

CROW-BOX5-3/26-DOC2



Memories of Girlhood
In the Grey Days of the Depression (1928...1932)

A Companion Document to "Memories of the Golden Years of Childhood"

Ruth Crow
July 1989

Memories of Girlhood
In the Grey Days of the Depression (1928...1932)

A Companion Document to "Memories of the Golden Years of Childhood"

Ruth Crow
July 1989

"A Red Letter Day"
1929



Forbes, Mother, Ken
and Freckles
(see page 9)

Memories of Girlhood
In the Grey Days of the Depression (1928...1932)

By Ruth Crow, 1989

This is a companion document to the "Memories of the Golden Years of Childhood".

These two documents have been prepared for June Factor in appreciation of the contribution to Australian history and culture by the European migrants who came to Australia because of Hitler's oppression.

This is a draft document and thus contains some typing mistakes and other errors.

The real names of people have been used without their knowledge. No part of the document can be published without permission from Ruth Crow.

This document has been prepared entirely from memory, but of course the way the facts are presented is from hind-sight. There may be a few inaccuracies in detail but these do not change the facts.

Readers of "Memories of Golden Years of Childhood" may notice a discrepancy in the date my father died. In that document it was stated as 1931. In fact it was January 1932.

To provide readers with the main dates of our family history I have listed them on this page.

There is no index to this document. The only attachment is the 1932 Family Budget.

Main Dates

Mother	187?	1952	Winifred	1915
Father	187?.....	1932	Ruth	1916
Forbes	1911.....	1988	Betty	1919
Ken	1913.....	1963		

In May 1932 the family shifted to Melbourne.

Oral anecdotes to illustrate the facts are available for serious students from :-

RUTH CROW
E2-5, 89 O'Shanassy Street
North Melbourne, Vic. 3051
Phone: 328 2345

The Sufferings of Others

Part of a Page from "We Must Go On"
by F.O. Barnett, W.O. Burt and F. Heath
published 1944



OLD WOMAN EVICTED FROM A SLUM HOUSE IN NORTH MELBOURNE.

The problem of the slums is essentially a problem of poverty, and there is, within extensive areas of sub-standard housing, a shocking traffic in human misery. The "market" value of a sub-standard "house" depends upon its rental return, and successive purchasers increase rentals with a view to getting a higher price on resale. This picture depicts a victim of the eternal contest between "the interests of the few and the welfare of the many."

In the past private enterprise has failed to provide houses with a realisation of a public or social service, and the cost of housing to the community has been excessively high measured from every point of view—financial, social and amenity. The following particulars of families evicted in Victoria for non-payment of rent speak for themselves:—

Period.	No. of Evictions.
May, 1932, to December, 1932	2,120
January, 1933, to June, 1933	1,595
July, 1933, to December, 1934	10,110
January, 1935, to December, 1935	2,905
January, 1936, to December, 1936	2,213
January, 1937, to June, 1937	1,668
Total	20,611

or an average of approximately 4000 for each year.

In a state of emergency it is part of the duty of the State to ensure that its citizens are provided with food. Failure means famine and death. Shelter is just as essential as food. Failure to provide it visits on the community evils more subtle, and, in the final analysis, just as destructive as death.

In 1936-37 rentals of "houses" within certain slum pockets in Victoria gave to landlords returns as high as 130 per centum per annum on valuations of those "houses" made by a competent valuer from the State Land Tax Department.

Cover photo from "Melbourne, A Portrait"
by Mark Strizic and David Saunders.
1960

Memories of Girlhood in the Grey Days
of the Depression (1928...1932)

By Ruth Crow, 1989

In "Memories of the Golden Years of Childhood" I wrote in the Introduction :- "My childhood ended when we left Ballarat soon after my father died in 1932. He left us penniless even after the house and his practise had been sold."

I have written about the sweetness of life, but now comes the hard task of trying to describe life's anguish in my girlhood years. It is appropriate to repeat the quote from Willa Catha :-

"One realises that even in harmonious families there is this double life; the group life which is the one we can all observe, in our neighbours household, and underneath another - secret and passionate and intense - which is the real life that stamps the faces and gives character to the voices of our friends...One realises that human relationships are the tragic necessity of human life; that they can never be wholly satisfactory, that every ego is half the time greedily seeking them, and half the time pulling away from them. In those simple relationships of loving husband and wife, affectionate sisters, children and grandparents there are innumerable shades of sweetness and anguish which make up the pattern of our lives day by day, though they are not down on the list of subjects from which the conventionalist novelist works." (My emphasis).

Everyone has their own unique experience of this is type of double life. In thinking about my girlhood years I have tried to find out what was the basis of my unique experiences of anguish.

I have selected two circumstances in our family life which contributed to what can best be described as the unabated anguish of the double life of our family in the depression years.

These were the public life to which the family was constantly exposed and the heirarchical relationships in the family. Both of these were as much historical circumstances as was the depression.

My mother's position in the family and society will gradually be revealed as I record my memories; but first it is useful to explain what I mean by 'the public life to which the family was constantly exposed'.

In the Public Eye

As the grandchildren of two 'well known', large, Ballarat 'business' families we were very conscious, from quite an early age, that we were respected because we were members of a "well known Ballarat family". We had to live up to this reputation.

My mother took considerable concern to make sure that whenever we went out we were well dressed, and well behaved. We never played in the street. We were not allowed to play in the front garden wearing old clothes.

My mother was a significant member of quite a number of organisations and was an office-bearer in several. She had, what in those days was called, 'quite a presence' and could chair meetings. She was, to a certain extent, a public figure in the social life of the more well to do citizenesses.

Similarly my father was the type of person who could chair public meetings. He was particularly well known for his interest in natural history and his study of the fresh water life in Lake Wendouree.

"The Fisherman Who Never Caught a Fish"

Because of his involvement in increasing the number of trout that they could catch from the Lake, my father was a type of folk/science hero to quite a few of the amateur fishermen around the Lake. He did not go fishing himself, but each year he was the main guest at a special lakeside ceremony when they stripped the fish of roe for the hatchery.

My father was called the "Fisherman who never caught a fish" and our nick-name at school was "Fishy". My father's photo is probably still in the Ballarat Hatchery. It was a few years ago.

On childhood outings to the Lake we would be warmly greeted by some of the men with their rods. If I remember correctly, the fishermen would have their own favourite areas, and dotted all around the Lake would be spots where we knew our little egos would be boosted by a greeting.

In reminiscing I am reminded of little Lord Fauntleroy when I picture these occasions.

"Gentlemen of Ballarat"

As a child I believed that there were "two Ballarats". One of "gentlemen" (west of the city) and the other of "savages" east of the city).

My uncle, Matthew Baird, was the Member of Parliament for West Ballarat for about 17 years (representing the "gentlemen" !). In my childhood he was Minister of Education and Chief Secretary in the Nationalist Party Governments of Argyle and Peacock.

My father used to make up Uncle Mat's speeches and my brothers, Forbes and Ken, were on the platform with him when they were teenagers.

I remember my brothers excitement when they "addressed the rabble" from the balcony of a hotel in Liddiard Street. The crowd was very angry. It was probably about 1928 at the beginning of the depression.

I can't remember hearing any discussions on issues which I would now regard as being about political issues of the day; but, I do remember the social occasions at my aunt's home when Alexander Peacock, Robert Menzies and other such as Keon Cohen came to Ballarat.

Watching the Crowds Go By

My aunt's home overlooked the Lake. On Boxing Day, New Years Day and other public holidays she would have a lunch party on the front lawn and we would watch the crowds go by. Hundreds and thousands of people would be passing on their way to the Gardens and the picnic spots near there. They would come on foot, bikes, in drays, gigs and carts, cars and charabancs.

We would sit out there, under the trees in Aunt Rue's garden waving to any passer-by we knew. My brothers, half cynically, called it "taking the salute". It was all part of "being in the public eye".

A Double-double Life (A Treble Life ?)

The above facts provide some idea of how our family was "observed" (to use Willa Catha's word) by a much larger circle than neighbours and friends. How our behaviour towards each other and in the community was shaped by our conscious and sub-conscious knowledge of this position in our social setting.

"The crisis, shocks and bewildering complications" that tried us in the depression years were exacerbated by a loss of public identity. My mother permanently suffered from this.

To return once again to Willa Catha, as well as trying secretly and passionately to hold onto our individual lives, we were all, intensely trying to hold onto our family's public image.

"A Harmonious Family"

It would seem that there was every reason for our family to be a "harmonious family". My mother and father had much in common. They seemed to have a very wide network of friends and relations; and, social, cultural and political interests in common and individually. All the children were healthy and more than able to cope with their school work. I can't remember any bickering or heated arguments. Yet, from about mid 1928, in my girlhood years, we lived in an atmosphere of constant anxiety.

Today everyone knows that the depression was a world wide phenomenon, but, when it was happening, it was natural to try to find some human failing which caused the family to be impoverished. And, of course some failings could be found; but finding them did not change the situation.

We can say "If only my father had been a 'better' business man.... If only the family hadn't been living on their credit.... If only my mother had gone back to teaching..... (but, of course she couldn't because married women could not be employed)....."

No doubt both my mother and father sighed separately over these 'If onlies'. I think they had quite a deep empathy and tried to protect each other from the worst blows.

My memories are not about heated discussions, reprimands and expressed regrets but of my father's perpetual preoccupation with his 'hobbies' (reading, looking down his microscope and working in his dark room); my mother's 'wretched worrying'; the way strangers intruded into the private spaces of our home; and the fear of public exposure of our impoverished position.

Mounting Problems

I have the impression that at first my parents believed that the family economies could be explained for reasons other than the real ones. But the problems kept mounting as this recollection of the years reveals.

When I was about eleven years of age we could no longer afford to pay wages to Nancy. She was the 'live-in' maid. To their friends my parents rationalised this economy by saying that "it was good for the girls to have to help a bit with the housework".

But then my parents could not afford to send me to the Grammar School unless I won a scholarship. I did not succeed so had to stay on at the State School (!!!)

And then, both my brothers had to leave Ballarat College to get jobs. There was no possibility of the boys getting work in Ballarat.

Forbes was 17 and had expected to go to the University ("but working first would be good for him"). He was very fortunate to get a job as a reporter on the Herald (possibly through family influence).

Ken was only 15 and he was doing very well indeed at school. It was less easy to explain why he had to go to Deniliquin to work in the Bank of Australasia (again family influence may have helped him to get the job).

And then, my cousins had "to walk off their farm. They stayed with us for a while.

And then, my mother arranged to let one of the rooms ("The house was too big now that the boys were living away from home").

And then I tried for another Grammar scholarship and failed again !

And then, my father had to dismiss his dental nurse and mechanic. I remember mother crying when Albert (the mechanic) had to dig potatoes and ruin his hands "He was so capable with his hands", she sobbed.

And then, a fourteen year old cousin, who had just left school, came to stay and he stayed, and stayed, and stayed, and "outlived his welcome".

Eventually he rode his bike to Minyip where he worked on a farm owned by a relation. Such a bike ride in those days would be over unmade roads and on a bike without gears. It would have taken several days. Quite a courageous adventure for a youngster.

And then, my mother could no longer afford to have a woman to do the washing and ironing.

Our washing and ironing was very arduous. In addition to the family wash (which included several white table cloths that had to be starched and ironed) there would be my father's white coats and the napkins from the surgery; dozens and dozens of white linen squares to be boiled, pegged out and ironed. Washing, of course, was done by using a wood copper.

One of my most vivid memories is of coming home from school and finding my mother, absolutely exhausted, at the wash tubs.

And then, as my mother could not let the room, we had a "paying guest". That meant we had a person (not a relation or friend) eating at our table at breakfast and tea.

And then, other cousins had "to walk off their farm".

And then, an uncle, who had lost his job came and stayed on and on and on, even though he did not fit in very well in our family circle.

And then, my father could no longer pay the rent for his surgery and he set up his dental chair at home. We had to be conscious about how we behaved at home as it was becoming less and less our own private space.

And then, I did win a scholarship to the Grammar School but I don't know from that day to this whether it was on my own merits or on my mother's influence.

And then, my sister had to leave Grammar to do a very short business course so she could get a job. She was fifteen.

And then, our next door friends had to sell their home and move to a much cheaper place. This coincided with the father of this family selling his business (which had been in the family for two generations). He became an employee of the new owners.

And then, I actually started going to Grammar!

The School of the Mitre

My parents' ambition to send us to the schools they had attended may have been part of the desire of first generation Australians to make Australia more like "Home" with it's "Great Public Schools" and their traditions. Anyhow, I felt I was carrying on a family tradition when, at last, I entered the Grammar gate.

In "Memories of Childhood" I have briefly mentioned my first disappointments at this school. But, worst of all, I was not accepted by my class mates.

There would be numerous reasons for this but I knew in my heart of hearts, or at least thought I knew, that it was because we were losing our social position in the town.

I knew that my poverty was publicly evident. I had to wear silk blouses when trabalco blouses were 'in'. I had no decent tennis racquet or hockey stick. I had to wear a plain navy jumper knitted by my aunt and the school uniform jumpers had bands of the school colours. They had a diferent neckline too. I am quite sure I did not tell my parents how ostracised I felt.

I escaped into being a "swot". This did not endear me to the other scholars.

The Last Garden Party at "Rossie"

The double life that our family was living was epitomised by the Garden Party in 1931 at the end of my first year at Grammar.

As one of the mainstays of the Queens Old Collegians (Queens was the name of the Grammar when it was first established) my mother annually opened our garden for "Garden Parties" to raise funds for Grammar.

In December 1931 the garden looked beautiful with its shady trees, bright flower borders and freshly rolled grass tennis court.

You can imagine how hard we had all worked to get the place 'up to scratch'.

As it was a Garden Party there was no need to open the house and to let people know that the best bedroom was occupied by our 'paying guest'. Of course the 'p.g.' was not invited to attend; but, for some reason or another, he decided it was the appropriate time to practise the violin.

The screeching of the strings was probably not noticed by the guests but it certainly 'put my mother on edge' and no doubt hardened the hearts of my sisters and me against this intruder (see later).

During the afternoon I went upstairs for some reason and I found my father writhing on the floor in agony.

Unknown to us (the girls) and probably unknown to my mother, my father knew he had cancer of the bowel. He died within two months. Within six months we had shifted to Melbourne with the grand sum of 45 pounds from the selling of the family home and many valued possessions.

Flight from "Nirvana"

Almost the same weekend as the Garden Party the Tylers left "Nirvana", the house next door to ours.

Gwen Tyler and my sister Betty were about the same age; but all the rest of the Tylers were younger. We shared families. By the end of the 1920s between the two families there were "ten little steps and stairs" (see attachments in "Memories of Childhood").

When there were only three Tyler children, my sisters and I each had a special responsibility for a Tyler child. Betty and Gwen were paired, Winifred looked after Bobby and I looked after Peggy who was six years my junior. You can see the three twosomes in the Christmas photo in "Memories of Childhood".

By 1931 this caring and sharing had relaxed with the age differences but the strong links remained.

Actually the links between the families went back to the nineteenth century when Miller (the Tailor) and Tyler (the draper) opened shops in Bridge Street next door to each other.

The changes in the Tyler's fortunes touched our hearts. It was an omen to many people in Ballarat.

My heart was more than touched when we visited the Tylers in their new home a few weeks after my father died.

The upheaval of the shift had resulted in Mrs Tyler prematurely giving birth to her sixth child. The doctors had given him up for dead, but with extraordinary courage, Mrs Tyler wrapped the baby in cottonwool fed him with a eyedropper and he lived. When we visited the family the baby could fit in the palm of a hand.

I will never forget Mrs Tyler's courage on this and other occasions.

'The Skeleton in the Cupboard'

Norman Blee was 'our skeleton in the cupboard'. He was our paying guest (really he was a boarder). We tried to ignore his existence, but if he had not existed we would have had much less food.

Norman had a deep interest in music, he was learning the violin and learning German to understand music better. He liked romantic poetry.

I think he was really thrilled to have a chance to be in our home. No doubt he assumed that 'well known Ballarat people' living in such a pleasant house and garden could help him in his quest for culture.

But his cultural interests were in a different field from those of my family. In any case my parents were so overwhelmed with their own worries they had little time to consider how to relate to him.

One thing my sisters and I agreed on was that we loathed him. He was so different from our brothers. For example, he wore a silk dressing gown, and he used highly scented soap, he sang in German while he was having a bath, he had brushed back hair which we called a 'boof haircut'. It always seemed to us that he practised the violin whenever we had visitors ! We secretly nick-named him "Marmion" after his favourite poem.

Whether he was aware of our attitude I will never know. But I do know that he gave me my first opportunity of listening to classical music.

Norman must have gone to a lot of bother to borrow a gramophone and records to give the family a musical evening. I remember that one of the records was "Night on Bald Mountain" and I pretended I was scared and went to bed. I have always felt guilty about that, because what I really wanted to escape from was having Norman as part of the family in our sitting room. Usually, when at home in the evening, he sat in his own room.

Norman was living with us during the distressful experiences of my father's death, the auctioning of our home and furniture and the packing up of our remaining possessions when we left for Melbourne.

He must have been an extremely patient and compassionate young man, but right to the end I regarded him as an intruder.

Also, Harold must have been a very persevering person. Later, in my adult years, I used to hear his voice on the ABC announcing music programs. I enjoyed it !

"I am the Master of My Fate !"

During these years I began to question religion. Partly I did not have new clothes to wear to Sunday School.

Then, trying to get us back to Sunday School, Dr Button (our minister) suggested that Winifred should become a Sunday School teacher. For me, this fully destroyed the integrity of the Sunday School.

About this time Dr Button gave a children's sermon on 'taking responsibility' and he said that when you signed a letter you took responsibility for the contents and that saying 'Amen' at the end of a prayer was saying that you meant what you prayed. I decided not to say 'Amen' unless I fully agreed with what the prayer really was meaning.

Another Sunday Dr Button gave a sermon on W.E. Henley's poem 'Invictus'. He said we are not 'masters of our fate'. The rhetorical ending of his sermon was; "Christ is the master of my fate ! Christ is the captain of my soul !" It was quite inspiring but I then and there decided, secretly, that I was going to be the master of my fate.

"Head High, Shoulders Back, Face the Music"

For my mother, going to church was an intrinsic part of trying to maintain our position in Ballarat society. The more evidence of our increasing poverty became publicly obvious, the more my mother continued her 'normal' social round.

It was quite obvious to me that this was a great strain on her. For example, on Sundays following some deterioration in our situation, on the final 'once over' before we left for church she would bravely smile and say "Head up, shoulders back and face the music, and, don't forget to smile when you shake hands with Dr Button."

She also kept up her committee responsibilities and was very much involved in fund raising activities for the Baby Health Centre, the Queens Collegians and other such 'causes'.

The usual fund raising effort was a bridge party. Each person paid 2/6, or 10 shillings a table for the usual function but those held in really 'posh' houses could ask 5/- or a pound a table.

In order to always have the 2/6 my mother had a peculiar system.

When she did have some ready cash, for example when Mr Bell paid his board, she would hide a couple of 'bob' in various handbags, or amongst her handkerchiefs. She was not hiding them because she did not trust the family, she was hiding them from herself. Then when an invitation came for a bridge party she would search through the hiding places and 'low and behold !' she most likely could 'scrap up' the half crown. I think this ruse gave her some sense of independence, for she was using her own money from her own purse for her own outing. She often had 'to raid her handbags' and she was always reluctant to do this.

Mint Sauce and Roast Lamb

I always associate going to church with the Sunday roast. On the way home along Sturt and Errard Streets you could smell the roasts cooking when you passed the houses.

After Nancy (our maid) left I no longer went to morning Church service because I had to stay home to cook the roast. By me being the cook my mother could continue her church attendance as if she still had a maid at home.

Cooking Sunday dinner for the family and the extra visitors was quite a big responsibility for an eleven year old. There would be at least seven, usually more, around the table.

I was a bit lucky because I had learnt a great deal about cooking and housework from Nancy. Today it could be said that I was 'bonded to Nancy'. I was definitely her favourite and I spent many more 'days in the kitchen' with her than my sisters.

'Days in the kitchen' were a part of our upbringing. We took turns to learn cooking from Nancy.

Nancy had been a pupil at the Ballarat School of Domestic Arts (later called Girls Secondary School). I know now that she had been really well taught the principles of cooking and she was a wonderful teacher. So I put what she taught me into practise from quite an early age, and I still carry out her simple instructions today.

When Nancy left, to me, it was like saying a permanent farewell to an aunt or older sister. I only saw her once again as she went to live in Adelaide, but I kept up my letters to her for many years.

"Any Size Fits Me"

For several years after Nancy left we did have a woman to do the washing and ironing and the weekly house cleaning.

We had quite a few different women over the years. They were paid 1/- an hour and we usually had one for three lots of four hours.

I remember how poorly clothed most of these women were. On one occasion my father offered some old shoes to the woman "What size do you take Mrs ... ?" and her reply "Any size fits me." (! ?)

I had great sympathy with this assessment of her size because even then we were dependent on 'cast off' clothes from relations and friends and in practice 'any size fitted me' too.

On another occasion I remember mother admiring a new jumper the woman was wearing and she said "Yes I bought it new and I told Elly (her daughter) she can have it Saturdays and Sundays and I will wear it to work on weekdays." (! ?)

"Loving Like the Lord Loves Us"

This is not an essay on the relationship between the family and employed domestic labour but this cherished memory is worth recording.

Mrs Evans worked for my mother doing the washing, ironing and cleaning and she also cleaned my father's surgery.

One day she explained to my mother that she had told her daughter that she "loved Mr Miller. He looks like Jesus in his white coat". She said that her daughter was shocked and said "That's wicked mum ! You should not say that !" but Mrs Evans replied "No Nellie, not the dirty love, I love him like the Lord loves us." !!

When my father died, although Mrs Evans had not been doing our work for some years (because we could not afford to pay her a shilling an hour), she came on the day of the funeral and said "I have only my two hands to give, here they are." She worked for two days without pay.

When thinking, today, about our domestic help I am very much reminded of novels I have recently read about the Irish Catholic servants in the homes of the protestants during the Black and Tan rebellion. I think all of our 'helpers' were Catholics of Irish origin. There was this peculiar duality in their loyalties. This was particularly so in election time, but this is not the place to tell anecdotes about that.

Oh Bother the Cleaning That Comes in the Spring

I have already mentioned what a huge wash and ironing we had. The housework was equally arduous. Our rambling house had 12 rooms. We did not have a vacuum cleaner (few people did) so the carpets were swept with a straw broom and the lino with a hair broom. The lino surrounding the carpets was beeswaxed.

Housework was also more difficult then because we only had fires for heating and each day, during the winter, the fireplace had to be cleaned and the wood brought in. Open fires also meant much more dusting.

Spring cleaning was a nightmare. My mother used to keep me home from school to help with the spring cleaning. We would lift all the furniture off the carpets and take them up and put them on the line and beat them with heavy sticks or cricket bats. We would take all the books from the shelves and dust them. Then we would have to put the carpet back and put back the furniture.

In the bedrooms we had to pull out the heavy wardrobes, washstands and dressing tables and dust behind. It was unbelievably hard work. My mother would work energetically but with great resentment.

Spring cleaning is also associated in my mind with my mother being more worried than usual. I think the extra cleaning showed up how shabby our house was becoming. I remember us trying to use red ink to cover up the grey worn out parts of the dining room carpet.

It is timely to note that at this time my mother would be in her fifties and she had high blood pressure.

While doing all this hard work ourselves we 'kept up appearances' letting it be assumed that we still had daily help.

And don't forget as well as the cleaning, meals had to be prepared for the family and the 'paying guest'.

When cleaning together mother and I tried to be companionable and cheerful and our theme ditty was a parody of Gilbert and Sullivan's "Flowers that Bloom in the Spring".

"Mother's Little Willing Foot"

When I reflect on what a 'good girl' I was in the light of Willa Catha's observations I realise (only a little) that my 'goodness' pushed Winifred and Betty out of contributing to domestic harmony.

From quite an early age, I knew that a nicely set table and well served meals could smooth over family tensions and throughout my girlhood I was "mother's little Willing Foot". I did not have to be told to clean the fire place, get my mother a cup of afternoon tea or clear the table. I did it first. That stopped Winifred and Betty getting into the act !! Of course it was not at all so clear-cut.

There were contributing reasons why I was the mainstay helper at home. I was bigger and stronger than Winifred (although she was eighteen months older) and Betty, who was younger. I don't think either of the others could have helped with the spring cleaning, for example.

I also was more skilled at cookery. I had learnt so much from Nancy.

I also monopolised my mother's time (or thoughts) when she was ironing as I would ask her to help me understand poetry or other school work. I don't remember either of the other girls doing this, but Ken used to do it. She was a very good teacher.

Naturally, it is impossible to verify this breast beating but I do think I had a very, very close bond with my mother during these years, and it may have been at my sisters' expense.

My sister Betty, on the otherhand, had a close bond with my father and accompanied him on his excursions to the Lake.

'Red Letter Days'

Once a month Forbes would come home on the Sunday excursion train for an 8/- fare. These were the 'red letter days' for my mother. We worked 'like mad' to get the house and garden ready and to prepare the usual Sunday roast. We were all 'on our honour' to be on our best behaviour. Even our dog, 'Freckles' seemed to be preparing for the visit. My sisters and I described my mother's wait for Forbes as 'Watching for Hero'; showing off our knowledge of pictures in the art magazines.

On the Monday following the 'red letter days' mother would be very tearful and she and 'Freckles' would cry together. He was a great comfort to her.

Ken only came home at Easter and Christmas during the three years he was in Deniliquin. His visits coincided with Forbes' so I don't know if the same 'hero's welcome' would have been given, but I have a sneaking feeling that Forbes, the first born, had a very special position in the family.

When Ken came home the house was always cheerful. He would strum on the piano the tunes he had learnt from the woman he was staying with in Deniliquin, he would play games with us, do conjuring tricks and go for walks. He was a great companion to us. He was closer to us in age than Forbes.

Far, Far and Away

One advantage to the girls of the boys leaving home was that they left their bicycles behind and this meant that two of us at a time could go for bike rides. So off we went around the Lake and to visit friends in the near country at Mount Rowen, Buninyong and Learmonth.

We also rode out to the Gong Gong and Kirks's Reservoirs, passing on our way the make-shift humpies of the unemployed at Brown Hill.

These days were days of real freedom !

Other special remembrances of the period are the walking outings we went with our father over Soldier's Hill to Black Hill.

On the way he would tell us about his boyhood days when the goats ran about the streets and the butchers hung their meat up outside their shops and had to employ lads as fly-swatters. When we got to Black Hill we scrambled over the mullock and he taught us quite a bit of geology.

When Ballarat was founded the hill was called Black Hill because of black trunks of the gums due to the nature of the soil. In my childhood it was really a huge white hill, now it is green.

As a child Black Hill was a magic place to the east. We could see it from our upstairs windows. On some summer evenings when there was a sunset it would glow with the colours of mother-of-pearl. We couldn't reach this magic place until we were old enough to walk there as we had only 'Shank's pony' for transport.

Black hill was even more magical when we picnicked there. There was (is ?) a wide, low tunnel that you could scramble through, slippery clay hills to climb and slide down and a panorama of Ballarat when you reached the lookout.

'All That Swagger'

Miles Franklin in "All that Swagger" has written an accurate description of life of the squatocracy. I know this because I have actually holidayed in the Western District, staying for several weeks at a time with one of the 'well known' grazier families.

It was then that I learnt about all the grades in country society.

I was staying not far from a station called "Gala" which belonged to the Currie family. (One of the Currie daughters married a squatter called Street. Their son Tony was a member of Parliament and the Minister in Menzies Governments).

The Currie's had a most magnificent, private golf course. The family I was staying with played golf there, but not as part of the Currie's intimate inner circle. I caddied for my friends.

The towns-people and small farmers did not play golf at Gala. They had their own golf course near the town but the people I stayed with would not play golf with them even though the course was very close to their home.

In the evening at the home where I was staying we all 'dressed for dinner'. The women put on party type frocks and the men lounge suits, no matter what time they finished their work.

At the homes of the Curries and Manifold the women wore long evening gowns and the men evening dress. I know this because we called in at the Manifold's one evening.

I also remember calling in at a bachelor's home and finding him dressed for dinner in his lounge suit and eating his solitary meal from a table covered in a damask cloth and set with appropriate cutlery and crockery. He was very much accepted by my friends despite the fact that he was very poor at the time.

We drove around the countryside in a huge limousine and I heartily agreed with the hatred my friends poured on the rabbits and thistles in the paddocks and the sustenance workers on the roads. I believed these were the three reasons the country was 'going to the dogs'.

These were wonderful holidays. I enjoyed the horse riding, the Sheep Show Ball, the discussions on 'body line' and the preparation of the huge meals for the 'Threshing Team'.

I really did have a glimpse of a different life style and relief from the anguish of our double life.

Country Cousins

A couple of older cousins married returned servicemen who were farmers. One had a farm near Minyip and another near Wannon. We spent school holidays on the farms until their properties were 'sold over their heads'.

Holidays there were different from the ones I have just described. These farmers were very hard working, but despite this they lost their farms in the early thirties.

My memories of the Minyip holidays are of the really huge mallee root fires and of freezing cold winter nights; of driving over slippery, muddy roads to visit the families of other young returned soldier farmers and and of the callous way the farm hand was treated.

The farm hand, Norman, would have been in his early teens. He had lived most of his life in an orphanage. It was the custom of the time to get 'maids' and 'lads for the farm' from orphanages and to pay them a pittance.

Norman slept in a lean-to of the shed and was allowed into the house once a week for a bath. He had his meals in the shed. I really believed he did not feel the same as we did.

The "Tanna Essence"

Auntie Anna was my mother's sister. She was about two years older than my mother, so she would be well into her fifties in my girlhood. We called her 'Tanna'.

'Tanna' had no children of her own but she had brought up her two younger sisters and two younger brothers when her mother died when she was in her early teens; and she brought up a neice and two nephews when their mother died; and she brought up her neice's son; and she was involved in the bringing up of numerous children whether they were related to her or not. She was thus daily involved in the lives of children from about 1890 to the mid-thirties.

She was a midwife and was with my mother for birth of her children.

I don't think our family would have weathered the depression if Anna had not freely given her cheerful support, helping mother to face one harrowing situation after another.

Anna lived at Diamond Creek with her husband Hugh. They were battling to make a living from a poultry farm.

If she could not come to Ballarat every time she was needed we always knew she was there 'in spirit'. My brothers used to say that she had a secret "Tanna Essence" that she 'poured on troubled waters' and that the "Tanna Essence" could travel through space. This was a comforting thought to us all !

I have been trying to work out what was her "essence". The answer includes the fact that she could 'look on the funny side' and find the 'bright side' but she never used her humour to belittle others. Of course she had wonderful domestic skills and her "Tanna essence" was in the cakes and jams and other goodies she brought with her when she did

Anna and Hugh had their own financial problems and in the mid-thirties they "lost their farm to the banks". But I will not record my memories of that, suffice it to say that even in such adversity Tanna could still cope with helping others to face their problems.

"The Time Between is the Slacker's Paradise"

Because I was a swot I won an 'Honour Prize' my first year at Grammar. It was "Scott's Last Expedition". A book in a dreary cover with small print, but I read the first few chapters about his childhood and boyhood.

I was impressed with the words attributed to the youthful Scott :- "the time between is the slacker's paradise". I determined I would have no "time between". This meant running instead of walking wherever possible. Reading instead of just musing, in other words being very purposeful.

When I was living with Auntie Rue, after the family shifted to Melbourne, my way to school was from the west side of the Lake down to the school in Mair Street (near Ascot Street).

The other schoolgirls living near my Aunt's home used to catch the tram and then walk a short block to school. I could not afford the fare.

Putting my new found philosophy into practice (and also in a spirit of one-upwomanship, I think), I would start running when the tram passed my aunt's gate and I would always be in the school courtyard when the others arrived. It was quite unfair competition because none of the others knew I was racing.

My efforts to save time were strengthened later when I read the slogan on the Remington typewriter "To save time is to lengthen life".

By the way I frequently feel tempted to race trams today and in fact on Sundays I can reach destinations walking three miles or so in less time than catching two trams !

"Wearing Her Fingers to the Bone"

One of my mother's colourful sayings was that "she would wear her fingers to the bone to give us a 'good' education.....or to give us the opportunity of mixing with the 'right people'..... or to continue to live at "Rossie" (the family home)....."

But the problem was that there was no way she could be paid for 'wearing her fingers to the bone'. There was absolutely no way she could earn any money other than by letting rooms and taking boarders. She could reduce expenses by doing without domestic help and 'making do' in all sort of ways and 'doing without' too. But that was all.

What she was good at, however, was 'moving heaven and earth' through her influence with people who had influence. I really believe that this was her interpretation of 'wearing her fingers to the bone'.

I have already indicated how I am really pretty sure my scholarship at Grammar was because she was my mother. I have also suggested that she used her influence to get the boys their jobs. In fact I know precisely who she went to see. I have many, many examples in my head.

But, all this robbed her of her dignity. So the words 'wearing my fingers to the bone' are to me a cry of desperation.

In recording this, it is quite easy to see that the first economies were at my mother's expense. She had to bear the burden of the arduous housework and the invasion of the home by strangers, and lose her dignity.

"Ultima Thule"

While we were still living in Ballarat Henry Handel Richardson's "Fortunes of Richard Mahoney" was being popularly discussed, especially because the early part of the book is about Ballarat.

I know my mother and I cried over the last part of "Ultima Thule".

H.H.R. was a great artist. It was easy to transfer the experiences of Mary and Cuffy Mahoney to our situation, and we did.

But now, with the experiences of fifty years I know that we were wrong. The anguish that Mary suffered was different from my mother's for Mary did have the dignity of earning her living no matter how she 'lost cast' by so doing. My mother did not have that dignity.

'Under the Hammer'

My father died in mid-January 1932 and by May of that year the house and furniture had been auctioned and, as a result, we had less than fifty pounds to start our new life in Melbourne.

It is impossible to describe these months. The old rambling house and the rambling sheds had many places to store things.

"Rossie" had been the family home for over eighty years. During that time various relations had left behind some of their possessions; some were poignant reminders of happy or sad events from the past. We cleaned out all sorts of storage spaces (under the stairs, in the loft of the shed, in the disused cellar).

All my father's books, dentistry equipment, microscopes, cameras and other photographic equipment, some of our better toys and even our gardening tools had to be put out for sale as well as a large proportion of our furniture. Quite a few pieces of furniture had family sentimental value, but this had to be ignored.

But the emotions experienced when preparing for the auctions paled into insignificance once the auctions were advertised and people came to 'inspect' the house and goods.

Our upstairs poverty was exposed to the public. The threadbare mats, the worn lino., the shabby curtains were on display for all to see. And see they did !

The Main Bread Winners

We shifted to Melbourne because by then Forbes and Ken were living there. They provided the only income we could possibly have.

We rented 'a small house in a good suburb close to public transport'.

How the family managed financially for the rest of the year has been recorded by my brother, Ken (the family budget is attached).

Today it is difficult to realise that many young men and young women were the main bread winners for their parents' families during the depression years. We were not unusual.

Seven Hours to Travel Seventy Miles

We could only afford one furniture van when we shifted to Melbourne. In any case all the worldly possessions we had saved from the hammer fitted into one van.

We could not afford the fares for all of us to travel to Melbourne by train so Winifred and I travelled in the van.

It was a bitter cold day. Quite long sections of the road were unmade or being repaired. The van crept along. It took over seven hours to travel the seventy miles. We were cold, hungry and very very sad on that day.

I can remember the van passing homeless people walking along the road in both directions. They were 'on the track'. I had seen them before on their way up Sturt Street; men singly or in small groups a man and woman together; a family group with ragged children; couples pushing prams, some with babies peeping over the bundles of household goods, others packed high with the swags.

We were probably too pre-occupied with our own problems to feel any sympathy for them.

Aunt Rue's 'Little Willing Foot'

I stayed on in Ballarat so that I could continue at Grammar. I lived with my Aunt Rue. I have many memories about those six months but they are not directly family memories so they will not be included here.

However I will record that I was really a very hard working, unpaid domestic servant for Aunt Rue, who had considerable wealth.

While living with her I felt quite affectionate towards her and was her 'little Willing Foot' carrying out her every wish; but on the way home (to Melbourne), when I knew I was escaping, I despised her. I am still amazed at how suddenly my feelings changed.

Hello Marvellous Melbourne !

On the way to Melbourne to join the family I put my head out of the carriage window nearly all the way. I sang my own "Ode to Joy" to the meter of the trains' wheels, using the words "I can do it. I can do it. I can do IT !" over and over again.

I don't know if I knew then what I meant by "it" but it was definitely my answer to Dr Button's statement that "Christ is the Master of My Fate". I was not going to 'have a bar' of that !

Mother and Betty were at Spencer Street Station to meet me. I probably had smuts on my cheeks and my hair windblown and full of soot, but I was enthusiastically ready to embrace the future.

Melbourne was MARVELLOUS. I loved the bright lights of the city which we could see from the railway bridge near our home; I loved the financial security we had, we knew how much money was coming into the house and we lived within it (see the family budget attached); I loved the small house which was so easy to keep clean; and I loved the sun shining in through the bay windows ; and this littany could go on and on and on.



Aunt Anna
1945

Attachment to Memories of Girlhood Years

The First Family Balance Sheet
Prepared by Ken Miller
1932

The Main Bread Winners



Forbes and Ken
1931

Forbes, Ken and Winifred were the family bread winners from 1932 to 1937. Ken kept the books for the family for those frugal five years.

In 1932, Forbes was a reporter on the Herald. Ken worked as a clerk in the Bank of Australasia and Winifred as a typist in a local office.

Ruth was at school in Ballarat. this accounts for the low amount debited, as her "board".

Until mother's death, in 1952, she was helped financially by her children, especially by Forbes.

When it paid to stay together

A Depression Budget.

This is a photostat~~x~~ copy of a document prepared by an eighteen year old boy in 1932.

Points of interest.

1. This family moved to Melbourne from a large country town. The father of this family died in January 1932. Although he was a dentist, his family was left penniless/ ... even though the house and dental ~~examine~~ equipment were auctioned (the practice could not be sold as no-one wanted to purchase it) there was no money at all except for the earnings of the sons. The family moved to Melbourne because both the sons were in employment in Melbourne.
2. Both sons had reasonably good jobs.. The eldest, aged 20 years was a journalist on a daily ~~xxxx~~ paper, the second son aged 18 years was a bank ~~xxxxxx~~ clerk. The eldest daughter, aged 16 worked as a typist at an estate agents office in the suburb where the family lived, the second eldest daughter, aged 15 ~~xxxxxx~~ continued to attend school in the country town where the family had lived, the youngest daughter aged 12 attended the State School in the suburb. The mother aged about 50 had been a school teacher before marriage but did not consider the possibility of re-entering teaching... probably because it was not a possibility as teachers were being retrenched.
3. The family rented a house near the ~~Tronak~~^T station, the rent is ~~there~~ therefore perhaps a little higher than if the family had chosen to live in a less "respectable" suburb/ '!' expenses low.
4. Every member of the family were studying in 1932 but ~~xxxxxx~~ Although two daughters were attending school no separate entry has been made for these educational expenses... (education is lumped in with fares). No fees were ~~xxxx~~ paid at the Grammar school attended by second daughter as she was awarded a scholarship (mainly for sympathetic ~~xxxxxx~~ reasons,) and was given a special allowance for books by the school... this was unusual ... but the family had been connected with the school for two generations. etc etc. etc.) The amount for fares and education for eldest son included some university fees for ~~xxxxxx~~ part-time study. The £13.10 holiday expenses were for a walking trip through Tasmania.
5. Each member of the family paid every penny they earned into the common fund, and each accounted for every penny spent. Each member of family had memo cash book in which they daily entered every penny spent. A similar book was ~~xxxxxx~~ kept for the household. Every weekend the accounts were balanced.
6. The budgeting was done on a type of credit system. The total income was divided out into portions for each. What was not spent one week was credited for spending the next. E.g. ~~Myx~~ The second daughters portion was ~~5/6~~ 5/- a week. If she spent 2/6 one week her account would then stand at 7/6.
7. This system of budgeting and of half yearly statements continued until the beginning of 1937.

mother:

10

7
1
1

10
3
5

[illegible]

1

10

--	--

४
 ३
 २
 १

--	--

63

10

(S.S.S.)

1

31/12/32

1

1

BOARD 3. ADDING PER CAPITA (1932) AND (1933) TO THE TOTALS OF THE DIVISION OF EXPENDITURE IN COMPARISON WITH OTHER COUNTRIES

DIVISION	OURSELVES (1932)	SAXONY (1877)	U.S.A. (1901)	GREAT BRITAIN (1914)
Clothing	14%	17.5%	11.8%	12.5%
Fuel	4%	5%	6.5%	5%
Board	34%	55%	46%	56.55%
lodging	17%	12.5%	18.2%	15%
Other purposes	31%	10%	17%	11.25%

INDIVIDUAL EXPENDITURE

NAME	BORED (Est. 19/9)	SUNDRIES	TOTAL
Portes	23 14 0	44 11 1	68 5 1
Ken	26 13 3	23 19 3	50 12 6
Winifred	21 14 6	17 19 10	39 14 4
Ruth	2 19 3	7 11 6	10 10 9
Betty	26 13 3	1 14 4	28 7 7
Mother	26 13 3	6 3 8	32 16 11
Visitors	1 19 6		1 19 6

£130 7 0	£101 19 8	232 6 8
BANK		6 0 0
CAPITAL EXPENDITURE	12 1 10	
EXTRA SUNDRIES	6 12 6	

LESS APPROXIMATION ERROR 257 1 0
4 8

TOTAL EXPENDITURE 256 16 4

FAMILY ACCOUNTS, 1932.

(The family of the views of a provincial man, trying to retain middle class standard and save the children from a poor start in life.)

ASSETS AND LIABILITIES

PROFIT AND LOSS

	Dr.	Cr.		Dr.	Cr.
	s	d		s	d
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	256	16 4			
TOTAL SALARIES	194	13 6		194	13 6
BONDS				5	0 0
BANK				6	0 0
CAPITAL EXPENDITURE				12	1 10
LOSS				39	1 0

£256	16	4	£256	16	4
------	----	---	------	----	---

LOSS % OF INCOME 15.2

LOSS PER WEEK \$1-3-11