

GRANDMA'S STORIES

By Lysbeth Jenkins



For my Children, Grandchildren, Great Grandchildren
And Great Great Grandchildren.

Part One

Life at Elbow Hill

I was born in 1925, in the Cowell District Hospital on Eyre Peninsula, the eighth child of Richard and Barbara Mills.

It is not necessary for me to go any further back into my ancestry than my parents, as all that information has been adequately recorded in two books and each family has a copy of them both.

These are “*Millbrae and its Founding Family*” by Aunt May Mills and “*From Whence We Inherit*” by Joan Jenkins.

There were four brothers and three sisters preceding me, namely (in order), Ric, Doug, Bill, Joan, Jack, Margret, Helen then me – Lizzie. Then came Isabel, Bessie and Bruce. Eleven children in all, which was not unusual in those days. One neighbour had thirteen children.

My Father registered my birth, naming me Lizzie after his Mother and youngest sister. As nobody else in the family liked my name, I was just called “Baby” until Isabel was born, then I became “Big Baby”.

As soon as I could, I started eating everything green I could get hold of, such as grass, Lucerne, cabbage, parsley, etc. So I was promptly nicknamed “Bunny Rabbit”. From then on I was called “Bunny” by all and sundry, except my Father who called me “Liza”. My sisters and brother Bruce still call me Bunny.

At the time I was born, we lived at Elbow Hill, a small community on the main road between Cowell and Port Lincoln, (with other towns and communities along the way of course). Our front yard adjoined the main road, which at the time was not bituminised, so muddy and rutted in winter and corrugated and dusty in summer. The main road seemed to be the dividing line between the hills and the plains, which sloped down to the sea.

From our house and the village of Elbow Hill one could look over the farming land on the plains to the sea and hear its roar in rough weather, although it was several miles away. To the North we could see part of

Franklin Harbour, but not the town of Cowell on its shores. To the South were Port Gibbon, and the huge white sand hills at Point Price. They stood out clearly against the background of blue sea. Looking towards the hills, the highest peak (rounded like an elbow) was called Elbow Hill, after which the village of Elbow Hill took its name. There was also Finger Hill, a favourite place for exploring.

The Village of Elbow Hill

The village of Elbow Hill consisted of the Methodist Church, a Public School and further along, opposite our house was the Church of England – a corrugated iron building in someone’s paddock. Opposite the Methodist Church and school building, Mr and Mrs Joe Williams had a general store and Post Office connected to their house. They also owned a big corrugated iron building, which served as a Community Hall. Mr Williams also had a Blacksmith shed away from the hall.

Other farming families lived within a few miles of Elbow Hill and Joe Williams had a farm about a quarter of a mile up the rise towards Cowell. Elbow hill was the junction of several roads: the main road went right through the middle, one road went up Finger hill, one went down to the sea and one went diagonally down to Pt Gibbon and Point Price.

There was a football playing field on some relatively flat land below William’s General Store. A single furrow plough line, marked out the boundary of the oval and the goal sticks at each end were cut from tall trees. There was a plentiful supply of cowpats on the field!

Our house at Elbow hill was built of stone, originally four rooms, with a huge combined dining, living and kitchen (added later) on a lower level than the rest of the house. The three bedrooms were connected to the living areas by a long dark room called the “store room”. Very scary to me as a little girl! There was a verandah outside this room with a sleep-out at one end, “the boys’ room”. There was another verandah outside the kitchen.

I hope this description of where I lived will set the background to the stories I will tell you.

My Earliest Memory

My earliest memory was at three years old. My twelve-year-old sister Joan had gotten out of bed one morning to use the chamber pot. For those of you too young to know what a chamber pot was, it was a big round pot with a handle on it made of china (or enamel usually), and used in the

bedrooms to urinate in during the hours of darkness, because there were no indoor toilets. They were usually kept under the bed! More about toilets later!

Well as I said, Joan sat on the chamber pot, and there she was, with one leg sticking out stiff and straight and she couldn't get up. She had contracted Poliomyelitis and her right leg was paralysed. She was put in an isolation ward at the Cowell Hospital, because no one was sure just how infectious polio was.

Thank goodness no one else in the family got it. It was a very traumatic time for the whole family.

When I was three years and three months old I tripped on the front step and fell face down on the cement verandah and broke off both my front teeth. My next memory was of lying on a white barouche on a vine-shaded verandah at the Cowell Hospital with Dr Fox pulling out my broken teeth, while Nurse Byrd held my hand. I must have been in a state of shock for sometime, as I have no memory of how I got the ten miles from Elbow Hill to the Cowell Hospital. No doubt horses would have had to be harnessed to the buggy, or the neighbours called upon to help. When I felt better I was able to talk to Joan from the door of her isolation ward and told her, "A fox pulled out my teeth, while the bird held my hand!"

I once asked my Mother how on earth she managed with so many children. Her reply was; "Well the older ones looked after the little ones." Apparently, one older child was given a younger one as their special charge, and I was Joan's "baby" so no doubt I missed her a lot when she went into hospital for so long. It would seem one's clearest memories are related to the amount of trauma involved.

The Tipperary

Now about those toilets! Our house was surrounded by several acres of land and the toilet otherwise known as the lavatory, little house, dunny, long drop etc was a long way from the house and alongside the neighbour's paddock. Grandma Helen, (Mum's Mother) named it "Tipperary" because it was a long way to go.

Tipperary was a song of the First World War and it went like this:

"It's a long way to Tipperary. It's a long way to go.

It's a long way to Tipperary, to the sweetest girl I know."

And so on. Our "Tipperary" was a big hole in the ground over which was built a "little house" of wood and corrugated iron. Inside, was a box seat the width of the building in which was cut a good-sized hole for sitting

over, to do one's business! Sometimes a smaller hole was made alongside the large hole for the little children's bottoms.

Big black spiders and red backed spiders made their homes under the seat, to feed on the plentiful supply of flies and mosquitoes. Sometimes a snake would fall into the hole, which was rather better than in the "little house" itself, which sometimes happened.

Toilet paper was newspaper cut into six-inch squares, threaded onto string and hung on a nail inside the toilet.

When Mum finished with the fire under the copper on washdays, she would scrape out the coals and tip them down the toilet. What a stink!!

We hated having to "go" then, because the smell of smouldering excrement and paper would cling to one's person for ages afterwards. Aren't you glad you live in an age of nice clean indoor flush toilets!

Snakes

Talking of snakes reminds me of what a great snake killer my Mother was. If there were a snake about it would be quickly dispatched, unless it escaped down a hole. In which case Mum would pour a kettle of hot water down after it. If a snake was seen, but disappeared, she would put out saucers of milk, play the piano or get us kids to sing. She usually got the snake.

We lived quite near the school, a few hundred yards away I should think, so we came home for lunch. There was a trellis of grapevines at the bottom of the yard and this particular day Margret, leading the way, saw a big black snake with its head in under the vines. She yelled "*Mum, there's a snake*" and Mum said, "*Well, kill it you silly thing.*" So Margret grabbed the nearest implement, a broom and was whacking at the snake until we realised Mum was standing on the back step laughing.

She had killed the snake earlier and placed it nicely in position to trick us, but she was a very protective Mother when it came to snakes.

Our Home

Our kitchen was a big room with a big black wood stove across one corner, which was kept shiny with stove black, a block of black powdery paste, which was rubbed onto the stove with a damp rag or brush, then polished to a shine. The fire in the stove had to be let go out so the stove was cool enough to do this.

A big black water fountain with a brass tap always stood on top of the stove to supply hot water, and also a big black kettle for making cups of tea etc.

In another corner were two big bins, one for flour and the other for sugar. There were open shelves on another side, with a hatch above for passing food and dishes into and out of the dining-living room. A big table and chairs dominated the centre of the kitchen. There was also a food safe with wire mesh panels, which let the air circulate while keeping out the flies. There was a big tin bowl in which dishes were washed and a bigger oval tray to drain them on. These were placed on the kitchen table for washing up after meals, (and there were plenty of dishes).

We children had to do the washing up, which we did with much singing, laughing and squabbling as well. We had competitions to see how long we could stand on one leg like a stork while drying the dishes. Now and then our parents would call out from the living room in protests at the noise we made!

Our living-dining room was also a very big room, it had to be, as it contained a piano and a sideboard made of dark polished wood, with cupboards and drawers. Mum kept her “good” china, silverware and table linen in this cabinet.

There was also a fireplace in this room with Dad’s chair on one side and Mum’s chair on the other. There were shelves in two corners of the room and a very big table in the centre. A homemade wooden bench with a back rail occupied one side of the table, where we younger children sat for meals and our older siblings sat on chairs along the other side. Dad had his chair at one end of the table and Mum had her chair at the other end.

The corner shelves contained books and ornaments and on one shelf sat a wind up gramophone with a big megaphone attached. It was “His Masters Voice” brand and had a picture of a dog on it. We loved to wind up the gramophone by the handle on the side and listen to the records, one of which was Dame Nellie Melba singing “*Velia, the Witch of the Woods*”. There was one about “*The Stone outside Dan Murphy’s Door*” and one about an old yellow cat someone was trying to get rid of. The song said “*But the cat came back. Yes, the very next day the cat came back. We thought he was a goner but the cat came back!*” There were other records but these are the ones I remember. The records were thick and heavy, as were the needles used to play them. When the records became damaged or worn out, they were sometimes put in very hot water and while soft and pliable, shaped into bowls and vases.

To get to the bedrooms we had to go through the ‘storeroom’, a long oblong room with a fireplace in one corner and a window and door opening onto the back verandah. The window was always covered up and the door usually kept closed, so the storeroom was quite dark. It was called the ‘storeroom’ because Dad bought stuff in bulk. There were bags of flour and sugar, foil lined tea chests full of Bushell’s tea and boxes of dried fruit such as pears, apples, prunes, dates, raisins and currants. Sometimes there were peaches – I didn’t like those because they had furry skins! Many other items were also stored in this room. Against one wall was a cupboard with shelves on top. Books were kept on the shelves, with jams, pickles and chutneys, all homemade, stored in the cupboard below.

Mice made their home in the storeroom, so there were always rustlings, scratching and squeaking noises, which, in the darkness, I found quite spooky!

At the opposite end to the living room was the door to the bedroom, which I shared with Helen, Isabel and Bessie. Bessie had a couch bed along one wall and the rest of us shared the double bed. If we had visitors with children who stayed over, there would be children’s heads at both ends of the double bed, with feet in the middle! We would eventually go to sleep, after giggling and kicking at each other.

At right angles to our door, was a passage that went to the front verandah. Joan and Margret shared a bedroom on one side of this passage with Mum and Dad on the other side with a cot in there for the baby. There was nearly always a baby!

When we went to bed we would have a candle in a candleholder lit for us in the living room, then we would go through the storeroom to bed. Well, I was so scared of that room; I would sometimes go so fast the candle would blow out. Then I would have to go back in the dark and get it lit again! Sometimes we would be allowed to read in bed, as books and reading were an important part of our lives. There were times when told to blow out the candle and go to sleep; I would try to hide it behind the bedclothes, so I could finish a chapter. It was only by good luck I didn’t set the bed on fire! We often singed our eyebrows, eyelashes and fringes over the candle flame by accident.

The ceiling of the bedroom was a lovely golden brown matchboard, which is a kind of pinewood, with lots of knots and patterns. A favourite game was to lie in bed and see how many animals and other things we could imagine in these knots and patterns. Another favourite game was “I spy with my little eye”. No getting up to watch cartoons on the TV. There was no TV!!

Wash Days

As I mentioned, outside the storeroom was a verandah, which at one end was a sleepout where my brothers used to sleep. The other end was Mum's 'laundry'. This consisted of a wooden bench, with a frame in the middle on which was mounted a hand operated wringer. On either side of this wringer was a large round galvanised tub. One was used for scrubbing the clothes and the other one for rinsing. The clothes were rubbed up and down on a corrugated wooden scrubbing board using homemade or Velvet soap to help get them clean. First of all, all the white clothes were boiled up in a copper, which was down in the back yard. When they were sufficiently boiled, Mum would haul the clothes out of the boiling water with a sturdy stick, called the 'copper stick' and into a bucket. She then carried them up the sloping ramp into the verandah and tipped them into the first tub to rinse, then put them through the hand wringer into the next tub. The water in this tub would have been tinted a pale blue by dipping a 'blue bag' into it. The white clothes came out a sparkling white. The blue bags were cubes of solidified blue powder wrapped in little drawstring calico bags and called 'Reckitts Blue'. They were also used for dabbing on bung eyes.

Sometimes the bush flies would get into our eyes and bite causing our eyelids to swell up so much we couldn't see. This was called a Bung Eye. The copper was a deep bowl holding many gallons of water and was set into a surround of stones and cement, with a grating underneath.

Underneath this grating was the fire for heating the water. The copper was made of copper and was kept clean and shiny by rubbing it with vinegar and salt, otherwise it would get green verdigris on it, which would stain the clothes. The copper was used for many things, such as heating water for baths, making soap and scalding chooks when one had to be plucked!

Mum filled it by bucket from the rainwater tank but if we were getting low on rainwater she would haul water out of the underground tank. She would also fill the washing tubs in the same way. How hard she used to work!

Dad used to wear heavy moleskin pants, so Mum would leave those soaking in a tub of suds until we children came home from school when we delighted in jumping up and down on the pants to get them clean. Then with Mum holding one end and one of us on the other, we would twist as much water out of those pants as we could. They were too thick for the wringer.

The clothes were hung on wires stretched between two sturdy posts in the yard. The wires were propped up in the middle with forked sticks called 'clothes props'. On windy days the pegs would come out and sheets would drag in the dust or mud, (whichever the season happened to be). Sometimes the prop would fall down, or worst of all, the clothesline would break. Oh dear! After all that hard work it would have to be done again! Bother and damnation!! That was all the swearing I heard from my Mother. Neither of my parents swore and if we ever said any 'bad' words we would be threatened with having our mouths washed out with soap. As it was always homemade, or Velvet soaps it was not a prospect we relished. It was a luxury to have a cake of nice smelling soap. I was given for my birthday or Christmas one year, some Carnation soap and talcum powder. What a delight. I still love the smell of carnations.

Lamps, Candles and Other things

Because we lived in the country away from the cities and large towns there was no electricity, which is why we used candles, kerosene lamps and hurricane lanterns. Grannie once gave us younger children a little hurricane lantern each. Perhaps she was worried we would set ourselves on fire with candles.

I presume kerosene could be purchased in forty-four gallon drums, but it also came in four-gallon tins, packed together in wooden boxes. Each tin had a carry handle on top with a round opening in one corner, with a screw top lid.

When the kerosene was used up, the tins were thoroughly washed, then used for many things. With the top cut out, the sharp edges smoothed down and a wire handle attached, the tins became excellent buckets. Cut through diagonally from top to bottom, opened out and the sharp edges neatened, the tin became a wash-up and draining bowl. The boxes, which were made of pinewood, were also put to many uses. When the boxes were opened, the top boards made useful timber and were sometimes shaped into cricket bats, or butter pats (for shaping homemade butter). Stacked one on top of the other the boxes became useful shelves and with some pretty material gathered round they became a dressing table. When the number of people for a meal was more than the number of chairs, a kerosene box was brought in to sit on.

My Mother

I have told you that my mother worked very hard. She was a very good Mother, which I did not appreciate until I became a mother myself. She was good looking and ladylike – Mum and her sisters were known as ‘the Beauties of Mitcham’, which is where they were born and grew up. She was very strict about good manners and good behaviour. We would get a whack or two with the wooden spoon if we deserved it, which did us no harm! Sometimes I thought I was wrongly punished! My sister Isabel, who was two years younger, was very shy and clung to Mum a lot, so we nicknamed her ‘Little brown Mouse’. Any of you who know her, as ‘Aunty Kim’ would find that very hard to believe! Mum used to take her part, so she got me into lots of trouble.

When I was a child, I thought my Mother didn’t love me very much and that I was the odd one out in the family. Strange to say, after Aunty Dolly stayed with us once, she sent me a book when she got home, which was about a little girl who was the odd one out in the family!

I was seven and a half when Isabel started school and it was my job to get her there, but she would come part way and then run home, so we would have to start again. When we finally got into school, where we sat side by side in long desks, she sat so close to me I couldn’t do my writing. Mr Hausler, the teacher said, “Move down Isabel,” but she said, “I won’t” and clung even closer. I think she was in her late teens before she overcame her shyness.

One time Mum locked me in the bedroom for being naughty. I don’t remember what for, as I was only five, I think. I was so furious and frustrated, I stamped and screamed and beat my fists on the door, to no avail, as I was not let out until I calmed down. I think one or two of my grandchildren have inherited the same trait! Shall we call it ‘strength of character?’

Mum always liked the dining table to be set with a starched white damask linen cloth and were taught at an early age to place the cutlery in the right order. Things were more relaxed in the kitchen where we ate at lunch times, or when there were only Mum and we kids at home.

Dad and the older boys were often away working on the sheep station near Iron Baron until we moved there in 1936, when I was eleven years old.

Mum kept a long bamboo stick loose handy to the table in the kitchen. She would give us a whack with that if we misbehaved – after all, someone had to keep order, but we had lots of fun and laughter.

When my brother Bruce was two or three, he tied his big toe to his high chair with a piece of string. Then when he was allowed to leave the table, he climbed out of his high chair, quite forgetting his big toe was still tied up. Over went Bruce with the chair on top of him. We all laughed but Bruce was so embarrassed and so cross, he said, “I meant to do that.”

On winter evenings, after the dishes were done, Mum would read to us in front of the fire. Stories of; *Uncle Remus and Brer Rabbit*, *Seven Little Australians*, *Little Women*, etc. A favourite book was, *Peck's Bad Boy and His Pa*. One story from the book was about the day Mr and Mrs Peck took their ‘bad boy’ to church, where they sat on either side of him. Very soon they smelt an awful smell. Pa looked at Ma and Ma looked at Pa, then they both looked at their boy and knew where the bad smell was coming from. Bad Boy had put a piece of Gorgonzola cheese in his pocket and if you have ever smelt Gorgonzola cheese, you would know why Bad Boy was immediately escorted from the church. Phew!

Sunday evenings, Mum would play the piano and we would stand around and sing, except for Dad, who would sit in his chair by the fireplace and ask for his favourite hymns. He couldn't whistle or sing and I suspect he was tone deaf!

We had our own dairy produce and eggs, and home killed meat and Mum, being an excellent cook, could always find something to make a meal of. She made all the bread for our large family after first making the yeast, which was made like this: First boil a potato with the skin on. When cooked, take it out of the water and then throw into the water a good handful of hops. Peel the potato and mash it with a little plain flour and sugar, then gradually mix in the water that has been strained off the hops. Put this liquid into a bottle, cork it and tie the cork down with string then place the bottle in a warm place until the yeast ‘works’. It works more quickly if yeast from a previous mix is added to the bottle. If you

don't keep a good watch on the proceeds, the yeast might blow the cork out of the bottle, with very messy results.

When I was fourteen and we had moved to the sheep station, Mum went to visit relatives in Adelaide and left me in charge of making the bread. Into a large bowl were put seven large sifters of flour; a handful of salt well mixed in and then a hollow was made in the middle of the flour. Into this hollow went the contents of the yeast bottle, mixed with sufficient warm water to make nice pliable dough. This was formed by gradually bringing the flour into the centre and punching and folding until it became a big pliable ball.

It was then covered with a clean towel, warmly covered with blankets and put into a warm place to rise. Bread was usually made at night after the oven was finished with for the day. The oven door would be opened down and the bread bowl placed on it so that it would get the warmth of the dying fire overnight. Next morning the dough had risen to the top of the bowl; it would be punched down again and left to rise once more. After that, it would be placed on a flat board, cut into loaf size pieces and each loaf punched, rolled and folded into shape. It was then put into a bread tin, mostly four loaves to a kerosene tin, with one side cut out. The bread was then baked in a hot oven.

When we lived at Elbow Hill, Mum would often make buns on a Sunday morning, using the bread recipe, with the addition of sugar, milk and currants. The buns were glazed with beaten egg. When the smell of freshly cooked buns wafted out of the kitchen, my older brothers would appear like magic and soon there would be no buns left! But Mum seemed to take great pleasure from this.

Joan once made a batch of bread that was a miserable failure. It finished up like a hard round ball and we kicked it around the yard for a long time!

Because we lived on a main road, quite a few 'swaggies' called in during the depression years. They were often big, rough looking men with tattoos and we kids were scared of them. So if we were playing outside and we saw a swaggie coming down the road, we would run inside to tell Mum, "There's a swaggie coming". They would always call in with their black, tea billy and ask, "Any chance of a meal Missus, if I chop some wood?" They would always get a meal of something, with tea and sugar to take away.

Sometimes they would chop a minimum amount of wood and one night our dog was given poisoned bait. But they were usually poor men just trying to survive.

Another of Mum's talents was making soap, which was used for washing clothes and dishes. Velvet soap was bought for bathing and washing hair.

When a sheep was killed for meat, the caul fat from around the intestines was saved, as was all other fat, until there was sufficient to make a batch of soap. I am not sure just how it was made but it involved boiling the fat in the copper, then adding other ingredients, one of which was caustic soda. This was a fairly dangerous process, so we were not allowed to come near. When the caustic soda was added to the hot fat, the whole lot would boil up furiously and had to be done very carefully.

When it had cooled down, it would be ladled into a kerosene tin, which was cut in half lengthwise. It would then be left to set. What would we have done without kerosene tins? When cooled and still soft, the soap would be cut into bars and left to harden.

When Mum ran out of jam jars, she would make some from bottles. To do this, she had a strong piece of wire, one end of which was formed into a circle large enough to fit down over the neck of the bottle. The wire circle would be heated in the fire in the stove until it was white hot and then placed over the neck of the bottle. The bottle was then plunged into a bucket of cold water and - Hey Presto! - The top would snap off where the hot wire ring had been.

We had cows, which Mum milked and the milk would be put through the Separator on the back verandah. The Separator separated the cream from the milk; the skim milk was fed to the pigs and calves and the cream was made into butter. If we had a lot of cream, it would be churned in a wooden butter churn, but if not a lot, the cream would then be beaten by hand using a wooden spoon until the butterfat separated from the buttermilk. The buttermilk was saved for making scones and the butterfat was washed a couple of times with cold water and some salt added. Then a butter board and butter pats were scalded with boiling water and then rinsed in cold, so the butter would not stick to them. The butter was then placed on the board and flattened and squeezed with the butter pats to remove as much water as possible. It was then formed into nice oblong one-pound lots. Each one-pound was then wrapped in special butter paper, which was bought at the shop. If we had more butter than we needed, we sometimes sold it to the shop for one shilling a pound!

Our cows used to be put in a paddock across the road during the day and as there was no water in this paddock, they would be very thirsty when we brought them home in the evening.

One old cow made sure she got her share of the water. She would put her mouth in the trough and go slurp and swallow, slurp and swallow with us watching in amazement as her stomach got bigger and bigger and bigger until at last she could hold no more! She would turn very slowly and carefully away from the trough and waddle away. All that water must

have weighed a lot and had she not moved very carefully, would probably have tipped her over! Mum said she looked like a ship in full sail!

We had a roan coloured cow and one time she had a calf, which was put in a yard to be fed on skim milk. While Mum was milking one of the other cows Helen and I were sitting on a log outside the yard. Dossy, the roan cow took exception to us sitting near her calf and came at us with her head down. We screamed and ran which frightened Mum and the cow she was milking. The cow kicked over the milk bucket and Mum was cross! She said, "I'll give you a thrashing when I finish milking", but I was not waiting around for that, so I went and hid in the creeper in the front garden and snuck into the bedroom when it started to get dark.

Apart from having my broken teeth pulled out by a doctor when I was three, I don't ever remember going to a doctor again as a child.

Mum had a little medicine cabinet, which contained various things like a little green bottle of smelling salts - I loved that. Amongst other things were, Oil of Cloves, Tincture of Rhubarb and Epicuana wine.

In the spring we would get a tonic of hops and salts. Boiling hop flowers in water, then adding Epsom Salts to the liquid, made this tonic. We would be required to drink a medicine glassful each day. Milk Emulsion and Cod Liver Oil were also administered when we looked a bit below par. So we grew up strong and healthy, because a wonderful Mother looked after us well.

My Father

Dad was a big man; over six feet tall and well built. He believed in good posture and tried to instil it into his children. He was a handsome man, who always had a beard, because his skin burnt easily. His hair and beard went white when he was quite young and I only remember him that way. He had a quick and volatile temper and although he loved children, we knew better than to incur his wrath! He was an unusual man, quite clairvoyant and a bit mystical.

He was probably more suited to being a professor or philosopher than a farmer and grazier. He died of a heart attack aged fifty-eight.

In his latter years he spent much time studying the Bible and writing reams of his interpretation of same as well as writing stories and poetry. As a child I remember him sitting at the end of the dining table with one ankle hooked over the opposite thigh, with a baby placed in the hollow thus made. The baby, whether his own or someone else's, would be given little tastes of Vegemite, salt, gravy or a bone to suck on.

We had a patch of Lucerne in the front garden and would be encouraged by Dad to eat the fresh tips, as Lucerne was good for us! He would ask us to lie on our backs in the Lucerne on a warm summer evening and tell him what imaginary things we could see in the clouds above us.

We had an old couch on the front verandah and sometimes Dad would stretch out on that with kids draped all over him. We would say, "Tell us a story Dad." "Alright what do you want a story about?" "A fox and a duck." So Dad would then weave the most exciting story about our chosen subjects.

He also encouraged us to try and pick up things with our bare toes. When we went down to the sand hills at Pt Price he would roll down the sand hills with us.

There was one time I fell foul of his quick temper and got a good hiding, but overall I remember him as a good father, who you couldn't put anything over!

Carmody's Bull!

About three miles up the road from our place, lived Jim Carmody and his family. They had a big red bull that was always getting out of his paddock and coming down to Elbow Hill to visit the cows living there. We would hear him coming long before he came into view, because he would lower his head and trot along, rumbling in his throat. Every now and then he would give a high-pitched bellow. We were really scared of him!

One time when Helen was ten, I was seven and Bruce was a few months old, we were taking Bruce for a walk up the road. Helen was carrying Bruce, when we heard Carmody's bull coming. Helen dumped Bruce on the road and we ran for home and safety. Mum was furious with us for dumping Bruce like that and made us go back and get him with Carmody's bull getting even closer!

On the opposite of the road to our house, between the road and the neighbour's paddock was a length of mallee scrub composed of mallee trees with an under cover of smaller shrubs and bushes. We used to make 'wurleys' in the scrub and after much pleading, Mum agreed to us camping in our 'wurly' overnight. Well, all went well, until we heard Carmody's bull coming and then it was a fast scatter for home.

One night I woke up to hear loud noises coming from the storeroom. I was sure somehow or other, Carmody's bull had gotten in and I was glad

the bedroom door was shut. Terrified, I hid my head under the blankets. In the morning, I discovered Mum's brother, Uncle Wilf, had arrived after I had gone to bed and Mum had put up a stretcher bed for him in the storeroom. The noise I heard was Uncle Wilf's snoring!

Another night, this infamous bull got into the yard outside our bedroom window, hooked his horns into the Tacoma creeper growing there and ripped it to shreds. My brothers used to fill his rump with buckshot, get on a horse and using a stockwhip would chase him home. It was all in vain as Carmody's bull, like the old yellow cat, always came back!

School Days

The school at Elbow Hill was one big room built of stone with a front door and back door, a fireplace in one corner and two or three windows each side. A corrugated iron shelter shed was built onto the back. This served as a storeroom, lunchroom and a place to play during recess in wet weather.

It was a one-teacher school and I had the same teacher from grade 1 to the end of grade 5, which was when we moved from Elbow Hill. Roderick Wake and I were the only ones in Grade 1 when I started school at five and a half and apart from one year of correspondence in Grade 6, we went right through to Grade 7, just the two of us in each class. We had great fun in Grade 1 seeing who could read out loud the fastest. As long as we didn't make too much noise, Mr Hausler was very tolerant of us. Roderick was always ahead of me though. He was either more intelligent or more studious – probably both! Apart from getting a cut across the fingers with a ruler for not getting all my spelling right, I seemed to go through school without much trouble. Although getting hit across the fingers with a ruler on a cold frosty morning really hurts! I can still feel it!

We used to play games like hopscotch, chasey, donkey and marbles. The boys played cricket and we girls joined in sometimes. Mr Hausler used to play games with us as well. Every morning before going into school we would line up in two rows to do exercises and salute the flag.

We would then march around reciting our tables in singsong fashion and finally into school and stand until Mr Hausler told us to sit. He would call the roll of names to which each pupil would reply, "present," then the school day would begin, often with a singing lesson. Mr Hausler would strike a note with his tuning fork and we would all sing; Doe, Ray, Me, Far, So, La, Te, Doe, then down the scale; Doe, Te, La, So, Far, Me, Ray,

Doe. We then might sing, 'Men of Harlech', 'Funiculi, Funicular', or the 'Song of Australia'.

I liked singing lessons and I think Mr Hausler did as well.

I really blotted my copybook, so to speak, one day at school; we were outside at recess and we saw a Red back spider on the wall near the window.

I picked up a stone and with the attitude, 'Stand back, I'll get him', threw the stone, but alas the stone completely missed the spider and went crashing through the windowpane. Mr Hausler was not amused and neither were Mum and Dad. I was told I would have to pay for the damage. Considering we did not get pocket money, I don't quite know how that was to be achieved. Perhaps it just all blew over!

School concerts were a highlight of the year and one year when I was not very old, I was in a little play. The story was about a little girl who had a kitten but the kitten had to be drowned because the girl's mother was busy with twins. In trying to console her daughter's grief at the loss of the kitten, the mother showed her the twin babies saying, "See this one has blue eyes and this one has brown." For my part, I had to say, "And which one are you going to drown?" Apparently I said it with such feeling, the audience all laughed. I can remember thinking, "Why are they laughing?" "Did I say something wrong?" I thought it was a very serious matter!

Being naturally a very left-handed person, it became a problem when I started school because you were not supposed to be left-handed. So everyone tried to make me use my right hand. Dad even offered me ten shillings if I could use my right hand for writing. That was a whole week's wages for some people in those days. I tried very hard but with no success. Then Mr Adey, the school inspector, visited our school and said, "If that child is left-handed, just let her be that way." What a relief.

Every year we had a school picnic, which was held at Pt Gibbon, on the beach. A great day was made of it, with all the mothers bringing lots of picnic food. There were foot races, three legged races, egg and spoon races and so on. If you came first you received a sixpence, second place a threepence and third, a penny. Buns were hung on strings tied to the jetty and the competition was to see who could eat the entire bun first.

You were not allowed to touch the bun other than with your mouth. There was also an apple floating in a bucket of water, race. Margret won that once - we told her it was because she had a big mouth! The best fun of all was - 'catch the rooster'. Someone would bring a lively rooster and keep him caged up until all the other races were over, then let him loose on the

beach. Then all who wanted to could have a go at catching him. This created much hilarity.

As every good picnic story ends, we all went home tired but happy!

Sunday School

Besides going to school during the week we went to Sunday school in the Methodist Church on Sunday mornings.

We ran barefoot most of the time but we had to wear shoes and socks to Sunday school. Somehow, my shoes always felt too tight and I couldn't wait to get home to take them off.

We had to learn a verse off by heart from the Bible and recite it in class. For this we would be given a ticket to stick in our ticket books. The tickets were usually illustrated with birds and flowers and with the text, 'God Is Love' or something similar, printed on them. We were taught that if we were naughty, God would punish us, or the Devil would get us and throw us into the Fires of Hell! We were also taught that God made everything.

Well, one day I was standing in the front garden looking up into the sky and thinking, "If God made everything, who made God?" I was only nine I think. I tried so hard to imagine nothing and how could God make something out of nothing and who made God anyway? I thought my head would blow apart with all the thinking, so I ran off and found something else to do.

There was a Sunday School Anniversary every year. This was a concert, combined with prize giving. Every child received a book of some kind.

At Christmas time a big native pine tree was put in the hall and all the children received a present – lollies and balloons.

We also had a Strawberry Fete every year, which was a fundraiser for something or other. There were stalls for all sorts of things. Mothers made lolly baskets and filled them with homemade sweets. Toffees in paper patty pans could be bought for a penny. Strawberries and cream were sold on saucers and no strawberries ever taste better!

I loved the lolly baskets decorated with coloured crepe paper and filled with toffees, caramels, coconut ice and French jellies. Yum!

Saturday nights after football or cricket games had been played, a dance was often held in the hall. I was too young to go of course but I liked to listen to the music, which was quite loud and if the wind was blowing towards our house. Mr Joe Williams played the violin and his daughter

Gwen could play anything 'by ear'. She was a very good pianist. Mr William could play 'The Irish Washerwoman' and other Irish jigs.

William's General Store

Williams General Store was a fascinating place, which smelt of leather, onions, fruit, cheese and bacon. As you came in the front door of the shop, a door on the left led into a small room, which was the Post Office. This had a small window facing into the shop where you could buy stamps and post letters. Sometimes I could hear the clinkety-clack of telegrams being received or sent. Further along the wall on the left was the hardware section and here you would find tools such as picks, pick handles, axes, hurricane lamps, and spare kerosene lamp glasses. Also ropes, tacks, nails, screws, boots, bootlaces and leather soles for resoling boots. In fact all sorts of things a farming community might need. Along the back wall was constructed a big bench here fruit and veg were laid out in their different categories.

Along the right wall was the grocery section, with a big high counter on top of which was a set of scales for weighing flour, sugar and other groceries. These were weighed into brown paper bags, which Mrs Williams would deftly flip over and over to seal the top of the bags. On the counter was a wooden board on which sat a big round cheese coated in cheesecloth. However much you wanted to buy was cut into a wedge with a big knife.

Along the wall behind the counter were big bins containing flour, sugar, tea, rolled oats and many other groceries. There were large tins of biscuits with a picture of a Rosella parrot on the tin. There was also a glass case on the counter, which contained lollies. There were straps and twists of black liquorice, flat strips of red and yellow lollies we called 'eggs and bacon', pink twists of musk-flavoured lollies and big round 'changing' balls. Most of these could be bought for an h'penny' (halfpenny). If Mr Williams was in the shop he would give us a lolly or some broken biscuits, but Mrs Williams would say, "Joe, you are giving away the profits".

There was a shed near the shop where they kept the potatoes and onions spread out on the floor and sometimes we would be paid in lollies to pick out all the smelly, rotting potatoes and onions so they could be thrown away.

One time Aileen, the daughter of our nearest neighbour and about my age, was in the shop with me. There was no one else in the shop and Aileen said to me, "Let's take some fruit" but I refused. Soon after Mrs Williams came out of the post office and we purchased what we had

come for. When Christmas came, Mrs Williams gave me a cup and saucer with the cup full of lollies. She said it was a reward for not stealing when Aileen wanted me to. My parents really deserved the reward though because they taught us that if something did not belong to you, you didn't take it and if you didn't have the money to pay for something then you went without.

Mr Williams had a blacksmith shed where we would sometimes go after school to watch him work. He had a forge in which he burnt coal to heat the article he was making. A very big set of bellows was attached to this forge and he would let us pump the bellows until the fire in the forge was really hot. Whatever he was making, quite often a horseshoe, he would put in the hot coals until it became white-hot. He would then take it out with some big tongs and hammer it into shape on his anvil. When he had fashioned it to his satisfaction, he would plunge it into a bucket of cold water to harden the steel. This would make a lot of steam and sizzling. He also had a flat-topped trolley, to which he would harness two big draught horses. If we saw him driving along the road we would run out and ask if we could have a ride. He would stop while we clambered on and with legs hanging over the side, would ride as far his farm and then walk home. He obviously liked children but not when he found us rolling in his crop of wheat! We got yelled at that day. Every time he saw me though, he would sing, "Barney Google with the goog, goog, googly eyes".

A Trip to Adelaide

When I was seven, my brother Bruce was born and soon after Mum had a bad 'flu' or something and was very ill, so the Williams family took Bruce and looked after him until Mum was well again. They had him for six weeks or so and would have kept been quite happy to keep him longer.

About this time, my brothers Doug and Bill were going to Adelaide to shear Grandpa's sheep on his property at Shepherds Hill, which is now 'Bellevue Heights'. The property was called 'Sturtbrae'. Grandpa was a Member of Parliament but had suffered a stroke. The trip to Adelaide was in Mr Harvey's car and besides Mr Harvey, who drove, there were my two brothers, myself, a girl called Jessie and maybe one other.

I think we drove all night. I presumably slept all the way but I do remember at one creek crossing Mr Harvey yelling out, "Hang onto your hats boys".

Besides Grannie and Grandpa living at 'Sturtbrae', there was Aunty May and Maria, the housekeeper. My brothers and I stayed until the shearing

was finished. Aunty May called me ‘Bunty’ which I hated as it made me feel I was a pet lamb or something!

Soursobs grew luxuriously around the shed and I picked a big bunch and ate the stems with disastrous results. The oxalic acid in the soursobs is not good for the kidneys and bladder.

One day, soon after, Grannie took me into the city to a big building and talked for ages to a man there. I badly wanted to go to the toilet and finally I wet my pants. When Grannie realised what had happened she said, “You dirty little girl, go outside at once.”

Very ashamed, I went outside and stood behind a big marble pillar.

Maybe it was Parliament House! Another day Aunty May took me into the city and met a friend on the corner of a street, again they talked for ages and again I wet my pants, but I don’t think Aunty May even noticed.

Don’t eat soursobs; they are *not* good for you!

When it was time to go home to Elbow Hill, it was via the coastal trading ship, ‘The Quorna’. We were in the ships saloon, where my brothers were playing cards, when Bill looked at me and said, “Are you all right?” I said I was, but promptly threw up all over the floor. The stewardess was really cross with my brothers for letting such a thing happen. *They* probably thought I was a little nuisance.

Exploring and other Happenings

Bruce was a fretful baby as I remember, but I adored him and Mum did not need to ask me twice to stay home from school to mind him on washing days. Helen was very studious and loved school, so never wanted to stay home to help. I would walk with Bruce in my arms and sing him to sleep. One day Helen and I took Bruce, in his big wicker pram, for a walk up Finger Hill. Coming home, Helen let go of the pram and let it run down the hill by itself, she would then run and catch it, slow it down, then do the same thing again. How did poor little Bruce survive the things his sisters did to him?

Finger Hill was a favourite place to explore on Saturdays, especially in the spring, when there would be lots of wild flowers. We would come home garlanded in fluffy clematis, (we called it ‘Old man’s Beard’) and carrying bunches of blue, pink and spider orchids. One day Helen and I walked to the crest of Finger Hill where the road flattened out alongside the wide sandy bed of Narridy Creek. There was a big pepper tree growing in the middle of the creek. Helen said, “There’s a snake over there, I’m going to kill it”. I said, “No Helen, it might bite you”, but when Helen made up her mind to do something, that was it! She picked up a stout stick and went over to kill the snake but instead of slithering away

as most snakes do, this one decided to attack. All I could do was watch and yell, "Run Helen!" Helen was backing away; trying to defend herself with the stick, while the snake kept rising up on its tail and lunging at her. She finally backed far enough away to be able to turn and run. It was a very white faced, frightened girl who came back to where I was. We went straight home after that.

Sometimes a circus would put on a show on the flat ground below William's place. We would go over after school to see all the animals in cages and the elephants tethered by their feet.

One time when the circus was moving along the road into Cowell, I climbed up on the picket fence in front of our house to get a better look. I perched on the top rail with my feet in between the pickets. A man on one of the trucks yelled out, "Come and join the circus" He probably thought I would be good at monkey tricks!

We saw many things going along the road, such as big wagonloads of wool, pulled by teams of camels, donkeys or mules. For some reason our cows used to get spooked by the mules and would race around madly with heads and tails in the air. Many years later when we lived on the sheep station, the cows would do the same thing if they saw an emu.

When I was about eight or nine, I went across the road and into the neighbours paddock for a walk but Mr Wake had put his big draught horses into this paddock. When they saw this strange little thing in their paddock they all started coming towards me. I was terrified, you would never have seen a little girl run so fast and literally fall through the fence! Another adventure was when I persuaded Mum to let me sleep over at Aileen's place. Aileen, a couple of her sisters and I, all got into the same double bed, which was in the bedroom that opened off the back porch. During the night their big old pig got out of its sty and pushed its way into the bedroom, grunting and snuffling around and under the bed. I did not ask to sleep there again!

One wet morning at school I climbed in a Tamarisk tree but slipped on a wet branch and staked the inside of my thigh on a broken off twig. A boy, three years older than me, helped me get down and I had a crush on him after that. I ran home, bleeding. Dad was in the yard, so he poured kerosene in my wound which was about a centimetre deep and just as round. He said, "You'll be all right, off you go". So I went back to school without even seeing Mum. Apparently kerosene stops the bleeding and prevents infection but I still have the scar. These days, it would be off to the doctor for stitches and a Tetanus injection.

Another time I got a large splinter under my big toe nail. I had to soak my foot in hot salted water to try and draw out the splinter but the water was very hot. My big brother Bill encouraged me to keep dipping my big toe in until I could bear to put my whole foot in the water. It was so painful.

Joan used to cut our hair as younger girls and would often snip our ears and laugh about it. One day she cut my hair really short and I looked like a boy. I was so cross that I ran away into the scrub across the road. I was never, ever going to come home again, not until it got dark anyway!

Did I tell you about the two big mulberry trees that grew in our back yard? They produced big, black, juicy mulberries and we spent hours climbing around in the trees picking mulberries for jam, mulberry pies, mulberries and cream and mulberry cordial. Shiny, blue-black ants about a centimetre long also loved mulberries, so climbed the trees as well. Sometimes I would put what seemed to be an extra big luscious looking mulberry in my mouth and bite into it. Oh, Yuk! Spit! Splutter! There was an ant in it and it tasted awful. Wherever I sat, whether it was in the front garden, or down by the mulberry tree, these ants would swarm over me and bite me. Their bites hurt for ages.

Summer Holidays at Pt Gibbon

Pt Gibbon was a place where the three masted sailing ships, or ketches as they were called, would come to get loads of wheat. They would also bring supplies of super phosphate and other things the farmers needed. There are high cliffs at Pt Gibbon, which millions of years ago were under the sea. You can see in them, layers of different coloured sand and pebbles. Some of the layers are of fine sand; some coarse and some layers have big and little, water-washed round stones in them. On top of the cliffs is a layer of hard white limestone.

A gap was cut through the cliff so railway tracks could be laid down a sloping incline and right to the end of a jetty which went right out into deep water. Inland a little way back from the edge of the cliffs were constructed open-sided wheat sheds where bags of wheat were stacked until a sailing ship came for a load. There was also another big shed, called a Goods Shed, where the goods that came on the sailing ship, were kept until the farmers came to get them. The farmers reaped their wheat into bags that were then sown across the top with a big needle, threaded with strong twine. The bags were then brought to Pt Gibbon, to be stacked in the wheat shed. Some farmers carted the bags on flat, tray-top

trucks but many still used wagons with teams of big draught horses to pull them.

Without all the labour saving machinery of today, the farmers had to work very hard and developed very strong muscles. They could carry bags of wheat on their backs all day.

On the base of the wheat stacks was placed a layer of mallee logs to keep the wheat bags off the ground so they would not get wet and rot.

The bags of wheat would then be stacked layer upon layer until they nearly reached the roof.

As the bags were unloaded from truck or wagon, they would be weighed on some scales, the weight written on the bag and recorded in a book so the farmer would be paid accordingly. Then one of the men, wheat lumpers they were called, would back up to the scales, hoist the bag of wheat onto his back and carry it to where it should go on the stack.

When a sailing ship arrived, these men would be contacted to come and help load the ship.

They would take the wheat bags off the stack and load them onto flat-topped rail trucks. When a truck was loaded, it would be allowed to roll down the slope, through the gap in the cliff and onto the jetty. A man would stand on the back with his foot on a brake ready to slow it down in case it got up too much speed.

At the end of the jetty, there was a big log of timber secured with huge bolts, to stop the truck going over the end. The bags of wheat would then be slid down a chute into the ship where sailors would be ready to catch them and stack them in the hold. When the ship was fully loaded and the tide was right, the sails would be hoisted and away would sail the ship.

The sailing ships looked beautiful with all their wind-filled sails.

While the truck was being unloaded into the ship, a man would walk down the jetty with a big draught horse, its harness jingling. When the truck was fully unloaded, he would hitch the horse up to it so it could pull the truck back up to the shed for another load.

We would watch for this to happen, race up the steps onto the jetty and run along to get a ride back as far as the cliffs, then go back down to the beach. All other times were strictly forbidden to play anywhere near the jetty, or the sheds, when wheat was being loaded or unloaded, in case a bag of wheat fell off and injured us – or we got in the way of men and horses.

New Years Day was a big day at Pt Gibbon. All the local people would gather for a picnic. The Cowell Council Brass Band would come and play rousing, Oompah music and one of the shopkeepers from Cowell would be there with cool drinks and sweets etc. I think there was also a beer tent.

Mothers would bring lots of good food for lunch and family groups would set their lunch out on truck tops or on the wheat stacks. On the flat ground by the wheat sheds, young and old would compete in all kinds of races and all had a great day. If the Goods Shed was empty, the day may finish with a dance, otherwise it would be held in the hall at Elbow Hill. One New Years Day, Dad took Mum and us children down to Pt Gibbon in a buggy pulled by two horses. The buggy had a big black hood on it. Dad called it 'Black Maria'.

Well, we got to the beach all right and Dad tied the horses and buggy to a fence well away from the crowd. Unfortunately, when it was time to go home he found the horses and buggy missing. Some stupid boys had spooked the horses and they'd broken away and galloped off with the buggy. Mrs Kidman had a nice car and had to pass our place on her way home, so she gave Mum and us children a ride home while Dad went to find the horses.

After Christmas and New Year celebrations were over, many families would camp at Pt Gibbon during the school holidays. Some came from as far away as Kimba and Cowell and some had permanent shacks built on the cliff top, or back in the ti-tree scrub. Several families would camp in the Goods Shed if it were empty. Separate areas would be partitioned off with tarpaulins, hung like curtains from the roof rafters. There would be long trestle tables down one end, which were shared for meals and keeping food supplies on. Cooking was done outside over an open fire. Mum cooked lovely roast dinners, stews, cakes and scones in a camp oven. It was mostly mothers and children camping, with fathers coming and going, depending on how much work had to be done on their farms. Children would be off to the beach as soon as possible, with mothers coming down to sit in the shade of the jetty when the morning chores were done. We all went up to the camp for lunch, then back to the beach again. There was a strong rope swing with a board seat that hung from the jetty, which gave big as well as little people lots of fun. If the weather was cold and windy we would play on the wheat stacks, or make wurley houses in the low growing, wind swept ti-tree bushes.

The winter tides dumped big heaps of seaweed on the south side of the jetty. These were great for running and jumping on, or lying on in the sun to read a book. When the tide went out, we looked in all the little rock pools for starfish, little crabs and fish. We poked our fingers in the middle of anemones to watch them quickly shrink into the sand. There were always many shells to gather; big abalone shells with opalescent hollows, anemone shells and tiny little shells of all colours. These could be pierced with a strong needle and threaded on cotton to make necklaces.

Many happy hours would be spent frolicking in the water and trying to swim. There was a girl a little older than me, who, for some reason didn't like me. One day she got me by the back of the neck and held me under the water until I almost drowned.

At the southern end of the beach, the cliffs protruded out into the sea, so we would only get around this point when the tide was well out. If we walked around this point we had to make sure to come back before the tide came in. One day Helen and I misjudged the tide and couldn't get back, so we had to make the dangerous climb up the crumbling cliff and walk back along the top but we managed it. Around this point was a beach of fine white sand that squeaked under our toes and if we went far enough we could get to the big white sand hills at Pt Price. There was a lovely reef here as well, when the tide was out. The many clear pools contained coloured seaweed, shells, anemones, little fish and tiny crayfish. Under every rock we could find a little brown crab. Lots of black Periwinkle clung to the rocks. These look like black snails and we would collect billies full of them. We would boil them in seawater over the open fire and then get one of Mum's hairpins to prise the meat out of the snails. Then with bread and butter, vinegar and pepper and salt to dip them in, we would have a chewy feast.

One year we stayed in McCullum's shack on the cliff top, overlooking the beach. Mr McCullum had built it from posts cut from native pine trees and second-hand corrugated iron from farm buildings. One end was the parents' bedroom; the other end was for the children, with bunk beds built against opposite walls. The mattresses were made from chaff bags filled with seaweed. In between the bedrooms was the living room. It was nice to lie in bed at night and listen to the slap and sigh of the waves along the beach.

We used to have fun seeing how far we could walk one foot in front of the other along the railway lines on the jetty. Some daring people would even try walking on the top railing of the three-foot high fence that went along one side of the jetty. Looking down from the jetty we could see stingrays and other fish swimming in the water.

People would fish from the jetty; mostly the boys and they would catch squid for fish-bait. When landed, the squid would squirt black ink all over the jetty. Nobody thought of eating squid in those days, it is now known as Calamari!

Dolphins were often seen and on a rare occasion a whale could be seen spouting further out to sea.

One lady, who came to the beach every year and had one of the better shacks in the Ti-tree scrub, owned a little black Pomeranian dog, which yapped, snapped and barked at everything and everybody. One day my brother Jack and a couple of his mates decided they would give it something to yap about. So when the lady went up to lunch from the beach, taking her “little darling” with her, they found a smelly dead crab and buried it in the sand under her chair. After lunch, back she came and settled down in her chair.

The dog went crazy, it yapped and barked and scratched sand in all directions until it unearthed the crab! Its mistress was furious with those horrible boys who teased her “little darling” so badly.

Mum would take one of the cows to the beach to provide us with milk and because the cow would go dry if it was not milked.

One year when Mum and Dad were preparing to go to Pt Gibbon, Dad decided Helen and I could start out first and walk Dossy the cow to the beach. Well he got us started and armed with a stick each, we walked behind her, but we could see she was not happy. When we got as far as the dry, sandy, wide bed of the Narridy Creek, she decided she had had enough and turned around and headed for home. Well we yelled and shouted and threatened her with our sticks, but she dodged and weaved past us and galloped for home and her companions. All we could do was follow. Dad was a bit disgusted with us, but probably realised it was too difficult a job for two young girls.

Many of the men of the district liked to go night fishing, including my older bothers. To do this, they would wear a light on their foreheads, secured by a strap that went around the back of their heads. They looked similar to miner’s lamps. Burning carbide, a white powdery stuff with an obnoxious smell, made the light. I am not sure how they worked. Fishing gear was home made, usually a three-pronged spear with a fairly long handle and a ‘knocker’ which was a length of flat iron, a little over an inch wide and a ¼-inch thick. It would be about three feet long and have a wooden handle attached to one end.

Garfish swim near the surface of the water and would be easily seen in the light from the lamp. The men would give the fish a quick hit and quickly put it in the fishing bag. Fishing bags were made from wheat or sugar bags, folded back in half, and a rope knotted through each side, so the bag could be slung across the shoulder.

The fish caught would be whiting, garfish, mullet, Tommy roughs, snapper, flathead and crabs.

Sometimes they would get a big haul, at other times hardly anything, depending on the moon, tides and the weather.

Well, these are some of Grandma's stories; up to the time I was eleven years old. We then went to live on a sheep station, which was quite a different lifestyle.

Part Two

Life at Myola

In 1936, the year that I was eleven years old, we moved from Elbow Hill to Myola, a sheep station, which is about twenty-eight miles inland from Whyalla.

Our homestead on the station was four miles from the BHP mining town of Iron Baron and Dad's grazing lease adjoined the BHP mining lease. The town of Iron Baron was quite new, consisting mainly of two streets of houses set down in a scrub of Black oaks, Myall and Sandalwood. A short distance away over a sharp little hill were several more houses, with single men's quarters (including a catering kitchen and dining area) situated further away again. These buildings were near a railway line, which took the iron ore from the quarry to the smelters in Whyalla. The mail was delivered to the kitchen, which had a phone line connection to Whyalla.

At this stage there was no school, so we had to have correspondence lessons. A couple of years later a school was built in Iron Baron, but I had left school by then.

I don't remember very much about how we got to Whyalla from Elbow hill, except we went in Dad's old Ford truck. Mum was a very poor traveller, suffering terribly from motion sickness, so when we got in sight of the homestead she decided to walk the rest of the way. Dad stopped the truck; Mum got out and promptly vomited, losing her dentures in the process. She walked the rest of the way, probably wishing she could get to bed to lie down and recover. Doug went next morning to find her dentures!

Poor Mum, she had lived all her married life to this point at or near Elbow Hill and knew most people in the district. All her friends were there, but now she had to start a new life on a sheep station, with the nearest neighbours four miles away, none of whom she knew. I think it

must have been very hard for her but of course that did not occur to me at the age of eleven. By this stage Rick was married and took over the house at Elbow Hill.

Our House

The original house at Myola was a two roomed, wood and corrugated iron shack, with a lean-to on the back. Dad, Rick and Doug built onto this structure, a solid, thick walled dwelling of local stone and cement.

The house then consisted of a large dining-lounge room, with a big open fireplace and then a step down into a big kitchen.

These two rooms were separated from two bedrooms by a wide passage, which went from the front to the back of the house. There was a wide verandah enclosed with fly wire, along the front of the house and an open verandah along the back. At one end of the back verandah was a cellar and at the other end an under ground tank for storing precious rainwater, which ran off the roof of the house. The tank had a roof of corrugated iron with an opening in one corner, so a bucket tied to the end of a rope could pull up water.

I loved to put my head inside the tank and sing and listen to the sound echoing under the roof. One day while I was doing this Jack crept up behind me, grabbed me by the legs and upended me over the tank. I got such a fright, I yelled, "Put me down, you bloody bastard!" He got such a shock to hear his young sister swear at him, he nearly dropped me right in. He called out, "Mum, you should hear Bunny swearing."

Adventures and Fun

Well, we settled down to life on a sheep station; we had correspondence school lessons, supervised by Margret as she had finished her secondary school education and was waiting to start her nursing training. Helen was boarding in Woodville with Aunty Bell and going to the Woodville High School.

It was a free and comparatively adventurous life. We children used to go for long walks in the scrub carrying a Billy containing water, tea, sugar, matches, pannikins and some food. When we found a nice spot, we would light a fire and boil the Billy. We would then eat our food, washed down with sweet, Billy tea. Then we would walk home again, unless it was the

season for Quandongs to be ripe, in which case we would go 'Wild Peaching'.

After a good rain, mushrooms could be found in the thick mulch of leaves under the Myall trees and Bullock bush. Rain was always welcome in the dry, saltbush country. The storm clouds, which brought sheet and forked lightening with deafening claps of rolling thunder, were welcomed with delight.

Even before the rain reached us in great downpours, we could hear it coming across the open country and smell the wonderful smell of rain on dry earth.

Dad would put on his big old leather overcoat and armed with a spade, would clear blocked drains and direct the water into the garden and his Lucerne patch. When the rain ceased, we children would paddle for miles in the drains, which flowed into the dams and have mud squelching between our toes. There was a small dam near our house, which did not hold water for more than a few weeks, but while it did, the frogs came out of the mud and there would be a frenzy of croaking and mating. In no time there would be a raft of frog's eggs floating on the water.

These eggs soon hatched into tadpoles, some of which we would catch and keep in jam jars of water to watch as their tails disappeared and grew into legs. As the water leaked away through the bottom of the dam there would be hundreds of tadpoles left high and dry, baking in the sun.

Dad's patch of Lucerne, however, which also became flooded, soon turned from dry sticks into a three-foot high forest of luscious green. This was scythed off and fed to the cows. I became quite proficient using the scythe.

After a good rain the trees and shrubs would come into bloom as well as lots of smaller flowering plants. Sometimes there would be acres of white and yellow Everlastings. The birds would also take advantage of the abundance of flowers and insects to mate and raise a family. There would be brilliantly coloured parrots and large flocks of crested pigeons, which would help themselves to the grain fed to the fowls.

A strong wire, our wireless aerial, was strung between the house and a tall Sandalwood tree and was a favourite meeting place for a flock of Galahs, who must be the larrikins of the bird world. After much jostling, shoving and screeching, they would settle in pairs on the wire and for a while would kiss and cuddle until a fight broke out, when they would screech and yell and swear at each other and at any human who came near. They would also swing by their toes or beaks or hang onto another bird, which was swinging upside down. I used to find them amazing to watch.

There were also big Wedge-tailed Eagles around. One day I was sent up to the big dam to turn off the windmill; it was a perfect day, warm and sunny, with a light breeze, so I lay on my back on the bank of the dam, looking at the sky. As I did, I noticed a pair of Eagles soaring on an updraft current of air. I watched as they spiralled up and up until they disappeared from view, then down they came as tiny black dots, which grew bigger and bigger, but then they would catch another updraft and spiral up again. I thought how wonderful it would be, to soar like an Eagle.

I composed a poem in my head about them, but I soon forgot it.

Something else in the feathered world I found amusing, was watching our chooks go to bed. They had perches in the fowl house but some preferred to roost in the Myall tree in the pigs' yard. This was separated from the cow yard by a Cyclone wire fence, topped with a stout post railing. First of all, the hens would walk up and down along the fence at ground level, looking up at the top railing saying, "Tork, tork, tork, tork." When they had plucked up enough courage they would make a noisy attempt to fly up onto the railing.

Often they would make several attempts before reaching it but having done so they would look up at a branch of the Myall tree for some time before again being courageous enough to fly up into the tree. This was done with more noise and flapping of wings.

I was so amused by this performance; I decided to give the family a demonstration of 'the chooks going to bed'. Well, they were all very amused too but unfortunately, when we had a birthday for Dad they persuaded me to give my demonstration for all the guests! I ended up feeling very embarrassed and a complete idiot.

Something else we liked to do was make wurlies in the scrub; children these days would call them 'cubby houses'. We would select a tree with a low growing, horizontal branch, against which we would place a framework of sticks and branches of 'feather top' bushes. 'Feather top', as we called it, was a medium sized shrub with soft grey foliage, which when in flower would be covered in little, pale lilac, bell shaped flowers. It had a lovely soft feel and made a splendid floor for our wurlies as well as sheltering walls. We spent more time making our wurlies than being in them. But when they were finished, they were quite cosy.

Shearing and Sheep Work

Besides school and play, I was soon introduced to work.

One morning Dad said to me, “Come on Liza, you can help me in the shed today”. It was shearing time and my job was to sweep the shearing floor clean of the bits of wool left after a fleece was picked up and thrown on the wool table. I progressed to; dabbing tar on any bad cuts made by the shearer and pouring milk-oil fluid on fly blown sheep. When the belly wool was shorn off, I picked that up and put it in its right bin. I also helped yard sheep into the holding pens. I was then taught how to skirt a fleece, which meant taking off the shorter, dusty wool from the edges of the fleece as it lay on the wool table. The really dusty bits with lots of prickles went into the ‘second class’ bin and the cleaner bits into the ‘first pieces’ bin. The part down the back of the fleece was also taken out, as it usually contained dust and sticks from sheep going under the Myall trees. These went into a bin for ‘backs’ and so the best wool from each side of the fleece was left. These fleeces were rolled into a ball and graded according to quality. Dad and Doug were very fussy about the preparation and classing of the wool and usually received good prices for quality wool.

Then came the baling of the wool into hemp wool packs. This involved considerable hard labour, as the wool presses were hand operated.

The four sides of the wool pack were hung inside the iron cage of the wool press. Doug would throw in some fleeces, then I would climb in and jump on the wool and stamp it down, making sure the corners were well filled, while Doug kept throwing in more fleeces. When the bale was almost full and needed more weight and strength, I would get out and Doug would get in. I would then pass more fleeces up to him until the bale was full. After getting out Doug would then put a heavy iron press on top of the wool and squeeze it down with a lever as far as he could. Three strong, steel pins would then be put through the bale from one side to the other (to hold the wool down) so the iron press could be taken out. Two opposite flaps of the bale would be folded over and secured with bale hooks, the steel pins taken out and then the other two flaps folded over and secured. The full bale was then taken out of the wool press and pushed and rolled outside of the shed ready to be branded, indicating whatever kind of wool it contained.

When the shearing was all finished, the wool would be carted down to Adelaide, to be sold at the wool sales.

Sometimes two or three of us kids would get in the bale together to jump on the wool, which was good fun. The Lanolin in the wool would make our skin feel very smooth and soft, but we also got Bindii prickles in our hands and feet.

About a week after shearing, the sheep would have to be dipped to keep them free of lice and ticks. Before rotary spray dipping was used, digging a narrow trench in the ground, sheep width, and cementing both the sides and bottom made our dip.

One end was about four-feet deep with a sloping ramp at the other end. The dip was filled with water and bright, yellow, dipping powder added. The sheep were herded into a yard at the deep end and forced to jump and plunge into the dip. They would then swim to the other end until they could walk up the ramp and into the draining yard. Sometimes it was my job to make sure each sheep was properly 'dunked', by pushing its head under with a plunger especially made for the job. The dogs got thrown in last to get rid of any fleas they might have.

I enjoyed all the sheep work and swelled with pride one day when I overheard Dad telling someone, I was worth two men to him!

Besides the dam near the house, which didn't hold water for long, there was another dam about half a mile away. When we hadn't had rain for a long time and the dams were getting low in water, the sheep would get stuck in the mud at the water's edge, when they came in for a drink. They would have to be pulled out and we kids used to do that sometimes. We would pull and pull and the sheep's legs would come out suddenly and guess who would go over backward into the mud! One day I found a flyblown sheep stuck in the mud, so I went home, got a pair of shears, a bottle of milk-oil fluid and went back to the dam. I pulled the sheep out of the mud and after shearing off the flyblown wool; I poured milk-oil fluid onto the maggots. I felt quite proud of myself, but was very deflated later that evening after telling Doug what I had done, as he said, "Yes I saw that, but you only half did the job!" Big brothers don't let you get too cocky!

Storing Food Perishables

Besides the cellar to keep food in, we had a cool safe, which stood in the passage to get a good draught of air. The sides were made of asbestos and were kept wet by water dripping down from a tray at the top of the safe. The draught blowing on the wet safe, kept it cool and milk, cream, butter and other perishables were kept in there.

When a sheep was killed for meat, it was hung in the meat house, which was built up near the shed where there was free flowing air all around it. Its sides were flywire on a strong frame and the roof was covered in tree branches and Spinifex to keep off the heat from the sun. The flywire allowed the air to flow through, but kept out the blowflies, dogs, cats and

foxes. The meat would be kept in here for a week, if the weather were good. Saltbush mutton treated this way is very tender and delicious. However, if it were humid or thundery weather, the meat would soon go off and have to be cooked or salted.

Winter Time

It can get very cold and frosty inland from the sea, especially on clear, moonlit nights and we often suffered from chilblains on our ears, fingers and toes. One morning Doug brought the axe in from the wood heap and poured boiling water on the blade and the water froze! Stock troughs would freeze on top and water pipes would burst!

Dad always built a huge fireplace in the living room, in any house he built and he would stoke up the fire in wintertime with big logs of Myall. Myall wood throws off a lot of heat and burns down to a white ash. In the morning there would always be live coals under the ashes, which would only need some kindling to get a fire going again. Dad had his big chair near the fireplace and loved to have his head rubbed and his beard combed, so I used to sit on his knee and do just that, but I got called Dad's Pet! We had no TV and poor radio reception, so card games were a popular past time after tea. Dad and the older members of the family living at home often played Bridge.

Rabbiting

One day I decided I would make my fortune selling rabbit skins. So, armed with some rabbit traps, and squares of newspaper, I started setting traps in the rabbit burrows up near the cowshed. I caught a few rabbits, which I laboriously skinned and gutted, then stretched the skins over wire hoops to dry. Mum cooked the rabbits. The newspaper, all country people got once a week, was the Chronicle. It had lots of articles and advertisements to do with rural affairs. In the centre of the paper were two full, glossy black and white pages of photos of people who had attended social gatherings in the country.

Now one day Uncle Will, Mum's rascally brother came to visit and said to me, "You won't catch many rabbits using ordinary newspaper, you have to use the photo pages, because when the rabbits come to look at the photos they get caught!" Do you know what, I believed him! How green can one be? Well, I earned a few shillings but certainly not my fortune.

Back To Elbow Hill

At the beginning of our second year at Myola, it was decided I should go back to Elbow Hill School; I was nearly thirteen years old. I boarded with Rick and Bessie, who also boarded the schoolteacher, our brother Jack and sometimes our cousin George. I missed my family and Myola and was very home sick.

Rick and Jack did shearing and other farm work to make a living. Mr Morton was the teacher when I started grade seven. He was a fun teacher but not a good one and was soon replaced with Miss Trebilcock. It was her first teaching appointment out of teachers college. She was rather 'horsy' looking; I did not like her very much but she was a good teacher and gave me piano lessons after school, at no charge. She had strong opinions about everything and expressed them loudly and forcefully, which did not go down well with Rick, Jack and George! Playing the game 'knock, knock who's there?' was very popular at the time. So one Saturday, when Miss Trebilcock was hanging out some washing, Jack and George grabbed her and carried her to the water trough saying, "Knock, knock". "Who's there?" She asked "Bumblebee," said Jack. "Bumblebee who?" was her reply. "Your Bumble bee wet when we dip you in the trough." Said Jack. This they did, despite much fury and struggling from Miss Trebilcock! Ha ha!

At one stage, after being milked in the morning, the milking cow was taken to a paddock along the creek. One day after school, I had to go and bring her home for evening milking and we were crossing the creek, when I heard a roaring noise. Looking up the creek, I could see a four-foot high wall of water, puffing up dust in front of it as it rolled along the dry creek bed. The cow and I did a quick run across the creek and I hurried home to tell Rick and Bessie the creek was in flood. We went back to watch the water rushing down the creek carrying with it dead trees, bushes, a sheep and lots of rubbish; on its way out to sea at Pt Gibbon. We had not had a drop of rain at Elbow Hill, but there had been a big thunderstorm further up in the hills, which caused the flooding in the creek. There was a big muddy patch in the sea for a long time and all sorts of rubbish got washed up on the beach.

I completed one year in grade seven and passed the Qualifying Certificate, which qualified me to go on to high school. As I didn't get a scholarship, Dad couldn't afford to send me to board with Aunt Bell in Adelaide to go to high school and it was against the law to leave school

before we turned fourteen, so back I had to go for another year of grade seven!

During this year, there was a ball held in the local hall and Bess persuaded Jack he should pay for some material to make me a ball dress. After much persuasion, he agreed and Bess got her sister Peggy, who was a dressmaker in Cowell, to make me a dress. The dress was pale blue muslin, with a little, white sprigged flower pattern on it and had a corselet waist. My very first dancing dress and I thought I was Christmas! At the end of the year I did the QC exam again and passed but still no scholarship.

Miss Trebilcock decided to put on a concert for the end of the year and Margaret Carmody (the only other girl at the school) and I were to dance an Irish jig to music, played by Mr Williams on his fiddle.

Dad came down from Myola to take me home and said he would stay until after the concert, but I couldn't wait to get home, so home we went. Miss Trebilcock was very annoyed and I realise now it was wrong of me to let her down like that.

So that was the end of my formal school days!