health is reported to be failing. His son is set to succeed him as head of the church.(Unspecified, 2003b).

My mother thoroughly enjoyed the opening of the Crestwood exhibition with my father receiving accolades from the Minister for Housing and Professor Gordon Stephenson, Dean of Architecture at the University of WA, prompting my mother to express a yearning for my father to return to the academic life.

She was also sharing the frivolous:

**28<sup>th</sup> Oct.**

*You have a crazy daughter I went in to town to the new Archbishop's reception and had a bit of time to wait, I walked into one of the big city stores and out the other side wearing a big cream straw sombrero. Paul did laugh when we met up because I had spent a lot of the journey in convincing him that it did not really matter if I was not wearing a hat. However I don't regret it because it will go with just about anything and in the hot summer a hat is just about essential. And so many commented on how nice it looked at the reception it made me feel good I do think one looks more dressed wearing a hat.*

And the political with the Australian Federal Election having been held;

*There has been a terrific swing to labour and the Government has been returned with a very small majority .... I think it is largely the continuing war in Vietnam that has gone against the Government. It is not popular especially as National Servicemen get killed. And Gorton, the Prime Minister has lost favour. I don't like him I don't trust any man who when asked a direct question flutters his eyelids and sidesteps the question.*

Nov. 9<sup>th</sup>

*Dear me all these family weddings.... I begin to think my daughters are slow though perhaps it is studying that does not give them so much time for sweethearting. I hope they all go through University I have seen so much heartbreak these last months caused by untrained women being left to look after their children on their own that I would not want that for my own.*

She describes the death of the local shire clerk at the age of 37, leaving his wife with "Not much in the way of education to fall back on".

Adding:

*It made me pleased that I am both educated and insured. Mind you I would not want to have to work now I get funny heads at times and if I am just at home I can have a lie down but I couldn't do that if I went out to work".*

My father was in the Eastern States again. There was a lot of planning work over there and my mother canvassed the idea of moving to Sydney or Melbourne to take advantage of it. My father would not even consider moving.

*He is very attached to Perth but provided we lived in the country it would not worry me if we moved. I guess I get itchy feet every once in a while. Mind you these last weeks have been hard, our staff have worked weekends as well as to finish two rush jobs and of course they bring their families with them. Last Sunday there were 11 children under the age of eight, and it poured so they had all to be in the house, it was dreadful. Most of them are here again today but at least they are outside. I'll be thankful when we have weekends to ourselves again.*

*I have given up sewing for the time being it is all a bit too much right now.*

I read between the lines. My mother is not happy. She resents her loss of privacy and personal space, she resents the many trips to the Eastern States my father is making and his unwillingness to consider moving to where the work is. She is left to do all the everyday management and parenting. She is struggling with the distress of her second daughter due to relationship upsets during the year and concerned and angry that she might fail her exams as a result.

But she redirected her energy into redecorating the kitchen, without my father's knowledge, ending her letter: "Take care of yourself and lots of love, wish I could give you a big hug".

Leonora tells me she was having the worst year of her life, which must also have influenced the emotional atmosphere in our house. "I wish I could give you a big hug" seems to mean "I need a big hug and some mothering" but my mother was the one dishing out the nurturing to the best of her ability. She did not like to talk ill of my father to anyone outside the family, a mix of pride and loyalty perhaps, so often we would be the ones she would tell and I recall the emotional dissonance of split loyalty that this caused me.

The business continued to run on an overdraft and my mother tried to remain optimistic in her letters home:

14. 11.69

*Our overdraft stays around £2,500 but we hope next year will show an improvement it is a hard battle building up from scratch but I think we will make it. Paul is always cheerful – he sees it as a challenge what does make me mad is when I see some of the well-in planners turning out work that is not a patch on ours, still I must be patient. Mind you if there was a Professors' job in a reasonable place I would agitate for Paul applying.*

*On Thursday we had a morning tea with the Lady Mayress when each Councillor's wife invites three lady ratepayers along to see how Council House is from the inside. I just pick mine out of the electoral roll and it shows what a small world it is, one of them this time was married in to a family that knew Carla's family when they were in Java!*

She goes on to tell her mother of jam-making (strawberry and mulberry) and social visits. A Council Dinner for the racing fraternity featured "Australian goose" which, much to her disgust, turned out to be a roast of mutton and another dinner at a "parson's house" with "mussels, steak and salad and fruit salad and coffee, very good.". She was feeling tired after a spell of hot weather but the family was busy around her and she had been invited to sit on a deserted wives committee to formulate guidelines for the government. She was pleased that I had been elected a school prefect and amused by a comment of Mark's: "The other night when I was bathing him I explained to him that dirt and disease go together and he said 'the trouble with you Mum is you will believe all you read'".

She is not sharing the tension in the house, mentioned in my diary, regarding Erica's plans to go out marroning with a group of eight boys – my mother was very concerned at her safety, my father sure she would be fine. I recall the impasse was resolved by her taking the dog with her, but not without a lot of preceding angst.

28<sup>th</sup> Nov.

*Many, many happy returns of your birthday. I shall be thinking of you with lots of love and gratitude.*

*It was very funny yesterday when your letter of the 19<sup>th</sup> arrived. Leo came in and said "I thought you were going to town" and I said "Yes I am but I am just waiting for the post, there is a letter from Mum in it." A minute later the postman hooted and Leo came in saying "How on earth do you do it, here is your letter." I think she is now convinced that I am a bit of a witch. It is funny but I always know when there is going to be a letter, I sometimes have other funny foresights too a few days ago I was coming home with the children from school when there was like a flash in my head and I said to Penny, "Paul will get a phone call from the East this afternoon it will be important." Blow me he did and has to fly East on Sunday so that he can be present at an exhibition opening of the model he did for Hastings, Victoria at their expense of course. The chap who rang said there would be a group to meet Paul who were important.*

My mother could be rather spooky with her ESP as she often called it. I did not know how to tell between her foresights and her concretised anxiety. She used to worry a great deal and was very good at imagining the worst. As a child I would worry that these imaginings of hers were her ESP and something terrible was going to happen. She says concretised anxiety is quite different and can be controlled. She describes the "second sight" as *"though a very great pool of stillness appears in the centre of me and in to this, images flow, they are not frightening but tell me that something is happening to someone I care about, not necessarily a bad something"*. She can't make it happen and doesn't know if she still has it.

I don't think she was as good at controlling the anxiety when she was younger, but over the ensuing years has read and learnt a lot about Rational Thinking and Cognitive Restructuring thereby making controlling her 'catastrophising' much more effective.

She wrote in 1969 that she felt the Australian climate also contributed to a change in her approach to life: *"I am very different now, more relaxed more outgoing and a different pattern of life"*.

There are letters missing between November and late December, but they pick up again just before Christmas describing the preparations, cooking, parties, presents and Carols by Candlelight. The Council Christmas Dinner had been a particular success:

**22 Dec.**

*Without Alf Curlewis there everyone seems so happy. We certainly had a very merry time, the Lord Mayor made sure he had a good time by having his son and daughter-in-law and a couple of young journalists as his guests. It sure is something having a millionaire as Lord Mayor, every councillor got a bottle of whisky as a Christmas present and every lady present at the dinner got a gaily wrapped parcel from the Lady Mayoress, mine turned out to be a very charming ceramic cake plate and a broad bladed cake knife. I was very pleased.*

In the midst of the Festive frivolities we had to fight a bushfire which began on the hillside opposite and burnt out 3000 acres. Luckily the wind was blowing away from our property but my father, two older sisters and I pitched in with wet sacks saving a new house that was yet to be occupied. My mother tells her mother we spent the entire day out fire-fighting but my diary tells me I was only out for a couple of hours before heading off to play squash with my boyfriend.

*At this moment the house is beautifully quiet. Leo and Penny have gone to watch a State cricket match. Paul has taken Mark and Jemima in to town. Erica is over in the office and Nicky is in her room.*

We would sit on a rug under the trees on the grass at the West Australian Cricket Association Grounds in Perth. It was a relaxing and enjoyable day. The challenge was to pay attention to the game because it was the days before TV screens at the grounds and big screen replays of the

action. We would take a radio and listen to the broadcast as we watched. At the time ABC television would televise the last session of play so we would often leave at the tea break to watch the remainder at home. I have never developed an understanding of the finer points of the game just enjoyed the simple ebb and flow and drama that the game of cricket provides. My mother was the sporting role model having seen some of the greats play as a child and she taught me my interest in the game. The grass at the WACA was long ago replaced by the Lillie Marsh Grandstand and the family picnic style of watching cricket is long gone amidst the rigid seating that maximises capacity and income. Ironically in the last few years they have replaced some of the smaller stands with grass, but it is a far cry from following the shade across the grass under the trees. On this occasion I am not sure I did so well following the shade as my diary records that I got my legs very sunburnt, but it was a good day with the cricket “exciting” and WA winning by 10 wickets.

*I may buy a few shares. We have taken a friendly interest in an aboriginal student he is one of only two at the University and a really nice bloke, he rang up from his home where he has gone for Christmas, about 500 miles away, to tell us of a new nickel strike richer than Posiedon and not on the market yet. So I reckon I will invest £1000 it is not an enormous amount to lose and yet if it does as well as Posiedon it could make a £2000 anyway it is a tip straight from the horse's mouth. Viv knows about it because his father owned the land but being an illiterate aborigine was bought out for very little. Viv was upset about it because he feels his father was taken for a ride. If Viv had been home he would have insisted on a royalty clause for his father. It is supposed to be 4% nickel which is good. Anyway it is worth a small gamble.*

My mother recalls that Viv rang from Laverton to tell us to buy Laverton Nickel shares. I was also caught up in the buying of shares contributing the \$25 from my R.S. Sampson scholarship to the money my parents put in – I remember looking up the share prices in the newspaper when at a maths camp some weeks later and my disillusionment as the price fell and they eventually disappeared from the stock listings.

Many people got caught up in the mining boom at that time. Poseidon shares went from \$1.85 in September 1969 hitting \$270 a share on January 10<sup>th</sup> 1970 (Locanto, 2002) and then collapsing dramatically leaving many with a bitter taste of share trading. It proved to be a pivotal moment in the Australian mining industry as Patrick Hanna reports:

The one event that arguably had the most catastrophic effect on the mining industry was the Poseidon nickel boom and bust in the late 1960's. Because of misleading Resource reporting at the time, many stock market investors lost not only considerable amounts of money, but also confidence in the Australian mining industry, a mistrust that took years to rebuild. (Hanna, 2001)

Another beneficiary of the Poseidon experience was the successful beginning it provided for the Stock Market career of infamous Australian stockbroker the late René Rivkin, controversially convicted in 2003 for insider trading.

My diary mentions Viv's first visit on May 11<sup>th</sup>, recording that he is a "nice bloke". I ask my mother if she recalls him and she describes him as "*one of Leo's odd bods . . . . He was a descendant of Sir Alexander Forrest, on the wrong side of the blanket, a classic aboriginal tragedy.*" In a later letter (6<sup>th</sup> January 1970) she tells her mother:

*His grandmother was a full aboriginal but his grandfather was Sir Alexander Forrest and on the other side it was a Lefroy who mingled with an aboriginal. Viv is therefore a half-caste but extremely intelligent . . . I think he could become a real leader.*

My parents made him welcome and he visited often for a while. My mother was always welcoming to visitors no matter colour or creed, perhaps it was a function of her upbringing and good manners but also, I believe, the result of her compassion and sense of justice. There may at times have been a vestige of noblesse oblige but in 1969 that was less offensive than in the current postcolonial era. My mother would comment derisively about calling Caucasians 'white' when they were really varying shades of pink and brown and calling aboriginal people 'black' when they were varying shades of brown. I remember the laughter when we stood Viv and Mark Graham-White, the Anglo-Saxon son of the friends from Belfast, back-to-back later that summer. Mark, having spent a lot of time in the sun, had tanned very darkly and was much darker of skin than Viv. Somewhere there is a photograph to prove it.

Aboriginal student attendance at University was a rarity at that time. I had no idea of the difficulties aboriginal people faced, and even less of the policies in place at the time that lead to what we now know as "The Stolen Generation". My mother saw Viv again a few years ago when he turned up with a granddaughter, she recalled he had a very chequered history, he had got a degree, taught for while but also faced many difficulties.

In 1969 I turned 16 and, after 3 years of relating as much to my sister's peer group at school as my own, I was compelled to reinforce relationships with my classmates as my social context in 4<sup>th</sup> year high school. During the year I had my first kiss, first boyfriend, first learnt to jive (an enduring love of my life) and first learnt to play squash – the only sport I had ever enjoyed or been any good at.

In Australia politics was dominated by the rise of Gough Whitlam, the increasing resistance to the Vietnam War, the Nimmo report into health insurance, F111 fighter jets and the plan to build a nuclear power station at Jervis Bay. The economy was booming with disposable income increasing by 11%. The Government announced that an Australian would be an "Australian Citizen" instead of an "Australian Citizen and British Subject", Mick Jagger came to Australia to play Ned Kelly, theories abounded that Paul McCartney was really dead and the musical *Hair*

was shocking many conservative Australians with its full frontal nudity (Hancock, 1999). In late 1969 Anne Summers and four friends met and inaugurated the Women’s Liberation Movement in Australia (Summers, 1999, p. 226).





## 1970

By the beginning of 1970 my mother had gone some way into adjusting to the reality of life after the upheavals of the previous five years and looking back now reflects: *"It almost seemed like a golden time in retrospect"*. It was a time of building and renewing friendships, of enjoying the benefits of being a City Councillor's wife and believing that things would steadily improve financially. Family-wise it was a time of relative stability with all her children established at school or University and her roles in the community respected and carefully chosen to meet her needs and beliefs. She shared those beliefs through community talks and media opportunities including a regular contribution to the 'letters to the editor' having several letters published during 1970 on issues including abortion, my father's sculpture exhibition and sex education.

Early in the year she welcomed some old friends to Perth, John and Gisela Graham White. They brought three of their children with them, Mark, Inga and Nicholas. John had been appointed as a visiting professor in psychology to the University of Western Australia while he was on long-service leave from the University of Belfast.

Inga became a good friend of mine over the eight months they were here. She was a beautiful person, physically and mentally, lively, funny and generous. Mark was a beautiful young man. I fell instantly in love with him. He was darkly tanned with long black hair and a rich, natural smile. His tastes were, however, sophisticated, and his girlfriends were all statuesque and gorgeous. As for Nicholas, he was as beautiful as his siblings, a vibrant and energetic boy.

My mother enjoyed their visit to Perth and the social interactions that went along. They got on well with many of her friends. Gisela was a talented artist and did drawings of Jemima and Erica whilst she was in Perth. My mother feels that they underestimated her at the time, seeing her as Paul's wife rather than an intellect of her own. In recent years my mother's skill in free design tapestry has impressed their artistic eye.

My mother's health was problematic with a bout of viral vertigo early in the year. She was encouraged by her doctor friend, Joan Trevelyan, to take a holiday to recover. Consequently my parents went to stay in the somewhat primitive holiday house of John and Ray Oldham on an island in the Murray River in Yunderup. My mother recalls this holiday with some fondness, although the mosquitoes still stand out in her memory: *"they were horrific, we used to run the 50 yards from the river to the house or just about get eaten alive"*. The time away was, however, very restorative of both health and relationship.

Feb 26<sup>th</sup>

*The girls coped very well while we were away and everyone seems to have pulled their weight even little Mark. He made his own bed, kept his room tidy and generally behaved very sensibly. He is cricket mad at the moment. He plays at every possible moment with anyone and everyone he can bully into it, he has really got a very quick eye. He was grumbling again this morning that work at school was too easy for him. I tried to explain to him how difficult it was for the teacher to keep track of so many children. It really can be quite difficult at school for bright children too.*

Perth itself was changing as a result of the mineral boom with increasing numbers of high-rise buildings. Nickel and share prices dominated conversation. As a result of its higher world profile a number of VIPs graced the reception room at the Council and my mother enjoyed the opportunity to meet them and shared her comments on them with her mother: "*I am going in to town tomorrow ... because there is a reception for Sir Alec and Lady Douglas-Home, I'll see if I can manage to have a word with him as one borderer to another*" (5<sup>th</sup> March). Sir Alec Douglas Hume had been British Prime Minister in the years before we left England, from 1963 to 1965.

She also comments on the birth of my father's idea for the Ore Obelisk, which stands in Supreme Court Gardens in Perth. Thirty years later it is described on the internet tourist site about Stirling Gardens:

A modern memorial to the State's progress – the Ore Obelisk, unveiled in July, 1971 – consists of a 45foot oil drill pipe on which have been threaded fifteen ores – each representing the natural wealth of ore, which has made this State one of the world's foremost producers of minerals.

It nestles amongst trees and lawns, inferring that mining and conservation go hand in hand. Very close to the spot where the City was founded in 1829, it is a monument to the energy of generations of Perth people. (Sullivan's Hotel, 1998)

And:

**Stirling Gardens**, on the corner of Pier Street, with its "Ore Obelisk" sculpture, symbolises W.A.'s mineral diversity. (Total Travel, 2003)

Mark's behaviour and comments are a frequent topic during the year as my mother shares with her mother her delight, commenting:

*Mark does make me laugh at times. Yesterday we were up at Dave Gwynnes' our orchardist friend and Jemima was begging a dahlia tuber from him. Paul said to her "you must look after it and water it every day" and Mark said "That's why they call it a dahlia you have to water daily!" He is quite a wag for eight.*

And:

*Mark is so funny at the moment, he is such a mixture. On of the one hand he plays the piano very sweetly, he goes regularly once a week for a lesson and practices without any bullying, on the*

*other hand he never seems to come quietly into a room he erupts, and yet at other times he will be completely engrossed in art work of some form or other.*

In April 1970 her attention was captured by the predicament of Apollo 13:

**23<sup>rd</sup> April**

*I suppose you like us and the rest of the world were anxiously awaiting the return of the astronauts last week. I feel very cross with the Americans because like Leonora I feel they have not done their preparations well enough. They have been too anxious to beat the Russians to the moon. They should have had rescue stations prepared before they set off. Mind you it was a real cliffhanger I had the radio and TV on far more than usual because with the Carnarvon tracking station, just North of here, being used for the final guide in we felt very much involved.*

The story of Apollo 13 was reprised in the movie of the same name in 1995. I don't remember much of the original event other than that while it was going on an avalanche in Switzerland killed about 70 schoolchildren. I was cynical about the American insistence that God had saved the astronauts meanwhile, I thought, letting the children die, and I wrote an essay about it for English at school. When the movie came out I enjoyed it, impressed with the dramatics that had me on the edge of my seat at the end, even though I knew they got home safely. I revisited my diary at that time and was impressed to see recorded each of the calamities as the trip proceeded, a mark of the impact it made.

Closer to home the traumatic birth of the daughter of one of my father's ex-staff had an impact on my mother, prompting a critical spray at the obstetric profession. She was well qualified to comment on childbirth practices. In the UK she had been a natural childbirth advocate and educator. She had taught the birthing techniques of Grantly Dick Read, a British natural childbirth pioneer, to mothers keen to avoid pain in labour. At the time the majority of births in England were at home. There was a comprehensive service of midwives who would attend the birth and follow up mother and baby.

Her interest in natural childbirth arose when she lived in Switzerland and was pregnant for the first time. With lots of time on her hands she read a lot and one of the books was Grantly Dick Read's *Childbirth without Fear*. She was impressed by the biological sense it made and she wrote to him, later becoming a member of the Natural Childbirth Association.

On May 4<sup>th</sup> 1970 four students at Kent State University were shot:

**May 6<sup>th</sup>**

*We were all very upset last night to hear of the shooting of those four American students. You know if that had happened in Russia the western press would have made hay with it. There is a lot to be said for the unarmed British Bobby though these days even he does not seem as unruffled as he used to be. There is an anti-Vietnam Moratorium March here on Friday evening*

*I am very tempted to join in. it is being run by the Quakers so will be strictly non-violent. It seems to me the Yankee guardsmen just lost their heads and fired.*

Two female and two male students died, another was paralysed and eight others injured. They were shot by the National Guard during student demonstrations that had arisen in response to the invasion of Cambodia launched by President Richard Nixon on May 1<sup>st</sup>. The Ohio state governor had ordered the Guard onto campus in response to the burning of the Reserve Officer Training Building by arsonists the previous day. Provoked by several hours of clashes with protesters throwing rocks and taunting them, the Guardsmen fired a single volley of rifle fire at the gathered crowd. Only one of the four students killed was participating in the protest (2003b). A photograph of a 14-year-old runaway girl, kneeling over one of the bodies as she cried, is one of the most enduring images of the tragedy, it won a Pulitzer Prize for photographer John Filo, a student at Kent State at the time (CNN, 2000).

Like many events in the USA, then and since, the struggle to unravel the truth about the events has been a difficult one, as has that of the surviving students to perpetuate the memory of the event within and at the University. A memorial now exists to an event that seems to me to mark the loss of naïvety about the state of democracy in America.

In her own life a letter my mother had written to *The West Australian* newspaper on sex education had created a lot of interest:

### **EX-TEACHER ON SEX EDUCATION**

JEAN P. RITTER, Kelmscott: Education Minister Lewis has said that next year there will be a pilot subject on sex education in primary schools.

Twenty years ago in England I was giving sex education lessons at a grammar school. I was a biology teacher and information was given strictly in context – a fact of life and not the facts of life.

My first group were 34 11 year old girls. I met all their parents first and talked with them of the role of the new course. Information was kept simple at this level and it was very easy to talk to them.

With my next group of 15 year-old-girls, it was much more emotionally difficult. The aim was not to give them information but make them aware that I was available to help with personal queries as well as information.

### **INDIVIDUALS**

Since then I have had six children of my own – ages now eight to 20 – and I realise how completely individual children are in their need and quest for knowledge, sex education included. I have been lucky in that I have had the knowledge to answer their questions when asked and to the depth needed.

All this has made me realise that although I am all for good sex education in context I would not want my children given sex education at school unless I knew precisely the content of it.

I would not want them shown films or slides that I had not seen first. Sex education is not necessarily good in itself.

A few years ago I saw a film supposed to be good sex education and showing also childbirth. I was horrified. It was cold, clinical with overtones of fear in the childbirth scenes.

There was no tenderness, no concern for the partner. Bleak and uncaring, it seemed to me to epitomise the attitude to sex today which is thrust upon our young from every direction.

Sex education needs to be given with love and approval. Perhaps the answer is a group to help the parents to help the children.

The essential thing is that help should be available – there should be someone to talk to when youth needs them, not just have facts coldly forced on young people as part of a cause and by a possibly unwilling teacher.

She was invited to speak on talk back radio with Lesley Anderson on station 6IX and a televised discussion programme followed entitled "Sex before Marriage" organised by Gary Carvolth, my mother comments *"it was considered very daring"*. A number of private talks ensued as well. My mother loved these opportunities and still reflects on how surprisingly easy she found it to perform in public as an adult when she had been such a shy child. She finds the content of that letter of contemporary relevance although she would change the age timeframe now. She adds *"the really astonishing thing is that they are still talking about it and do not seem to have resolved anything. There is still so much lack of consideration of feeling in the various things I have seen"*.

From time to time my mother identifies herself in the letters as "the daughter". Commonly it is at a time of vulnerability through illness or fatigue. I ask her about the appearance of the daughter identity:

*The idea of being the daughter . . . comes down to my old query, 'Who nurtures the nurturers?' Sometimes I just wanted to be the comforted child and not the comforting adult. It is hard to think, now that you have all surpassed me in wisdom, that once I had to be the one with the answers . . . with six children of varying ages, I just wanted to cry "Enough". Also I knew it gave Mum a good feeling, just as it does me now, to not feel one is on the scrap heap of life (teenagers are pretty good at doing that). I needed to feel the strength of my female antecedents and the continuum of life.*

In June her eldest daughter reached her "majority" and my mother organised her a party to mark the occasion. The week preceding it was very busy with cleaning and food organisation. Erica

was particularly helpful when my mother's home help was rushed to hospital on the Thursday night. A marquee was set up outside for dancing and the spread of food was magnificent, arranged in the kitchen as a buffet on the table and benches: *"A dozen roast chickens, ham, smoke eels, roast beef, salad, open sandwiches, trifles, fruit salad and lots of cakes and of course champagne was set up on a make shift bar in the sunroom"* (7<sup>th</sup> June).

Tom Wardle was the preeminent guest and proposed Leonora's health:

*He said we were one of the closest knit families he knew and as such would be the strength of WA. He said he used to read about families like ours when he was a boy but one hardly ever saw them now and that in proposing Leonora's health he wished also to pay tribute to all of us. Leo made a very sweet speech in reply thanking Tom and all the people who made her feel at home in WA, she thanked the family for helping to get everything ready and then she thanked me very beautifully for the last 21 years and drank my health and Paul's.*

The accolades for the party flowed freely afterwards, much to my mother's delight, and she shared with pride her pleasure in the appearance of her daughters. She ends: *"I wish you could have been here to make the party complete"*.

By the middle of the year my mother's faith in the progress of the business had stalled and she talked of the next few months being make or break as my father attempted to market some of his ideas. She was frightened by the uncertainty of it and qualified her letter describing the opportunities with: *"Keep your fingers crossed for luck for us but say a little prayer as well"* (14.6.70).

This is one of the times my mother was, as she puts it, "spin doctoring" to her mother. She was very unhappy with the commercial direction my father was taking. He wanted an easy way of funding his writing and research and got very absorbed in playing with concrete surfaces using polystyrene moulds that he dissolved with toluene. My mother regrets now that my father would not listen to her opinion on the concrete products and pursued their production in the face of failure. She comments now: *"With every fibre of my being I hated Paul being self employed"*. She hated having responsibility for the income tax, the *"wheeling and dealings"* that went with business and the worry about whether there would be enough money to pay the staff. My father's mantra was always that "the bank has plenty of money" but this did not sit well with my mother and she blames the stress of the business for many of the health problems she suffered over the years.

1970 marked the first time that Wimbledon was broadcast live by satellite to Western Australia. The advent of satellite coverage of world events gave people separated by long distances an opportunity to feel linked by the contemporality of their experience. For my mother and her

mother, both passionate supporters of tennis, in particular Wimbledon, to be viewing the event simultaneously brought them together in a way the deferred communication of epistolary narrative could not: *"It was a nice feeling that I was seeing it at the same time as you" (18<sup>th</sup> July).*

My mother's love of tennis went back to the time she had been evacuated to Bangor in Wales during the war. The grandparents of her great friend there, Gaynor, were well off and owned a tennis club called Glyndyl. My mother's boyfriend David Williams-Hughes (who went on to be quite well known on British television as Hugh David) was paid to look after the club after school. They taught her how to play. Tennis was THE summer sport at Bangor High School. My mother felt a great sense of belonging to the up-market tennis scene there. Her mother also had a love for tennis and had followed it through the newspapers with a special interest in Wimbledon as the All England Championships. Tennis became one thing she thanked television for and she would get so excited she would have to go for a walk in the garden to recover. She particularly liked "those gorgeous Aussie Boys" as she called them. My father had also loved tennis as a young man and he and my mother had played often in the second year of their marriage when they had ready access to a court. By the time I was old enough for sport my father had dismissed it as a futile waste of energy when there was so much else to do.

In August, despite a severe attack of fibrositis in her back, my mother took on another committee set up to investigate rents and bonds in tenancy arrangements.

**24.8.70**

*Friday was a bit depressing though it was my morning for working on the rents and bonds committee and some of the letters especially from old age pensioners were very sad.*

She became chairman of this committee and was persistently infuriated by the politicians and bureaucrats who had no idea of the stringency of living on the pension. While she was on the committee she actually tried living on the pension for a week to see if it could be done. She sees it as ironical that she is now dependent on it

Work drew my father to Melbourne and Sydney in September and my mother accompanied him. They enjoyed a busy trip with my father being fêted wherever he spoke. Unfortunately my mother was not well when they were in Sydney and went to the doctor for a check-up as soon as she returned.

**12.10.70**

*My Dearest Mother,*

*Thank you very much for your letter of the 2<sup>nd</sup>. I think this letter is going to give you a big a shock as I got last week. I went to see my doctor because I had not been well in Sydney and found myself worrying whether I had a growth. He examined me and told me quite cheerfully well it might be a growth but he thought I was 10 weeks pregnant. I had a urine test and he was*

right. I feel rather shattered but now I am getting used to the idea I find I don't really mind. The funny thing was my periods had been normal but he said this sometimes happens. He gave me a thorough going over and said I had blood pressure like a woman of 30 and very sound lungs and heart and said as far as he was concerned there was absolutely no reason why I should not have a completely normal pregnancy and happy birth. Of course Paul and I talked about having an abortion but I found I could not really stomach the idea – if I miscarried naturally well OK but otherwise I shall have it. The reaction of the girls has been fantastic they are absolutely thrilled to bits and even Mark thinks it is wonderful. I feel perfectly well now and less depressed than I have felt for a long time and I am quite joyfully resigning from all my commitments. Paul too was a bit staggered but he has now happily accepted the idea and is going round telling everyone, he says I look ten years younger over night. Of course I have nothing at all for it but I have already had offers of all sorts of things. Certainly in many ways having a baby will be easier here since it is one floor and the washing will be a lot easier. I shall go to the little local hospital to have it and the Doctor says he has absolutely no objection to Paul being present. Well enough of that.

My mother was 46 years old, her oldest child was planning to leave home, her youngest child was well established at school and she was happy filling her own life with her own interests, but she embraced the change in circumstance with hardly a backward glance.

She comments in the following letters:

19.10.70

It was lovely to get a letter from you this morning but it is rather a sleepy daughter writing this. I have gone like a broody hen and with the greatest of pleasure I have given up outside activities

29<sup>th</sup> Oct.

Funny what Gran said has been said to me by ever such a lot of people.

I ask my mother whether she remembers what her Gran said and she replies: "*Granny always said that God sent a late baby for a reason, they were always a comfort in a woman's hour of need and should be made welcome as coming from God*". Her words would prove to be prophetic.

I am not fretting about the baby, actually apart from a bit of nausea I feel very fit and am enjoying living the quiet life, the weather is absolutely perfect warm enough to swim but not too hot to be enervating so I do my housework and enjoy the sunshine and fresh air do some knitting and sewing but don't go out very much so of course that gives me less to bother about. Paul is being so wonderful to me it would do your heart good to see it and the children are all so pleased. Mark appears to be fascinated by the whole business and asks all kinds of interesting and intelligent questions. Yesterday he asked me whether I would have the baby at home or in hospital and I explained to him that they did not have here the set up for having babies at home and that at 46 I was a little old for having a baby and he looked so thoughtful and then said "I think you should go in to hospital. Pup can ring us as soon as the baby is born and tell us and when you have had a good sleep we will come and see you." Altogether he is a funny little boy – he has such an enormous sense of justice for a chap of his age – his teacher occasionally drives him mad when she is unjust to children in his class.

It is funny not really knowing when this baby is due, the doctor can't seem to make up his mind between the beginning of April and the end of May. Well our silver wedding is April 11<sup>th</sup> so



*maybe it will hit that date though I hope not because I am planning a party for about 100.  
Perhaps if it is a girl we should call it Sylvia!*

*If Leonora gets her degree I shall be very tempted to telephone you to tell you, after all she will be the first grandchild to do so won't she? She will have B.A. (Hons History) after her name not that that will content her she wants to collect an M.A. and Ph. D. after that. Well Gan-gan used to say to me educate a girl and you educate a family. We should know sometime mid December.*

It seems somehow appropriate here to mention that Leo has her M.A., PhD and was appointed an Associate Professor at the end of 2003. She was thrilled to get the appointment because of her love of education and delight at the opportunity to influence the education of many young people. She may never have educated a family as her great grandfather suggested but she has instead imparted an enthusiasm for learning to a generation of students.

My mother's restlessness and unhappiness at their financial state of affairs creates an undercurrent in her letters as the year ends. In Perth there was nowhere to hide and plenty of opportunity for professional jealousy and small-minded sabotage. My father aroused polarising feelings. He had many devoted and passionate supporters but, equally, he had ruffled the feathers of many others, often, and significantly, those with power.

It had been my last year at school. I remember the last day, walking down the school driveway for the final time. School years seemed to have taken forever, far longer than those of my own children. I don't recall having “muck up” day the way my children did. We would not have considered, nor would our parents have condoned, staying out all night to decorate the school with toilet paper, egg the teachers' cars and spray-paint the roads. My diary reflects many moments of enjoyment during the year, I enjoyed my first serious relationship, yet I remember the ongoing uncertainty about my peer group's opinion of me.

On the world stage Vietnam dominated and in Australia Joh Bjelke Petersen was establishing his authority over Queensland. Defence issues were high on the Australian Government agenda, buying F111s and justifying National Service. Australia was enjoying economic growth, signed the nuclear non-proliferation treaty but declined to ratify it. WA was linked to the national telephone network, the first woodchips left Australia for Japan, Victoria made seat belts compulsory and in WA the Hutt River Province was declared and embraced by an amused public (Hancock, 2001).

And Germaine Greer published *The Female Eunuch*.



## 1971

But back at home I was unaware of the political significance of the times. I had finished school and was enjoying a break from study before taking on the challenges of medicine. My mother was savouring the last few weeks of her oldest daughter's time at home before she left to take up a scholarship in Armidale NSW. They had had a fairly close relationship in my mother's eyes, sharing adult interests but also having the bond of the mother to the first child. The first child is an experiment for every parent, a trial of beliefs in parenting and values. For my mother this was more so because of the progressive thinking about child-rearing that my parents had held, and followed, despite the clash with contemporary thinking and process. The fact that Leonora was going so far away made it worse. Once again, my mother would be dependent on the mail for contact because telephone calls were still very expensive.

But the first half of 1971 was dominated by her pregnancy and the reactions people had to it. A baby at 46 was uncommon in the 1970s, balanced as it was between the availability of good contraception in the 1960s and the postponement of first pregnancy in the 1980s.

*Jan 3<sup>rd</sup>*

*Well I have changed both my doctor and hospital. I found that there was a clinic in South Perth which taught the natural childbirth method I had studied in England so I made an appointment and went to see them.*

My mother's writing was patient with uncertainty. The process of birth and pregnancy was very familiar to her. But Australia was less enlightened than the UK. Its systems were hospital-based and doctor-centric. She and my father had invested much in their belief in the critical importance of natural childbirth in the happy development of the mother-baby bond and the psychological well-being of their children so they could not lightly give in to a system less in tune to their needs. She recalls that her first intention had been to have a natural birth at home, as she had with her last five babies. She was in touch with the home birth fraternity in Perth, led by midwife Henny Ligtermoet. When she was advised that her age and the uncertainty of her dates made a home birth unsafe she made the contact with David Watson, who pointed out she could have a good birth in his facilities in South Perth, she recalls: "*Henny Ligtermoet was furious with me, she felt I was letting down NATURAL CHILDBIRTH!!*" Her first impressions of David Watson were very positive:

*The doctor I saw, Dr David Watson, is a most charming Englishman he is not only a doctor but a member of the British College of Gynaecology. He has been here five years he was obviously delighted to look after me. He used to have his practice near Mountbatten's estate and told us stories of treating De Gaulle for piles and Prince Charles when he fell off his horse! ... he even gave us a date - April 9<sup>th</sup> - our silver wedding is April 11<sup>th</sup> so I will have to hope the baby is late in order to get a party in first.*

She got rather frustrated at people saying they hoped she would have another boy, and felt at times flustered at the idea of managing a small baby again.

*We expect Penny's results to be out later this week so we are keeping our fingers crossed. She should come through with flying colours but she was a bit worried by the physics paper.*

In 1970 the path to university consisted of Leaving Exams and Matriculation exams. Leaving exams were state set exams in the subjects studied during the year. They were worth 100% of your mark for the year – there was no account taken of the standard of work during the year. Matriculation exams were specifically for University entrance. I exceeded my expectations. My mother was thrilled for me, her heart was set on me doing medicine, and also winning a Commonwealth Scholarship eased some of the uncertain financial pressure that dogged her emotional equanimity.

Late in January industrial action paralysed communication in a way that is unthinkable in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. But in 1971, hundreds of thousands of people relied on the postal systems to keep contact with their friends and relatives across the globe. My mother recalls how cross the strike made her. She can't remember if she rang her mother during the strike but thinks not, as it was much more difficult and expensive then, and her mother was not very used to the phone, so conversation was very stilted and not very helpful. The strike lasted from January 20 through March 8, 1971. It was a philatelic bonanza, spawning many local stamps in the UK, as people found ways of circumventing its impact locally, but not globally.

The lack of mail coming in from the UK and the knowledge that nothing will get through to her mother has the effect of curtailing any urgency to write. In the meantime Leonora left home and the pregnancy progressed uneventfully.

#### **10<sup>th</sup> March**

*I still feel very well but am glad the hot weather will soon be at an end though with only a month to go I still swim several times a day. I went to see the Dr. yesterday and my blood pressure and weight are fine but he said it was a small baby which was lying rather awkwardly at the moment it is lying slant wise across with its head towards my right groin and its bottom under my stomach. As long as it is not too small I think it is a good thing not to have a monster to push out. I still like this Doctor Watson very much, he is so calm and confident and patient – he also said the foetal heart was strong. I must say I am glad it is a very active baby because I hope this means it is normal. I have had a few moments of black depression wondering if it will be alright.*

Not surprisingly. My mother was very well read with a particular interest in medical matters, so she knew well the increased incidence of foetal abnormality in older mothers. She reflects on her fears:

*So many, many people told me that I was taking an enormous risk in having a baby at that age and Paul had always said he did not think we could cope with an intellectually challenged one, no wonder, perhaps, that I suffered a black depression from time to time.*

A letter from my grandmother written on January 14<sup>th</sup> finally arrived on the 12<sup>th</sup> March.

#### **12<sup>th</sup> March**

*It was really lovely to hear from you it quite cheered me up I have missed my letters from home during this time. There has been a lot of bitterness here about the strike so much of the population is migrant and they all, like me, look forward to the letters from home.*

Interestingly my mother did not consider herself a migrant. Migrants were the "£10 Poms" who came out and lived in hostels, often sponsored by families already in Australia.

She comments on the political scene in Australia in March:

*The country seems to be riding a wave of prosperity. No doubt you read about our change of Prime Minister. I am quite glad John Gorton is out because he was an unstable man a bit of a larrikin, it will be interesting to see how MacMahon the new one makes out – he certainly has a very glamorous wife.*

According to Ian Hancock, author of the Australian Archives summary of events in 1971, the Australian economy was heading into serious difficulty. The momentum for change in society was building and the Liberal government of the day struggled to keep up with changing attitudes, their decades of rule were stuttering to a conclusion. On the 10<sup>th</sup> March, following the resignation of Malcolm Fraser as Minister of Defence the Liberal Party voted 33-33 on a confidence motion in John Gorton's leadership. Gorton himself gave a casting vote (to which he apparently was not entitled under party rules) and voted against himself. William McMahon was elected in his place. Gorton was surprisingly elected deputy but he continued to be a destabilising influence and was sacked (Hancock, 2002). Sonia McMahon, the much younger and very attractive wife of the Prime Minister, became infamous for the dress – figure hugging and split to the thigh – she wore to a White House dinner in the USA.

In late March the Duke of Edinburgh visited Perth and my mother enjoyed the reception despite the covert disapproval of some of the other Councillors and their wives, who thought it was disgraceful enough she was pregnant let alone that she should appear in public, in front of royalty, too; *"I was no longer in awe of them and made my 'dip' to Philip with more than a little amusement"*.

The uncertainty about dates created problems as her pregnancy progressed. If she was in the same situation now it would have been easily resolved with ultrasound and she would have been able to plan with certainty.

*It has been a funny week really because when I trotted along to the Dr on Tuesday as usual he proceeded to set off an alarm. I had had a rather nasty backache and what with a few other things he thought labour might be about to start, then he found that the silly baby was firmly wedged across my tum and he could not shift it.*

*So it was decided I must have an X-ray and be prepared if necessary to go in to hospital that evening. However thinks I to myself he could not move the baby but perhaps gravity will. So I lay with my body at an angle of 45 deg and my head downwards for about an hour. Guess what – the baby shifted, the backache disappeared and the X ray showed the baby in the right position. However the X-ray Dr wrote a note to my doctor suggesting that the X-ray showed the baby as not ready and that it would be beginning of May after all. I did not know whether to laugh or cry, it just shows that when they don't know the last period dates they can't predict the date of the baby's birth. They gave me the X-ray to bring here so I could show the family. Mark in particular was very thrilled.*

In early April my parents signed the contract for the German edition of the *Free Family* including feedback from my parents and each of us on the feelings and opinions we had about the effectiveness or otherwise of self-regulation as a child-rearing method. I recall spending a lot of time writing my section, worrying about it being acceptable and as good as that which my older sisters had written. At that stage I had no doubts about my upbringing despite the sense of alienation it had given me during my childhood and adolescence. I saw it as superior and therefore felt I was somehow special. I would find it very difficult to write personal feedback now. It would seem impossible to separate the personalities of my parents from their techniques of parenting. Having said that I have used many of the interventions of my mother's in my own parenting and often remind myself of her saying “when children are the least lovable is when they need the most love”.

My parents celebrated their 25<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary in the middle of the Easter weekend on April 11<sup>th</sup> 1971. They spent it quietly at home. Easter Sunday was marked in our traditional fashion with my father hiding the eggs. We each had one, surrounded by chocolates. It was a great treat to spin out over the next few days. No one would dream of having eggs before Easter Sunday. They were not so brazenly displayed in the shops as they are today, often six or eight weeks before Easter, but then again supermarkets were not as ubiquitous as they are now. My father would always do the hiding and would always forget where at least one egg was hidden, often leading to a degree of frustration for the searcher. If it rained the hunt would be brought inside to the lounge room. My mother does not recall when our Easter traditions began. Her memory of them is different to mine:

*It is a custom that I always hated. I loathed the smugness of the child who first found an egg and the despair of those that could not, and since it took place on Easter Sunday and I usually needed to be in the kitchen, it was a considerable irritation.*

Her memories of her own childhood Easters are very different again. She has no recollection of getting chocolate eggs and her memories are tainted with boredom and solemnity. They were

often at Slade with her grandmother who would allow only quiet reading on Sundays, Easter Sunday in particular. She does recall colouring hard-boiled eggs. Her reminiscences trigger memories of the poverty her family endured from the time she was five years old, so that when chocolate Easter Eggs became available they were too expensive for them to buy. During the war chocolate was severely rationed at one 2-ounce block a week and Easter eggs were not available again until afterwards, my mother adds: "*Easter eggs became, to some extent, status symbols . . . Perhaps it is not surprising that chocolate has such emotional connotations for me.*"

Easter remains special for me. Mark and his family now join mine for Easter, often in Collie where the tradition of hiding the Easter eggs continues and, like my father before me, I often forget where the last egg has been camouflaged. The little ones these days believe it is the Easter Bunny who leaves the eggs – I remember always knowing it was Dad. One year when we went to Perth for Easter my niece insisted we leave a message for the Easter Bunny so he would know we were not at home and would make his deliveries to her home instead.

The little ones know no shortage. They get eggs from their parents and from us and from their cousins and we scatter some around and there is a feast of eggs collected at the end. I love the excessiveness. I love having so many there can be no sense of longing for more, no need to savour each bite. I love Easter Egg chocolate – I don't care if it is Lindt or Coles home brand – I love the texture and the feeling of the thin layer snapping in my mouth. Of course the little ones don't appreciate the surplus, the excess, the over-adequacy because they have never had a restricted supply.

By May my mother was increasingly impatient at the wait for the baby, she amused herself thinking of names and daydreaming about bringing the baby to visit her mother when my father travelled overseas the following year. She kept physically active, possibly too much so as she describes:

*I am very cheerful in spite of having had a mishap last week Monday. It was such a glorious day I decided to take the dog for a walk by the river and believe it or not I was skipping along singing when I fell out with a rabbit hole!!! I had to crawl part of the way back to the house before anyone heard me. Paul took me to the doctor who ascertained that the baby was alright – I fell uphill not down so took weight on my arms and they X-rayed my ankle and there as clear as can be on the x-ray plate is a piece of bone chipped off, the ligament had pulled it away . . . I will eventually have to have it in plaster for a month with a stirrup on the plaster so I can walk around, but for the moment I have to have it strapped in crepe bandage until after the baby is born. However I have devised a method whereby I can move around by using a kitchen chair and kneeling on it. It means I can get myself up and go to the lavatory and move around the house and watch T.V. and so on. I can't get myself out to hang out washing and so on but as always the girls particularly Erica are wonderful. As I say despite the discomfort and sometimes pain I am very cheerful I am knitting and reading and watching T.V. and managing not to swear at myself too often.*

She was by now heartily sick of being pregnant. The uncertainty of dates, the discomfort of her injury and the frustration of not being able to do everything herself increasing the irritation she was feeling. She tried to put a positive spin on things for her mother commenting on how much knitting she was getting done.

POST OFFICE  
TELEGRAM

21 MY 71

JEAN AND SON BOTH WELL CAESARIAN ON SATURDAY  
PAUL

South Perth Community Hospital  
22<sup>nd</sup> May

My Dearest Mum,

This will only be a short letter but I wanted to let you know that I am recovering well and that David is an absolute dish. I hope you will have had his photograph, these are taken by a couple of young lasses who come to the hospital each Wednesday. It looks as though he will have to be my first bottle fed baby because the breasts are just not filling.

All the doctors were wrong he was in fact a fortnight early because there was a thumping great fibroid in the way which made the womb seem bigger than it was. This was the reason for the caesarian it was blocking the outlet. They could not remove it because of the risk of haemorrhage but Dr White my specialist says it will shrink especially as the menopause comes. They also tied the tubes at my request so definitely the last baby. The organisation to do a caesarian was superb once the decision was made, Paul says the hour and a half he sat outside the operating theatre was the longest and most agonising of his life because he had been told there was a growth but no one knew it was benign for sure. They also told him the op would take 35 mins but because of the delay in the blood coming it took the 1½. And because he is who he is they have allowed him unrestricted visiting so he has spent hours and hours here with me, practically all night the first night. Today the stitches come out and on Tuesday I can go home on the strict understanding I do nothing and no lifting for six weeks so I must organise myself well.

Thank you for your card and present – the hospital made me a cake! I am sorry it was so long letting you know but things were chaotic, Erica tried to ring Ron but no reply.

Lots and lots of love will write again as soon as I am a bit better.  
Jean.

Reflecting on the experience of my brother's birth my mother reveals that the process was not as smooth as she had told her mother. The uncertainty about her due date was problematic. The attempt to induce labour was quite distressing for her. Her specialist tried an oxytocin drip to no avail and then handed over to his colleague, a man my mother disliked intensely. He ruptured the membranes, "one of the most painful procedures I have ever experienced". After twelve hours there were signs of foetal distress and the decision was made to perform an emergency caesarian. My mother requested that a tubal ligation be included and was annoyed when they required my father's consent to do so.



As she came round from the anaesthetic she heard my father say "In view of what you found it is a good job you decided to do a Caesar" and recalls how long it seemed before she could ask what they had found. She was not happy with the hospital and recalls cold showers and cold corridors and a staff unresponsive to the cries of her newborn:

*There was one memorable occasion when I could hear David crying and they carried on with their meeting. I put my finger on the buzzer and kept it there until they interrupted their gabfest and brought him in. One young nurse had the nerve to tell me I was making a rod for my back by picking him up when he cried!*

My father did well to get permission to stay in with my mother – but then he could be very persistent and disarming. We were not allowed in to see David the night he was born and I remember driving down to the hospital and my father pushed David's crib over to a window so we could peek in at him. It was very wet that night. I don't remember being told he had been born. My diary records it was a Saturday night at 8 o'clock and I rang lots of people including Leo in Armidale. I also watched the FA Cup final that night.

It was actually fairly devastating for my mother. The combined disappointments of an operative birth, given her longstanding passion for, and belief in, the value of natural childbirth, and the inability to breastfeed, another area of passion and belief, left her feeling bereft even though the reason for the intervention was unarguable. She had a general anaesthetic so also missed the critical period of bonding immediately after birth. This left her having to rationalise about the value of natural childbirth and focus on the alternative ways of 'making it up to the baby'. The inability to breast-feed compounded this problem as she could not bond that way either.

It is hard to explain the magnitude of these two things. Natural childbirth and breastfeeding on demand had been the cornerstones of their belief systems about childrearing and had taken up a considerable part of their book on childrearing – *The Free Family*. She had given many talks and taught many classes on the subjects. In a sense part of her identity was invested in her passion for these beliefs. So to be facing a post-operative, post-natal period with a past history of post-natal depression at 47 years of age whilst dealing with the let down of lost ideals was not to be underestimated. For once she does not minimise her exhaustion to her mother.

I remember how tired she looked even now. She describes herself to her mother at the time as "A very weary lass" adding "Another thing I have discovered is that you are never too old to cry for your Mum, cos I sure had a good howl for mine" (28<sup>th</sup> May). She headed for home as soon as she was allowed, to let her family look after her. Erica was particularly appreciated, running the house, doing the cooking and nursing. My mother adds "She is tremendous with David seems to know what to do instinctively". Fortunately due to his prematurity David was a very settled baby in the beginning; "the sweetest little love".

The disruption of night feeds took its toll but fortunately my mother got support from the infant health sister who shared her preference for natural interventions rather than drugs and provided a huge resource of information for bottle-feeding. Her helpfulness contrasted markedly with the lack of support my mother had got from the Nursing Mothers' Association to whom she had turned when she could not breastfeed David. She recalls them being aggressive and judgemental, completely the opposite to their purported brief. She had a cleaner come in once a week and also appreciated our support:

*June 71 (Undated)*

*It was grand today to have Penny to hold the wee fellow while I was finishing off the dinner. makes me wonder how I used to cope when they were all little.*

*I was thinking while I was out in the garden today how marvellous it would be to have you here – winter days can either be really soaking wet or heavenly sunny and today was one of the latter and I gave David his bottle outside and I wished I could spirit you here to have you to talk to. David is crabby this evening but Paul is carrying him up and down. I must say I find these reclina-rocker chairs we have marvellous with a baby.*

My father was wonderful with babies. He would walk them up and down for hours, cradling and nuzzling whilst he chanted soothing noises, a softly musical aah-aah, aah-aah which seemed very effective in comforting the most distressed of infants.

My mother was not all consumed by her new baby finding time to tell her mother about Mark's nickname for David (Crockett – after Davey Crockett) and Jemima's ballet exams (Erica had made the costume) and violin scholarship. She tells of my successful exams and adds:

*I am glad Leo writes to you. It still seems odd that she is not here. I miss her specially because she always understood my moods better than Erica, though Penny is growing in to a good substitute. Penny in fact has grown in to a wonderful person warm and sweet and very level headed.*

Her recovery was interrupted by the return of her periods, heavy and intrusive. In combination with the fatigue brought on by night feeds and anxiety about money she was driven back to bed for three days rest under the threat of a return to hospital if she didn't. Despite her health worries she enjoyed David but was concerned about how she would cope when my father went away and could not share the night feeds. Money was once again tight and my father's trips east potentially important.

In the midst of her recent new motherhood she was struck by the birth of nontuplets in Sydney:

*25<sup>th</sup> June*

*Did the story of the woman having nine babies in Sydney make the English newspapers? We felt the whole thing was a lamentable waste of effort especially as my gynaecologist said the whole thing was caused by some doctor making a mistake and giving her the incorrect dosage.*

Geraldine Broderick was the mother concerned. Of the nine babies six were born alive but all were dead within two days. She had been the subject of infertility treatment involving human pituitary hormone which was later implicated in the spread of Creutzfeldt-Jacob Disease a human form of mad-cow disease. Ms Broderick gave evidence at the Australian Senate Community Affairs References Committee appointed to examine the Australian Federal Government's treatment of recipients of human pituitary hormones (Tankard Reist, 1992).

Gradually my mother adjusted to the schedules of a young baby again, the "*dash and do*" as she describes it. She relearned how to do things with one hand and enjoy the daytime television of *Coronation St* when he was due for a bottle. She was finding it less easy to focus on doing the business accounts for the end of the year and expressed her frustration from my father's tendency not to write on cheque stubs or to forget to date them.

She was still struggling with a yearning to have some mothering herself. My father's life had rushed on unabated by David's birth, with his frequent absences from home, whereas my mother's had been stopped in its tracks and the energy and youthfulness she had felt while pregnant had been replaced by the chronic relentless fatigue of mothering an infant.

#### 21<sup>st</sup> July

*Funny thing Paul and I were so close all through the pregnancy and the troubles in hospital and yet these last few weeks we seem to have done nothing but snap at each other. I suppose tiredness has got a lot to do with it and I get periods of depression and I don't think I make life easy for the poor man. But David is so sweet and smiles and makes such nice noises if one talks to him. Sister Browne reckons he will walk and talk before all 'her' other babies, the wee lad had the same sort of short flu that Erica, Penny and Mark had and his tum is still not quite settled. Things will be easier when he sleeps all night.*

She was also dealing with Leonora's homesickness from afar, the rest of us were busy with our own lives, and her social commitments to her husband and children remained. She did however find the energy to go to a Council Dinner and to take Jemima to a performance by Margot Fonteyn, still dancing at the age of 52.

My father hit the headlines again in August with a government appointment that polarised the community. The public airing of support and criticism made my mother edgy but she keeps her epistolary focus on her children sharing Mark's success at captaining his soccer team and my birthday lunch at Council House. Leonora was planning to come home to see David, despite the cost, and Mark and Jemima had plans for holiday camps in soccer and music. She adds: "*David continues to be a delightful baby he really only cries when there is something wrong and smiles and gurgles lots and lots and is very eager to try any solid food from a spoon*" (31.7.71).

Her health was gradually improving and she gave credit to the Waterbury’s Compound the infant health sister had recommended. The press continued to cover my father’s appointment to report on the new planning scheme alongside the plans for the introduction of daylight saving for the first time in Western Australia:

*They are having daylight saving here from Oct 31<sup>st</sup> when the clocks go on an hour and it is amazing how difficult some people find the thought of it, some seem to think the Government is introducing a 25 hour day. (15<sup>th</sup> Aug)*

It was the first of several trials of daylight saving, it was supported by the business community but opposed by farmers and drive-in cinema operators (Ruse, 2002).

My mother’s letter-writing was interrupted by a bout of tenosynovitis in her right wrist late in August which affected her for over a fortnight. It was triggered by a day of polishing furniture and knitting and her doctor felt her body was still readjusting after David’s birth.

*2<sup>nd</sup> Sept.*

*But in spite of the downs I seem to have had no regrets at all about having David. He is such a sunny tempered delightful baby and gives great joy to us all by the way he smiles and gurgles and blows bubbles. He really only cries when he has a pain, he wakes up without crying, and I can hear him in his cradle ‘chuntering away’ to himself long before he starts to natter for food. He seems a very alert little fellow and is ready to try new food but pulls some comical faces when he does not like the taste. I would not have believed it possible to have a contented bottle fed baby but I guess it all depends on the amount of love they get.*

Embedded in this paragraph is the entrenched and previously core belief about childrearing, the absolute importance of breastfeeding to ensure a happy baby. The change in position is still qualified by the amount of love. Personally I think that a baby can be unsettled however it is fed and however much it is loved and the implicit blame placed on the mother by her beliefs were very unhelpful for me.

She comments later in the letter:

*I also spend lots and lots of time talking with my family. I do think the most important thing with teenagers is to keep the lines of communication open so I always spend time with them talking about their problems.*

I fully agree with my mother on this one. Teenage children require a leap of faith from their parents. They need to be allowed not to talk everything through with their parents but to be able to ask if they want to. I think privacy and respect for the teenagers right to think their own thoughts, make their own decisions, and therefore their own mistakes, is critical to their growth and maturity. To share your concerns with them so they are informed, without imposing your will, is part of the challenge. The communication systems are established in infancy and the respect and trust developed then pay dividends in adolescence. A recent report from a clinical psychologist in the newspaper comments on the need to nurture and attend to babies, to pick

them up when they cry. The psychologist concerned observed an association between the mental health of boys and the parenting approach of their parents when they were infants.

The business continued to struggle, despite the smooth process of my father's government work and he had to sack one of his staff. My exams and Erica's assignments made us less emotionally and physically available to help my mother but she was uplifted listening to Jemima play the violin at a public concert. Mark's comments also bring a chuckle:

*We did laugh at Mark the other day. Jemima was baking a cake and when she cracked one of the eggs there was a blood fleck in it, shouts Mark "Come quick Mum an egg's had a heart attack."*  
(2<sup>nd</sup> Sept.)

Leonora's visit had come to an end leaving my mother wistful at the change she had noticed:

*Looking back on Leo's visit I realise that she has grown up and away from us. Inevitable I suppose. I should be pleased because she has managed it successfully. (12<sup>th</sup> Sept)*

But it was actually a significant loss to my mother to let go of her eldest daughter – they had been very close, at least from my mother's perspective. Like all mothers she saw her relationship with her children in a more rose-coloured light perhaps than vice versa. My mother had not been the only one missing Leonora and while she was home her boyfriend, Peter, had taken the opportunity to propose to her. She turned him down. My mother told him to be patient, a rather futile suggestion as it turned out. But she would have been happy to have Peter as a son-in-law even though she had some ambivalence about love and career mixes for her children.

*Jemima is growing in to a most competent person. she got herself completely ready for the music camp she has just been to. She really is a very self composed thirteen year old, she says she has decided to be a lawyer – barrister – QC and judge and is going to write a best-seller – big ambitions but I reckon she has the ability to do anything. I just hope she does not fall in love too young.*

My mother's spirits began to lift despite some wild September weather, a power strike and continuing financial constraints. David continued to be a contented baby and my mother credited his happy disposition for her increasing sense of wellness. She was daring to believe that my father might be considered for a Professorship in planning at Perth's new University and shared an anecdote with her mother:

25<sup>th</sup> (envelope 27/9/71)

*Sometimes funny things happen, some of the architects here have been pretty snooty to us particularly those of old established firms, but last Thursday Paul was invited to a select reception for a Japanese American architect – world renowned etc and you should have seen the local boys faces when Yamasaki said to Paul "Ah yes we have met before, you opened an exhibition of my work in New York in 1963".*

She was also pleased that Leonora had been offered a tutorship with a concomitant rise in pay (and status). The Australian economy was less healthy and the credit squeeze meant a heightening in her concerns with regard to money, although she brushes this off lightly to her mother: "*Beginning to wonder how far this credit squeeze will go here tell the girls they might yet have to earn their living but life is good in this weather and the wildflowers*" (3.10.71).

Life has become very centred around her family and she comments to her mother at the paucity of things to write about, whilst finding interest in the sharing of the everyday:

12.10.71

*The days go whizzing by so fast and apart from the care of my family I seem to do so little. It just isn't possible for me to go to many functions at present because Erica and Penny are under pressure from their studies and can't do much baby sitting and it would not be safe to leave David for long with dear little absent minded Nicola. I really think 15 is the age of the day dreamer, and untidy? Nic's room has to be seen to be believed every so often I give it a good clean and tidy but it looks no better five minutes later. I am going out on Saturday however, Rolf Harris is giving a special concert here and City Councillors get free seats – I shall really enjoy that. We are invited to a big cocktail party tonight to celebrate the opening of a big new store but I don't think I can be bothered it is always the thought of the cigarette smoke at these things that puts me off. We got our swimming pool scrubbed out on Sunday but we are still waiting for spring like weather. It was only 40 deg last night. Still no doubt the heat will come – I have just finished making a cotton voile dress in preparation. I also bought some very pretty wool in Fontein Crepe to make a cardigan. Colour is called Paris pink but Penny says it looks like blackcurrant yoghurt! How I enjoy the quiet of the house when David is asleep like this I have neither radio nor T.V on just enjoy the quiet.*

She does find a little bit of general news, sharing the local political events:

*Great excitement because Labour party who govern with only one vote lost a member who died of heart attack – would there be a general election? But Governor stepped in and prorogued Parliament till after by-election.*

15 Oct.

*I wish money here were not so tight I am really very contented with my lot, I have good kids and a good husband and provided I lead an equable life I have reasonable health.*

In the margin of the letter she has asterisked and added; "*I knock on wood when I say it.*" It didn't, as fate would have it, help.

I am intrigued to come across a mention of my appearance on television's current affairs:

*Penny was on the Today Tonight T.V. programme the other night. Some eminent bloke said that a medical course was wasted on women and they asked Penny along to defend women's rights. She was tremendous, came over looking and sounding convincing.*

I remember I had my hair in plaits and was wearing a blue/purple cardigan I had knitted in a self-striping yarn very popular at the time. The argument, supported by a male fellow student (now an eminent cardiologist) was that the government would spend all the money educating women to become doctors only for them to leave to raise families. I don't remember my argument but research was being undertaken at the time to refute the facts. It is retrospectively enlightening to think that the solution to the perceived problem was to ban women from medicine not to make medicine more family and female friendly. In my first year there were eleven women out of a class of about one hundred and ten. Now there are more women than men graduating in medicine each year and two recent West Australians of the Year have been women doctors in their mid-life, Fiona Stanley and Fiona Woods. I do remember it being said that all a woman doctor needed to be equal to a man was a good wife!

**26.10.71**

*We had a lovely day yesterday Erica and Penny looked after David and Paul and I went down to Bunbury for the day – it is a hundred miles away and though it was a very cold blustery day – October weather has been haywire this year – we had a lovely picnic by the sea then we looked at some new housing developments and Paul gave the after dinner talk to a hundred men. Tickle me these country districts they have the delightful old fashioned idea that one woman should be chaperoned, but it did not bother me being the only woman at the dinner – I guess that is through going to the Oulton.*

The Oulton was the high school to which my mother had won a scholarship when she was eleven years old. At that stage in Liverpool not everyone went to High School. The winner of the Junior City Scholarship could choose which high school they would like to go to. Only two of them were co-educational and my grandmother was a great believer in co-ed because, my mother says, “It stopped girls getting silly”. Oulton was one of the co-ed schools, her sister Peggy had already been there so she was not afraid of mixing with the boys, in fact her ambition was always to beat them all. Her experience at Oulton gave her what she calls ‘ease with boys’ and she recalls when she was playing the cello in the orchestra she shared a music stand with “the gorgeous head boy, Eric Copeland”.

*Mind you they had a crisis at home Erica tried to make chips for the first time, she made the fat too hot and when she put the chips in the fat boiled over on to the electric ring and caught fire. They had the sense to put the electricity off and throw sand on the flames, no one was hurt but the kitchen was a mess.*

It was very dramatic. Mark (aged 9) had been very insistent he wanted chips for tea, so his big sister complied – Erica was the stand-in cook when my mother was not there – even before Leonora had left home. She put the raw chips into the smoking pan of fat and there was an eruption of boiling fat that hit the hotplates and burst into flame. It spread rapidly over the top of

the stove. I remembered from school that you do not use water for fat fires but need to smother them, and that sand worked, so I rushed out and grabbed a bucket of dirt and tipped it on the flames while someone else turned off the power. It was the most appalling mess of fat and dirt and mangled chips. We set about clearing it up, whilst Mark – who seemed to have missed the gravity of the event – wailed for his lost chips and when would some more be ready. I ended up going to the shops to buy him some.

On Monday November the 1<sup>st</sup> my mother's ankle injury had an unexpected and near fatal consequence. She was rushed to hospital in the middle of the night with a pulmonary embolism. The blood clot, that nearly killed her, had formed as a deep vein thrombosis in her leg after she broke her ankle and hobbled around with the chair late in her pregnancy. The clot broke off and blocked part of the pulmonary artery in her lung.

*Wednesday (Undated – November 3<sup>rd</sup> by content)*

*My Dearest Mum,*

*Just a wee line which I am sorry it is also not such good news. On Monday evening I was giving David his 10 p.m. bottle when I had a pulmonary embolism – a blood clot broke loose in my leg and lodged in my lung but prompt action by Dr Smith and Paul who rushed me to hospital saved my life. I have heparin dripping in through a tube in my arm which will stay in for a couple of days and then I have to take anti-coagulant drugs for 3 months. I have to be here in the hospital until the end of next week because apparently I need careful nursing. Please do not worry the danger is apparently over and now I need patience to convalesce.*

*At first I was in a general ward which was dreadful but Paul pulled a few strings to get me under the best specialist and into a private room costs £15 a day but it is heavenly to be alone and he has had a portable T.V. installed because I am not supposed to do anything but lie here and wiggle my toes. The nursing staff is very friendly and jolly and I am well cared for in fact it is a darn sight better than some hotels I have stayed in.*

*The real thing that worries me is that it is slap in the middle of Penny's and Erica's exams because someone has to look after David and things at home. In to the bargain our secretary waltzed out without notice last week – it never rains but it pours. But I am very cheerful and happy to be alive.*

*Lots and lots of love,*

*Jeannie.*

My mother recalls having had a very painful swollen leg and whilst giving David a bottle about 11.30pm she was struck by classic symptoms of a pulmonary embolism: *“a terrific pain in my chest and down my left arm and I felt I could not breathe, my bladder and bowels went crazy”*. She woke my father and told him to ring the doctor at home and tell him it was an emergency. My mother was friends with the doctor's wife. He came straight away, in his pyjamas:

*He said it would be faster if he helped Paul put me in the car and he should drive like hell for RPH in the meanwhile he would phone ahead. Paul woke Erica to tell her what had happened... I don't remember much about the trip in except I kept saying "I did want to grow old with you."*



My mother did not tell her mother that the doctor thought she might die on the way in to the hospital. She was troubled for many years when anxiety symptoms made her fear it was happening again.

It was an incredibly difficult time and if I had known then what I later learnt about the mortality rate of pulmonary embolism it would have been far worse. The results I got in first year medicine would determine whether I was accepted into second year. My father wrote to the powers-that-be at the university asking for allowance to be given for the family situation. The infant health sister offered to take David into care while my mother was ill but Erica and I were determined we could manage to fit his care into our study and exam timetables. On one occasion this meant Erica went in to uni in the morning to do her exam while I looked after David and I drove in at lunchtime, gave him to her to bring home, and went to do my afternoon exam. He was then six and a half months old.

When my mother writes again, nearly a month later, she is putting the positive spin on things, perhaps as much in response to her mother's unhappiness as in truth.

**Sunday** (envelope 29<sup>th</sup> Nov 1971)

*Many happy returns of Saturday. But I do hope you cheer up a bit, it is not often I get such a depressed letter from you, you must have been overtired or something. I must say after being ill like that I am appreciating all the little things each day, my red roses, the baby's smile, the smell of the roast beef cooking etc. I know that there is a lot of ugliness and unhappiness in the world but it won't make it any better if I don't appreciate what I have after having so nearly lost it.*

*You say you don't like living alone but my darling you can come and live with me any time you like.*

I don't know whether she was writing and the letters are lost or whether her health, mood or the demands of family created a hiatus in letter-writing but her next letter is not until Christmas. It shares my and Erica's "excellent University results", Leonora's planned arrival home and my holiday job, nursing at South Perth Community Centre Hospital. She ends "*I have not much news really. I am happy and contented and spend a lot of time sewing and playing with David*" (Undated – envelope Xmas 1971).

Her last letter of the year on the 31st is very brief, a description of the latest crisis in the office, her frustration at not being able to get through to her brother on the phone for Christmas because the lines were all busy and booked, her improving health and a list of the presents she got for Christmas. She finishes by saying the New Year will be welcomed in in bed.

1971 was the year in which future Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser made his oft-quoted remark that "Life is not meant to be easy," a phrase that haunted him throughout his political life. Later he was to clarify this remark: "I often said at the time, whether life is meant to be easy or not, for many people, many families, many kids it's not", he said. "But the whole quotation is rather

different. It's the old man in George Bernard Shaw's (*Back to Methusaleh*) speaking and he says: 'Life is not meant to be easy, my child, but take courage, for it can be delightful.' " It seems a very apt quote for the year my mother had had (The Age Newspaper, 2003).

## 1972

12<sup>th</sup> Jan.

My Dearest Mum,

*Thank you for your New Year's letter. I hope this year brings us better health and yet you know last year was a very happy year in spite of everything. It showed very clearly what a wonderful family I have.*

My father's business dominated the early news of 1972 as he had lost yet another secretary. My mother put this down to the unreliability of the genre but I rather think my father was a particularly challenging man to work for. He had included in his advert for the position "no one not interested in the fate of humanity need apply" and had seventeen applicants. My mother wanted to go home to see her family but money was a problem throughout the business world. 1971 had been a bad year for Australia economically with the end of the mining boom, escalating inflation and unemployment and falling business confidence. The government was uncertain and currency exchange issues were threatening. December 1971 had seen the highest quarterly rise (2.3%) in the CPI since 1956 (Hancock, 2002).

England also had its problems with a fuel strike causing my mother concern over my grandmother's welfare. The British coal miners had gone out on strike on January 9<sup>th</sup> 1972 and did not return to work until February 25<sup>th</sup>. They were demanding a significant weekly pay rise. The support of the transport workers union during the seven weeks meant coal could not be moved. Schools dependent on coal-fired heating closed, factories laid off workers, the government declared a state of emergency on February 9<sup>th</sup> and a three day working week ensued. By 16<sup>th</sup> February *The Times* stated 1.2 million workers had been laid off. Power restrictions meant consumers faced six to nine hour blackouts which, in the middle of the UK winter, was a considerable impost especially for the elderly already deprived of coal for heating (BBC, 2003).

By contrast my mother was enjoying a hot Australian summer, feeling much better since coming off the anti-coagulant drugs she had been taking after the embolism. She was swimming every day, enjoying the gentle, whole-body workout it provided. She had only learnt to swim in her forties when we came to Australia. In her eighties now she is still swimming daily through the warmer months.

Our huge swimming pool was the epicenter of our lives in the heat. It was so big it was always cool and therefore did not require much in the way of chlorination so it was also very refreshing. On the hot nights a quick dip would be a revitalizing way to get ready for bed. It was deliciously exciting to slip into the cool water in the dark with the stars clear and the sounds of frogs (which made the pool their home) sometimes startling me as I slid through the water.

During the day we spent hours in the water, to the detriment of our skin in the days before the public education campaigns on prevention of skin cancer encouraged us to cover up, use sunscreen and avoid sun exposure in the middle of the day.

*Mark and Jemima are regular little water rats in this weather. They do somersaults underwater and dive and really enjoy themselves, they are both beautifully tanned and really lovely looking. (Undated [Envelope reads Jan 1972- Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> January by events.] )*

Leonora had returned to the Eastern States having very much enjoyed the time she had spent with David. My mother comments:

*She said to me she would love a couple of kids of her own but had not yet found the chap she fancied for their father. I assured her that there was plenty of time for Mr Right to turn up. Though you know practically all her friends are married, but my guess is half of them will end in the divorce courts.*

As it turns out this was probably a fairly accurate statistic.

She goes on to mention the death of a friend of Erica’s in a car accident, a head-on collision in the early hours of the morning:

*Mind you she was a sad lass that one, she went to live with another student when she was eighteen —both parents insisted on marriage — a year later they had broken up and the car was in fact being driven by another chap. There are so many pressures on the young these days that I think they need all the help they can get from their parents.*

A sentiment with contemporary relevance. I ask my mother if she thinks it is harder now for young people, but she thinks it is difficult to compare. She considers global worries as more significant now but I am not so sure having grown up with the Cold War and the fear that Russia would try and take over the world. But perhaps she is right when she says that anxiety seems to have become endemic across all age groups. Our exposure to the worries of the world is more direct now with global, immediate and graphic television coverage of events. She comments further that the sense of belonging that she enjoyed as a young person has gone with the demise of the extended family and formal religious practice.

I think I was a very insular child – I don’t remember being touched by much – I don’t remember the death of Erica’s friend. I don’t remember relating at an emotional level to my parents’ history. I didn’t and still don’t like watching tragedy. My mother was at the time engrossed in watching *Family at War* a British television series set in the Second World War and taking place around the area in which she grew up and went to University. She comments “*I think it is very good for the kids to learn a bit of history and especially of something that affected their parents’ lives so much*”. But when I was a teenager I didn’t want to see the characters on the drama die and I didn’t want to hear of my parents’ pain.

In England the problems in Ireland were making the news and my grandmother's concern for another grandson, her older daughter Peggy's only child, who was in the British Army in Belfast, triggered a comment from my mother:

*The Irish doings made the main headlines here but as you say no one thinks of the soldiers – they don't want to be there, they are just ordered there. They should be withdrawn and the Irish left to get on with it.*

This comment related to the events of "Bloody Sunday" – January 30<sup>th</sup> 1972 when soldiers fired at a civil rights procession in Londonderry killing 13 protestors and injuring 17, another woman was injured by a speeding armoured car and a further victim died later of injuries received. The crowd of between 7,000 and 10,000 was marching in protest at the policy of internment without trial. The Catholic protesters insisted it was an unprovoked attack, the British that the soldiers had been fired on first. The 1972 inquiry exonerated the army but in 1998 Tony Blair's government announced a new inquiry that is yet to report (Winchester, 1972), (BBC, 1972a). My mother recalls the worry about her nephew who was involved with patrolling the streets, never knowing when they would come under sniper fire.

On the home front her greatest concern was the anticipated reaction to the government planning report my father had just completed. The Professorship of Architecture at the University of WA had become available and my mother was hoping my father would be appointed and she would be able to get her trip home.

Her thoughts of England were heightened by the reports of the worsening of the coal strike. The lack of heating was of particular threat, especially to the elderly. Ironically Perth was experiencing its hottest February for over 50 years with only two days lower than 90 deg.

David was the main focus of her life:

### 103.72

*I think he [David] is going to be an early talker like the others because he already repeats his name when you call him.*

*[He] . . . is such an energetic crawler that he takes quite a bit of keeping an eye on. I have just moved the cabinet – it used to be in the sitting room in Nottingham – in to my bedroom because it has all the trousseau glassware in it that belonged to Paul's Mum and it is such beautiful stuff I would hate it to get damaged.*

The cabinet was an antique about a metre high with a glass front and made of beautiful dark timber. The glassware was etched crystal, in a whole range of types; wine, tumblers etc. Like many heirlooms it was too precious and delicate to actually use. My mother comments; *"I was terrified of it, it looked so fragile. It belonged to a salon lifestyle long ago and far away"*.

Recently she has taken to giving it away to us for significant birthdays, and six of the tumblers

sit in my cabinet (albeit a pine kitchen dresser made by my husband rather than the antique version of my mother's).

### 20<sup>th</sup> March

*David is such a mischief but has such a disarming grin. Laughed at Mark on Saturday – Paul had promised to play a game of cricket with him, then the next thing I see is that the telephone has been tied down to the leg of the table it stands on. Mark was just making sure that he didn't get any interruptions.*

*The children are all a bit on the irritable side but I guess they will be better when the long hot summer is over.*

I check my diary for my irritability and find a gap between the 16<sup>th</sup> of February when I declare I am feeling very grumpy, in part because "Mum hasn't stopped grumbling and worriting for a week – and my tolerance and capacity to sympathise are at a very low level" and 21<sup>st</sup> March when I have written some discontented poetry trying to persuade myself how lucky I am in the face of the state of the world. The cause of my mother's anxiety is suggested as she writes:

*This is the big week with the report being made public, press conferences the lot but I do wonder what the publicity will be like – my stars for this week say be charming not aggressive so I intend to take the hint. This is also the closing date for the Professor applications – there is also another one here which Paul intends to apply for, it is that of Environmental Studies at the new university here and that closing date is May 15<sup>th</sup>. Should help that Channel 9 T.V is putting on six, fifteen minute programmes by Paul called Perth – A New Vision starting rather funnily on April 1<sup>st</sup>.*

*Somedays it seems as though I get all the menopausal troubles thrown at me at once – hot flashes, palpitations, cold sweats – the lot. I have to keep reminding myself that they won't last forever but they do make me so tired!*

I am sure her irritability at home was related to her yearning for my father to have a stable and respectable academic job as well as the impact of the menopause. She remembers getting her hopes up and it all falling apart again. In retrospect she blames both my father's attitude and some anti-Semitic feeling. My father "*fell between two stools*". Because he was not practising the Jewish faith he did not get the support of the Jewish community, conversely because he was racially Jewish he suffered the prejudices of the anti-Semites. Key figures at the University had also become alienated blocking my father's chance at being appointed Professor.

My mother became gradually disillusioned, her staunch support of my father being tempered by her realisation that her idol had "*feet of clay*". She was very determined to protect her children from what was happening, finding an inner strength she had not previously realised.

It was not until 1986 that I finally faced my father's 'feet of clay' and probably not until the last years of the 1990s that I accepted his worth as himself and distilled for myself the strengths he

had and the passions he felt, even though his ways of dealing with the world were not always effective and on many occasions he potentially "shot himself in the foot".

The presentation of the report to Parliament on an alternate regional plan for the city was a great let-down. My mother recalls that my father erred in persuading other people to present the report. They made it sound *"impractical and useless"*. She did find some comfort in the responses of others, in particular Professor Martyn Webb from the Geography department of the University of WA who was in full support. The media including the ABC's *Today Tonight* and the *Sunday Times* newspaper were enthusiastic:

*The Sunday Times leader said "an excellent report it will make people think" and the Independent said "the enfant terrible of planning, upsetter of official applecarts presents his planning with devastating logic" (27.3.72).*

Retreat into family life was my mother's main antidote to the stress of my father's ups and downs. Another little anecdote from Mark and one from David reflect this:

**Undated** (Post-marked 8<sup>th</sup> April 1972)

*Mark is a funny one he was being sorry for the slow children in school yesterday and said "You know I am lucky I only have to look in my brain and the answer is there." His trouble is that he is too introspective at times.*

**April 12<sup>th</sup>**

*David keeps me occupied. Yesterday I heard him shout from the kitchen and I went to investigate only to find him sitting on the bottom drawer of the fruit trolley (an old double decker tea trolley) amongst the apples – cheerfully eating one but unable to get down. He is asleep at the moment he usually sleeps for a couple of hours during the day but likes to be up in the evening because he loves the company of the other children and Paul of course.*

The stresses of their life were taking the toll on their marriage and they went to Geographe Bay for a few days staying in the hotel in a room with a view over the sea. They spoilt themselves with restaurant dinners, lunch hampers and full breakfast. My father was such a prominent figure in the press at the time that he was often recognised and my mother writes: *"Funny because of his T.V. programmes every one recognises Paul and in the motel dining room people would raise their glasses to him" (26.4.72).*

It is hard to remember now the popularity my father harnessed. He was charismatic and passionate and people felt he was on the side of the little man. He had a captivating smile and ready sense of humour and fun but the polish has tarnished and the passion been blunted if not lessened by the balance in the sands of time. The feeling of "them and us" that was so prevalent in the years of my growing up has been leveled out by the broadening brush of life's experiences.

David, although only eleven months old, had not been troubled by his mother's absence.

*The wonderful thing is that we had such a completely relaxed time that even four days has made a difference to the way we feel. It did not seem to have bothered David at all I suppose it is because he is such a complete "family" baby he does not mind who cuddles him or puts him to sleep.*

*Instead of spending your 80<sup>th</sup> in cold Huyton why don't you fly here. I am quite serious – Paul could escort you and pay your fare and you could stay in the sunshine until your garden called again. Even in the hot weather the mornings and evenings are lovely and in the heat of the day you can snooze or sit by a fan and natter to me. If you can climb up and put a net on an apple tree then you can climb up plane steps and the rest is simple.*

My mother, when 80, said she would still be game to fly to England if she had a support person with her, she reflects that she didn't ever really think her mother would make the trip, though if she had had someone to look after her she might well have managed it, she had not after all ever been out of UK and the only place "abroad" she had ever expressed a wish to see were the fjords of Norway.

*Tell you something really funny – yesterday I received a phone call from the West Australian Women's Liberation Group to invite me to be the first woman to contest the Lord Mayor's seat in Perth. Well I can't because I am not a ratepayer but I found it a very funny thought. They asked me because they wanted to show that freedom for women does not necessarily mean promiscuity and four letter words but can be found in a solid family background. I was almost sorry to have to say no. So was Paul. Tom had stood down so there will be a free for all.*

My father also resisted pressures to stand for Lord Mayor and my parents put their support behind Ernest Lee-Steere whom my mother described as "not only WA born but is a very well educated, intelligent man with the right sort of presence to greet international visitors". He was subsequently elected and my father described him as "more sure of himself and more relaxed" than Tom Wardle. The same elections saw a number of my father's associates elected to the Council ahead of those sponsored by Joan Watters, giving him support and my mother some satisfaction.

On the 20<sup>th</sup> May she turned 48 and my father gave her a portable TV to use in her bedroom: "*so often want to watch programmes that the others don't want to that it is a marvellous thought to have my own set in my bedroom to retreat to*" (Postmarked 23<sup>rd</sup> May 1972). She enjoyed the period dramas and documentaries, as did her mother, and was not so interested in the endless sport that appealed to Mark. Her bedroom was a special space for her, full of light and beautiful antique furniture where we were less inclined to disturb her.

Perth had also been experiencing a print strike and she comments: "*amazing how much time one wastes reading the paper really*". She also mentions to her mother the farewell Council dinner for Tom Wardle and how well my father's testimonial speech went down.



My mother was developing an increasing interest in photography and David made a ready subject, this prompted her to tackle an old box of photographs and begin some albums comparing each of us at the same age. David’s development was a common topic of her letters and she delighted in sharing with her mother his advanced fine-motor coordination and sociability. She also credited the walking she did with him for her better general health.

*Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> July*

*David seems to be developing at a very fast rate at present, he has taken his first steps and is like a little parrot repeating words one says and he can say at least 25 words and know what they mean. One of his favourite words is flower – lots about at the moment of course – hibiscus, fuschia, bougainvillea and so on.*

My parents put great effort into talking to us and teaching us words. They would emphasise syllables both in tone and pronunciation for example flower would be fl – ow – wuh with an upward lilt on the “wuh”. They always used proper words not baby variations – so said “thank you” instead of “ta”. This reflected their core beliefs valuing the rights of children by treating them with respect from conception on. These beliefs were recorded and published in the *Free Family*. It is not surprising that my mother was quick to share the success of the German edition of the book in being selected by a major German radio station as book of the week. The theme of childcare recurred when events within the family in England prompted my mother to reaffirm her belief in the role of kindergarten education in her next letter:

*11<sup>th</sup> July*

*It makes an incredible difference to the whole life of children to give them a good educational start. I should know after all I have been on the teachers training college council for over six years and yesterday I was voted the new chairman of the Council. Quite an honour it means morning coffee with the Governor’s wife (who is our patron), presiding over the governing body of the college, acting as hostess on all sorts of occasions – it is the national conference next month so I expect I will be busy then. I was rather thrilled because I was proposed by a man, seconded by a man and voted in unanimously. It gives me a very necessary outlet from housework the main meetings are one Monday afternoon a month and one Thursday evening a month, other times I have to go in to sign letters and such. I can take David with me then, I have baby sitter for the afternoon one and Paul looks after him for the evening one.*

My mother attended the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the kindergarten movement in WA in 2002. She was touched to receive a personal tribute from Professor Tom Stannage for her contribution. She herself pays tribute to the work of Bessie Reischbeth and Betty Lefroy, great contributors in “a procession of people, mostly women, who saw the importance of early education”.

She found the Council work stimulating and enjoyable. It was an antidote to the tedium of housework and she put in many unpaid hours. She was responsible for the appointment of staff and the preparation of papers for Board of Management meetings. She also played a big part in the hosting of the Australian Pre-schools Association biennial conference held in Perth later in

August, including giving a drinks party at the College for six overseas visitors from India, Ceylon, Philippines, Ghana, West Samoa and Indonesia.

She shared with her mother the enjoyment she felt in working with committees of men and having her say. It made her canvass the possibility of standing for Parliament but a lack of allegiance to either party was a problem.

August saw another big celebration with Erica's 21<sup>st</sup> birthday.

### *Aug 19<sup>th</sup> 1972*

*The party was a tremendous success it did not end until 3.30 am and wouldn't you know it the very last guest to leave could not get his car to start and we had to lend him one to get home. Erica had some lovely presents, it was really funny we had not said anything to each other about what we were giving her but her boyfriend gave her an opal pendant, Leonora gave her an opal bracelet and Paul and I gave her an opal ring and funny enough you would think they had been bought as a set. She had some other glorious things too; a mohair rug, two evening bags a leather handbag gold earrings, some bottom drawer stuff, a beautiful silver and polished iron ore brooch from the Deputy-Premier – most unusual – oh and two bristle hairbrushes and perfume and some lovely Wedgwood ornaments and Penny bought her some hair combs from Indonesia made of Buffalo horn and decorated with gold filigree.*

I remember choosing the combs with great care – they added up to the princely sum of \$11 – which for me at that time was a great deal – I don't recall Erica ever wearing them. She was very fond of her opals, however, and my reading of the letters has added poignancy when I remember that they were stolen from her house while she was on holiday in England some 28 years later. They had been called home early because of the death of her father-in-law and arrived exhausted and grieving to a ransacked house.

The spell of good health and humour my mother had been enjoying had come to an end and she confided in her mother that her last period had brought a bad spell of depression. This was compounded by the imminent departure of my father to Europe. He was to be away for 6½ weeks visiting thirty cities in ten countries and giving about sixty lectures, leaving on October 11<sup>th</sup>. My mother noted the irony that the Germans, who had made him a refugee back in 1938, were the best payers, paying £40 a lecture as well as expenses in contrast to his Alma Mater, Liverpool University, who wrote that they had no money to pay for a lecture, but they were sure he would want to come anyway.

*I feel very depressed at the thought of him being away and am glad the girls are older than they were the last time. I wish my Mum were near enough to come and stay as before. I had a really bad depression spell this last period, I do so hate them and refuse to resort to doctors and drugs. Paul is so patient with me but sometimes I feel as though my head will burst. I was talking to a friend of mine and she said what a joy the fifties were being she felt as though she had a new lease of life. It does not surprise me that lots of marriages break up in their forties.*

She hints to her mother, in a letter some weeks later, of the financial difficulties being faced at home. She attributed her depressions and health problems to the menopause but it would be as logical to attribute it to the chronic stress my father's business finances caused.

Her introspection did not stop her making commentary on world events:

**10<sup>th</sup> Sept 1972**

*You know one of the reasons the Ugandan Asians were refused was because there is a great deal of anger over the fact that if you carry an Australian passport you are not necessarily allowed in to England. You have to prove that a parent was born in the U.K or you have to apply for a visa. This means that a Ugandan Asian with a British passport is allowed in but a fifth generation Australian who fought with Britain and whose father fought with Britain and has an Australian passport would not be allowed in freely. It is this sort of move by the British that has caused great bitterness here and will I think cause Australia's withdrawal from the Commonwealth in the foreseeable future. Further when Australians have won medals at the Olympics there has been resentment at the playing of the "Queen" they want "Advance Australia Fair" or "Waltzing Matilda" played.*

Australians were beginning to move away from their long-standing allegiance to, and glorification of, the "mother-land" as demonstrated by my mother's remarks. This was paralleled by the movement of Britain towards the European Economic Community. The Ugandan issue resulted from the expulsion of large numbers of Asian Ugandans, many with British passports, from Uganda by the despot Idi Amin. The British Government allowed them in as refugees despite opposition (BBC, 1972b). The Australian Government and people were only just emerging from the years of the White Australia Policy and declined them admission. My grandmother apparently thought Australia was being mean.

Just before he left for Europe my father was short-listed for the Professorship: *"We won't know until Nov how it went. I am not expecting anything so won't fret"* (24.9.72).

I asked my mother whether she really felt so calm about it. She reflected that my doubt was valid; she had desperately wanted my father to get the professorship but was trying to armor herself against disappointment. She was also steeling herself to manage while my father was away lecturing. Yearning to go with him to England to see her mother she adds wistfully, two letters later, *"I hope next year will bring my turn"* (14.10.72).

My mother recalls now that my father was away for 9 weeks, she thought it was excessively long to leave all of us and she was very resentful of him going, but it proved worthwhile from his perspective. He attended a big conference in Stockholm where he was described as "the Danny Kaye of planning". My mother comments: *"It was always so hard not to feel 'mingy' about Paul's activities when everyone told me how wonderful he was and I was feeling deserted"*.

My grandmother was due to turn 80 on December the 4<sup>th</sup> which accentuated my mother's sense of regret at not being able to travel to England. *"It really grieves me that I won't be with you for your 80<sup>th</sup> I had so hoped I would"* (15<sup>th</sup>). My mother had all of her children, their partners and children with her for her 80<sup>th</sup> birthday lunch in May 2004. It was a wonderful occasion with speeches from her husband, sons, three of her daughters, her daughter-in-law and oldest grandchild.

26.11.72

*My Darling Mum,*

*The happiest of happy birthdays for you. I hope the weather is kind and you have a bright day. Well if I can't make it for your 80<sup>th</sup> I sure will be there for the 100<sup>th</sup> and by all Paul's accounts you will make it. I was sorry too he could not be with you longer. I guess there are a lot of friends around the world that didn't get to ask him all they wanted. I should think too he did not want to put you to too much trouble and he is not one for eating too much either. Only eleven days now till he is back, it is incredible that after 26 years of marriage I can miss him so.*

*I think I told you Paul did not get the Professorship well I suppose it was just not to be. I think he was very disappointed, he wants to stay in Perth but it is such a small place that if he wants a Prof. he may have to reconcile himself with leaving it.*

My father arrived back exhausted in early December bearing many beautiful gifts. David was quick to recognise his father despite the two-month break and my mother was relieved to have him home.

As the year draws to a close I reappear in her narrative: *"Penny is working at a child care centre for some of the holidays – hard work in this hot weather"*. I don't remember a lot about the job. It was at Ngala centre in South Perth, which provided childcare for children of disadvantaged parents. In 1972 childcare was not the significant part of life that it is now; the majority of mothers were still full time at home. I did not like the job – I had very strong views about the treatment of children, inculcated by my parents but still held today. The people at the centre did not share them and I found it very stressful watching the oppressive management of the kids so I resigned before Christmas. Ngala now runs as an educational and support service for parents and I still disagree with several of the principles upon which they base their teaching.

The family was all together for Christmas, with Leo's ex-boyfriend Peter joining us:

26<sup>th</sup> Dec.

*This year thank goodness Christmas has been cool only 76 ° F on Christmas Day and the same today. I really enjoyed yesterday the air was fresh and it was possible to have the kitchen doors open sometimes it is a toss up whether it is hotter inside or out when the mercury climbs. The weather forecasters were once again wrong. They forecast a very hot Christmas and lots of my friends decided on cold turkey and salad on the beach but a cool change came in with a strong westerly and the beaches were whipped by sandstorms.*

*We had a very happy day – the cooking seemed to go very easily and the older ones played lots of Mark's Christmas games with him Leonora had given him 'Cluedo' and Erica had given him Scrabble. From me he had all cricket things.*

My mother was in her middle-age, struggling with the tensions of teenagers, the absence of her eldest daughter, the vicissitudes of her husband's business and the demands of a toddler. She seemed cocooned within her family and the remarkable events and attitudes of the time are notably absent from her writing. In 1972 the problems in the Middle East backgrounded our lives, as they do now. During the year eleven Israeli athletes were killed at the Munich Olympics. I remember listening to the updating reports on ABC radio with both horror and fascination. Later that year bombs exploded in Sydney bringing the threat of terrorism closer to home.

It was by contrast a year of local political optimism – I was caught up in the enthusiasm engendered by Gough Whitlam's leadership of the Labour Party and the "It's Time" election campaign that led to the first Labor government in Australia in 23 years. I was still too young to vote. Elected on December 2nd, by year's end Whitlam had freed draft resisters, excluded racially selected sporting teams from competition in Australia, and begun the processes that led to the recognition of Aboriginal Land Rights. He also re-opened the equal pay case and abolished the sales tax on contraception.

Ian Hancock writing for the National Archives website provides a snapshot of contemporary opinions with particular reference to the roles of women and the issues of race:

The Rev. Ian Herring declared that ordaining women would be analogous to consecrating a meat pie on God's altar, and the Rev. Donald Howard said that 'a woman's highest calling was to be a helpmate for her husband'. The publicity manager of the makers of Concorde said that there was nothing in the Australian desert 'except a couple of Abos and plenty of kangaroos'. Arthur Calwell declared that 'no red-blooded Australian wants to see a chocolate-coloured Australia'. The then Mayor of Port Lincoln said he had nothing against Aborigines but asked: 'How would you like them to live next door?' Charles Court, the Leader of the WA Opposition, said that if he 'were a Bantu or negro or whatever you call the Black people in the African continent, I would make a beeline for South Africa. There you have peace and someone to look after you.' (Hancock, 2003a)

These quotes mark the escalation of challenges to the status quo that made the early seventies an invigorating time to be young.



## 1973

My mother's first letter for the year was undated but postmarked the 2<sup>nd</sup> January – Nicola's 17<sup>th</sup> Birthday. David's progress in language development dominated the letter but she also wrote of the forthcoming opening of the Perth Concert Hall:

### **Postmarked 2.1.73**

*The opening of the Concert Hall is getting to be a "hotter" and "hotter" occasion – busy wise that is. It takes place on the 26<sup>th</sup> January and starts off with the official opening by the Governor-General at 11 am then an inaugural concert at 8pm – invitation only and evening dress. followed by a Ball by Candlelight starting at midnight and lasting until a champagne breakfast at dawn. Don't know how much of the ball I shall be able to cope with but I shall certainly go to it. The restaurant of the Concert Hall is having its opening tomorrow with a buffet lunch for Councillors and wives and Members of Parliament and other big noises. It will be hot driving in but at least it will be cool in the air conditioning when we get there. And it will be a nice change to eat something I haven't cooked.*

The early part of the year also brought good news about Nicola's final school exam results, my mother credits her parents' valuing of education for girls for the academic success of her children:

### **6<sup>th</sup> January 1973**

*You little thought when you sent me to the University that you would be sending a whole other generation there too ... I reckon with Leo's B.A and Erica's BSc and Penny doing well at Medicine you have a lot to be proud of and it was all your effort that gave me the drive and ambition. I feel so strongly about children being educated to the full extent of their ability. I feel education is never wasted even if I am housebound I rarely find myself getting bored and some of my ideas have turned out to be winners for Paul. Also of course I do all the accounts for us and the office.*

In her seventies my mother became an avid member of the University of the Third Age and in an email in March 2003 commented on the language conversation group in which she was involved "*We translated German recipes and learnt some fundamentals of Swahili.*" She believes her mother would have been much happier in her twilight years had she had the same sort of intellectual stimulation.

The Perth Concert Hall opened on Australia Day, January 26<sup>th</sup> 1973. The festivities for my parents included an official opening ceremony at 11 am followed by champagne with the official guests and a civic luncheon that went until 3pm. The first concert was held in the evening and followed by more champagne with the VIPs until a ball held from midnight to 5 am.

### **27.1.73**

*The Ball was held on the Terrace outside the Concert Hall it was a perfect summer night the merest suggestion of a breeze and warm so there was no need to wear a wrap all night. There*

were 1700 people at a buffet and very good floor show and as dawn started to break at 4.30 a.m. they started to serve breakfast they also had Scottish pipers who piped in the special guests and the night finished with the pipe band playing Scottish reels. Oh I forgot the fireworks – the Ball was opened with a terrific display which was reflected in the waters of the Swan. I was amazed that I did not feel particularly tired all night and I still don't after only 4 hours in bed but boy I bet I feel tired tomorrow.

One of the VIPs was Gough Whitlam and my mother wrote of her chat to Mrs Whitlam:

*Mrs Whitlam seems a very nice person I took her to show her where the ladies room is and she chatted away – she is warm and friendly and completely straightforward. I should think she helped enormously to help him win the election. She also has a university degree. The previous P.M.'s wife McMahon was a beautiful but rather dumb socialite without an opinion of her own.*

I have only vague personal recollections of the opening of the Concert Hall. I know I had hurt my ankle not long before and was limping a little – I remember sitting in the boxes along the side but nothing of the proceedings. I don't remember going in to the concert in the evening but I must have from my mother's account.

My grandmother's interest in politics is reflected in my mother's comment:

*You say one of the commentators said Gough Whitlam had been rude to America and France well I think he was just firm and I am darn glad of it. Like most bullies the Yanks need standing up to and as far as France if the atomic bombs they are testing are as safe as they say let them test them in the Mediterranean instead of in the Pacific (so they get the fallout not us).*

The French had commenced nuclear tests in the Pacific in 1966 and over the next eight years detonated 44 bombs over the islands of Moruroa and Fangataufa. Vociferous opposition grew in Australia, New Zealand, and the other Pacific islands culminating, in 1973, in widespread boycotts of French goods, airlines, and shipping lines. That year Australia and New Zealand also instituted proceedings against France in the International Court of Justice at the Hague. As a result, in 1974 the new French president, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, ordered the tests moved underground (Danielsson, 1990).

The beginning of February saw Leonora return to NSW, Erica go on a field trip to Carnarvon and me to Rockingham to stay with a university friend for a week, which was all a little bewildering to David. My mother shared a small personal coup:

**Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> Feb.**

*How about that!! The government is proposing to put me on the Statutory Board of Management of the Kindergarten Association of W.A. Whether I will or not depends on whether the legislation forming the Board is passed by Parliament during March. The difficulty with the State Parliament at the moment is that Labour has a majority just – only 1 – in the lower house but the Liberals have a majority in the Legislative Council so things get awkward at times.*

But her excitement was tempered with sadness when she learned of the illness of her good friend Nell Bestman.



**Feb. '73** (On envelope)

*I have been feeling very upset these last few days one of my close friends Nell Bestman went in to hospital to have a small lump removed from her groin and they have told her it is malignant. They hope deep radium will help but make no promises. She is only 4'10" tall but one of the gamest people I know, she gives all her spare time to young swimmers – she has never had any children of her own which is a shame because she really is a sweetie.*

Sadly the illness did claim her life and my mother recalls with grief her death and decline.

She also recorded for her mother the death of a very old friend from England:

**5<sup>th</sup> March**

*Our good friend Mrs Waller – we had a flat in her house in Newstead Park in 1950 and 51 and have remained good friends ever since, has died. To my astonishment I found she was nearly 90.*

Mrs Waller was a background figure in my childhood life, often mentioned but rarely present – I recall meeting her once on Sark, I think. To my child's eye she was old and ugly and had a hairy mole. My mother has fonder memories and describes her as "*like a good fairy to us*". Mrs Waller, her husband and daughter Margaret were all artists. They converted part of their old Victorian house in Liverpool into a flat which my parents rented when Leonora was small. My mother recalls:

*Alice was not physically attractive in middle age but a warm lovely person. Leo adored her and learnt her colours from her. When she found I was pregnant with Erica she treated me so kindly, even though she had had doubts about having children there at all.*

She and Margaret were also very supportive when my father was completing his architectural thesis. It was their passion for the Channel Island of Sark, where they had a studio, that led us to go there for our family holidays when we lived in England.

In March I left home and the day-to-day events of family life became a part of phone calls not first hand experience. In a way it is a shame I did not move further because I would have had the rich historical resource of my mother's letters to me and mine to her. I moved in to Currie Hall at the University of Western Australia. I was very homesick, especially for David, and went home most weekends. This wasn't very good for my settling in to a social context at Hall and I was slow to adjust. I was very enmeshed in family life and had no interest in drinking, pubs or dope. I found the noise of neighbours at Hall intrusive and would play the 1812 Overture loudly to counter the music from next door. There was no such thing as a TV in your room, there was one in an old, cold common room in another building, and the fridge was in a shared kitchen at the end of the corridor. There was one telephone to two floors and getting calls depended on those with rooms next to the stair well being inclined to answer the phone and come and get you. Amazingly they often did.

My father was spending a lot of time writing, trying to finish the *Encyclopaedia of Australian Planning* and writing *Baby Revolution*. The former was never finished, the latter never published. Neither my mother nor my father can remember what happened to it but think it might have gone to a London publisher who went broke. To fund his writing my father was planning a subdivision in a beach suburb and working on his concrete finishes.

At the end of March Leonora told us she and her boyfriend, David, were planning to marry in December. My mother had not met him nor seen a photograph before but Leonora included one with her letter:

*March 24<sup>th</sup>*

*He has a kind, merry face. She says she is quite settled in her own mind but says David's parents are a bit worried because she has a degree and he has not. David's sister Robbie was Leonora's best friend at college and she has a PhD. in psychology so they can't be a dumb family. David says he did not like the academic rat race and prefers the open air and his bees! .... He certainly seems to take care of Leo .... And her letters have been so happy – I burst into tears when I heard the news.*

Domestic mayhem dominated her next letter:

*Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> (April)*

*My goodness how daft I feel, my new cooking unit was put in earlier in the week and so used am I to doing things in a different way I have managed to burn myself three times. What a chaotic time I had while it was being put in. They were supposed to come Monday morning at 9am they finally turned up at 2 p.m. Wednesday and only when they had dismantled and removed the old one did they tell me that they were carpenters and I would need an electrician to connect up the new one! Frantic telephone calls but the earliest an electrician would come was Thursday afternoon. They departed at 5.15 p.m. leaving the kitchen in absolute chaos with the contents of the fixed cupboards, which they had had to move, spread all over the table and floor. In the middle of all this Paul remembered he had asked a famous Sydney planner to dinner!! I had to laugh – what else could I do. Well Jemima is always a good kid in a crisis so that by the time Erica and Nicola came in at six you could see the kitchen at least. So then I sent Erica into the village to buy a couple of barbecued chickens and in the meantime I did some rice in the electric frypan ... and when the rice was nearly cooked I added a can of champignons, a can of sweetcorn and some beaten up eggs. I served this hot with the chickens and had salad on the side and fruit salad with ice cream and whipped cream for dessert and it turned out quite an enjoyable meal.*

The mayhem continued later in the month when a fox attacked and killed all her chooks (24.4.73).

Her social calendar was very busy and included Erica's graduation and Jemima's birthday. Erica was following her graduation with a trip to Canberra to see her boyfriend. My mother continued her tales of David:

*Sometimes when I watch David I think we have a genius on our hands the things he can do with his hands are exceptional and his language control for two not quite is staggering. Today he said to Penny "any objections" when she frowned at something he wanted to do. (April 8<sup>th</sup>)*

My father's lifestyle meant my parents often had unexpected visitors and my mother was always overtly welcoming even though she sometimes resented the intrusions, the following anecdote demonstrates her willing engagement in people's lives and determination to make a difference and share a viewpoint:

25<sup>th</sup>

*Well that was all I got written yesterday when we had some unexpected visitors! The bloke services our photostat machine in the office and they came with their three children to ask my advice about their middle child. He is a boy of about two years and three months but I could see at once there was something the matter because he was very heavy and lumpish – could not walk or talk and sat with his mouth hanging open and yet there seemed some life in his eyes, he also had a very large head. The mother wanted to take him to a psychologist but I told her to take him to a paediatrician because there was something obviously physically wrong . . . . The sad thing was his mother had initially rejected him – she said to me "I could not bear it if there was something mentally wrong with him." I tried to persuade her that if he did have a learning disability the only way he would overcome it at all was with her love and encouragement. The whole thing made me say a prayer of thanksgiving that my David is alright it also made me realise that being a doctor was my first love, no wonder I like talking to Penny about her course. She was here yesterday . . . . She would like to specialise either as a paediatrician or a gynaecologist-obstetrician.*

My mother has written to me of her concern that the contemporary devaluation of motherhood makes her unsure of the worth of her life's efforts. I write back that she was not "just" a mother (indeed a very able mother) but also a role model and guide to others. This anecdote, shared with her mother, demonstrates that she used her talents for listening and communicating to help other mothers with the job. She acted as a consultant, albeit unpaid, to many other parents in the course of her life through one-to-one conversations and her many talks to groups. Her commentary also highlights the influence of family belief systems on my own thinking at that time with the ongoing and powerful emphasis on natural childbirth and child management as the causes of most importance. I would have made a dreadful obstetrician, lacking composure in a crisis and struggling with making quick decisions!

She goes on to discuss another example of her consultancy:

25<sup>th</sup> April

*I quite often get people coming or writing or ringing me up for help with children's problems. One who had her little girl to all kinds of educational psychologists rang us in desperation and then rang back a few days later to thank us for our help – the long standing problem had been resolved. I also had a letter published in this morning's paper under the headline "Raising children without caning." We are trying to write another popular quite short book on the importance of loving handling in the first few years of a child's life. I very firmly believe that you cannot leave a baby to cry, which is after all that baby's way of trying to talk to you and then be able to talk to that child when it becomes a teenager.*

*You know Mum I think psychologists may have done a lot of good but I think they have done one hell of a lot of harm. They have made women afraid to do good old-fashioned mothering, they make husbands and wives afraid to kiss and hug each other in front of their children in case they cause an Oedipus complex. They make mothers afraid of a good firm 'no' to their children in case*

*they repress them. I have not met a psychologist yet who did not go into psychology searching for some buttress for their own inadequate personality.*

Issues of parenting remain high on society's agenda and frequently feature in the media. Only last month the local newspaper ran a story on the value of or otherwise of smacking children and the problem of sleep management for babies is frequently brought up. Parents are advised by the 'experts' and sometimes made more insecure by the 'rules' they set down than by following their loving instincts.

Her voluntary consultancy was rewarded in May with a trip to Canberra to attend the pre-school associations conference which she describes as "*virtually . . . deciding on the future of pre-school education in Australia*" (7.5.73). She includes in the letter a cutting which was part of a series on the wives of well know Perth people. My mother sent it as an amusement, acknowledging to her mother that it was not entirely accurate:

### **THIS IS JEAN RITTER'S STYLE**

**By Bev Pagram**

Tiny blonde Jean Ritter's life is a whirlwind of varied activities that would have exhausted a lesser woman years ago.

But, as Jean, B.A., Dip.Ed., the mother of seven children and the wife of Perth City Councillor and planning consultant Paul Ritter, says: "What Scotswoman ever ran away from a fight?"

Jean's fight is with time.

As well as constantly caring for her youngest child, David, 2, whom she had at the age of 47, Jean is a director of the Ritter firm, Planned Environment and Educational Research, the business manager of her husband's many projects (he is now leading consultant for the Adelaide City Plan and writing a massive encyclopaedia on Australian architecture) and she is chairman of the Kindergarten Teachers' College Council. Adding to that impressive list of occupations she is a staunch supporter and past office-bearer on the Deserted Wives Committee and the Rents and Bonds Committee and is writing a book titled *No Substitute for Skin*, about birth and early childhood from the child's point of view.

"I am involved in so many things, particularly children as an underprivileged group in Australia, at the moment, that I don't have a great deal of time to worry about fashion and entertaining, although we do entertain quite a lot," said Jean.

"My views on fashion are that clothes should be comfortable and forgettable."

#### **One taboo is trousers**

"I really feel sorry for people whose lives are so empty and boring they have to fill the gap with dressing themselves up like mannequins every day.

"I love bright colours and sensual materials," said Jean. "I tend to get very attached to particular outfits, and wear them for years and years."

"My favourite suit is 14 years old, and I like it more every time I wear it.

"Paul and I speak at so many functions that I have been obliged to collect a reasonable wardrobe, most of which is made by a marvellous local dressmaker who knows how to hide my figure faults, of which I have many after seven children.

"Most of the clothes are from very good materials that is why they last so long.

"One of my taboos is on trousers, Paul hates them," she said.

Entertaining in the Ritter household is a very informal affair. "It does tend to have somewhat of a surprise element," said Jean. "I never know whom or how many people Paul is going to bring home for dinner.

Visitors to the Ritter home along tree-lined Brookton Highway, Kelmscott, would wander through the garden filled with sculptures and objet d'art made by various members of the family and into the warm cosy lounge room which would be an antique dealers dream come true.

Ancient grandfather clocks and rich walnut tables and chairs jostle with mountains of books and carefully framed children's drawings for pride of place.

"Usually when people come to dinner, I serve up lots of vegetables and home made bread with the meal, and always have a roaring open fire in the background in the winter," said Jean.

"Twice a year we give a great big party for all our friends and acquaintances, usually a couple of hundred people."

The Ritter family is a close knit unit . . . and every Sunday all the children, except Leonora, the eldest, who is a tutor at Sydney University, and Paul and Jean, have dinner together and discuss the week's problems and topics of interest.

"We all like each other a lot," said Jean. (Pagram, 1973)

Alongside the article is a photo of my mother sitting cross-legged, arms on the chair arms and leaning slightly forward. She does not look happy. Beneath the photo the caption reads: " 'If I am wearing yellow I feel sunny and cheerful' says Jean Ritter. This jersey suit in a chocolate and yellow leaf design complemented by a brilliant yellow crepe blouse tied at the neck in a floppy bow, is one of her favourite outfits."

The superficiality of the article strikes me strongly. It focuses on fashion and entertainment as of major interest ahead of the real issues of the committees with which my mother was involved. She remembers both the interview and her irritation at the resultant article. The journalist had brought a photographer with her and asked my mother to try different outfits and poses so the resultant look was far from natural and relaxed. Publicity was important for my father getting work so my mother obliged with the article but it makes her cringe now, she is surprised that my father's opinion would have stopped her wearing trousers. She feels it emphasises the change in the status of women.

In the National Archives of Australia review of 1974, published when the Cabinet Records of the year are released 30 years later, Ian Hancock includes the following as representative of the attitudes of the time:

- Justice Elizabeth Evatt chaired the Royal Commission into Human Relationships, Mary Gaudron was appointed Deputy President of the Conciliation and Arbitration Commission, and Joan Child won the federal seat of Henty;
- a Town Clerk explained that if women stood in local government elections, the Randwick Council could not meet on Mondays because that was when they did the washing;
- Alan McGilvray said that he simplified his cricket commentaries on Mondays and Tuesdays because the housewives were listening while they did the laundry;
- the Attorney-General's Department chose a cartoon to advertise the amended Trade Practices Act 'so that every housewife could understand it'; and
- Alan Renouf warned that anyone 'stuck with the wife of an Australian diplomat overseas' would find she had nothing interesting to say other than to discuss children and holidays. (Hancock, 2005)

So perhaps the emphasis of the article is not surprising.

My father's sculptured concrete finish began its first run in mid-May. My mother describes her feelings:

**15<sup>th</sup> May 1973**

*We have got our first concrete run going and it is all very exciting we found we can make all kinds of things like garden pots in glazed concrete that looks as though it has been fired in a kiln. Paul is concentrating on this at present we are calling it "Sculpcrete" because it looks sculptured – it really ought to make money I hope so.*

She left for the Conference in Canberra a few days later, after enjoying the successful Kindergarten Teachers' College graduation ceremony which she had emceed to accolades from the Principal of the College that she had "*set the tone for the graduation with my grace and warmth*". She includes in her letter the comments of the guest speaker, the Professor of Child Health, saying, "*In Princess Margaret Hospital (the children's hospital) you could see in the battered and neglected children the hooligans of the future*".

The trip to Canberra was a success. She enjoyed the flight so much she used it as an example to entice her mother to come to Australia for a visit:

May 29<sup>th</sup>

*You say you could not face the travel but you know these big planes are fantastic, incredibly comfortable, plenty of leg room seats that lie back so you can sleep and really remarkably good meals en route. The flight I did was the equivalent of London-New York and back and yet I enjoyed every second of it. Restful journey and yet when I felt a bit stiff it is quite easy to get up and move around. I am amazed that Ron is so nervous about flying it is a darn sight safer than on our roads at present .... Still think you should come out with Kath specially if she has a man in attendance.*

It is the little throw away lines that remind me the letters are from another time, likewise my mother is much amused by this comment now, reflecting on how often she has seen women embarrassed by the men attending them.

During the trip she spent time with Leonora and her fiancé David, to whom she took a liking, commenting later that he reminded her of her dad (June 30<sup>th</sup>). The conference itself was hectic marred only by the behaviour of one of the West Australian delegates whom she describes as "a bloody little know-all ... who embarrassed the rest of us by putting her foot in it every time she opened her mouth".

Her next letter is full of the little things of life, the phones not working, my visit home for the weekend, Jemima's trip to the orthodontist and more about her photography, amongst other things. My father was in Sydney again while my mother held the family and business reins in his absence. On this occasion the drains blocked up.

Not long afterwards the family was struck by a severe gastric flu with David particularly badly hit and my mother forced to spend three days in bed. Luckily she had not come down with it until after giving a talk to sixty ladies at the Victoria League titled "To lib or not to lib?" (Postmarked 26. June 73).

My mother does not, unfortunately, have a transcript of this talk but says she remembers it well as a discussion on the difference between freedom and licence, canvassing her doubt about the capacity of women to cope with freedom after so many years of oppression and repression.

*I think now I was right. The rate of change, particularly with the advent of the pill and the increase of availability of education for women, has been too fast and the pendulum has swung too far, too fast.*

She feels now that too many women have thought the solution was to copy men and "indulge in their worst excesses"

She goes on to reflect on her own mother's experience of feminism in earlier times, describing her mother as *a suffragette, if not a very active one*". My grandmother felt strongly that women got a raw deal, particularly in marriage. She was quick to take advantage of Marie Stopes push

for readily available contraception and acquired a cervical cap "*at a time when Marie Stopes meetings were violently broken up*".

My mother mentions Marie Stopes on several occasions and I have, as a result, read her biography by June Rose. It is a fascinating read (Rose, 1992). Rose discusses the publication of Stopes landmark text *Married Love* in March 1918:

The reasons for its success are complex. Writing from a woman's point of view, with an intensity of feeling with which her many readers would empathise, Marie had produced the first book about sex technique for women. In it she had dared to stake a claim for female sexuality, for women's sexual needs and sexual rights. Her views challenged the centuries of prejudice and superstition and the accretions of religious teaching which saw women's bodies and women's attractions as desirable but also dirty and corrupting and the lust for women as shameful and sinful. The wife's fate, therefore, was to be a passive suffering victim of her husband's lust. (p.111)

Stopes herself was a woman of intransigent views:

Marie was an elitist, an idealist, interested in creating a society in which only the best and beautiful should survive . . . . She was in sympathy with the aims of the Eugenics Society founded in 1908 by Darwin's cousin, Francis Galton, to encourage the prevalence of the more suitable races or strains of blood over the less suitable . . . . The First World War had advanced the cause of the Eugenics lobby, since it had revealed widespread disease and disability among the lower classes. Marie believed passionately that if such people could be persuaded not to breed, society would benefit. She told the National Birth-Rate Commission in her evidence in 1919 that the simplest way of dealing with chronic cases of inherent disease, drunkenness or bad character would be to sterilise the parents.

. . . The large numbers of physically low grade 'C3' people in the population . . . could no longer be ignored and, rather than improve general standards of health, housing and hygiene, a preferred solution was sterilization or birth control. (p.134)

Her legacy remains in the Marie Stopes Clinics that provide birth control information in countries across the world.

The desire to re-unite the family conceived the idea of employing Leo's David to look after the fruit trees and help with the concrete work and brought another attempt to lure my grandmother to Australia.

The family theme triggered a bout of nostalgia associated with a visit to see *The Merry Widow*:

*June 30<sup>th</sup>*

*All the tunes brought back so much Dad when he was young, when he used to whistle hum and play them on the mandolin that I found the tears in my eyes in the theatre. I tried to make Paul feel what he was like when we were kids. We might have been hard up in some ways but my memories are of fun and Dad cheerful and whistling in the shed. Those pre-war years were damned hard for you in some ways but you know we were a happy and loving family. And when I*



*look at my own beautiful mob growing up in such good healthy surroundings with good food and clothes and the chance to make use of their brains I wonder whether Dad's spirit can see what you achieved by sending me to the University and making it all possible.*

My mother recalls that for the first five years of her life she was very happy but the depression brought high levels of anxiety even though she did not know how bad things really were. She often went to bed hungry during the depression years, her mother wanting to make sure there was food for breakfast. She remembers the enormous amount of weight her mother lost and her mother's determination her children should have it better. My mother recalls they were better off than some, they owned their own house and had hens for eggs and jam from the fruit from Slade. They spent a month cost free at Slade each summer. Her mother was a good manager and her father a teetotaler which also helped the economic cause.

Despite the financial hardships she recalls a loving, loyal family life where they made their own amusements. Her father always joined in, whistling or playing his mandolin, he loved the Merry Widow music. He had struggled with his education having spent his childhood as an army child travelling the world with his parents. My mother remembers clearly when he finally got his qualification to teach manual arts. The rest of the family were at Slade and a telegram arrived with the results. *"That really was a moment for celebration because it meant security of tenure in his job"*.

### 16.7.73

*Had to laugh last Wednesday I had nearly finished my dinner when Paul burst in from town and said "stop you are going out to dinner." He had been giving evidence at a Federal Parliamentary Commission on Traffic Safety being held in Perth and the Parliamentarians said he was like a breath of fresh air and promptly invited us both out to dinner. So I had chicken casserole with the kids at 6 p.m. and crab cocktail followed by trout armandine at 8.30 p.m. Needless to say I did not eat a sweet either time. These Parliamentarians said that Crestwood Estate which Paul designed was the best bit of estate planning they had seen anywhere.*

I find the information about my father's planning talents and the development of Sculptcrete rather sad. He was such a skilled planner and the playing with concrete was meant to be a way of raising funds to support his research interests. But instead it seemed to overtake everything. The garden pots and panels went on display at the homes and gardens exhibition sponsored by *The West Australian* newspaper the following month. My father also had them included in the adjacent David Jones exhibit.

### 24<sup>th</sup> July

*Paul is very optimistic about it but then bless him he is always optimistic. I made a new resolution myself the other day I decided I had done enough worriting in the first 50 years of my life to last me for the rest of it, so I am trying to stop. It really is silly the way I worry about the future after all with their scholarships 4 of them are capable of looking after themselves now.*

It sounded very good, business optimism, a new attitude but it was not as easy as that and as nothing came of the optimism the worry continued. It has bedeviled my mother's equanimity throughout her life.

In 1973 she commented on the ups and downs of her mood and energy as well as "queer turns" that her doctor put down to hormonal fluctuations:

*My pulse and heart beat go off on a gallop and I feel as though I can't breath and waves and waves and dizziness come – lasts anything up to a couple of hours. I told a friend of mine about them and how they worried me and she made me laugh she said she knew how I felt she had experienced similar things and that the first time it happened her husband was away and she was so sure she was about to die that she went and sat on the verandah so that if she did the milkman would find her not her daughters. She said she felt quite a fool when the clattering milk bottles woke her up.*

Leonora's David had arrived and initially fitted in very well. However after Leonora arrived to join him my mother became increasingly sure that they would not make a match of it because of the discrepancy in intellect:

### 13<sup>th</sup> August

*We were all sitting talking on Saturday evening in a way we often do, talking about all kinds of things from religion to politics to education etc etc and the conversation was fast, furious and quite entertaining and in the middle of it all David got up and said "Well I am afraid it is all beyond me, I'm going to bed".*

At the time David was keen to come over and set up his beekeeping but he and my father did not hit it off and he returned permanently to NSW.

The Sculptcrete exhibition had gone well with plenty of positive feedback and an interstate order of \$500 from Melbourne but it was not enough to settle my mother's anxiety about their unstable and unpredictable finances. Another bout of ill-health hit before the next letter, this time a heavy cold, again affecting David badly.

In amongst the misfortune my mother tells of Nicola and her boyfriend's plans to marry in 3 years time. My mother liked Nicola's boyfriend, also an engineering student, describing him as "quietly spoken and very well-mannered but has a terrific sense of fun". She observes that she was only a few months older than Nicola when she decided to marry my father.

My parents had met at a meal at the University of Liverpool. She attracted to him by his unusual appearance, bushy black hair, yellow shoes and green trousers, he to her by her innocent look and lack of make-up. He wooed her with an intensity that must have been very flattering, travelling long distances just to see her for a short time. He found work nearby during her

holidays at her grandparents and they met in secret because her mother did not approve of the attentions of a 'foreigner', even though she had never met him.

My grandmother's voice sometimes comes through in the replies my mother makes to her letters and questions:

*Sept 7<sup>th</sup>*

*Sorry to get such a depressed letter (31<sup>st</sup> Aug) from you this morning. But you know lass if you had not got married and had not had children you could still have been all alone and old and no one to visit and no letters to receive. I still think you should give winter a miss this year ... you could spend some months here .... You would find the air here so clear and clean and wonderful and the food is good and I would so enjoy you being here. Just think of sitting on our back terrace and looking towards the hills across the valley and David is such a delight.*

*Go on Mum you have never been a devil in all your life, shock 'em all by coming and spending November, December and January – it is my turn to have my mum.*

Her next comment, perhaps triggered by Erica's engagement to her long-term boyfriend, heralds the changing of social values, as the 1970s feminist push begins to take hold:

*I don't think you need worry about my daughters marrying and throwing away their freedom, their marriages will be partnerships they will all earn as much as their husbands they don't intend to have big families and all intend to continue their careers – Paul calls them the real liberated women unlike the silly bra-burning lot in America. The status of women has changed a lot and one need no longer have big families, after all apart from David I wanted a big family and he is so delightful I would not be without him.*

On September the 8<sup>th</sup> the IRA set off bombs in Manchester city centre and at Victoria Station in London, they followed this up with further blasts in Oxford St and Sloane Square in London.

*"The senseless violence of the London bombings gets me down, I know it is a very small chance but still I wonder whether Ron or Hans is anywhere near" (Postmarked 21 Sep 1973).*

The bombing campaign had started after the Bloody Sunday killings in 1972 and continued until December 1975. Ironically the activities of the IRA put the British Police and military far ahead in terrorist control, a knowledge that proved useful almost exactly 28 years later after the destruction of the World Trade Center in New York (BBC, 1974b; 2004a).

*We had our own scare the other evening. I took Jemima to see the Leningrad Kirov Ballet at the Concert Hall and before it started there was a demonstration by the Jews against the Russians not letting Jews leave the country – very peaceful demonstration but still a demonstration and then just as we sat down after the second interval the police came onstage to say would we all leave quickly and quietly as they had received a phone call to say there was a bomb. It was a first night audience – all jewels and furs and they were inclined not to take it seriously but in the end all went out and after five minutes the police announced it must have been a hoax and we all went back in. So even peaceful Perth can seem crazy at times.*

I made a brief reappearance in her letters as I moved from the academic study of medicine to patient contact. I did not like medicine and through the years of theory my mother would tell me it would get better when I was working with patients. Unfortunately she was wrong and I disliked that more, but by then it seemed too late to stop and I had no idea what else I would do.

*Penny begins to look like a real doctor now complete with short white coat and stethoscope – she makes quite a bit of extra money by waitressing at weddings once every week for 25/- an hour.*

I waitressed at The Palace Hotel, one of Perth's old buildings later turned into the façade of the R and I Bank by Alan Bond. One of my friends got me the job. It involved serving at weddings held at the hotel. We were required to wear a black top and skirt and they supplied little starched white aprons with a white band to wear in our hair. I earned \$3.50 an hour. The other girls were great and we had lots of fun. The menu was an entrée of fish followed by chicken; we were instructed to offer seasoning and gravy and to remember never to ask the patrons if they wanted stuffing. The final course was a Bombe Vesuvius which we carried in to the darkened dining room aflame and adorned with sparklers, usually to the applause of the patrons. After dessert we had to wait for the speeches to end to serve coffee and clear up, if there was some dessert left we were allowed to have some – the base of biscuits soaked in liqueur was delicious.

Erica's forthcoming wedding took over my mother's life and letters in October. She enjoyed the designing and fitting of her dress and the planning of the reception to be held at our home following the ceremony at the Kelmscott Church on January 5<sup>th</sup>. A provisional guest list of 200 was proposed. Erica wanted all her sisters to be bridesmaids wearing broderie anglais dresses in different colours. Erica, Nicola and I made our own dresses and my mother made them for Jemima and Leonora. My mother baked the three-tier wedding cake.

Increasingly my mother censored the news to her mother, perhaps as reflection of her mother's age, excluding anything that may create anxiety. However she told her brother and at times he saw fit to pass the information on. On this occasion she had omitted to tell her mother about the need for surgery for a vaginal repair, but her brother had. She wrote afterwards to reassure her mother that all was well:

**14.10.73**

*I gather that scamp of a brother of mine told you I was going to hospital for a repair operation. I went in ... last Wednesday, the operation was on Thursday and today is Sunday so you can see the worst is over. The trouble was that the womb had prolapsed pulling the bladder with it so they both had to be stitched back in to place. Not a comfortable operation but I am kept sufficiently doped by Sister's 'cocktail' to make it bearable. And really Paul spoils me. I not only have a private room which is furnished in Queen Anne style and has a carpeted floor but I have my own private bathroom as well. There is a sliding door opening on to a balcony and the view is across the river towards the hills. As pleasant a place to be sick in as one could wish for. The only signs that show it is not a hotel bedroom are the wind-up beds and the oxygen outlet on the*

wall. I will be here for a fortnight all together the difficulty is apparently to get the bladder back to normal behaviour – however I even have a T.V. when I feel up to it. Sorry my writing is a bit shaky but I am still fairly well doped but I did want you to know how I was. I worked out that this is my 8<sup>th</sup> trip to hospital! Tell you something I have learned a catholic nursing home is generally better than the others. The food here – even by my standards is very good.

She had strict instructions from the surgeon to take things easy afterwards.

I am caught by another passing comment:

**Postmarked 3.11.73**

*Don't be sad about Erica marrying. she will be 22 ½.*

Twenty two and a half seemed a very normal age to marry in 1973 – it was even a little old for many of our peers. When I discuss the age of marriage with my daughter and my son's girlfriends they are horrified at the idea of marrying so young. My grandmother's sadness at the marriage intrigues me, my mother explains that she saw Erica as throwing away everything she had studied for. She could not have envisaged the change that has seen women working in tandem with family making. My grandmother was often disillusioned about marriage, seeing it as a trap. My mother thinks for many it still often is, leaving them having to cope with two jobs. She would like to see motherhood recognised as a career in its own right.

I reflect on Vera Brittain's autobiography *Testament of Youth*, written in 1933. She was a contemporary of my grandmother's, an active feminist with an attitude to marriage and career that would sit well many years on:

I was already determined that, whether married or not, I would support myself, preferably by writing, and never become a financial burden to my husband. I believed even then that personal freedom and dignity in marriage were incompatible with economic dependence. (Brittain, 1981, p.181)

My mother's health did not pick up as quickly post-operatively as she had hoped and she bemoaned to her mother her inability to get up and get on with things despite feeling fine mentally and when sitting or lying still. Reframing for her mother she talked of reading, and planning the wedding, re-affirming her appreciation of the help she got from her daughters in managing David (now 2 ½ years old).

Simultaneously my father was in the midst of planning an exhibition of his concrete products, which continued to stretch the financial resources considerably.

**6/11/73 (On envelope)**

*We are putting a big advert in the paper and one of the T.V. channels has promised us T.V. coverage. The advert will cost \$250 but we hope will be worthwhile .... Our overdraft stays monstrously high \$23,000 but not because we have not been getting orders, we are selling \$3,000*

– 4,000 a month but because we need every cent back in to it to develop ideas. Paul looks incredibly fit, has even lost the tendency to a pot tum he was getting, he only weighs 11 ½ stone.

*I must say I feel very cheerful today but a few days ago I felt really down but I expect it was post-operative and I hate being so inactive. I guess women do have a lot to put up with but there are lots worse off than I am. Money may be always scarce but at least I don't have to worry about Paul chasing other women and he doesn't drink and he is a good father so I have lots to be thankful for.*

Her frustration and anxiety continued with a recovery much slower than she wanted. She found it very hard to be as patient as the surgeon preferred.

**23 Nov.**

*This morning I could not stand it any longer and I had a good tidy through before I went weekend shopping. It is the first time I have done the shopping since I went into hospital and in spite of Penny going with me and Joe [the shopkeeper] carrying the boxes out for me I was absolutely whacked when I got home*

She did manage to muster the energy to attend the Urban Planning Institute of Australia's award dinner and was rewarded when Crestwood, the development my father had planned, was awarded best in the State. My father has been aggrieved in the last few years as planners have turned away from the Radburn concept that he had championed and used as a basis for the design of Crestwood. The idea was to keep cars and pedestrians apart in housing estates by having all homes backing on to parkland and pathways.

By the time she writes again nearly three weeks later she is on the mend.

**12 Dec. 1973 (Postmarked)**

*I feel pretty fit already, the only thing I sometimes go to bed very early yesterday for example I got up at 7.15 got Jemima off to her holiday job and Mark off to school, went to the hairdresser, came back and spent 1½ hours painting the kitchen, gave David his lunch then sat for half an hour then I finished Jemima's bridesmaid's dress, went shopping, picked Mark up from school and then got dinner ready and after dinner worked in the garden for an hour and a half. Finally ended up by tidying right through the house before I went to bed about 10 p.m. Tomorrow however I am having a day off, I am going shopping in town first thing then having morning tea with the Lady Mayoress, then Erica and I are going to watch some of the matches at the Royal King's Park Tennis Club where the W.A. championships are taking place.*

The wedding plans were demanding plenty of attention, not only in the logistics but also the financing. Only hints of the problems get through to her mother but in reality there wasn't enough available to pay for what was wanted. "*Leonora comes home on Sunday. She really is sweet she said I should let her know if I needed any money for the wedding because she had some saved up she could let us have*". Leonora ultimately paid for Erica's wedding. I asked her if she could recall her input at the time and she replies that the money situation was very fraught and she did not want that to spoil Erica's wedding. She also recalls the elation of having a

salaried job and the sense of responsibility at being the only one in the family to have a regular job.

My mother's pride would have been causing her distress at having to borrow from Leonora, she recalls feeling humiliated that my father thought it was okay to ask Leonora for money. She believes she was trying to gloss over the financial difficulties to her mother and reassure herself that she could survive, as much for her family as for herself. My father was not patient with depressive symptoms and felt it was a matter of willpower for my mother to overcome the postoperative melancholy and physical symptoms that continued to trouble her. She says there was a time when she seriously thought about going home to her family but she did not have the money for fares for us all. Ultimately the belief that women were the strong ones and must protect the father's image to the children, a belief inherited from her own mother, overcame her desire to flee. *"Looking back I do wonder where the strength came from but I have sometimes wondered whether the ill health was my body demanding a breathing space"*.

Her mother got a moderated and rationalised version:

*18<sup>th</sup> Dec.*

*Every marriage hits low spells but you just have to work at it and sort your problems out. I don't think there ever was a marriage that did not have patches of thin ice. There have been times when much as I love Paul, I have wondered why I bothered. ... I married a creative genius who is a bit eccentric and we seem to live from one crisis to the next but he is a damned good father and a faithful bloke and a home lover so one has to be thankful, the perfect man and husband does not exist any more than the perfect woman or wife. I think I must be hard to put up with at present I seem to be short tempered and very volatile in mood and yet Paul is always so patient. I suppose one could say life is a bit like a roller coaster we seem to zoom up and down with ever increasing speed.*

*Dear me I do sound my age tonight normally I don't feel anything like 49 but just lately I feel the years have caught up on me. ... Quite honestly Mum I will be glad when the wedding is over, thankfully only about half the people have accepted but that still leaves 130 people to cater for, maybe I should have had a real recuperation Leonora reckons my moods and tiredness are just post-operative.*

On December 17<sup>th</sup> five Palestinian terrorists pulled weapons from their luggage at Rome airport and began shooting, killing two people. They then threw incendiary devices into an American Airlines jet heading for Beirut and Teheran killing another 29 and destroying the plane. Hijacking a Lufthansa jet they killed another man who tried to escape. With five hostages they ordered the pilot to fly to Beirut. It was refused landing and flew on to Athens where negotiations with the Greek government and the death of another hostage, ultimately led to their release and free passage to an unknown destination. Their goal had been the release of two Arab terrorists, who after their release refused to join the hijackers (Kuepper, 2002). In the context of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 it seems as if the Americans only discovered terrorism 30 years after it had made the news on the other side of the world.

*This business at Rome airport is so frightening. there seem to be forces of mindless violence loose in the world. I sometimes wonder if the world would be better off without the car and the aeroplane.*

Ian Hancock, in his review of the year on the Australian Archives website, introduces his description of 1973 thus:

Every year is in some way turbulent, but not every turbulent year produces continuing aftershocks. The hike in oil prices, which followed the Arab-Israeli or Yom Kippur war of October 1973, had such a profound effect, not only on the world economy, but on practically everything from international stability to individual expectations, that 1973 can be considered a pivotal year in modern world history. (Hancock, 2004)

He goes on to describe the frenetic legislative actions of Gough Whitlam's government designed to promote equal opportunity and Australian ownership and control of its industries and resources. Whitlam gave the vote to 18 year olds and abolished university fees. Hancock mentions the beginning of the battle with inflation that would cloud Australia's economy over the next few years, and consequently my parents. On the world stage he notes the implosion of the Nixon regime under the weight of Watergate (a name that would become part of the language system of the ensuing decades as every political disaster had -gate tagged on) and the explosion of a Japanese airliner by Arab terrorists in July. All events that failed to rate a mention in my mother's letters home as she dealt with the turbulence in her own life, a turbulence that, like world events, would prove to herald ongoing disturbance.



## 1974

Erica and her long-term boyfriend married on January 5<sup>th</sup>. The wedding was not without its dramas. They were underpinned by the financial strain as well as the disapproval of the groom's parents. My mother had a dispute with Nicola about where her boyfriend would sleep, Erica lost her usual composure and smashed a watermelon on the floor and threw a bread knife at Leonora and David fell off a chair whilst scraping the leftovers out of two cake bowls and smashed them on top of him.

None of this drama makes it into my mother's letter home. She told her mother she was worrying because she was "*not in a flap*" (Postmarked 3 Jan 1974). She finally mentions some of her stress and tension with regard to money commenting that they had "*never started a year more broke*". It was only the sale of our lion skin mat and an unexpected receipt of £1000 as final settlement from the Germans of claims on my father's grandmother's estate that relieved the immediate pressure.

The lion skin was a manky old thing. Now it would be frightfully politically incorrect to own such an icon of British Imperialism. It had a big stuffed head with glass eyes that were loose. As little kids we would sit on its head. It felt hard but fragile. My mother bought it because my father had always wanted one. I don't know if it was legal in 1965 to bring such a thing into the country and neither does my mother. Apparently Town Clerk Green had their possessions brought through customs without any difficulty or delay.

The money from the Germans was reparation made to victims of the Holocaust. My father's mother had to apply to the Germans through a designated lawyer and was granted a pension. She had this paid into a bank in Jersey on the Channel Islands to avoid it being taxed by the British Government. She had chosen a pension rather than a lump sum. My mother doesn't know why this money came so long afterwards. My father's grandmother was Emma Schnabel (nee Sonnenschein). The Schnabels had a farm and quarry. She was arrested by the Germans because she was not only Jewish but also confined to a wheelchair with arthritis. Her sister Hilde went with her and both died in Thereseinstadt concentration camp. My father's mother went back after the war to find out what happened to them and an old neighbour told her how the Germans came for them. She found their names in the camp records.

My paternal grandmother was always an enigmatic figure during my childhood. I wish I could meet her now and hear her stories.

The wedding was "*an enormous success*" (9.1.74).

*David at the last minute refused to stay with the two baby sitters and there was I in my long chiffon dress nursing an already slightly grubby two year old in the church. ... As Paul came out of the vestry, he scooped David off my knee (he settled still asleep on Paul's shoulder) so we marched out to the Wedding March with the wee lad asleep and me on Paul's other arm – the congregation loved it. And all through the group photos David is there asleep.*

The weather was hot during the day but mellowed into a still, balmy evening with an almost full moon. The food was perfect.

*Drinks were champagne, fruit punch, beer or soft drink. Crisps, nuts, open sandwiches piled high, cheese dips with crackers, devils on horseback (bacon wrapped around prunes), twelve whole roast chickens on beds of lettuce, two large sugared hams, smoked eels, curried eggs, jellied chickens. Two melon baskets carved out and filled with fresh fruit salads, three trifles, four tortes (each based on a pound of butter), and dozens of chocolate butterfly cakes, eclairs and biscuits. And it was all good.*

My mother was very touched at the end of the reception when my sister rose to speak:

*When they were ready to go Erica rang the gong for silence and then said "I know it is not usual for the bride to speak and I know it is customary for a bride to throw the bouquet to all unmarried girls but I am going to break with tradition and give my bouquet to my mother because she has been so wonderful and she and Dad have been and I hope always will be my best friends." And then she burst into tears.*

The groom's speech also struck a chord:

*He thanked his parents for bringing him up so well that he had the sense to choose Erica for a bride and he thanked me for looking after her so well and teaching her so many womanly arts and so on.*

"Womanly arts" an interesting and outdated phrase laced with patriarchal significance. My sister was and is a great cook and I expect it was this to which he mainly referred.

The wedding had many emotional undercurrents which took a toll on my mother's health and she developed sciatica and a cold in the few days following. Her mother had not been well either:

*Funny you should have a stinking cold – it must be telepathy – throughout the wedding preparations I had the stingiest catarrhal cold I have ever had. I and all the family had a good laugh at you being pleased with your ten bags of manure.*

The cryptic nature of this comment begs a query from me to my mother and she reveals that the manure was part of a Christmas present. She also reflects on her changing perception of her mother from the perspective of her own age noting that she herself now regularly puts potting mix on her birthday list.

Erica and her husband moved to Canberra after the wedding, where he worked in the public service and she began her career as a kindergarten teacher.

*I hope to visit them later in the year and I will also go to see Leonora in Sydney. Leonora has another boyfriend coming to stay this next weekend .... He heard Leonora was driving back to Sydney with a friend and he did not like the idea of two girls driving 2000 miles including the Nullarbor desert when there is nothing for hundreds of miles, on their own, so he is flying here on Friday evening and leaving with the girls on Tuesday morning. I must say I am very relieved that they will have a sensible man with them.*

My mother had never met this man but she seemed to trust Leonora's judgement. She says she would still be happier having a man on the trip across the Nullarbor even though it is easier now with better roads and more traffic. As it was she liked him and enjoyed their visit.

Her very particular and sometimes judgemental beliefs about things reveal themselves in her next letter when she responds to a comment about a relative:

*Feb 11<sup>th</sup>*

*I have no patience with mothers who don't wean their children emotionally. You never know when they might have to stand on their own two feet. But I am not sure of this business of staying together for the sake of the children.*

Her interest in political policy lead her to attend a meeting of the Australia Party, pre-cursor to the Australian Democrats, that week. She was toying with the idea of standing as a candidate. At the same time the political situation in the UK was causing comment with particular criticism directed at Edward Heath:

*He sounds like a jumped up nobody (did you know his mother was a parlour maid and his father a carpenter?) Trying to throw his weight around and deny his origins I think it shows the paucity of the talent in the conservative party that such a man could be their leader".*

The British economy was being badly affected by the Oil Embargo. Prime Minister Heath had introduced a three-day week in the winter of 1973/74 to conserve power. In combination with striking miners and the renewal of Irish violence the economic deterioration led Heath to call an election in February. The Queen was called home from a trip to Australia, annoying the locals, to swear in the new Prime Minister. As it happened the election result was inconclusive and Heath's inability to entice the Liberals into coalition and the antagonism of the Ulster Unionists meant he had to concede defeat leaving Harold Wilson and the Labour Party to govern with a minority government. Wilson won a second election that October with a very small majority (Wikipedia, 2004).

At home another cash flow problem had threatened to halt the development of Sculpcrete but a prominent local lawyer and friend of my parents stepped in with collateral to support a bank loan. The future of Sculpcrete was looking promising with expressions of interest from Switzerland and Germany as well as from a local manufacturer of concrete building blocks. My

father was about to travel to the Eastern States to present his work to the Cement and Concrete Association. The aim was to sell licences and royalties.

*Another incredible thing is that the Federal Government is bringing in new legislation to help the new exporter this comes in on July 1<sup>st</sup>. They are prepared to pay 85% of overseas selling trips, these grants are taxable of course so not much use to big firms but they could help us.*

There are a few moments in the narrative of her letters that shout at me "Wrong Way – Go Back" and this is the biggest. This apparently great opportunity would bring them great distress. Luckily the worst of this happened after my grandmother had died and my mother did not have to find a way of sharing the most difficult days. At the time she saw in this the prospect of getting a trip to England as a director of the business.

*I hope things go better from now because you know Mum these last months have been financially the worst of the whole of our married life and with that operation as well I really have felt pretty desperate at times.*

Her distractions were politics, although she found the shifting of real issues into political footballs rather distasteful, family and, in stark juxtaposition, world events:

*Yesterday was a holiday and Mark had his best friend Alistair Cheal to play and do you know these two twelve year olds were marvellous they let David tag along by them all day and never a cross word out of them. Whenever they started a new game I could hear Mark explain and then say to David "Do you understand?" It was very sweet.*

*I must say that monster plane crash and the hi-jackings do not make me feel inclined to fly but I suppose the roads are really more dangerous. Pity the Suez is still closed I'd rather make a trip by sea than fly but it takes six weeks via the Cape.*

The Turkish Airlines DC10 that crashed near Paris was the first of the big jets to crash. All 345 people on board were killed when it came down, minutes after take-off, in the forest of Ermonville. Many of the passengers were British, on board because their own flight had been cancelled due to industrial action by engineers at London Airport (2004a). My mother had so often reassured her mother that flying was safe it must have really shaken her to go back on her previous entreaties.

With my father away life became quieter, but in his absence she attended the meeting arranged by the overseas trade department to explain the new export incentive arrangements. She was one of only four women in amongst a hundred men. She was concerned that the grants allowed 85% of overseas expenses to be claimed back at the end of the financial year in which it was spent, so that you had to have the money before you could get it rebated (13.3.74).

Despite that things seemed to be looking up with orders of over \$25,000 coming in making at least some dent in the \$40,000 they were in debt (19.3.74).

1.4.74

*My Dearest Mum,*

*Lovely to have your letter of the 26<sup>th</sup> this morning. You sound so busy and your garden work so active you put me to shame.*

My grandmother was now 82 years old. Her grandsons did the garden digging for her but she managed the rest herself, keeping herself in fruit and vegetables. She would still walk the mile to her local shops. She was well read and had particular interests in politics and nutrition, living by the adage "moderation in all things".

David was an ongoing light in my mother's life even when he disturbed her sleep and struggled through the illnesses of childhood. In her next letters she shares some favourite moments:

*David is so funny and grown up at times. Mark was jibbing at taking the penicillin tablets to cure the staphylococcal foot and David said "Don't be ridiculous Mark the doctors cured Mummy, do you want me to take the pills for you?" Then he said "A long day ago I took strawberries to Mummy in hospital". A good memory I think.*

And:

*David said the following yesterday "I have a good idea, I want to write a song, you need lines and dots. It will be about pelicans and it will start with a silly pussy cat flying high in the sky to chase the pelicans." Even to my biased ears that sounds pretty terrific for a kid his size.*

And:

*Whenever it gets dark David always says – 'Who has got the sunshine now?' and always grins with delight when I say "Nanny has it is her turn now." This morning he said "I am sure I must be five by now I want to go to school."!*

He was not quite 3.

A comment from my grandmother about Australian news on British TV precipitates a reply at length about a demonstration in Perth against Gough Whitlam:

*Whitlam may be considered arrogant by some but he is a Q.C. and comes from the well to do class and is undoubtedly a ruler. What caused the trouble was that Whitlam's government had decided to remove the superphosphate bounty given to the farmers (April 18<sup>th</sup> 1974).*

It had been a tradition for politicians to speak directly to the people in Forrest Place – the broad street/square in front of the old post office opposite the central railway station in Perth. Gough Whitlam was trying to speak there but got heckled and things were thrown at him. My mother recalls it as "not a very salubrious sight". It proved to be the beginning of the end for that tradition.

Anzac Day triggered a bout of reflection and my mother wrote of her recollections of friends killed in the Second World War and how she had been moved by the Anzac Day Parade. As I was transcribing her letters I received an email from her:

22<sup>nd</sup> March 2003

Dear Penny,

*I feel so grieved that there is another war, why can't men see sense, The problems linger so, this morning we had a violent thunder storm, I was out of bed looking for my clothes before I reminded myself it was not an air raid, no wonder I feel so for the children of Iraq.*

In May 1974 my mother turned 50 and she celebrated with a trip to the Eastern States to see her two older daughters. She was a little concerned about the cost but was aware of her need for a break from the work of homemaking.

*It seems slightly immoral to me to be spending money on oneself while one has an overdraft but Paul says using the bank's money is the best way to function these days as long as one has assets to cover it." (4.5.74)*

My father's unopposed re-election to the Council was a relief and allowed her to thoroughly enjoy her ten-day holiday, especially driving through the NSW mountains with Leonora. They visited the Sydney Opera House, which had been opened on the 20<sup>th</sup> October the previous year, and anticipated her birthday with dinner at an exclusive seafood restaurant. She then spent some days with Erica in Canberra.

Her return to Perth was greeted with cold, wet weather and David with the flu (4.6.74). Postal go-slows and strikes, in particular that of the milk-truck drivers, made life less than ideal, she comments "*sometimes I think the housewives should go on strike to knock some sense in to the men but they can't because of the children*" (Postmarked 14 Jun 1974). Things did not improve with a series of misfortunes throughout the month. Firstly David narrowly escaped injury when he fell through a trapdoor in the bedroom, opened to allow treatment for white ants, then a major contract for the business went broke and then there were a series of breakages; an antique glass, a big Wedgwood dish and her spectacles. If that was not enough there was a major burst in a main pipe into the house, a fox got into the chickens, killing three of them, Jemima's record player broke down, she broke her dental plate and the oven malfunctioned burning solid two loaves of bread (28.6.74).

She goes on to comment on Mark:

*I laughed at you thinking Mark looked a quiet, knowledgeable kid. Brainy yes but quiet, no, he is enormously energetic, on the go all the time and a real darling. He is captain of the Kelmscott 12 year old soccer team and does it very well. He absolutely waltzes through schoolwork, he said to me once "You know Mum I am lucky I just have to look in my head and the answer is there."*

And on Jemima's unexpected success in the school production of "South Pacific":

15.7.74

*My family certainly surprise me, we went to see Jemima in South Pacific and my heaven Mum she was fantastic. She can both sing and act and has excellent timing in comedy. Paul and I were both staggered we had no idea she was capable of it. It was very flattering of course having everyone say how wonderful she was.*

I remember how amazed everyone was at Jemima's voice – I went to see the production later and can still hear her belting out a near faultless rendition of Bali Hai. My father was delighted, one of his great pleasures in life was listening to opera and to have a child who could actually sing captivated him.

*I am so looking forward to having the family all together for a few days I just wish you could be here too. I have met some very nice women at this play group David goes to and I was talking to one of them about the ups and downs of life with Paul and I was so surprised when she answered "Well at least you never get a chance to be bored." And may be she has a point perhaps that is why that I look so young in spite of everything, people rarely believe I am 50. And Paul constantly loves me and spoils me and we are very happy together, money is just a cussed extra.*

My mother's frequent comments about my father's patience and devotion always sound a little patronising to me. The advantage of retrospect is in knowing that, while he was apparently faultlessly loving, he failed to accommodate, respect and act on my mother's deep need for financial security. Instead he followed his own dreams and fantasies with the carrot of "we'll be rich by Christmas" whilst my mother suffered. (My father's financial Christmases have never come). The pay off was in part the celebratory status being "Mrs Paul Ritter" gave her:

*The other day when I took queer in town (palpitations caused by the menopause) I only had to say "I am Mrs Paul Ritter" and people were rushing for Paul and a doctor and so on .... It is quite something to know people think your husband is incorruptible. People say: Ring Paul Ritter he will help. And people like Sir Thomas Wardle greet him like a friend. No doubt you read something about Alan Bond the Perth guy who is backing the yacht challenge "Southern Cross" to win the America's Cup. Well he is a multi-millionaire and has made his money by walking roughshod over small people, by wheeling and dealing and sharp practice everywhere. Well as far as I am concerned I'd rather have my Paul than twenty bastards like that any day. And when I saw the way one local architect was sucking up to Alan Bond and his wife, yuk, there is no way I would want Paul to be like that.*

August brought the next 'big event, my 21<sup>st</sup> birthday party. My mother catered for it with Erica's help:

7.8.74

*It was a good job I had Erica here because I am darn sure I could not have got Penny's 21<sup>st</sup> ready without it. Really I think just between you and I – for I show no favouritism to the kids – I think I get on best of all with Erica. The way we worked together for two solid days in the kitchen catering for that 100 people was nothing short of miraculous. Not one cross word did we have and we understand that order of things so well we barely had to discuss what would go into the oven when. One friend of ours – also a Perth City Councillor reckons Erica and I should go into the catering business together as specialties for parties. he reckoned he would be quite happy to pay \$10 a head for the food we provided.*

As a result of their efforts the party was a great success with wonderful food, lots of people and a dance floor under a marquee on the back lawn. The highlight for the guests was my present:

*After the toasts and speeches and the cake was cut they smuggled in this big parcel gloriously wrapped and gave it to Penny. her reaction when she found it was a \$200 sewing machine was marvellous ... it took her completely by surprise".*

It was not a surprise. But I am delighted I had them convinced it was. My parents had said I could have 21<sup>st</sup> party or my own sewing machine. After much deliberation I opted for the party in the belief that the experience would be irreplaceable, the material possession available later. Without my knowledge Nicola and a college friend, Aileen, decided to get together and gather money from all my friends to buy a sewing machine. A few days before my party Aileen got cold feet, worried I would not like it, and so told me to make sure it was all right. I am pleased to say I did not tell anyone she had spoiled the surprise but instead set about being really surprised and happy on the night. It worked; even I am convinced by the photos. I had been given a whole range of mock presents. My mother mentions one "very heavy one prettily wrapped and marked fragile turned out to be half an axle from a tractor".

We partied until 3.30am. It was the first time my mother had met my boyfriend and, fortunately, he made a good impression: "*What a delightful person he is six foot tall, fair, quiet and very warm twinkly eyes. He is a farmer's son – pretty comfortably off too*".

The wet winter had one dramatic spin off with the Canning Dam overflowing creating "a 200' raging torrent at the bottom of the orchard." It was a magnificent sight. If it happened now it would cause chaos to a number of homes built near the river, including the one built on our old block. Later a tunnel was blasted through solid granite from the Canning Dam to Roleystone to boost the water flow from the dam. I don't believe it has overflowed since.

Life settled back to family routine after the party:

19<sup>th</sup> Aug.

*The meeting of the playgroup (that David goes to) Mums is here tonight. Most of them are young enough to be my daughters and I feel it very hard at times not to give too much advice when I see obvious errors being made. I am not sure how much good the playgroup does David but he seems to enjoy going as long as I stay with him.*



*Penny and Nikki are still at home but they go back to University on Sunday. Jemima and Mark's school holidays start then. Penny's friend Keith was here for the weekend I like him very much. He is very quiet and shy – a nice change with my noisy brood.*

My father had added another invention to his business this one a system of environmental parking involving asbestos rings on a mesh backing:

18.9.74

*The asbestos rings protect the grass roots which don't get worn down by the cars so all parking areas remain green. The biggest expense is the machine to cut the asbestos. Asbestos is incredibly hard and we need a multiple diamond saw drill which costs about \$5000.*

The local authority would not let him cut the asbestos in his present factory so he went in search of a new one. The commercial use of asbestos has stopped since the deleterious effects have become widely known. The cutting of the pipes in the factory would be unacceptable now. My mother says that they know of no bad health consequences from the practice, hopefully the use of industrial masks and extraction fans were fully protective. She expresses her concern over the years of the consequences of washing the contaminated clothes at home and the risk it may have caused to the family. The environmental car park paving was later changed to use plastic rings.

My mother had been maintaining her own interests with her passion for writing to the press on issues dear to her heart: *"I have been having a letter columns battle about this new birth induction machine that the U.K. doctor has invented and hopes to bring to Australia"*. She had a lot of support for this letter at the time, however, the battle for the hearts and minds of mothers to entrench the value of natural childbirth has since been largely lost. As the 21<sup>st</sup> century builds birth by caesarian section is offered as a normal choice to mothers who have private insurance and many take it as a preferred option, enjoying the certainty of time and date of birth and the purported enhancement of birth outcome for the baby. I personally would not trade my natural births for caesarian sections – I was playing squash a week after my third child was born. Perhaps my first child would have been less traumatised by a caesarian birth but in the context I would have felt an even greater degree of failure. A recent article in *The Sunday Times* newspaper canvassed the situation from the perspective of the female journalist who had opted for an elective caesarian section because the obstetricians had emphasised the "gentle lifting out of the baby from the womb" (Egan, 2004). My mother sent me her response to the journalist, part of which read:

*You were persuaded by the words the baby is "lifted gently out", there is another way of looking at this, suppose you are lying curled up warm and comfortable in the knowledge that you don't have to get up just yet and someone comes along and firmly removes you, before you are quite ready, from the safety and warmth of the womb in to the exposure of what is an alien world, how would you feel?*

The warming weather of October brought a burst of activity in the garden and my mother reflected on how much better she felt after four difficult years:

3<sup>rd</sup> Oct.

*Because ... apart from all the money worries, I have notched up one pregnancy, one broken ankle, one caesarian, one embolism and one major gynaecological operation*

*The miracle of it is that Paul and I seem to have survived it all with our marriage stronger than ever. I almost feel I ought to knock on wood all the time. Money is no easier but I worrit less – what is the point – the big guys in the world seem to make inflation and depressions and there does not seem much one can do about it.*

I asked my mother her reflections on this quote and she didn't reply with her usual promptness. When she did she reports her surprise that she did not mention in her list having her tubes tied because this was *"the single most dramatic change in my life... not being able to get pregnant gave me freedom from fear, hidden fear of death in childbirth and real fear of not being able to manage another pregnancy.... I was like a butterfly breaking free from a chrysalis and expanding my wings"*. She believes the greatest bond between her and my father was the shared passion for the rights of women and children.

Another David quote follows:

*David is very keen to grow everything and follows me around the orchard feeding the trees – mind you he tends to give too much to the little ones on the grounds that "they are little and have to grow".*

She comments in her next letter on the burden of a big family recommending to her mother that a younger relative have a tubal ligation after the birth of her next baby.

*I know a big family is a hell of a struggle and if that op. had been freely available when I was young I would not have had such a big family. I love them all dearly but it is a big drain on one, not only financially, but physically and emotionally, and this seems to be getting worse. (14.10.74)*

Her next few letters were full of the everyday. She mentions my boyfriend and her approval of him as *"a very satisfactory match"* (7.11.74). The latest hopes for Sculpcrete and their trip to Calingiri for a Melbourne Cup lunch. She was particularly tickled that she had backed the winner "Think Big". This joy was tempered by the death of their dog after being hit by a car. Not long after David was stricken by a childhood virus triggering my mother's anticipation of my finishing my training so I could do the doctoring for home. *"It will be good when Penny has finished her training. She passed successfully through fourth year so now she is a fifth year medical student"* (22.11.74).

The same letter includes a cutting about *"the freedom school"* Jemima was attending. My parents had been great supporters of A.S. Neil's "free school" Summerhill in Scotland in the 1950s and

regretted there had not been the opportunity to send us to such schools. They toyed at times with the idea of setting one up. My father had asked Neill at one point whether he could take over Summerhill but Neill told him to start his own. My mother resisted the idea *"I knew I did not have the capacity . . . I think you have to be a special kind of person which I am not"*.

So when Jemima heard about the Lance Holt Community School starting up in Fremantle from her friend, they were open to the idea. Other notable attendees at the Community School were Mary Bedbrook – the daughter of Perth's leading orthopaedic surgeon at the time and Suzanne Bond, the late daughter of the infamous Alan Bond.

In November 1974 an IRA bomb exploded in Birmingham:

*That dreadful bomb outrage in Birmingham made the front page major headlines here, what a terrible thing, what sort of minds must these people have to make innocent people suffer so. Surely there must be some way of stopping these people.*

The bombing killed 19 people and injured 180 and was attributed to the IRA. Six men were convicted of the attack in 1975 but the court of appeal overturned their conviction in 1991. Later three detectives were charged with perjury and conspiracy but fear of a lack of fair trial meant the case never went to court. It remains a mystery who planted the bombs (BBC, 1974a).

The community was once again being disrupted by strikes by the post office and transport workers, and my mother's equanimity disturbed by the uncertainty of business.

*By the time you get this I'll be either cheerful or cranky because once again a big firm is considering taking over a couple of Paul's ideas – surely it must happen sooner or later. (Dec. 7<sup>th</sup>)*

Her comments to her mother were covering up a very low time in their lives, in a letter to my boyfriend I wrote:

**Tuesday December 17<sup>th</sup>**

It frustrates me so that I can't help my folks – they are both very unhappy, very tired and even disillusioned – you know how much I think of my Dad – it breaks my heart to see him so low – I can't really explain – he's lost his unquenchable enthusiasm and joy of living, his opportunism – I've never known him like this – Mum's the same but she has always been moody – see they are so much in debt that even the money coming in – like \$1000 this morning is only a drop in the ocean – and any little gestures on my part – like coming home – I was so glad to be back – so pleased to see them – that made them feel good for a while but such a short while – Mum just grumbles non-stop – I don't blame her but it's very trying for us – Nikki is very good but for all of us it's so hopeless – it will be such a long time 'till they will have any money to throw around – Mum can't bear the idea of all that time – and I can't help, I can't do anything but try and be patient and listen sympathetically and I guess I'm not much good at that!

My mother's letters give little of this away and her post-Christmas letter is apparently full of good cheer:

*Dec 29<sup>th</sup>*

*I had some very nice presents – perfume from Paul, some gorgeous chocolate liqueurs and liqueur fruit from Leo, a blouse and matching wool to knit a cardigan from Erica, a bottle of Sabre liqueur from Penny, a good adjustable spanner from Nic (one of my present requests) a car first aid kit and face cream from the boys. My ham and turkey were the best I have ever had in Australia.*

*The house feels quite deserted Mark is out for the day, Jemima is staying with a school friend for the weekend. Nicola is staying at Roger's for the weekend and Penny has gone to meet Keith's parents for the first time and stay on the farm for a fortnight.*

*Well by the time you get this 1974 will have departed – I don't know anyone who had a satisfactory financial year. I had to laugh rather ruefully – Pen, Nic and Jemima had to fill in their Commonwealth Scholarship forms and by the time the accountant took off all the allowances we earned minus \$890 last year. Still we face next year with our health intact knock on wood rather hard. A few miracles would not come amiss so if you know any good prayers you could toss them in this direction.*

*The cyclone in Darwin which hit on Christmas morning is a dreadful business I wonder whether you have had anything in your papers. The city looks just as if it has been blitzed.*

I don't remember seeing 1974 out. I would have been on the farm with Keith, but I don't recall celebrating. It was my "coming of age" year. I turned 21 and started my relationship with the man who was to become, and remains my life partner. I no longer felt the need to come home from College every weekend and I moved into the hospital system and began the real work of learning medicine. My mother's life became gradually more distant to me.

## 1975

The International Year for Women started slowly for my mother. She didn't write until a fortnight into the year and when she did the letter was tired. She was feeling the heat and the demands of her family. As an antidote to her stress her older daughters had bought her and my father a week's stay at Geographe Bay in the South West, staying in the Bridal Suite, whilst we looked after the house and David. My parents did not have the money to go on holiday themselves.

*Jan 13<sup>th</sup>*

*Well I wonder what 1975 will bring I daren't say it could not be worse than '74 but I say a prayer of thanks for the family health but also a wish for a bit more cash about. I shan't take a job this year unless I can fit it in with David's kindergarten hours – I reckon he needs me still.*

She enjoyed the holiday, "lazy days by the sea and lovely food by the motel chef" (3.2.75), and we had managed to run home and family in her absence, including an accident in which Mark had gashed his foot and required seven stitches. Mark hated going to the doctor and my mother commented on her relief that Erica had been home to take him.

She wrote next on Valentine's Day musing "What a pity the old customs are not followed so much any more. I really feel it is time a return to gentleness and caring took place" (Feb 14<sup>th</sup>).

I never noticed my parent's adherence to Valentine's Day but my mother reports they did traditionally acknowledge it with little gifts of flowers or chocolates. My mother recalls with amusement how sometimes she would go in to the newsagents and they would tell her that her husband had put some chocolates on the paper bill. My children see Valentine's Day as a commercial exercise, one of many celebrations of relationships hijacked by the capitalist ethos.

In the UK Margaret Thatcher was beginning her rise to power:

*It has been quite exciting watching the rise of Margaret Thatcher to leadership of the conservative party maybe this is what England needs to revitalise it, what do you think of her? She comes across here as an immensely clever and capable woman, it will be interesting to see what she makes of it, it was a woman after all who stirred things up in the first Elizabethan reign.*

Thirty years on my mother reflects on her disappointment with Thatcher's performance describing her as a "male doppel-ganger". She recalls that at the time of writing the letter she was becoming increasingly sensitive to her mother's age and beliefs and softened her letters to fit the reader.

On the home front Nicola's preoccupation with her boyfriend rated a mention. They had decided to get married later that year, but because he did not believe in long engagements they were not announcing it as yet. Nicola was only 19 and my mother has, in retrospect, expressed her reservations at the time about the wisdom of the decision. His father told them it would not last. My mother considers his opposition was part of the spur for them to get married, in order to prove him wrong.

My mother had enjoyed the trial of daylight saving throughout the summer. It was a first in the State and had aroused a great deal of controversy. As it came to an end she observed:

**8.3.75** (on envelope)

*Personally I like it, it means getting housework and shopping done while it is cool and light long enough in the evening for Paul to spend extra time outside with the boys. There is no twilight here so it is nice to have it dark at nine in the summer instead of 8. But the farmers don't like it and a lot of women with small children don't like it, there is a referendum on it next Sat. it will be interesting to see how it goes.*

The referendum was lost by a small margin.

*I talked to Leo of all the things I could remember about my childhood and relatives and one anomaly suddenly struck me – how come that for such dictator Gan-gan believed so firmly in education for women? What a curious mixture he was really.*

I find it particularly interesting to follow up her comments about her childhood and her grandfather. She remembers being frightened of him citing incidents when he smacked her for disturbing others when she had had a nightmare and threatening them with a dog whip if they misbehaved. When she was about four she asked her mother why she called that horrid old man Dad. However as she learned about the difficulties and oppressions of his life she learned to love and respect him and eventually, as a student, stood up to him. After that he showed her more respect, seeking her help in editing an article he had written for a national magazine.

Her grandfather was the eldest of eleven children, son of a head gamekeeper. His mother had been told he was too delicate to rear so she encouraged him to work outdoors. She passionately believed in education and she wanted a better life for her children. My mother thinks her grandfather would have been influenced by his mother and her regrets that her daughters did not get the same educational opportunities as her sons. I was interested when reading Marie Stopes biography at the state of education for girls in England in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, in particular that her mother Charlotte was not allowed to receive a degree at the end of her university training because she was female.

My great-grandfather broke with traditional social order when he sent my grandmother to high school and teachers' college rather than send her into service. As a teenager my mother was

rather ashamed of her “ ‘humble’ antecedents” but later realised the worth of her irascible grandfather.

My mother had decided to send David to the kindergarten at which Erica was teaching despite it being 15 miles away. She had hoped my father would be able to share some of the driving but it was a vain hope as he was absorbed in his business. My mother got caught up in his planning for a weekend seminar at his factory to demonstrate his concrete finish as she was expected to provide the meals. She describes the outcome on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of March:

*We had a dozen architects studying what can be done with Sculpcrete in building at the factory – they paid £20 a head and I made some nice meals for them which I then transported to the factory . . . . I took them salad, sugar baked ham, marron, seafood in aspic, home made bread and butter and coffee for lunch. And dinner in the evening I made a beef casserole with herbs and wine, paprika chicken, rice, flagons of wine, cheese and biscuits, apples and coffee. They certainly appreciated it all.*

It was a time of relative optimism for the business with the Main Roads Department in Perth showing an interest in using Sculpcrete in two bridges. The process had been patented with a view to selling the patented rights and receiving royalties that would then be used to fund my father’s writing. My mother’s health was still compromised by menopausal symptoms but she focused as much as possible on the joys of her youngest son:

### 17.3.75

*As David grows he is an increasing delight to be with, he is such an even tempered delightful little mischief and so intelligent and the questions!!*

*You know it seemed a travail to me when I had David but he is a never ending delight to me now. He is so charming and so intelligent. The other day he got hurt on his elbow and when I was a bit upset he said “There, there Mum, it wasn’t that bad.” He plays with his animals and cowboys in a way that reminds me very much of myself when a child.*

Her other distraction was her committee work and she made contributions to a pre-school committee, the library committee of Mark’s school and the John Bamford Memorial Trust. This had been set up by Dr David Watson in honour of John Bamford who was a South Perth doctor who had championed Natural Childbirth prior to his premature death. The committee produced a whole series of educational tapes and slides on childbirth education and these were sent, by the Country Women’s Association, all over Western Australia, including some of the most isolated places. My mother recalls writing a piece for the booklet they put out and she served on its management committee for a time.

My father turned 50 on April 6<sup>th</sup> 1975 and my mother threw him a surprise party which acted as a networking opportunity as well as a celebration.

*8<sup>th</sup> April 1975*

*I must say our parties are all very democratic, last week you could have talked to anyone from the local greengrocer and a postal sorter friend, a metal worker, a couple of doctors right through to the Minister for Local Government, I think Australians are less class conscious – matters more what a person is like.*

My father was a vital and vibrant man at 50, despite the stresses of business his enthusiasm and optimism remained strong. I remember how often people wished him well for the "next 50" and my musing on the likelihood of him reaching 100. At the time it seemed entirely possible.

On the world stage my mother wrote of the aftermath of the Vietnam War:

*The Vietnam situation is of great concern here at the moment as always the children are the most pathetic they are bringing some of them to W.A. for adoption.*

The fall of Saigon in April 1975 marked the end of the Vietnam War. The Americans had been concerned at the safety of orphans in Saigon, many of whom had American fathers so they organised an airlift of the orphans out of Saigon to the USA. A British newspaper followed suit as did Australian and Canadian interests. Over two thousand children were taken out. Tragically one of the US planes crashed killing nearly one hundred children and the twenty adults who had been caring for them. Most of the American orphans were adopted but only half of the one hundred taken to Britain were. None of the British orphans returned to Vietnam.

It was now 10 years since my mother and her mother had seen each other. David was about to turn four and continued to delight his mother with his thinking: "He asked me today how did a seed know whether to grow into a person or a tree!". After his birthday she comments:

*He was such a joy on his birthday he is growing up in to such a delightful companion . . . . He knows exactly what he wants to buy with the money from you – a fossil trilobite for his fossil collection!! (18.5.75).*

Nicola and her fiancé decided to bring their wedding forward to the 2nd of August. Erica was making the dress: "It is a Chinese brocade . . . . in a simple princess line style with a square neck and full rather medieval sleeves." (June 8<sup>th</sup>). My parents wanted Jemima to sing at the wedding but she declined because she did not feel comfortable with the Church context. David had his own view on marriage:

*David is very funny on the subject of weddings he said yesterday that he would only marry me because he did not want to marry anyone outside the family. So I said to him if he did get married whoever he married would become a Ritter and thus one of the family and he said "oh*



*good then I'll marry Rebecca." Rebecca is the most enchanting blue eyed blonde with pigtails at his kindergarten, and when David scowls his fiercest and the other kids run away, Rebecca just gurgles with laughter and pats his tum.*

Of course 1975 was International Women's Year so it was early days in second wave feminism and its impact on the keeping of one's own surname on marriage. I was disillusioned – too late to change my decision about keeping my name – when it was pointed out to me that whether or not one kept one's own name or took one's husband's it was still a man's name – either father's or partner's.

Leonora received her Master of Arts degree later that month and my mother was very proud: "So now she is Miss Leonora Ritter B.A. (HONS) M.A. looks good doesn't it?" (19 June 1975).

My grandmother was very concerned that we would give up our careers when we married, as had been the pattern for previous generations, so when my mother wrote of Nicola's ongoing wedding plans she added: "Of course she is carrying on at University – she will do her B.Sc. then teach. They have no plans to have a family for a few years yet".

Luckily the financial situation was much better for her than when Erica had married 18 months earlier. She could enjoy the planning and choosing an outfit without fretting on where the money would come from to pay for it all. She had found a gifted dressmaker who made her "simple classical things that don't date". So she had a repertoire of outfits to wear to various social functions:

*Tomorrow night Paul and I are standing in for the Lord and Lady Mayoress at a Ball given for the Glasgow Rangers Soccer Club. Always amuses me on these occasions when a loud voice announces "Acting Lord Mayor Councillor Paul Ritter and Mrs Ritter".*

My interest is caught in the next letter by my mother's comment about friction between Mark and my father: "[I] sometimes feel like a buffer state between him and Paul" (7.7.75 on envelope). By contrast my mother's relationship with Mark was strong and she sang his praises to her mother: "I watched Mark play hockey this morning for the first time and by jove he is good – he seems to be a natural sportsman, good job he is good at school work he spends so long out at sport".

She really enjoyed watching him and often surprised herself with her engagement in the games. She was less enamored with the grumbling and complaints after they lost a game:

*On one memorable occasion I stopped the car and told Doug Harris he could either shut up or get out and walk, as we were a long way from home he shut up. I also found it quite useful to keep quiet and listen to their conversation, I learnt a lot about what was going on at school that way.*

Doug Harris went on to represent WA as a wicketkeeper, albeit briefly, and as a State Cricket Selector.

July 1975 saw the beginning of the end of the Whitlam Government and my mother asked whether the “*political fun and games going on in Australia*” had been reported in the U.K. The Whitlam Government had implemented change in many areas including bringing in Medibank, arranging independence for Papua New Guinea, beginning the processes of Native Title, instigating the Racial Discrimination Act and investigating Human Rights, Fraser Island and Uranium mining in the NT. However they had also got caught up in what became known as the “Loans Affair” in which, against the wishes of parliament, Minister Rex Connor had gone ahead in negotiating a massive loan through an international broker. This led to the political demise of deputy Prime Minister Jim Cairns (who misled Parliament on the matter) and Rex Connor and paved the way for Opposition Leader Malcolm Fraser to block the budget bills in the Senate (National Archives of Australia, 2004).

Correspondence and wedding preparations were disrupted when my mother was admitted to hospital after seeing her doctor with chest pains. He made a diagnosis of angina but all her test results were normal and she, after talking to a pathologist, decided it was caused by inhaling some fly-spray. Her doctor was very skeptical and told her she would need by-pass surgery before too long. Not long after Mortein was reported to have altered the contents of its fly-spray because of reports of chest pain in those who had used it. The tests she had at the time showed her cholesterol was high and she took steps to modify her diet.

Another opportunity for my mother to use her substantial knowledge and skills in a productive voluntary capacity arose with her involvement with the Kelmscott School Council. She had been appointed secretary.

*This does not mean I type or anything but just that I keep the records straight and dictate any letters that need doing – unpaid of course but interesting. Mark is the first year representative on the school council.*

The Kelmscott School Council was the first school council in WA. My mother particularly enjoyed the opportunity to have real contact with the school and provide educational input instead of just fund raising as the traditional Parents and Citizens committees had done. She did not think highly of the Principal who instigated the council “*I came to the conclusion that the job was actually beyond him and he needed the Council to blame whenever staff or parents objected to something that was done.*”

Amongst the Council's achievements were the admittance of mature age students, the establishment of a crèche so students with babies could return to school and the development of a school farm.

Nicola and Roger were married on the 2nd of August. They had a Catholic Wedding, Nicola had converted and been baptized during their engagement. My recollection is that the wedding was not without incident and my mother confirms the details. On the day, while Erica was giving the dress a final pressing, the iron, which was "*a bit old and dodgy*", spat dirty water all over the back leaving a considerable mess. She washed it, borrowed an iron from next door and had all well before my mother and Nicola returned from the hairdresser.

My only recollection of the ceremony was that Leonora, for some reason, could not come to the church at the last minute so I was asked to stand in for one of the readings. I was happy to step in but felt my clothes were not as appropriate as I would have chosen had I known I would be up in front of a formal congregation. I wore a full length, figure hugging, purple, glittery, jersey dress with dozens of buttons up the front, and matching purple suede boots with a fringe half way up.

My mother shared nothing of the dramas with her mother but rather wrote of the quality of the food: "*I think we outdid ourselves with the food every one was full of praise*" (12.8.75). The cooperation of the weather and her satisfaction with her own outfit completed her appraisal. She also remarks on the newlyweds misfortune on their honeymoon: "*The honeymooners came back very happy in spite of the fact that Nicola got flu and they got a \$15 fine for speeding on the way back*".

The organisation of the wedding took its toll and my mother was very tired for some time afterwards. Her doctor had told her she must lose weight because of the high cholesterol level found after her hospital admission. She had succeeded in losing 7lbs (approximately 3 kg) from a weight of 10 stone 1 lb or 64kg (a weight seen as ideal for her height by current wisdom). Perhaps the dietary restrictions required to do this had also contributed to the fatigue. She feels now that the emphasis on weight was rather stupid and more should have been placed on health.

My father had been overseas again for a month and my mother was unsettled. Despite this she tried to put a happy tone in to her letters home, reassuring her mother about her heart health and the success of her diet and sharing the activities of her children and David's latest quotes:

*How is this for a four year old's statement, I was driving along with David when he said "Why is it that when you look at big things far away you can see them through a tiny hole?" (8<sup>th</sup> Sept.)*

*Do animals know what they are? (25.9.75)*

And, when he was stricken with mumps, and told he would have to miss some school, replied:

*"Well I planned that, there is a lot on T.V. that I want to watch" (12.10.75).*

But a note of discontent slips in, almost like an invitation for her mother to ask more:

*Dear Ron I tried to ring him but could not find his number but because he had a rather sad letter from me he rang me and it cheered me up tremendously.*

*Well there is one thing when you get as low physically and emotionally as I have been there is only one way and that is up.*

*No doubt Ron has told you of some of the difficulties we have been facing. They are still not resolved but things do look a little more hopeful and really my children are tremendous support to me. As a friend said the other day "The trouble with being married to a genius they are always in advance of their age, times will catch up with Paul's inventiveness" but when?*

My mother reflects that the events of 1975 had her at times in "utter despair". She says she dared not tell her mother how bad things were:

*Mum had been in hospital for the first time in her life, I had always thought that she would always be there for me to draw strength from, even her anger was sustaining, now she was needing more and more reassurance from me that her Jeannie was OK.*

So she censored things more and more, to the extent that it was sometimes difficult to write at all.

Early in November the financial pressures were eased somewhat when the Federal Government overseas trade branch approved their efforts to get Sculptcrete started and granted them \$35,000 reducing their bank loan to \$5000. The emotion spills out:

*Well if you heard a big sigh of relief from Perth this week it was me .... It was a hell of a risk Paul took because if the government had not helped in development costs like this we could have been bankrupt. (6.11.75)*

Leonora and Erica had lent my mother \$2000 to "hold the fort with while Paul was away ... the kids were marvellous ... I am very happy to be able to repay them. I certainly have wonderful children". My mother hated borrowing money from her children even though she was very appreciative of their support. The threat of the financial abyss and its consequences put an enormous strain on my parents' relationship over this time. This was compounded by emotional growth my mother was enjoying as she read the flood of women's writing fuelled by the second wave of feminism. Her unquestioning belief in my father and his ideals had been problematic for her over many years and to read other women's perspectives freed her to give voice and movement to her own. As for many couples of the time she was feeling empowered and validated and he had to face change that was not of his choice or vision.

My mother summarises to her mother: *"We need to do a bit of hard work on our relationship which has suffered rather"*. To facilitate this they spent two weeks in the forests in the South West: *"With trout streams and forest trails to walk along"*, whilst I went home to look after Mark and David. She closes the letter: *"A more cheerful daughter than for a long, long time"*.

A fortnight later she was happily telling my grandmother of my engagement:

**22.11.75**

*What a joy to be able to write and tell you that Penny and Keith are getting married on January 3<sup>rd</sup>. He is such a lovely person it makes me so happy to welcome him to the family. He has bought Penny a beautiful ring, has saved up for it all year, he admitted quite cheerfully that it probably was more than he should have afforded but that he wanted her to have a really beautiful ring that she would still enjoy when they were both doctors. ... It was very sweet the way they announced it, they came in yesterday evening and gave me a lovely spray of orchids but did not say anything until Erica got suspicious of their smiles at each other and asked to see Penny's ring finger. Fortunately they want a small wedding and no publicity so there will be only about 40-50 people here. Keith is a real country boy at heart his parents had a farm until arthritis forced his Dad to give up a few years ago .... He is actually ten months younger than Penny. The only thing I wish is that you and Ronnie would be here. There will be no church wedding they want to be married at home and are only having a parson to perform the ceremony to please Keith's Mum. Penny will design and make her own dress in white crepe and lace and wants to wear fresh flowers in her hair.*

I am a little embarrassed to admit I did not consider the stress I was imposing on my mother with such a short engagement. I just assumed she would manage, indeed that she would enjoy the process, but she comments to her mother: *"Good job they don't want a big wedding only six weeks to go and I am going to be away for two of them!"*

On a national scale the Whitlam affair was finally coming to its conclusion:

*No doubt you have read of some of the extraordinary political goings on in Canberra – we are having our third election in two years after the Governor General dissolved parliament to break a dead lock.*

The political deadlock was the refusal, on October 15<sup>th</sup>, by the Liberal and Country parties to pass the supply bills in the Senate. Despite Malcolm Fraser's offer of a compromise – he would pass the bills if an election were called before May 1976 – Gough Whitlam stood firm. On November the 11<sup>th</sup> the Governor General John Kerr had a clandestine meeting with Malcolm Fraser following which he dismissed Whitlam, put Fraser in as caretaker Prime Minister and an election was called for December 13<sup>th</sup>. Fraser's Liberals and offshoots, the Country Party, were elected with a big margin, which seems to have pleased my mother.

**15 Dec 1975**

*The last eighteen months things have really been in the doldrums, there has just been no confidence in the Government's handling of the economy. It surely has cheered me up.*

She had been much refreshed by their holiday and shared her pleasure in Mark's success at school, he had been named Dux of his year of 360 students, and mine at University, I had won the fifth year surgery prize. She adds:

**16<sup>th</sup>**

*Thank you and Ron very much for Christmas present arrived safely this morning but you should really not bother. Penny also received your card and present she was very pleased since they have another year yet of being very hard up.*

*Hope you have a peaceful Christmas and all the best for the New Year.*

*Lots of love, Jean.*

## 1976

On January 3<sup>rd</sup> 1976 I got married at home:

*January 6<sup>th</sup> 1976.*

*It was a beautiful wedding – it took place on our back verandah with 40 people present and Penny looked lovely I'll send you some photos and a piece of cake today. ...Keith made a very sweet speech amongst other things he said he was glad to say he had not found a traditional mother-in-law but he felt he had found a friend.*

My mother catered with her usual excellence. I was completely oblivious to the pressure I had put on her to organise a wedding with 6 weeks notice, she did a marvellous job. The photographer at our wedding was the only mistake. He was freelance and had come earlier to take the photos for an article for *Cleo* magazine and my father had liked his work. He did not have much of a clue about wedding photos and took black and white film and one of coloured slides. He only charged \$40 and took ages to get them to us. Luckily my sister-in-law also took a lot of photos and it is hers that provide the best record.

My mother's wedding day was in stark contrast to the happy family occasion we shared. She and my father were married on a Thursday, April 11<sup>th</sup> 1946, in a Registry Office. They had wanted to get married as soon as my mother turned 21 but my father's mother would not give consent, so they waited until he was also 21. With a special licence they needed only to wait three days, not the normal three weeks. With the disapproval on both parents' sides and my mother's recent unpleasant memories of her brother's wedding, my parents eloped.

My father had surreptitiously removed my mother's belongings for several days beforehand and taken them to their new home in St Helen's. They wrote to their parents, my father's letter read "*Coming to London, as arranged but married*". My mother spent the night before her wedding mending her father's long Johns.

My parents have no photographs of their wedding but my mother remembers wearing one of her few pieces of good clothing, a Munrospun suit in a heathermix Harris Tweed with a scarf over her head to keep her hair tidy. The ceremony, so brisk my mother did not have time to take her scarf off, was witnessed by two medical student friends. The four of them then caught a bus back into Liverpool where they met up with my mother's younger brother and they lunched at the Stork Hotel on rabbit pie.

They spent their honeymoon doing things with my father's mother and brother. The theatre, zoo and crown jewels captured my mother's interest but she comments "*some of the visits to Oma's friends and the odd other relation who had survived the Holocaust were a bit tedious*".

There was a critical housing shortage so they set up home in two rooms for rent in a middle-aged miner's cottage with minimal facilities: *"The bathroom had a cold water sink and a copper which had a gas ring under it which heated water for a bath if you had the time and patience"*. The toilet was down the backyard.

My grandmother was mortified at their actions assuming my mother had got herself pregnant, bringing shame on the family (actually my parents were both virgins on their wedding night). Even when she heard my mother had a teaching appointment she was too proud to apologise and they did not communicate again until seven years later after I was born.

20.1.76

*My Dearest Mum,*

*Lovely to have your letter of the 8<sup>th</sup> January. all these great grandchildren. I did not know Sheila was expecting another baby. I hope her husband is not made redundant. they are such uncertain times for young people. Thank goodness my children's husbands seem to be in secure jobs as far as one can tell.*

This was still a world where married women and mothers were expected to be dependent on their spouses. My mother does not question this assumption by hoping her daughters acquire secure jobs or even dream of a time when secure maternity leave will be part of the system, although she has felt for a long time that mothers should be paid to stay home and do their own mothering. At the time she was basking in the glow of my success at medical school:

*Penny heard yesterday that she had won another prize this time for the best student in fifth year in the department of infant and child health. I am really thrilled at having a daughter doing medicine it was what I would most like to have done. I think she and Keith will make an excellent husband and wife doctor team.*

She was also farewelling her youngest daughter who had won a coveted place in the Law School at the Australian National University in Canberra.

*Jemima sets off on Feb 6<sup>th</sup>. She will have a little holiday on the way she is spending three days each in Adelaide, Melbourne and Sydney before going to stay with Leonora in Bathurst and then Leonora will take her to Canberra and settle her in. I shall miss Jemima very much we have become very close this last year but I don't worry about her since she has a good head on her shoulders and is far too ambitious to run in to trouble, though going from here to Canberra is like going from London to New York. The scholarship however does pay for her to come home by air three times a year.*

My mother's home now became a system unfamiliar to me, she, my father and their two sons. Mark and David got on very well considering the nine-year age difference, probably in part because David was so bright.

20.2.76 (on envelope)

*Kids don't start school here until they are six here. I don't know how David will cope because he finds his own age group so young already. The girl at the supermarket asked him condescendingly*



the other day "Will you go to school next year" and as quick as a flash he replied "No to University of course".

**Feb. 25 1976**

*In spite of our ups and downs here I still think we did the best thing coming to Australia. We have had ten years in a very healthy environment and Paul and I are still close and in love and we certainly can't grumble about the success of our daughters here or the calibre of the men they have married. Did I ever tell you that Gollanz republished The Free Family with some chapters by the girls?*

*One of the big women's magazines here "Woman's Day" is doing a story which should be out in about a month's time.*

The book was called *Free Family and Feedback*. I think it was about then that I realised my success as an adult would be the validation of my parents' beliefs, they would be judged on our lives. At the time this was not too much of a problem but it begged the question about what was acceptable, and was the judgement of the general public necessarily right. My father lists our degrees and occupations as confirmation of the success of the theory, but they do not necessarily represent happiness and at times coming to terms with the burden of being the proof of a very specific child-rearing pudding has been problematic. Having said that, I must acknowledge the enormous courage it took for them to stand firm in the face of community antagonism and resistance with beliefs that I continue to support in principle and in practice.

**30.3.76**

*Our press has given a big coverage to both Wilson's departure and the Snowden, Margaret split. What makes me cross is that the papers appear to blame Margaret well I reckon no marriage split is ever one sided. I can remember ever so clearly you saying when they would not let Margaret marry Peter Townsend "Mark my words they will rue the day they stopped her marrying him." When I met Snowden and Margaret here I liked her and it was the second time we had talked quite a lot to Snowden (in Nottingham the other time) and we both felt he was quite out of his depth in the Royal scene. I reckon Charles is right when he says his bride must know what she is in for.*

History will show she did not.

My parents' marriage was more sound and they celebrated their 30<sup>th</sup> Wedding Anniversary with a few friends and family, champagne and cake. Shortly after they left for a two-week holiday to the Eastern States combining business with visits to their oldest and youngest daughters. Erica moved home to look after the boys. My mother thoroughly enjoyed her trip:

**May 9<sup>th</sup>**

*It was lovely meeting so many interesting people and seeing so many different places but I found it very hard settling down again to a mundane life. One of the interesting things we did was to have lunch in Parliament House in Canberra and then have seats in the speaker's gallery in the House. It was great fun seeing all the Parliamentarians in the flesh and talking to many of them. The guy who took us to lunch was Dr Jim Cairns he was Deputy Premier in the Labour Government under Whitlam and was sacked from being Treasurer by Whitlam. I must admit I*

*liked him, though I did not take to his secretary Junie Morosi too well who was the cause of a lot of the brou-ha-ha. He seemed very disillusioned with politics and when I asked what he thought of Whitlam, I was told he had not changed his opinion for twenty years Whitlam was a cretin. Dr Cairns seemed such a gentle man I was amazed he had stood it in politics.*

*It was tremendous and rather funny seeing Leonora in charge of a college full of students. I must say she seemed good at it. I wonder if she ever will marry. She would have a lot to give up, the college is in such a beautiful place, she has a rent free flat with heating, food and cleaning free, even free laundry facilities. She runs her car gets good holidays and earns about \$12,000 a year, she has some good friends too so makes you wonder what more she needs.*

As David approached school age my mother canvassed the idea of home-schooling, or starting a small school of her own.

**May 28<sup>th</sup>**

*David ... has a phenomenal memory for a little chap – he knows so much I really wonder how his teacher will cope. In fact I'm wondering whether to start a small school of about ten children so he can be educated at home.*

The school my mother considered starting would have been run along the lines of A.S. Neill's "Summerhill" using a small building on the Kelmscott property. Erica was to have been involved with the teaching. The idea did not progress as the financial pressures continued to mount. My mother doesn't think she would have been the right person to run a home school as she valued too much her time alone.

*I was quite sad to see Jemima go back I have really enjoyed her company during the holiday but it is good to have the others so near. I see lots of Erica and Penny but not so much of Nicky. I feel Roger is trying to separate Nicola from her family.*

Religion was the underlying issue. Nicola's involvement in the Catholic Church was alienating and my mother felt that her husband saw the family as a bad influence on her. My mother recalls Nicola being disturbed when she found how children were treated in church. The treatment of children by society was part of what set us aside, in a sense the topic that gave us (the family) the 'moral high ground' over the rest of the world, sadly pedestals, especially self-erected, are high, small, isolating and vulnerable to collapse.

*I have been following the fortunes of the pound and Harold Wilson's rather disgraceful honours list and the big scrap in Parliament yesterday was widely reported here. England really needs a clarion call by a Henry V or a Churchill to bring it back to responsibility & hard work. I was very very sorry to hear the Jeremy Thorpe bit – I always admired him & was very sorry for his wife – wasn't his first wife and one of his children killed in a car crash?*

I like the little mentions of political and social history, especially when they are a little enigmatic. The Churchill Society 1998 Christmas Lecture reports that Harold Wilson was

"adept at buying off the press for his own political ends" and the honours list on his resignation was so controversial that it threatened the very existence of the system (Lidstone, 1998).

Jeremy Thorpe was leader of the British Liberal Party but he was forced to resign after being accused of a homosexual relationship with Norman Scott, who claimed to have been threatened by Thorpe after the end of their affair (Wikipedia, 2003).

My mother's finances were always in the back of her mind and for once she could share some better news with her mother. A large Swedish firm had taken a \$4000 option on the manufacturing rights of Sculpcrete, this was offset by the \$400 it cost to take out each patent and with patents in Australia, Sweden, Canada and America already granted and pending in South Africa, Germany, Italy, Holland, U.K. and Japan there was no net gain. My father was planning another overseas trip to promote the product while my mother was facing the end of the financial year:

**14.6.76**

*It has been a busy time for me I not only have to get the books ready for the income tax accountant but also get the accounts ready for the Government auditor so that we can claim our Federal Government overseas development grant.*

My mother managed money very efficiently and enjoyed the process. I think it helped her feel some sense of control over their financial dealings but she did not like the processes required to get the Government grants or the fact that they were "*playing catch-up*".

**28 June**

*I seem to have spent the last week fighting bureaucracy – oh how I wish I were a man and could get in to one of these high places. They have suddenly widened the road outside the kindergarten Erica and David are at and made it no parking. I have suggested a practical common sense solution but just because it is partially state government and partially local government they don't want to be responsible. ...I have just had a phone call and someone is doing something at last – not in response to my reason I might add but because I rang the Minister for Local Government and told him that we were going to double park outside the kindergarten at rush hour and block the traffic and I would make sure the T.V. stations and press were there. Well I am tickled pink – I better be careful or I will be getting a reputation as a tartar.*

I am curious about the inherent powerlessness implied by being female. My mother reflects on the social change since then and how difficult it is for modern younger women to have any idea about the patronizing attitudes prevalent toward women in the 1970s. She recalls with frustration how her ideas were assumed to be my father's and how it was even suggested that he wrote her frequent letters to the press. The categorization of being "the little woman" infuriated her. On the occasion mentioned she took great delight in finding a way to bypass their inability to listen to reason.

19<sup>th</sup> July

Did an 8 minute piece on T.V. last Thursday on children's upbringing – Erica reckoned it was very good.

My mother had no real memory of this but thinks it came after an article in *The West Australian* newspaper by Hugh Schmitt on *Free Family and Feedback* and was possibly done by Jenny Seaton asking questions about the book and the children. The article had been published on March 10<sup>th</sup> 1976 and began:

**After 17 years, here is the feedback on a free family**

Former Perth city planner Paul Ritter and his wife, Jean, have never punished their children and they laugh at the adage "spare the rod and spoil the child." (Schmitt, 1976)

It went on to give some background into the original book, a description of the family structure at the present time and some quotes from our feedback sections. I feel very disconnected from that time and my own opinions as written in the feedback book. Even with my mother's letters to give some context to the times it is difficult to remember the power of the contemporary social mores and the attitudes against which my parents had rebelled in the early 1950s when they took on the challenges of backing their beliefs with action. Doing the maths I realised that my mother had written the original when she was only in her early thirties. It seemed amazing.

She clarifies now that she did not write anywhere near as much of the book as is implied. The publisher had suggested the split into hers and my father's contributions and she believes a careful reader will pick the difference in style. The book had been originally titled *One, two, three little girls*. It had its origins in articles and long letters they had had published in magazines and journals. Her motivation to write came from her observations of women she knew: "*The idiocies of their approach, children left to cry until the clock struck, left to cry themselves to sleep and so on*". This passion for the rights of children had developed early as a result of a couple of incidents from her primary school days: once when she had been given the cane for altering a dictation and on another occasion when a boy had had his mouth washed out with soap and been humiliated in front of his peers for swearing.

Her opinions had been consolidated when she read of A.S. Neill and Grantley Dick-Read. My father's brother had introduced my father to the works of Wilhelm Reich, a psychoanalytic psychotherapist. When my parents went to Switzerland, for my father to study, my uncle sent them the journals which contained articles about Reich but also articles about Neill and Dick-Read. My mother describes this as "*wonderfully fortuitous*".

Reich, Neill and Dick Read gave them knowledge and philosophies that fuelled the idealism born in them by surviving the war. They felt a strong need to use their intelligence and abilities

to help other people. Neill appealed to my mother because he was on the side of the child and a report of Dick Read's methods of creating painless labour caught her imagination at a time when anything to do with childbirth engendered great fear. Reich offered enlightenment about sex but his philosophy failed to engage my mother in the way the others did. His words did inspire my father and he began to publish his own small Reichian journal in 1954 he called *Orgonomic Functionalism*. He continued to publish it for ten years creating friction with its demands on my mother's time and their money when she felt the needs of her growing family should come first.

When it came to the effect of *The Free Family* on her children my mother believes they were aware of a potential impact. They declined to use the first dust jacket suggested because it implied that they invited their children to watch them have intercourse. They had to pay from their own pockets for a replacement. They were surprised at the way in which other people misinterpreted the theory allowing their children to do what they liked without respect for the rights of others, a principle intrinsic to my parents' philosophy.

She describes the fact that some of her children mind that the book was written as:

*One of the surprises of my life . . . I found it difficult to see why it would have deleterious effects, after all it showed how much we care . . . . There are so many people round the world who have written to us to say what a lifesaver the book was to them . . . . I hate it that Mark and Leo find the book distasteful but I can't help wondering if they have ever really thought of the battle we took on to try to change people's attitudes to children – just suppose there are more happy children . . . because it was written not for our glory but for their welfare. Was it worth it?? I think so.*

Conversely she doesn't think she would do it as she is now, preferring to protect her privacy and personal space.

Despite the changes in the world, particularly in mass communication, that she considers have made child-rearing more difficult she believes certain fundamental principles still apply: *"The need for unconditional love even when you are making quite clear you don't like what they are doing, the need for the serious no, the need to imbue self discipline, the need for respect for other people's rights"*.

Back in 1976 the advent of colour TV was bringing enjoyment and my mother savoured the prospect of watching the Olympic Hockey Final between Australia and New Zealand. The same letter brought some of her homespun, but contemporarily relevant, wisdom about diet:

### 30.7.76

*I do think diet is important I watch what we eat – very little fry – most things can be grilled and lots of fruit and salad and nuts and raisins are a great standby. I keep a canister in the*

kitchen filled with dried fruit and nut mixture and even the married kids still head straight for it when they come home. I guess the osteoarthritis in my back would be worse if I did not watch my diet. Find it hard to remember I'm 52 – only remember it in fact when I look in the mirror, too busy the rest of the time.

15.8.76

Well our drought finally broke with a cloudburst yesterday. I was driving home from the hockey match with the boys in the car when down it came. I have never driven in such rain. I had to come down Echo Rd – a quite steep hill near us and it was like driving through a raging torrent – there were bow waves of water either side of the car just like in a boat. The boys of course were making all sorts of wise cracks like "Quick throw out a line I see a fish." Our Mark is a bit of a wag at times – sometimes he reminds me of Ron – he can be so witty. I just heard on the radio that three inches of rain fell yesterday.

My mother commented to her mother about how those of us who had already left home would just turn up and assume a meal would be available and the difficulties when she had planned a meal like steak that could not be easily shared. I feel retrospectively guilty that we assumed we would be welcome any time we turned up and never gave any thought to whether my mother would have enough to cater for us. She may have fussed over it but it obviously had no impact on me.

Her life continued to be busy with meetings, Mark's sporting commitments and David's idiosyncrasies:

Sept 3<sup>rd</sup>

David is as funny as ever I was explaining to him how some people thought the world evolved and how some people thought God had made it and he said "You mean the earth is just a model for God to play with."

My father was caught up planning his next trip to the USA, my mother a trip to the Royal Show.

21.9.76

It is such a beautiful spring day here the sort of day when you feel like singing . . . . Another sign of spring here is the Royal Show. It is on next week and I hope to have a day pottering around with Erica. I love shows and love looking at the food and the dressmaking and the displays. Paul doesn't so it is marvellous to have a daughter to go with.

I always thought my mother hated 'shows'. She never came to Goose Fair with us in Nottingham, that was my father's job and he would always win us a coconut at the coconut shy – I still love the taste of coconut milk! But reading my mother's letter now I realise it was not the shows she disliked but the process of taking small children. In fact she enjoyed the exhibits and had fond memories of her Grandad at the Padiham and Burnley Royal Shows. One of my mother's tapestries depicts her memories of the childhood shows and fairs she attended.

6<sup>th</sup> Oct 1976

*Paul left on his trip last night so I am having a quiet morning to get over the hassle of his departure. I hope he will soon stop these hectic trips – he finds it difficult to remember he is 52 – he still runs rather than walks – doesn't smoke, doesn't drink, doesn't need glasses. his blood pressure is normal and he sleeps like a top. I guess being his own boss is the right thing for Paul even if at times I despair at the way in which our fortunes go up and down like a yo-yo.*

My father's departures were always chaotic and my mother describes them as "ghastly" requiring several days' recovery after he left. It did not seem that he could get away without some drama or crisis and she recalls one occasion when he left with a \$3000 debt unpaid and Leonora and Paul's half-sister Carla (living in Holland) loaned her the money. His absences did, however, give her the opportunity to do some of the things around the house and garden she wanted to without deferring to him. On this occasion she made curtains for four rooms and did some painting. She was also providing emotional support to me as I faced my final exams in medicine.

3 Nov 1976

*Penny's exam results come out on Nov 24<sup>th</sup> and if she passes these I shall be so proud to have a doctor daughter. I always wanted to be a doctor and Penny and I always find plenty to talk about. I shall be so thrilled I shall be tempted to send you a cable. Penny of course alternates by feeling sure she will pass to being equally sure she will fail. After six years study it seems ridiculous that the results hinge on exams .... Penny has not failed a single exam yet but when I remind her of that she just replies gloomily "There is always a first time." Nikki too is convinced she will fail her finals; if she passes she will have a B.Sc. Maths. It is a pity Oma did not live a bit longer she was so keen on education for women and would have been so proud of the girls. And Dad if he could only realise what your sacrifice in sending me to University has meant to the next generation. And the boys are bright and will get their chance too.*

Medicine was a long haul. I remember sitting at my desk looking at all the files full of information I was meant to know and feeling defeated. Leonora was encouraging saying that they could only ever test you on about 5% of the information in an exam and you only needed to get 50% of that right – so logically you only needed to know 2.5% of the lot. Of course which 2.5% was the problem. I would study long hours munching on chocolate beanies for 'brain food'. My mother's letter confirms her emotional investment in my career choice. Her preference was certainly a strong part of my choice of university course, a chance to vicariously live out her own dreams. She had been very envious of her friend Gaynor who had been able to go to medical school because her parents had the money whereas my mother's education was paid for by scholarship, but not one sufficient to fund a medical degree. My mother added her acknowledgment of her father as a fillip for her mother: *"I suspect by this time I was feeling much more compassion towards Mum, life was not the wonderment I had dreamt of when I was young and she was increasingly frail"*.

My grandmother's frailty triggered comments in most of my mother's letters encouraging and egging her on to come and visit: *"Wish you were here to sit on my verandah and look at the hills and have a good natter. This time of the year is superb"* (3 Nov 1976).

My father returned from his trip exhausted and having lost a stone in weight. As usual he brought lots of gifts including some silver jewellery from Mexico. The Americans had shown an interest in Sculptcrete but nothing tangible.

After 11 years in Australia my mother decided to become an Australian citizen:

**18.11.76**

*I can't see me living in England again – the children are all settled here and the way of life suits me, what is more last time the Poms played here I was barracking for the Aussies, and after all the Queen is Queen of Australia too . . . . I think I have acquired a bit of the forthright Aussie attitude I think it is high time humans started to pull together instead of against each other all the time.*

On the 24<sup>th</sup> November the final year medicine results were posted on a notice board inside the door of the medical faculty building at the Queen Elizabeth II Medical Centre. There was nothing private about it. Just a panicky, breath-holding moment when you scanned for your name and tried to absorb the letters that appeared next to the subjects. The relief when I registered that I had not only passed but been awarded the prize in Child Health was enormous. My clearest memory of it was walking back to our flat, the elation and liberation intoxicating.

My mother's pride is evidenced in her sending her mother a telegram. She reveled in the simple induction ceremony where we took the Hippocratic Oath and received the prizes.

Nicola completed her BSc in Maths early in December and Jemima passed her first year law exams.

**Undated**

*Happy New Year.*

*Christmas was lovely – not a single cross word and everyone happy with their presents. I had a beautiful opal brooch from Paul, records from Leo, my favourite liqueur from Nic, a housecoat from Erica, handbag from Penny and records again from Jemima, Mark and David. I play my stereogram a lot so am very happy to have records.*

*A lovely extra Christmas present is that Erica is expecting a baby in early August. We are all thrilled and happy about it. She poor lamb is a bit morning sick but cheerful nevertheless. I enclose a copy of the Sunday column I wrote. It has been lovely having all the family home, including the sons in law and total success all round in their exams. Leonora now has a Diploma in Education to add to her other qualifications. Mark had an excellent school report.*

*This weekend we will all be together too for New Year . . .*

1976 was a pivotal year for me. My last as a student, my first as a wife. Much of it is lost to my memory or residing as a blur of recognition or a flash triggered by something else. My intermittent letters to my new husband tell me stories about myself that I have no recollection of living.



1977

The shift in attitudes brought on by feminism in the early seventies was taking hold, setting a different stage for girls coming into adulthood. The option of remaining single by choice, disregarding social pressures to marry and procreate, and entering a profession with a view to working in it for a life-time became increasingly commonplace. During her Christmas visit home Jemima had provided my mother with some stimulating conversation championing these concepts of feminism:

26.1.77

*I shall miss her when she goes she is good company – intelligent and lively, though we disagree on lots of things – she is all for women's emancipation and freedom and can't see the need for husbands be interesting to see how she goes.*

A major shift in family life was the beginning of David's formal schooling. This gave my mother a renewed freedom although it would prove problematic. He settled in initially with his teacher recognizing quickly that he needed to be kept busy.

My mother filled the free time available to her with an increased commitment to the West Australian Branch of the Association for the Welfare of Children in Hospital (AWCH) becoming its Chairperson in March. The AWCH website gives a brief history of the association, which is now the Association for the Welfare of Child Health. It came into being on the 15th February 1973 as a voluntary organisation consisting of both professional and non-professional people from all parts of Australia, interested in formulating and satisfying the non-medical needs of children and their families in hospital and health care (Association for the Welfare of Children in Hospital, 2002).

My mother had been involved briefly in the UK, just before we left, with a movement to improve parents' access to sick children and was asked by the Professor of Child Health, Dr Bill MacDonald, to be the Founding Chairman in WA. The Association had the support of such people as Dr Fiona Stanley and the Director of Nursing at Princess Margaret Hospital. My mother recalls the resistance from some of the older doctors but the strength of the movement carried the day. My mother's motivation for her interest stemmed from her lifelong sensitivity to the needs of children with some specific memories. She tells the chilling story of her older brother's best friend who, at the age of fifteen, was admitted to hospital with an infected boil on his chest, before the wide-spread availability of antibiotics. Visiting hours at the hospital were two hours per week and his mother was not allowed to stay with him. He developed septicaemia and died. His mother found out from a phone call to the corner storekeepers who

sent someone over to tell her. My mother can remember the mother's scream as she rushed past their house.

She describes how a hospitalized child would be handed over to the doctors' and nurses' care. Parents were discouraged as it was felt they unsettled the child. It has been realised since that the child became docile and apathetic thinking it had been abandoned. Doctors were treated as gods and were often insensitive.

Once unlimited visiting had been agreed on the biggest challenge for AWCH was to get permission for a parent to be there when the child was coming round from an anaesthetic. My mother was vehement in pointing out that you can hear before you can speak when you are coming round so that a soothing, familiar voice could only be an asset to a fretful child.

In late March my mother went to the State Reception for the Queen:

*March 28<sup>th</sup>*

*I wonder whether they will show pictures of the Queen in Perth on your T.V. if they did you should have been able to pick me out. I was wearing a bright yellow linen dress. I talked with the Queen about meeting her on a bombsite in Liverpool in 1943 when I was a Uni student. The Duke of Edinburgh asked Paul what he did for a living. The Queen's face is far more shut off than either Princess Margaret's or Princess Anne's and for warmth of approach she can't hold a candle to her mother.*

*Personally I think Australia should stop having Governors for each state and a Governor General and instead should have King Andrew I of Australia. It seems silly to have a queen so far away. She has only been to Perth three times in the last 25 years it would make much more sense to make Andrew King of Australia. There have been a few demonstrations against the monarchy but mostly I think because people don't consider the alternatives.*

This seems a remarkable opinion and my mother is amazed that she wrote that about royalty. She is not sure what the alternative is but despite the "idiocies" of the royals feels it is a preferable system to that of the USA or dictatorships.

David's honeymoon period with formal schooling hit its first snag that Easter, an event he still remembers:

*11.4.77*

*Had a real upset with David last week. A teacher told them the Easter story and he was so upset that anyone could be that cruel. He said to me that no one would ever persuade him to go near a church again. He had nightmares and was very slow going to sleep. but a lot of cuddling seems to have helped.*

A strike by air-traffic controllers, preventing any movement of aeroplanes and therefore of post, interrupted the letters in April and May. It also stopped Jemima from coming home for her holidays. Fortunately the situation resolved in time for my mother to attend the national conference of AWCH and spend a few days with Leonora.

The conference was held at Sydney University and attended by 320 delegates from around Australia and representing a wide range of professions. *"All with one concern the quality of life which the under three year old is experiencing in society today" (28<sup>th</sup> May. Sydney).* My mother recalls proposing that the mission of the association should be wider encompassing the rights of children in general.

At home Erica's pregnancy was progressing well as was the building of her house at Crestwood:

*They have started building Erica's house but it won't be ready until September so we will be having a little baby around for a while. The Dr who is going to deliver it says that Penny can be there too if she wishes. Erica is very pleased at that since she feels Penny can keep an eye on things.*

This comment makes me shudder at the arrogance of believing I would be better placed to make safe decisions about a birth than a doctor with decades of experience in the field. It is iconic of the belief systems my parents had entrenched in us – again born of very valid needs to change what was happening to mothers and babies in the 1940s and 50s but of increasingly less relevance as the pendulum swung under the momentum of the feminist, natural childbirth and other movements.

My mother's return to Perth had been greeted by another problem with David and school:

*June 12<sup>th</sup>*

*I had to sort them out at David's school when I got back. A big grouch of a teacher had bawled him out and he was refusing to go back to school because she would not listen to his explanation of what had actually happened. So I told her and the Head that I did not believe in education by fear and that even a six year old has the right to be heard. My actions were applauded by David's teacher and a lot of others and mothers too because that particular teacher, who must be close to six feet tall terrorises everyone! She was supposed to apologise to David but of course has not done so.*

David later in his school life coined the term "teaching by threatology" to describe another such teacher.

Her next few letters bring up a number of issues of social context.

Firstly relating to bad language:

*June 28<sup>th</sup>*

*Well although we did not see the parade (for the Queen's Jubilee) on T.V. we did see the fireworks – my word what an absolutely glorious display – looked far bigger and better than those for George V's jubilee which I can still remember very clearly. Do you remember when that radio commentator was drunk and said “the damn fleets gone” and how shocked we all were at the swear word. I wish we could get back a bit to old fashioned morality I am so sick of the crudity of today's youth. I insist on a reasonable standard of language in the house and as for the stupid women's libbers trying to show themselves as good as men while copying all their worst habits – can't see any sense in it at all.*

She is now amused that she thought the language was bad then, admitting nowadays to using the F word with gusto, on occasion, herself. It occurred to me recently when watching a prominent Australian comedian with my adult children and listening to him use f... frequently and c... occasionally that my children's children will have no words left to use to shock their parents.

My mother's social commentary continues:

*I have a real set to from time to time with these women who try to make out you get more out of life by working for some petty boss. As far as I am concerned women are the backbone of family life and the nation and they can run rings around men without showing themselves to be as idiotic as men are with their smoking, drinking and swearing.*

This opinion has not changed. She considers the homemaker of fundamental importance and believes work habits and places need to be rearranged to facilitate women maintaining career and self-esteem while their children need their mother. She sees a difference in the role of mothers and fathers and acknowledges both as important.

My father was planning his next trip abroad to South America in September and my mother would have loved to go home to the UK, but despite her many attempts to persuade my grandmother to come for a visit by saying how easy jet travel was she herself was daunted by the prospect of such a long trip.

Communication was interrupted by another postal strike in the middle of the year and when it resumed my mother gave an update on family news. Jemima had been home, telling of her first regular boyfriend, Mark had been starring in the school play and everyone had been waiting for the birth of Erica's baby.

The telegram announcing Jessica's birth is missing, she was born on August 25<sup>th</sup>. She was warmly and enthusiastically greeted by the family and her birth notice from us in *The West Australian* newspaper recognised her as “the first of the third generation”, a comment that speaks to the isolation that existed between us and our families of origin.

### **1<sup>st</sup> September**

*Jessica is already a week old and this is the first chance I have had to write. So far she is a darling contented child and Erica has persisted although her nipples were rather sore and now she has got breast-feeding successfully established. Penny delivered Jessica ... and Erica remembered all she had learnt and kept good control of herself so that the labour was only seven hours which is not bad for a first baby.*

I think describing my role in Jessica's birth as 'delivering' her is rather flattering. She was born very quickly in the end. I think I caught her rather than delivered her. I do recall the midwife as a rather intimidating woman with excessive make-up on a rather haggard face who was appalled that I insisted on carrying Jess to the nursery to be bathed rather than pushing her in the crib. Apparently carrying the babies was against the rules in case you dropped them. Erica was very uncomfortable in hospital and went home the next day where a Silver Chain nurse visited to provide post-natal care.

They stayed at Kelmscott with my parents while the finishing touches were put on their house. Despite their close relationship my mother was not entirely happy with the arrangement:

*We have managed very well while they have been staying here but candidly Mum I'll be glad when they move into their own home. I like days on my own at times and that just has not been possible. Paul's overseas trip has been postponed a little but I shall quite enjoy a time with just me and the two boys when he is away. I must say I am glad I can't have any more babies.*

On 13<sup>th</sup> September my mother's brother-in-law died of a heart attack in England.

### **2<sup>nd</sup> October**

*I was so shocked by Roy's death. I suppose I remember him as he was and have not seen the growing older of the last few years. The cigarette smoking of the past will not have helped but poor poor Molly.*

*Erica is a lovely mother. Jessica will have to find a nickname for me or call me Jean. Gran is a special name to me and can only mean your mother and Nan means you so there will have to be an alternative.*

My mother's 14 grandchildren all call her Jean. She says it makes her feel like a person and not someone to whom they have to feel dutiful. Jessica summed the nomenclature issue up when she started school saying *"There are millions of Grans in the world but only one Jeannie"*.

My mother then describes taking David to his first concert:

*The fifth military district concert band played and finished up with Beethoven's "Wellington's Victory" with full battle effects. David was entranced – I have often told him of the old major and his dress swords. He has a remarkably good ear for music – I seem to remember Dad did. His constant refrain at the moment is that he wants to be Scottish and play the bagpipes.*

My grandmother's health was becoming an increasing problem and reading between the lines of my mother's letters it sounded though she was having to wait for appointments through the National Health system:

**Saturday Oct 30<sup>th</sup>**

*Tell me this, isn't it possible in England now to have a private appointment with a specialist without you having to go through hospital. Can't you go to his private rooms? I have written to Ronnie that he should ring your doctor and do this. I'll pay the bill it is much pleasanter being a private patient. Penny said you should jump on a plane and come here – a doctor granddaughter could get you specialist treatment fast. Such a ridiculous delay. I must say the British Health service has a poor reputation here and making you wait till Dec 5<sup>th</sup> seems incredible to me.*

The health system was not the only criticism she had of her country of origin:

*We do get the showing of riots in England on our T.V. it is a real question of the sins of the fathers being visited on the children because if it had not been for British nineteenth century imperialism the coloured people would not have had the right to enter Great Britain. Do you know that when there are a lot of strikes here it is called "having the British disease".*

I ask my mother her reflections on this and she acknowledges a change of perspective such that she would now see the problem more from the point of view of the dispossession of the native races. She describes it as a long process "*from the might and right of the British Empire to being able to read Nelson Mandela's 'Long Walk to Freedom'*".

*We are in for yet another general election on Dec 10<sup>th</sup>, there had been such a lot of union trouble that Fraser is going to the country. Leonora has become involved quite a lot with a new group called "The Australian Democrats" I could quite see Leonora entering parliament. Jemima is the other one of my children who is very politically conscious.*

In 1977, Don Chipp, a Liberal Member of the House of Representatives and former Minister, was approached by people from a number of smaller parties and by other concerned individuals to hold a series of meetings across Australia with a view to forming a new party which would give ordinary people a real say on policies and directions. The "Australian Democrats" were formed after a series of meetings around the country. This was a factor in Malcolm Fraser calling an earlier election. Other factors were the need to bring the elections for the Senate and House of Representatives back into line and the threat of a deteriorating economy. The government offered voters tax cuts that never eventuated (Australian Democrats, 2004).

My grandmother's health continued to deteriorate and she was admitted to hospital with a stomach upset and suspected diabetes. My mother felt very disempowered by the distance between them, relying on her younger brother to let her know what was happening.

**Nov 8<sup>th</sup>**

*I was so sorry to hear from Ron that you were in hospital. He said you had had an upset tum and they thought it was diabetes. What a nuisance. Will the district nurse come to see you when you*

*are back home again. ... Ronnie said he was planning to go up to Liverpool this coming weekend so I hope he will ring me up when he has seen you. I told him to find out what you need or would most like and get it on my behalf and I will refund him so please imagine what you would like most.*

My father had once again left on an overseas business trip leaving my mother to keep the property and family running:

**19.11.77**

*Paul will be in London just for the weekend but then he goes on to Stockholm, Copenhagen, Munich and Israel and Iran. I will be glad when he is home. I don't much like him buzzing round Germany and the Middle East. I always worry about plane hijackers but I suppose one is much more at risk just going to town. I am trying to get a bit of painting done and some new curtains made while he is away but there are just not enough hours in the day with all the watering needing doing. We have a severe water shortage which is going to cause a great deal of trouble this summer. We do not get any rain normally from now until April but depend on water in the dams but these are very low. We have water restrictions but the real trouble will come if we have another dry winter next year.*

The watering was of the fruit trees my father had planted. He fancied himself as an orchardist like their dear friend Dave Gwynne, who had provided us with fruit since our first weeks in Kelmscott. My father, however, had neither the time nor patience to plant or maintain the trees properly and many did not survive. For my mother there was enough to do looking after the family and trying to steal time for herself without having to look after an orchard.

My father returned full of optimism and the family enjoyed a happy Christmas, my mother describes as "*one of the best I ever remember*" (26.12.77).

*There were fourteen of us to dinner including Jessica. It is very hard to imagine what a cold Christmas is like any more. ... I hope your Christmas was good we drank a toast to you all in cider and send all our love to you for the New Year.*

My grandmother's life was about to change, her failing health triggering a plan to move her to a bungalow alongside her eldest son's house so he and his wife could look after her. It was a necessary move for her physical health but psychologically she would feel the loss of her garden and her independence keenly.





## 1978

1978 marked a generational shift in family life. The birth of her first grandchild the year before and the hospitalisation and ill health of her mother for the first time were significant markers in my mother's life. Her focus in her letters was on the everyday with commentary on her children and granddaughter. My father's business finances were often precarious but not yet pervadingly so.

The review of my grandmother's living conditions necessitated by her failing health triggered family dissent in England with my mother's older brother and his wife recognising a fiscal benefit in caring for my grandmother. My mother made her own suggestion:

*25<sup>th</sup> January*

*I wonder what you have decided to do, I can see advantages to both – a nice convenient bungalow as against familiar surroundings and neighbours. Hard to decide – if you are going to move why not to an air-conditioned home with your daughter here?*

Some letters seem to have gone missing as my grandmother has asked questions my mother has already answered, this appears to be a recurrent problem during the year, possibly as a result of my grandmother moving around a lot from one family member to another or possibly because of the unreliable postal services.

It is a month before the next letter:

*23<sup>rd</sup> Feb.*

*I am just trying to scrawl a line while Jessica is asleep. Erica is doing six hours a week lecturing at a Teachers College which is extremely well paid so I look after Jess. She really is a darling child and so far we enjoy each other's company.*

At the same time she was finalising a script for ABC radio.

*Undated* (Envelope reads Spring '78)

*It takes a long time from an idea to it actually going to air but my script for the Australian Broadcasting Commission called Psychobabble finally goes to air on May 21<sup>st</sup>. I am really very pleased about it, it is based on the fairy story "the Emperor's New Clothes" and I point out how many people take notice of psychologists without understanding what they are saying. It feels good being able to do something new like writing a radio script and get paid for it – \$300.*

As it happened my mother would not be available to read her own script. The Government package to assist exports meant she could access financial support to go with my father on a trip to Europe to sell his invention, as long as she was working with him. After 13 years she would finally get her chance to go "home" and see her mother.

303.78

No doubt Ron has told you by now that with a little bit of luck I will be in England for a week at the end of April . . . . I only get a short time because it is a Government sponsored trip and I can't make a holiday of it or they will not pay my fare.

*I have a very busy time before I leave here on April 17<sup>th</sup> for the trade fair in Germany including recording a programme for ABC radio and being in a film for the Education Dept. on community participation in school management. Also organising Mark to stay with a friend and David with Erica and finding someone to look after the dog and cat, locking up the house and so on.*

*I keep my fingers crossed that nothing drastic happens.*

She left Australia on 14<sup>th</sup> April stopping at Bangkok on the way to Amsterdam where she met up with Carla and her family. My father had exhibitions of Sculptcrete at a trade exhibition in Hanover. My mother then flew to London where she met up with her brother, Ronnie, and spent some time with him and his partner in Folkestone. She found the rapport with her brother was as good as ever, "as if we had parted the day before". From there she went to Liverpool to be re-united with her mother and other siblings, travelling by train to her older brothers, where she met her sisters. In her diary of her trip my mother describes the moment of seeing her mother: "Shattered at the sight of Mum, moved beyond tears".

Now she recalls:

*I watched for her and had to hide for a moment when I saw her, I wept, I almost could not believe that this tiny little old lady was my Mum . . . . She had been still so powerful in my memory, it really tore me apart to see her dependency. They took me across the road to show me the bungalow that she moved in to not long after I was there. I spent the next two days just talking to Mum and holding her hand, I guess we really became close at that time, but I tell you it was bloody hard to leave. It was altogether a very emotional traumatic time but I think a lot of healing and "forgiveness", for want of a better word, took place.*

I ask for more detail about what drew her close, what had they talked about that brought healing between my 54-year-old mother and her 85-year-old mother.

*I had the vision of Mother as she was and in came this small anxious woman saying "Where's my Jeannie, where's my Jeannie?" It was as if the years had flown away and we were back in the kitchen at Stanley Park Ave ... and singing "O'er the hills to Aberdinnie, just to see my bonnie Jeannie".*

My mother was deeply moved and she sat and held her mother's hands and talked about the past:

*Dad and the fun and games on Duck apple night, Ronnie's birth, her regret at how she had reacted when I married Paul and her grudging respect that I did not come running home to her . . . her sorrow that I was so far away, her comments that, with Ronnie, I was like a separate intelligent family from her other three and she wished she had me to discuss world affairs with. Her sorrow that she did not think I was fulfilling my potential, her regret that I was involved in business because she did not trust it. She also warned me about some health problems that she thought were inheritable, that I would get as I got older.*

She describes how her mother barely left her side the entire time she was awake. She felt as if she had absorbed some genetic strength from the warmth and love she had felt during her stay.

Afterwards she rejoined my father in London where they spent a few days with his brother and family then they flew to Vienna where they met the 88-year-old man who was the last person to see my father when he left Czechoslovakia 39 years earlier. My mother comments on how amazed my father was at how much the old man could remember, reciting a long poem that my father had found amusing long ago. The two men spoke in German and my mother left them to go shopping. Her journal remarks: *"Got crosser and crosser while they talked German round me. Dismissed to go shopping"*.

They arrived back in Perth after an eventful trip home with a special present for David.

19578

*I have been back home a week now and this is the first morning that my brain has felt awake. The time change did not seem to worry me coming to Europe but I have kept nodding off at odd moments since returning home.*

*Probably Ron has told you by now but I hope you don't mind that he gave me Dad's sword to give David. David was so thrilled he tells everyone that he has got "Percy Rupert Charles's sword". He even told it for news at school. He has cleaned it so that the copper and bronze really gleam and he has it hanging by his bed. Mind you we had fun and games getting it here. we carried it out of the luggage and declared it at each change of plane. Each time it was carried in the plane's security locker. The Italian bloke was practically hysterical when he saw it, so we taped it to the walking stick and gave it to the Qantas man.*

I doubt they would have got it through post 9/11.

*The day we spent in Rome was terrible, it was the day Moro's body was found and the atmosphere in Rome was terrible, the hotel staff went on strike and crowds gathered in the most frightening fashion. Our plane was six and a half hours delayed in leaving so we ended up spending 2 nights on the airport.*

My father had been supposed to be giving a lecture but on arrival they found that the lecture had not been booked and the contact was in Naples. So they went sight-seeing. The discovery of former Prime Minister Aldo Moro's body overnight created mass hysteria and they were advised to go to the airport. My mother describes:

*As we left two massive crowds were approaching each other with threatening gestures, our cab whizzed between the two and raced past the Colosseum to the airport. The cab driver said if we had been a few minutes later we would not have got through.*

The airport was chaotic, all the flights were delayed and they were sent to a hotel nearby and finally flew out at 1 am the next morning, my mother swearing she would never travel again!

Back at home her radio program had gone to air on May 21<sup>st</sup>. Titled *Psychobabble the religion of the docile man*, it lasted 40 mins and engendered such a positive response it was later repeated. (5.6.78)

My father was already planning his next trip overseas. Sculpcrete options were continuing to fund their lives with Venezuela and Holland the latest to show an interest:

*The deal with Venezuela came off we now hold 10% interest in a Sculpcrete Venezuela company and the Americans are still interested. The Dutch have taken up their option so within a year or two we should be getting royalties from round the world. Paul always said that an overdraft left and divided by seven children would not mean much each but at this rate we might even leave them something.*

My mother recalls that they lived on the options paid for these deals but the contracts my father drew up fell apart. She believes that Sculpcrete, under other names, will have been plagiarised. I don't think my father was ever going to leave us any wealth of a financial nature. His legacy will be one of personality, writings and library and, for me, a rich vein of memory about his playful, gentle and inventive fathering when I was a small child in England, contrasted with the implications of being the child of a difficult man.

The time my mother spent babysitting Jessica led her to reflect on the shock she felt when she did not feel the same bonding to her grandchildren that she had to her children (July 13<sup>th</sup>). She found over time that she did not want to be committed to looking after children on a regular basis nor to wear out her welcome in her daughter's house and be seen as an "*interfering old biddy who thought her way was the only way*".

So she maintained some of her community involvement and one of the committees she kept on was the Lady Gowrie Research Centre Management Committee. Other members of this committee were the Director of Community Health and Welfare and the Leader of the State Opposition. She enjoyed the intellectual challenge and the respect shown to her views (July 19<sup>th</sup>). The Lady Gowrie Research Centre was part of the Australian Pre-school Association. There was one in each State named after the Governor General's wife who had a passionate interest in early childhood education and was instrumental in progressing the aims of the steering committee.

The movement was initiated by women in Melbourne in 1930 who saw the importance of children's early experience on their later development. Working in a voluntary capacity the

committee worked to establish demonstration centres for preschool child development in each capital city. In April 1938 the Prime Minister announced:

It has been decided that a Demonstration Centre should be established in each Capital City at which not only will the methods of care and instruction of young children be tested and demonstrated, but also problems of physical growth, nutrition and development will be studied. These Centres will be under the direction of the Commonwealth Department of Health. (The Gowrie (WA), 2004)

The centre in WA did research into early childhood education, ran a pre-school centre and provided scholarships to send students overseas. My mother represented the WA centre at National Conferences, an involvement she found very rewarding and stimulating. The centres are now known as “The Gowrie Inc”.

She was having her own childhood problem with David experiencing night terrors and she took the rare step of asking for her mother’s advice:

**24.7.78**

*I wonder whether any of us did what he does if he gets over heated from temperature or too many bedclothes he gets almost hysterical and appears to have hallucinations. The other night he was yelling and throwing himself about and shrieking “Help me Dad. Help me Mum.”. And we said well of course but what was the matter and he was quite beside himself shouting. “They are trying to steal the alphabet.”*

*These bad dreams not only worry me but seem to worry him too. Any experience of it yourself?*

He suffered from a classic night terror. He would open his eyes and scream out but he would not seem to see you or hear any reassurance. He would look at you without recognition. The only thing that helped was to cool him down with a wet flannel and he would go back to sleep. My grandmother did send some suggestions but they had all been tried.

David’s comments continued to amuse my mother and she enjoyed sharing them:

**15.8.78**

*Yesterday I said to him “I really don’t know why Mark McCleod is your friend” He replied “Mother, Mark is a follower I am a leader and it is far better for him to follow me than that awful Shane Dillello who would get him in to nothing but trouble”*

Business stresses were again pressing and my mother hints at them when she writes:

*I don’t know who will look after this place in another year or two. I often think I would like to buy a block of land across the park from Erica and build a nice convenient modern house but then I don’t know where Paul would put all his junk. I many many times wish he had not left the academic world for business – I so hate the uncertainty of it – here we owe the bank \$30,000 and they are screaming for it, we on the other hand are owed \$70,000 but don’t seem to be able to collect. One thing I impress on my daughters is to keep contact with their own careers so they*

*can always be independent. Money has been the one great hassle Paul and I have had – there is a hell of a lot to be said for a secure job.*

She kept her mind off her worries, busying herself with the tasks of parenting and the challenge of writing. In September she had a letter published in the paper about birth and bonding. (2.9.78)

My mother's concern for her mother and sense of impotence in doing anything to help was increasing. There had been delays and problems in purchasing the bungalow and my grandmother had been moving between her children until the purchase was complete.

**5.9.78**

*So be sure between you you really let me know how things really are. Have you thought of getting one of those little office chairs on wheels to move around with if you feel shaky. Do you remember when I was little I used to say I would push you in a wheel chair when you were old and here I am 12,000 miles away and unable to help. I should have brought you here years ago except that I know you are very attached to Molly's children.*

Over the next month she engages her mother in a dialogue about the past.

**12.9.78**

This would have been my grandfather's 85<sup>th</sup> birthday and my grandparent's 62<sup>nd</sup> wedding anniversary:

*To the Dearest Mother in all the World*

*... I was thinking of you so much today I wanted you to know it. I sat here on the verandah thinking of Dad and of all the fun times when we were kids and I could shut my eyes and imagine I could hear him whistling from the shed in the yard at 296. One of my most vivid memories of being very small is falling asleep leaning on Dad's head while he carried me from the tram stop. We had been to New Brighton for the day and had tea on a café verandah with cream savoyes. I wonder how old I was then.*

**Undated** (10.10.78 on envelope)

*Thank you very much indeed for the long letter describing all our births, it is a bit of our family research which I am very pleased to have and which only you could supply.*

My grandmother apparently had a "good fish tea" the night my mother was born, she had eaten a lot of fish during the pregnancy and credited it with my mother's intellect. My grandmother had hoped for a boy (she had one son and two daughters at this point) but her third daughter was born at 7.30pm. It was a cold May day and my grandfather had lit a fire in the bedroom fireplace. The birth was attended by a midwife but whether she was a qualified nurse or a "wise woman of the neighbourhood" is unknown. They did not have a bassinet so my mother slept in her mother's bed until she was big enough for the dropped side cot, a practice that would be frowned upon by the Sudden Infant Death Syndrome researchers today.

She goes on to muse on some older social childbirth rituals and beliefs:

*It made me wonder when the quaint habit of being 'churched' went out. Have you any idea? I wonder what the derivation of it was, so primitive really amazing that it hung on into the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.*

My mother explains that after a woman had a baby she stayed in seclusion for about 6 weeks. This had two useful functions; it gave women time to recover from the birth and abstinence from intercourse spaced further pregnancy. It was a function common to many religions. There is apparently a section in the Book of Common Prayer for the conducting of such a service. My mother recalls hearing her Mother say: "There goes Ena Mitchell she must be going to be churched".

*Still I remember when menstruation was called 'unwell' and if you bathed or showered you were supposed to risk madness. Were there sanitary towels for sale when you were young or did people make them and wash them? I am very very interested in social history so anything you can remember will be much appreciated by me. How did servants in big houses cope with personal problems like that.*

They had no choice. My mother describes how sanitary towels were made from flannelette folded with a loop at each end, they were washed and boiled and re-used. When her mother went to teachers training school in London one of the items on the list was; "One dozen sanitary napkins each to be labeled". She adds; "*At the College, as in the big country houses, it was some poor little skivvy's rotten task to collect them and wash them and return them to their owner*". She recalls she did not get to use a bought sanitary napkin until she reported to the nurse at Oulton High School, and only regularly used them after she was evacuated during the war.

The epistolary reminiscences continue:

*I can still remember clearly Ronnie's birthday and coming home to a strange woman in the kitchen —what a shock. Still at least I was able to see you quickly the picture of being on the landing is vivid in my mind and Ron can't have been long born because it was lunchtime.*

My mother often recalled her negative attitude to the birth of her baby brother and how she threatened to throw him out of the window. The story, told by my grandmother with a twinkle in her eye, went that he was an unplanned pregnancy: "*the result of sneaked sex on a Sunday afternoon on the couch without her Marie Stopes cap*". The pregnancy and birth had been difficult. My mother recalls coming home from school for lunch and, ignorant of the impending birth, being frightened by finding a completely strange woman in the kitchen, "*when I was told I had a baby brother I said 'I don't want him I will throw him out of the window'*". Luckily her antipathy lasted only until she saw him.

She links in to my own birth:

*There was a fascinating article in the paper this morning it was a chap who had had a heart attack and clinically died and had then been resuscitated and he could remember hearing (and he*

*repeated) what the doctors had said and he described so clearly the peace and the blue and gold and the whispers of spirit voices talking to him. It all tied up so with my experiences after I had had that massive haemorrhage and was very ill after Penny was born. I can remember the blue and gold and the voices fading when they gave me a transfusion and I came back.*

The story of my birth was much told to me when I was young. I knew my mother had had a severe post-partum haemorrhage after my birth at home and had been rushed to hospital by ambulance leaving my father, standing crying, with my two sisters, 4 and 2 years old. The story goes that my mother's doctor did not know her blood group so transfusion was delayed and may not have been the perfect match. I also knew about the "near death experience" she had just before the transfusion, she would tell the story as a comfort to me as a child if I was feeling afraid of dying:

*I still remember, clearly, floating up by the ceiling attached by a silver cord to my body, watching the Nigerian Doctor trying to resuscitate me and the blue and gold and the voices saying "It is not time, go back, go back" and the feeling of the cord shortening and being pulled back in to my body, then awakening and saying to the nurses "I like coloured faces" though the Doctor was no longer there. I really don't know whether it was an hallucination or whether there are spirit bodies. Logic says there aren't but . . .*

My father left for overseas again on the 14<sup>th</sup> of October in the middle of the night, leaving an exhausted wife and distressed son behind. My mother usually became active re-decorating when my father was away but this time she took time out to relax. She had been very busy organising a school fete and writing a column for *The Sunday Times* and letters to *The West Australian*. One letter championed the role of mothering and included the very contemporaneously appropriate comment: "It is one of the greatest fallacies of all time that going out "doing your own thing" – whatever that may mean – is somehow better than being a homemaker parent".

My father's trip was proving successful:

*Paul will be back on Friday and I will be so pleased to see him but I bet he will be tired. He has been to so many places but everywhere he goes people are impressed by Sculpcrete. I bet it will be our children who will benefit from the invention in years to come. David keeps saying funny things he said "I am going to be a brilliant scientist when I grow up but that is only a part time job so I think I will carry on Sculpcrete too." And then later "You know I wonder if I can make you understand sometimes the solution of a problem is actually in the question." Meanwhile poor little guy has had yet another gastric upset it is a good job he is quick at school or he would fall behind in his work.*

My mother rejoiced in my father's return:

**27.11.78**

*It is lovely having Paul home again. We really are pretty happy together and at the moment things business wise seem to have taken an upturn hope it keeps up.*



*I could wish my own health were a bit better but emotionally I think I am happier and more at peace with myself than any other time of my life. I remember you saying that the fifties were good I suppose that after the menopause life does not go up and down so much. I made three plum puddings and two Christmas cakes yesterday – I made two because Paul always reckons he would have one to sample.*

**3.12.78**

*Well and tomorrow you will be 86 what an incredible number of changes you must have seen in your life. Even I can remember at 296 when someone shouted 'aeroplane' we all rushed out of the house to watch and didn't one crash down on a house somewhere near before the war? The young don't realise what energy and freedom they have and how so many of them misuse it. The trouble is people are brought up nowadays without a sense of responsibility and they don't know how to cope with freedom when they have it. Thank goodness my kids seem to have some aim in life.*

An airline strike interrupted the flow of letters in December as well as delaying Leonora's flight home for Christmas, but she did arrive and my mother reports a happy Christmas Day.



## 1979

1979 was the sesquicentennial of the foundation of Western Australia. The government heralded the year with a huge public concert and fireworks display. My father's position as a Perth City Councillor of 11 years standing meant he and my mother were seated in relative comfort to watch the pomp and ceremony. I remember that night – my husband was due to start duty at Fremantle Hospital casualty department at midnight. I stood on the back verandah of our house in Graylands and watched the top of the fireworks in the city. Three of my siblings were privileged to share the official function and see the fireworks in full glory.

### 3.1.79

*The 150<sup>th</sup> celebrations got off to quite a start on New Year's Eve. There was a four hour long free open air concert at which as official guests I was glad we had chairs. The concert was very good and very varied and included people like Rolf Harris and the time passed very quickly. It was a perfect night weather wise, warm and not much wind. There were a few speeches and then at midnight we all sang God Save the Queen and Auld Lang Syne and then there was a magnificent firework display. The singing of 'the Queen' was one of the most moving moments I ever remember, there were 80,000 people in the crowd! Then on New Years Day in the evening there was a cruise down the river – many of the people wore the costume of 150 years ago – we were served a superb dinner on board – we took Nic, Roger, Mark and Leo as our guests. There was also a band on board and we enjoyed a bit of dancing.*

It is jarring to think of *God Save the Queen* as our National Anthem. Then Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser had reversed Gough Whitlam's 1974 decision to instate *Advance Australia Fair* as our national anthem in 1975. A national poll on 21<sup>st</sup> May 1977 had confirmed that the Australian people preferred *Advance Australia Fair* but this was not proclaimed until 1984. I am sure my royalist Grandmother enjoyed mention of the singing of "the Queen" but it creates dissonant echoes for me.

Despite significant industrial unrest in Britain, in protest against the government's 5% limit on pay rises, letters were still getting through and they described a tense family. Leonora was no longer finding it easy to slip back into the family system, Mark had failed his driver's test and my mother was not comfortable with his girlfriend of the time. I was relatively absent, working long hours at the children's hospital.

A comment made in a letter in early February caught my attention:

### 9.2.79

*I went to see an orthopaedic specialist about my shoulder last Wednesday, he said it was coming along fine but it would probably be six months before it was right. But the nice thing was what he said about Penny – he said she was a magnificent Dr wonderful with the children and totally committed to her work and that he hoped when she had her family she would go back to medicine because such quality doctors as she were hard to find.*

The comments of the surgeon reflect the prevailing attitude of the time. Women went back to their careers, they were not expected, or indeed encouraged, to continue in their careers. Practically speaking, going "back to" medicine was a very difficult thing to do because the changes were rapid, diverse and extensive. By the time my children were of school age many of the pharmaceuticals, investigative tests and management principles had changed since my training. A speaker on time-management at a recent conference for rural doctors spoke about the challenge of making the practice of medicine "female-friendly". The audience was asking how to be attentive parents and committed doctors simultaneously, perhaps an impossible challenge. The term "family friendly" would be more helpful but the problem of maintaining high standards in all aspects of life is not easily solved. Is it possible to have everything and do it well?

Correspondence was interrupted again in March with a Telecom strike.

In May my mother's letters observe with pleasure the election of Margaret Thatcher as Prime Minister of Britain:

*Sunday May 6<sup>th</sup>*

*So Britain has a woman P.M. More power to her elbow but I do hope she is very tough, whatever a woman does she has got to be that bit better than a man to cope with a man's world. I have quite enjoyed reading all the stuff about the election it gave it an added spice having a woman in the running.*

My parents flew east with David in early May to attend two conferences, speaking on the subject of self-regulation of children. The first was the Australian Pre-school Conference in Sydney, chaired by Lady Mary Fairfax. It was followed by The "Birth and Being" Conference in Melbourne where David joined them on the stage and they met Natural Childbirth guru Sheila Kitzinger and Jean Leidloff, author of *The Continuum Concept*.

In their absence Mark had been kept company by a friend who thought it would be amusing to throw eggs at the house. The resulting marks were indelible!

There are letters missing between the beginning of May and June, one of them must have told my grandmother of my first pregnancy as this knowledge is assumed in the next letter:

*Sunday June 3<sup>rd</sup>*

*We seem to be having quite a family weekend yesterday Nicola, Roger and Penny came to tea and today Erica .... Poor old 'Ca still suffers morning sickness although she is 15 weeks but it does not seem to be bothering Penny at all. In fact Penny looks bonnier than I have ever seen*

*her. Keith is up at Kununurra Hospital doing some isolated town practice – it is really in the far North of the State. Penny will go to join him in a month's time. We went up to tell Penny's mother-in-law the news yesterday but she was out. She will be beside herself with joy because she is dying to have a grandchild and this will be her first.*

It was a great relief to me that my mother-in-law was out; she could be rather over-the-top in her reactions to things. I left a note beginning "Dear Grandmother" and she was quick to track me down on the phone when she read it.

Letters were continuing to go missing during the year. Unfortunately my mother did not keep copies.

#### 20.6.79

*I was very happy to receive your letter yesterday but I am blown if I know what is happening to my letters to you. I write, apart from the week I was in the Eastern States, every four or five days and it seems as though half the letters don't reach you. I told you in one letter all about my trip East and the flights and thanked you for our birthday cards I even told you how I put my birthday money towards buying a Johnston kilt, something I had always wanted.*

In July attention was captured by the imminent demise of the space station, Skylab, which fell to Earth landing in the Australian inland near the town of Balladonia:

#### Sat. 21<sup>st</sup> July

*There is considerable feeling here that the Americans deliberately dumped Skylab on Western Australia. I don't know whether you had much about Skylab in English papers it was an American Space Station that had ceased to function properly and the Americans admit to making it tumble when it appeared as if it would hit N. America. It was really extraordinarily lucky that it missed Perth. it was incredibly dramatic in the night sky, our dog started going mad about midnight and when I got up to see what was wrong the sky looked like an enormous Guy Fawkes night rocket with coloured splodges from its tail. Mark was heard to mutter "I know it is West Australia's 150<sup>th</sup> birthday year but this is ridiculous."*

My mother mentioned Skylab's re-entry in a letter to me on July 12<sup>th</sup> 1979:

Today of course all the talk is how Skylab only missed Perth by one minute in its reentry time. When it came across Perth's night sky Blackie together with all the other dogs in the neighbourhood was going absolutely bananas. I meant to sit up with my camera but it was overcast and raining heavily when I went to bed and when I got up I had just missed it and the sky was clear – curses!

My mother embellished the truth for her mother; she declares it a use of "poetic license" to give her 87 yr old mother a positive story. Combining the dogs barking with eyewitness reports from *The West Australian* newspaper she came up with a very plausible description.

My grandmother was becoming increasingly physically incapacitated with a consequent deterioration in her mood:

*Aug. 9<sup>th</sup>*

*You say you can't get down your step without help would it not be possible to make a gentle ramp with a railing. You do sound as though you were having a fit of the blues when you wrote, you should not be feeling empty you should be feeling immense satisfaction at your healthy happy descendents. Of course you feel you could have achieved more but with your mental capacity that is not surprising both Paul and I feel that we could fill our lives half a dozen times over. But isn't it better to get old feeling that there is still lots to achieve rather than having been bored and without brain capacity. David made me smile yesterday he said "You know it somehow takes away from the value to this life if what they say about heaven is true." A budding philosopher I feel.*

My mother has a lot more empathy for her mother now, finding herself wondering how she could have done more with her life and where did it go? In particular she regrets not going into politics in a serious way and capitalizing on the skills she had developed as a committee member.

There are moments in the reading of my mother's letters that bring back vivid feelings. When I read the next line I was caught up again in the shock I felt at the time. I knew what was coming and I didn't want to read on:

*I was very upset on Monday I had a letter from Gisela – a friend from thirty years ago and for whom Penny is named –*

*- to say her youngest son Nicholas age 19 had been killed in a car crash. No drink or drugs involved, he apparently fell asleep at the wheel and failed to 'take a turn' and drove straight into a building it was in Edinburgh. The irony was he was going to fetch his brother from a party. He was out here in 1970 with his parents a darling boy and a great friend of my Mark's.*

My mother had shared this news with me in a letter I picked up at the Townsville post office as Keith and I traveled around Australia. I remember my delight at finding a letter from my Mum and was enjoying the chit-chat when it hit me hard from left field in the middle of the letter. It occupied my mind for days as we drove on.

My mother often hid important news in the middle of a letter – perhaps feeling she should lull the reader into a false sense of security or try to delay the inevitable.

Nicholas's family struggled to recover from his tragic death – he was a much-loved son and young brother to his four siblings, one of whom was my friend Inga. She and her brother Mark – who Nicholas was going to pick up when he died – named their own sons after him. He was a vibrant, intelligent and good-looking boy and I shed another tear as I read again of his death.

My mother continued to fill her free time with writing:

*My autobiography goes very slowly, that is one thing I plan to do when I don't have Jessica to look after make a real effort I have tentatively titled it "Life with not St Paul" Any suggestions. I am trying to remember bits from my childhood. Don't let my letters to you go out of your hands they could be very useful. And please tell me anything of my babyhood that I would not remember.*

Information came back that told of a "good" baby who was demand fed, slept with her mother until she was 6 months old, walked at 12 months, had measles at 18 months and was very close to her grandmother. Not as much information as my mother wanted.

Part of a letter in late August reveals more of her perspectives on money and motherhood:

**20.8.79**

*My lawyer thinks I should get about \$1000 from that sore shoulder fall I had last October. I hope to be able to put that in my rainy day account. I do not really believe in secrets between husband and wife but I have always tried to keep a few dollars in a quiet account in my own name. At present I have a building society account into which the family allowance is paid and any other bits I acquire. I have told Erica that she should let the family allowance go into an account of her own. I firmly believe that what is needed is for women who stay home and make a good job of family life should be paid a much better family allowance. The women's libbers would soon stop screaming for women to be able "to go out and do their own thing" whatever that means, if being a housewife was given a better status. That is what freedom for women is really about – women should not have to be dependent on the generosity or otherwise of men for keeping the home going. Bringing up children is the most important job and should be given the status it deserves. Look what terrific children I have got and yet there are women who have said to me "What a waste someone with a brain like yours staying at home bringing up kids"!! Makes me so mad.*

She believes now, sadly, that the status of motherhood has gone backwards and that politicians without children should not get portfolios to do with children unless they are female and have had children. An issue becoming increasingly problematic as many of the prominent female politicians are single and childless. She adds "*Unless you have known the 'pull of the umbilical cord' you don't know what the continuum of life is all about*".

A bad bout of influenza, she had caught from David, laid her low a week later and it took her a few weeks to get back on track. David was experiencing some bullying at school which much troubled my mother. She had also been distressed at the violent death of Louis Mountbatten.

**15.9.79**

*We were all very upset about the Mountbatten tragedy. Some Irish guy had the nerve to say it was justified and he was promptly deported. I reckon the solution is tow Ireland away and close all ports to it and let them get on with it. Well you said in a letter at the beginning of the year that there was a black stripe across this year that must have been it.*

Mountbatten died on August 27<sup>th</sup> when the IRA blew up his boat in Ireland. I remember my husband and I were in South Australia and I had persuaded him, after camping for six weeks,

we deserved a night in a motel. He agreed and we booked in to an average motel in Nurioopta. I was looking forward to a warm night snuggled up in front of the TV, unfortunately both channels in rural SA decided to show the funeral of Lord Mountbatten and in those days there was no in-house movie or pay TV so I was thwarted.

22.9.79

Your letter of the 11<sup>th</sup> arrived yesterday. The same time as one from Ron enclosing the pictures of Dad. David was absolutely thrilled to bits to see them and I have promised him faithfully that they will be his one day. Did I ever tell you how enormously pleased Leonora was that I had that Echo from the General Strike. I am giving another talk on Tuesday morning to a housewives group. I enjoy stirring them all up a bit. Paul has been asked to stand for Parliament in the next State Elections. He is finding it difficult to make up his mind, on the one hand he would like the challenge but on the other it would take a lot of time to fight an election. Ah well there is time we will just have to wait and see.

Up until now my grandmother's voice has been absent, represented only as meaning between the lines of my mother's letters. From September 1979 I have many of my grandmother's letters to my mother. So at last she speaks for herself, her writing is strong and clear and I include a full text to give my readers a flavour.

September 19<sup>th</sup>

My dear Jean,

I guess you are looking for a letter, Well my little world fell apart. I told you I came to Mollie's so that Nor and Eve could go away on a fortnights' holiday. However Geoff took ill with a chest infection. He was so ill one night they feared pneumonia but the Dr said it was a chest infection. So they only had 4 days holiday in Norfolk. On the Monday night Nor came for me and took me back to Lowton, but Evelyn was so ill that Nor gave me my meals and I never saw Evelyn. On the Thurs I went back to Mollie. After a week I phoned Eve – she said she was a bit better but Nor was off work ill. I told her I couldn't stay here after this date because Mollie was going to Kathie's on Friday for her wedding on Sat. So she said Nor would come Sunday night. Sept. 16<sup>th</sup> at 8 o'clock, I was all packed up time went by – no sign of Nor. So at 10 o'clock Mollie phoned up. Nor answered the phone – he said Eve and he had decided they couldn't look after me and had had enough – I could stay with her for 5 months, then stay with Peggy for 5 months. So Mollie told him he promised to look after me and he replied, "more fool me" and slammed the phone down. Mollie was fuming and terribly upset. She reminded me that she said this would happen. On Monday (17<sup>th</sup>) Russie ran me over to Lowton and I contacted Olive and told her what had happened – her face was a study of shock as if she couldn't believe what had happened. However she said she would look after me until Peggy came on the 28<sup>th</sup> for a week. You know Jean I love my little home and am so happy in it I don't think much of living out of a suitcase in somebody else's home. It is no fun paying rates etc on a house and not living in it.

Well I was shocked and upset to hear Ronnie might have a heart operation. He never said anything to me. I wish he was here – he is a wise counselor. Mollie was so upset after Nor's outburst that she immediately phoned Peggy and then Ron. I only hope there isn't a Scotland Road row when Peggy comes. She has been boiling for some time over Nor and Eve. I've told Mollie and Peggy to keep their tempers until I'm dead then they can let rip. You know Jean you and Ron don't really know Nor and Eve like Mollie does you should hear what her mother has to say. My guess is that they will come round and want to look after me again. They have had over £500 in the past year for looking after me and I should think that is not to be coughed at seeing that they are always moaning they are hard up.

Yr affect Mum

Wish I could have a chat with you.

My grandmother's problems dominated the next few letters:



30.9.79

Dearest Little Mum,

Oh dear what a storm for you. Your letter of the 19<sup>th</sup> arrived yesterday. I was upset and frustrated at not being able to do anything to help.

You know darling you say Ron and I do not know everything but Ron and I have been blessed – or cursed – as the case may be, with being able to see both sides of things. And even though you are a model old lady Nor and Eve have had a very rough run health wise, it is easy for Peggy, Molly and even easier for me and Ron to say what should be done but they have after all looked after you consistently for months, so I suggest a bit more tolerance and a bit less blaming all round amongst your children. Of course you should be in your own home but isn't it possible for someone else to help you one day a week so Nor and Eve could count on that one day at least to do outside things.

Reflecting back on this time my mother says it was very hard hearing about this distress and her reply was trying to pour oil on troubled waters. She knew from her younger brother that her mother could be difficult but she saw no point in telling her that. Her older brother and his wife had been promised certain furniture and jewellery in return for looking after my grandmother. She reads her remarks above and feels she is sounding a "*bit holier than thou*" but apparently it helped.

Ronnie sure was mad with me for telling you about his heart operation but I get cross with people who think old is synonymous with idiot. It is not something to worry about. I wish Penny could talk to you she explained to me that it is really comparatively simple nowadays .... So please get it in to perspective.

My mother is just as fervent on the subject now: "*I absolutely hate it if I think my family are trying to "protect" me by not telling me something*".

My grandmother was not placated by my mother's words and on the 7<sup>th</sup> of October replied vehemently:

Now I'm going to tell you a bit of the truth. Nor and Eve brainwash you and Ron. Peggy begged and begged of me to go to Gretna and she would look after me but I thought I would be better off here – Nor and Eve only have a bit of washing to do for me and a minimum of cooking for which the Social Securities give them £10.40 a week, I give them £11 a week for my food which isn't spectacular and if they do me any favours I give them £5 or £10. I pay for all extras like writing paper, stamps, vitamin pills etc etc. A few months ago Geoff needed a lot for his work at College and was always asking for money. Eve told me that she didn't know how she would have managed if it hadn't been for my money. She has had a lot of nasty things to say about Mollie and Peggy and even you but not Ron. I have kept my mouth shut so as not to inflame matters. In the past year I have spent 3 weeks with Peggy. 5 weeks with Mollie, Peggy had looked after me here for 3 weeks and Ron has looked after me for two weeks so they haven't had all to do for me. Do you know Jean I get a sponge down once a week, my feet are washed once in 2 or 3 weeks and I have had my hair washed 4 times in the year. I get one clean pair of knickers a week. Now I can manage to wash them out in the bathroom bowl. I know Eveyn suffers with her back but she wants to do less – there is no necessity to make wine and a lot of jam or put pounds and pounds of fruit in the freezer. ... The home help does all the cleaning. She told Peggy I could get help an hour a day if they couldn't do it.

Yes I was annoyed I wasn't told about Ron. When he came last March I worried him a lot to help me straighten things out and I wouldn't have done that if I had known.

*When you write don't mention anything of what I've told you. Write to Ron and he will phone me if you want to comment. The postman always delivers my letters at Nor's and you never know!!*

She signs off paradoxically:

*I am quite cheerful today so cheerio with much love to all,  
Yr affect Mum*

My mother got very caught up with the family problems in England in her letters. She was concerned for her mother and her younger brother and unhappy she was not close enough to help. Telephone connections had improved considerably since our arrival in Perth in 1965 and she rang her brother regularly to check on their health, meanwhile keeping her letters to her mother interesting and thought provoking where she could.

**October 28 1979**

*I quite agree with that article in the paper, troubled youth is caused by uncaring parents and I do not believe you can be a good mum while you are working full time. I am really sorry for mothers who have to work but a great many women work for material goods and such women should not have children. Even though I am a good substitute for Erica Jessica still finds three half days without her mum the limit of her tolerance, and that will stop in another three weeks.*

Her hardline attitude to working mothers has softened over the years. She still does not countenance childcare for babies and believes the quality of childcare for children is critical. She feels that the battle for women to have choice has meant that they are now pressured to be all things to the family and society as well.

My mother came with me in November to visit the maternity unit at King Edward Memorial Hospital, where I was booked in to have my baby.

**7.11.79**

*I had a lovely visit with Penny this morning to be shown over the new King Edward Hospital for Women's wing. I thought I looked rather smart I had a short sleeved white linen suit, yellow blouse and white accessories.*

I find it incongruous for her to be describing her outfit in this situation – the new wing had a 'home' birthing unit and individual rooms, in stark contrast to the stalls within which I had done my training and paediatric attachments. I assume it was an issue of status in an environment in which she wished to impress.

Mark finished his high schooling with his Leaving Exams mid-month which lifted some of the strain and tension from the house:

**Nov. 24<sup>th</sup>**

*Bless his heart he arrived home after his last exam with a bouquet of carnations for me saying he knew he had been impossible but hoped he was forgiven.*

Her mood was buoyed further by the news that Jemima had been offered a small solo part in a performance by the Canberra Opera Company, replacing someone who had fallen ill.

At the same time my mother got her payout from her shoulder injury and put it into her “rainy day” fund and she was always happier when she had some money tucked away.

Further good news followed with the birth of Erica’s second baby at home in the early hours of November 27<sup>th</sup>.

**Tuesday (Nov 27<sup>th</sup>)**

*This morning the phone rang at 4.30 a.m. to say Erica had just given birth to a son whom they will call Ian Andrew. I have just come back from seeing them and have taken a mass of photos so hope one or two will be good enough to send you. Funny enough the baby is absolutely opposite to Jessica – she had a soft fuzz of blonde hair and this laddie – 8 ½ lb has a mass of dark hair – in fact he looks the spitting image of Erica as a baby.*

My mother’s autobiographical writing prompted her to think more about her own family of origin and she asked her mother for her recollections about her grandmother and her father’s ancestors (10.12.79). Much of what her mother told her she already knew and she refers me to the self-published genealogies of my mother’s family of origin written and researched by my mother’s older brother Norman and his wife Evelyn. They are comprehensive chronologies of time, place and events.

My mother goes on to describe her perceptions of her maternal ancestors. Her favourite was her Gran. She was the second of ten children and rose to be head cook to the McCorquorkodale family. She was uneducated but very capable and my mother learnt a great deal from her. “*She was everything a Gran should be – quiet, cuddly, competent, a marvellous cook with a cupboard full of treats and surprises*”. Her Gran secretly provided extra pocket money and comfort when she was in trouble. She smoothed troubled waters within the family and rescued in times of emotional turmoil. She sounds like the ultimate role model, a deeply nurturing woman in a most female way, valuing and excelling at traditional women’s work.

Our family assembled for Christmas:

**Dec 26<sup>th</sup> 1979**

We had a very happy Christmas Day all the family were together in the morning then Erica's family went off ... and Penny and Keith to his folk's then they came back to us in the late afternoon. Nicola and Roger stayed all day but went off to their own place about 3.30p.m. Funny Nicola is such a darling but there is no doubt that she and Roger introduce a tension in the rest of the family. We sat down 12 to tea out on the big fly-screened verandah as usual, and had lots of fun. It was a very hot day ... I started ... with a swim at 7 a.m. – cool fresh and so beautiful, then did all the preparations in the morning and simply kept out of the kitchen as much as possible and had another swim just before serving up dinner.

I had some nice presents too from Paul a beautiful antique coffee table, from Leo and Jemima – gramophone records, from Erica, a sheepskin car seat cover, from Penny, a selection of liqueurs, from Nic, soap and perfume, from Mark a leather steering wheel cover and from David a big case. Thank you and Ron for the fiver – Ron said I should buy a bottle of wine but since I listen to music such a lot I would rather buy a couple of records. I rang Ron to wish him a merry Christmas, he was just leaving to do his shopping.

I hope you had a good day and some nice things to eat – I am enjoying having Jemima and Leo home. We fair whizzed round this morning, I dusted, Michael vacuumed, Jemima washed up, Paul washed the kitchen floor, Leo did the bathroom Mark and David tidied the verandah and now I can relax for the rest of the day so the first thing to do was to write to my dear old Mum and wish her a very happy new year and lots of love.

## 1980

My grandmother was, by now, frail and incapacitated, relying on her eldest son and his wife to care for her. This would be the last decade she would greet. She still had a steady hand and an active mind. Her letters are full of family news, reflections on world events and responses to my mother's letters. She writes the first letter of the decade:

*Jan 11<sup>th</sup> 80*

*I was pleased to receive a letter from you last Saturday and to hear that you had a good Xmas and enjoyed having all your chicks around you. I was not surprised Nikki left early and went home. Marriage seems to make rifts in the family.*

*I enjoyed watching our cricketers playing at Perth and thought my Jean is in that crowd. There was a placard on the side with "Hello Mum" written on it. I said to myself my Jean put that there.*

It was two weeks into the year before my mother got around to writing "home".

*16.1.80*

*Well I guess you will be looking for a letter. It seems so hard when it is so hot and the home is full of people finding a quiet minute to write a letter. So right now I am trying to ignore all the hurly burly and get a few words written. Especially as we have a guest arriving tonight to stay for five days. He is Paul Jordan a now well known internationally organist. We knew him as a student when he used to play the piano in the kitchen in Nottingham. He is on a worldwide concert tour and is playing at the Concert Hall on Saturday night. He included Perth in his tour so he could see us all again the joke being that my Paul left for America yesterday morning!! However no doubt Jemima can talk music to him. But since Paul is not here it looks like I will be doing all the ferrying around. It is a good job my car is air-conditioned or I just would not survive it.*

Paul Jordan was the son of a Reichian therapist with whom my father had stayed in New York. He was a Professor of Music at the very prestigious Julliard School of Music. My mother enjoyed his visit which included a concert at the Concert Hall that she rated as excellent. He also listened to Jemima sing and was very encouraging about her potential. My mother liked her privacy and personal space however, so she was not sorry to see him go later that week.

She had enjoyed Leonora's visit more this summer and before she left they spent a day at the W.A. Open Tennis Championships. Despite getting sunburnt they went out to dinner as Leo's thank you for an enjoyable visit. My mother describes a meal of "*champagne cocktail, smoked trout, crayfish with mushrooms, salad, chocolate mousse, coffee*".

My grandmother had a keen interest in world affairs and read the newspaper from cover to cover. She was very anxious about the events in Iran and Russia's influence over the world, commenting on several occasions about her fear that tension in the Middle East would lead to a third world war. My mother tried to downplay her concerns:

22.1.80

*I too worry about the Middle East but try to make the best of each day.*

But my grandmother was not easily put off:

*Jan 30<sup>th</sup> 1980*

*Though hard work entertaining your guest Paul Jordan it must have been lovely and interesting to have someone of the past to visit you. Am I right in thinking he lives in America? If so had he any comments on the situation in the Arab countries. I am not happy about it at all. It wouldn't take much to start a third world war and next time it will be hell let loose making the last one look like child's play.*

Twenty-five years later her comments could be just as topical.

6.2.80

*But the major worry this week has been Penny's baby. He was born in hospital with a specialist present and my candid view is that the specialist interfered with nature too soon. She put a vacuum extractor on its head which caused massive bleeding on the scalp and bad jaundice.*

*The baby was 'flat' when born and had to be resuscitated and was in intensive care for several days. However when I went to see them yesterday he had started sucking and appeared to be getting over his birth problems. He was 8lb 5ozs at birth and lovely looking and of course since Penny does not smoke and had kept herself fit throughout pregnancy we hope he will now be okay. They have called him Ross Graeme. I went to see him in the intensive care nursery and was amazed at the size of some of the premature babies there – incredible that some of them could survive.*

My parents' dogmatic views about natural childbirth and lifelong criticism of the medical profession as insensitive and interfering did not make the planning for birth easy. There were so many “shoulds” that seemed to be vital to the long-term psychological well being of the child. The choice of obstetrician, the practising of breathing techniques, leaving the cord until it stopped pulsating, the immediacy of skin contact and breastfeeding all seemed, on listening to them, to be critically important. I was anxious I would not meet my mother's expectations, that I would fail the test, and my baby be permanently disadvantaged as a result.

Her description of my son's birth is not accurate or complete. I was admitted to the new home birthing unit at King Edward Memorial Hospital and I laboured without interference until I could no longer manage the pain. He was in a posterior position and the uterine contractions were relatively ineffective. The nitrous oxide gas was useless and difficult to manage. So I was transferred, already feeling like a failure, to the normal labour ward where I had an epidural anaesthetic inserted (a definite no-no to the natural childbirth lobby). I still remember with great gratitude the face of Dr Stan Webster, the anaesthetist who put in the epidural, it was truly wonderful going from severe pain to analgesia in seconds. They used a vacuum extractor to assist the delivery. To her credit my obstetrician used her skill to deliver him without an episiotomy, as I had requested in my “birth plan” and completely against the common practice. The baby was somewhat distressed by his birth and had a scalp haematoma from the vacuum cup. He cried like a seagull and the paediatrician told me later he was surprised he had not had

fits. He would not suckle and kept crying so they took him to the nursery to give me a rest where he was given a glucose bottle (another cardinal sin of natural birthing). This helped him settle – poor love was probably starving hungry and thirsty from the struggles of birth and very frustrated that he could not get any food.

Despite some reservations they let us take our baby home after 12 hours. I remember the whole family seemingly descending upon us to see him the next day, despite them knowing he and I had both been distressed. Over the next 24 hours he developed jaundice and my recent paediatric training told me this was not a good sign so we were readmitted to King Edward Hospital. Because we had been home he required a septic screen to exclude infection as the cause of the jaundice and he was given prophylactic antibiotics by injection into his thighs for 48 hours until the pathology results were back – because he had the antibiotics he needed heel pricks for blood tests to make sure he didn’t have too much antibiotic in his blood. His little thighs looked like those of an AFL footballer and the scars on his heels were still visible years later. He spent only one night in the special care nursery and after that was in my room with me in a light incubator to reduce the jaundice.

Reading my mother’s judgmental observation to her mother it is no wonder I felt a failure and suffered what in retrospect was post-natal depression after the birth of my beautiful first born boy – but this marks part of the challenge of being her daughter – she set high standards and had dogmatic beliefs powerfully felt and powerfully expressed.

She has mellowed with age and when I sent her the excerpt from the letter she acknowledges that it was presumptuous of her to be critical of his birth. She says she was sad she was not there at the birth.

My mother was so concerned for the well being of my baby that she rang my father and told him to curtail his overseas trip and come home. He did so and I was very touched he had, although unaware at the time that my mother had told him my son might die – this had not been a probability.

But if I thought my mother’s response was a little excessive, her mother’s was more so:

*Feb 15<sup>th</sup> 80*

*I’m glad Penny has got her ordeal over with – poor lass, I hope the baby will be okay after such a rough introduction into this awful old world – What with strikes, revolutions and wars it is time the Lord drowned it again.*

Ill health delayed my mother’s next letter. She had been suffering with a viral infection that left her shaky and tired. My father was heading off overseas again leaving my mother alone with

David. The plan was for my mother to join my father in Honolulu for a fortnight in Hawaii to recuperate and rest.

**28.2.80**

*I am taking David with me as far as Sydney and Leonora is going to meet me there and take him back to College with her, she is then going to bring him back the Wednesday before Easter.*

*I have been feeling off colour since Christmas but just assumed it was the heat and all the hassles from the new babies and so on well as Penny says the more I give in the quicker I'll be better.*

It seems another letter went missing in February including some photographs of my baby and of Mark. Mark had split up with his girlfriend and my mother notes to her mother his quiet interest in a new girl, although he described himself as "playing the field". My mother tells of her fondness for his new interest and comments on the apparent stability of her daughters' marriages.

**March 11 1980**

*Penny is hoping to move in to her new house soon and I must say I wish I could persuade Paul to move to that area too – this place is so big and the property so demanding it is getting so shabby outside in the three acres I would like to move to something smaller where I did not have to get in the car all the time but could walk and had less responsibility when Paul was away.*

The area I was moving to was Crestwood Estate, designed by my father in the early seventies. Erica lived there and I was hoping by moving close to her to get some support. My first-born was a high need baby and I felt very isolated living in Graylands. In retrospect I think I should have made an effort to become involved with other mothers closer to home, I hated the traffic noise in the house we bought and my husband had much further to travel to work. We also lost money on the sale of both the house in Graylands and three years later the house in Crestwood.

The holiday to Hawaii was looming large, although a massive petrol strike was threatening to interfere. 70% of the fares would be paid by Government grants regardless of whether she traveled economy or first class so first class it was. The Trade Fair in Honolulu was to last 4 days, the rest of the time away being holiday.

My grandmother did not keep the postcards from Hawaii that my mother sent during her holiday. Her next contact is written in the airplane on the eleven-hour flight between Honolulu and Hong Kong on the way home.

**29.3.80**

*This has been an unforgettable experience staying in first class hotels, the one on Maui was even more impressive than the one in Honolulu – eating marvellous food that I didn't cook and being looked after so well by Paul. He makes me feel really cherished. Who would have thought that*



*little Jean Finch from Stanley Park Ave would have such an experience. The trip has been good for business too and we have really made friends with people in Honolulu. Hawaii is really a very friendly multi-racial society with no apparent racial tensions – some of the people are incredibly beautiful and the race mixtures seem to make them even more so.*

My grandmother tried to share my mother's delight and wonder at where she had come to in the world but she was unable to avoid a bitter addendum:

*Friday Apr. 11<sup>th</sup> 80*

*What a lovely interesting holiday you have had. Yes fancy little Jean Finch from Anfield living it up in the luxury hotels of the East and flying jumbo jet and her poor old mum who lived on the fat of the land in a lovely country cottage and now living on social security in a dump of uninteresting bungalows. When I look out of the window here it reminds me of the mud huts of the natives of Africa.*

My parent's trip home was not smooth with a 24-hour delay and re-routing to Kuala Lumpur. Two of their four suitcases had been lost, turning up again some days later. They were pitched straight into the festivities of Easter and my father's birthday:

**10.4.80**

*The weekend was very hectic it was Paul's birthday on Easter Sunday so not only all the family but a couple of extras as well. I thought Monday would be quiet but it turned out just as busy. David seems to have enjoyed his stay with Leonora but is finding it a bit hard settling back at school after all he had been to all Leonora's History lectures and seems to have been able to understand and enjoy them all. [David was 9 years old at the time.] Well another great grandchild for you. Nikki is expecting a baby ... she positively glows.*

**16 APR 1980 (postmark)**

*Sometimes having Paul's office by the house is just like having your own electrical thunder storm around. the more hectic the pace the more he seems to thrive on it. I am just willing him to go out so I can settle for a bit of peace and quiet. There is a real possibility – again – of a firm taking a sculpcrete licence for the whole of the U.S.A. which would be great news but I wish we did not know of the chance until it really happened because Paul hums around like top.*

It was difficult for my mother to handle the repeated ups and downs of my father's business let alone the "maybes". It created in her a chronic state of anxious anticipation that often proved to be false hope. She could not enjoy the prospects because so often things had not turned out as my father had anticipated. He, by contrast, always assumed the best and cruised through the disappointment in the blithe assumption that something else would turn up. Not to say he did not put the effort in to creating new opportunities. If effort had been rewarded he would have been a very rich man.

Her level of anxiety was not improved by the news that their home was threatened with demolition because part of it occupied the road reserve of Brookton Highway which was intended to become a four-lane highway in the future. The plans showed that the new road would go through David's bedroom and my father's office. Although she was shocked at first it

proved a powerful motivator for change. My mother had been troubled by the noise and fumes from the increasingly busy highway for sometime and had wanted to move but was deterred by the effort involved (29.4.80).

Despite the anxieties in her life she continued to occupy her time with community activities and writing, including a short piece for publication on the psychology of the pregnant woman that she wrote for Dr David Watson (unfortunately she does not have a copy). During the previous twelve months she had had letters to the editor published in *The West Australian* on non-smoking hotel rooms (July 1979), the role of schools in the community (Feb. 1980) and self-dipping headlights (March 1980).

My father's activities also made significant demands on her time. He had been opposed in the Perth City council elections for the first time since his election 12 years earlier and the task of identifying all the absentee property owners in the electorate and contacting them to canvas votes fell to her.

#### 75.80

*I was relieved to see the release of the hostages in the Iranian Embassy but I wish the American Hostages could be let go it is a worrying situation what a botch up of a job they made, though Paul reckoned the laughter it must have caused could have been a tension releaser too. It will hit Australia very hard if they impose food sanctions on Iran because we do an enormous amount of trade with them particularly in the way of sheep.*

Six gunman had taken over the Iranian Embassy in London several days earlier demanding the release of political prisoners. They took 30 hostages. SAS commandos stormed the Embassy killing five of the Iranian gunmen and one hostage. The rescue was screened live on British television. The Home Secretary William Whitelaw had ordered the attack on the sixth day of the siege after the gunmen shot dead an Iranian press attaché and dumped his body outside the building (BBC, 1980).

My grandmother had enjoyed the spectacle:

#### May 9<sup>th</sup> 80

*Well we had a real good film on T.V. the other night "The Rescue of the Iran Hostages by the S.A.S. men." We all feel proud to be British.*

By contrast ten days earlier the Americans had suffered a humiliating failure when a top-secret attempt to release hostages from the American Embassy in Tehran collapsed. The 53 American civilians had been held by Islamic militants since early November 1979. The BBC describe the mission as part farce and part tragedy as the failure of two helicopters with engine trouble and the loss of another to landing damage left the mission critically short. It was aborted by President Carter but as they began to depart there was a collision in which eight soldiers died.

The Iranians were jubilant. The EEC had recently threatened to introduce trade sanctions as an alternative to force, which had sparked the concern expressed by my mother. It would be another eight months before the hostages were finally released (BBC, 1980).

*You know Mum what is needed is a new spirit of Renaissance of man but who is going to achieve that I do not know. Certainly none of the figures of the world scene of the moment are great enough to achieve it. It needs someone who can transcend all colours, races and creeds.*

She adds David's latest comment: "I will be glad for the holidays then I can begin to learn".

With her health improving she followed up some new interests, joining the Women's Electoral Lobby and working on some committees for the Council of Social Services. She converted Mark's old bedroom into a private sitting room/study where she could read and write quietly. On the 20<sup>th</sup> May she turned 56 musing "doesn't seem long since I was a young girl running down the fields at Slade" (17.5.80).

My father won his election comfortably:

**27.5.80**

*David thoroughly enjoyed the day he spent time on the polling booth and also went around with the loud hailer on Paul's car and used the microphone shouting 'vote for Paul Ritter' but then amused everyone by adding "and he is a jolly good dad too."*

My mother wonders if this is where David caught his interest in politics and elections.

*I had a very happy but quiet birthday. Today is very, very wet and tonight we have to get dressed up in our glad rags to go to the grand re-opening of the theatre "His Majesty's" Only invited guests tonight and it will be one of those posh occasions which I sometimes enjoy and sometimes wish I had stayed at home with my knitting .... David always says he likes to see me knitting it is so friendly .... I spend a lot of time knitting and listening to music in the winter. I don't watch much T.V these days – doesn't seem to be anything but violence. David is back at school after the holidays but he gets so bored by school. Penny and Keith left for Broome this morning, a country town in the North of W.A. where Keith is spending three months. I shall miss little Ross he is a delight. Erica will miss them too.*

**2.6.80**

*I have just had a lovely long phone call with Leonora I rang her to wish her a happy birthday. She made me laugh she said she was not celebrating the 31<sup>st</sup> birthday but she was celebrating the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of her 21<sup>st</sup> .... When I see how weary Erica is at present I think Leonora does not have too bad a time of it.*

When asked what she would say to a young woman today trying to decide whether to have children or not my mother replies that she would not swap children for anything. She describes it as "the hardest job in all the world with not much credit for a job well done" and one that is not being given sufficient priority in society at the present time, "women have to realise the

*commitment to a lifetime of caring, the umbilical cord may be invisible but it is still there and if they can't cope with that they should not have children".*

How does one know, however, whether or not one will be able to cope with the lifelong pull on your heartstrings. It is a daunting concept to consider, before becoming pregnant, the enormity of the task of parenting, and have faith that one can complete it satisfactorily. My grandmother had her own firm views in response to my mother's letter:

*June 11<sup>th</sup> 1980*

*Yes, Erica will be weary having two babies. I think there should be at least 3½ years between births... I get a lovely interesting letter now and again from Leo. She sounds very happy, enjoys her work and has good holidays and enjoys her spare time. One doesn't get that when married. Children are a worry and a lot of work. However good they are they never repay the sacrifice.*

My mother is not drawn in to her mother's despondency but replies with a cheerful missive about social activities and my father's hectic lifestyle, although a little of her own concern for his well-being and their financial state creeps in as she describes his whirlwind trip to London, Stockholm, Lagos, New York and Atlanta, Las Vegas, Sydney and Melbourne over three weeks. By contrast my mother planned a restful few weeks.

*11.6.80*

*I worry sometimes what would happen if Paul became ill because the whole business really rests on his shoulders. He is well covered with insurance for death but it is incapacitation I worry about I would not be able to keep things going. I suppose the great comfort is that we could always sell this place and from the proceeds buy a small home and invest the rest to give us an income. Whenever he has a medical he always comes out remarkably fit and of course he does not smoke or drink and that all helps. Ah well we can't predict what life will bring.*

*Penny and Keith seem to be finding Broome a very quiet place but they have started to meet more people so perhaps the ten weeks they are up there will pass pleasantly enough. I thought of going up to see Penny but the air fare structure is such that it is very expensive to fly internally in Australia you can go on an overseas all expenses paid holiday for less than I could go to see Penny.*

Broome was, indeed, very quiet. There was no television and I was stuck in the little government house with my 4-month-old baby all day. He would not go to sleep without being rocked and there was no rocking chair. My father – ever the rescuer – bought an unassembled wooden one and air freighted it up to us. My husband put it together with ropes so we could take it to pieces again when we left. It was a lifesaver.

The momentum in my mother's mind for moving house was building and she found occasion to fuel it at every opportunity:

*17.6.80*

*I keep looking around at houses but have not seen anything that really takes my fancy. The real problem is we can't decide whether to move closer to Perth – we would like to get away from this noisy highway. At the same time it would really be a major operation to move no wonder*

*Paul feels like postponing it. Still the longer we leave it the greater the effort will be because the older we will be. I am having my bedroom painted while Paul is away; he hates the mess so I always get things done while he is gone.*

While he was gone she had to deal with some misfortunes. A storm blew down two trees, blocking the driveway, the laundry flooded in torrential rain and the septic system was unable to cope, flooding the toilets (22.6.80). But ordinary life went on and she wrote of her knitting and sewing, reminiscing about the fabrics she could buy at the Nottingham markets (30.6.80). The markets featured stalls with the off-cuts and seconds of fabrics manufactured in Nottingham, heaps of materials piled on tables. Using these resources my mother had made shirts for my father as well as clothes for her five little girls. Nottingham was also famous for its lace and my mother describes one area of narrow one-way streets called "The Lace Market" where the lace was made and on Fridays they set up stalls to sell the seconds.

### 9.7.80

*I looked at your writing and the content of your letter of 27 June and found it quite unbelievable that it was written by a lady of 87. I have fastened on my fridge, by magnets, a very interesting article called Golden Oldies which is all about the work done by many famous people like Picasso and Schweitzer. I reckon my Mum's letters should be added to the list.*

My mother continues with news of the sudden death of Nicola's father-in-law from a heart attack. He was 51. Nicola's husband was the eldest of three boys and the management of family and business fell to him on his father's death.

### 29.7.80

*I guess you will be wondering what happened sorry for the break in letters. Leonora has been home for eight days and the house seems to have been constantly full of people, children, dogs, cats and all the friends who wanted to say hello to her. She left this morning and how quiet the house suddenly seems, just the log fire hissing away and me. I have even left the radio off I am in need of time to catch up on my desk. Paul is back in America but only away for a week this time, with luck he will have a contract for a mile long sculpcrete in Memphis, Tennessee when he returns. The actual profit on it will not be enormous but it would be the breakthrough we need. The Federal Government helps us to pay an agent there and at the moment we have a very good one.*

Once again my mother's hopes of a breakthrough that would signal long-term financial security were false.

David's schooling problems were coming to a head:

### 8.8.80

*I have won one battle with David's school he is now allowed to read what he likes in reading time. He reads by his own choice and for pleasure books by A.J.P. Taylor like "The War Lords" and "Second World War" and they kept sending him home with things like "Tallulah the Taxi" I can remember my own disgust at school when I was already reading Scott and Shakespeare being given, as a prize, "Waffles Whiskers".*

*I am having an amusing time at present, there is a minority party here called "Australian Democrats". It was started a few years ago by a group of people tired of the sheep like following of a party line by the other major parties and has grown steadily over the years but has as yet not much representation in Parliament. I have virtually no chance of being elected but am doing it for the fun – however your daughter is the endorsed candidate for the Federal seat of Swan. It tickles me to have a campaign manager and a campaign committee. Good for stirring up the old grey matter and at a time when most people of 56 think of themselves as good grandmother material. I have one instant way of reducing my children to near hysterical laughter and that is by telling them that in four years time I will be entitled to the old age pension!*

I remember my mother saying this and how strange it sounded. She had always looked after her skin and never wore make-up. She had also grown up in the gentle English sunlight (such that it was) not the harsh and destructive rays of the Australian sun, so she had very youthful skin. She certainly did not look or act as if she was due for the pension! She was, however, having some further health worries, she cracked a rib playing with Jessica and had to have a uterine mass investigated. She chose to return to the specialist for that. He sent her for an ultrasound – a relatively new investigation at the time – which showed calcified fibroids meaning surgery was unnecessary.

Ironically it was probably the cracked rib that should have been paid more attention as it may have been signifying the beginnings of the osteoporosis that now plagues her older years. Not that there was much to offer as treatment in 1980 other than high calcium and vitamin D intake and exercise.

**24.8.80**

*I am very much looking forward to Jemima coming home on Wednesday for ten days. I have not seen her since Christmas so there will be plenty to talk about. Paul is going to Singapore for three days this week to give two lectures then immediately after Jemima goes Paul, David and I are going to Kalbarri for a week. A friend has lent us a house there it is 600 kms north of here and it will be warm and beautiful wildflowers which are a feature of the area will be out. Also there is no phone and no T.V. I shall take some books, knitting and my cassette recorder for the evenings. David will miss a week of school – next two weeks are school holidays – but as we are having a battle with his school I don't mind. The education department did an assessment of him and the result was he is now 'registered as a gifted child'. Personally if it was not that he would miss his friends I would simply keep him away from school – he gets so bored school does not extend him and in to the bargain he has a sarcastic teacher who makes his life a misery. It is a real problem. I can remember being very bored at school. I think David is in fact the cleverest of all my brood he has inherited Paul's intellect as well as my intelligence and has had the stimulation from his brother and sisters. I wish I could bring him to see you all.*

The week's holiday in Kalbarri was very successful and my mother recalls it as one of the happiest weeks of her life, despite David having the flu. *"We . . . lived an idyllic week . . . . It really seemed as if we were at last going to be established but it was the calm before the storm"*.

A small storm hit when she returned home when she was involved in a car accident. Although the car was damaged my mother was only shaken and observed how it wouldn't have happened if "I had not been held up at the bank by a new girl who did not know me" (21.9.80), thus highlighting the arbitrary nature of life-changing events.

Mark lent her his car to continue her electioneering:

*My involvement with politics won't last long since the election is on Oct 18<sup>th</sup> – there is no chance of me winning but I am enjoying the fun. I even like the election literature pictures taken. My election platform is "return to Government with common sense".*

My mother was a natural at electioneering. She had a special talent for engaging people in chat. With no prospect of winning she could enjoy the process without worrying about being rejected or, indeed, elected. There were four other candidates in the electorate of Swan in 1980 one of them the current Leader of the Opposition Kim Beazley.

**27.9.80**

*I personally think that Kim Beazley will get elected he is a university lecturer in economics and son of a very famous father of the same name who was a Minister for Education a few years ago. John Martyn is the sitting member but I very much hope he gets defeated he is so anti-women. He is anti legal abortion for whatever reason. He thinks pregnancy should never be interrupted whether it is the result of rape or incest or even whether the mother's life is at risk or even if the baby is known to be abnormal! I am against abortion personally after the first few weeks except in exceptional cases but I still say it should be the business of a woman, her doctor and her own personal God. I do not think it is something that should be dictated by a group of men who never have to experience the problems of a woman. ...Especially as, if they are desperate, they will go to an illegal abortionist anyway.*

The abortion debate is one that regularly reinvents itself and as I write is once again the focus of much media time and space.

David was now spending most of his time at school in the library using a programme set by my parents that reflected his assessment of "at the 'very superior end of the intelligence range'".

The normal classroom had been unable to meet his needs. However some of the teacher's union members of the school staff were not happy with having non-union members in the school and complained to the Education Department who referred the matter back to the headmaster.

*I am fed up with them and have withdrawn David from school I shall simply educate him at home for the moment .... David is just so intellectually advanced at 9 he is getting history books from the adult section, he is reading "Rommel's Memoirs" at present.*

In reflecting on David's difficult journey with primary schooling my mother recalls how she went in to the classroom and saw a misspelling on the black board, she pointed it out to the teacher who then bore a grudge and took it out on David. When the education department

announced special programmes for bright children the teacher was resistant to having David tested but my mother could be very persistent when she wanted and she had the Department Psychologist do an intelligence test which indicated, much to the teacher's chagrin, an IQ of 170.

It was at this point that my mother lost patience and told them in no uncertain terms what they could do with their school and that she would educate him at home. My father was overseas while this was going on. My mother did not really want to be responsible for his education; she enjoyed her life, her time on her own precious after so many years of child-rearing. So she was relieved and happy when she heard about an alternative independent school run in the hills. Beenong School was in Darlington, 25 miles away, and my mother drove David there everyday.

My grandmother's reply on October 3<sup>rd</sup> is again a very impressive effort from a woman of nearly 88. I include it in its entirety to give the reader a good taste of her character and opinions.

*My dear Jean,*

*Thanks for your letter of Sept 27<sup>th</sup>. It actually flew here – arrived in 4 days. Well I hope your elections won't be as rowdy as the Labour conference in B'pool this week. The leftists behaved like low down scum. To think Britain has to be governed by bag-rags like that. The British businessman doesn't over exert himself these days but if Weggie Benn and co get power they won't stir themselves at all. What they advocate is not democratic at all. I've always admired Shirley Williams. She is very moderate and she didn't half lash out at Benn and co. Callaghan said in his speech that Thatcher had put the country back 30 years. There is a letter in the Mail this morning and the writer said it would be good if she had then we could walk on the streets in safety answer the door without trepidation and jobs were done on time and with satisfaction.*

*It is a pity you can't get a satisfactory school for David. I think he needs to be in a class of children of his standard of intelligence. It is better to have competition with other children than being taught on his own. There are some rows over schools in this country. Labour want to do away with private schools and higher grades. I say if parents want to spend their money for education instead of drink and gambling – well let them. I detest deep dyed labourites. They stick up for scum and keep down the people who would prosper. Just think – if my father hadn't spent his money on educating me at a Higher grade in Burnley there wouldn't have been a Jean Ritter with that wonderful write-up in Who's Who.*

*I was sorry to hear of your car accident – hope you are no worse for it. All the space you have in Australia and you have to bash one another. Eve reckons the new Ford Escort is a grand little car. Nor went to see a specialist in hospital yesterday. He told Nor he had osteo-arthritis and he couldn't do anything for him. He would just have to put up with it and take the doctor's tablets. I can see a time coming when they won't be able to look after me – Did I tell you Sheila and Tom have bought a large bungalow with a lot of land. You once asked me about Slade brass. I keep forgetting to answer you. When I was at Eveline's in May I noticed there was no brass about. I bet she has sold it. She doesn't value keepsakes. However I have a brass Indian plant pot. Your Dad bought it for Gran at Wembley exhibition. I'll will it to you if you would like it. Maybe you will be over here someday. It is nearly three years since you were here – I have received all the Geographic magazines except Feb – have read them all and found them most interesting but my dull old brains don't retain a single fact these days. Yet I get a general impression of life in different parts and am more anti-communist than ever. I am now going to start reading “God is an Englishman”.  
Cheerio with lots of love to all- Yr affect Mum*

My mother was tiring of the political agenda at home and looking forward to the end of the election campaign (7.10.80). The next interchange of letters includes a brief discussion on armaments:



*I very much begrudge the amount of money spent on armaments. I can't help feeling if they spent half that amount on peace it would be achieved, at present the armament manufacturers are laughing all the way to the bank.*

My grandmother replies:

*Oct. 17<sup>th</sup> 80*

*Yes I think war armaments are a waste of good money which could be put for better use in improving the terrible conditions in the undeveloped countries. On the other hand I don't approve of not providing the best armaments when there are such countries as Russia. She is hell bent on dominating the world. The Kaiser and Hitler wouldn't have gone to war if we had been well armed. It amazes me that we won the war after being so ill provided.*

The Federal election was held on October 18<sup>th</sup> and my mother writes two days later:

*20.10.80*

*I have really enjoyed the campaign and have done all kinds of things I have never done before. I have stood on the back of a truck and spoken to a Sunday morning market crowd. I have stood under an umbrella in the pouring rain and talked to working men at the Midland Railway Workshops and I have met a great many people. And I can tell you mum I have met better manners and behaviour from the working man than from what I call the blue rinse set. And the girls standing on polling booths found exactly the same. Penny said that she was tempted to trip up some of the incredibly bad mannered liberal ladies who brushed straight past her with their noses in the air whereas the working classes at least said 'no thanks love' when offered a how to vote card.*

The funniest of these was my husband's uncle who lived in an expensive penthouse apartment in the high-rise blocks in South Perth. He marched up to the polling booth and, recognizing him, I smiled warmly offered a how-to-vote card and said, "Hello, Uncle George, I am sure you'd love to vote for my mother", in a cheerful, chatty voice. He, however, did not recognise me and glaring said, "I don't think so!" He was somewhat abashed when he realised who I was.

The election resulted in a win to Kim Beazley in my mother's electorate but overall the Liberal Government of Malcolm Fraser was returned to power with a decreased majority – a happy result from my mother's perspective.

*We ended up with quite a merry lot here on Saturday night and they all stayed overnight in fact did not leave until Sunday evening. No wonder I am tired today – not only Paul, David and I in the house but Mark, his girlfriend Deborah, another friend Gillian, Erica, ..., Jessica, Andrew, Penny and Ross. What a houseful.*

My grandmother was not convinced by my mother's enthusiasm for life in her fifties:

*Oct 30<sup>th</sup> 80*

*You know Jean it is time you eased up a bit your life hasn't been a lazy one bringing up 7 children and coping with the energetic Paul. I think one is endowed with so much energy and one can use it up quickly or make it spin out a long time. After 50 it is time to put the brakes on. ... To really relax for a couple of hours with feet up and the rest of the body limp is worth more than all the doctor's pills.*

David was thoroughly enjoying his new school, my mother writes: *"it is doing him so much good having the chance to be a small boy instead of being treated as a gifted child all the time"* (27.10.80). The distance she had to drive to take and fetch him acted as a further catalyst to the plan to move house.

*We may in fact have found where we want to move to. It is nearly as big a property as this 3 acres but 1 acre of it has been left natural bush so in effect it is smaller to look after. It has a stream running through, 70 mature fruit trees of 20 different sorts it is very well fenced and quite near shops and a High School. The house is smaller than this but is fully air-conditioned and has potential.*

*David is a funny kid he told me this morning he thought he would be one of the world's future leaders he realised this would not be easy but he thought he had the brains and capacity to cope!*

Letters back from my grandmother were less cheerful:

*Nov 7<sup>th</sup>. 80*

*It is kind of you to ask me what I would like for my birthday. They all ask me that and I reply some new legs. It would be grand if that could happen and then I could look after myself and to hell with everybody. Peggy says old people should go into a home and not be a burden to their children.*

My parents were going ahead with the purchase of the new house in Kalamunda with a move planned for December 15<sup>th</sup> (2.11.80). It was smaller but with a huge sitting room that would accommodate the whole family (as it was at the time). The garden was neglected but that was an incentive to my mother to get out and rehabilitate it.

*It has a lot of kind of terraced garden beds with retaining brick walls and I plan to tackle them one at a time and get them looking good. I would say Paul will not stay on the City Council it takes up a lot of time and energy and is very frustrating a lot of the time.*

This was wishful thinking on my mother's part. Despite all the dinners and receptions and the prestige my mother found my father's involvement on the Perth City Council very emotionally draining. She recalls he came home from Council meetings angry and frustrated by the name-calling and personal putdowns that he endured. My mother found herself often soothing his ego. She resents in retrospect the energy this took that, she felt, would have been better used in other aspects of family life.

The task of moving was daunting, not only were they moving all their goods and chattels but also my father's office building and the freestanding hexagonal guest room. Both of which required cranes and trucks maneuvering through difficult winding roads and a very steep narrow driveway into the new place. My father estimated he would have 200 cardboard boxes of stuff from the office alone. Added to this was the readying of the Kelmscott home for sale, the cleaning of the carpets in Kalamunda and packing of the household goods. In all they planned for ten days of moving, with David away at school camp for four of them (14.11.80). *"There are*

*a lot of memories tied up with this home and yet I am not in the least reluctant to move. I guess the time was right". My grandmother agrees: "Your new home sounds very nice and I hope you will be lucky there . . . . I think it is a good idea to move at your age – gives one a new lease of life". (Nov 21<sup>st</sup>)*

With packing underway my mother comments on the cost of moving and the possible mistake of buying the new place before selling the old.

*It is typical of us somehow to be using up all our available money, having just received our export grant refund, on buying the new place instead of waiting until we have sold this one. It is costing about £50,000 but it is a lovely spot. I just pray we find a buyer for this one.*

Nevertheless she is enthusiastic for the change and tells her mother that she will put the Christmas money she sent towards a jacaranda tree, *"this grows to a beautiful tree which flowers with magnificent translucent blue flowers bluebell colour – at this time of the year. Then I can always say 'This is Mum's tree'" (2.12.80).* Her mother had loved the idea of the tree *"What a lovely thought to plant a tree in memory of me" (Dec 12<sup>th</sup> 80).* She adds: *"The state of this country worsens – afraid there will be riots before times get better. Well I'm glad I lived when I did. People are selfish and grabbing today.* My mother planted the jacaranda tree and it continues to give her great pleasure.

The next few weeks of moving house were very hectic for my mother. But in the midst of the chaos she finally got her wish to be with one of her daughters through the birth of a grandchild, when Nicola's daughter Christine was born. Unfortunately things did not go according to plan, despite her presence. The baby was very overdue and when the membranes were ruptured there was evidence of foetal distress and an emergency caesarian ensued.

Trying to create order after moving house was a big task and by the time she writes to her mother on Boxing Day the fatigue of it all has taken its toll:

**26.12.80**

*I suppose it is not surprising I feel very tired not only the move which was and still is a colossal undertaking but also Christine's birth. I stayed up all one night with Nikki and then stayed at the hospital the following night until she was safely back in bed and did not get home to bed till 2am.*

*But it is lovely here and so quiet Christmas Day yesterday worked extremely well with all the family here.*

*Leo and Jemima are home again and all love this place. I can't tell you how relieved I am to have left Kelmscott you will probably think I am fanciful but I always felt there must have been unhappy things happen here. Have you ever felt like that?*

*Our two little grandsons are a real delight together. Funny I feel a real closeness to Penny's baby Ross whether it is because he was so sick and I nursed him such a lot I don't know, but*

*whenever he sees me coming he gives a great big smile and comes to me, and if I am cooking he loves to be picked up to watch.*

The beginning of 1980 marked the beginning of an era for me, and the end of it marked the end of an era for my mother. She had never really liked the house in Kelmscott but made the best of it in the face of my father’s passion for the space and the opportunities it gave her children. She had fretted on the traffic noise for some time before finally deciding to make the move. After nearly fifteen years and with only one child left at home the timing was right.

## 1981

My mother's early correspondence of 1981 never arrived and it is not until February that my grandmother gets a letter. She has mentioned in her first letter of the year that postage has gone up and small air letters are no longer going to be available so she aims to write more, less often. It is the middle of winter in the UK and she describes the snowfall overnight and heavy rain and gales of recent times and the isolation she feels:

*Jan 15<sup>th</sup> 1981*

*Ronnie says he will come and stay with me two weeks in the summer – that is something to look forward to. Now it is winter I scarcely get a visitor. Nor's children will call across the road but they never think of coming to see me.*

*Friday Jan 30<sup>th</sup> 1981*

*My dear Jeannie,*

*If I don't write you a letter you will be wondering what has happened to me. I keep going to write then put off hoping to get a letter from you. It is three weeks since I had one. I suppose you are busy settling into your new home. Everybody in the family here likes the look of it by the photos. How isolated is it though? I don't fancy you being on your own and long way from a neighbour. Strange I spent my early days in the country but today I would hate not to have neighbours. There are such terrible things happening these days.*

She also makes her commentary on world events:

*Last week I was quite excited watching the return of the American hostages. I reckon Reagan will be a tougher man than Carter, but we will be lucky if that General Haig doesn't trigger off another war.*

My mother is reassuring about her new home letting her mother know that it is not as isolated as it looks with several houses in sight of her window as well as the protection of the dog and the low crime rate in Kalamunda. She was more concerned about my father in America who hadn't contacted her in several days. During his absence there had been a fire at the factory, luckily my father's off-sider, Ralph, was back from his holiday and had dealt with it. There was \$15,000 worth of damage including a nine-foot square Aztec clock they had produced in Sculptcrete. Insurance would only cover about \$10,000 worth. The fire was thought to have started in an incinerator in the adjacent factory (9.2.81).

Despite the dramas of the fire my mother had spent time in the garden planting 25 young trees and bushes with Erica's help. *"I also put in some roses, carnations and frangipani – that is my sweet smelling Edith Mary Corner I get the scent on my balcony seat."*

My father returned fit but thin from his trip. He was lucky to be flying British Airways not Qantas because of major strike action involving the Australian airline. Mark's girlfriend was not so lucky and got stranded in England.

18.2.81

*I and many others like me are just so fed up with the unions, how in heaven's name they think a nation can prosper with constant disruptions I do not know. I believe in the right to strike but it is used so irresponsibly.*

The remains of the letter is family chat. Erica's need to do some part time work while her husband finishes his Law degree, Nicola's baby and Mark's return to University. She also talks of Jemima's singing and a possibility she may travel to New York to further her training.

My grandmother was happy to pick up on the union theme:

Feb 24<sup>th</sup> 81

*Like you and many others I am absolutely fed up with strikes. The unions were good years ago but they have bugged the economy of this country. They have no brains just the gift of the gab. I used to think the male was brainier than the female but not now. Maggie by doing a U turn has just saved the country from a coal strike. Now the watermen are threatening to strike. I dread that...*

*The government workers just don't work. Last Thurs a telephone van drew up just across the road about half way through the morning. Three men got out stood and walked about a bit. Then one decided to dig a trench on the outside of the fence – well he just moved and that was all – the other two stood and looked on. Then another one would take the spade off him and dig, (as slowly as he could) a few more feet. Then the three just stood or sat down for a quarter of an hour. They in turn dug a little more then went off for a 1½ hrs lunch break. In the afternoon they finished laying what looked like a telephone cable. They went at 3.30pm.*

*As for myself I have good days and bad. Yesterday I felt rotten and depressed. Today I feel quite chirpy. But how I envy you being able to garden. It is a heart-ache to me to see my neglected gardens. There just isn't anyone to do them – all the males in the family have a bad back or something else to prevent them working hard. You know Jean people are not so kind and helpful as they were when I was a girl.*

My mother was being kind and helpful looking after my son while I was incapacitated with a boil on my leg. She was on grandmother duty for Erica as well, looking after her two while she lectured. Topped off with a school board meeting the same evening she was busy giving out (3.3.81).

The cooler temperatures, fresher air and peace and quiet of her new environment were bringing her relief after the traffic pollution of Kelmscott. She savoured the change by spending many hours in the garden.

10.3.81

*Almost all the plants I have put in have survived well. The only ones to die were two Sturt peas which are notoriously tricky to grow. I put the yellow climbing rose Peace in by the verandah post the other day. That really is a lovely spot that I call Nan's corner. it is a bed that I see from my kitchen window and the stairs from the kitchen part of the verandah lead down to it. it also goes under the part of the verandah where I like to sit when I get five minutes and all the lovely perfumes come up from it. There are roses, frangipani, jasmines, carnations and all sorts of ground cover – heavenly. Further along the bed there are some quite tall bushes and I am going to plant lots of bulbs. I have 250 bulbs waiting to be planted so they should make a lovely perfume too. Slowly the garden improves as I plant and clear and prune but this back of mine does not make it easy.*

"Nan's Corner" still flourishes in my mother's garden, bringing her ongoing joy even though she cannot garden much herself anymore.

*Paul leaves again for overseas in ten days time, this time he is going to Israel, Switzerland and Germany while he is away I shall go and spend five days in Canberra with Jemima and Michael. Two of the days I am W.A.'s representative at a conference on children in hospital.*

*Your description of the P.M.G. workers made me laugh. But they are just the same here, if they worked as hard as Paul the world could get out of the mess it is in pretty fast.*

My grandmother's reply to this letter picks up on the theme of hard work:

*Mar 20<sup>th</sup> 81*

*True if other workers did their work half as hard as he (Paul) does the world would be a better place. Well 30,000 people emigrated from this country last year to Australia. Just recently thousands have been queuing in Manchester and being interviewed for permits to Australia. Thousands emigrate to Canada and South Africa. It is all our best workers especially engineers and computer workers who are leaving. This is going to be a country of Blacks, Asians and layabouts. It is very disturbing how many Blacks there are and they are very much disliked by the majority of people. The police have a lot of trouble with them.*

I am surprised at her bitter racism. She sounded very threatened by the changing demographics in the UK. Her absolute thinking and judgementalism temper my sentimentality about not having her around during my life. I wonder if I would have liked her or found her attitudes too negative. Reading her letters fills in some of the gaps her absence had created.

My mother seemed to be feeling more and more settled and content.

*21.3.81*

*I wish we had moved up to these hills, even though they are not very high, many years ago the air is so fresh and good. Even though it is getting cooler I still go for a swim and a walk every morning before breakfast.*

*David loves this place as much as I do he is busy establishing a cactus garden. Every time we go to a plant nursery a couple of cacti or succulents manage to get bought too. I have not finished planting all my bulbs yet but there will be a bonny show in the spring – jonquils, daffodils, narcissi, tulips, scilla, bluebells, ranunculas, anemones and iris about 300 bulbs in all.*

Moving had given my mother a great fillip. She felt, and still feels a great peace and comfort in her home in Kalamunda. It is not a good home for the aged it has many levels and ups and downs in the garden. But she believes the steep walk up to the road to get the paper every morning helps her physical health and the beautiful outlook into the trees, and the peace and quiet, help her spiritual health.

My grandmother was less happy, firing on all political cylinders:

*Apr 1st 1981*

*No doubt you have heard about the new breakaway party the Social Democrats. They are not for me. They are just a paler shade of red. Among their party there is A Shirley Williams. She is saying she wants a classless*

*society and is suggesting that boys in Eton change sessions with boys in L'pool and vice-versa. How ridiculous. The scum in Toxteth or Kirby would wreck Eton just like they do their modern comprehensive school. Gan-gan used to say you couldn't make everybody equal. In a litter of pups they weren't all equal.*

*We were all shocked at the attempted assassination of Reagan. Do you remember Dad and me being with you when Kennedy was killed. – There is never a dull moment on the telly at present what with squabbles in the Common Market and revelations of spies.*

Remembering where you were when Kennedy was killed is one of those unifying moments of history. I had a vague feeling my uncle Ronnie was staying with us but no recollection my grandparents were there so it is interesting to read my grandmother's recollection.

14481

*The news in the papers here and on the T.V. is all of the rioting in Brixton what an absolutely terrible thing to happen – Poor old England what a change in status in the last fifty years. I feel very sad about it but at the same time glad that my family is away from it.*

Racial tensions between police and black occupants of the Brixton area lead to the riots on April 11<sup>th</sup> 1981. Many young black people had felt victimised by the police and the laws that allowed them to be questioned at random. The arrest of a black man triggered a rampage in which there was much property damage, fires, looting and many police injured (BBC, 1981a). My grandmother's strong feeling against the black immigrants was obviously not a lone one.

*I am very interested in the formation of the Social Democrats I do think it could mean the end of the Labour Party as it is today. Yes it is nonsense to talk about equality. It is alright to talk about equality of opportunity but take someone like David born in to this household where there are plenty of books, plenty of intellectual conversations, very little T.V. and where educational importance is taken for granted. Now suppose a chap with his potential was born in to a home where there were no books, rubbishy magazines where sport, boozing and women were the chief topics of conversation and where the T.V. was never off what chance would he have.*

My mother's words proved prescient although the Social Democrats were only to last nine years before the majority merged with the Liberal party in 1988 and the remnants finally disappeared in 1991. It originated with the discontent felt by Shirley Williams and four other members at the extreme leftism of the labour party. It did not prosper after an initial flurry of support but is credited by some with leading to the movement of the Labour Party back to the right under the leadership of Tony Blair (Unspecified, 2003a).

*Paul arrived back on Saturday – our 35<sup>th</sup> Wedding Anniversary we got some beautiful flowers from the children. We did not do any celebrating – Paul was too tired – we just had a lovely relaxed evening at home. He gave me a lovely pendant which was a section of a nautilus shell which had been injected with silver and set in silver – most unusual and very beautiful.*

A mild Easter came and went, spent mostly in the garden.



21.4.81

*Guess what? I am having a birthday party this year. The kids decided it was time I had one since I had made so many for others. So they are working out who is doing what. They have asked about 80 people of whom I reckon about 50 will come – it should be quite entertaining. I told Paul if anyone wanted to know what I wanted they could give me a token to a plant nursery.*

My grandmother picks up the theme of the garden in her letter:

*I'm glad you are feeling better. There is nothing like gardening for improving your health. It is hard work but somehow it relieves the tension. Peggy was telling me off for staying at home after Dad died – said I should have gone out and enjoyed myself but I was so happy working in my garden and what more does one want but a good feed and happiness. She lectured me the other night because I had wasted my brains and education – said I should have gone out lecturing and giving talks. But I was a loner as a child and have been quite happy since to be a loner.*

29.4.81

*Peggy is wrong saying you had wasted your brains and education but for them I would not have gone to university and the world would have lost seven good people as a result. I often wonder what David will do – two university lecturers, two lawyers, a doctor and a maths teacher are a hard act to follow. I feel he has enormous potential if he does not waste it.*

At time of writing my grandmother's descendents through my mother have the following qualifications:

BSc. Dip.Ed. MACE, B.A. (Hons), M.A. (Hons), Dip.Ed., PhD, MACE, M.B.A , B.Sc. Dip.K.T.C., B.A. (Hons), B.Comm (Marketing), M.B.R.S, B.A.(Hons) F.A.C Psych. Med., B.Sc. Grad. Dip.Ed., PhD, MSc., GradDipComp, DipEd, BSc., MIEEE, B.A.(Hons) , Dip. Env. Science, B.A. Ll.B., B.Juris, Ll.B.(Hons), B.A.(Hons) Ll.B.(Hons):

And in progress – PhD (Writing), PhD (History), PhD (History/Law), Advanced Diploma in Performing Arts (WAAPA), B.A. (Journalism). BSc (Environmental Science).

My grandmother continues her discussion of political affairs in her reply:

*May 8<sup>th</sup> 81*

*I suppose you have read about all the sad goings on in Ireland. I hope they tell you the truth not like the American journalists. The Daily Mail today has exposed the lies they have been writing about our soldiers in Ireland. My heart aches for those young lads. I don't know how they can resist not shooting when they are pelted with petrol bombs. The Irish are an uncouth lot.*

She had strong feelings about Ireland in part because her grandson had been badly affected psychologically after military service there.

My mother was more concerned about domestic matters, in particular that the Kelmscott land had not been sold.

*Undated* – Mid-May 1981 (Grandmother's handwriting)

*I wish we could hurry up and get a buyer for our land at Kelmscott. Quite a lot of stuff like fencing has been stolen and it is impossible to keep an eye on it. We have told the police but they are short numbered.*

*We have just had Leonora home for six days and I must say I am very concerned about her she seemed incredibly tired and tense. I really feel she could do with a month's holiday on Sark like*

*we used to have. Amazing when I think of it though when I was her age my fourth child was on the way!*

Leonora's life was certainly very different from her mother's. This did create some tension when she visited home. My mother had included a newspaper article about Leonora in her letter (unfortunately there is not a copy) and my grandmother acknowledges and comments:

*May 19<sup>th</sup> 1981*

*Thanks for the lovely photos and newspaper account of Leo's interview. She sure is an interesting personality. I wonder if in the years to come she will be as happy as her married sisters. There are a lot of worries in married life and you are left alone in the end. But if one doesn't marry are the regrets greater?*

*I would have loved to be a horticulturalist instead of a teacher of snotty-nosed miners' kids. I think we don't know until we are grown up what our real calling is.*

When I asked Leonora what she remembered of this she was quite disconcerted that her mother and grandmother had been discussing and analyzing her. She felt a sense of invasion of her privacy. She finds in her diary that her job had been quite demanding and a young man attracting her attention before she left. She was also considering the consequences of the Lynch Report into Education. All this was compounded by an airline strike and the uncertainty it created.

I am caught by her concern about her mother and grandmother's discussions. I recognise that their letters were a criss-cross of family tales and happenings. They analysed a lot of relatives both sympathetically and judgmentally. I see it as similar to a bunch of doctors sitting down to a meal and discussing patients; for full-time mothers their children are their work and no matter how old your children your working life will always have been invested in their outcome. Perhaps the only problem is when others read the letters or hear the conversations. The words written were, after all, intended for an audience of one, thousands of miles away at a given moment in time. Topically the content is about the debate on choice, a debate that is as pertinent today, about whether to have children – is it lonelier to have had them and not see them (Nan felt she did not see enough of her children and grandchildren, she regretted a life of marriage and childbearing and yearned for someone with whom to have intellectual conversation) – to be irrelevant to those to whom you have devoted your working life – or is it lonelier to have had none. Probably the former because in the latter case you know you will have to structure your life around friendships and therefore will have planned to redress the risk whereas in the former you may have held expectations of care that your children reject or resent therefore ending up not only lonely but also rejected, sad, inadequate, even bitter.

*21.5.81*

*Many, many thanks for the birthday cards and presents for David and I. I bought some more plants for the rockery I am building and David also spent his on plants – he is mad about succulents and I have given him a patch to grow them in. I also got some raspberry, blackcurrant,*

*redcurrant canes and gooseberry bushes today. We have not been able to grow soft fruit before but being a bit higher and cooler we thought we would have a go.*

My father grew wonderful raspberries and knowing how much I loved them would secrete some for me when he knew I was visiting.

*I thoroughly enjoyed my birthday party and it was a great success. The only problem was that we overcatered. But better food left than not enough to go round. Everyone seemed to enjoy themselves and it was a very happy evening.*

It is a family joke that my mother will always worry that there will be enough food and that it will be good enough. There always has been and it always has been. Erica catered for my mother's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday party in May 2004. We all contributed our specialties as requested. My mother's main concern was that there be enough food! There was a magnificent spread even though the baked fish had not cooked properly and could not be served. (Later my father accidentally knocked it over so it did not make it to supper either!)

*I hope some of the photos turn out. Ross and Andrew wore the chinese suits we bought them in Hong Kong last year and looked quite enchanting. Jessica was very sweet but disappointed herself by falling asleep before the candles were lit so I gave Erica a chunk of cake with candles on to take home so they could "play birthdays" the next day. Chris enchanted everyone she is tiny but so lively and such big grey eyes at five months she already moves around the floor. I was given masses of flowers and chocolates lots and lots of plants for outside and inside, wine, champagne, beautiful soap, perfume two beautiful sets of crystal glasses, a beautiful white Glomesh handbag and best of all from Paul a solar heating system for the swimming pool which means when it is installed I will be able to swim most of the year. I find that going for a swim every morning at seven am loosened my joints and made me feel marvellous but the water just got too cold so as soon as it warms up a bit I will be able to go again.*

*I feel quite selfish sometimes living in this quiet backwater while so much of the world is in turmoil. Why can't man live together happily. I do not understand the fanatical mentality of hunger strikers. I feel only something drastic can help Ireland. My solution would be 1) Deport all S. Irish from England. 2) Give Ulsterians the chance of staying in Ireland or resettling in England. 3) Withdraw all British troops and support for Ireland and make all Irish have to apply for visas to get in to England with stringent supervision of applicants.*

My grandmother is quick to point out that my mother's plan will not work because Ireland is part of the Common Market and as such the people do not need a visa to move from one country to another, a concept that has turned her against the Common Market itself. Her last paragraph rings true down the decades:

*May 29<sup>th</sup> 81*

*Yes, why can't the people of this world live together peacefully. It is so mad and futile to be blowing one another to bits. War and bombing achieves nothing only waste and misery.*

Mind you this is from a lady who in a previous letter had advocated sinking Ireland into the Atlantic!

The complexities of the Kelmscott property deal were troubling my mother. The deal involved selling the top half acre to the Main roads department for the re-alignment of Brookton Highway. They paid off their mortgage and were trying to sell it to pay off the bank loan on the new property. The various negotiations involved the Crown Law Department, Main Roads Department, Metropolitan Region Planning Authority, Building Society, Bank Of New South Wales and Armadale-Kelmscott Shire with a great deal of bureaucracy and red tape (*May 21<sup>st</sup>*).

Mention of this process to my mother brings a flow of regret. The Kelmscott land took a long time to sell and when it did the Government taxed them as if it was in investment property because they were no longer living in it. A big cheque from the Grants Board meant that they did own the Kalamunda property outright for a while but my father later borrowed against it and then they did not have the connivance to put everything in my mother's name and keep her out of the business to create financial safety in the case of bankruptcy. She remains bitter about the emotional and financial costs that resulted from remaining in business and risking the house.

#### 10.6.81

*David is very, very happy at his new school I really wonder what he will do with his life he is incredibly intelligent but at times so intolerant, he certainly does not suffer fools gladly. Yet he is a very tender, gentle, loving boy if he is in the room his nieces and nephews head for him first and hold up their arms to him, and he is devoted to me. His health has improved enormously here, the lack of stress from school and the fact that he loves being outside all contribute to his feeling of well being.*

My family has enjoyed the results of being large and spread out over a big age range. My oldest brother, Mark, is nine years younger than me, my younger brother, David, is nine years younger than him. David and my oldest son and my daughter and Mark's daughter are also separated by nine years. My brothers were mentors and older playmates for my children and they have taken the same roles in their younger cousins' lives. It has created a wonderful continuity of generations that bridge the gaps that are now common in the smaller, more nuclear families.

*I say to myself that I must not tempt fate but nothing can take away the happiness of the last six months. The odd thing I made the move for David's sake and yet it has been of such an incredible boon to me.*

Tempting fate. It seems a common trait for people not to enjoy the pleasures of the moment in case they don't last and in my mother's case in the superstitious belief that the enjoyment will cause a decline in luck. It is a similar notion to the concept of pride coming before a fall. It seems to me that it is like not eating in case you might get hungry again. My mother reflects that it was one of the happiest years of her life. She remembers how the first time she drove down the Kalamunda driveway she felt like she was coming home. She adds now:

*It was hell persuading Paul to move and the removal was horrendous, there are still boxes of junk unpacked that he insisted had to come but "God's Helicopters" abounded here and Kalamunda was much more supportive than Kelmscott would have been and I still find it a great place to live.*

“God’s Helicopters” refers to a favourite story of my mother’s about the deeply religious man whose house was cut off, and then inundated, by cyclonic floods. As the waters rose he made his way onto his roof, sure that God would protect him. When a boat came to take him off he waved it away saying God would look after him and later, as the waters rose further, two helicopters came to save him. He waved them away with the same belief. Finally the waters washed him away and he drowned. When he arrived at the Pearly Gates he was outraged at God demanding to know why he had not saved him. God replied – “Well I sent you a boat and two helicopters – what more did you want ...”

David’s happiness at Beenong School convinced Erica that Jessica would be best served by also being sent there. So she decided to leave Crestwood and look for a house nearer to our parents. This was disappointing for me as we had moved to Crestwood, leaving a little house I loved, to be closer to Erica for the support we could provide each other.

It was a very wet and cold winter which seemed to bring colds and flu to David and the grandchildren. Erica was also badly affected and my mother writes: *“Erica was here yesterday and should obviously have been in bed it is hard when you are a Mum. And so often if the mother is off colour the children are twice as much trouble”* (Undated -Postmarked 6 Jul.1981).

Motherhood is the only job that, when performed full time, means working three shifts a day or at least two shifts on and one on call. With no sick leave, holidays or long service leave it is a challenging profession, especially when it is either unpaid or poorly paid by government allowances.

My mother was also concerned about the state of England, having been shocked by riots in Brixton in April. Reports of police injuries when youths ran amuck in July disturbed her further:

*Our papers today are full of the riots in England again. They sound terrifying. Does anything like that happen in Warrington or it is all confined to the big cities.*

The BBC described nearly 200 white and black youths had attacked police, cars and shops with petrol bombs and bricks, staging pitched battles with officers, confronting police with scaffolding and charging at them with milk floats. Civic leaders were quick to deny any racial overtones but still labelling the rioters as “a crowd of black hooligans intent on making life unbearable and indulging in criminal activities” (BBC, 1981b).

My grandmother was very sympathetic to the police and critical of the costs of dealing with the riots and angry at the perpetrators: "*The paper says many blacks want to return to their native land. Give them a sum of money to go I say and good shuttance to them*" (July 17<sup>th</sup> 81). The areas of rioting were familiar to my mother, places she had known well when she was a student.

As riots were disrupting parts of England, strikes were causing havoc in Western Australia. The PMG were on strike stopping postal deliveries and a twelve-day strike by the Transport Workers Union caused shortages in shops and disruption of milk supplies, this had an unexpected benefit:

**9.8.81**

*Milk was delivered in plastic bottles after farmers drove their own milk supplies to the city and volunteers bottled it. The milk was beautiful – makes you wonder what normally happens to it to turn it in to such tasteless stuff.*

My mother noted that the strikers had at least allowed the telecast of the wedding of Prince Charles to Lady Diana Spencer. My grandmother also enjoyed watching it with her usual political commentary attached:

**Sunday Aug 16<sup>th</sup> 81**

*It was a perfect day for the wedding – fine and sunny – not too hot – not too cold. The crowds in London were ecstatic. The new Princess seems to be very popular except with a few miserable socialists. Socialism has ruined this country. It has bred a lot of miserable, lazy envious people. It looks as if we will have a national rail strike the end of August – the bank holiday weekend. There were riots in Liverpool again yesterday. They should ban all demonstrations. That fool Michael Foot adds fuel to the fire with his inane utterances. Recently British shipyards and some other big business have got huge orders from abroad. But I bet the workers will go slow and strike instead of getting on with the work and making a good job of it. A lot of trouble is stirred up by the 'reds' who are agents of Russia.*

My grandmother had written to me on the 30<sup>th</sup> July for my birthday and described the Royal wedding:

*Well we had a happy day yesterday watching the Royal Wedding. It was such a treat after all the awful riots in some of our big cities... The romance of Prince Charles and Lady Diana has fairly won the hearts of our people. There is only a small minority (miserable scum) who are not in favour. Londoners went wild with delight. We were all a little apprehensive – hoping there wouldn't be a crank's shot at the royals. But the security measures were marvellous. A superb marksman dressed as a footman sat behind the Prince and Princess as they returned to Buckingham palace. For a change the weather was good – a lovely sunny day but not too hot. On Tuesday there was a wonderful firework display in Hyde Park and we had wonderful viewing on TV. For months our TV news has been about strikes and riots – everyone was fed up with the news so the Wedding of the year has brought much pleasure.*

My grandmother yearned for intelligent conversation. She had mentioned in her previous letter how much she enjoyed the visit of her youngest son with whom she could enjoy an intellectual chat.

My mother was still busy with her committees, AWCN and the council of David's school figuring prominently in her time. The school was a private "alternative" school based on the principles of A.S. Neill's school Summerhill in the UK. My father now describes the philosophy of schools such as Summerhill and Beenong as "social self-regulation", a term that reflects the concept of doing whatever you want providing there is respect for the rights of others and the social construct of cooperation. Beenong is now a Montessori school.

Jemima came home for a few weeks in late August and my mother thoroughly enjoyed her visit, especially as my father was off on another overseas trip, this time to Singapore and the Philippines. His absence did not curtail my mother's social life and she describes going out to a Chinese meal with her younger children, a picnic with Erica's family and a meals out with some new friends, *"I really enjoyed myself. It was funny I got home at 1 a.m. to be greeted by Mark saying, 'This is a fine time to come home!'" (31.8.81)*

She was not feeling any more comfortable with the business life, earlier in the year she had done the business accounts dealing with nearly \$300,000 of turn-over. *"I thought I would end up a professor's wife in a protected University environment not the wife of a business man in the cold stream of business" (20.8.81).*

### 12.9.81

*Paul had a 1000 small trout arriving tomorrow so he has been busy making a pond to put them in by putting judicious dams in to our little stream. David too is in his element here, he spends so much time outside and has now added a parrot and a duck to his collection. The solar heat collecting panels we have had put on our roof make the swimming pool warm enough to swim in so although it is still cold in the mornings (40 deg) I go for a quarter hour swim then towel down and go for a short brisk walk. And breakfast today was fresh squeezed orange juice (the oranges from our own trees of course) followed by a mushroom omelette topped with chopped parsley (eggs, mushrooms and parsley home grown) with home made bread and marmalade!*

It all sounds very idyllic, and perhaps it was. But underlying the satisfaction was a current of anxiety about money that rarely left her. My grandmother enjoyed the description and delighted in David's love of the outdoors, *"Fresh air and outdoor interests are good for health and good health is more precious than all other gifts".*

*I have had a very busy week including shaking hands and chatting with the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh on Thursday. I must say the Queen looked much more relaxed though much older than the last time. She has put on weight is quite grey at the temples and yet she looks more peaceful as though she has come to terms with her age. There was much more security than last time they were here and yet no one really checked the people at the small reception we met her at. I guess in a small place like Perth odd bods would stick out.*

*Yesterday I thought "great I can have a day at home – no driving" but it was not to be. Jessica fell awkwardly and cracked a bone in her arm so I ended up driving her and Erica to Princess*

*Margaret Hospital for children. Funny Keith was on duty in the orthopaedic department so he was able to put the plaster on. Keith has got the job at King Edward Hospital as registrar so he and Penny will not be leaving for the country yet awhile. Last weekend we had a Chinese girl for the weekend and at present we have a Swiss girl staying for a few weeks. Paul's sister Carla is coming for Christmas with two of her children so I hope my dining room extension is finished by then. What fun and chaos.*

The spring weather brought a burst of gardening activity and my mother shares these in her next letter. She has been bottling mulberries whilst having an eye to her planning for Christmas.

I have become very absorbed in reading my grandmother's letters. Her family anecdotes of cousins I have never met and aunts and uncles about whom I have always known but never actually known. She is at times bitter, at others feisty. Her loneliness stands out against her emotional self-sufficiency. I gather she was not easy to please yet she seemed to take joy in the achievements, and grief in the losses, of her offspring and their children. Her letters tell of her yearning to see my mother again and I am moved by the sadness of their enforced separation. My father traveled so much it seems heartless that my mother could not make another trip to see her aged mother. As the year goes by my grandmother's writing becomes more infirm, spelling mistakes creep in, yet her mind continues to show a lively interest in the affairs of the world and strong opinions about the happenings in her family as well as the wider community, but her writing signifies a physical decline.

My mother has told me that she wrote deliberately cheerful and chatty letters as her mother aged. Her intent not to communicate the real every day troubles of life but a positive spin that would bring her mother a lighter moment in her day. So my mother's letters become less and less useful as a chronicle of her real life, but more a Pollyannic view cultivated for her audience.

1.11.81

*Darling Ma,*

*A soaking wet Sunday! How I used to hate them when I was little. However Paul is out cleaning the dirt traps on his trout pond. Mark and David are playing table tennis. Barbara our young friend from the Eastern States, is reading and I am trying to get a few letters written before the family descends on us.*

One of my grandmother's letters is missing; I feel its loss as I read my mother's reply to its contents. I am coming to enjoy her rigid opinions but my mother was not so compliant and she argues the worth of Shirley Williams versus Maggie Thatcher, questioning her right wing posturing and the consequences of imperialism. My mother challenges her mother's racist views: "*Colour has got nothing to do with it there are rotters of all colours and nationalities and similarly great people of all colours and religions*".

And pushes her views on mothering:



*Why does Dorothy go to work is her husband out of a job? These are the years that her children need her. Even if a teenager comes in from school and ignores you, she needs you there to ignore. Women's lib alas has meant too much damage to children, the real liberation for women would come if they were paid to be good wives and mothers.*

Twenty-three years later the Australian Government is paying women to have babies. But this is still far short of my mother's ideals. She remains firmly attached to the view of mother as homemaker. She gets annoyed that houses are advertised as homes, arguing homes are created with love and care and not *"these sterile structures which persuade people to spend more than they can afford so they have to earn more money so do not have time to turn them in to homes"*. She yearns for a time when children belonged in a community, where women were chatting on the street, when the elderly were not *"abandoned to nursing homes . . . It seems to me that because the mothers are not there no sense of belonging is created. Nelson Mandela was so wise when he said children need a village to educate them"*.

Back in 1981 my grandmother was bemoaning the changing times as well. She needed constant, if intermittent, supervision, often a source of distress for her. She describes the visit of her eldest daughter:

**Nov 20th 81**

*Peggy is very stormy at times and you know it can hurt especially when you are partially disabled. For instance the other evening we were expecting to see the Princess of Wales on TV switching the lights on in Regent St. Peggy went into the kitchen and told me to give her a call when it came on. Well I was looking at the paper and didn't call her immediately. She came rushing in and said "I told you to call me -- you stupid woman."*

A rather nasty bout of the flu disrupted my mother's Christmas planning (26.11.81) but she was nevertheless anticipating the arrival of Jemima, Leonora and Carla and her children. My parents had extended the kitchen in their new house to include a big dining area which would accommodate her expanding family when they visited. The cork flooring was laid late in November to be ready for the Christmas invasion.

**Dec 1.**

*I do find it so odd being a grandma -- I just don't feel that old, gives me quite a surprise when I look in mirror and see my lined face. Inside me I still feel so young and I enjoy so many things gardening particularly. We have a heavy crop of cherry plums and plums so I am trying to do bottling in the midst of chaos. And the glue fixing the cork tiles sure does stink!*

*It is going to be a hectic Christmas but I look forward to it. It looks hopeful for me coming to Europe at the end of April if the International situation is reasonable.*

My grandmother turned 89 on December the 4<sup>th</sup>. She was well feted by her family for her birthday with dinner at her son's house, *"a lovely laid out tea of salmon salad, cheese cake, oranges and sponge fingers in orange jelly. There was a lovely sponge cake with strawberries and whipped cream in it"* (Dec 9<sup>th</sup> 1981).

12.12.81

*I am feeling very happy ... Mark has done exceptionally well he has topped the whole of his law year and has won the Blackstone Prize. He had three distinctions and a credit and distinctions are very hard to get in the law course .... Mark works very hard but plays hard too. He gets far more uptight about a cricket match than he ever does about his study. He is a nice lad and even though he is 20 next month he behaves like a kid at times. He and David are like a comic duo at times, but luckily most of the time they are really good mates.*

Her new extension had created a beautiful space where she put her desk. It sat up high looking out into the valley over the bottlebrush trees in one direction and over the swimming pool into the neighboring bush on the other; it was a light spacious room.

*Well so Shirley Williams got in ... it looks as though England is in for an interesting time politically after the next election. You really should read some of the books written by her mother Vera Brittain they are "Testament of Youth", "Testament of Friendship" and "Testament of Experience".*

I found the books of Vera Brittain very useful reading as her lifetime paralleled my grandmother's and gave great insight into the realities and impacts of being a teenager in the Great War (Brittain, 1980, 1981).

Nicola's baby had her first birthday party and the joy my mother felt at watching her prompted the comment:

*You know I believe the reason my children and grandchildren are bright is not just luck of heredity but it is a lot due to the deep breathing exercises I did when pregnant as did the girls. The deep breathing increases the oxygen flow to the foetus just like smoking decreases the oxygen flow and affects the brain adversely.*

Christmas saw my mother surrounded by family in her home, including my father's half-sister and her three children, my grandmother had fallen ill a fortnight before Christmas but recovered enough to enjoy the day with her grandson and his family watching *"the kids with all their modern toys. I would have been miserable if I had been at home. There just wasn't anything worth watching on the 'telly'"* (Dec 30<sup>th</sup>).

While my mother and grandmother were settled in to the patterns of family and the filling of personal time, I was branching out with my own small family. That year we established our own traditions of holidays in Augusta and began the break from the family Christmas. My little boy was bright and demanding and there were strong injunctions built in to the family belief system that made child-rearing sometimes more fraught than it may have needed to be. I cannot complain about the results but the "shoulds" of parenting were very strong. My oldest niece was a headstrong child and prone to tantrums, whenever she threw one when we were around my husband would become very stern with our son, afraid that he would develop the same tendencies. My mother did not intrude overtly in my parenting but I was very sensitive to her

opinion and unsettled if I thought she implied criticism. I was very uncertain of my own opinion and this created for me a lot of angst.

My parents’ antagonism to the medical models and traditional approaches to child-rearing made relying on expert wisdom impossible. I did read Thomas Gordon’s *Parent Effectiveness Training* during my son’s early years, recommended by Peter Cook, the child psychiatrist I had stayed with in Sydney some years earlier. It was a landmark publication in child rearing and full of skills I have used and taught over many years. Ironically its popularity lead to an increase in attendance at help clinics for parents because few could manage to do it perfectly, leaving many parents feeling inadequate.

I went back to work a few hours a week, initially in a practice set up for mothers of young children with a babysitter on site – but I could not concentrate when I could hear my baby crying in the background and I found general practice such an enormous area of knowledge to cover. It seemed impossible for me to feel confident because I didn’t see anything often enough to be sure I was sure. I’d had no specific training in general practice having spent all my working life thus far in hospitals. In 1981 I found a practice closer to home where I could work a few hours and leave my son in the care of someone close. It worked better. I also joined the Family Medicine Programme and as a result attended sessions at the Wasley Centre (home of the Psychodrama Institute of WA) in Perth to improve my consultation skills by increasing my personal awareness. This changed my life and began me on the path to a career in psychological medicine which I have pursued for the last 23 years. It also marked a movement away from the apparently intransigent family belief systems to a more flexible set of perceptions that were a better fit for my world.



1982

My mother writes on New Year's Day taking advantage of the relative quiet when most of the houseguests went to the Perth Cup. She has been very busy with ten people in the house, including Carla's children who do not speak English. The new extension has worked very well with eighteen sitting down to Christmas dinner. She was less happy with the quality of the frozen turkey she had bought, bemoaning the lack of taste of pre-packaged food and expressing concern for the young who "just do not know what good food tastes like" (1.1.82).

*Jan 8<sup>th</sup> 82*

*Well you are sure having a busy time but it is better than my lonely existence. I would be miserable if I couldn't read. It worries me sometimes that my eyesight may go. I've read three books in a fortnight. Just finished Ken Follett's "The Key to Rebecca". It is a spy thriller of the last war. It is exciting but a bit too much whoring for my liking.*

By the end of the month just my mother and David remain at home. My father is away again visiting Los Angeles, New York, London, Oslo, Zurich and Kuwait and my mother writes of her garden and the books she's been reading (26.1.82).

*Friday Feb 5<sup>th</sup> 82*

*My dearest Jean,*

*I was so pleased to receive your letter of Jan 21<sup>st</sup>. I've waited answering until I had been to hospital this morning. I was there almost three hours. I had to undress and lie on a bed with a nurse in attendance and had my tummy prodded and pummeled and sounded, my fingers and feet examined then my eyes examined. He said the cataract on the eye wasn't very bad. Then I had a blood test then undress again and have an x-ray... I now have to take water tablets twice a day – go back to hospital Mar 8<sup>th</sup>. I've to eat nothing for 6 hours before – take barium and have an x-ray. I don't know how this is going to work out. If I don't have food regularly I come over faint and shaky. Then on the 9<sup>th</sup> I have to go into hospital for a day to have 2 hourly blood tests.*

She adds that her granddaughter, Gail, has lost her baby.

15.2.82

*What a sad letter was yours of Feb 5<sup>th</sup>. Poor Gail. I hope everyone gives her the chance to grieve – that way she will get over it much sooner. Saying things like "she must try again" is bad. I have done a lot of work of counselling parents on the death of a child – our society is very bad at allowing people to express their grief, they need to cry and shout and thump pillows.*

*Now Mum darling you really must ask why they are doing all these tests on you. It makes no sort of sense either to Penny or to me to allow them to muck you about without you knowing the reason. If they won't tell you please tell me the name of the specialist and the hospital and I will ring from here. Barium meals are not pleasant to swallow and some doctors are too damned quick to muck old people about without real reason behind it. Stick up for your rights.*

*Paul arrived back in the early hours of Sat. He was originally supposed to come back on Wed morning but they forgot to tell me he had changed his flight and I spent half the night at the airport before I found out. However I seem to be able to manage with comparatively little sleep these days.*

*David is happily back at school and Jessica is also there. The children of an A.B.C. newsreader also go to Beenong and Jessica was quite bemused seeing him in the flesh she said "I did not know ordinary people could be on T.V."*

*This really is a beautiful peaceful place. I wish I could blink you in here.*

This sentiment struck a chord with my grandmother whose health was unstable. This was compounded by her lack of faith in her doctors.

**Feb 27<sup>th</sup> 1982**

*I feel lonely these days – never see anyone. Mollie stays at Kathie's during the week to look after the children... Gordon has been working Saturdays and Sundays so I can't expect to see him... I am glad you like your new home. I'm afraid I haven't grown roots here I loved 17 The Avenue. Guess I wouldn't have been as happy there now. My old neighbour Mrs Owens has moved.*

She was also concerned about the health of her son who had had a biopsy taken from a lump on his vocal chords and was concerned he had cancer. My mother replied with lots of reassurance whilst blaming cigarette smoke for her brother's problem and her brother-in-law's earlier death. My mother was a relative pioneer in standing up for her rights for fresh air and even when we were young demanded people smoke outside. Later she would respond to the request "Do you mind if I smoke" with the response "As long as you don't mind if I'm sick" (3.3.82).

As it transpired my uncle did have throat cancer which greatly distressed my grandmother. She was aggrieved the doctor had ignored the lump for four years before investigating it properly. With her eldest son confronting radium therapy for his cancer, own health precarious, her widowed daughter in financial difficulty and her daughter-in-law injured she was struggling. My mother was also upset about her brother, she struggled to imagine him as an older man having seen so little of him in the previous decades. He became quite ill during his treatment.

My mother set about writing to her mother with determined cheerfulness.

**25.3.82**

*It is glorious weather for gardening here at present. I cleared all the straggly petunias out of one of my flower beds yesterday raked it and fertilised it and watered it and today I have planted out stocks and pansies and lobelia. The West Australian Garden Week is on at present so David and I are going to pay it a visit on Saturday morning. I bought all kinds of things from the stalls on my visit last year and they have all grown well. In a year or two I'll have a really beautiful garden. Last year I put in lots of grevilleas they are a native plant and they not only have beautiful flowers but they attract the birds and the butterflies.*

*I put in a moonflower creeper only a week ago and it is going ahead with great pace. I find I must have green fingers I lose very few plants but I suppose now I only have David at home I have more time to garden than I used to.*

Despite my mother's efforts my grandmother remained despondent. Her blood tests revealed that her blood sugar level was not under control and she must be more assiduous with her diet.

So she reluctantly had to tell my mother not to send her any more glacé fruits as even one a day, the doctor said, was too many. It seems harsh to me to deprive a woman in her 90<sup>th</sup> year of small luxuries.

Her next few weeks were enriched by a visit from her youngest son but this only highlighted her loneliness when he left (*Mar 31<sup>st</sup> 82*). She reminded my mother of a promise made as a child: "*I guess you don't remember when you were a little girl you said, 'Mum when you are old I will wheel you about in a chair'. Well the need is there but no Jean*".

Her mood had not improved when she wrote again on the 16<sup>th</sup> of April troubled by the looming war with Argentina over the Falkland Islands: "*Sometimes I wonder why we wish to live on this rotten earth*".

My mother tries to remain chatty and cheerful but her own angst creeps in:

#### **18.4.82**

*Paul leaves tomorrow for a trip to the Hanover Trade Fair. I had hoped to come with him but until we sell the Kelmscott block we are rather sadly broke. It is very annoying to have a block of land worth about £30,000 and be unable to turn it into cash and in the meanwhile have to borrow from the bank. Mind you this place is worth about £70,000 and we own it clear so we are not really broke just have none of the liquid stuff. Since it seems impossible for me to get away for a holiday I intend to take it as easy as possible during the next two weeks while Paul is away. Mind you that is not easy with all the watering that has to be seen to and feeding, dog, cat, hens and trout. David was very upset this week when for no apparent reason his pet duck died.*

It seemed to me very unfair and sad that my father was repeatedly travelling while my mother was stuck in Perth longing to visit her now frail mother. I asked her whether she had resented this and she replied that she would have loved to go but could not without having sunk further into debt and this she was not prepared to do.

Both my mother and grandmother comment frequently on the deterioration of the postal service with delayed and missing letters. But despite the disruption they managed a dialogue about the Falklands War and British politics. My grandmother continued her support of Margaret Thatcher, impressed with her strength and determination in taking a military stand against Argentina. Countering my mother's belief that the Falklands was not worth fighting over with a declaration that it was the principal of the matter that counted:

#### **May 11<sup>th</sup> 1982**

*The people are British and the invasion by the Argentinians is an act of aggression. If Hitler had been tackled earlier we wouldn't have had that awful World War II. Besides if Argentine got the Falkland Isles they would murder all the British people there. The Junta have murdered thousands of their own people. There are minerals and oil in the Antarctic and the real cause is the Argentines want the Falklands as a base to explore the Antarctic. Maggie Thatcher has gained some popularity over the decision to stand up to the Argentinians.*

But my mother was more interested in family affairs at home. My father had had all his teeth removed and was suffering a diet of soft food until his dentures settled. He and David had managed well while my mother was at a conference in Sydney although they hadn't done any washing in her absence. Whilst over East my mother had visited Leonora and Jemima and her partner.

11.6.82

*I had a lovely time on my trip. I spent five days with Leonora, two days at the National Council Meeting of the Association for the Welfare of Children in Hospital – of which I am State President and two days with Jemima. I thoroughly enjoyed it all. I gave a lecture to Leonora's students while I was there. Leonora took me lots of nice places to eat and so did Jemima. Jemima's parents-in-law to be took me out to a very posh restaurant.*

The big news of her next letter was my second pregnancy:

25.6.82

*Penny has probably written to you to let you know that she is expecting another baby next February. She looks glowing and except for a bit of morning sickness she would appear to be very well. I think she is hoping for a girl this time especially as she likes sewing so much. Ross will be just three when the new baby comes.*

*Paul leaves for overseas again tomorrow. He is giving a major lecture at Strathclyde University, Glasgow on traffic planning in Australia and is also going to Norway and America I do get tired of him being away – it is a good job I have David for companionship.*

My grandmother had been up to Scotland to stay with her oldest daughter and her husband. She enjoyed the cooking, the conversation and the change of scenery. There are some signs of increasing mental frailty, the date is written as the 23<sup>rd</sup> July when it is actually 23<sup>rd</sup> of June (postmark), the writing is larger and more widely spaced and the occasional spelling mistake creeps in.

*Peggy chatters all the time so I can't write when she is here. I appreciate her chatter because I am so lonely at home . . . I had some lovely runs in the car. It is such a treat to see the lovely country side. Being in Lowton is like being in prison. Nor and Eve never take me out.*

She finishes with a comment on the "murderous" Argentinians and ends "*Thank God we have a good royalty and Maggie Thatcher*".

My mother was more upset by the renewed IRA activity in England: "*Really customs and passports should be introduced with Ireland again and shoot the terrorists they don't deserve anything better*" (26.7.82).

The IRA claimed responsibility for bombs that killed eleven soldiers and a number of horses in attacks in Hyde Park and Regents Park, London on July 20<sup>th</sup>. Striking hospital workers called off their industrial action to treat the victims. The man convicted, in 1987, of conspiring to



cause the blast was released four years later as part of the Good Friday agreement and later his conviction was overturned having been ruled unsafe (BBC, 2004b).

According to my mother's letters things are ticking along at home quite smoothly. My father returned home in time to deal with a leak from their solar hot water system (4.8.82). She had dinner for Erica's 31<sup>st</sup> birthday, "Of all my children I feel I have the easiest rapport with her probably because she is so equably tempered". David went off to school camp on Rottneest and they paid a visit to old Mr Gwynne, the orchardist from whom we got all our fruit in the early years, who was celebrating his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday (13.8.82).

### 17.8.82

*He ended up giving us all sorts of things to plant in our garden. He also gave me some tangelos – a cross between an orange and a mandarin I think- they make beautiful marmalade so I have spent all morning today getting a couple of lots ready for making tomorrow. The girls never seem to get time to make it themselves but are quite happy to beg a bit from Mum.*

After this there is another gap in letters from both ends. My mother's next letter is mid September. She had been unwell with a recurrence of the "angina" she had suffered several years earlier. On top of that Erica had sold her house and the move was rather stressful for all concerned (14.9.82).

If my mother had angina it has never developed into significant heart disease and I wonder in retrospect whether it was chest pain caused by stress as my father's business processes caused her increasing anxiety. She did not share this anxiety with her mother, instead keeping to the cheerful and mundane wherever possible. Gardening continued to bring her both satisfaction and distraction.

This letter crossed with one from England. My grandmother's writing is again notably bigger, a reflection of her failing eyesight. She had developed an infection in her eczematous leg necessitating visits from the doctor and district nurse. She expresses her concern for my mother's health:

### 28.9.82

*I am not feeling too bad at all providing I lead a fairly quiet life and get to bed early or if I am going to be out in the evening have an afternoon rest. The weekends tend to be the busiest because so often the family drop in. There are often nine or ten here for evening dinner on a Sunday. The weather has turned fine and spring like and there is a lot to do in the garden but I don't find pottering about outside tiring it makes me sleep well. I wish you could see my azaleas they really are a picture. I have lots of bedding plants to put in too though my stocks are quite a picture now. Paul put in several more willow trees round the pond and stream they help to shade it for the trout. We already have one magnificent willow growing by one of the trout ponds. We are re-stocking the stream this week from the trout hatchery. It is marvellous to be able to serve trout to visitors and I am learning several different ways of cooking them.*

When I first read through the letters from my mother in 1982 I was frustrated at how superficial they were. Having my grandmother's letters puts that into a very different context. Her struggle with health and well-being make it easy to understand why my mother kept things light as she wrote. My grandmother's letters are feisty and coherent even as her failing eyesight makes the writing larger and less tidy, and physical wellness declines.

My mother had been picking up the vibes:

**9.10.82**

*Darling Ma,*

*You have been in my thoughts a great deal these last few days, it really makes me wonder if you are not well.*

*Well my lamb your 90<sup>th</sup> is coming up and what can I send you that you would enjoy. David reckons they should put you in a spacecraft and spirit you to W.A. I must say I sometimes daydream about having you and Ron for Christmas but I guess it is just not possible.*

*I must say I am enjoying life since I am taking it more quietly. I spend a lot of time pottering in my garden, my miniature roses are lovely and I have a climber called Paul Scarlett which is glorious. The rockery which I have built, from an area which the previous owners used as a rubbish dump looks amazing. It is a funny mixture of plants, native Australian like the heavenly smelling frangipani and grevilleas together with primulas and succulents and even cacti but somehow the mixture goes together and Paul built a winding stepped path in brick.*

*There is a lot of cleaning up to do at this time of the year before the summer heat dries the grass and makes a fire hazard. Paul likes landscaping down by our stream and looks very fit on it. Mind you we go to bed early and get up with the sun.*

My grandmother enjoyed these pleasant, chatty letters and actually received the photos sent with the letter of September 28<sup>th</sup>. Her health took a temporary turn for the better despite chronic pain in her left leg and right foot that limited her mobility. She writes of her daughter-in-law's interest in family genealogy, an interest that eventually produced two self-published books.

**Oct 18<sup>th</sup> 1982**

*I hope Eve will send me the results of her research. I am writing an autobiography called "Letters for David" at present. Heaven knows how long it will take me to do it, but it occurred to me there was so much of my life as a child and of course with the other children that my David knows nothing about that it would be good for him to know. So I try to write but the days never seem long enough and so much of the time I like to spend outside – there is so much to do at this time of the year after the winter rains and before the summer heat.*

My mother continued to write "Letters for David". She never finished it but believes what she did write is still around somewhere. When I first began this project David read the early part based on 1965 and found it fascinating because it filled in some family history for him. His childhood was very different from mine, geographically, structurally and socially.

She ends her letter: "*Dearest Mum I think of you lots and send my love winging to you*". I am moved as I read this, so sad that my mother did not get back to see her mother again.

My grandmother was getting bitter as her health continued to deteriorate:

*Oct 22<sup>nd</sup> 82*

*My eyes are failing I can scarcely see to write or read. I use a magnifying glass as well as my glasses when reading and then can scarcely see. It is lovely having Peggy here to look after me. She cooks some lovely meals which I really enjoy. She said she had a letter from you and you said you were happy I was being well looked after – who has been kidding you? I haven't been at all well since Mollie was here. But I am very happy to say my leg has improved. The district nurse was here this morning and he was quite pleased how it has mended. It was blood red from my toes to nearly my knee. I was very worried. A black doctor had ordered cream costing £5 a tube and it really did harm. I hate black doctors.*

*I am glad you are happy in your new home. I'm not happy here – not really. But I realise I couldn't have managed in Huyton.*

At home things with my father's business finances were starting to unravel and he borrowed money on the house to keep things going. My mother didn't tell her mother this but let slip that she was not sleeping well and had relinquished her last two committees, Beenong School and the State Council of the Australian Democrats, which was plagued with in-fighting (28.10.82).

The garden was her solace.

*The world and its troubles seem so immense at present I guess I would just as soon spend my time in my garden at least that appreciates my efforts.*

*One of the roses I have, in what I think of as Nan's corner in the garden, bought with money from you, is simply spectacular this year. The flowers are deep apricot – almost orange and as they age they look as though they are shot with crimson.*

*And the climbing rose 'Peace' also bought from you has flowers spilling over the verandah – and they smell lovely too.*

By November three of her daughters were expecting babies:

**4.11.82**

*Nikki told me today that she is expecting a baby too. So that is Penny's baby due on February 5<sup>th</sup> Erica's baby on May 29<sup>th</sup> and Nicola's baby on June 25<sup>th</sup>. Looks like I am in for a busy year, though in actual fact the girls do not pester me too much.*

My grandmother's comment on the number of babies due in the family is not positive:

*Ron says one of a family is enough – there are too many people on the Earth. The trouble is the better class are limiting theirs and the lower classes produce too many – hence there is growing up a rabble society. I am strongly against the Pope's teaching.*

Sunday Nov 14<sup>th</sup>

Darling Ma,

*It is half past three in the afternoon West Australian time, that makes it half past seven in the morning your time and I wonder what you are doing. It is a perfect spring day sunny and breezy and not horribly humid like yesterday. Mark, Deborah and David have gone to watch the Test Match at the W.A.C.A. ground and Paul is in the orchard and here I sit in my lovely little study writing.*

*It was such a beautiful morning I got up at 6.30 and had a twenty minute swim then dressed and had a walk around the property. we caught a trout for Paul's breakfast and picked the first ever raspberries we have grown here for mine and David's. Then I had a quick read of the paper and Jessica came to spend the morning with me. ...They called back for her at 12.45 and since then I have caught up on my accounts done the preparations for dinner and just before dark I have a lot of watering to do including lots of geranium and pelargonium cuttings I have put in. I should also burn some rubbish but the wind is a bit strong for that it is designated a 'high fire danger' day. Our new dog 'Blondie' seems to have settled down well, she is only seven months old and 'Blackie' as befits an old dog of eight years old treats her with suitable contempt.*

*Next Saturday we are going to Rottnest Island for a week of being lazy. I feel badly in need of it, especially as we seem to get so many visitors in December.*

*The economic situation and particularly unemployment is bad here at present but to my mind men haven't got a clue about management I reckon I could do a better job than the mob we have in Canberra at present. As far as I am concerned you only need one maxim for economics and that is "Cut your coat according to your cloth" I am thankful all my family are employed.*

*Lots and lots of love,*

*Jean.*

My grandmother appreciated the "*happy, chatty letter*". Her own was brief as her writing reflected her failing eyesight and quickly filled the airletter she was using.

28.11.82

Darling Ma,

*Well I hope you have had a good 90<sup>th</sup> what an amazing age to be, wherever Dad's spirit is I bet he is staggered that you made it, only another 10 years and you will get a telegram from the Queen.*

*You may have been looking for a letter from me well we have been away on Rottnest Island for a week. Totally away from it all in a chalet on a bay totally away from civilisation. I think it did us good though Paul is always a bit difficult to fathom at present.*

At last my mother had let slip. I asked what she meant by my father being difficult to fathom and she speaks of that time in a way she could or would not speak to her aging and somewhat judgmental mother. She describes the breakdown in communication between her and my father which resulted in "terrible rows". The process of getting funding from the Export Grants Board had come to the attention of the powers that be. My father believed that if he was doing the wrong thing they would simply disallow the claims but that was not the case. It became a matter for investigation by the Appeals Tribunal and the Federal Police. They had gone to the bank and examined all their accounts, my father had not realised they could do this. My mother is cynically amused in retrospect that the investigators found it necessary to go to interview my father's agent in Los Angeles while the Olympics were on there in 1984! She recalls the holiday

on Rottneest and thinks Mark paid for it to try to help them, although he recalls it was a later holiday he paid for. They were tense and uptight and she regrets that David had to cope with the fights and the fear that they would separate. She says she did not know what my father was thinking and believes that perhaps he was having doubts about himself, something that was, in itself, very rare.

On their return from this holiday they heard that Erica had suffered a miscarriage and been told she should wait three months before trying again.

There is no evidence of the angst in the next letter, instead she shared Mark's success in his exams and his plans for a coach trip to Eastern Australia (11.12.82).

My grandmother had celebrated her 90<sup>th</sup> birthday on December 4<sup>th</sup> with her family: *“Isn't it grand to be 90. If it wasn't for my eyes I really feel good at present considering my age”*. Her daughter-in-law made her a sponge cake and she received flowers from my mother:

*I've never seen such a beautiful array of roses, carnations, chrysanthemums, freesia etc. They were beautifully arranged in a lovely ceramic bowl. The arrangement is about 20 ins tall and stretches over more than half the length of my table. (Dec 8<sup>th</sup> 82)*

She also got flowers from Jemima.

In Kalamunda Christmastime brought an influx of family and my mother describes a happy day:

#### **Dec 27<sup>th</sup> 1982**

*It has been one of the best Christmases I ever remember...I had some beautiful presents and we had a very happy day. All the children and grandchildren were here but not a single cross word or squeak the whole day. And my 18lb turkey was superb – even I could not fault it.*

But it was a front for the despair that was settling in as financial and legal problems deepened. She reflects now that she did not want her moral discomfort to distress her mother:

*Mother was 90, I was realising more and more that I would not have her much longer and I was appreciating more and more her battles... even her efforts to get me to avoid the pitfalls she had made in her own life. Perspective was giving value to her life. She had not wanted me to marry Paul, and I did not feel she should be burdened with my despair. I also realised how much strength she had given me, moral perhaps more than physical . . . . Given the rigid morality I had got from my mother life was very uncomfortable but I did not want to "punish" her.*



## 1983

Mark celebrated his 21<sup>st</sup> birthday on January 9<sup>th</sup>, leaving for a six-week holiday in the Eastern States on the 10<sup>th</sup>, his actual birthday.

My mother had been laid low with a dental abscess that required antibiotics. The heat was also taking its toll and she sought refuge in front of the television watching the test cricket and looking forward to the Perth City Council reception for the English team. I was in the last weeks of my second pregnancy.

**19<sup>th</sup> Jan 1983**

*Penny has only two weeks now until her baby is due, I hope it arrives in the day or I will have to go and look after Ross in the middle of the night.*

As it happened the labour began in the evening and I decided to head for hospital in the early hours. My mother did not come out because my father had left their phone switched through to his office so it did not ring in the house. Unable to get hold of her I rang Nicola who lived 5 minutes away and she generously came out and stayed with my 3 year old until my husband went to pick him up to meet his new brother later in the morning. I still have etched in my mind the image of my 3 year old sitting on a stepping stool in the labour ward holding his baby brother, absorbed in his face and talking softly. He proudly wheeled the crib up in the lift with me to my room. My mother was a little disappointed that she had not been a part of the birth, albeit as home support, but her letters to her mother focus on David's imminent transition to high school. He was starting a year early and my mother expressed some concern about him coping. She commented wryly "*I spent all evening sewing name tapes on. My word I wish I had a dollar for all the name tapes I have stitched on over the years*".

She continued to spend her time writing with some frustration at being unable to remember much of her childhood, I think she was hoping her mother would send some of her own memories of my mother as a girl but instead she got back a sad description of my grandmother's latest visit to hospital:

**Jan 27th 83**

*Well I went to the eye specialist in Leigh hospital on Monday. As far as I am concerned it was a waste of time I was there 3 hours. First went to see a coloured consultant – had my eyes tested – back in the corridor for half an hour then went into another room and saw an Indian lady specialist – didn't like her – too abrupt. She looked into my eyes then told a nurse to put drops in – back into the corridor again. Two hours later we were called back into her room. A frame was brought and she sharply told me to rest my chin on a pad about half way up the frame. Well I was sitting in a wheel chair and couldn't reach it. So she told me to stand up. Well then I was too high. She kept shouting bend down – I couldn't do that because I would have fallen. In the end the nurse held one arm and Eve held the other. With a struggle and shaking I managed. She looked into my eyes with a bright light. Afterwards she called Eve into an anteroom. She told Eve there was no cataract on one eye and only a very small spot on the other – too small to operate on. She said the black specks on the back of the eye were due to the diabetes.*

92.83

*Darling Ma,*

*Many thanks for your letter of Jan 27. I was somewhat dismayed to hear of your trip to Leigh hospital. When will people realise that old does not mean idiot. I showed the letter to Penny and it made her very angry indeed.*

It still annoys me. Firstly that the doctor was so inconsiderate to a senior citizen and secondly that she did not talk to my grandmother about her eyes but chose to speak to her relative. My grandmother's letters prove her intellectual ability; she had the right to be informed first hand. At the time though I was rather preoccupied with my new baby. His birth on the morning of February 4<sup>th</sup> passed the test and my mother describes it as "*a beautiful birth*" and my second son "*unlike Ross he is a darling peaceful baby*". I went home the next day to get ready for our move to the country.

*I shall miss them all when they move to Collie, where Keith is joining a country practice. Collie is about two and a half hours away by car. I think Penny will miss her family more than she realises too.*

My mother's allusion to being depressed, in a letter of the 30<sup>th</sup> January, was taken up by my grandmother.

*Feb 3<sup>rd</sup> 83*

*With so much interest in your life I was surprised you get depressed at times. I rarely feel depressed even with all my disabilities. There are so many people worse off than I am. But I'm afraid if I go blind I won't be so happy.*

She finally responds to my mother's query about her early life:

*I remember the happy days when you were 4 years and how we used to dance. I think you were the only one of my family to give me such great pleasure. The others seemed such a toil to bring up. I'm glad your family are happy and close. It makes me very sad that there isn't that deep affection amongst you . . . You were a happy lot until marriages took place and Norman doesn't seem to have much love for his brother and sisters. He says friends are better than relations. . . . When I hear the youngsters moan about life I could scream. They don't know what housework is like.*

My mother defends her comment about depression:

122.83

*The only reasons I get depressed as a rule are financial ones. I hate business really you never know how you stand and just when you think you are getting on an even keel you get hit by a big tax bill or a downturn in property values so we have not been able to sell the Kelmscott property. I like security and being able to budget and neither seems possible.*

*I am glad only David is at home I would not like to keep a big family without being able to plan properly I often wish I had gone back to a proper career of my own years ago.*

My mother is circling around the financial stresses building as the year went on. She distracted herself with her writing and shared how the memories seemed to flow better when she used ink rather than biro.



*I want to leave a comprehensive family background for my children and grandchildren . . . . At present I am writing about the years at Oulton High School I certainly think they were some of my happiest years. I did not enjoy school half as much when we moved to Chidwall Valley. There was no tradition there, the girls were so silly and I don't like women teachers on their own at all. It felt very nostalgic remembering the words of the school song and writing about the school concerts . . . . So much I learnt in those years stick with me. Miss Connell's History lessons and Mr Grosvenor's art lessons I can still remember so clearly. I wish they had left us at Oulton it had such a good feeling.*

*Paul leaves for the World of Concrete Exhibition in America on Feb 21<sup>st</sup> so I guess I'll try for a quiet time then.*

My grandmother's next letter was a feisty diatribe about the state of the world ranging from the Australian bushfires to the multiple murders in London.

*Feb 17<sup>th</sup> 83*

*There are such tragedies in the world today and such wickedness it makes one wonder if there is a wonderful God above. There are more people on the Earth than it can feed comfortably so I think God is getting rid of some of them . . . . It is time the birch and hanging were brought back, I have no time for the soft do-gooders . . . This country has been ruined by socialism. It has created a lot of selfish people.*

The bushfires that razed large areas around Melbourne and Adelaide were deliberately lit and my mother joins her mother in a yearning for rough justice "What I find so terrible is that the original fires were deliberately lit and afterwards there were looters around. I am afraid I would shoot them" (Feb 23<sup>rd</sup> 1983). My mother had been personally concerned because Mark was in Victoria at the time.

Politically she had been involved with some electioneering for the Australian Democrats in the Federal Election, with the preceding West Australian election resulting in a win to the Labour party of Brian Burke change was in the air for the Federal government as well. Bob Hawke had taken over leadership from Bill Hayden and optimism was high. Australian politics had been featured on British TV and my grandmother had her own opinion:

*Mar. 2<sup>nd</sup> 83*

*There is a lot in the papers and on T.V. about your elections I don't like the look of Hawke. Hawke by name & hawk by nature. Labour and trade unions have ruined this country.*

She continues her political theme in her next letter:

*Mar 17<sup>th</sup> 83*

*It was nice to read about your parliamentary efforts. I thought you had retired from public life and enjoying a serene retired life in your garden. Well Hawke may be well educated and have charm with the women but that doesn't make him a good politician. Maggie sure is an Iron Lady but she has a terrible task with the unions pulling against her. The leaders are selfish and ignorant. I think the next election will be a fiasco – there won't be one party with an overall majority.*

*Well my visit to the hospital last Friday was a waste of time. It was a black doctor so of course I couldn't hear a word he said and Eve did all the talking. She didn't tell me what was said.*

*I wish some money would turn up for you. I would dearly love to see you – a letter isn't like a personal chat.*

My mother had been down to see me making the 210 km drive in two and a half hours.

**31.3.83**

*Penny looked really pretty and the boys are lovely. ... It was a lovely day and though I was a bit tired when I got home I really enjoyed it. The house Penny and Keith are renting is rather poky but if they decide they want to stay in Collie they will buy a place with a few acres. Collie is a mining community but there is lots of lovely country round.*

Her description of our house in Collie as "poky" was an understatement. Rental housing in Collie was almost unattainable when we moved there as the workforce had been swelled by the building of the Worsley Alumina refinery nearby. Our house was a three-bedroom fibro building in an old part of the town. It had hideous brown print wallpaper in the lounge room and was already furnished so we had to move the owner's furniture aside to fit in our own. The bathroom was tiny and dark and had no bath, which made life difficult with two small children. The bedrooms at the back were cold and bleak. The only saving grace was the enormous back yard that my three-year-old thought was our own park. You could hear the kitchen activities of the neighbours in our toilet and I always hoped, but never asked, if the reverse was true. It was a very stressful time in my life but involvement with the Nursing Mother's Association branch in the town and the independent kindergarten allowed me to make friends, some of whom I still communicate with today. Leaving Perth allowed me to develop an independence that staying close to family in Perth would not have. I recall the time as one of tension in my relationship with my mother.

My grandmother was a great royalist and enjoyed the prospect that my parents were due to meet Prince Charles and Princess Diana, who were visiting Australia in April 1983.

*Apr 6<sup>th</sup> 83*

*I hope you enjoy meeting Charles and Diana. Diana is extremely popular and it appears she is making a good impression in Australia. ... Wouldn't it be lovely if I saw you on TV shaking hands with Diana. I watch all the TV news just to see Charles and Diana.*

**14.4.83**

*Yes we met Prince Charles and Princess Diana. We had quite a chat with them – we told her how much we approved of her baby attitude and she said she was doing it to raise the status of motherhood. She also said how much the crowds terrified her and though she smiled and did not show it she could be heard to say "Oh my God, oh my God." The crowds particularly in Brisbane were horrific. I was worried about security with such dense crowds it would be easy to do harm though anyone trying to do so would be torn limb from limb. I also wondered what the Queen would say if she knew Diana was stockingless. She said to us how hot it was but we thought it quite a mild sort of day.*

After my grandmother's problems with her eye examination earlier in the year my mother had been sufficiently infuriated to write a letter of complaint to the hospital. As my grandmother tells her, this did not go down well in England. My grandmother heads her next letter "*Don't worry about me*".

*Apr 21<sup>st</sup> 83*

*Well I went to hospital on Monday again and saw that horrible woman. She was shouting and I said to her there was no need to shout – if she spoke slowly I could hear her. Then she screamed "I'm not here to shout" She stormed on and all I could hear was "Australia". Then she calmed down looked into my eyes (this time the nurse put two cushions on my chair so I could reach the frame. She said there was very little cataract – the black spots were due to the diabetes. She suggested she put my name down on the paper to have an injection in my arm. When I got outside "the storm broke" Evelyn told Norman that the specialist had a letter from you making a complaint. Norman was in a fury said you ought to mind your own business – he was sick of the family interfering (Well the family have never interfered) As I stepped into the house he screamed "you can sell up and go to Jean in Australia. She can look after you. He said he would write to you. I didn't think he would but he got an airmail letter yesterday and it was in the envelope with my pension book – otherwise I wouldn't have known. However Jean do ignore it . . . . Peggy said you were quite right to write to the hospital*

*4.5.83*

*My Darling Ma*

*I am sorry my actions caused such a fuss but that hospital needed telling. Hospital administrations need to be told when doctors are not functioning properly and there are too many damn fools who think because you are old you are idiot. I have seen it very often here and it makes me furious. However I wrote calmly to Norman. I do a lot of parent counselling so I don't get that easily rattled.*

*I love my Mum and can't bear to think of a stupid doctor shouting and after all if all it needed was two cushions why on earth weren't they brought in the first place.*

*I haven't heard from Norman and Evelyn for a very long time.*

My mother reflects on this family controversy, amused looking back at how life in Australia had changed her, making her more assertive. She also thinks that it was a way of letting off steam as much related to the deteriorating situation at home as to the events in England. It caused a rift with her brother expressed in an exchange of letters. Although he told his mother to sell up and come to Australia for my mother to care for her he would not have wanted to relinquish the inheritance that came from being her primary carer late in her life. She later received a letter from the hospital which she described as: "full of apology and whitewash!" (21.5.83).

My grandmother appreciated the thought behind my mother's action and replied on May 17<sup>th</sup>:

*"Thank you for your lovely letter of the 4<sup>th</sup>. The love and concern in it made me happy."*

Meantime my father had been re-elected to the Perth City Council unopposed. This was fortunate because he was in Canberra at the time meeting with John Dawkins, the Minister for Finance in Bob Hawke's government. My father had spent time with him when he was a post-graduate student on our arrival in Australia.

David's first high school report card reassured my mother that he was coping well, getting above average in all subjects and accolades from his teachers for his enthusiasm (14.5.83).

My grandmother had been saddened to hear of the sale of Huntroyde Hall where her father had been gamekeeper and she had grown up.

*May 10<sup>th</sup> 83*

*So that is the end of another gentleman's estate and a grand way of life. How I loved to roam those lovely woods. It was heaven to me. The aristocrats of England showed a good way of living and did much good work for charity – often anonymously.*

It also saddened my mother:

**21.5.83**

*The trouble with trying to make all people equal is it makes for mediocrity and a levelling down not up.*

The rest of the letter is about her garden and the new plants she had bought with her birthday money from her mother. The weather had remained unusually warm and dry.

**27.5.83**

*We now have a video attached to our T.V. set so we can rent a movie from time to time and also record programmes that are on too late to stay up and watch. Ain't it amazing. I can remember so clearly the first cats whisker radio that Dad made and how clever we thought it was. We listened to a Test Match commentary through the earphones and Dad was so thrilled. Mind you I do not think people are any happier through technological advances. They should be but they aren't.*

I guess it is a marker of age when things that seemed remarkable new inventions, doing things never thought of, become part of history. So it is with the video recorder. The first one we owned was given to us by my father-in-law, it was a Betacord format with piano key controls. I loved it not only because we could tape and watch programs for ourselves, and hire movies we might otherwise not get to see (Collie did not have a movie theatre), but mostly because I could tape Sesame Street and Play School and put them on on Saturday and Sunday to get my hour and a half in the mornings to study for my qualifications in Hypnotherapy undisturbed by my little sons. Now video players are gradually becoming obsolete as DVDs take over.

June's exchange of letters share my grandmother's enjoyment of a trip to stay with her eldest daughter in Scotland and my mother's chat about family events.

**6.6.83**

*Nikki and Roger have got an offer for their house so they hope when the sale has gone through to build a house on a half acre block they have bought which is very close to where Erica lives. The air is so much better here in the Hills that Nikki looked so much healthier yesterday after just being on their block for an hour trying to decide exactly where to put the house. Christine, their little girl, is like a little elf but as sharp as can be, she is quite delightful to look after. Penny and Keith have decided to stay in Collie so they have bought five acres of land and will build there, at present they are just renting a place.*

12.6.83

*Nikki's baby is due in a fortnight's time . . . . Nikki now looks very well . . . . Her doctor will allow trial natural labour in a specialist hospital but will have a team standing by in case a caesar becomes necessary.*

At the end of the letter my mother drops her guard.

*Business is still a battle but I try and enjoy each day and not worry too much. I have a wonderful family and that counts for a great deal.*

**Undated** – (Postmarked 28 June 1983)

*Nikki's baby has not yet arrived . . . . Erica has cheered up since it would appear she is pregnant again. Heaven knows why people want more than two children when they can control the size of their families but I suppose Mother Nature has provided a very strong driving force.*

*I would like to take some walks in the English woods again. I love Australia but there is nothing quite like walking in English woods after there has been a shower I particularly used to like walking in beech woods. I remember with great pleasure some of the Saturday hikes we used to go on when I was at the Oulton High School. Usually school days are not particularly happy but I remember with great affection those days at Oulton.*

*David's school has only been open three years and is on a lovely site – a really healthy place in the hills away from the city. I hope he stays there he has made good friends, is in the lower school hockey team and is even good at wood work which is something Mark never was. He seems to get a lot of homework but he is in an advanced class and they do seem to push them hard these days.*

She cannot sustain any further illusion that all is well and finishes the letter with:

*Dearest Mum I wish you would give me your blessing I feel very low in spirits and don't know where to get strength.*

*Jeannie*

The Federal police had come to raid my father's office on 31<sup>st</sup> May to investigate a suspicion that he had been obtaining grants from the Export Grants Board illegally. This was my mother's worst nightmare. She had repeatedly expressed her concern at the ethics of his processes but he had told her not to be silly – if there was a problem they would simply turn down the application. From then on my mother lived in a constant state of anxiety about when the police would strike.

It was anguish for her to tell her 12-year-old son the police were investigating his father. She was also distressed that an idealist like my father had got himself in such a position. She suffered an enormous sense of shame that built as the case against him built and the threat of arrest, trial and imprisonment loomed larger in her mind.

Despite her fears and building anger that he had got them into this position she tried to maintain a high public profile and keep a stable existence for David. Erica's pregnancy was a bright light in a very dark phase of her life. She reflects back now that had her mother been younger she might have been able to unburden to her. As it was she did not know where to turn. Her pride

prevented her from talking to others, *"I went through all kinds of contortions in my head but nothing relieved the despair and I thought a blessing from Mum might help"*.

My grandmother replies with warmth but, not surprisingly given how my mother had hidden the reality, a lack of perception about the depths of the problems my mother was facing.

*July 4<sup>th</sup> 83*

*My dearest Jean,*

*I was pleased to receive a letter from you but sorry to hear you are feeling depressed. Of course I give you my blessing and my other two daughters and one son, also. Are you doing too much in the garden? However much you love a job to overwork at it when one passes middle age can make one depressed.*

My mother returns to the everyday in her next letter commenting on the stormy weather, Leonora's forthcoming holiday to Fiji, the tardiness of Nicola's baby and David's interest in learning to cook. She had also been enjoying watching Wimbledon and made her usual commentary to her mother on the games. She finishes wistfully, again giving a glimpse of her state of despair:

**3.7.83**

*Wish I could be a little girl again going for a walk with Mum and buying black currant pastilles.*

*July 11<sup>th</sup> 83*

*I think thoughts must travel. Lately I have been musing a lot over the past and I've often thought how happy I was when you were a little girl. You were so good playing with your dolls and farm house I easily got my work done in the morning and we went for a walk in the afternoon. Those were the happiest years of my married life. Your Dad was doing night teaching at the Sheltering Homes and cash was plentiful – no squawking babies and no money worries... Single bliss has many advantages. I'm afraid in old age I'm rather disillusioned with married life, you sacrifice so much and there is no recompense.*

*We'll cheerio wishing you were a 4 year old and I was taking you for a walk...*

Nicola's baby was finally born on July 11<sup>th</sup>.

**16.7.83**

*I am so glad that the baby is safely here. We had such a lot of false alarms that Nikki was not the only one getting worn out. I had Christine all day last Monday with Nikki being in half hearted kind of labour. At 4 o'clock in the afternoon her doctor decided to rupture the membranes to see if that would make her get a move on. He had hoped, that in spite of Christine being a Caesarian, it would be a normal birth this time, however he found the baby's arm was up over its head and as it was a tight fit he decided to do a Caesar straight away.*

*Of course I have been in and out to the hospital like a jack-in-the-box so I am rather pleased Nicola is going home today. Mind you yesterday I took myself off on my own for a couple of hours and I really did enjoy it. I went to the Orchid Show and had a gentle walk around. I have been growing cymbidium orchids for the last couple of years they are beautiful but not in the show class yet. Some orchids are beautiful but like some beautiful women have no warmth behind them but the vibrant reds and yellows are simply amazing. The weather is crazy I have roses and snowdrops blooming at the same time! I have a yellow rose called Finesia which has a beautiful perfume.*

She returns to her nostalgic thoughts when next she writes:

**20.7.83**

*I suppose it is because I have been trying to write my autobiography that makes so many memories come back. For example it was always quoted about me that I said I would throw Ron out of the window when he was born, and yet no one ever knew that the first time I held him I felt such a rush of protective love that it is still there today. I reckon that is why Ron and I have always been so close. Bonding is what they call it.*

*You say you feel disillusioned about marriage. The only thing I have minded is being a dependent wife. If I had my way women who stay home and look after their children properly should be paid a wage. I think young couples should do a course in parenting after all it is the most difficult job in the world and the one for which there is the least training. These days too with such small families children do not have brothers and sisters for them to learn on.*

This was not a problem for us with one generation rolling into the next. Erica had her pregnancy confirmed with an ultrasound test, a relatively new medical device which demonstrated a 12-week foetus and Nicola's baby was thriving.

Mark and Deborah had taken a further step in their relationship when he gave her a friendship ring for her 21<sup>st</sup> birthday. His study continued to go well, topping the year in Judicial Process.

**24.7.83**

*[I] keep having a go at "lotto" if I won a big lottery I would take off with David for a trip to Europe and England. Ah well can't help day dreaming.*

While my mother daydreams my grandmother is struggling to cope with a spell of unusually hot weather in England. In amongst the chit-chat of her next letter her dissatisfaction with the world surfaces: *"I don't think women get a square deal on this earth" and "I'm not happy about world affairs. It wouldn't take much to trigger off another war and it would be hell. The world is too full of people".* She is finding it increasingly tiring to manage her daily life and writing gets set aside. She writes next on August 2nd: *"I get too mentally tired to write most days."* And *"it is a miserable life when you can't look after yourself and have to depend on other people".*

**3.8.83**

*Penny, Keith and their two boys are coming up today to stay till Sat. It is Penny's 30<sup>th</sup> birthday on Friday so we are going to look after the boys while they go out to dinner. There are a couple of nice restaurants in Kalamunda so they won't have far to go.*

I had no recollection of how I celebrated my 30<sup>th</sup> birthday so it is quite nice to find out although I don't know which restaurant we went to or what we ate.

*Strange how life deals with one, I sometimes look back and think what a difference it would have made if one had done 'this' instead of 'that'. I often wonder what has happened to some of my old school friends. I wrote to Childwall Valley High School once but did not get a reply.*

My mother's retrospection was triggered by the discomfort and uncertainty of my father's finances. It is rarely happiness and contentment with life that lead to "if only" or "what if". Her next letter confirms this:

**8.8.83**

*Business wise things are the worst they have ever been. You are not the only one who wishes we had stayed in England with Paul still in the academic life. Ah well it is easy to be wise after the event. I don't know how we will weather this storm but if you can say a few prayers in the right place it might help.*

*Well they say life is no bed of flowers and they sure are right.*

My mother tries to put on a cheerful voice when next she writes. She has been playing host to two young families. The first the sister of Leonora's old boyfriend Peter and her husband and 18 month old daughter from Sydney and the second an ex-student of Paul's from the Nottingham days and his wife and their two and half year old son from Los Angeles. My mother comments: "*Barbara and Charlene are like two different facets of the human female race. Charlene is tall dark beautiful, airy fairy artistic while Barbara is a down to earth Yorkshire lass*". Charlene's son, Skye, was rather wild and kept my mother on edge the whole visit. She worries about the extra costs of water and electricity, the angst never far from the surface. Her comments about the false spring seem to be a metaphor for her contentment a few years earlier:

**14.8.83**

*The sun is shining and the birds are singing they are being fooled in to thinking it is spring, it always happens and then September turns cold.*

*Hope everyone is well and the summer is good. Will Ron be with you on his birthday? Eh I would like a trip home but I might as well cry for the moon.*

*Lots of love dearest Mum,*

*Jeannie.*

**21.8.83**

*Darling Ma,*

*I thought you might like to have a copy of the enclosed photos, in one we are talking to the Prince of Wales and in the other to the Princess. They have taken a long time to get the photos ready for us but better late than never I suppose. The other three photos I took when I went down to see Penny last Monday for some reason Ian reminds me of Dad I can't think why. Penny took me to see the beautiful five acre block she and Keith have bought to build a house on. It has a river frontage and an old shed but has otherwise been stripped bare of trees. Keith has already planted a row down one boundary. It will be interesting to see how things change over the years.*

The trees have thrived and fill the skyline, today they are bowing and tossing in the wind. The house has settled in to the block surrounded by Australian native plants and the shed has expanded to house four trailers, a dune buggy, an old tractor, canoe and runabout. There is an orchard next to the shed growing apples and pears, nectarines and peaches. A fig tree has grown



large and fruitful and chooks run around the base providing manure as they go. Next to the house there is a swimming pool and a large shed and below the house the slope of the block has been interrupted by a large play area for hockey and soccer, cricket and mucking around. A third size basketball court abuts the grass and a suburb of birdcages nest next to the old swings and monkey bars.

*Our guests left yesterday .... It is great to have a quiet house this morning but Erica ... and children and Mark and Deborah are coming to tea – they none of them can resist roast pork the way I do it.*

*I am trying to keep cheerful and take one day at a time but the situation is very worrying and I am trying to keep it as stable as possible for David.*

Her pride and pleasure in David are an antidote to the worry.

### **22.8.83**

*David is just such a darling child as his photo shows, he is a very good student but he has a tremendous sense of fun as well. He is very ambitious and sometimes makes me laugh when he describes all the things he wants to do with his life. To think the doctor suggested I should have an abortion when I was pregnant with David what a lot of love we would all have missed. They tell you of the risks you take of having a Mongol baby when you are older but I found ever so many people who had bright kids in their forties.*

*David has to give a ten minute talk in Maths today he chose to talk about the tendency of living and growing things to move in spirals – I wish I could have been there to hear him.*

This was one of my father's pet topics – he used to say that if you closed your eyes you would swim in spirals and if you couldn't swim you would sink in spirals. Meanwhile he had had another "idea" and was putting his version of a swimming pool heater on the market. It came to nothing.

*Penny pops in and out of my life like a jack-in-the-box, she was here on Saturday for a few hours then she is coming up on Wednesday for an evening lecture and going back on Thursday morning then next week she is coming up for a day's Medical Hypnotherapy exam leaving the boys with me.*

My life was a battle for balance in the face of fatigue. I was a fulltime mother, had started working one session a week in hypnotherapy while I studied for my qualifications in a course held fortnightly in Perth. My husband was working long hours establishing himself in the practice and I was trying to develop social networks where I knew no one. No wonder I could only "pop in and out" of my mother's life. Her stress levels meant phone calls for support might be yet another burden for her so were not much help. Erica and I stayed close and the phone between us was often busy.

### **4.9.83**

*I have just finished helping David finish a major essay on the Etruscans. It does seem to me that children have to work very hard at school these days. Fortunately he is very bright and enjoys*

*study but I can't help feeling sorry for the less clever children. They don't seem to have time to be children and there is so much pressure on them in their teenage years.*

*Like everyone else we have been upset and worried about the shooting down of that airliner – I hope everyone keeps their cool.*

On September the first the Russians had shot down a Korean commercial airliner that had inadvertently deviated over Russian airspace. 269 people died (BBC, 2004c). It engendered another burst of political fervour in my grandmother:

*Sept 12<sup>th</sup> 83*

*That shooting down of the Korean aeroplane was a dreadful thing. The Russians are a hateful lot – agents of the Devil. I could scream when people bury Russian and Japanese goods.*

She also told of the breakdown of a granddaughter's marriage prompting my mother to let her guard down about her own strained marriage:

*15.9.83*

*I was sorry to hear of the break up of Karen and Russie but only for the children's sake. I think there was far too much sticking together because it was expected of a woman when we were young. If it had not been for the "you made your bed now lie on it" attitude Paul and I would not have lasted a year and though I would have missed out on a lot of wonderful children I would of missed out on a lot of heartache too. Basically we have a totally different approach to money which would have been resolved if women caring at home for their families were paid a wage they might then be appreciated for what they do.*

*I tell my girls to keep their careers going ever so little while their children are small so that later they need not be dependent.*

My grandmother is having a difficult time with her dependency on her children, feeling as if no one wants to take care of her and that they get angry at her for needing care:

*Sept 21<sup>st</sup> 83*

*When you were young and life was hard I used to console myself by saying that when I was old I would have someone to look after me. How disillusioned I am.*

The grumblings of everyday life were interrupted by Australia II winning the America's Cup Yacht Race.

*27.9.83*

*Darling Ma,*

*I know it is crazy to be enthused over a sporting event but Perth went wild today after winning the America's Cup. The Royal Perth Yacht Club which mounted the challenge was quite crazy. People stayed up all night to watch the race on T.V. because of the time difference it was the middle of the night here.*

*It will give a tremendous boost to tourism but I for one am not sure if I want our beautiful W.A. invaded by hordes of tourists but I suppose it would do the economy good.*

It certainly made a big impact. I did not stay up because sleep was a rare commodity with my 7-month-old baby – I did feel like I had missed out at the time. The passing of the years has, in a sense tarnished the event with Alan Bond’s fall from grace and the farcical races that followed – some settled more in the courts than on the water. The next challenge was held off Fremantle in 1987 and is credited with changing the face of the city and the attitudes of its people forever (Malan, 2004).

By October my husband and I were planning the house we would build on our five acres of land on the Collie River.

### 2.10.83

*The house Nikki and Roger are building is also on a half acre site but they are in a very tight budget – their house and land come to about \$45,000 whereas Penny and Keith can splash out a bit their house on five acres of land will cost about double that. Paul is designing the house for Penny and Keith.*

This was a contentious issue. We had originally engaged an old colleague of my father’s who had come out to Australia with his deaf wife and six children. He had already done a preliminary design, which we mostly liked, but he had added some bizarre curved windows that would have cost a fortune to have made. At the same time my father’s financial situation was precarious, so he suggested, almost implored, we engage him as our architect. It was not comfortable telling the original architect we were dispensing with his services but it was impossible to say no to my father. An offer on the Kelmscott land was promising them some additional financial relief. My mother was disillusioned at how little reward my father was getting for the many hours he worked.

Her letters home continued to revolve around her garden, in particular the building of a rockery where there had been only rubble (15.10.83). She had bought another sewing machine on impulse, disgusted at the prices being charged for new casual clothes.

*I have bought material for four dresses and it only cost me what one bought one would do. Won’t take me long to make up the cost of the machine at this rate.*

She added a comment on current affairs:

*I was interested to read that there is a big swing in America against sexual permissiveness. I was very pleased to see it. It is about time the world gained a bit of morality. The Parkinson case has made big news here, I feel sorry for them both – he has lost a great career and she has ruined her life and that of her child. What fools sex makes of people.*

The case my mother refers to was the resignation of Margaret Thatcher’s Secretary for Trade and Industry, Cecil Parkinson, when it became public that he had had a 12 year relationship with his personal assistant who had then become pregnant. He stayed with his wife and took

out an injunction on any publicity about his illegitimate daughter, until she was 18. His lack of interest in her or involvement in her life seems to me more immoral than his original transgression. He returned to the government front bench in 1987 (BBC, 1983). The swing back to morality was not sustained as the media portrayal of sex and sexuality now compared to then, will confirm.

*My dear Mum, I wish I could drop in for a yarn and a nice cuppa.*

**30.10.83**

*I am writing this sitting up in bed the clock went on last night and though it is theoretically bed time I am just not tired enough to sleep. Paul left for an overseas trip this afternoon he had a heavy cold so I hope he manages alright. He is going to Copenhagen to lecture then Amsterdam, London, New York, Milwaukee, Denver, Los Angeles, Sydney, Canberra and home. He will be back on November 17<sup>th</sup>.*

*I intend to have as peaceful a time as possible I plan to do a lot of sewing. mind you I often have plans that get disrupted by children or grandchildren. Last weekend Penny and the boys came to stay and it was a thoroughly miserable weekend. Always just before her periods Penny is well nigh impossible and she blew up at David and I in no uncertain fashion. It was quite a relief when they went home. Funny really how you love all your children but there are times when you wonder whether you like them at all. I don't think enough research has been done on pre-menstrual tension it really is an unpleasant time of the month. I guess that is one of the few compensations of getting older.*

I don't think it was as simple as that. My relationship with my mother had become increasingly strained since I started my own family, fuelled by my failure to have my first baby “naturally” and my disenchantment with medicine as a career and a chronic low-level depression that ensued, I found it harder and harder to empathise. On the other hand my mother was increasingly distressed by the deterioration in her relationship with my father and her sense of powerlessness as things descended into what she later described as chaos. I think this may have been the time when she told me a news item about the mutilation of a little boy in some public toilets and I was angry at her for making me know about something so distressing and close to home, as my own little boys were of a similar age. Once known such things cannot be “un” known.

In England my grandmother had suffered a fall when she got up during the night to check on a faulty light.

**Nov 24<sup>th</sup> 83**

*I decided to switch it off and put the passage light on. Well I did the daft thing of putting the light off before I put the passage light on. Of course I couldn't see my way back to bed. Then I must have turned dizzy and fell knocking my head on the floor. I thought I can't stay here all night, thought if I could heave myself backwards on my bottom by heaving with my hands towards the bed. It took me ages to do this. However with one last great effort I managed.*

Fortunately nothing was broken but my mother exhorts her to leave a light on at night and to be more careful.

The sale of the Kelmscott land was due to go through the following week and there were some other positive signs for the business:

**Dec 1<sup>st</sup> 1983**

*I am hoping this is the turning of the tide for us as there seems to be one or two other things that seem to be improving too. I always felt that Kelmscott was an unlucky place for us – somehow it had bad vibes about it. I was so relieved when we left there.*

Mark was due to start his first job in a legal office and my mother speaks with pride of his appearance in a light grey three-piece suit. He finished the year with excellent marks.

My grandmother turned 91 on December the fourth. She had a quiet birthday still suffering some after effects of her fall, but cheered up by a call from her old neighbours. She also comments on the news that laser beams will be used to treat diabetic eye problems, expressing her surprise at the number of people affected by it.

**10.12.83**

*I have been trying to have a quiet few days because the busiest time of the year is coming up. The Sunday before Christmas we have open house for our friends and that entails a lot of cooking and then the family will be here for Christmas Day plus a couple of extra Swiss students. I always like to have the odd extra person who is far from home on Christmas Day. It is Perth City Council Christmas Dinner next Friday. I can't make up my mind whether to wear an old dress – I wore it for Erica's wedding ten years ago – or buy something new. I am thinking of having sewing lessons in the New Year. I like sewing but I would like to have a more professional finish.*

In responding to my queries about the chatty letters home and the relative absence therein of any of the angst that was prevailing in her life, my mother has found a piece of her writing dated the same date as this apparently cheerful letter. It is a deeply personal narration written late at night and begins:

*How noisy a silence can be. Paul and David are in bed, there is no sound except a distant cricket and the gentle gnawing of Blackie at an ancient bone but the silence is screaming in anguish.*

*David and I had a very happy Christmas-preparing relaxed day. I went to the airport to meet Paul with the fullest intentions of making a new start, of communicating the way we used to do so that the "grow old together" syndrome could be one of happiness and fulfillment. I wanted to talk to him of what mattered to me, what I felt like inside....*

She goes on to write of her inability to do so and her enormous anger at how my father had got them into such a financially parlous state and his failure to see the hurt he was causing. She was outraged that he had not acknowledged those of his children who were giving her emotional support but rather feting those providing financial support.

Her writing also refers to our relationship:

*Penny had not wanted to know the details of what had gone on, whereas Erica, Mark, my poor David and to a lesser extent my pregnant Nikki had given me tremendous emotional strength and backing when I was desperately unhappy from the chaos of the last year.*

Luckily my grandmother is in blissful ignorance of my mother's despair on the other side of the world. She is appreciative of my mother's chatty letters but preoccupied with her own health.

*Dec 12<sup>th</sup> 83*

*It is a treat to receive a letter. The rest of the family phone. It's nice to hear their voices but when the phone goes down – that's that – you can't pick it up like a letter and read it time and time again.*

Or keep it for posterity.

*I don't feel like writing since I fell – just want to sleep most of the time. I'm still very shaky and have an awful fear of falling. I wish I could get back to my normal self – make a cup of tea etc. ... I shall probably spend a quiet day at home Xmas day. The last two Xmas I have gone to Gordon's. Even if they ask me this year I'm not equal to going. Couldn't walk and struggle into a car. I shall just hope there is something nice on TV.*

On Nov 25<sup>th</sup> my mother had written of an award she was giving at David's school for woodwork. She had named it in honour of her father, Percy Finch, who was a very talented woodcrafter.

**14.12.83**

*Many thanks for your letter of the 5.12 which arrived this morning. I am enclosing the sheet from the Lesmurdie High School presentation night on it which shows about the award. I was called out from the audience to present it. I think next year I shall give an Edith Finch award what would you like it to be for?*

*Yes they showed the riots at Warrington on T.V. here. The world seems to be going backwards not forwards. Mind you I admire the women the world over who are demonstrating against nuclear weapons. It is time someone tried to show that no one can win a nuclear war, women bear the children why should they see them slaughtered. President Reagan worries me he still behaves as if he were the hero in B class movies.*

My grandmother replies that she would like an award in her name to be for Domestic Science even though history was her favourite subject. She is not so enamored with the Greenham Common women:

Dec 28<sup>th</sup> 83

*They are a nuisance to the villagers, they achieve nothing but cost the ratepayers millions of pounds for police. They should study history and they would realise that all through the ages the weak have been attacked by the strong. If we had been well armed neither the Kaiser nor Hitler would have started wars. At the beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> World War we had no army to speak of. Consequently thousands of untrained young men were sent out to France and slaughtered. It was a heartache. Every day we heard of nice young men we knew locally having been killed or missing. Neither Maggie nor Reagan intend to be caught napping like that. I know Reagan is a big American Blow, but he doesn't dilly-dally like Nixon and Carter. It is Russia's intention to take the world by fair means or foul. She is building 3 warplanes a day and is teaching her soldiers European languages especially English. So let's be prepared.*

My grandmother was 22 when World War I started.

Christmas took centre stage as the year drew to a close. My mother organised a pre-Christmas gathering for us because we couldn't come to Perth that year, she writes that sixty people turned up to see us – I don't remember the occasion at all. My mother was expecting sixteen for dinner on Christmas Day including two Swiss students of Leonora's.

She was saddened to hear that her very good friend Betty had a recurrence of breast cancer:

24.12.83

*Well we have sold the Kelmscott block at last somehow I feel that things will take a turn for the better now, still what are business worries compared with health. My dearest friend had to have a breast removed with cancer three years ago and now it has returned in her bones. She is such a lovely person too.*

We had a lovely Christmas in Collie. The time was right to break the traditions of the past and begin new ones. This was made easy because my husband was rostered on call on Christmas Day so we could not travel to Perth. We had our Christmas dinner on Christmas Eve, just my husband and I after our little boys had gone to bed and his parents and sister came down to share Christmas Day with us.





1984

The business of Christmas, visitors and concern over Erica's pregnancy took their toll on my mother as the New Year began and she became ill, spending New Year's Eve in bed with gastroenteritis. She seeks her own natural remedy with herbal teas and by the time she writes she is feeling better, sharing the problems regarding Erica and her joy at Mark's quiet success in his Law studies.

5.1.84

*Erica's baby is due in 4 weeks but the little blighter is persisting in being the wrong way round. Keith has advised her to have it in hospital if it stays a breech birth and she is very upset at the idea she wants to stay at home. I tell her to be thankful there is such a good hospital to go to there used not to be.*

*A friend of ours asked me the other day wasn't I pleased at Mark getting another University prize. I was very surprised because he had not told me, he said he did not want to make a fuss!*

*My grandmother comments on her respect for Mark, "Mark is the sort of person I admire – clever but not upish and boastful"*

Erica's pregnancy continued to cause concern.

12.1.84

*Erica's baby which is due in four weeks time refuses to descend properly. It is what they call a 'footling' presentation trying to come out feet first. It has been turned twice but each time it swings back again. Also the cord is right down, so that if the waters break there is a great risk of a dead baby. Erica is naturally very worried about it*

*I am going to try to get to an International Technology Conference in Brighton in November, if we get accepted for it I will try to raise the funds to bring David too since I could leave him with Ron while the Conference was on so better take care of yourself yes?*

The idea of a visit from my mother appealed to my grandmother, although she did not think November was the best time for it. As it was it was all dreaming and the events of 1984 left those dreams in tatters. My mother agrees this was never a real option, but she felt some faint comfort from the thought of being able to visit and talk to her brother Ronnie who was one of the only people with whom she could share her deep anxiety and despair. She reflected, in some private writing in 1985, that she could not talk to my father because of his conviction of his "rightness". She could not talk to her children, especially her sons, because she did not wish to contaminate their view of their father and she could not talk to her friends because that would seem to be disloyal. She adds now:

*I have always tried, though not always succeeded, to be loyal to Paul and it put a lot of stress on me to try to conceal what I felt about what was going on. I could have talked to Ron.*

My mother had had a few days on her own when my father went to America for ten days at the end of January. She enjoyed some solitary times although they were often disturbed with visits from children and requests to look after grandchildren. She comments that for once she had turned down a request by Nicola for babysitting.

The garden continued to be her passion and distraction. It was an interest she could share with her mother.

**Jan 19. 1984**

*I have got a lot of plans for what I want to do in the garden while Paul is away. I enjoy gardening and although it tires me physically I find it mentally refreshing. Looking out of this window yesterday I realised how I disliked all the ragged pelargoniums so I grubbed them up and planted them by the fence, they are climbing varieties the previous owners had put in, and prepared the bed for some miniature roses. I have a dustbin under the down pipe from the roof which catches water from the air conditioner as well as rain I put in liquid fertiliser and use that to water my pots. No wonder they are bonny.*

My grandmother responds:

**Jan 31<sup>st</sup> 84**

*I hope you enjoyed your solitary days. I still hate being alone. I miss not being able to garden. In spite of all that goes wrong there is something about gardening that calms the nerves and relaxes the tensions of life. It is a great heartache to me that my garden is in such a mess.*

She also describes the very cold weather blanketing England. On the same day my mother writes of the intense heat in Perth and of the successful arrival of Erica's third child, by caesarian section because of the footling breech presentation.

She was not totally invested in family and garden however:

**Feb. 8<sup>th</sup> 1984**

*I am celebrating my 60<sup>th</sup> birthday this year by going to some lecture courses, one on making your own dress making patterns, one on understanding computers and one on stress management including a fascinating whole day seminar on "Mind as the Healer". I admire tremendously the way you have kept so mentally alert and I aim to do the same if I can.*

My mother had decided that as she was turning 60 she would try to do something about the emotional distress her marital and financial problems were causing her. The University courses were an integral part of this goal. The computing fell by the wayside because of the difficulty of using bi-focals with a computer screen but the other courses proved to be pivotal in her mental survival over the next few, very difficult years. Working with psychologist Bob Flecker and Sister Ignatius Prindiville helped her recognise her mental strength. She also decided that she would make an effort to try and re-build her relationship with my father based on the love and caring that remained in the midst of the financial and ethical mistrust. She reflects now that Bob Flecker's lasting message was the concept of "the utility of action", in other words getting up and doing something instead of wallowing in self-pity. Sr Ignatius Prindiville was a Roman

Catholic nun who had studied in America. She was a friend of Mary Durack and a member of one of the "old" families of Perth. She lectured in self-esteem. *"She was great fun; she became a friend and really enjoyed lunches at Council House including the grog"*. My mother visited her at her convent and found great comfort in her words: *"She used to say to me 'Accept the frightened child within you, she is part of who you are, she will give you strength'"*.

In her letters my mother made no mention of the emotional difficulties she was enduring, rather she shared success stories such as Mark's acceptance into articles at one of Perth's top law firms, Jemima's appointment to work in Perth for a month and David's academic success. By the time she writes next Mark and Deborah have announced their engagement and my mother's joy and satisfaction at this news fill her letter:

**21.2.84**

*Mark and Deborah came in and gave us some good news on Sunday. They announced their engagement and plan to marry on Dec 15<sup>th</sup>. It was not exactly a surprise they have known each other for ten years ever since first year high school and have been going steady for five years. They will have finished their studies then and both have good jobs for next year.*

*Deborah is a lovely girl and comes from a steady background.*

*The whole family are thoroughly delighted about it, though I must say it feels odd not to have to do anything about the wedding. Mark will make a good husband he has lived away from home for four years now and has learnt to do for himself and budget wisely. David was sad that he was not old enough to be best man. I think they plan quite a big wedding I think I will enjoy not having to do the catering for it.*

Given the pressure my mother was under emotionally it was very good that the wedding preparations and costs were not her responsibility. She lets glimpses of her duress show when she writes next:

**Undated**

*I feel badly in need of a holiday but I cannot see me getting one for some months yet. I feel tired, irritable and run down. Mind you I know I'll feel better in April the weather is fresher then.*

My grandmother replied with news of her latest visit to the eye specialist, amazingly she had not left home since her fall late in 1983 so she was very anxious about going out. Fortunately it all went very smoothly and she did not have to see the female doctor who had shouted at her previously but *"a charming man doctor. He was coloured but oh ever so nice. He said how wonderful I was for 91 years"*.

My father had been overseas yet again and in his absence David and the garden were up most in her thoughts. My grandmother had expressed concern earlier that David might become a 'smart Alec' as a result of his intellectual talents but my mother is quick to refute that idea:

**March 25<sup>th</sup>**

There is a big show on at the moment called the "West Australian Garden Week" and David and I paid it a visit yesterday. We thoroughly enjoyed ourselves but I had a lot of planting as a result. David bought a lot of small things for the terrarium he was setting up in the old glass fish tank he had, it really looks very effective. I wish I had some before and after photographs of this property it looks so different from Kelmscott where the traffic noise always drove me inside. No David is not a 'clever Alec' he is a sensible sensitive lad as well as being clever also a pretty good cook – he made some delicious scones for lunch.

**4.4.84**

Paul arrived back in the middle of the night last Thursday. He had had flu while in Switzerland and he looked simple dreadful. Before he left we had agreed I would leave his keys at the desk at the Airport so he could drive himself home because the plane came in at 3.10 a.m. However I got up at 2 a.m. and went to fetch him the look on his face when he spotted me sure made it worth while.

When my father returned from overseas it triggered another crisis in their relationship. While he had been away he had been informed that the Federal police had been investigating his business dealings with his overseas connections. They had known the police had been to the bank but were now learning how the police were pressuring those in Europe and America, creating considerable problems to both personal and business relationships. Some of those interviewed had made statements that my mother described at the time as "bending the truth", others had said only that they considered things above board. Either way it increased the intensity of my mother's anxiety. She continued, however, to paint a picture of positives for her mother:

Your spring flowers are just coming up and I am just planting my bulbs, funny how much I love gardening these days. I often take you for a walk in my garden in my imagination particularly to the sweet smelling corner I call Nan's garden – I planted a deep red, almost black, velvet rose there the other day smells heavenly. Paul laughed when he asked me what did I want for my 38<sup>th</sup> Wedding Anniversary present next week and I replied ten pots, two sacks of potting mix and \$50 for plants.

**Easter Monday (Postmarked 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1984)**

It is a beautiful day today, Friday and Saturday we had rain. I was glad it was fine yesterday because Erica, Nicola and all their children and Mark and Deborah came to dinner and of course we hid Easter eggs for the children to find. Mark is very like a child in some ways still he loves being involved in all the childish nonsense.

There was a story in the paper about a 90 year old bloke learning to run again and competing in veteran's races so I have started jogging a little bit every day I may be getting old but I am going to stay as fit as I can sensible eating and exercise should help.

Would dearly love to see you. I keep buying lottery tickets and hoping.

**5.5.84**

They have been showing the miners riots on T.V., there would appear to have been some ugly scenes.

My grandmother had mentioned the ugly scenes between Yorkshire miners and Nottingham miners blaming the "*brainless Union leaders*" as the "*curse of Britain*". She comments further on the 15<sup>th</sup> May:

*I suppose you have seen it on TV – the ugly scenes of the striking miners. Scargill and McCathay are Marxist Communists and they want to oust Maggie's Government. They should be put up against a wall and shot. The Riot Act would have been read in Gan gan's early days.*

Her health is not good with a recurrence of the colitis that dogged her early years. She talks of her frustration at the doctors who think she is deaf and talk to her daughter-in-law instead of to her. She is frustrated because she knows that diet is an important factor yet she has no control over what she eats. But her family have done some gardening for her and cleaned up her front yard which she describes as "*lots of daffodils in bloom – makes me feel happy*". She finishes with a response to my mother's concerns about Erica's health with the comment: "*I'm sorry Erica isn't looking well but don't worry she will be a lot better as soon as the baby gets a bit older. Babies are a lot of work and they never repay it. I don't know why women are crazy to have them*".

13.5.84

*Darling Ma,*

*For some reason I have done nothing but worry about you for the last two days I do hope you have not been feeling bad. Strange we have had two beautiful days after the heavy rain of the last week and I have spent practically the entire time in the garden and yet I felt all the time that if I turned around suddenly I would see you standing there. It is an odd thought really that if you go back into the womb eventually you would get back to the beginning of time.*

*David has two weeks holiday from school now, he did very well in the end of term tests, he really worried about the maths test but he got 86% so he need not have done. Seems amazing that he will be 13 on Tuesday how time flies – he is growing so much he will be as tall as I soon. I think he is going to be a tall man he is much bigger than Mark at the same age.*

As her 60<sup>th</sup> birthday approaches recognition and celebrations occupy my mother's next few letters. She had received money from her mother, flowers at the Perth City Council post-election dinner and orchids and gladioli from Leonora.

19<sup>th</sup> May.

*I was told not to buy or prepare any food for tomorrow the children are taking care if it so I guess there will be a bit of a bring your own party. Penny and Keith and the boys are arriving this evening I hope they drive carefully it is appallingly wet today, really torrential. It is one of those days when a warm room, knitting and a good book should be in order.*

I sense some anxiety in her anticipation. She worried about there being enough food and over liking what people had done. She admits to a frustration at receiving gifts she didn't like. I suspect both foibles have their origins in a childhood based in the depression when both food and gifts were scarce. But all went well:

23.5.84

*I had an amazing birthday. On the morning Paul said he had some money from his sister Carla to buy me something special in the way of plants for the garden, something I would not normally buy for myself so he wanted to take me round to some of the nurseries to choose something. So we set off at about 10 a.m. and we dawdled around lots of places with Paul driving at about snails pace and we got back to Kalamunda about 12.30 and I was caught completely by surprise there were 46 people in the place. The children waited until I was out of sight then moved in. Erica, Penny and Nicola had prepared masses of food at home and they had the tables laden while Mark and David tidied everything up. They had rung around my friends and no one had given the surprise away, they all stood on the verandah and sang "Happy Birthday" and my grandchildren jumped up and down shouting "Tricked you", "tricked you". It was marvellous and I received lots of lovely presents. I was so touched and felt so loved by them all, what a wonderful way to celebrate being 60! I just wish you all could have been here too.*

30.5.84

*We have one of the TV Stations here this morning filming some of Paul's inventions they have been here for three hours and I expect the finished news item will be about 5 minutes.*

This was a rare moment of positivity in my father's business affairs that were increasingly being consumed by his dispute with the Export Grants Board about the eligibility of some of his claims. Her next letter is full of the visits and activities of her children and is in stark contrast to the one that follows.

10.6.84

*I thought you might like a copy of this formal photograph of Mark at his graduation ceremony. He is a nice boy and it certainly shows in this photo. I looked for my graduation photo and could not find it, do you by any chance have one that you could get copied for me.*

*Jemima rang me yesterday to say that she had had another promotion – she certainly seems to be in the right place at the right time.... The marvellous thing in the Public Service is if she wants to take a few years off and have a family she can go back into the Service afterwards. It is lovely the way she rings me up to have a chat, it is so good that the family keeps in touch so well. Penny came up just for the day on Friday her two little lads really are sweet, she had a friend with her an American parson's wife but very nice for all that. Mark and Deborah are coming to tea today they still have not decided where they are getting married though they have the reception center booked. Jemima is going to sing in the church and again at the reception. I think I shall try and record the wedding so I can send a copy to you.*

*I am doing an interesting course at the University this term 'Creative response to interpersonal relationship' helps to keep the old brain ticking. Funny to think I am supposed to be an old age pensioner I don't feel any less lively than thirty years ago.*

My grandmother was enjoying a stay with her oldest daughter and husband in Scotland. In particular she enjoyed the company, conversation, cooking and car trips. Her only complaint was a painful left leg and heel and her failing eyesight, the script in her letter of the 17<sup>th</sup> June is notably larger than before. Likewise my mother's in her next letter, but for a rather different reason:

24.6.84

My Darling Mum,

Thank you very much for your letter I am glad you are enjoying your stay with Peggy. Will you thank her for all the lovely cards she sent us I'll write in a day or two to her.

Life seems to be being rather more than usually cursed at present, it seems as though things would rather go wrong than right. Our previous Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser was fond of saying "Life wasn't meant to be easy" and I reckon he was right. We seem to have got into a downward spiral that seems like a slippery slope that we can't get off. Not health wise thank God, but business wise. Tell Peggy if she has any prayers for me they are more than needed. The trouble with geniuses like Paul they not only have genius for new ideas but they also have an absolute genius for getting into trouble and difficulty and once he sets his mind on a track you can't convince him he is doing the wrong thing. Then when things go all wrong he looks all innocent as if to say why didn't anyone tell me. I swear if I had any income of my own I'd go and live in a little house and close the doors against the world. I sure can understand Leonora not getting married, she looks younger and more lively than the ones with kids. You used to call me "Pat the next best thing" well believe me I don't half wish I had been born a boy and in charge of my own life.

All my love always

Jeannie.

My mother reflects now that one of my father's major difficulties in life has been caused by him always trying to milk a situation for more than it is worth. He involved family and friends overseas in ways that seemed acceptable to him. My mother hated this process but was told that she was showing her "middle class morality", this was business and because she was not Jewish she could not possibly understand it. Problems arose in my father's process and my mother comments:

*Every time Paul used the phrase 'I have thought it through . . . ' I knew I was in for another traumatic time. It was not just the perceived fraud but also the constant put down that I "did not understand" that was so wearing – and I wanted to maintain as normal a home life for David as I could. I knew the Police were inevitable, not if but when . . . . By the time I wrote that letter . . . I was at the end of my tether, I did not know there was worse to come, I could have done with a spiritual confessor at that time. Well they say what does not break you makes you stronger so I hope that is what has happened.*

My grandmother replies on July 5<sup>th</sup> with a letter headed by a PS which reads

*"It's a long lane that has no turning".*

July 5<sup>th</sup> 1984

*Well I was very sad when I read your last letter. Such a clever girl you should have been rolling in money, Paul should have stuck to his lecturing at which he was very good. Business is always tricky and you have to have the mentality for it. . . . Well Jean I dearly hope life will soon turn for the better for you. Malcolm Fraser might say "life isn't meant to be easy" but there is a saying "life is what you make it". Well cheer up dear – there are worse things in life. I sincerely wish you a jolly big win financially.*

15.7.84.

*Darling Mum.*

*Thank you very much for your cheering letter. I know none of you really wanted me to marry Paul and you know you did curse us fairly effectively so I have often kept my troubles to myself though Ronnie has always been very supporting.*

*Paul is a genius – he is a wonderful father and he loves me as much as he has ever done in all the forty years but nevertheless we have always staggered from one financial crisis to another.*

*Except for when he was employed as a lecturer I have never been able to budget and I am an orderly organised person and would like to be able to.*

*Whenever he gets a new idea – and admittedly many of them are brilliant – he has always borrowed to the hilt to attempt to launch them and they don't always succeed. The major problem at the moment is that his claims for reimbursement of monies spent from the Export Development Grants Board were knocked back two years ago and this still has not been resolved. The Board says he has been claiming too much and have even called in the police to attempt to show so – all a lot of nonsense and very maliciously based but it is causing us a great deal of grief – you know how honest I am, I even tell if I am undercharged in a shop. I am thankful that all but David have left home – he is a tremendous child and doing so well at school. It is no wonder that I wanted my girls to keep in touch with their jobs – I should have kept on teaching but not easy with seven children. Eh dear but it is a weary world sometimes.*

By the time she writes next my mother has "pulled herself together" with respect to her confidence-sharing with her mother and followed the advice of "life is what you make it", at least as she describes it in her correspondence, she has had a reality check with news that her dear friend Betty Hain's breast cancer was spreading:

22.7.84

*We have had some beautiful weather and it really makes the spirits lift. I am just taking each day as it comes and doing what the French say. They say that in life one gets very few big happinesses so one should look for all the small ones, they call them "Le petit bonheur" and I must say I found a lot of small happinesses this week from the sight of the dew on the poinsettia to my beautiful home grown orchids to Vanessa's toothless grin and the wonderful things that teachers said about David at his school parents evening. Also I am very, very thankful and grateful for my comparative good health – my dearest friend Betty has secondary cancer spreading and has had to have chemotherapy which is a very uncomfortable business. Oddly another good friend is a catholic nun and yet she is so full of good sense and compassion and fun. She is a qualified psychologist and I met her when she was giving one of the lecture courses at the University. Tomorrow we are going down to see Penny and Keith at Collie and have a look at their new house which Paul designed. I saw it last when it was just walls and roof and I am quite excited to see it lived in.*

As my mother rejoices in her good health her mother's health is increasingly failing:

July 26<sup>th</sup> 84

*I am having a terrible time with my left foot. I've never suffered such pain not even in childbirth. Last night I got no sleep at all – just turned and turned all night to try and get some sleep. At 4 o'clock I could not stand it any more, got up wrapped myself in shawls and sat on the settee. I've managed a little sleep this afternoon. On Monday when the District Nurse dressed it he said it would take a fortnight for the ulcer to go and then two months for it to heal.*



She does not write again until September. Nevertheless my mother keeps her correspondence going, full of sympathy for my grandmother's painful foot and the disruption that coal strikes are having on British society (4.8.84).

A fortnight later she shares the beautiful smell of her homemade marmalade, dinner at Government House and their leaking bedroom roof. She describes her anticipation of a holiday on Rottnest:

*19.8.84 (Sunday)*

*I hope the weather picks up a bit because starting on Friday David has two weeks holiday and for the second week [3<sup>rd</sup> September] we are going to Rottnest Island we are renting a chalet right on the sea front and although I will still have to do the food I hope for a much needed break. Erica ... and the children will be just three chalets away and we hope to have lots of barbecues and picnics. The weather can be beautiful then but I am taking fisherman's wet weather gear. Rottnest is only half an hour by hovercraft from Perth but it is like another world and no telephone or T.V. and no cars on the island ... it is terrific for children.*

My mother cannot remember the exact date when the police came. By checking some other old letters she narrowed it down to between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> of August. *The West Australian* newspaper records the event on Wednesday, August 22<sup>nd</sup> 1984. The front pages were devoted to Paul Keating's second budget but a couple of pages in a short article describes my father's arrest on several counts of fraud with a brief background. There is also a succinct biography on page 52.

My mother gave no indication of the events in her letters to her mother but the following year she wrote:

*When the police came to arrest Paul there was certainly an element of farce about it. It was an absolutely soaking wet morning. I took David to school wearing my mac, souwester and rubber boots. When I arrived back at the house a car, which I was sure was the one that had been across the road as I left, followed me down the drive.*

*I went to the office and said to Paul "There is an ominous looking car coming down the drive." He came out and the man in the car came and said to him "I am sure you remember me" ... "We would like you to come to the office to answer a few questions". Paul in his naiveté – never having been arrested before – said, "Shall I come in my own car?" The police indicated Paul should go with them and he came in to the house to change out of his daggy clothes. I asked the police if they would like to come in out of the rain but they said no and remained in the carport.*

*When Paul was going to change the phone rang: it was the ABC wanting him to make some comments on air about a planning problem in the city. Paul answered the phone and while he was talking to Des Guilloyle I collected some town clothes from the bedroom and helped him change in to a suit while he was still talking. At one point we actually lost the telephone inside the big woollie he was wearing.*

*When Paul had left my brain went in to the sort of detached neutral it goes into when I have to face an operation so that feeling is removed from the surface and I retreat inside. I had a*

hairdresser's appointment at 9.30, I decided to keep it – anything that kept up my morale was bound to be useful. Strangely enough I was not worried about being arrested myself – though, since we were a partnership, there could have been a distinct possibility of it. Simply I had felt some weeks before that as I did not make the overseas claims and in fact knew a limited amount about them and had only been on two out of about 20 trips Paul had made I could not help the police much.

I telephoned all the family to warn them what had happened. Deborah said she would go to the Uni to warn Mark and I was able to contact all the others. Roger said he would contact Nikki at school so she could break it to David.

It did, of course, make the news bulletins and the phone rang hot with messages of disbelief and support. Erica and Deborah and Mark fielded all the phone calls except for the odd one they thought I would like. One of these was Veronica Evans who rang to say she could believe fraud charges of a great many people she knew but not Paul.

I felt at the same time both numb and furious at Paul and yet relieved that matters were come to a head. David also expressed this relief that at last things were out in the open. It had been fourteen months of agony of wondering when or if the police would act.

The news bulletins of the day were bad enough but the Daily News had the whole front page of a photo of Paul and banner headlines "Paul Ritter fraud charges". This was also the headlines on their placards the length and breadth of the city. I tried to stay numb since anything less certainly hurt too much. I kept thinking, "if only Paul had not rejected my advice", "If only Paul had not thought he knew better than anyone else" and so on and so on agonizing and agonizing....It almost seemed as if there was no way we could survive this, it seemed as though somehow he had ... drawn it upon himself.

Penny said the only thing of any real use, she said that it needed something as big as this to break Paul out of the treadmill he had got on of needing to earn and earn to pay bills and then not knowing whether the Board would deem it eligible expenditure or not. Every time Paul got an idea or invented something new he had said "Jeannie our money worries are finally over, we are going to be rich by Christmas, the only problem from now on will be coping with the money we will earn".

This phrase "rich by Christmas" had become a family joke and saying though as Penny said "Maybe all our Christmases will come at once".

It was on the TV programmes that evening showing Paul going to court and coming out and saying "I only know I am an honest man". He looked so old and so ill that some of my anger lessened and I decided that I would be the one to go to the City to pick him up since he had been let out on bail. Sure is when you find out who your friends are since Nev Monkhouse had not hesitated in agreeing to act as surety of \$40,000 with Paul making a similar surety on his own behalf.

When I arrived at Council House to pick Paul up he was very surprised to see me since he thought someone else of the family would come but compassion was there for the sorry figure he looked.

It was certainly the lowest ebb of our relationship of over 40 years. I wonder why I did not move out and simply wash my hands of Paul Ritter and the exasperating unevenness of life with him. I guess I have never known what he would get up to next, well I suppose that meant that life has not been boring and at least there is only David left to be responsible for. That night I was very concerned as to what effect it would have on Mark who was in his final law year at Uni.

*Everyone kept telling me that in WA people did not visit the father's sins on the children. Mark, thank God, did extremely well topping the final year of law and graduating with 1<sup>st</sup> Class honours. (3<sup>rd</sup> Oct 1985)*

Back in 1984, eight days after his arrest, she writes to her mother with detached ease.

**29.8.84**

*I was sorry to hear from Ronnie that the ulcers on your foot are refusing to heal. I hope by the time you get this you are feeling a bit better.*

*Nearly 92 is really a very grand old age especially to keep your mind clear as you have done. I think one should get a telegram from the queen when you are 85 never mind a 100.*

*Last night we went to a very glittering affair, the opening of a big hotel complex by the Premier of W.A. The food was quite good but we left at 11.30 p.m. because the cabaret was very noisy and the cigarette smoke was irritating my eyes I would not like the life of the jet set. I find these long dinners and cabarets so boring. I don't like suggestive jokes at the best of times let alone in a glamour setting.*

The occasion was the opening of the Merlin Hotel. She recalls the cabaret guest was Barry Humphries and remembers the joke that precipitated them leaving: "*Poor Hazel Hawke is so neglected by Bob these days, she had to go out to buy a dildo*". She recalls the effort involved in putting on a face and keeping her inner anguish from public view. She also remembers a sense of guilty relief that she had not been charged herself, as she was also a director of the firm. She was told later she was not charged because they thought it would weaken the case against my father.

Her letter reaches out of her pain:

*I just wish I could give you a big hug and bring you some of the sweet smelling flowers from Nan's garden. The gardenias will be out very soon and there are masses of buds.*

**10.9.84**

*There is a delicious smell of freesias and jasmine in the air so I guess Spring will soon be here. Freesias grow widely and in the wild here and it really is a sight to see.*

*I thoroughly enjoyed my week by the sea on Rottnest. Paul could only stay two days but David and I enjoyed the rest. ... I had lots of long solitary walks in the lovely sea air. I walked seven miles one day and was not even particularly tired at the end of it so I must be pretty fit.*

*David ... did lots of fishing but without much luck. I really would like to have stayed another week but David is back at school today.*

*We were very lucky for weather it was mostly beautiful though one day I got soaked to the skin. It had been a beautiful morning when I set off, without a Mac, and on the way back on an isolated beach a squall blew in from the sea and I got soaked but I just kept walking, the beach was quite deserted and I don't seem to have taken any harm.*

The trip to Rottneest provided much needed relief from the pretence of normality and some space to come to terms with the new reality, but the yearning to both give and receive the comfort of a mother's love can be heard as she closes her letter.

*I dearly wish I had the money to come home to see you, Ronnie says you are not well and I would so so like to be able to give you a hug. Really now travel is so quick it is only dollars not distance that counts.*

*Give my dearest love to everyone and especially you.  
Jeannie.*

My grandmother finally writes again in early September. She had had her second daughter to stay and enjoying the opportunity to chatter and the change of diet. Her foot was not better and her eyesight continued to fail. She asked my mother not to renew the subscription to the National Geographic she had enjoyed so much because she could no longer see the print, even with a magnifying glass (*Sept 5th 1984*).

**16.9.84**

*Thank you very much for your letter of the 5<sup>th</sup> Ronnie had told me Mollie was with you so I guessed you were busy. I am sorry to hear about your eyes so I will not send the National Geographic again this year but what else would you like instead.*

*I just heard on the news that Princess Diana had a second son. I wonder whether she was disappointed or did not mind. I guess she can afford any number of children any way.*

*We had the worst storms the other night that I have ever heard, we had nearly three inches of rain over night as one thunderstorm after another rolled across us. Our little creek turned into a raging torrent even managed to shift a big galvanized tank, I guess we were lucky there was no other damage. But today it is mild and sunny and the birds are singing so I guess spring cannot be far away. The garden is lush with growth the only trouble is that half of it is weeds but I shall be glad to get outside. Spring is so beautiful here I like to enjoy before the heat comes. My gardenia bush has so many buds this year I use dilute fish emulsion a lot when I am watering and all the plants seem to like it. I am a great believer in organic fertiliser little and often.*

*Paul is taking David and his mates fishing this afternoon so I should get a quiet spell then Mark and Deborah are coming to tea. Lots and lots of love dearest mother mine.  
Jeannie.*

I felt tears in my eyes as I transcribed these last letters. My mother was finding 'le petit bonheur' to share with her mother. Her world was disintegrating as my father battled an inevitable and inexorable descent into her worst financial and personal nightmare and her mother was caught in an equally inexorable and inevitable descent into physical decline. How much would it have meant to my mother to have had the money to go and say goodbye to her mother – how many trips had my father made overseas to no avail. By now we were all pitching in financially. The emotional obligation to lend money and be supportive was at odds with the resentment that my father had come to this when we all had our own lives to build. It was agonizing to watch his desperation and the mix of anger, anxiety, love and duty was not

easy to withstand. Had I had any idea then of the impact of my grandmother's imminent death for my mother perhaps I would have suggested we all pitch in so she could go home to see her mother. But I didn't get it then. I had no idea of this twenty-year link of letters and its meaning.

My grandmother appreciated the happy letters. She had a heavy cold and cough and her foot was as bad as ever, she wrote of her shakiness and fear of falling, about her loneliness now her daughter had left.

**23.9.84**

*Darling Mum.*

*The sun is shining, the birds are singing the plants are growing and so are the weeds. But the smell is heavenly freesias and jasmine!*

*We had quite a family invasion yesterday. Penny is up here for a weekend course so Erica ... turned up and so did Mark and Deborah. Penny is going to make the two bridesmaids dresses for the wedding, they are in satin backed crepe and lace. A most unusual colour for bridesmaids' dresses, difficult to describe pink with coffee is the nearest I can get with cream lace. Jessica is going to be a flower girl and is very excited at the idea. Mark and the groomsmen and David are going to wear brown suits with cream shirts and brown velvet bow ties. Mark actually looks best in grey, you can't see clearly on photos but he has the most beautiful clear grey eyes.*

*David has just gone off to cricket practice with his friends and Paul has gone off to see a client so the house is quiet and I thought I would write to you.*

She was pleased to tell her mother that Erica was planning to move closer to her. They saw each other every day which at the time meant a 20 minute drive for one or the other.

**5.10.84**

*She would like to move so that the kids can walk safely to school and the High School which David goes to is nearby too. She has been painting her present house so that it looks nice and fresh. So far she has found lots of building blocks in the right places but no houses so she may end up building again.*

And late in the letter the angst creeps back in:

*I hope you enjoy Ronnie's visit. I sure would like to see the lad. I had hoped to come home for your birthday this year but with all these difficulties I am having to use the money I had saved for the trips to live on. Life sure never goes according to plan.*

**Oct 12<sup>th</sup> 84**

*My dearest Jean,*

*I was so pleased to receive a cheery letter from you last Monday. Sorry I've been so long in answering it, but I don't feel like writing. I'm still waiting to hear about going into hospital so I don't feel very cheerful. My leg doesn't pain much but aches and is stiff. A person living a few houses away from Norman had her leg cut off the other week. She had an ulcer that wouldn't heal. She is very poorly. By various symptoms I think my diabetes is worse and the specialist thinks that is causing the ulcers so that is why he wants me to go into hospital for tests.*

There is a hiatus of letters until early November and my mother frets on the well being of her mother. She keeps her news light and chatty, Mark and Deborah's mix of exams and wedding planning, Melbourne Cup Day and the first flower on her magnolia tree adding to the "*many beautiful perfumes*" from the garden she has established. She adds: "*In my imagination I often take a walk around Slade and think of the flowers there*".

My grandmother's writing is shaky, wayward and overlapping but she is glad to be home:

*Dec 5th 1984*

*They brought me home on Monday just in time for my birthday. It was a very happy one – had a celebration glass of sherry with Nor and Eve. Russie brought most their children here. It seems a bit of a muddle. No it is not the sherry. My eyes are failing greatly. The light is terrible at present very dull and hazy or very sunny. So I have to write and form words at guesswork. It is a good thing I was trained to write well. However I hope you can make sense of it. Later in my Birthday evening Russie brought Mollie Karen and the children. It was lovely to see them such a happy . . . family.*

*I'm sorry I can't answer invitation to wedding I would very much loved to be there I have sent card with £10 Wedding present sent by special money order.*

*Well I hope you can make sense of what I have written.*

*I'm glad Peggy is coming to look after me for a week I am very shaky.*

*Lots and Lots of Love,*

*Yr affect Mum*

Since my grandmother's diabetes had precluded glacé fruits as a gift and her failing eyesight made the National Geographic useless my mother racked her brains for a useful gift to send her mother for her birthday:

*7.12.84*

*Darling Ma,*

*I do hope that you had a good birthday and that your birthday present arrived in time. They are known as ugg boots here. I wear mine a lot of the time indoors in the winter otherwise I get chilblains.*

Mark and Deborah had passed all their final exams and my mother was proud to share that Mark had also won two prizes:

*He is a modest fellow he did not tell me he had got the prizes. I had to find out for myself but what a nice wedding present he has given himself.*

Erica was moving house and my mother describes the place as feeling "*full of turbulence*". She was tired and facing a visit to the dentist with a cracked filling. On the other hand she was full of anticipation at seeing her oldest daughter for the first time in a year.

Tears press as I know I am about to type the last letter. My grandmother will not die for another 3 months but the last letters from my mother were not kept. So I am about to end my personal journey through my mother's letters. They have become a part of my own life over the past six and a half years, they have brought my mother and I much closer as we talk to and fro over the Internet about the content and her journey then and now. I feel the imminent loss quite unexpectedly keenly. I know what happens next but only from my perspective. My mother's perspective has given me knowledge about her and about my siblings that was not mine before. She has written of things in my own life that I don't remember and now it is about to be over. I rant inside at the carelessness of my grandmother's carers, their ignorance that she had kept all the letters and their failure to keep the last few. I desperately want to know what my mother's last words were to her mother but it is a futile ranting and a futile longing. So the last words I have follow.

*My dearest Jean,*

*Thank you very much for your lovely boots. They will be lovely and warm in cold weather. They have all got their eyes on them.*

*Kay was admiring them.*

*Well I'm afraid I've some bad news for you. They can't find anything to heal the heel so the only alternative is to cut the leg off. Don't worry old dear.*

*Hope you have a lovely X-mas. Enclosed is a fiver.*

*Lots of Love and Best Wishes to Al (sic).*

*Yr afecct (sic) Mum*

*£ Many thanks*

**Undated** (Postmarked 23<sup>rd</sup> Dec 1984)

*Darling, darling Ma,*

*Thank you for the letters, money and cards for David and I. But the news about your foot is most distressing. The only thing I can say old dear is that you never lacked for courage and that will help you now. I wish I could be with you to hold your hand.*

*I once again gave the Percy Finch award for woodwork at David's School speech night. What I was very pleased about was that David won the most outstanding student in English award, he really is a most talented writer.*

*The wedding went off very smoothly we have a video film of it. Is there anyone in the family who has a video V.H.S. video machine that it could be shown on because we are going to send a copy to England. Jemima sang at the service so she is on it too.*

*The family all descend on me tonight, it was sad that Leonora did not get home for the wedding the airline she was booked on went on strike and she could not get a seat on the other one. Plan things as you might you can still get things messed up by the unions.*

*The perfume from my gardenia bush just outside the window is absolutely heavenly, it has more flowers than ever this year.*

*Lots and lots of love from us all*

*Jeannie.*





## 1985

My mother recalls a final letter from my grandmother in late January or early February 1985. She knows she has it somewhere but cannot find it. She says it was written on a half sheet of pale blue lined airmail paper. It read:

*My Dear Jean,  
I am to go back to hospital. Nor and Eve can't manage. They want to take my leg off, I won't let them. I know I am in for a weary time. Take care.  
Your affectionate Mum*

My mother was told her mother would not understand letters so she relied on occasional phone calls to keep in touch. She found these frustrating and describes how she felt shut off most of the time since the stress levels at home were so great.

*December 1984 was part of a really tough time, Mark and Deborah were a happy bit but Paul was still making court appearances, the financial pressures were horrendous, I could not even afford a dress for the wedding and wore one I had made but hated, I knew Mum was dying I could not afford to go, I could not leave David, his stability meant so much to me, trying to salvage something. I felt "abandoned".*

My grandmother died on 28<sup>th</sup> March 1985. My mother was having breakfast when her sister-in-law, Evelyn, rang.

*I listened to only part of the call before I handed the phone to Paul. I understood at that point that she had been at home, I did not get a clear picture of what happened until later. I have never felt so devastatingly alone. I felt totally numb and bereft, she had always been there, a place to retreat to, "my Mum". I carried on as normal, seemingly, even kept my hairdressing appointment, put a death notice in the West but I could not let go. I felt if I started to cry I would scream and not be able to stop.*

*There was no money so there was no possibility of my going to the funeral and I am ashamed to say that at that time I actually hated Paul. I felt it was his insufferable arrogance that had got us in such a mess that I had been unable to say "goodbye" and again I could not leave David. I also had the numbing feeling I might not come back, who needed me? I organised some flowers through Norman and he said he would take the cost off the money I inherited when Mum's house was sold. It was \$8400 but it all went on tax and accountants ... how Mum would have hated that, she always said women needed a rainy day fund and that was to have been mine.*

*In the end I think she was incredibly brave, she hated being dependent (in that I take after her) and she chose.*

*I know Mother hoped she would die at home just as her parents had. Norman and Eve stayed at the hospital as late as they would allow, long past the end of visiting hours (8pm) but at 10pm they said Mum was going to last the night so they went, but no sooner had they got home than the hospital rang to say a nurse had noticed her colour changing and sat with her and held her hands till she slipped away. I have always felt bad that I was not there to hold her.*

Two months after my grandmother died my mother's older sister, Peggy, writes:

*May 1985*

*My Dear Jeannie,*

*Try not to grieve any more for Mother. According to my beliefs I know Salvation it happened to me. My mother became saved. The Brethren Ministers come here and gave mother the message of the Bible to seek God, to believe in the Everlasting life. To acknowledge there was only God Holy all people are sinners and come short of the Glory of God.*

*It does not matter what religion you are. The Old Testament Jewish writings of Prophets they were preaching the same thing Isaiah Chapter 6-5 said he was a man of unclean lips acknowledged God was Holy Chapter 12 – found Salvation was putting it over. Religion, Priests and Popes and Religious Leaders and Archbishops have little to do with God and putting his message of Salvation over. The Old Testament is preaching it. Mother took the Light. What they said Kay visited her a lot; I knew she had found it.*

*She said she had seen where she was going it was a better place than this. They all believe someone came to take mother away. She smiling and waving at someone so no one else could see.*

*Don't fret for Mother Jean she was in a dreadful state. The flesh dropped off her feet with gangrene no one could stand the smell. The Diabetes they could do nothing about. The end was in hospital, she went highly infectious. She left the world peaceful. I do not know whether I have told you or not. She sat up in bed – death bed at that and said wrap yourselves well up and don't stand gaping at the grave or you will never see 90. Another time she said after the funeral have a good feed and good sherry and good wine. She was something our mother. She went with dignity.*

*It was very wet raining a cloud burst I believe at the grave. The grandchildren carried her. A strange thing happened to Russell. He couldn't manage the coffin and was panicky. He suddenly heard Mother say "Don't drop me" and he went calm.*

*Well we went to the Cemetery and I put tulips and iris and daffodils marked in loving memory and deepest love from Jeannie. It is where our mother and father went but their soul is in heaven...Kay will look after the grave. She was good to Mother made her parties and all sorts.*

*Look after yourselves, keep happy, take everything quiet. Next year you will find a good time, everything will change just now for the best. Cheer up, Cheer up. God bless and don't dwell on troubles...*

*All love*

*Sister Peggy*

**Finch (nee Johnston):** Aged 92 yrs. March 28, peacefully at home in England. Beloved mother of Jean Ritter, mother-in-law of Paul, nan of Leo, Erica, Nicola, Penny, Jemima, Mark and David.

Our love goes with you.

## Epilogue

*Dearest Penny,*

*I am sad ... that you are at the end of the letters, the communication has meant a great deal to me.*

*The other very important thing to me is that through all this and very surprising perhaps, is that I feel I have at last been able to grieve for my Mother, it makes me feel lighter and healed. Thank you.*

*Lots of love  
Jean*

**July 4<sup>th</sup> 2004**

*My Dearest Mum,*

*It has been a strange journey for me, working with Penny through the letters I wrote to you, from our departure from England in May 1965 to your death in March 1985. There were so many wrenching things going on in my life when you died I did not allow myself to grieve properly for you, I could not let myself because I had to maintain the capacity to cherish my children, in particular Mark, and David who was still at home, through a difficult family situation. It was not until nearly 20 years later that I really appreciated my loss or that I could get the business troubles and the prison time in to perspective to allow my emotions to explode into the tears I had not shed.*

*I had told you some of my anxieties and concerns about the unethical business practices that had been going on in my name as well as Paul's. I did not tell you everything because you were old and frail, though still so mentally alert, what is more I knew you had never felt comfortable about Paul's personality in relationship with me, so there was no use burdening you but I needed family comfort.*

*Paul did receive a prison sentence.*

*This was devastating and gave me great difficulties just to survive financially but there was an upside to this. My siblings were totally supportive and my own children were utterly terrific, I am so proud of them. I can never forget Mark going to the Court every day and David, only 14, saying to me, after I had returned from the prison in a somewhat upset state "It is OK to grieve" and my lovely daughters, some with families, still trying to establish themselves in the world, offering me help, which I am sure they could not afford and strangers leaving money for me at the till of the fruit and vegie shop to pay for my purchases. Of course it hurt when people who knew us ignored me and passed by but there were others, like Diana Warnock, a well-known figure in Perth, who very publicly hugged me, and most of our friends stayed true.*

*David and I lived on our own for 16 months, the length of time Paul served in an open prison, it was a strange time, the ongoing anxiety to have enough funds, the gut wrenching twice a week prison visits, the determination to hold my head up high and the fight not to let self pity take over. To this end I went to various courses and read many books and I feel that I came out of the experience a much stronger person, though I must say I feel that person was hiding there all along. It was incredibly difficult when Paul came out of prison. I had been used to making decisions and David and I had a comfortable non-stressful relationship but Paul expected to be head of the household again.*

*Somehow we survived those months, they had their own stresses, we were made bankrupt, our assets were taken and it was touch and go whether we became homeless. Once again our children saved us, securing our home for us and making it possible for us to have some sort of*

*stability and when we became old enough to get the pension I could sigh with relief and budget so that I could always have the money for bills when they came. Paul's sister Carla and her husband Jan have also added their generosity to that of our children.*

*The children have all done well in their professions and are all in happy stable relationships and we now have 14 interesting lively grandchildren ranging in age from 5 to 26.*

*So dearest Mum, how do I find myself now in what I suppose is old age? I am mostly happy, my health is annoyingly disturbing to some of my activities, I have a wonderful creative hobby; that is one of my great sadnesses that you did not have the opportunity to see my tapestries, I have a fascinating family with whom I can keep in touch with some of the technology that would have stunned and amazed you, Dad would have loved it. I have a great group of friends through the University of the Third Age. I am sometimes the consummate garrulous old lady and occasionally suffer from foot- in- mouth disease. Somehow Paul and I have created a relationship which is based much more on equal terms and much less of a patriarchal dictatorship, I am no longer afraid of losing his love by being my sometimes assertive self and some subjects are put in a no-go area.*

*I remember you saying, the last time we talked together face to face, that the older you got the more you felt you could hear your Mother, my dear Gran, calling you, perhaps that is what I now feel.*

*All my dearest love  
Jean*

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