

**Reading the Silence of My Great-Grandmother: The Role of  
Life-Writing in Locating the Hidden Life of a Jewish  
Woman.**

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## Abstract

Family history has become a significant cultural, academic and economic pursuit giving rise to television shows, university degrees and DNA testing. Family historians grapple with epistemological questions about the extent to which a life can ever be known to someone else – limited resources exacerbate the problem. This thesis, by creative project and exegesis, focuses on Rose Pearlman, my Great-Grandmother [1875 – 1956], and explores how the genre of life-writing contributes to our understanding of an ‘ordinary’ Jewish woman who migrated to Australia from England leaving no traditional sources such as diaries or memoirs. In so doing, this thesis makes contributions to academic and general scholarship about the extent to which knowledge resides in, and can be derived from the fragmentary, and how the researcher’s imagination - as distinct from the invention of episodes - illuminates the specificities of a Jewish woman’s life. Narrative threads in Rose Pearlman’s life are researched and developed using the genre of life-writing<sup>1</sup>. This genre employs a ‘fossicking’ method which involves three actions: first, rummaging for wisps of information; second, selecting and curating an archive and third, threading together the fragments from the archive to produce narratives.

Further, this thesis argues that life-writing, which has been used by biographers and some historians to tell the stories of the marginalised, can usefully be applied to family storytelling to offer important insights into lives that have previously been hidden from history. Holmes’ notion of ‘recreating the past’<sup>2</sup> has guided this approach.

Within this context, this thesis contends that Rose Pearlman’s life provides important

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<sup>1</sup> Lee, H (2009) *Biography: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford, UK, Oxford University Press. Lee provides definitions of life-writing, which are outlined in the introduction and further explored in the exegesis along with other definitions from life-writers and academics.

<sup>2</sup> Holmes, R (1985) *Footsteps: Adventures of a Romantic Biographer*, London, Hodder and Stoughton.



insights into the diversity of Jewish women's lives generally, and challenges the trope of the 'rags to riches' Jew. In addition, it makes original contributions to the history of Jewish women in Australia during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Finally, it adds to emerging and ongoing discussions in the academy about the importance of family history in contributing evidence which may help to question and reshape established historical narratives. This thesis also has personal significance because Rose Pearlman is part of my family. Tanya Evans notes that each family's history has the 'potential to be part of local, national, global class and gender history'.<sup>3</sup> Within this frame, Rose Pearlman's life is afforded enduring meaning because it represents a moment in time that tells her descendants – and the wider public – about her connection to local communities and to national policies.

Structurally, this thesis is divided into three parts. The first presents the preface and overall introduction to the creative project and exegesis. The second part, the creative component, is entitled 'Yizkor for Rose: A Life Lost and Found'. The exegesis, 'But She Didn't Leave a Diary!': Making Sense of Fragments of a life, forms the third and final part of this work.

For the doctoral examination the creative project is weighted 60 per cent and the exegesis 40 per cent.

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<sup>3</sup> Evans, T (2011) 'Secrets and Lies: the radical Potential of Family History', *History Workshop Journal*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, issue 71, p.56, downloaded 19 February, 2018.

I, Erica Cervini, declare that the PhD thesis by Creative Project and Exegesis entitled 'Reading the silence of my Great-Grandmother: The role of life-writing in locating the hidden life a Jewish woman' is no more than 100,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated this thesis is my own work.

Signature:

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of Erica Cervini.

Date: 28/5/2019

This thesis is dedicated to my mum, Roberta Cervini, for her unwavering support and interest in my studies, and for her immense patience in answering my constant questions from the time I was little.

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My extended family has been an amazing support during the course of my thesis. In particular, they have rummaged through boxes and searched albums to find family photographs, which are an integral part of the creative project. My cousin Lynda Fridman entrusted me with her mother Faye’s diaries, which gave me great insights into day-to-day life in St Kilda during World War II. She also passed on Rose’s *Siddur* [prayer book], which is also significant for this thesis. Other cousins found family materials for me and listened to my long lists of questions. My cousin Jessica Pearlman Fields shared photographs and stories she had discovered about the Pearlman family. Thanks goes to my cousins: the Leon, Wise and Green families in Melbourne; the Buchbinder and Bettane families in Perth, and the Pearlman family in California. I am especially indebted to my mum, Roberta Cervini, and Great-Uncle Lloyd Pearlman for the many interviews I conducted with them. Finally, my dog, the Emeritus Professor Sholem Bonchek, was my constant companion in the first year of my PhD until his death at the age of nearly eighteen. Raisel, Yiddish for ‘little Rose’, was my rescue dog, who reminded me in the final year of my PhD that I needed to take breaks and play. The week before I submitted this thesis my little study buddy died of heart failure.

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## Preface

In 2017, I made a chance discovery in Waterstones Bookshop in Cambridge, England. Wedged among thousands of texts was a book about one hundred and forty-eight anonymous dairies that had been discarded in a skip. British biographer Alexander Masters<sup>1</sup>, whose friend found the diaries in Cambridge, became so intrigued with the haul that he set about trying to work out who wrote the diaries and why.

Masters' book caught my attention for many reasons. At the time I was piecing together my Great-Grandmother's life for this doctoral project and had flown to London to visit streets in the Spitalfields where she had spent the first thirteen years of her life. When I spotted Masters' book, it struck me how I had the opposite problem to his: I knew my Great-Grandmother's name, Rose Pearlman, but there were no diaries. She probably never kept any.

Despite our different challenges, Masters and I did have some things in common. He was writing about an 'ordinary' person – someone who lived largely within the private sphere - and so was I. The way Masters was trawling through the diaries also resonated. His was an act of *bricolage*<sup>2</sup> where he was piecing together a life from found fragments. I was also using the term *bricolage* to describe the way I was collecting fragments from disparate sources to thread together moments in Rose's life.

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<sup>1</sup> Masters, A (2016), *A Life Discarded*, London: HarperCollins.

<sup>2</sup> The term *bricolage* is discussed in Chapter Three of exegesis where I explain how I draw and build upon Levi Strauss' idea of a the *bricoleur*, who 'makes do with whatever is at hand'.

Masters' book prompted me to think about people's hopes and dreams, and what meaning we give a life. These were the kind of considerations I was grappling with when I began my doctorate in March 2015. I also wondered if Rose's life or anyone's for that matter can ever really be known. I also wrestled with the question of whether my representation of Rose's existence would be one which she herself would have recognised. What might it mean to represent her life accurately or with respect?

My personal investment in writing about Rose's life is different from Masters'. Although Rose died before I was born I have, since the age of nine, wondered about her. After discovering a sepia photo of my Great-Grandmother in a dress adorned with pearls, my childish curiosity prompted me to make up stories about why Rose was wearing it. I took the photograph with me when I left home.

After my husband died of cancer in 2013, I re-discovered that photograph. My thinking had evolved to contemplating how Rose coped with loss, grief and the unknown. She was left a widow with six of her eight surviving children still living at home, and during World War II four of her children served overseas, prompting constant angst about their safety.

While researching the life of Rose, my thinking progressed again. I realised that her life could open a window on how poorer Jewish women who migrated to Victoria in the late nineteenth lived their lives. Notions about what Rose's life could tell us about Victoria's Jewish past gained momentum, particularly after telling people about my project. Many responded that they didn't realise there were sizable Jewish



communities in Melbourne before World War Two, and did not know that Jews had lived in Ballarat, a town that was home to Rose for thirty years.

Masters investigated a stranger. I searched for a relative, a woman, whose stories had got lost in the tangle of time. My representation of Rose's life has given me a connection to the past and provided me with a greater understanding of her place in migration stories, and of a Jewish past that has now vanished. Most of all, I have gained insights into Rose's resilience and discovered a magical rich bond between her and her youngest daughter, Faye.

Rose is now talked about and remembered in our extended family. This is why I have called the creative component *Yizkor for Rose: A Life Lost and Found*. *Yizkor* in Hebrew means remembrance. It is also a memorial service for the dead and is the name of a memorial prayer. This thesis is my memorial to Rose, my Great-Grandmother, a woman I know and will never know.

## Introduction

*Why family history matters; questions this thesis explores; significance of this thesis; organisation of this thesis.*

When historian Anna Clark interviewed one hundred Australians about how they connected to the past, she identified a common thread in their responses. Many of the individuals, who ranged in age from sixteen to eighty, told Clark that personal stories prompted them to have conversations about their attachment to the past and helped them to negotiate its complexity.<sup>1</sup> Samantha, a sixteen-year-old Chinese Australian, explained how she formed links between the present to past through family history:

Yeah, I'm kind of interested. Well, it's kind of interesting, like, knowing how your family came to what it is today. And sometimes they're, like, really minor events, and then sometimes your family is part of this big event, which leads to making some decisions which affect you today.<sup>2</sup>

The practice of using personal narratives to make sense of and illuminate the past is well documented in Australian and American<sup>3</sup> historical research. For example, *Australians and the Past*, a major survey of historical consciousness in Australia, reveals that individuals attempt to make connections to bygone eras through the specificity of their families.<sup>4</sup> Paula Hamilton and Paul Ashton, who undertook the research, suggest that people gain an understanding of the past via the intimacy and particularity of their families rather than a formal study of history in the classroom.

In our survey, many Australians felt that high school history study, whether enjoyable or not, failed to deal with this most significant questions they had about the past generally and their

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<sup>1</sup> Clark, A (2016) *Public Lives Public History*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, pp 24-25.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p.29.

<sup>3</sup> Warren-Findley, J 'History in New Worlds: Survey Results in the United States and Australia', in *Australian Cultural History*, 22:2003, pp 43-52.

<sup>4</sup> Ashton, P and Hamilton (2010) *History at the Crossroads: Australians and the Past*, Sydney: Halstead Press.

past in particular. The family, however, not the classroom, is often the principal site for exploration and teaching about the past amongst all cultures and religions.<sup>5</sup>

The opportunity for individuals' historical consciousness to be raised through an investigation of their ancestors is a major reason why family history matters. In particular, individuals are prompted through the telling of stories about their ancestors to make links between past and present. An article historian Tanya Evans wrote about the family history TV series, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, highlights that historians such as Ann Curthoys see value in the program because of 'its capacity to link the past with the present'.<sup>6</sup> 'It is this strength,' Evans writes, 'that has such resonance for viewers who hope to slot the stories of their lives and those of their ancestors into grander narratives of the past.'<sup>7</sup>

During the course of this thesis, I became engrossed in the family stories my ninety-nine-year-old Great-Uncle Lloyd told me. This fascination, like Samantha's, stemmed from gaining an understanding of how world events and individual family choices have impacted on my forebears and extended family – and conversely, how the individuals in one family might function as a kind of microcosm of that broader world. There was also the tantalising prospect that Great-Uncle Lloyd's stories might fill gaps in my knowledge about what members of the extended family, who died before I was born, were like: Were they dreamers? Were they nasty or kind? Were they introverted or extroverted? What effect did they have on people around them?

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p.20.

<sup>6</sup> Evans, Tanya (2015) 'Who Do You Think You Are? Historical Television Consultancy', *Australian Historical Studies*, 46:3, p.457. Evans was an historical consultant on the TV program.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

These questions are unsurprising given writer Hermione Lee's observation that people always want to know the 'inward life' of a subject being written about. In *Body Parts* she explains:

The reader's first question of a biographer is always going to be, what was she, or he, like? Other questions...may follow. But "likeness" must be there. And when we are reading other forms of life-writing – autobiography, memoir, journal, letter, autobiographical fiction, or poem – or when we are trying ourselves to tell the story of a life, whether in an obituary, or in conversation, or in a confession, or in a book, we are always drawn to moments of intimacy, revelation, or particular inwardness.<sup>8</sup>

This focus on the specificity of an individual's personal or interior characteristics, I would argue, stems from descendants wanting to know what they have inherited from their forebears and whether, for example, certain physical and personality traits run in families. However as author Christine Kenneally points out what individuals may have inherited from their ancestors need not be 'physical or direct'.

The way people think about themselves is to some extent a reaction to the *ideas* about identity that were transmitted in their families. If you take genealogy to include all the qualities that characterise the people who are part of your lineage – not just (their biologies but also their unique histories their cultures, their choices, their personalities, and the significant events they lived through) – then the significance that these factors had on them, and in turn on you, is an open and interesting question.<sup>9</sup>

As I delved deeper into my research and reading, I concurred with historians such as Graeme Davison and Tanya Evans that family history also matters because it opens an avenue for individuals to investigate 'ordinary' people, who have been left out of the history books, which document grand and public narratives. Therefore, the abiding interest in my Great-Uncle's stories went beyond the personal connection. I became intrigued with the idea of contextualising family stories within a feminist, social and economic framework to challenge the often cited preference to write life-stories about

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<sup>8</sup> Lee, H (2005) *Body Parts/Virginia Woolf's Nose: Essays on Biography*, Princeton University Press, p.2.

<sup>9</sup> Kenneally, C (2014) *The Invisible History of the Human Race: How DNA and History Shape Our Identities and Our Futures*, New York: Viking, p.21.

the more powerful in society.<sup>10</sup> Specifically, the decision to explore an ‘ordinary’ woman’s life through family history would open a window onto lives not normally written about because they may have been considered on the margins of society or at least not lived at a sociopolitical centre.

In particular, the life story of my Great-Grandmother alerted me to gaps in Victoria’s history about the struggles and joys of working-class Jewish women and their contribution to the social and economic well-being of their families. Researching the gaps and then writing the resultant narrative challenged the invisibility of women and offered insights into the vital roles that women like my Grand-Grandmother played in sustaining their families and passing on cultural and religious traditions to the next generation. These revelations also counter tropes about the ‘rags to riches’ Jew that are often cited when the history of Jews in Victoria are discussed.<sup>11</sup> In addition, they also challenge the silence in historical texts about working-class Jewish women living in Victoria before World War II, which is discussed in Chapter One of the exegesis.

### Questions this thesis explores

Despite causal links between family stories and the acquisition of historical knowledge, it is a complex task for people to arrive at a point when they can articulate how family history provides an entrée into reading, grasping and making sense of the past. First, they need to track down family narratives, which often involves painstaking research to uncover fragments of stories and objects. For the descendants

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<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Caine, B (2010) *Biography and History*, England: Palgrave MacMillan, pp. 2-6. Caine maintains that biographies have tended to be about the more powerful in society. Chapter one of the exegesis explores this more fully.

<sup>11</sup> Chapter One of the exegesis highlights the Jews that tend to be profiled and those who are missing from historical texts.

of ‘ordinary’ and poorer families, this can be an extremely arduous process because there may be few documents such as government records, personal diaries, or memoirs to draw on. This is further complicated by a family’s dislocation due to migration or fleeing a country because of war or persecution. Many of their precious records such as photographs and personal documentation may have been left behind.

The research is arguably more difficult when trying to locate female family members. In his family biography, *Lost Relations*, Davison maintains that it is often the men who get written about in family histories because the women’s ‘names and identities were merged on marriage into their husbands’.<sup>12</sup> In a conversation with Davison in 2015, he told me that after reflecting on his family line he was struck that it was a woman, his great-great-great-grandmother Jane Hewitt, who held the key to the family story.<sup>13</sup> Davison, therefore, was motivated to write his book to tell the story behind her story, ‘the one she must have known but did not tell, or perhaps did not even think worth telling’.<sup>14</sup>

My participation in a year-long course, Writing Your Family History, exposed me to another stumbling block family historians often confront.<sup>15</sup> Some of my peers had accumulated a large body of information about their ancestors and had a strong emotional engagement with the material. However, they found the task of finding the narrative threads in their mountainous research and contextualising them within a wider social, political and economic framework a ferociously complex task. These

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<sup>12</sup> Davison, G, (2015) *Lost Relations: Fortunes of My Family in Australia’s Golden Age*, Melbourne: Allen & Unwin, p.32

<sup>13</sup> Conversation with Davison, 18 August, 2015.

<sup>14</sup> Davison, G, (2015) p.xii.

<sup>15</sup> The program was offered in 2018 at the Public Record Office, Victoria, and involved a three-hour workshop once a month.

observations are partly confirmed in the survey undertaken by Ashton and Hamilton. One woman expressed her desire in the survey to write a family narrative but was deterred because she felt it would be ‘no good’.<sup>16</sup> Despite the hurdles my peers encountered they nevertheless wanted to pursue the task of turning their research into a narrative because they understood the power of the story to engage readers and provide patterns about a life. They were averse to producing an emotionless set of facts such as birth, marriage and death dates, and writing their narratives as if they were police reports: ‘this happened, and then that happened...’. Their aim was to construct family narratives that would be remembered and passed on to future generations. Within this context, they could be described as the agents of memory who give shape to stories.<sup>17</sup>

To grapple with the challenges of researching and writing about family members and, in particular women, I investigate how the role of life-writing can provide a framework for researching and writing about my Great-Grandmother. The Oxford Centre for Life-Writing’s [OCLW] definition of life-writing provides a useful framework. In one of its most popular blogs, OCLW explains that life-writing ‘involves and goes beyond biography. It encompasses everything from the complete life to the day-in-the-life...it embraces the lives of objects and institutions as well as the lives of individuals, families and groups.’<sup>18</sup>

Central to OCLW’s definition of life-writing is the concept that it is an inclusive genre. It encompasses fields such as biography, autobiography, memoir and letters,

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<sup>16</sup> Ashton, P and Hamilton, P (2010), p.31.

<sup>17</sup> Ashton P and Hamilton P, 2010, pp 63-73.

<sup>18</sup> The Oxford Centre for Life-Writing: <https://oxlifelife.wordpress.com/life-writing/>

and can cross genres and blur the distinctions between biography and memoir.<sup>19</sup> This is a blurring which is examined in this creative project as I grapple with the challenges of researching and writing about Rose, as well as teasing out how to use my own memories and experiences in constructing a narrative about my Great-Grandmother. Furthermore, life-writing is liberating because it transcends biography's traditional limitation of often only exploring the lives of 'well-known people'.<sup>20</sup> As explained in Chapter One of the exegesis, theorists and writers have employed life-writing to challenge the silences around and question established narratives about women in the past.

Delving into the role which life-writing plays in constructing a life poses challenges about what can be known and how. What are the traits, clues and legacies which can provide us with a window onto what has occurred in the past and what was experienced by someone other than ourselves? This, I would maintain, is an important line of inquiry given the crop of reality television shows that feature twenty-first century families who are sent back in time to 'live' in a producer's engineered and imagined bygone era, so the families can 'know' what it is like to have lived in a previous decade. The recent Australian Broadcasting Corporation program, *Back in Time for Dinner*, gave viewers, I would argue, the incorrect impression that people can don costumes, drive vintage cars, use old recipes and utensils and know what it is like to live in a previous era.<sup>21</sup> I came to this conclusion during the course of the

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> See, for example, Virginia Woolf's statement that too many 'great' men are written about. Woolf, V (1929), *A Room of One's Own*, Wordsworth Edition (2012), p.626.

<sup>21</sup> The ABC program, *Back in Time for Dinner* was aired in 2018. A middle-class family 'lives' for a week in the following decades: 1950s, 1960s, 1970, 1980s, 1990s, 2000s. The program focuses on food as a way of telling stories, for example, about gender roles through the decades.



creative project while grappling with what I can really know about my Great-Grandmother after visiting the locations and homes she once inhabited.

This thesis, therefore, aims to tie together the threads of the above discussion through the exploration of an overarching question: *How can the genre of life-writing help to locate and foster an understanding of a female family member, who left few personal documents, as well as provide wider insights about the extent to which a life might ever be available to someone else to know and to represent within narrative form?*

This double-barrelled question will be considered through the production of a creative project that relates specifically to researching and writing about my Great-Grandmother's life as well as an exegesis that places the creative project in context and tackles the methodological and philosophical issues that emerge from the narrative about Rose Pearlman.

Life-writing is the concept and strategy which frames and binds together the two lines of enquiry in the overarching question. The idea of life-writing as an inclusive and binding force will be explored throughout the exegesis and in particular in the chapter on methodology. Part of this chapter explains how life-writing can be seen metaphorically as a multi-layered thick, black picture frame that supports the methodological and philosophical considerations of this thesis.<sup>22</sup> Inside the frame I place my discoveries and draw connections among them to produce a narrative. This process gives rise to sub-questions that are specifically of an epistemological nature and include: What can be known and how? Can knowledge reside in, be derived from,

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<sup>22</sup> The idea of the picture frame is inspired by American academic and author Nancy K. Miller's image of a picture frame in *What They Saved: Pieces of a Jewish Past* (2011) University of Nebraska Press/Lincoln and London Kindle Edition, Kindle Loc: 42.

the fragmentary and partial? How do you give meaning and shape to the fundamental elusiveness of a life?

### Significance of this thesis

Family history is a popular activity, despite its challenges as previously discussed. Evans notes that the first airing of the Australian TV show, *Who Do You Think You Are?* appeared to prompt an increased number of people to visit archives and relevant websites.<sup>23</sup> She cites statistics suggesting that in early 2008, the Society of Australian Genealogists experienced seventy-seven per cent more members than for the same period in 2007.<sup>24</sup> She states that many of these people were those who had started their family trees previously but abandoned them because ‘the task became too complicated or tiresome’:

They now returned to their family trees re-energised by the program and embracing possibilities by the technological revolution and enhanced software. The demand for web-based services has been identified as the most significant impact of the program.<sup>25</sup>

Ashley Barnwell comments that this overwhelming interest shows no signs of abating and argues that the collection of family narratives is continuing to grow both within and outside the academy as an ‘investigative life-writing practice’.<sup>26</sup>

While this thesis about my Great-Grandmother, Rose Pearlman, is produced at a time of momentous interest in collecting family narratives, its overall significance lies in its contribution to a growing body of work that seeks to build a bridge between academia and family historians. As Evans and Curthoys have pointed out, academics

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<sup>23</sup> Evans, T (2015) *Fractured Families: Life on the Margins in Colonial New South Wales*, University of New South Wales Press, pp. 7-8.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Barnwell, A (2013) ‘The Genealogy Craze: Authoring an Authentic Identity through Family History Research’, *Life Writing*, 10:3, p.261.

and family historians can forge a symbiotic relationship in which each helps the other with producing new knowledge and in contextualising this knowledge.<sup>27</sup> In their article ‘Family history, identity, and public history: Writing a history of The Benevolent Society in its 200<sup>th</sup> year’, Evans and Curthoys explain how the project about the history of the Benevolent Society in NSW involved both family historians and academics. ‘The project was driven by a desire to bring together the work of family historians, recovering the histories of their poor ancestors, with our academic research focused on analysing the history of the organisation and the wider historical context of this particular nineteenth-century charity,’ they write.<sup>28</sup>

The potential for family historians and academics working together was further highlighted after I interviewed Davison for a newspaper article on family history. He discussed how the particularity of his own family story could be viewed in light of movements of more general significance:

The story of the ‘distressed needlewomen’ [*In Lost Relations*] was the one that first captured my interest because, as a nineteenth century historian, I could see how it connected with what contemporaries called ‘the condition of England question’ and once people like Thackeray, Mayhew and Dickens entered it, I realised that the big story and the little story were two sides of the one coin. To some extent I was just applying the approaches and drawing on the literature I had known for years, but I began to realise that, as I wrote, I was finding a different voice, one that allowed me to register a different kind of subjectivity, that of the descendant as well as the historian.<sup>29</sup>

While Davison was an historian, who had written a family narrative and could therefore contextualise it within historical movements and literature, most family historians are not academic and/or professional historians. Davison is also cognisant of this fact. In 2016, he told *Inside History*’s Sarah Trevor that while family historians

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<sup>27</sup> Evans, T and Curthoys, P ‘Family history, identity, and public history writing a history of The Benevolent Society in its 200<sup>th</sup> Year’ in *Journal of Australian Studies*, 37:2013, pp.285-301.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, p.286.

<sup>29</sup> Interview with Davison 13 August 2018 for ‘UTas’s diploma of family history proves a major drawcard’, *The Australian* 15 August 2018 [Higher Education section]

had excellent research skills, they sometimes had difficulty contextualising their information:

I've read a number of family histories and I'm enormously impressed with the quality of research that family historians do. Their knowledge of the techniques of genealogical research is certainly greater than mine.

But sometimes they falter when it comes to trying to understand the significance of what they've found in the larger context. So I suppose if an academic historian brings anything to this, it's not that they're as good as family historians at genealogical technique or even at putting together the structure of the family, but they can perhaps bring something in understanding the larger context in which people lived. Often, that's the clue to understanding why they acted as they did.<sup>30</sup>

The flip-side is that academics may be drawn to family historians' narratives to challenge established historical narratives.<sup>31</sup>

The idea of bringing together the often separate worlds of academic and popular history in Australia can be partly traced to the work of the public historian and academic, Grace Karskens, who has influenced my approach. The salient lesson I have learnt from her work for this PhD by creative project and exegesis is the concept that bridging the divide between academia and the general public has to be achieved 'without compromising scholarly standards and without losing that wider audience'.<sup>32</sup> This notion is reflected in this thesis, for example, in the 'notes' to the creative component. Instead of using formal footnoting, I have provided notes to each chapter at the conclusion of the creative piece. This strategy has three aims: to allow the reader to become immersed in the narrative flow; to demonstrate the scholarly

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<sup>30</sup>Trevor, Sarah 'Lost Relations: Fortunes Of My Family In Australia's Golden Age' *Inside History* issue 30, September 2016. This is an interview with Graeme Davison, which is written in first person

<sup>31</sup> See, for example, Evans (2015).

<sup>32</sup> Griffiths, T, (2016) *The Art of Time Travel: Historians and Their Craft*, Carlton: Black Inc, p. 277. See, also, the introduction Karskens, G, (2010) *The Colony: A History of Early Sydney*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, pp 1-19.

research and analysis that underpins the life-writing; and to illuminate my method of ‘fossicking’. I ultimately hope that this PhD project could also speak to a broader audience.

Given that this thesis seeks to explain connections between the scholarly community and people who write about their families, this thesis is also significant for the following three reasons. First, it aims to fill gaps and contribute to academic work on the history of Jews in Victoria before and during World War II by highlighting the life of an ‘ordinary’ woman, a family member, to illustrate the emotional, cultural and economic contribution which she, and others like her, have made to their families and to the Jewish community at large. Second, this thesis contributes to scholarly methods on researching and writing about a life when few personal documents exist in both the academic and family history spheres. Finally, this thesis adds to epistemological debates about how much we can really know about a life, particularly one from the past. This is pertinent given the growing and complex library of works that combine fiction and non-fiction in family and historical writing, and in film.<sup>33</sup>

### Organisation of this thesis

This thesis is divided into two parts: the creative project and the exegesis. It is intended for the creative component to be read first after this introductory discussion and then the exegesis. This is mainly because some episodes from the creative project are discussed in the exegesis. In addition – as has already been highlighted in this

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<sup>33</sup> See, for example, Wood, M (2019) ‘Does it matter that film-makers play fast and loose with the facts?’, *BBC History Magazine*, March, p.14. Professor Wood asks if recently released historical films have an obligation to stick to the basic facts.

introduction – broader themes are best understood and related to through the engagement with the specific, and particularly through the production of a narrative.

The creative component, *Yizkor for Rose: A Life Lost and Found*, is a memorial from me to a working-class Jewish woman, Rose Pearlman, my Great-Grandmother. It is pieced together from found fragments and the memories of Rose's youngest son, my Great-Uncle Lloyd, who was approaching one hundred years of age during the course of this thesis, as well as my own mother's childhood memories. Rose's life alerts us to the once robust Jewish community in Ballarat as well as the vibrant Jewish streets of St Kilda before and during World War II. Rose also tells us about coping with the unknown. Four of her eight surviving children served overseas in World War II forcing her to wait for their letters to confirm if they were safe. One son goes missing and Rose has to wait four years to learn if he is alive in a POW camp or dead. Her story illuminates the little known narratives of mothers who had to wait during the war to hear of news about their sons missing in Rabaul.

*Yizkor for Rose* also takes the reader on a voyage from London to Jewish life in Melbourne, Ballarat and St Kilda in the late nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century. While trying to follow in my Great-Grandmother's footsteps, I grapple with limited personal sources such as diaries and memoirs. However, during the narrative I use a kind of *bricolage*, to thread together moments in Rose's life from interviews, newspaper articles, books, documents, maps as well as my observation of Rose's streetscapes. I have also embedded photographs throughout the creative project in order to show how they can drive the narrative. Ashton and Hamilton's research shows that family objects such as photos and jewellery are powerful triggers for

remembering someone in particular times and locations and are therefore integral in anchoring family narratives.<sup>34</sup>

The aim of the creative project is to give a sense of Rose through her relationships with her husband, children, relatives and friends as well as her connection to her religion, community and streets. It's a journey of discovery about the 'silent'<sup>35</sup> woman Rose, as I muse about grief, hope and resilience, and the extent to which I can really know the external let alone the interior life of my Great-Grandmother. The introduction to the creative component explains the personal and emotional reasons for writing this *Yizkor* for Rose. These reasons are tied up with the notion of whether I can assuage my own experiences of grief and loss through the reanimations of the past.

Following the creative component is the exegesis, '*But she didn't leave a diary!*': Making sense of fragments of a life.' Chapter One, 'The Hidden Woman: Upsetting the Status Quo', illuminates how the creative project is positioned within elements of both women's history and life-writing that seek to reveal the 'ordinary' woman, who is often not the focus of stories. In so doing, I examine the ideas of women writers and academics such as Virginia Woolf, Hermione Lee, Barbara Caine and Liz Stanley who have influenced my work and provide a conceptual and structured framework for the creative component. I assert that the reasons these women offer for revealing hidden women in history can also be applied to and developed as an important impetus for writing about female family members. Specifically, I contend that this

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<sup>34</sup> Ashton, P and Hamilton P 'Australians and the Past', *Australian Cultural History*, 22:2003, University of Queensland p.13.

<sup>35</sup> Rose Pearlman is not silent because she is quiet. The word silent is used in reference to family stories in which Rose is absent.

narrative I have made of Rose Pearlman's life has the potential to illustrate the 'everywoman's life' of struggle and hope, and that her experience as a mother of children who served in World War II sheds light on these women's private struggles. In addition, this chapter also identifies gaps in the historical literature about working-class Jewish women who came to Victoria before World War II.

Chapter Two, 'Biography, Memoir and Life-writing: Criss-crossing Paths', explores the nature and purpose of life-writing and why and how the creative component straddles the boundaries of biography and memoir. In so doing, I argue that the genres of biography and memoir provide too narrow a focus to encapsulate the inclusive and democratic features of this PhD. I, therefore, argue that the genre of life-writing is the appropriate term in which to classify the creative component, because of its inclusive and flexible nature. Following on from this, writers and some historians have viewed one of life-writing's major purposes as illuminating the lives of the marginalised.

Chapter Three, 'Fossicking as a Methodology for Life-Writing' explores why I refer to my methodology as 'fossicking' and how I knit together fragments of a family member's life when few of their personal papers exist. My method is underpinned by the interplay of ideas and practices of life-writers and historians, which I apply, modify and build upon in the context of writing about a family member. I further extrapolate on this method by considering the importance of curating an archive in order to identify and listen to its narrative threads. The epistemological questions that flow from these explorations contribute to discourses about whether a life can ever really be accessible or known to someone else.



This concept is further illuminated in Chapter Four, ‘The Role of the Imagination in Re-creative Writing’, where I explore the connection between imagination and life-writing, and how imagination, not invention, is employed in the creative project. In so doing, I define what I mean by imagination by drawing on the ideas of historians and life-writers, Greg Denning and Richard Holmes. Related to this exploration are the responsibilities of the life-writer to their subject, and the subject’s relatives and readers. Within the parameters of this discourse I mount an argument proposing caution in ‘making things up’ when writing about a relative by referencing the responsibilities of the author who is operating as a kind of custodian of family knowledge.

Before embarking on my doctoral studies I did not know when my Great-Grandmother was born, or where she lived in London as a child. I did not know how Rose, a widow, coped while waiting to hear if her children were safe while they served overseas during World War II. My Great-Grandmother had not written about her life in diaries or memoirs, and I had never met her because she died before I was born. All I had really known about Rose was that she had lived in St Kilda near her Granddaughter, my mother, who as a child loved visiting Rose’s home, and in the evening would have to be dragged back to her own home by her older brother. I still do not know many things about Rose Pearlman – such as why she developed a limp or her personal thoughts about war. I don’t know her favourite food or colour. I will never know how Rose compared growing up in the Spitalfields with living in Ballarat and Melbourne and if she had any miscarriages. And, I will never know what she thought of the men her daughters Millie and Celia chose to marry. They had difficult marriages. However, after four years of following in Rose Pearlman’s footsteps, she is

a presence in my life and that of my extended family. I no longer have a sense that she is missing.

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## **THE CREATIVE PROJECT: 'YIZKOR FOR ROSE': A LIFE LOST AND FOUND**

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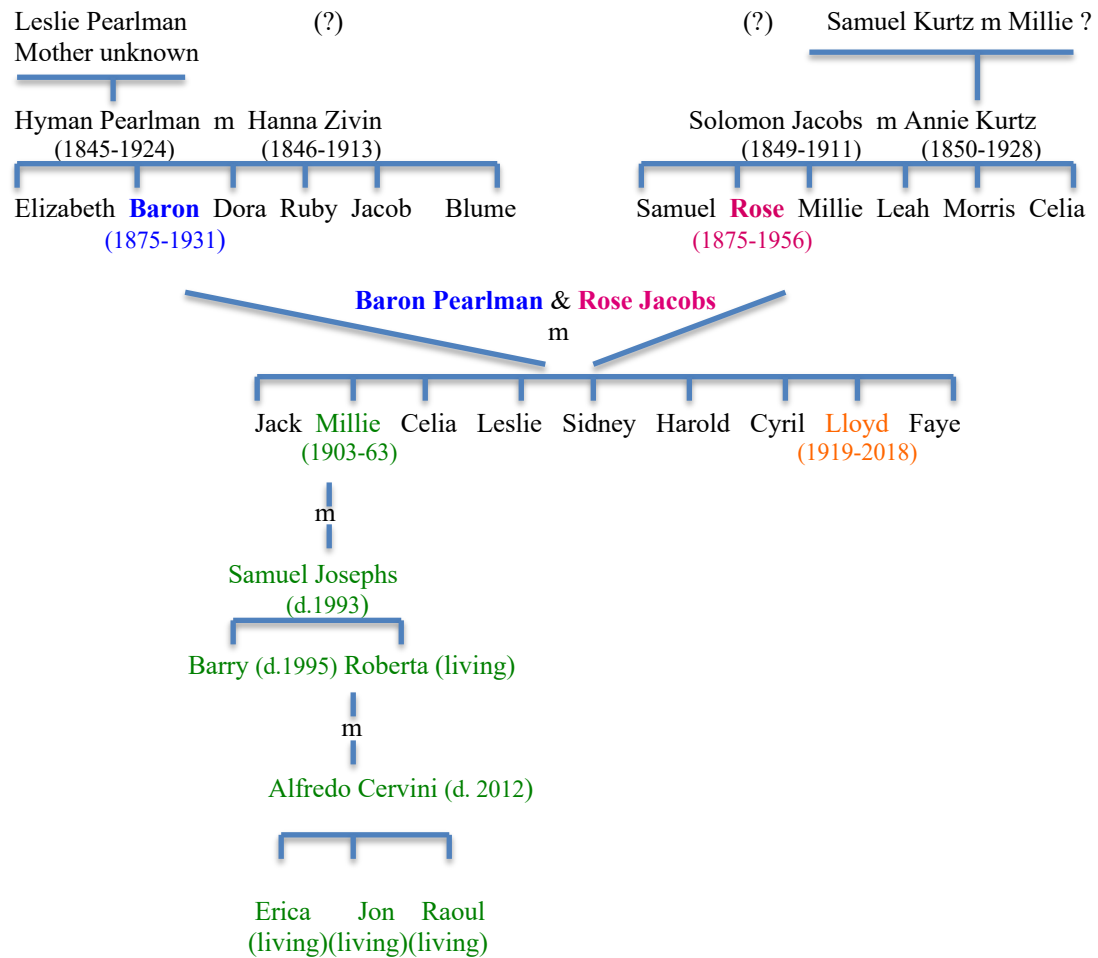
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## The Pearlman and Jacobs



## People

Throughout the creative project, I have capped the ‘Gs’ in Grandmother, Great-Grandmother and Great-Uncle to emphasise their connection to me. In addition, I refer to my Great-Uncle Lloyd as Uncle Lloyd in the creative project because that is what the extended family has always called him – and how I still think of him.

### The Pearlman family and their nine children

*Rose* – my Great-Grandmother, main subject, married Baron Pearlman.

*Baron* – my Great-Grandfather, hawker, office worker, bookie, married Rose Jacobs.

*Jack* – a postal worker, married Rachel.

*Millie* – my Grandmother, a secretary, married Samuel Josephs.

*Celia* – a nurse and army nurse, married Jerry Leon.

*Sidney* – died at age two-and-a-half in 1913.

*Leslie* – a printer, salesman, soldier.

*Harold* – public servant in Melbourne and Canberra, married Ette, involved in the Jewish Historical Society in Canberra.

*Cyril* – primary school teacher, soldier, department store owner, married Zelda, lived in Perth.

*Lloyd* – woman’s tailor, public servant, married Edie [Edith].

*Faye* – secretary, married Ken Green [Kurt Grenbaum, a Dunera Boy], Faye’s birth name was Valda Raphael, but the family has always referred to her as Faye from Raphael.

### Main people in Rose’s story

*Roberta Cervini* – my mother, Rose’s Granddaughter, Millie [Pearlman] Josephs’ daughter.

*Lloyd Pearlman* – my Great-Uncle, Rose’s youngest son, Roberta’s Uncle.

*Erica Cervini* – Rose Pearlman’s Great-Granddaughter. Rose’s twenty-two Great-Grandchildren range in age from seventeen to sixty-five.

### Supporting Pearlman people in Rose's life

*Hanna Zivin* – a businesswoman, married Hyman Pearlman, Rose's mother-in-law.

*Hyman Pearlman* – hawker, *shammas*, Rose's father-in-law.

### The Jacobs and their six children

*Annie* – my Great-Great Grandmother, married Solomon Jacobs.

*Solomon* – my Great-Great Grandfather, a boot finisher/maker.

*Samuel* – a boot maker, married Nellie.

*Rose* – main character, married Baron Pearlman, nine children, my Great-Grandmother.

*Millie* – helped her sister Celia run a hotel in Ballarat, lived mostly at 45 Mackenzie Street, Melbourne.

*Leah* – boot machinist, café worker, married Solomon Cohen, one child Letty [Charlotte], lived nearly all her life at 45 Mackenzie Street, Melbourne.

*Morris* – a bootmaker, died aged twenty-three in 1904.

*Celia* – licensee of two hotels, ran a café, married Samuel Phillips, two children Thelma and Joseph.

### Minor Ballarat people

*Billy Mong* and *Annie Mong* – ran the Red Lion Hotel, friends of the Pearlman family.

### Minor St Kilda people

*Les Goldsmith* – Faye Pearlman's boyfriend.

*Samuel Solomon Josephs* – my Grandfather.

### Other people

*Jessica Pearlman Fields* – Lloyd Pearlman's Granddaughter, Rose's Great-Granddaughter.

*Lesley Wise* – Lloyd Pearlman’s daughter, Rose’s Granddaughter.

*Lynda Fridman* – Faye [Pearlman] Green’s daughter, Rose’s Granddaughter.

*Ruth Leon* – Celia [Pearlman] Leon’s daughter-in-law.

*Jennifer Maschler* – Ruth’s daughter, Rose’s Great-Granddaughter.

*Ephraim Finch* – former head of the Melbourne Chevra Kadisha, Jewish Burial Society.

## **Glossary**

*Ashkenazi* – Jews whose ancestry can be traced to central Europe.

*Bar mitzvah* – Marks the time when a thirteen-year-old Jewish boy is considered a man and is called to Torah for the first time.

*Bimah* – The platform in a Synagogue.

*Bris* – Circumcision, which usually takes place on day eight after a Jewish baby boy is born.

*Chevra Kadisha* – A Jewish burial society.

*Chuppah* – A wedding canopy. The Jewish couple stands under it during the ceremony.

*Hallul* – A month in the Jewish calendar. Rose used this spelling, but the spelling most often used is Elul, and corresponds to August-September.

*Kadimah* – Jewish cultural centre.

*Ketubah* – The marriage contract.

*Kosher* – Food which is prepared, sold, cooked, eaten according to Jewish laws [*kashrut*].

*Matzos* – Unleavened bread, which is eaten during the festival of *Pesach* [Passover].

*Mikvah* – Ritual bath to wash away impurity. There are separate *Mikvah* for women and men.

*Minyan* – A quorum of ten adult male Jews required for ritual prayer.

*Moshe* – Moses.

*Onen* – A Jew who is in the first stages of the mourning process.

*Rosh Hashanah* – Jewish New Year.

*Saida* – Of Arabic origin, meaning lucky, fortunate.

*Savas* – A month in the Jewish calendar. Rose used this spelling, but there are other ways of spelling the month.

*Schmattes* – Refers to the ‘rag’ [garment] trade.

*Sephardi* – Jews descended from Jews from the Iberian Peninsula before the expulsion.

*Shabbat* – The seventh day of the week; the day of rest. It begins on Friday after sunset. Prayers and a meal are shared on Friday evening.

*Shammas* – an assistant in the Synagogue.

*Shivah* – The seven-day mourning period.

*Shofar* – The Ram’s horn, which is sounded mainly at *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur*.

*Shema* – The pre-eminent prayer in the Jewish faith.

*Shule* – The Yiddish word for synagogue, a house of worship. I use *Shule* in this thesis because the Pearlman family [and its descendants] used the word.

*Siddur* – Jewish prayer book.

*Sukkot* – Meaning Booths. A harvest holiday. Exodus from Egypt and the wanderings in the wilderness where the Jews had to build huts or booths.

*Talmud Torah* – Torah study.

*Tallis* – A prayer shawl.

*Yahrzeit* – Anniversary of a death.

*Yiddish* – A Judeo-German dialect, which also contains Hebrew and Slavic words.

*Yiddishkeit* – a Yiddish word meaning ‘Jewishness’, ‘a Jewish way of life’. (The Jewish home is the place where children and teenagers receive their most important training in Yiddishkeit. It is in the home that the principal celebrations of the life-cycle events take place in Judaism.

*Yom Kippur* – Day of Atonement, the holiest day of the Jewish New Year.

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## Introduction

### The Pearl Dress

Jellicoe Street, Cheltenham, Melbourne, 1979

When I was nine, I found a battered cardboard box groaning with surprises in the cherry-red cupboard in the back room of our home. My small fingers yanked the box from its tight space and my fingernails scratched at the sticky tape crisscrossing its flaps. The box was stacked with black and white photographs of people wearing clothes I didn't see in the local shops. The women in the photos wore billowing, frilly



blouses tucked into heavy dark skirts. I couldn't see their feet. Their curly hair was piled high on their heads with large floppy bows perched on top. One woman

wore a hat that resembled a toucan. My hands dipped in and out of the box until my fingers curled around a bigger photo. I slowly released it from the tangle of other pictures. 'Is it coloured?' I wondered. It had a buttery hue and was pressed onto something hard like a book cover. There was nothing written on the back of the photo to identify the woman. She was not my mum, but she had the same curly hair and full lips. I traced the line of her nose with the tip of my finger, but I spent most of the time staring at her princess-like dress with its decorative pearl beading and lantern-shaped frilly sleeves. I wished I could have seen the bottom of her pearl dress.

'Who's this?' I shouted to my mum, Roberta.

‘What are you talking about?’ her voice echoed down the hallway.

‘She’s wearing a pretty dress,’ I said with urgency.

I raced towards my mum and shoved the sepia photo in her face.



‘It’s Rose, your Great-Grandmother, my Grandmother. Isn’t she pretty with that curly hair?’ my mum responded.

In the years to come, Roberta would always say the same thing when Rose’s name was mentioned, ‘So pretty with that curly hair.’

I raced back to the box holding tightly to the photo mounted on the stiff cardboard and knelt over the cardboard box daydreaming. I hadn’t heard of anyone called Rose before. The old woman, Stella, who lived next door grew pink, red and yellow roses. She often invited me to sniff them. ‘I wish I had rose perfume,’ I’d tell her. Now there was a real Rose, who must have smelt sweet, I thought. My childish fingers had forgotten the urgency of flicking through the photos and I placed Rose in the cardboard box and slid it back inside the cherry-red cupboard that my father had painted.

Over the next decade before leaving home, I would dip into the box a few times a year always searching for the same photo: Rose. I would gaze absently at her pearl dress and her curly hair and wonder where her dress was now. I grew sorry for the picture and took my scissors to it to even up the corners, because I'd seen old portrait photos that had curved edges in my schoolbooks. 'Rose's photo should be shaped that way,' I thought. When I left home at twenty, Rose travelled with me in a box that once stored soap. She came with me on every move, but over the years I looked less and less inside the perfumed box.

### **Fitzroy Street Fitzroy, 2013**

During the fifteen months in which cancer attacked my husband's body, I didn't give Rose a thought. I was Paul's carer and everything else was secondary. After he died in June 2013, I did what I imagine many people do in grief: look at photographs to remind themselves of happy times and to connect with memories. One of the funniest memories I have from that day of combing through photo albums is a photo of Paul and me hauling a pink fluoro Ikea chair on two different tram routes to get it home.

Nestled next to the albums stored in a clear plastic tub was the soapbox containing the picture of Rose in her pearl dress. As I opened it there was still the faint sweet scent of soap. The sight of the abandoned photo combined with my own sense of loss prompted thoughts about forgotten relatives. I reflected on how quickly we lose narratives about people who have died and wondered if I would be guilty of letting go of stories. Would I tell the younger generation stories about Paul? Would I write notes about him and print all the digital photos? I wondered why we lose the stories. Was it

because we were so busy with our lives that we didn't think to ask questions about our families? Or was it a lack of interest? Most of my family in Australia is Jewish and the lack of knowledge about our ancestors seemed out of place with Jews recounting the stories of their ancestors in *Torah* readings.

In the months after my husband's death I became preoccupied with finding out more about Rose, who was also a widow at a relatively young age. My thinking had gone beyond seeking answers as to why she was wearing the pearl dress; I now wanted to know about the woman. Many reasons for this were tied up with feelings of grief and hope. Could I assuage my experiences of grief and loss through the reanimations of the past? What could Rose tell me about death and hope and how she coped with the unknown? The concept of the unknown was particularly compelling because Rose, a Jew, moved countries from England to Australia, and then from Melbourne to a country town and back to Melbourne. Later in life, four of Rose's eight surviving children were posted overseas to serve in World War II. She had an agonising wait for mail to inform her if her children were safe.

The closest I can get to imagining Rose's wait is to recall the time when a group of friends, including my then boyfriend, went missing in the Grampians in western Victoria. Every minute seemed like hours until a search helicopter found them.

**Only two living people** have memories of Rose. One is my Great-Uncle Lloyd Pearlman, Rose's youngest son, who was approaching one hundred during the course of this thesis.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Uncle Lloyd died after I wrote the final chapter of the creative project. The final chapter was re-written to take account of his death.

As I started interviewing him about his childhood and early teenage years in Ballarat, it dawned on me I needed to search for Rose *now*, given Uncle Lloyd's age. His mind was as agile as ever, but his body was failing. My mother, Roberta, also has childhood and teenage memories of Rose. She lived opposite Rose, her Grandmother, in Argyle Street in the inner beachside suburb of St Kilda in Melbourne. My Great-Uncle Lloyd and my mother Roberta are central to Rose's story because of their memories of her. Their quotations reflect time in motion where the present prompts memories of the past.



*Lloyd Pearlman and Roberta Cervini, Freemasons Homes, Melbourne, 2017*

Uncle Lloyd's and my mother's memories are precious as Rose did not leave memoirs or diaries. She was an ordinary woman, who probably did not think her life important enough to document. Besides, she may have been too busy to write, given how many children she had to care for. However, unless stories are told about women like my Great-Grandmother they will be lost and we will only learn about a narrow set of women's lives.

I have divided Rose's story, as I know it, into two sections. The first section, 'Travelling', explores Rose and her family's migration from London to Melbourne and Rose's subsequent moves to the gold-mining town of Ballarat in Victoria and the inner-Melbourne beachside suburb of St Kilda. 'Travelling' also signals the different streets Rose moved to in Ballarat and St Kilda as well as her travels to see family and friends, and to visit synagogues and shops. The streets, therefore, represent her life lived outside and inside the home. On a personal level, 'Travelling' tells the story of my discovery of Rose. I ventured to London where Rose was born and visited and walked her paths in Melbourne, East Melbourne, Ballarat and St Kilda.

The second section, 'Waiting', focuses on Rose's time living in St Kilda during World War II and just after. It juxtaposes Rose waiting for news of her children serving in the war with her daily life mixing with her family and Jewish community, who lived close by. Rose's daughter, Faye, kept diaries and two of these survive from the war years, which provide important insights into Rose's activities and how her family and friends nurtured Rose and how she supported them. Rose is still travelling her streets and I'm still following her, but mainly within St Kilda.

My extended family has contributed to my understanding of Rose through the Pearlman Facebook page I set up. This allowed me to share photographs and other artefacts with relatives and gave them a forum to discuss the pictures and objects. Their insights were invaluable. I am indebted to my relatives because they also found photographs and posted them on the site. In this sense, my relatives also joined the search for Rose. In 2015, two cousins came with my mum and me on a self-guided tour of Ballarat's Jewish past organised by the Jewish Museum of Australia. And, in

February 2016 descendants of the Pearlman family from Melbourne, Perth and California travelled to Ballarat to explore the Ballarat Synagogue and the Old Ballarat Cemetery, where some of our relatives are buried. My cousins were instrumental in gaining access to the Synagogue. Both the 2015 and 2016 adventures are referred to in the creative component. We, the Pearlman descendants, are now more connected through our experiences of sharing family stories, and learning and talking about Rose's life.

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## Section One: Travelling

### Chapter One: The Pearlman descendants eat cake.

#### Irwell Street, St Kilda, 2015

My mother's small, but light-filled apartment in St Kilda has become the central meeting place for my cousins. The female cousins. Away from the men. But today is different. As I enter the first-floor apartment near Acland Street, famous for its Jewish cake shops, I notice my Great-Uncle Lloyd sitting at my mum's square glass table whose edges are swathed in caramel-coloured cane. His blue eyes light up as I sit next to him.

Uncle Lloyd, whose ninety-sixth birthday was in February, is impeccably dressed, which is unsurprising given that he once worked as a tailor at Haskin in Flinders Lane, famous for its *schmattes*. His light grey waistcoat expertly matches his finely pressed trousers whereas I feel ratty in my denim jeans tucked into black biker Doc Martens. My curly thick hair is wild after being ravaged by a cold Melbourne wind while Uncle Lloyd's hair sits neatly, combed to the side.

'Here they go,' my mum sighs, before Uncle Lloyd and I have even opened our mouths. 'They are going to talk about Rose.'

'But I shouldn't be asking questions,' I say. 'I'm supposed to get ethics clearance from the university first to ensure you're protected in some way from my inquisitions. This was just going to be a casual family get-together with cake.'



‘What?’ Uncle Lloyd’s daughter, Lesley, quips. ‘Oh, put anything under your mum’s and my dad’s noses and they’ll sign.’

‘I’ve had a police check because of my voluntary work,’ my mum says helpfully.

‘No, it’s not about you being an upstanding citizen,’ I groan, snatching another slice of chocolate cake Lesley and her husband Gary have bought for my mum from Aviv Cakes and Bagels in Elsternwick.

‘Do you want me to sign something now?’ my mum asks. ‘I want to be in your story. Will there be photos?’

‘I don’t have the ethics forms yet,’ I stress. ‘This is not a formal interview! It’s just a casual family get-together.’

No one listens.

Uncle Lloyd purses his lips and cups his hand by his side: the ‘I’ll talk for money’ sign. We all laugh.

Only five of us are around the table, but it’s mayhem. People are talking over one another. It’s the same when the women cousins get together: the voices and hand gestures grow more exuberant as the afternoon progresses. We are products of the Pearlmans. I’m getting a sense of what it must have been like – noise-wise – in

Rose's home in Main Street, Ballarat. In 1924, twelve Jewish people of Eastern European descent lived under one roof: three adults including Rose's husband Baron and his father, Hyman as well as seven of eight of Rose and Baron's surviving children. One child had moved to Melbourne.

While my mum and her cousin Lesley debate the nature of an ethics document, Uncle Lloyd changes the subject. He speaks in a lowered tone, which prompts us to turn and listen. 'My mother was so strong,' Uncle Lloyd starts. 'I just don't know how she did it with all us kids.'

**It's 9.8 degrees Celsius**, the coldest day in Melbourne for two years but we are snug in my mum's apartment. The split system perched high on the wall is gently enveloping us in its warm bursts. In a couple of hours I'll have to confront the cold for a few minutes as I walk to the tram-stop. Soon the heated Number 96 tram will arrive and take me home across the Yarra River. Why am I dreading the cold burst? Am I too soft? I doubt Rose had the jumble of boots, jumpers and coats I have. Judging from the twenty-four photos I have collected of Rose she doesn't appear to have the variety and number of clothes we amass today.



In a photograph of Rose in Ballarat in the early 1920s she wears a dress that resembles a hessian sack. It's shapeless and looks rough; the ends of the sleeves form a halo-shape around her wrists, allowing biting winds to gush in and curl around her body.

Uncle Lloyd tells me during one of our interviews that there were no towels in the house because they were for richer people. So Rose would carry her small children wrapped in a sheet to and from the bath. The water was heated over a one-burner wood stove. For Lloyd, the warmth from the bath was replaced by the Ballarat chill as Rose ferried him up the dank hallway of the Main Road home set on the big paddock. The sheet must have stuck to Uncle Lloyd like thin layers of ice until Rose rubbed him warm again and clothed him. What about Rose herself? On July 14, 1924 while carrying four-year-old Uncle Lloyd to his bath it was 5 degrees Celsius. As the sheet soaked up the child's bath water it would have left an imprint on Rose. Her children were wiped dry, but I can't imagine that Rose was.

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## **Chapter Two: The Jacobs**

### **Fashion Street, London, 2017; Fashion Street and Fashion Court, London 1881 - 1888**

It's summer in London, 2017. The Petticoat Lane market in the East End is buzzing with locals rummaging through the cheap clothing and tourists fossicking for 'London' t-shirts and fluffy toys. There is the smell of falafel, grilled lamb and spice in the air. Muslim women's clothing in black, white, green and purple hang from a gaggle of wire and plastic coat hangers attached to the top and sides of the stallholders' tents. I chat with a Jewish man, who is eighty-four and has been selling jewellery for decades. He tells me he is one of the few Jewish stallholders left at the market. When I listen to the words around me they are spoken in Arabic – where once they would have sounded Yiddish. This all seems so far removed from the streets that I had imagined Rose walking to her home, school, Synagogue and kosher shops. From Petticoat Lane I weave my way along the maze of narrow streets to Commercial Street, my signpost for entering Rose's inner sanctum of lanes. I had prepared for the walk by poring over modern maps of the Spitalfields and Whitechapel and comparing them to Edward Weller's 1868 map of London and George Akell's 1899 map illustrating the spatial distribution of Jews in the East End. From the London Jewish Museum I bought a hardcopy of Akell's map, which graphically shows in dark blue how predominately Jewish the streets were that Rose and her family inhabited. In a square bounded by Fashion Street, Brick Lane,

Commercial Street and Flower and Dean Street, ninety-five to one hundred per cent of the inhabitants were Jewish in the late nineteenth century.



*Fashion Court is where Rose and her family lived. It backed onto the 'notorious' Flower and Dean Street. This street and the surrounding streets and courts had a reputation as the poorest and most dangerous in the East End. All five of Jack the Ripper's victims lived in or had connections to Flower and Dean Street and the immediate area.  
(A small section of George Arkell's map, 1899, showing Fashion Street)*

Rose's parents, Solomon and Annie Jacobs, were typical of the Jews who migrated to the East End and settled in the cramped and damp tenements and in tiny houses in the area known as the Spitalfields. Thousands of Jews left Lithuania, Russia and Poland to escape persecution and poverty from the second half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. I can only assume that this was the same reason Solomon and Annie left Kovno, part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, for a better life in London. While documents suggest they were from the same town, I do not know if they were married before they moved to London or if they met in the Spitalfields and then married. In any case, they must have travelled to their new country in the mid-to-late 1860s because their first child, Samuel, was born in the Spitalfields in 1870.

I stand on the corner of Commercial and Fashion streets trying to imagine what the area was like when Rose was a young girl. Did she play with the other children in the laneways? *The Times* newspaper article I read before I left Melbourne pops into my thoughts. It was about a false fire alarm that sent hundreds of people rampaging to the front doors of the Hebrew Dramatic Club causing seventeen young Jews to die of suffocation on 20 January 1887. The club was within Rose's inner circle of streets. I wonder if the twelve-year-old Rose was there with the other five hundred German, Polish and Russian Jewish families on the night. Were any of her school-friends killed? Was she involved? Was she hurt?

My thoughts wander again. I'm struck by how different the Fashion Street buildings are now compared with Rose's time. I have glimpses of her streets after poring over old photos of East End neighbourhoods in a book that I had bought at Foyles Bookshop in London. There are pages of dark, grim buildings curling around streets. Many have disappeared as a result of slum clearances and the Blitz of 1942. Now graffiti, a mix of tags, murals and stenciled statements like 'Stop Making Stupid Artists' cover the façade of the Post-World War II building that signals I have arrived at Fashion Street. Further along is a line of redbrick buildings, partly rendered in concrete, with Moorish-style decoration around their windows. They were built in 1905 as a shopping arcade but are now occupied by Workshare, which houses a mix of businesses including a modelling agency, a newspaper and software company.



I stroll down Fashion Street, which is narrower than I had imagined, to pinpoint where Rose's old street, Fashion Court, existed. Fashion Street is only about 180 metres in length.

The Jacobs lived at 5 Fashion Court, according to the London census of 1881. There were Synagogues that lined Fashion Street, but they have all disappeared. There was also a Fashion Court Chevra [Synagogue], which I assume the Jacobs attended. It has gone, too, along with Fashion Court, which was earmarked for slum clearance and eventually gobbled up in the 1905 Fashion Street arcade development. But the court still exists in old maps. Edward Weller's map has Fashion Court, a small curl of a lane, running off Fashion Street towards the Brick Lane end. There wouldn't have been any planning for Fashion Court; alleys and courts were haphazardly built to keep up with the influx of migrants, starting with the Huguenots, arriving at St Katharine's Docks, which was part of the London Port.

At the location where the maps suggest Fashion Court existed, I stop and wonder how Annie cared for her children in the cold London winters. Uncle Lloyd's words about how Rose wrapped him in a sheet after his bath are swirling in my head. Did Rose's mother, Annie, also swathe her in a sheet after her bath when she was four? Did Rose learn this from her mother? Rose, the second oldest of Annie's children, was born on 1 May 1875 at home at 2 Samuel Street, south of Commercial Road. The home has now been replaced with council flats.

From Fashion Street it takes about four minutes to walk around the corner to Bell Lane that housed The Jews' Free School.



*The Bell Lane entrance to the school, Jewish Museum, London*

Now there is nothing to remind passers-by of its existence; a tall, blue office block has replaced it. The school was destroyed in the Blitz and then reopened in Camden Town in London's north. In 2002, it moved to Kenton in the north-west to follow Jews who were moving further out to the suburbs. The school started in 1732 as the *Talmud Torah* of the Great Synagogue of London and only educated boys. Girls were admitted after the school moved to larger premises in Bell Lane in 1822 with the mission to educate the Jewish poor and to repel the Christian missionaries who were increasing their activities in the East End in order to convert Jews.

In March 1883, when Rose was eight, she started at the school, which had been newly rebuilt to accommodate the thousands of children from immigrant parents who were escaping the persecution and poverty of Poland and Russia. The year after Rose began in the infant school, three thousand, three hundred children attended the school, the biggest educational institution in England at the time. It cost a total of £3,000 a year to educate all the students. Money came from donations, a government grant and from funded property. Philanthropic drives to support the school were reported in



newspapers that named the dignitaries who attended the gala dinners. The Rothschilds were one of the wealthy and influential donors.

Although the school admitted girls and boys, they were educated separately. The girls' school provided children with boots, a white apron and dress as well as school meals. Rose's curls would have been swept off her face and tied up in bows in tight pigtails at the back of her head, because that was the fashion of the time.



*Jews' Free School, Jewish Museum, London.*

*The children spent thirty-three and a half hours each week at the school.*

Besides, the school was strict and any errant curl would have been frowned upon. The school was also known for its academic drive, which probably explains why Rose wrote in perfect copperplate. The children had singing classes, too. Later in life Rose would sing and play the piano with family and friends in St Kilda. However, like many educational institutions of the time, the girls were also taught domestic duties: washing, sewing and cooking.

Although Rose knew Yiddish, her headmaster Moses Angel, a strict disciplinarian, tried to dissuade students from speaking it in an attempt to Anglicise them. A school board report in 1894 described how educating the young was the best way to achieve this:

A far more powerful instrument [than adult evening classes] for 'anglicising' the foreign Jewish community is the great Jews' Free School in Bell Lane, Spitalfields which, in the spring of 1893 was attended by 3,582 Jewish children...They enter the school Russians and Poles and emerge from it almost indistinguishable from English children.

However Angel, who was headmaster between 1842 and 1897, was also determined that the children maintain their Jewish faith. Ninety-two per cent of the students attending the Jews' Free School voluntarily went to Hebrew and religious classes on the Sabbath. Rose may have known Hebrew, but with no doubt a cockney accent.

While standing at the spot where the school once stood, I try to imagine Rose going through the Jews' Free School gates. I see a child with fair curls and grey-blue eyes filing through the wooden school doors. The image of her face is influenced by the photograph I have of the adult Rose in her pearl dress and of photographs of the school gate and door in Gerry Black's text on the history of the school. As much as I try I can only conjure pictures based on what I've seen in photographs. My imaginative thoughts about Rose going to school are also influenced by Israel Zangwill's description of the children arriving at 'the great Ghetto school' in his book, *Children of the Ghetto*. There were ragged, sickly, sturdy and bright-eyed children, Zangwill writes. And there were some with 'great pumpkin heads' and others with 'pear-shaped heads'.

Zangwill, who lived on Fashion Street, attended the Jews' Free School in the 1870s and taught there in the mid-to-late 1880s when Rose was at the school. Zangwill drew on his intimate knowledge of the people; his observations are fluid, graphic and believable. I do not have Zangwill's insights and therefore cannot magically know what it was like for Rose to tread the lanes to her school on bleak wintry days just

because I have come to the Spitalfields. I know that I can only examine her life through the lens of the present.



But by coming to Fashion Street, Brick Lane and Bell Lane I can continue piecing together Rose's life from forgotten fragments. Treading Rose's streets in the Spitalfields provides an understanding of the daily paths she would have taken to get to school, Synagogue and the Old Spitalfields Market.

My trip to Rose's Spitalfields also gives a greater appreciation of how the squiggle of streets and lanes connected my Great-Grandmother to the Jewish community, which was a colourful part of East End life from the 1880s to the first part of the twentieth century.

### **Southampton, England to Port Melbourne, Victoria, 1888**

*Lead us with the gentle breezes that we need, and preserve us from the turbulence of the waves, and the roaring billows of the sea, from the raging storm, and from confusion of time, and change of seasons and from the destructive monsters that abound in the sea and on the dry land, from all trouble and loss.*

From Prayer for a Sea-Voyage, Rose Pearlman's *Siddur*, published 1893.

Jack the Ripper's reign of terror started in 1888, the year the Jacobs left London for Melbourne. They probably knew that the tiny dwellings in Fashion Court were going to be sold to the For Per Cent Company, which was planning to build new tenements. According to Jerry White's book on the Rothschild's tenement building in the East

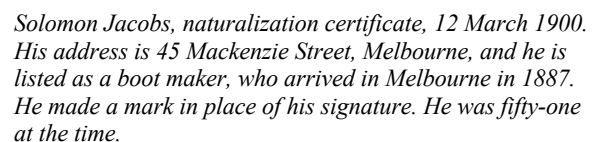
End, dwellings in Fashion Court and Flower and Dean Street were put on the market in about 1890. People had to vacate their homes, making some of them homeless. Despite the imminent demolition of homes in Fashion Court, another family, the Hedinki family, including their three children and a widow Mary Tilletaman, who was supported by charity, moved in. Henry Hediniski, like Solomon Jacobs, was a boot finisher.

Some families like the Jacobs chose to move countries, instead of trying to find another home in England. Like other migrants, they probably wanted to seek a better life for themselves and their six children in another country. I don't know why the Jacobs chose Melbourne, but they may have already known some people in the city. Chain migration features in the lives of many people who have settled in Australia.

The Jacobs paid for their own voyage on board the German mail steamship, the *Hohenstaufen*, named after a dynasty of German kings from the twelve and thirteenth centuries. The steamship began its maiden journey to New York in 1874 and was rebuilt at Bremerhaven in Germany for the Imperial Mail Service to Australia which she started in January 1887. In 1888, the *Hohenstaufen* began its voyage from Bremen in Germany on 8 August, and picked up the Jacobs in England. Boarding that ship were Annie aged forty with her six children: Samuel, eighteen, Rose, thirteen, Amelia, ten, Leah, nine, Morris, seven and Celia, one. They were among the eight hundred third-class passengers.

There is no record of Solomon Jacobs, Rose's father, on board the *Hohenstaufen*. While scrambling through passenger records anxious to find a 'Solomon Jacobs', I recall my Great-Aunt Celia telling me when I was teenager that her Grandfather, Solomon, arrived in Victoria two years earlier to prepare for his family's arrival. But

Solomon did take out citizenship in 1900, the year before Australia became a federation in January 1901. He had been in Melbourne for thirteen years since February 1887, about eighteen months before Annie arrived with the children in September 1888. Staring at the children's ages revealed two startling facts: Annie would have just been pregnant with her youngest child, Celia, when her husband left for Melbourne, and Solomon would not have met Celia until she was one-year-old. Did Annie know she was pregnant when Solomon left London in November 1886 on board the *Winnifred*? Did Annie hear about her husband's telling voyage? The questions have extra poignancy because Annie and Solomon were illiterate. Annie's signature as a witness to Solomon's will is a mark, 'A', owing to her being 'unable to write on account of her illiteracy'. Solomon also struggled with literacy, which his naturalisation certificate suggests.



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gales and high seas. When the family sailed the Red Sea the heat was ‘simply insufferable’, according to *The Argus*. The airless conditions in the Spitalfields tenement had followed Rose and her siblings, although the cold had been swapped for the heat. In contrast to the Jacobs’ crowded quarters, ten first-class passengers heading for Australia had large cabins containing only two berths to relax in and cuisine ‘modelled on the best Continental hotels’ to distract them from the heat.

The *Hohenstaufen* continued its journey to Australia with Captain Frederick Kessler in charge. Annie and her children experienced calm weather after the Red Sea until the steamship entered Australian waters. The family had to once again endure the sea monsters; the winds slapped the steamer and the waves leapt overboard. But Captain Kessler knew how to care for his passengers and make them content. Before the *Hohenstaufen* called in at Adelaide to say goodbye to fifty-three steerage passengers, a group thanked the Captain in English and German. If the Jacobs had been listening, they would have been familiar with the sounds of the German words because they all spoke Yiddish, which has traces of German.

The *Hohenstaufen* left for Melbourne on 27 September and entered Port Phillip Heads before daylight on 29 September 1888, a Saturday. The weather was smooth, which was lucky for the Captain and the Jacobs because the heads are notorious for fooling ships that the sea is welcoming. However, there was a sea pilot to guide the captain with his local knowledge of the channel, water depths and the strange and dangerous currents. Even today sea pilots go out on their tugs to meet leviathan of ships, climb up their sides and help the captains steer through the narrow heads.

It took three hours for the *Hohenstaufen* to reach Port Melbourne. The winds were

calm and the sun out. It was 18 degrees Celsius. The steamship moored alongside the railway pier and one hundred and eighty-six passengers disembarked. Rose and her family had finally conquered the ‘roaring billows of the sea’.

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## Chapter Three: The Pearlmans

### Moubray Street, Melbourne, 2016; Russia to Port Melbourne, 1891

Another family, the Pearlmans, arrived at Port Melbourne from Russia three years after the Jacobs in 1891. I visit Moubray Street in Melbourne where Uncle Lloyd lives at the Freemasons Retirement Homes to ask him why the Pearlmans settled in a country so far away from their own.

‘They had to escape the pogroms in Russia,’ Uncle Lloyd says matter of factly of his father, Baron, and Grandparents, Hyman and Hanna.

‘Do you know how they got out of Russia, Uncle Lloyd?’

‘No, I don’t,’ he says quietly.

‘Do you know why they came to Melbourne? I ask.

‘Oh, I don’t know; I wasn’t around then,’ he grins.

Did they live in Melbourne or go straight to Ballarat?’ I keep asking, worried that my questioning is starting to sound like an inquisition.

‘Oh, gee, first Melbourne, I think. It might have been Carlton. But don’t ask me where,’ Uncle Lloyd says, taking another bite of the Freemasons homemade biscuits.

The chase for the many threads of Rose’s story has captured me again. It began with locating Hyman Pearlman’s Australian naturalisation certificate, which revealed he arrived in Melbourne in 1891 on board the German *Sommerfeld* steamer from Hamburg. I search for Hyman on passenger ship lists to confirm the details and to see



if unearthing the name will provide clues to other family members who travelled with him. Nothing, no Pearlmans. I use different spelling combinations of the ship. The English spelling is *Sommerfeld*, the same on Hyman's certificate. Absolutely zilch.

It dawns on me that 'Pearlman' is an unusual spelling of the name because it contains two 'As'. A search of Victorian passenger lists of Perlman reveals a Chaim Perlmann, forty-four, Henne Perlmann, forty-one, and three of their children, Jacob, nine, Ruby, five, and Blume, one, arrived in Melbourne on 17 October 1891. Hyman and Hanna Pearlman did have children with those names. Comparing the Pearlman members' ages on the *Hohenstaufen* passenger list with the ages when they died provide further proof that they are *my* Pearlmans. The figures compute. The family was boarding a German steamer, which used German spellings. Perlmann is the German spelling and Chaim is the Hebrew of Hyman. But where was Baron, the couple's other son and Uncle Lloyd's father? And their daughters Elizabeth and Dora?

The *Sommerfeld* would take a similar route as the *Hohenstaufen* that had brought Rose and her family to Melbourne. It weaved its way through the Suez Canal, and in Australia called into ports in Albany, Adelaide and Melbourne, where twenty steerage passengers left the steamer. But the voyage was a stark contrast to the Jacobs' experience where the captain and crew were attentive to passenger needs. The *Sommerfeld* was mainly a cargo ship, which had space for about eighty steerage passengers. The fares were cheaper than for other steamers and the English passengers came from the poorer classes. For eight weeks the Pearlmans experienced a miserable trip. Details of their voyage are highlighted in an 'extraordinary' telegraphic statement, picked up by *The Age* and *The Argus* newspapers. The statement says that two fireman committed suicide by jumping overboard while the

*Sommerfeld* was sailing the Red Sea during intense heat. And when the steamer anchored at Albany in Western Australia two other crew jumped overboard but were picked up by a launch. They again sprang into the harbour when they saw another boat approaching but were rescued with ‘difficulty’.

The statement also highlights the grim conditions on board the steamer:

The passengers give an extraordinary account of the hardships they suffered from insufficient diet and attention, and nearly all required medical treatment. They all allege that the crew were badly treated, and that the men who committed suicide did so to end their suffering...Before the steamer got to Port Said the electric light machinery failed, leaving the passenger quarters in darkness. The captain banned passengers from taking kerosene lamps to steerage for fear the lamps might spark a fire.

Baron was spared the trip his other family members had to endure because he travelled to Melbourne in 1895 on board the *Gera*, a large German mail steamship. His naturalisation certificate provided a nugget of gold by detailing when he arrived in Melbourne and on which steamship. This led to an examination of passenger lists that revealed the nineteen-year-old Baron, a peddler, arrived with his sister, Dora, aged thirteen, on 1 May 1895, after boarding the *Gera* in England. Despite Baron and Dora staying in the third-class berths, *The Argus* newspaper says that all passengers had an ‘enjoyable’ voyage and that the crew put on entertainment for the passengers. Baron’s other sister, Elizabeth, did not travel with him.

After three years of researching and writing about the Pearlmans, it dawns on me that Elizabeth’s death certificate might provide clues about when she arrived in Melbourne. From examining the information on her certificate and that of her husband’s, I discover why Elizabeth probably came to Melbourne after her parents. She had already married at the age of eighteen in 1886 in Russia to Myer Froomkin. By the time Elizabeth’s parents left for Melbourne in 1891, she had a daughter and

would have been pregnant with her second daughter. Elizabeth and Myer would have two more children in Russia. They all travelled to Melbourne in 1898. Yet, it's a mystery to me why Baron made the sea journey after his parents so I return to Moubray Street with my mum to see if Uncle Lloyd can provide answers.

'Uncle Lloyd, do you know why Baron and Dora came out four years after Hyman and Hanna? Did they have to finish their education first? Did Baron want to try his luck in London, but couldn't find work?'

'London? It's the first I've heard of that!' Uncle Lloyd almost shouts.

'Yes, I found records that Baron and his sister had been living in London,' I say.

'Oh, I don't know about that. It's so long ago,' he sighs.

'Don't ask me, Erica. I don't know either,' my mum jumps in.

I ignore Uncle Lloyd's and my mum's exasperation at my questioning as I squeeze one more question in.

'Does anyone in the family know why the Pearlmans chose Melbourne?'

I'm expecting too much. The brain isn't a cabinet containing filed away documents that can readily produce easy answers. People need time for a word, smell, object or noise to prompt distant memories. It's much easier for me to comb the past with set aims and questions because I know what I want to discover. Nevertheless, I am convinced there is more to the story about the Pearlman's decision to travel to Melbourne because relatively few Russian Jews came to Australia, compared with the United States and United Kingdom. This story will have to wait.

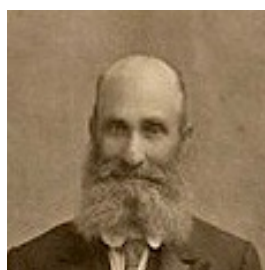
**Uncle Lloyd and I** are again sitting in the lounge area of the Freemasons aged care home, one month since we last met in September 2016. He is waving to residents and staff who pass by. Some workers try to catch Uncle Lloyd's eye so they get in first to sing out, 'Hello Lloyd. Who is with you today?' It's a competition to see who gets to do the greeting first. Today Uncle Lloyd wins. It seems wrong to ask him questions about the past when he is enthusiastically chatting to staff about the present: politics, food and his beloved St Kilda football team. It's time to stop the questions and let him direct the conversation.

I'm expecting one of his jokes or his analysis of the day's news but Uncle Lloyd surprises me and starts telling a story about his childhood in the house with the big paddock in Ballarat. As he speaks, I imagine him as a kid in the shorts held up with



*Uncle Lloyd, aged  
about four, 1923.*

braces captured in the sepia photos. Then Uncle Lloyd starts laughing, making it difficult for him to speak. Eventually his words replace the laughter: 'I'd pull on my



*Hyman Pearlman, date  
unknown.*

Grandfather's beard while he slept,' Uncle Lloyd says, his grin getting bigger again. Here was a man in his seventies who spoke in a heavy Russian accent, wore black, said prayers in Hebrew and held an important position at the Ballarat Synagogue. This didn't deter the four-year-old Lloyd from daring himself to tug at the long white beard without waking Hyman. 'How many times would you do that Uncle Lloyd?

'I did it once,' he says grinning. 'But I had to watch out that I didn't get caught 'cause I'd get a hiding.'

Perhaps Hyman pretended to be asleep and played along with the boy, his youngest Grandson. The image of a strictly religious man is out of keeping with a gentle old man that allows a child to think he has fooled him. Did Hyman have a special bond with children? Was there a softer side? The only other photo I have is of a younger Hyman, which shows a tall thin man impeccably dressed in a suit, waistcoat and top hat. A smile is also peeking through his long dark long beard.

I wonder if Hyman's memories of his children's deaths had made him anxious about not missing out on the joys of interacting with children. His first wife in Russia died giving birth to their first child, who also died. Another child, the eighteen-year-old Jacob, died of infections in Ballarat in 1900. There is no record of Blume, the baby, who came on the *Sommerfeld* with Hyman and Hanna. Perhaps, he died on board the steamship. It wasn't unusual for babies to die on such long journeys. Hyman also knew about his second wife Hanna Zivin's loss and grief: she had to leave her young son behind in Russia to come to Australia with Hyman. The family story goes that at some stage during Hanna's first marriage, her father visited her and was appalled at the physical and mental state that she was in. Her marriage was a living hell, because her husband had become a fanatical Jew. Hanna's father was so upset by what he saw,

he apparently told his daughter, ‘This cannot go on. You might have to leave him and be divorced.’ However, for the divorce to proceed Hanna’s husband had to apply for it, and he stipulated that Hanna would have to release the child to him. She did. The Rabbis told Hanna, ‘You have to be clever about this. Agree to it now, and later on his attitude might soften and you might get access to the child.’



*Hanna [Zivin] Pearlman, date unknown.*

Hanna’s will attests to the fact she did have a son in Russia. ‘I direct my Executors to cable the news of my death to my eldest son Lieb Aronoff of Mohislav Russia,’ it reads. Hanna also wanted each of her nieces Shonia Zivin and Deborah Fishbain of Minsk to each receive £5. Despite her first husband’s fanaticism, she kept her connection to Judaism. The Ballarat Hebrew Congregation and Rabbi Benzion Lenzer from the East Melbourne *Shule* were each promised £5. Other money was to be divided among her four surviving children, including Baron, who she also requested make a home for her husband, Hyman, after she died. That onus would fall on Rose. Hanna’s horse, waggonette and harness cart would go to her husband. She set aside money to cover her funeral expenses and £20 for her tombstone at the Old Ballarat Cemetery. It is bigger than Hyman’s and in better condition.

Until 2016 I was unaware of the stories about Hyman and Hanna's first marriages. Jessica Pearlman Fields, who lives in California and is Uncle Lloyd's Granddaughter, revealed the stories on the Pearlman Facebook page after a distant relative gave her a copy of a story Metta [Zivin] Joseph had written about why her Grandmother Hanna Zivin came to Melbourne. Hanna's story, as told by Metta, also reveals another reason – apart from fleeing the Russian pogroms – why the Pearlmans chose Melbourne. It was Hanna, my Great Great-Grandmother, who was instrumental in the Pearlmans sailing here. According to Metta, a cousin or close friend of Hanna's, Mr Rapken, who was also from Russia and had settled in Melbourne, asked Hanna if she would accompany his wife to Hamburg and make sure she got on a ship for Melbourne. She agreed. Hanna spoke several languages, making her the perfect escort for a woman who was nervous about taking the overland journey from Russia to the port in Hamburg. Mr Rapken had come on his own to Melbourne because of his wife's fears about leaving her parents. Mrs Rapken eventually arrived in Melbourne, but hated the city's heat and was lonely. Metta says there was another reason why Mrs Rapken was unhappy:

In the course of time she discovered that Mr Rapken had had a few extramarital Affairs That made her even unhappier and he might have said to her, "What can I do to make you happy?" And she said, "The only thing that would make me happy would be if you brought my dear friend Hanna Zivin and her family."

Mr Rapken wrote to persuade Hanna and her family to come to Melbourne. He penned glowing letters about Australia describing the country as 'wonderful', and promised he would help Hanna and her family once they arrived. He probably paid their fare to Melbourne, according to Metta. Hanna's younger sister, Esther Granat and her husband, Harris, also decided to come with the Pearlmans to Melbourne. However, Mr Rapken was furious to see the Granats arrive with their three-year-old

daughter Edith. He disliked Esther Granat, and instead of helping to set up Hyman and Harris in work suggested they buy a horse and cart and sell fruit. Many Eastern European Jews who came to Victoria started as fruit hawkers.



*Harris and Esther [Zivin] Granat with Edith [far right] and Sara. Another child Elizabeth died in childhood. Photo: private collection of Shirley [Cowen] Spivakovsky and David Spivakovsky. Harris and Esther are Shirley's Grandparents.*

Metta writes that both men were terribly upset because they thought they would be store managers for Mr Rapken. But he told them they first had to learn English and the best way to do this was to work as fruit hawkers. 'All you do is learn the phrase: 'Look in the basket,' Mr Rapken advised. Baron, Hyman and Harris began hawking with the horse and cart in inner Melbourne.

**I wonder if this explanation** of how the Pearlmans came to be in Melbourne is correct. The fossicking begins again, so I sift documents full of useless detail until I strike a few nuggets. The Granats are listed on the same page as the Pearlmans on the *Sommerfeld* passenger list. Other documents show that a few Mr Rapkens existed; Metta doesn't mention his first name. He was just Mr Rapken, the big man, who opened a general store on Smith Street in Collingwood, which he later sold to Foy and



Gibson Department Store. Trawling through more archival records reveals that Moses Aaron Rapken, an importer, opened a store at 153 Smith Street Collingwood. The original Foy and Gibson department store, modelled on Le Bon Marché in Paris, was located at the same address.

A picture is forming about the Jacobs' and Pearlmans' travels to Melbourne, which I could now post on the Pearlman Facebook page. The details stir my cousin's Ruth Leon's memory. She replies in a post that Zelman Cowen, a former Australian governor-general, refers to the Pearlmans' journey to Melbourne in his memoirs published in 2006.

I drop everything and race up the road from my Fitzroy terrace, not even registering the comforting scents wafting from the Italian cake-shops on Lygon Street, to The University of Melbourne's Baillieu library. I hurtle up two flights of stairs, almost tripping, before locating the book. Holding my breath I scroll down the index to find the name Pearlman listed on pages nine to eleven. My heart thumps in anticipation. I might be able to confirm Metta's story; after all Sir Zelman was also professor of law and a vice-chancellor at the University of Queensland. He should know, shouldn't he?

A little in from page nine, Sir Zelman begins:

In 1891 Esther and Harris Granat with their three-year-old daughter Edith made the journey from Mohilev to Melbourne in company with my grandmother's much older sister Hannah and her husband Hyman Pearlman. It is said that when Hannah told my grandmother of their intention to go my grandmother said she and her family would also go, and whatever my grandfather thought of the idea, he complied. The family tradition is that the Pearlmans decided to take the bold step, having been persuaded by the inducements of an earlier emigrant to Australia, Moses Aaron Rapken.

I sit cross-legged hemmed in between the shelves on level two. I stare at the rows of

books but they are just a blur of washed out colours. ‘Metta’s story rings true,’ I mouth. I read on. Mr Rapken asked Hanna to escort his wife to Hamburg and then encouraged her to sail to Melbourne to support his wife. He was unhappy that the Granats came out with the Pearlmans, and did little to help them except to advise they should be fruit hawkers. I keep reading and the details are the same as Metta’s: Harris sold Esther’s handiwork, the Pearlmans and Granats decided to leave for Ballarat for better opportunities.

‘The curious story is told in the family,’ Sir Zelman writes. Now it is told in the Pearlman family with the emphasis on a small, but feisty woman, who spoke many languages and owned a horse and cart and whose gravestone is bigger than her husband’s. She must have loved her daughter-in-law Rose, who lived near Hanna in Ballarat. Hanna’s will stipulated that Rose receive her gold brooch.



*Ballarat Old Cemetery, 2016. In official records and in newspaper death notices, ‘Hannah’ is spelt with an ‘h’. Her will refers to her as Anna.*

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## Chapter Four: The Rose Jacobs' Family Home.

**Moubray Street, Melbourne, 2016; Mackenzie Street, Melbourne, 1889 to 2016**

‘I went to Mackenzie Street for dinner and to eat my aunt’s pickles,’ Uncle Lloyd says licking his lips.

‘I went there as a kid,’ my mum jumps in. ‘But I was a bit frightened of the house, because it was big and dark. We never stayed in the main part but would sit in the kitchen out in the backyard. I did like the kitchen because you went up a spiral staircase to get into the larder.’

We’re sitting on a wooden bench in the manicured gardens of the Freemason Homes. Uncle Lloyd usually meets us at the front of the electronic doors, but today we find him asleep in the sunshine with his book, *The Great Swindle* by Pierre Lemaitre, resting precariously on his lap.

‘Uncle Lloyd do you know why Rose and her parents settled in Mackenzie Street?’

I get blank faces from Uncle Lloyd and my mum.

‘Was it because the house was close to the East Melbourne *Shule*?’

Again, Uncle Lloyd and my mum look at each other blankly.

‘I suppose the *Shule* had something to do with it,’ my mum says shrugging her shoulders.

The double-storey brick terrace at 45 Mackenzie Street housed Annie and Solomon Jacobs and their children Samuel, Rose, Millie, Leah, Morris and Celia.

‘Uncle Lloyd, is it true that Rose’s father had his boot finishing business at the front of the house?’

‘Yes,’ my mum pipes in.

‘And one of the sons, Samuel, had a boot business just off Mackenzie Street,’ Uncle Lloyd adds.

‘Did you go there, Uncle Lloyd?’

‘No, the business closed before I moved to Melbourne,’ he murmurs distracted by the thought of tea and coffee. ‘You must want a tea or coffee. Ah, go on.’

‘No, I’m fine. I’ve got more questions, though.’

‘Oh, you’re ripping me apart with questions,’ Uncle Lloyd laughs. He then makes a grunting sound as he pretends to prise his chest open with his bare hands.

‘How do you know about Samuel’s business Uncle Lloyd?’

‘I just know,’ he says giving me a wink.

Melbourne rate notices show that the Jacobs started leasing 1 Mackenzie Street in 1889 and moved to 45 Mackenzie Street in 1890. I don’t know where they lived before moving to Mackenzie Street; however, rate notices indicate that a Solomon Jacobs had a boot business in North Melbourne in the late 1880s. It’s likely the Jacobs moved to a newly-built terrace home in Mackenzie Street. Before 1890, there was no number 45, 43, 41 or 39 in Mackenzie Street, which suggests the four terrace homes were built just before 1890. While the ownership of 45 Mackenzie Street has changed hands a number of times over the life of the home, there was always a member of the Jacobs family who leased it. For seventy-one years from 1890 to 1961, the house was a Jacobs’ home until it and three other terraces were taken over by the Victoria Police Association, which eventually demolished the homes to erect the VPA building.

‘Mum, you always told me that the Russell Street Police Headquarters was built where the house once stood? But that was built in the early forties. You would have been visiting *the house* in the 1950s,’ I tell her.

‘Would I? You know more than me,’ my mum says startled.

Uncle Lloyd starts chortling at the news and at the baffled look on my mum’s face.

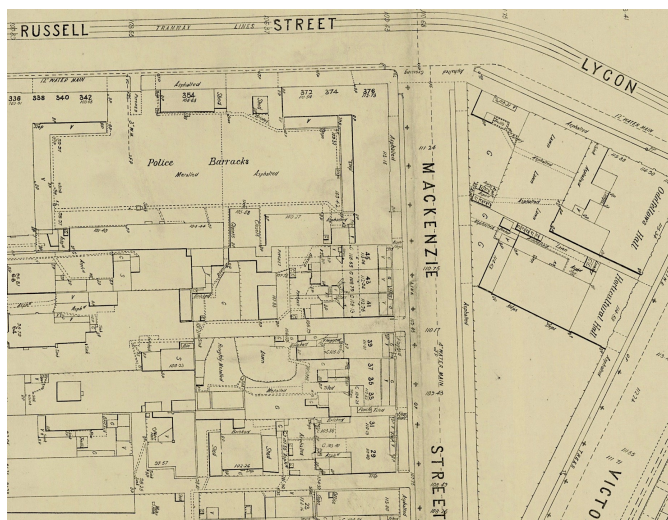
‘Ah, go on, have one of these biscuits to celebrate the news,’ Uncle Lloyd tells us, still laughing.

The rate notices also reveal how good Uncle Lloyd is at recalling details about Mackenzie Street's history. Annie and Solomon Jacobs' son, Samuel, did have a factory, where he made boots, off Mackenzie Street. Could that have been where Rose worked? On her wedding certificate, she's described as a machinist, which is news to Uncle Lloyd and my mum, who are unaware she had a job. I tell them that archival material and rates notices are exciting for what they can unearth. 'Eh,' Uncle Lloyd and my mum say in unison while stabbing at biscuit crumbs on their plates. The notices also tell stories about Rose's neighbours, I blurt out. 'What?' my mum asks with a quizzical glint in her eye. 'There's not a Slutzkin, Goldblatt or Rubinstein,' I say. 'Many of the Mackenzie Street renters had English and Irish-sounding names like Richardson, Chambers and O'Leary.'

Despite the lack of Jews living in the small street, it was central to Jewish life, particularly before the outbreak of World War II. Rose only had a six-minute walk to the East Melbourne *Shule* in Albert Street, which was established in 1877. She could walk or take a cable tram to the *kosher* butcher in Little Collins Street at the rear of the old Eastern Market, where she could buy spiced beef. A three-minute walk would take Rose to Issac Rotenberg Butcher at 351 Swanston Street, where she could choose from a large selection of *kosher* meat and small goods such as garlic worsht sausages and sheep's tongue. Reverend Benzion Lenzer, from the East Melbourne *Shule* killed the poultry there most days between 8 and 11am. Then a small group of women would pluck the birds dry instead of loosening their feathers with hot water, which was the habit of non-Jews. Now the fresh poultry was ready for customers to take it home and wash and clean it, and prepare it for making soup. They would rub salt over the bird and leave it for an hour, and wash it again. The chicken would now be ready

to be boiled with peppercorns, onions and carrot. Customers would buy the older hens or fowls that had stopped laying eggs. Although they took longer to cook, they were cheaper than roasting chickens and made a more fulsome soup. I recall my mum often telling me this, a tip that she got from her mother, Millie, and advice she probably got from Rose. The flesh was never discarded and was torn up and dropped into the soup.

Forty-five Mackenzie Street was also the gateway to Carlton, which housed Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe before World War II. On her family visits to Mackenzie Street after Rose had moved to Ballarat in 1900, she could stroll her old neighbourhood taking in the northern section of Russell Street, which becomes Lygon Street, Carlton.



*Mackenzie Street, gateway to Lygon Street, Carlton. Oddfellows Hall is to the right of Mackenzie Street.*

*Source: Melbourne Metropolitan Board of Works, Detail Plan, 1895. State Library of Victoria.*

She'd be able to smell the scent of cinnamon butter cakes wafting from Monaco Cakes, a Jewish cake shop, which moved across the Yarra River to St Kilda to follow the migration of Jews to the south. The cake shop, which changed its name to Monarch Cakes, opened in Acland Street in 1934 and is still a St Kilda fixture today. Rose would have also smelt the comforting aroma of borscht with whole boiled potatoes from Drummond Street's Cohen's Continental Café. It also dished up

chicken giblets, and chopped herring with black olives. All the meats were well cooked, 'not half raw as many Gentiles prefer'. Rose's daughters Millie, Faye and Celia continued the tradition of eating at Cohen's. Millie, my Grandmother, and her husband Samuel, would take their children Barry and my mum, Roberta there. They took the tram into the city from St Kilda and then the bus to Carlton. Cohen's no longer exists.

In the 1890s, Rose's densely populated streets on the fringe of the city were a magnet for Jewish hawkers selling fruit and wares. She probably knew some personally like Maurice Cohen, who often left his wagon laden with drapery and a few watches at the back of 1 Mackenzie Street, where he boarded and where the Jacobs once lived. Rose could watch Maurice fasten his iron padlocks to secure the wooden doors at both ends of his wagon. The city was often tough, particularly during the 1890s depression, forcing hawkers to thwart thieves' attempts to smash the padlocks. But iron was no match if the thieves used axes to grind away at the locks and guillotine the doors. Maurice was a victim of the axe villains, who stole £500 of goods when they ransacked his wagon on a misty evening on 10 May 1889 in Mackenzie Street. Fortunately, he had taken the jewellery inside to his room, but he still lost rolls of velvet, plush and lace.

**Mackenzie Street is short and narrow.** I had often walked along it to get to RMIT University where I studied journalism. The street never meant anything to me then except as a short cut to the university. Now it is a family landmark because Rose and her family lived there. It takes thirty minutes to walk from my home in Fitzroy in the inner north, which also housed Jews before World War II, to Mackenzie Street. While



walking I realise Rose would have taken a similar path if she had wanted to go to the sumptuous Carlton Gardens that wrap around the Royal Exhibition Building.



*Mackenzie Street is to the east of the Old Melbourne Gaol [left-hand side of map]. East Melbourne Shule is in Albert Street, and is identified with the Star of David. Source: City of Melbourne*

Surely, I think to myself as I stroll past the building admiring its Florentine-inspired cathedral dome, Rose and her family must have viewed it as well. Would Rose have been impressed with it? The building was only eight-years-old when Rose arrived in Melbourne in 1888. I then realise that Rose probably cut through the Carlton Gardens from her home in Mackenzie Street, crossed Nicholson Street to Princes Street and meandered along it until she reached Brunswick Street in Fitzroy. There she would have found Cathedral Hall, where Jewish dances were often held. As I edge closer to Mackenzie Street by crossing La Trobe Street, I smile at the thought that over one hundred years later I am observing some of the buildings and streetscapes Rose would have seen. Some of them haven't changed, giving me a romantic sense that Rose and I are both suspended in time. I shake that notion quickly when I arrive at Mackenzie Street with its tall residential tower blocks. The spot where Rose's family home once

stood looks sad. The brown brick four-storey Police Association Building is still there, but it is drab and derelict and covered in posters advertising ‘Bush Doof’. Nevertheless, I stare absently at the building and begin daydreaming a scenario in which Rose meets Hyman Pearlman and his son Baron and Hyman’s friend Harris Granat, who all worked as fruit hawkers in the inner-north of Melbourne. It’s a small item I had read in *The Argus* about a robbery in Carlton, which prompts the tantalising thought that Rose met the trio while they were plying their trade. In June 1899, a constable arrested three boys for stealing a basket of fruit from a hawker’s wagon in Macarthur Street in Carlton and planting the basket in the backyard of a house in nearby Drummond Street. The hawker was Hyman Pearlman. What if Hyman and his son Baron had been selling their fruit in the years before 1900 in Mackenzie Street, a stone’s throw from Macarthur and Drummond streets?

‘Uncle Lloyd, do you know how Rose and Baron met?’

‘No, I don’t. But how’s your love life Erica? How’s that new fella going? When do I get my invitation? I’m not getting any younger,’ Uncle Lloyd winks.

I squirm uncomfortably in my chair.

‘Please, back to Rose,’ I blush. ‘Did Rose ever tell you how she met your father, Uncle Lloyd?’

‘No. Look I wasn’t around when they met,’ he grins again.

‘They probably met at the East Melbourne *Shule*,’ my mum interjects.

They could have. The East Melbourne Synagogue, which opened in 1877, was Rose and Baron’s *Shule*. It was where they married in 1900. In the late nineteenth century it became known as the *Shule* for Eastern European Jews, like Rose and Baron, who had settled in the CBD and inner-north. Although I cannot locate a CBD or inner-north address for the Pearlmans, there is evidence they had attended the East Melbourne *Shule* because Hanna had left money in her will to the *Shule*’s Rabbi Benzion Lenzer. I also wonder if the Pearlmans and Granats, whose prospects for making a solid living from hawking were dim due to the 1890s depression, may have shared a house together to save money. Harris Granat is listed as holder of the lease at 8 Malvina Place, off Grattan Street in Carlton, where eight people lived. The families’ closest *Shule* would have been East Melbourne.

Rose and Baron could have met at Jewish community functions in the CBD or in the inner-north. Perhaps there was a chance meeting at The Bazaar Fancy and Doll Fair in December 1898, reported on by *The Hebrew Standard of Australasia*. Jews, including Rose, helped organise to raise funds for the Melbourne Hebrew School. Rose, who was twenty-two at the time, was one of two honorary treasurers for the event, and she and her sister Millie helped to run the ‘Lucky Stall’. Many Jews from the local area, which could have included the twenty-two year old Baron, his parents and sisters, attended the fair held at the Old Trades Hall in Lygon Street in Carlton.

Or perhaps Rose and Baron met at a Jewish dance organised by the Society of Judeans held at Cathedral Hall in Fitzroy, now part of the Australian Catholic

University. It makes sense. After all my parents met at a Jewish dance held at the old Empire Ballroom, now called 'Poof Doof: A Gay Club for Homos', on Chapel Street in South Yarra. There were other social events where Rose and Baron could have struck up a friendship. The Young Jewish Social Club had rooms at the Oddfellows Hall, just around the corner from where Rose lived. The club organised picnics to scenic spots like Healsville. The train journey and time for eating would have given Rose and Baron plenty of time to get to know each other. And they did have a lot in common. They were the same age and Jewish, and also had Eastern European heritage mixed with a smattering of English culture. Rose was born in London, but brought up in the East End, dominated by Eastern European Jews. Baron's parents were Russian and came straight to Melbourne, but Baron spent two years in England before sailing to Melbourne with his younger sister. About thirty-five per cent of Jewish migrants to Australia lived in the East End for an average seven years before settling in Australia.

Rose and Baron had stories to share about their lives in England, the details of their steamship adventures and hopes for the future in their new country. But this chatter would have taken place with the knowledge that Russian, Polish and other European Jews were being attacked. Newspapers in Victoria frequently published stories about anti-Semitism, the looting of Jewish shops and the beating of the shops' owners. In 1898, a mob pillaged several Jewish shops in Paris shouting, 'Down with the Jews.' In June 1906, the *Leader* ran a story from London about massacres in Bialystok:

Reports which have escaped the attention of the Russian censor show that the massacres of Jews at Bielostok were far more terrible than has hitherto been stated. The uncensored reports of special correspondents representing Polish newspapers, which have been published in Austria, declare that the massacres were arranged, by the authorities at Bielostok. The numbers of the victims are variously estimated at from 700 to

2000. The Jewish residents of many other towns, the reports state, are panic stricken, believing that the Bielostok outrages, are only the beginning of an organised series of massacres. On their behalf the four Jewish members of the Duma have made an appeal for foreign intervention, in order to avert what they fear will be a terrible catastrophe.

In *Shule* Rose and Baron may have listened to Rabbi Lenzer expressing gratitude to the wider Jewish population for raising £2000 for the persecuted Jewish families in Russia. And they may have heard him ask the congregation to pray that the ‘time might arrive when all Israel would be joined together under their own government and in their own land’. It was a message Rose understood. Rose’s family at 45 Mackenzie Street had a Jewish National Fund little blue tin with the gold Star of David embossed on the side, which they’d pop pennies in to help support Jewish settlement in the British mandate for Palestine, later Israel. The tin rested in the kitchen near the ladder that reached to the larder. My mum’s family home in St Kilda had a little blue tin, too.

### **Leaving Mackenzie Street – and returning, 1897 to 1961**

Rose was the second of the Jacobs sisters to leave Mackenzie Street to marry. Her wedding service took place at The East Melbourne *Shule* on 13 June, 1900.



*Interior of the East Melbourne Shule in 2017. Little has changed since Rose and Baron married in the Shule. The piano, according to Rabbi Gutnick, chief rabbi at East Melbourne, would have been there when Rose and Baron married.*

I try to imagine Rose before her wedding. Was she excited? Were the Pearlmans supportive? Both Uncle Lloyd and his younger sister, Faye, would tell the family story that the Pearlmans thought that Rose wasn't good enough for their son, Baron. There was a perception among the Pearlmans, according to Uncle Lloyd and his sister, that because Hyman was always praying and worked at the Ballarat Synagogue, they were superior to the Jacobs. Perhaps this feeling of superiority was reinforced because Rose's mother and father were illiterate. Ironically, Dora, one of Hyman's and Hanna's daughters married Mark Bryer, a Russian Jew, who could not read or write but became a successful tailor.

There is one studio photo of Rose in her wedding dress. Despite washed-out liver coloured spots dotting the picture, Rose's face still has its dreamy and ethereal look, the same expression I detected in her pearl dress photo. A swath of lace acts as a backdrop, which Rose almost melts into. Her dress is made partly of fine lace and cream silk. Ruffled lace drapes her arms and neck, and two pieces of silk form a 'V' shape and are fastened with a brooch to her cinched waist. A cream shoe peeks out from under the floor-length gown. Rose's veil is held in place on her curly hair with a thread of beads. One curl sits strategically in the middle of her forehead.

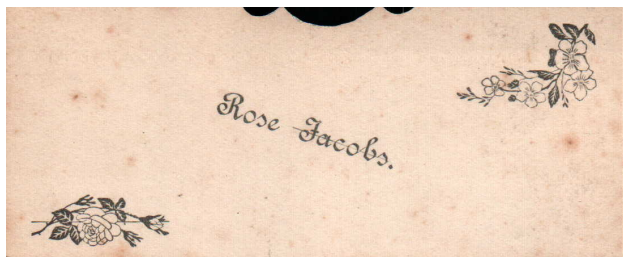


*Rose's Hebrew name as listed on the 'groom's index' at the East Melbourne Shule is Roza bat Shlomo [daughter of Solomon]. The wedding took place on a Wednesday, which was common because it could not take place on Shabbat [Friday to Saturday night]. Rose was twenty-five when she married, the same age as her husband Baron Pearlman.*

Uncle Lloyd beams when he looks at the photos I've collected and arranged on black cardboard slotted into archival sleeves, which are secured in a bound black folder. He tells me this is the first time he has seen them.

'Oh, that's a nice dress,' Uncle Lloyd says of Rose's wedding gown. 'But that's before she had all the kids. I can't remember her buying dresses for herself.'

We turn another page in the album. My mum, who is standing behind Uncle Lloyd and me, cranes her neck so hard she bumps our heads. Uncle Lloyd is too preoccupied with the album to notice.



'Oh geez, her place name,' Uncle Lloyd exclaims. 'It says Rose.'

‘And her invitation!’



I don't know why Mr and Mrs A Davis are mentioned instead of the Pearlmans.

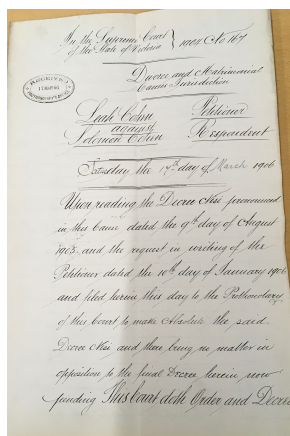
Perhaps, the Mr A Davis is Abraham Davis, who was president of the East Melbourne *Shule* at the time of the Rose and Baron's wedding. Were the Davis' helping to pay for the wedding? Uncle Lloyd and my mum have never heard of the Davis couple and despite extensive searches they remain a mystery.

I wish I had found Rose and Baron's *ketubah*, the Jewish wedding contract, and a photograph of the couple together. However, a cousin, Lynda Fridman, found a nugget of information for me: Rose's wedding band. Lynda's mother Faye, Rose's youngest daughter, had inherited the ring, and now Lynda is the custodian. It is a simple gold band with Hebrew inscribed around the inner rim. It is the line of the *shema*, the centerpiece of Jewish prayer, 'Hear, Israel, the Lord is our God, the lord is One.' Rose and Baron lived at Mackenzie Street after their wedding until they set off for Ballarat either late in 1900 or early 1901 because Baron hoped that his work prospects as a hawker would be better in the town. Besides, Moses Rapken had already told Hyman, Baron's father, and Harris Granat to move to Ballarat, which they did at the turn of the century.



Rose's two younger sisters also married at the East Melbourne *Shule*, but unlike Rose, they would return later to live at 45 Mackenzie Street. One was Leah, who left Mackenzie Street after she married Solomon Cohen, a factory packer, in a civil service at the North Carlton registry office on 26 May 1897 and then celebrated a religious wedding ceremony at the East Melbourne Synagogue on 27 January 1898. It is curious that the two services were nine months apart. And, there are no descriptions in the Jewish press of the wedding dress or details of whether there was a celebration afterwards. The couple settled not far from Mackenzie Street along Victoria Parade in East Melbourne.

Leah returned to Mackenzie Street in 1900 with Letty [Charlotte], born in 1897, after Solomon left them. He went to Sydney for a year and then disappeared to England, most probably to Liverpool. Leah petitioned for divorce in December 1904 on the grounds of desertion and was granted it. She never remarried.



*Leah's dissolution of marriage.  
The petition is 44-pages and is held at  
the PROV.*



*Leah [Jacobs] Cohen and Charlotte [(Letty)], 1904. Leah would have been twenty-five, and Letty, seven. This photograph was turned into a postcard and Leah sent it to Rose. On the back, Leah has written, 'My Dear Sister Rosy, I am sending you a photo of Letty. Hope you will like it. I remain your loving sister Leah and darling niece Letty.'*

Leah was now back in Mackenzie Street with Letty, the daughter who was conceived before Leah and Solomon married. She also began working as a forewoman in her father's and brother's boot making businesses. If it were not for 45 Mackenzie Street, Leah and her child could have ended up in a seedy rooming house or even on the street. Nor did Leah's parents, Annie and Solomon, hide her in a home for single, pregnant women after they learnt she was having a baby. Leah stayed in the double-storey family home where she gave birth to the little girl, who was brought into the world by Mrs Downey, the midwife. It was the destitute with no family support and poor pregnant unmarried women who went to the 'Melbourne Lying-in Hospital and Infirmary for Diseases of Women and Children', now the Royal Women's Hospital.

While tracking down details about Leah's marriage and Letty's birth I become side-tracked and search for what happened to women whose husbands left them at the turn of the twentieth century. *The Age*, *Argus* and country newspapers often ran stories about men who deserted their wives and abandoned their children. Some of the men had bashed their wives; others drank too much. Some women were forced to sell their homes or go into domestic service. One judge warned men about deserting their wives

after a husband was extradited to Victoria from Brisbane for leaving his wife and seven children and failing to provide monetary support. In 1900, *The Age* reported that the Hebrew Ladies' Benevolent Society had dealt with '200 cases of distress' and that 'assistance had been afforded in connection with a large number of cases of sickness and deserted wives'.

Leah remained at Mackenzie Street until her death at the age of seventy-seven. From the time I was a child I'd heard that someone in the family had died after being hit by a tram. Faye's daughter Lynda thought the family member was Rose's sister Leah because she recalls Faye telling her how Leah died. Other members in the family were unsure whether it was actually a tram that caused Leah's death. Inquest records held at the Public Record Office reveal what happened to Leah.

On 7 June 1957 Leah Golda Cohen, [Leah Golda Bat Kopel Yaacov], who had kept her married name, died in the Royal Melbourne Hospital as a result of head injuries after a tram hit her on Saturday morning 1st June. Apparently, she didn't notice the tram shunting despite her hearing and eyesight being normal. Lying beside her semi-conscious body was a cane basket, hessian shopping bag, reading glasses and a purse. She was on her way to the Victoria Market, her Saturday morning ritual, when the tram hit her on Victoria Street, close to where she lived on Mackenzie Street. Leah's daughter, Letty, became worried when her mother failed to return from her shopping trip because she was always back home by 11am. Letty Cohen Keast had the task of identifying the body of her mother at the Melbourne Mortuary on 7 June.

Letty, who was sixty at the time of Leah's death, took on the lease of 45 Mackenzie Street, where she lived for sixty-one of her seventy-one years. It was handy to work in Bourke Street in the CBD, where she was a clerk for Myer Department Store. Did she spend all those years in Mackenzie Street to keep Leah company? Did she need her mother's company? Or perhaps she remained there later in life because of her secret, the type only the closest of family and friends know but don't mention. Letty's boyfriend wasn't Jewish; he was Anglican. She was the first in the Jacobs family to be romantically linked to a non-Jew. Rabbis often pontificated about the 'problem of intermarriage', warning that Jewish numbers would fall. Blame was often apportioned to the women who sought to marry non-Jews, because Judaism follows the matrilineal line.

Letty eventually married her boyfriend, Raymond Keast, at the age of fifty-four in 1952, after Raymond's first wife died in 1950. Raymond had fought in World War 1, married Amy Louise in 1925 and either divorced or separated in the 1930s. After Raymond and Letty married Raymond moved into 45 Mackenzie Street and stayed there until he died in 1960. Letty remained in the house until 1961 when the Victoria Police Association acquired it. She moved to a little single-fronted weatherboard house at 19 Rosamond Street in St Kilda East. In the sitting room she kept her wedding presents in a glass cabinet with the cards still attached.

'Letty used to drink acid water. She had a sharp tongue,' Uncle Lloyd tells me.

‘But she was very good to Erica when she was very little,’ my mum interjects. ‘When I’d take her to Myer, Letty would put money in the machine, you know the rocking horse, so Erica could have a ride.’

‘You’re joking,’ Uncle Lloyd laughs, but he quickly changes tact and ponders Letty’s fortunes. ‘Look, she didn’t have much of a life.’

‘Well, I reckon it’s pretty sad. Her husband dies and then she has to leave Mackenzie Street. She’d lived in that house basically all her life and then had to move out by herself,’ I pipe in.

Celia, the youngest of Rose’s sisters, left Mackenzie Street in 1909 at the age of twenty-one to marry Samuel Phillips at the East Melbourne Synagogue, where Rabbi Jacob Lenzer performed the ceremony. *The Jewish Herald* reported that Celia wore an empire-shaped gown of oriental satin, trimmed with net and pearls. Letty, who was twelve at the time, was a bridesmaid. Rose isn’t mentioned, but her sister Millie is because she was also a bridesmaid. Like her sister Rose, Celia also moved to Ballarat because it was the town where her husband Samuel and his widowed mother were living.

Samuel was born in post-goldrush Ballarat, became a draper and, like many men in Ballarat, wanted to show his allegiance to Australia by signing up for World War 1. This was despite Samuel suffering from kidney disease, which had sent him to Castlemaine Hospital for a month in 1913, and to bed for six weeks at home in 1914.



When Samuel left for the Middle East in early 1915, Celia had two young children, Thelma and Joseph, to look after.

Samuel died at the Third Australian General Hospital in Cairo of nephritis, kidney disease in February 1916, and was buried at the Old Jewish Cemetery in Cairo by Rabbi Solomon Haini. Celia signed for his effects: a lighter, newspaper cuttings, a pencil, one coin, glasses in a case and a British war medal.

I post the information about Celia's husband on the Pearlman Facebook page along with a photo of Celia, who is wearing a brooch that fastens her fur stole. Ruth Leon soon made an amazing discovery:



‘That brooch looks as if it has a soldier on it,’ she commented on the Pearlman Facebook page.

I hadn't noticed the brooch's image because I was too pre-occupied gazing at Celia's cloth beret with the applique of leaves and acorns, her high cheekbones and luminous

eyes. I take a magnifying glass to the photo, which reveals a picture of Samuel. He's wearing an army hat. Celia returned to her ancestral home on Mackenzie Street with her two young children, Thelma, who had a clubfoot, and Joe, who was deaf.

Celia never remarried, but she did leave Mackenzie Street in the 1930s to take over the license of The Terminus Hotel in Williamstown. The theatrical types who drank at her hotel replaced the familiarity of the family home. Uncle Lloyd would describe her as 'rough', but I think she was probably gregarious and self-sufficient. In 1940, a group of men demanded drinks after closing time and bashed on the hotel's wooden door. Celia bolted it and rang the police. This didn't deter her from the hotel business. In 1944, Celia and her sister Millie, who had been living at Mackenzie Street, moved to Ballarat to take over The Railway Hotel. Celia continued running it until 1952.

After the hotel venture, Celia moved back to Melbourne and for a short time to Mackenzie Street. Her final address was Nepean Highway in North Brighton above a cafe she ran with her daughter. Celia died in July 1964 at the age of seventy-seven of acute pancreatitis and cirrhosis of the liver.

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## Chapter Five: Rose's Synagogue.

### Melbourne to Barkly Street Ballarat, 2015. Rose's Synagogue 1900 and 1927

We're on our way to Ballarat in the middle of winter. Three of us – my mum, me and cousin Jennifer – are direct descendants of Rose. Ruth, the driver, is Jennifer's mum, and was married to Rose's fourth grandchild, Derek, who died aged forty-eight in 1998. When we arrive in Ballarat, one hundred and sixteen kilometres from Melbourne, we'll join a self-guided tour of Jewish Ballarat organised by the Jewish Museum of Australia. Our first stop will be the Ballarat Synagogue in Barkly Street, which we've never seen inside before. The Synagogue, built in 1861, is largely inactive now because most of the Jewish community has moved away from the old gold-mining town.

It's fitting that the Synagogue is the first place we visit because it was the centre of Rose's universe. It determined the streets where her family lived because they had to be within walking distance to the *Shule*. The Pearlmans rented houses at eight different addresses in Ballarat in the thirty years they resided in the town, and all their streets led to the Synagogue. It also determined their rituals. Behind the Synagogue was a *mikvah*, a ritual bath, which orthodox Jewish women, like Rose, used for purification and cleansing following menstruation and childbirth or before *Shabbat*. Rose's sons had their *bris* and *bar mitvahs* at the synagogue, and most of the children studied Hebrew and religious studies at the school attached to the Synagogue.

The Pearlmans' calendar was full of Jewish festivals celebrated as a community at their *Shule* and in their home and in the home of relatives and friends. There were the



joyous days such as *Rosh Hashanah*, the Jewish New Year, in which Rose, Baron and the children lit candles, attended *Shule* and had a festive meal. ‘They would have dipped slices of apple into honey and wished each other a “sweet new year”,’ my mum says. In the *Jewish Herald* they placed advertisements – along with other Jewish families – to wish their family and friends a happy New Year:

Mr and Mrs Baron Pearlman and Family and Mr Hyman Pearlman wish all relatives and friends a Bright and Prosperous New Year, and well over their fast. 128 Main-road, Ballarat East.

Soon after the Jewish New Year, there was the solemn day of *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement, where the family fasted, atoned for their transgressions and attended Synagogue where the Rabbi blew the *shofar*, which is made from a ram’s horn. And there were the fun times for the Pearlman children when they helped their Grandfather Hyman build and decorate their *Sukkah*, a booth, for the seven-day *Sukkot* festival that commemorates the time the Israelites spent in the wilderness after they were escaped their Egyptian slaves. The *Sukkah*, where the Pearlmans would sit in to say prayers and share meals, was decorated with fresh fruit because *Sukkot* is also an agricultural festival that celebrates the fruit harvest. *The Jewish Herald’s* and *Hebrew Standard of Australasia’s* Ballarat sections would report on the Ballarat identities who erected *Sukkahs* and how they decorated them. Hyman Pearlman, according to *Hebrew Standard*, ‘completed a pretty tabernacle’.

**Ruth parks the car** close to the deep gutter in Barkly Street and we pile out in silence as we take our first glimpse of the Synagogue nestled among the neighbouring houses. Jennifer hasn’t worn enough clothes to deflect the Ballarat chill and wraps her arms around her body as we stand in front of the low speckled-brown brick fence

patterned with Stars of David. Photos I've located of the Synagogue at the State Library of Victoria suggest the brick fence went up in the late 1950s or early 1960s. Earlier photos show the old white picket fence resembling packs of toothpicks.



*Ballarat Synagogue, corner of Barkly and Princes streets, 1950. Photo by Colin Caldwell. State Library of Victoria*

Now a huge Canary Island Pine partially obscures one of the Synagogue's Tuscan white columns. As we edge closer to the portico, we can see Hebrew inscribed in a golden brown high above two long windows that flank the portico. The words read, 'remnant of Israel'. The Synagogue is square and a brilliant white.



*Ballarat Synagogue, 2016*

It wasn't like this when Rose walked this path to the entrance; she would have seen the original brickwork. In the 1960s, the building was rendered.

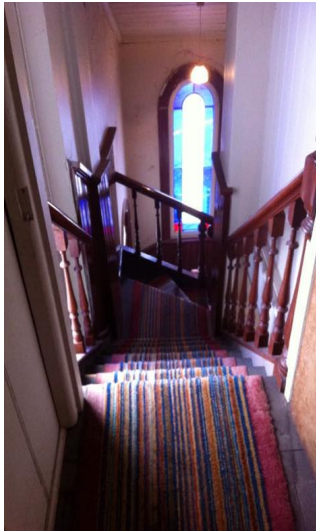
As I enter the Synagogue I imagine the sound of Rose's shoes clicking against the floorboards and I try to guess what she looked at first. Was it the memorial to the nine

Ballarat soldiers who died in ‘The Great War’? Samuel Phillips, the husband of her sister Celia, has his name painted in gold on the memorial board.



*Entrance to Ballarat Synagogue, 2016*

While the others scatter around the Synagogue, I find the entrance to a narrow, steep staircase, the gateway to the women’s gallery. I look up and see a severe bend at the halfway point in the now carpeted stairs. Rose and other women climbed these stairs into the private women’s world. There she would sit with the women probably talking about their families and perhaps the new items on display at Stone’s drapery store, a Jewish family business in Ballarat. I’ve seen and heard women talk amongst themselves at the St Kilda Synagogue where they either sit upstairs in the women’s gallery or downstairs where they are separated from the men by a symbolic gate. They pass on information about births and engagement, and talk about anything from clothes to food and relationships. Some do keep an eye on the prayers. After the service, they rejoin the men. For Rose and the other women, this meant navigating the narrow and incredibly steep stairs.



I climb down the stairs hanging tightly to the banister, concentrating on each step to try to prevent a tumble. I'm wearing jeans which makes it easier to negotiate the steps, but what if you were wearing a long skirt like Rose? Could she hitch it up as she contemplated each move?

My Grandmother, Millie, Rose's oldest daughter attended the Synagogue.



I imagine Millie peering over the cast iron gallery balustrading at the men below humming in Hebrew and turning the pages of their prayer book from right to left.

Was Millie entranced to see her Grandfather Hyman, a *shammas*, do the second reading? She knew some Hebrew. As a seven-year-old she won first prize in Hebrew reading awarded by the Hebrew school attached to the Ballarat synagogue. Until I found a story in *The Jewish Herald* about the prizes, my mum did not know that her mother Millie understood some Hebrew

The Synagogue has extra significance for my mum and me because Millie returned to get married in it. Millie had moved in with her Aunt Ruby Cohen, Baron's sister, in St Kilda so she could work as a secretary after studying at Stotts Secretarial College in Melbourne. Millie was the only one of Rose's children to marry in the Ballarat Synagogue. Her husband, Samuel Josephs, had no connection to Ballarat, although he had something in common with Rose and Baron: a link to London. Samuel was born in the Spitalfields, close to Fashion Street. Samuel and his family moved some time after 1911 to the north of London to the suburb of Golders Green, a heavily Jewish district. His sister opened a delicatessen shop there.

Millie bought her wedding dress in Ballarat at Lucas, a clothing store, created by Eleanor Price, a widow. Her dress no longer exists. My mum is upset that Millie's dress was wrecked when she was allowed to play dress-ups in it as a little girl. I also yearn for Millie's wedding dress after reading a description of it and how the Lucas dressmaker used pearls to embroider the gown. The weekly social newspaper, *Table Talk*, reported on the wedding dress:



The bridal gown was made of ivory georgette built over a foundation of pale pink. The bodice was embroidered in crystal beads and pearls while scallops of silk fringe hung from the low waistline and gave an uneven hem effect. The ivory train was also lined with pink and was embroidered with a big crystal true lover's crystal. Palest pink tulle composed the veil which was secured to the head by a coronet of orange blossom. A shower bouquet of pale pink and white flowers completed the toilette.

*Photo of Millie, private collection.*

Millie's wedding in January 1927 was a family affair. Millie's younger sister Celia was a bridesmaid as was a cousin, Kaye Cohen. The two little train bearers were Millie's much younger sister Faye and cousin June Cowen, Sir Zelman Cowen's sister. *Table Talk* described their dresses as 'chic little frocks of crepe de chine in two shades of pink set off with pretty wrist posies. Millie's brother Leslie was best man. There is no mention of Rose in the *Table Talk* article, except to say that Millie is the daughter of Mr and Mrs Baron Pearlman. In almost every article I read about the Pearlmans, Rose is invisible. Even the Ballarat vaccination records I examined for Rose's children only list Baron as a parent. It was the same for the other vaccination records of children: the fathers, not the mothers, are the only ones noted.

But Rose was the mother of the bride and at the wedding breakfast, held at the Alexandria Luncheon and Tearooms in Lydiard Street in Ballarat, relatives and friends would have gathered round her. Uncle Lloyd likes to tell me that Rose's sisters-in-law bickered amongst themselves, but that they all loved Rose. Her sister-in-law Nellie Jacobs set up a cosmetics company, Perfecta Toilet, and named a scent after Rose, Ashes of Rose. The tiny solid perfumes were sold in individual tins marked with a pink rose.

**I sit on** one of the wooden seats in the Ballarat synagogue watching speckles of sunlight illuminate the stained glass window overlooking the Ark. The window was installed in 1884 and supposedly dates from the time of Elizabeth I. I chuckle when a Ballarat local, Bernard Stone, informs us that the window was taken from an Irish mansion. It's magnificent. The centre is a rich blue representing the sky; the purple and yellow the Tabernacle in the wilderness. The window continues to tell stories.

The twelve inner circles represent the zodiac signs and the twelve points of the star, the twelve tribes. My eyes trace the Ark again. On either side are tablets: one in Hebrew and the other in English containing a prayer to the Royal Family. The English seems out of place because I have researched the Eastern European Jews coming to Victoria. But then I recall Rabbi John Levi's groundbreaking text, *Genesis*, about Jewish convicts on the First Fleet. Anglo-Jews were here first. Rose would have understood the allegiance to the English monarchy, having been born in London. So would Millie, who married a Londoner and Rose's daughter Celia, who also married an Englishman and Uncle Lloyd whose wife Edie [Edith] who was born in England. Rose is a very English name.

**It's easy** to find our way back to Melbourne. We take Ballarat Road. As we hit Footscray, I catch a glimpse of my university.

'That's it,' I tell my mum, pointing to a non-descript red-brick building. 'That's Victoria University.'

'Where are we exactly?' she asks.

'Footscray, you've been to Footscray before, although it was a long time ago. Didn't you go to Forges?'

'I think so,' she says.

‘Anyway, you read about Footscray in the book I leant you. You know, *Mothers*, about the women brought up in different eras and in different inner-suburbs of Melbourne. They all had the same thing in common – their struggles,’ I remind my mum.

‘What were they?’ Ruth and Jennifer chime in.

‘Poverty and their relationships with men. One woman lived in Footscray with her children and her husband left her for another woman,’ I respond.

‘It’s always been a man’s world,’ my mum butts in.

‘Another became pregnant and her boyfriend deserted her. So her parents sent their daughter off to a Salvation Army home in North Fitzroy to have the baby and he was taken away from her,’ I reel off.

‘That’s so sad,’ the women say.

‘It was tough for Rose, too, with all those kids and Baron,’ Ruth remarks.

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## Chapter Six: The Babies.

### Moubray Street, Melbourne, 2016; Main Road, Ballarat, 1901-1923

Inside the brown paper carry bag I can see a slither of burgundy cardboard poking through the white recycled tissue. I'm hesitant about revealing my 'show and tell' to Uncle Lloyd today. He's ninety-seven and a half and it will be a lot for him to take in. After all, he is the last surviving member of his family of eleven. I can't imagine what it must be like to reach a grand age and look at objects that prompt memories of more than eighty years ago, and of people long since gone. Would it seem like someone else's life?

The responsibility of asking Uncle Lloyd questions about what I'm planning to reveal is weighing on me. I stall for time by making chit chat about Uncle Lloyd's beloved St Kilda football club. But it's too late. His eagle eye has spotted me easing my hand into the paper bag and fiddling with the tissue.

'Geez, what have you got now?' he asks.

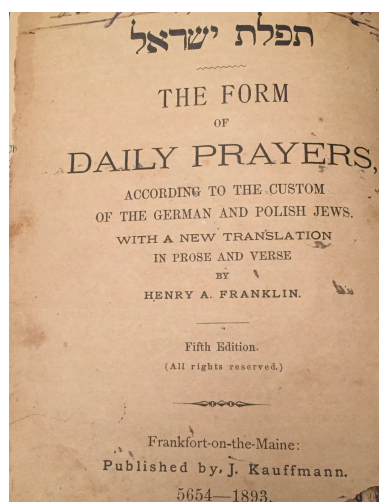
'Rose's *siddur*,' I respond.

I gently remove the prayer book from its cocoon of tissue and place it on the small round table. Uncle Lloyd, my mum and I are crowded around in the Freemasons lounge.

'Look at the good condition it's in,' Uncle Lloyd teases as I gingerly open the cover that's hanging by a few ancient strips of tape.

‘It has Rose’s handwriting,’ I say caressing Rose’s perfect copperplate. ‘She wrote the dates of when her were children born, some of her grandchildren and the deaths of relatives.’

Uncle Lloyd has never seen Rose’s *siddur* before. ‘Oh dear, people’s births,’ Uncle Lloyd says astonished at the list Rose kept. ‘Harold. Ah, look at this. Sam, oh, Sam, he died in the war. Oh, here I am. *Mazel Tov!* Valda. God, that’s little Betty. Oh, there’s Leslie, second of the twenty-second battalion.’



*Rose's Siddur. Faye, her daughter, continued writing relatives' births, deaths and marriages in it. Faye's daughter Lynda has also entered dates in the Siddur.*



*Rose's handwriting learnt at the Jews' Free School, Spitalfields, London. Rose's Siddur.*

Uncle Lloyd turns the pages searching for more dates then closes the *siddur's* cover and insists I pull out the photo album again. I was worried that viewing the births, marriages and deaths in his mother’s handwriting for the first time might have an

emotional effect on him I'd regret. But I was projecting how I might feel, and had underestimated the time Uncle Lloyd wanted to reflect on and discuss Rose and his siblings in Ballarat.

The three of us stare at the photo of Rose in her dress that looks as if it was made from discarded hessian bags. This time I notice an oblong-shaped cloth bag hanging from her apron. It's a peg bag. It's bulging, signalling nappies and sheets are ready to be hung on the line. Rose's apron is partially obscured because she is holding a baby with chubby legs. We can just make out 1920 in faint pencil on the back of the small photo, but there is no name. The baby has light-coloured hair and round eyes. We conclude it has to be Uncle Lloyd because he would be the right age in the photo: about seven months. We compare the photo to another two of Uncle Lloyd when he is about five and ten and he has the same shaped eyes and light hair.

As we stare at the photo, I work out that it must have been taken at Rose's home in Main Road in Ballarat. I wonder if Uncle Lloyd was born there, and if his siblings were born at their previous homes in Eureka, O'Brien and Channel streets.

'Uncle Lloyd were you and your brothers and sisters born at home?' I ask.

'I don't remember but I do remember screaming at my *bris*,' he says grinning.

It's the answer I should have expected. We all laugh.

**On 3 February 1919**, Uncle Lloyd was born pure, completely free from original sin like all Jewish babies. The day before the mild weather would have allowed Rose to say her prayers without dripping sweat on to her *siddur*. The 3<sup>rd</sup> of February was different. Hot winds swirled bringing dust and the ominous smell of bushfire smoke from the Windermere and Cardigan districts. The maximum temperature in the shade

at the Mt Pleasant Observatory was 33 degrees Celsius. It was even hotter in town. And would have been hotter again in Ballarat East in Rose's weatherboard home at 128 Main Road with the canvas and paper lined walls. There was a slight cool change in the afternoon Uncle Lloyd was born in Rose's home, but the weatherboard would have already soaked up the fierce February heat.

Rose was forty-three when she gave birth at home for the eighth time with Uncle Lloyd. Millie, Rose's daughter, who was sixteen at the time, was old enough to fetch the nurse, Mrs Pierce. Giving birth was often different for the wealthier women living near Lake Wendouree. They had doctors visit their brick homes, a live-in midwife and maids to do the domestic chores. Some poorer women went to a 'private hospital' in Ballarat, because they often had no room at home to give birth. To make some money, women applied to have a room or two in their houses designated a 'hospital' for midwifery purposes. The houses were much like the homes the mothers lived in: a weatherboard or small wood and corrugated iron home with walls lined with hessian and paper. Open drains were close to back doors. The better 'private hospital' homes had plastered walls and an inside bathroom. The women, who applied to have a room called a hospital, had no midwifery training, but could nominate a nurse and sometimes a doctor, who could attend the birth, or the mothers could bring their own nurse.

Rose had her sister Celia, widowed in World War 1, for comfort. She was living at 130 Victoria Street, just a fifteen-minute walk from Rose. When Rose was heavy with baby she didn't have to wash the nappies and sheets, Uncle Lloyd tells me. Celia and Millie, who was named after Rose's younger sister Millie, could take care of that. I can see them with the 'dipping stick' made from an old broomstick to push and swirl

the sheets around in the old oval copper wash tub, taking Rose's bulging peg bag and hanging the sheets on the makeshift clothes line in the paddock on which the house stood. Celia or Millie would make Rose's bed, smooth the sheets and cover it with the faulty bedspread Rose had purchased at cost from the Lucas factory. Celia would bring Rose cups of Robur tea and sit on the bed next to her and tell her stories of the time she and her two cousins Bess and Flo visited the photographer's studio in Ballarat. Rose already knew about this because Celia had sent her the picture that had been made into a postcard in 1908 when Celia wasn't yet a war widow. Celia wore a hat that resembled a toucan and her cousins had their hair piled high with bows perched on top. On the back of the postcard Celia wrote: *'Hoping you are all in the best of health with heaps of love and kisses, Celia xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx. Sam wishes to be remembered to you also.* The stories would have helped to distract Rose from her growing contractions. They were the stories that were also handed down to Uncle Lloyd.

Rose knew about childbirth and pain from an early age. Inside the Jacobs' home at 5 Fashion Court in the East End, Rose witnessed her mother's belly swelling and receding over a period of ten years while carrying her three younger sisters and a brother. I wonder if there were relatives to help Rose's mother, Annie, when she grew too tired to wash clothes and hang them on the line in the damp, dark tenement courtyard. Rose was nine and a half when Annie went into labour with Celia. I suspect it was Rose's job to entertain her younger siblings as her mother lay on the bed hoping for a live birth and a birth she would survive herself. I can hear Annie whispering, *'Lord, protect me and my baby as you did the Israelites of old.'* She would have known the stories of women, who had travelled to the dank streets of the

East End from Poland and Russia for a better life only to die in childbirth. Rose would have also heard the stories – and the birthing screams in the tight tenement blocks.

Annie's children survived – and *were* nurtured. Rose was a witness to how much the babies were cherished at 45 Mackenzie Street. Rose and her sister Celia were living in the house when their eighteen-year-old sister Leah gave birth to Letty in 1897 in the family home. Twenty-two-year-old Rose was there to support Leah. Perhaps, Rose and her mother were at the birth to soothe the hand of the frightened teenager and welcome Letty to the world. The bond between the sisters was strong: years later Leah would visit Rose at her home in Argyle Street in St Kilda every week.

Four years after Uncle Lloyd was born, Rose's last child, Faye, arrived at 128 Main Road, Ballarat. Rose was forty-six. After posting this information on the Pearlman Facebook page, a cousin from Perth commented that Rose had been giving birth for twenty-two years from 1901 to 1923. I wonder if Rose had any miscarriages during those years.

It becomes clear now why Rose invested in her 'wrapper' dress because it allowed her to quickly release her breasts swollen with milk for her hungry, bleating babies. Rose was practical. She had a cloth peg bag fastened to her apron and a wrapper dress. She was resourceful in another way. Neighbours who did not have enough milk would visit Rose, who wet-nursed their babies. She couldn't let them go hungry. Besides, she probably knew that breast milk would promote the babies' health. She'd had nine babies to observe this. There were also stories in the newspapers at the time Rose was giving birth advising, 'Babies should be breastfeed unless the mother is dead or is suffering from consumption and even then a wet-nurse should be procured if the best

results are desired.' There is no indication that Rose accepted money to nourish the babies, a common practice for working-class women to earn some pounds. Rose's daughter, Celia, a nurse, used to tell the story to her daughter-in-law Ruth about her mother wet-nursing other people's babies. Ruth says that Celia always emphasised that Rose did not accept money; she just wanted the babies to survive. 'It would have been out of character for her to take money,' Celia would say. There is further proof that Rose may not have wanted money. In 1985, Celia's friend Betty Malone wrote a three-page foolscap story about Celia's family for her seventy-ninth birthday. Malone writes that Celia had told her that, 'She [Rose] was never happy without a baby nursing in her arms.'

**Jellicoe Street, Cheltenham, 1979; Ballarat Hospital, 1913, Ballarat Old Cemetery, 2016**

Rose used blue ink to record Koppel Solomon's birth on the first page of her *siddur*. Her second son was born on 22 January 1911 at home at 14 Channel Street in Ballarat just around the corner from the family's previous address in O'Brien Street, where their weatherboard still stands.



*11 O'Brien Street, Ballarat.  
There have been improvements  
since the Pearlmans lived there.*

Solomon was Rose's father's name, but Rose's child was known as Sidney. Many members of the Pearlman family have been given the name of a relative to honour them after they have died or even while they were still alive. It's a mix of *Ashkenazi* and *Sephardic* traditions. A reason for sharing names is to prompt curiosity about the relative a person has been named after, and to remember the Jewish generations. Some say the ritual harks back to biblical times.

My Grandmother Millie [Amelia] was named after Rose's sister Millie [Amelia]. My Great-Aunt Celia was named after Rose's sister Celia. The name suited my Great-Aunt; she inherited her aunt Celia's vivaciousness. Auntie Celie – as I liked to call her – was a magnificent storyteller. She always wore a knee-length woollen straight skirt, blouse, cardigan and pearls. Just like the pearls that decorated Rose's dress in the photo I have kept in the scented soapbox. We often talked about her younger brother, Sidney while sitting outside on a wooden bench at my childhood home in Cheltenham.

'Did your baby brother cry much, Auntie Celie?' I'd ask.

'No, he was a happy little fellow, except when he broke his leg,' she'd say.

'How did he break his leg, Auntie Celie?'

'Playing outside. He fell off a log. He was only little and a bit wobbly on his legs,' she told me.

'How did the doctors fix his leg? I'd ask.

'The little darling had to go to hospital to have it mended,' Auntie Celie would say.



‘Did he get plaster? Did you write your name on it?’ I’d respond excitedly.

Auntie Celie often told the story about Sidney breaking his leg when he was two and half, but I never asked my Great-Aunt why she kept repeating it. Even as a young girl, I gathered there was something more to the story about the toddler snapping his leg, and I wanted to know more.

‘How long did Sidney spend in hospital, Auntie Celie?’ I’d ask.

‘Sidney didn’t come home,’ Auntie Celie would say.

‘Why didn’t Sidney come home?’ I’d inquire.

‘He caught diphtheria in the hospital and died,’ my Great-Aunt would respond.

‘That must have made you sad, Auntie Celie.’

‘Yes, it did little Erica.’ Auntie Celie always called me ‘little’ even when I became an adult.

In 2016 I tracked down a story about Sidney in *The Ballarat Star*, which reported the little boy’s death:

To those lacking medical knowledge it seems an extraordinary happening that a child admitted into the surgical ward of a public hospital should there some weeks later contract diphtheria, and succumb in a few days. Such a thing, however, has occurred in the case of a child admitted to the Ballarat Hospital five or six weeks ago. The little one was taken to the Hospital by its father, Mr R. (sic) Pearlman, of Ballarat East, suffering from a fractured thigh and it was placed in the surgical ward for treatment. It was discovered last Saturday that the child was suffering from diphtheria and it was removed to the infectious diseases ward, where death occurred yesterday morning.

A senior resident medical officer, Dr Gerard, told the reporter that visitors to the hospital had spread the disease. Another doctor, Dr Sloss, who was at Ballarat

Hospital when Sidney died, supported his colleague's views. The newspaper took the doctors' word and declared the hospital 'blameless'. No one spoke to the Pearlman family, not even to the parents. Little Sidney was just an 'it', an unfortunate death. I suspect Auntie Celie, who trained as a nurse, repeated the story because she was still so angry about the explanation for his death and the off-hand way the family was dismissed. She was seven at the time of Sidney's death, old enough to know what had happened and to recall her own and her parents' grief. Auntie Celie always maintained that Sidney was put in a ward with adults, who spread diphtheria to the toddler. Sidney's death certificate shows he had the disease for six days and on 11 September 1913, he suffered heart failure.

Rose used purple ink to record Sidney's death using the Hebrew calendar, a lunar calendar based on a twelve-month year regulated by the cycles of the moon. She wrote 11 *Hallul* 1913 inside the top of the burgundy cover of her *siddur*. She wrote no other words, just the date. Below the entry, Rose's daughter Faye, who carried on the tradition of entering the family's milestones, has squeezed in '*mum married 13/6/1900*'. After that Rose's list of her children's birthdates continues. My eyes are drawn to Harold's birth, 7 May 1913. Rose had a four-month old baby when Sidney died. Wedged between other birth dates, Rose wrote, '*father died 4<sup>th</sup> Savas 1911*'. Even in grief she was trying to get the dates in chronological order. She didn't care for columns headed 'births, marriages and deaths'. I spend a lot of time staring at the dates because they give a tangible link to Rose through her handwriting. There is the joy and lightness of the hand entering the birth dates. And the sadness and heaviness as Rose wrote Sidney's date of death.

I get glimpses of Rose's reaction to death through a remembrance notice she placed in *The Age*, a year after her brother Morris had died of a malignant disease on 26 May 1904 in The Melbourne Hospital, a five minute walk from Mackenzie Street. He was only twenty-three. All the other notices for Morris' *yahrzeit* follow the same formula: expressing sorrow at Morris' death and giving his age and whom he was related to. However, Rose's notice questions why he had to die, a line of existential interrogation I did not detect in the other notices:

Oh why was my loving brother taken in the prime of his life without time to say goodbye to the sister who loved him and is left to mourn him all her life. So dearly loved, so dearly mourned. Loved by all who knew him. Inserted by his sorrowing sister and brother-in-law Rose and Baron Pearlman, Ballarat.

Despite scouring Ballarat, Melbourne and Jewish newspapers, I cannot find death notices or published remembrances for Sidney. There is a funeral notice, however, inviting the friends of Baron Pearlman to follow the remains of 'his dearly beloved son Kopul Sidney to the Ballarat Old Cemetery' on Friday July 12, the day after Sidney died. The funeral director, Charles Morris, is mentioned, but Rose is out of the picture. Her absence tells a bigger story about a woman denied the chance to see and grieve for her child as he is lowered into his plot and final prayers are recited. The same happened at Millie, my Grandmother's funeral. Her body was prepared at the *Chevra Kadisha*, the funeral home then in Carlton, and the men followed her to Springvale where she was buried. The female relations went to Argyle Street, to Millie's home.

Rose's place to grieve was in the home, where the blinds would have been drawn. From the time of Sidney's death she became enmeshed in the Jewish way of mourning. Between death and burial, Rose was declared an *onen*, a person in deep distress who is 'yanked out of normal life and abruptly catapulted into the midst of

inexpressible grief'. Then she would have entered the next four stages of mourning, including *shiva*, seven days of mourning, when Rose emerged from the stage of intense grief and welcomed comfort from friends and family. The traditional period of mourning is twelve months after which a tombstone is erected.

**Sidney's burial plot** at the Old Ballarat Cemetery is next his Grandfather, Hyman, who was buried at the cemetery in 1924. His tombstone's lead lettering is deteriorating, but his wife Hanna's is beautifully intact. Baron's brother Jacob, who died at the age of seventeen in 1900, is buried a row away from Hanna and Hyman. Before the Pearlman trip to the cemetery on 1st February 2016, none of us knew there were so many Pearlman's buried in Ballarat. Relatives from Melbourne, Perth and San Francisco travelled in a convoy of cars to Ballarat united in our quest to find out more about Rose and her family. As we fossicked around the Jewish section of the cemetery, my mum's voice could be heard.

'Where's Sidney's tombstone?' she asked. It was a question everyone soon repeated.

The cemetery map has Sidney's exact location as Area G, Section 6, Row 1, Grave 7. But on the day in 2016 that we, the extended Pearlman clan, wandered the Jewish section of the cemetery, we became confused, perturbed and sad. There was no tombstone for Sidney, and no indication that one had ever been erected. He is the only one in the family without a tombstone at the cemetery. We wondered if money was an issue. The theory sounded plausible enough. At the time of Sidney's death there were five other children ranging in age from four months to twelve years. Baron had insecure employment as a hawker at the time, and there was another mouth to feed. Rose's father-in-law, Hyman, came to live with the family in 1913 because Hanna,

Hyman's wife who died the same year as Sidney, stipulated in her will that her husband should reside with her son, Baron.

Hyman was earning money, although very little, and perhaps he did not have enough funds to give his son and daughter-in-law financial help. He was a *shammash*, a personal assistant, to the officers of the Ballarat Synagogue, and a second reader. He was paid £11 and 14 shillings in 1906 for a year's work, and by 1912, £13. Even if Hyman did not have the money to help Rose and Baron, there was the [Jewish] Philanthropic Society. The Ballarat Synagogue could have also helped but it was in deficit of £131 at the time and was looking for people to donate in order to preserve the building.

Rose and Baron may have believed they could muster the funds to erect a tombstone later. Back in Melbourne, I consult books on Jewish burial law to see if this were possible. A simple marker such as a stone with the person's name written on it can be used to indicate where a person is buried. This may be sufficient in Jewish burial practice, particularly if the family is short of funds:

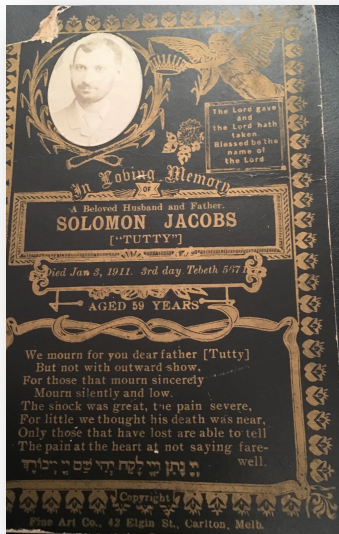
The cost, the size, the shape and the lettering of the monument should be determined by monies available to the family, the descendants' desires, and the type of monument generally used in that cemetery. One should do honour to the deceased, but one should not use funds for a monument for the dead that are needed for the expenses of the living. While the form of the marker is of little religious significance, what is important is that there be a clear, visible demarcation of the gravesite [Lamm, M *The Jewish Way in Death and Mourning*, New York: Jonathan David Publishers, p.188].

Perhaps, Rose and Baron had to use any spare money to pay for their oldest child's *bar mitzvah*. There would be a suit to buy and perhaps a celebration afterwards. Jack was *bar mitzvahed* a week before the first anniversary of Sidney's death. On the exact date of Sidney's *yahrzeit*, 11 September 1914, *The Jewish Herald* reported that a large number of people attended Jack's *bar mitzvah* at the Ballarat Synagogue, where he

‘acquitted himself very admirably’.

The desire to find an explanation for the tomb’s absence is overwhelming. My cousins want to know what happened and I want to be able to tell them. I feel a responsibility to fill gaps in their knowledge about the family because I have orchestrated the search for Rose.

I seek help from Ephraim Finch, the former head of the Melbourne *Chevra Kadisha*, who is now retired and an expert on the history of Jewish burial practices. We meet at the Jewish chapel in the Fawkner Cemetery, north of Melbourne, on the last day of June in 2016. It’s grey and as freezing as Ballarat. I have never met Ephraim before, but guess immediately it is him because of his long white beard and black coat. Ephraim knows the Fawkner graves and helps visitors with directions as we walk and talk. He has already done some homework and shows me where Rose’s father, Solomon Jacobs, is buried. He was the first Jew buried at the cemetery in January 1911 because the Melbourne Cemetery was getting too full, according to an article in *The Argus* newspaper.



*A memorial card for Rose's father, Solomon Jacobs. 'Tutty' is a Yiddish word for my father, my dad, my daddy. It is also spelt with an 'a' as in Tatty.*

Ephraim points to Jewish and non-Jewish plots without tombstones. 'The families probably didn't have the money,' he says. We stare at a tombstone that's shiny even in the dull weather. 'The child buried here didn't have a tombstone for a long time,' Ephraim says. 'His parents survived the Holocaust and it was very difficult for them to cope with the loss of a child as well. They put off erecting the tombstone until they were ready.'

I had been looking for an explanation for Sidney's absent tombstone based on an evaluation of factual evidence. This was too narrow an avenue to pursue because I hadn't factored in the emotional turmoil of losing a child. The erection of a tombstone for Sidney would have made his death seem so final and too real, despite the Jewish ways of mourning. Perhaps, Rose and Baron found it too painful to erect one. I do not know if this is the reason why there is no tombstone for Sidney, and I may never uncover the 'why'. But does it matter? The story is about a family's feelings of anguish and unfairness at losing a toddler. How a child who fractures a limb – and should recover – ends up dying from a disease caught in hospital? How could the

hospital's doctors and a reporter collude to explain Sidney's death away? Auntie Celie had carried that anguish throughout her life. She would have also seen her mother move through her own way of mourning. My Great-Aunt never spoke about that.

### **Tending the Children**

Rose had the same routines for her children. When they developed colds, she'd carry them to the local brewery so they could breathe in the hops to relieve their congested chests. When her children came down with whooping cough, she'd make them a hot water bottle, tuck them into bed and watch over until their gasping, tired bodies fell asleep. She'd stay there listening for the next round of rasping coughs hoping that her children would eventually catch their breath. In all those years in Ballarat, I wonder did Rose ever get a full night's sleep? There was much to do during the night: feeding, tending crying and sick children, and comforting the ones who dreamt of monsters lurking in the creek at the back of the house.

The food routine was also the same. Rose spent hours hovering over the one-burner wood-fire stove. She would methodically cut slices from a hardy loaf of bread, take a piece, stab it with a fork and hold the bread over the stove waiting for it to brown. In line was a mob of kids anxious for their toast and jam. Once a week when the children were already in line for their toast Rose gave them their dose of castor oil. Uncle Lloyd remembers it as 'vile stuff'. But Rose tried to make it palatable. She added a few drops of water to the spoon, a drop of orange juice and then the oil. The children didn't get much fruit, so this was their main taste of it. Rose also opened hundreds of little tins of bloater paste, a fish spread made from salted, smoked herrings called



‘bloaters’. They are smoked whole with their guts still intact, giving them a gamey flavor. They were cheap.

On another visit to The Freemasons, Uncle Lloyd and my mum recall eating the paste.

‘Gee, I can still taste them,’ Uncle Lloyd says screwing up his face.

‘I had them, too,’ my mum adds. ‘Horrible, just horrible.’

‘Do you think your mum learnt to use bloaters from Rose?’ I ask.

‘She must have. And she learnt how to make gefilte fish from Rose. I hated that, too. Bits of fish mixed with matzo and boiled. No wonder I don’t like fish,’ my mum says.

‘We also had canned sardines,’ Uncle Lloyd pipes in. ‘I didn’t like those either. But what could you do? You didn’t have much money to feed a family.’

‘Did you have meat?’ I ask.

‘Yeah, sometimes. But you see it had to be brought up from Melbourne because the *kosher* meat had gone from Ballarat. You see there weren’t many Jews around in the 1920s. We also had to get our *matzos* from Melbourne for Passover,’ Uncle Lloyd explains.

‘Was there any food you liked Uncle Lloyd?’ I inquire.

‘The eggs. My mum wrapped them individually in paper. You know, each egg to keep them warm for our picnic,’ Uncle Lloyd says excitedly.

Once a year, the family had an outing to Lake Wendouree, the rich part of Ballarat, where there were rowing sheds and fine houses overlooking the water. The lake was only three and a half kilometres from the Pearlman family home on Main Road, but it was a world away from the weatherboard cottages in the east, many of which have now been pulled down. Rose, Baron and the children caught the tram pulled by horses, which trundled along Sturt Street to the lake. There they would unwrap the picnic and the boiled eggs kept warm in their rounds of paper. By the lake, Rose could just sit taking in views of the lake, the swans, the rowing sheds and boats, and the rich women in their long lacey dresses that brushed against the grass. Unlike Rose, they held pastel-coloured parasols out of fear that the sun would turn their alabaster skin a darker shade. It was quiet at the lake, not like noisy Sturt Street with the iron wheels of the gigs, buggies and cabs scraping against the stone roads. The footpaths were no better. The women pushed prams with iron wheels. Rose could just sit back. The younger children played chasey, skippy and marbles with the other kids, while the older boys played cricket.

In Ballarat East, Rose also knew what her children were up to. She had walked the streets and recognised what her offspring would be attracted to. There was the large clay mullock heap for the children to slide down and the furrier who entertained the children while displaying his craft. There was the creek at the back of their Main Street house that turned red from the blood and sinew the pig farmer had thrown into

it. Every Thursday he killed the pigs by cutting their throats. There was the strange man, who the children would follow on Guy Fawkes night around the streets of Ballarat. He held a dummy of Guy Fawkes and then placed it on top of the bonfire and set it alight. In Humffray Street, the younger Pearlman children would press their noses against the front glass window of J. Chung Leong's herbalist shop, trying to identify the herbs' smells and shapes.

Rose also knew what her children were doing in the paddock where their weatherboard sat. Uncle Lloyd made sure of that because some things were just too funny to keep to himself and he would tell his mother about them. Like the time his older brother Cyril was so crook on passersby using their toilet, which was at the end of the unfenced paddock, that he put sticky flypaper over the seat. Other times Rose had her informants like the Rabbi who came around to the house to tell her that Cyril and Lloyd, the two boys closest in age, had skipped *Shule*. They had been trying a cigarette. Uncle Lloyd was sitting closest to his mother and copped the whack. Baron was often sick, so it was left to Rose to keep her children in line.

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## **Chapter Seven: The Lolly Shop.**

### **Moubray Street, Melbourne 2016; 35 Humffray Street, Ballarat, 1928**

In 1906, when Rose gave birth to Celia, Baron was working as a gold-miner. In 1908, when Rose gave birth to Leslie, Baron was still working as a miner sucking in air clogged with dust. Every time I meet Uncle Lloyd he recalls his father's cough and splutter. It must have been frightening for Rose and the young children. Smoking, a favourite pastime of miners including Baron, exacerbated the cough. Baron would buy State Express 333 cigarettes enclosed in scarlet and gold boxes accompanied by tiny silk flags of the world. He eventually left the mines and went back to travelling and collecting. When Uncle Lloyd and Faye were born he was working as a bookmaker.

‘Why a bookmaker, Uncle Lloyd?’ I ask on another visit to the Freemasons in late 2016.

‘We knew bookmakers in Ballarat and we knew they had money. But when we opened Baron's bag of a night there were all these little silver sixpenny pieces because they were betting sixpence all up. Even in those days I knew notes. There were no notes,’ Uncle Lloyd explains

‘Who was doing the betting?’ I ask.

‘My father went to the country races,’ Uncle Lloyd says. ‘Of course the country people were very poor.’

Uncle Lloyd lowers his voice and looks me straight in the eye. He's done this before in his prelude to something important. 'I knew my father was a gambler. But just the same you've got to give him a little bit of credit because he was a little bloke coming from Russia and he got jobs. He was always sick,' Uncle Lloyd says.

Baron also had brushes with the law between 1896 and 1914. He was in trouble for fraud and for receiving stolen goods – a gold watch. The charges, reported in city and Ballarat newspapers, were eventually dismissed after court trials, but not before Ballarat's Jewish community would have started gossiping about Baron. Rose, a temperamentally private person, became a public figure, in the Jewish community, which numbered less than 200 in 1914. In that year, too, *The Ballarat Courier* and *Ballarat Star* reported in detail how Baron Pearlman and Simon Cohen were charged for being on the Palace Hotel premises after hours. Baron did not have legal representation; he probably could not afford it. Both men, who were playing cards at the hotel, were found guilty and charged £2 each.

By 1927 Baron's health was getting worse: fatigue was gripping his body after exertion. Rose was becoming Baron's carer, and was still looking after most of her children. The absence of government support exacerbated Rose's anguish of not having sufficient money to sustain the family. The federal government did not pass legislation to introduce unemployment and sickness benefits until 1944, leaving families like the Pearlmans to rely on relatives or charitable organisations, or to just fend for themselves. Rose had to find a way to bring in money to care for Uncle Lloyd, who was eight-years-old at the time and the youngest child, Faye, who was four. Another three children were still at school, while the oldest two had married and

moved to Melbourne. Altogether, six children were living in the Humffray Street home, a double-storey ramshackle dwelling.

Rose had instigated the move from 128 Main Road to 35 Humffray Street, a minute's walk away. It was at 35 Humffray Street that Rose came up with the idea to make money by selling lollies. She could sell humbags and liquorice from her front room and still care for Baron and the children while making some money to pay the bills. Perhaps the 'make lollies at home' advertisements gave her hope. It's likely that Rose would have seen the newspaper advertisements. The Pearlman family read newspapers and as a child Uncle Lloyd sold a sports paper on Saturday nights. R & E Croaker, a Collins Street lolly making business in Melbourne, ran prominent display advertisements encouraging people to 'learn lolly-making by post'. The company would supply recipes and some ingredients to 'ladies and gents' so they could make lollies and sell them. 'Pay as you earn and learn,' the advertisements shouted. The company could also supply shops with English and American chocolates, bonbons, marshmallows, butterscotches and caramel.

Croaker had also opened an office in Ballarat at the AMP Chambers in Lydiard Street. Prospective lolly-makers could pick up free trial recipes of sweets. Lolly-making at home, a 'respectable occupation', was heralded as a breakthrough in the preparation of sweets:

The most remarkable change ever known in the making of lollies and chocolates is now in full bloom in Ballarat and every girl, boy or woman may in the course of a few hours' lesson become an expert in making the choicest lollies at much less than three-quarters the price now charged for them. This is a wonderful statement to make but it is true and it ensures big cash profits in the making of the home the best English and American sweets. It is almost impossible for Mr Croaker to describe the common sense realities of this new system on paper.

Rose was surrounded by lollies. A five-minute walk from where Rose and her family lived in Humffray Street were two lolly shops, including Brown's Lolly Shop. The Mingst's mixed business on the corner of Doveton and Macarthur Streets sold fifty different kinds of lollies. Snowballs were a penny, chocolate planks or chocolate guns a penny each. Milk poles about ten inches long were a half a penny. On the outskirts of town there was a Ballarat agency of MacRobertson Confectionary, near the Gordon Cemetery. Macpherson Robertson, the founder of the company, was born in 1859 in Ballarat. In 1903, there was a story about the death of Ballarat identity J.W Eastwood, known as the proprietor of the '*biggest lollyshop on earth*' on Bridge Street, where the Saturday market was held. Newspapers such as *The Ballarat Courier* and *Ballarat Star* ran many stories about boys breaking into shops and stealing fruit and lollies. So precious were lollies that when a 'motor truck' overturned in 1923 with a consignment of lollies for Ballarat, a guard was placed over the cargo.

Although Rose wanted to invest her hope in a lollyshop, she needed the upfront capital to do so. There were the lolly ingredients and ready-made lollies to buy. The front room had to look like a lollyshop with glass jars full of snowballs, the fluffy white dollops of marshmallow coated in chocolate and coconut flakes. According to Uncle Lloyd, the shop was set up with bookmaker money. Not Baron's; he only had sixpences.

The money came from his bookmaker friend Billy Mong, who also ran the Red Lion Hotel with his wife Annie. Baron and Billy would meet at the hotel, which was near the mullock heap the Pearlman children played on. Opposite the Red Lion was a horse trough and gambling den where the men played fantan. They had to be careful

because the police raided houses turned into gambling shops. When the police did show, the Europeans and Chinese had to be quick. They'd scatter, hide under tables and in rice bins. Some would return to the Chinese shantytown made up of huts with dirt floors near the Red Lion.

But was it really Annie Mong who helped Rose to set up the shop? Annie and Rose were neighbours for ten years on Main Street. Annie and Billy lived at 131 and Rose and the family at 128. Annie would have known when Rose's children Harold, Cyril, Lloyd and Faye, were born in the Main Street house, of Baron's miners' complaint and the struggle for Rose to pay the rent. Uncle Lloyd says the family had so many moves to skip paying rent. Annie was known to have helped women, the Ballarat East women, who were in financial distress. An archivist at the Ballarat Public Record Office is compiling a list of some women Annie helped. It is not an exhaustive list and Rose may yet appear on it.

Despite their different ethnic backgrounds, the Monges and Pearlmans had a lot in common: they were outsiders in a heavily Protestant and Catholic town. Of the 40,000 people living in Ballarat in 1927, less than a thousand were Chinese and there were only about eighty-five Jews. Many Chinese and Jews were hawkers who had ambitions of opening shops and businesses. Rose may have held these ambitions, too. There were examples of successful businesses established by Jewish migrants in Ballarat and in other country towns. Rose would have walked past Stone's Department Store, a high-end clothing store in Bridge Street in Ballarat, hundreds of times. Jessica Stone, daughter of the founders of the store, paraded elegant frocks for photographs placed in newspapers. Rose bought Uncle Lloyd the cheapest suit in the



store for his *bar mitzvah*, and my Grandmother worked there for a short time. *The Jewish Herald* ran stories about Sidney Myer, a hawker, who went on to create the Myer Emporium. Rose may have also read and heard stories about Helena Rubinstein and her time spent in country Victoria and Melbourne perfecting her cosmetics range before settling overseas.

Rose was fifty-three when she finally opened her shop in the Humffray Street home in 1928. Archival photos of south Humffray Street dating from the early twentieth century show rows of unnumbered weatherboard shops and homes with verandahs precariously held up with rotting planks of wood. The two-storey ones look as if an icy Ballarat gust or hot northerly would flatten them in a heartbeat. The lolly shop was in an ideal position to make money; it was close to where children would be going to and from Humffray Street State School.



*Humffray Street State School, State Library of Victoria. 1900-1920.*

The Pearlman children chipped in to help Rose run the shop. Leslie, Rose's second son, who went on to become a printer and soldier, helped Rose to sell the lollies. The younger children helped themselves to the lollies. How could they resist after a diet of bloater paste? Faye, the youngest, who was about four at the time, found the snowballs irresistible. She must have found a stool to climb up onto the wooden

bench to reach her prize. Faye had a plan to hide her tracks. She took mouse-sized bites from each snowball and placed them back in the jar hoping her mother wouldn't notice. Rose did; she knew what her children were up to. Faye felt the consequences of her action.



*Faye aged about four or five in 1928. A typical East Ballarat home in the background.*

Rose's store, while signifying hope, failed to produce a steady flow of income. The children didn't come with their half pennies and pennies to buy the lollies after school. There was stiff competition among lolly shops and it would have been difficult for Rose to come up with different kinds of confectionary when MacRobertson was adding new delights such as Cherry Ripes in 1924. Or perhaps, the children and their parents preferred a lolly shop run by a non-Jewish woman. Uncle Lloyd often mentions the anti-Semitism in Ballarat, despite there being two Jewish mayors in Ballarat. But this apparent tolerance masked the undercurrent of anti-Semitism in the town and schools. The children picked on the few Jews left because they were different. They probably took on the prejudices of their parents, who would have seen *Punch* magazine cartoons of Jews with hooked noses and

characterised as money grabbing. Uncle Lloyd shakes his head recalling his first year at Ballarat High School in 1931. Only the year before he had been dux of his Humffray Street Primary School.

‘I couldn’t handle high school because of the anti-Semitism,’ he says on another of my visits to the Freemasons. ‘It was awful. The kids called me names; they’d point you out all the time. There was a teacher who would bang me across the ears and say, “Now look here you little Jew get out of here. You little Jew, you’re not wanted here.” It was horrible.’

‘Where did you go Uncle Lloyd?’ I ask.

‘Outside a teacher’s office. I’d get six cuts. The teacher would ask, “Why were you sent here?” I didn’t know. I didn’t do anything. I didn’t like it.’

Rose’s shop may not have produced the money she had hoped for, but Rose did manage to hold her family together. She protected her children, the children she gave birth to at home. On *Shabbat*, Baron would bless the children and Rose would remind them that the blessing went back to the time of Jacob. She would tell her daughters about the mothers of the Jewish people, Leah, Rachel and Rebecca. The telling of generational stories has become important among Rose’s descendants, too. On the Pearlman Facebook page Ruth Leon, who was married to Rose’s grandson, Derek, posted a family photo in 2016 when she and my mum visited Oxford to see Ruth’s daughter.



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Accompanying the photo Ruth wrote,  
‘Rose’s Granddaughter, Roberta Cervini and  
Great-Granddaughter Cate Leon with her  
Great-Great-Granddaughter, Sophie, in  
Oxford, UK.’

## **Chapter Eight: Husbands.**

### **12A Humffray Street, Ballarat, 1930. Clarendon Street, East Melbourne, 2013**

Uncle Lloyd is feeling his age at ninety-seven-and-a-half. Not so long ago he was walking from the Freemasons to the corner of St Kilda Road to wave me goodbye as I headed for the city tram. Now he struggles to walk. An ulcer has latched onto his leg and is gradually eating into the flesh. It's always about the legs when you get sick or older. My mum fears a piece of raised concrete in a footpath will trip her up so she lifts each leg as she takes a step just like a pony. There's Sidney's broken leg. Faye developed a limp that made her rock from side-to-side as she walked. Rose had a limp, too. But my mother doesn't know why or when she developed it or whether Faye inherited the limp from Rose. Uncle Lloyd only remembers Rose's limp when she lived in St Kilda. He has his own theory on why his mother developed one.

'See, my mum was tired after looking after all us kids. She was too busy. What can you expect? Poor old thing,' Uncle Lloyd tells me.

Baron's legs gave way, too. He was in his fifties when the miners' complaint took hold of his body and his legs could no longer sustain him. They weren't chubby to begin with. One of the three photographs I have of Baron is of him wearing trouser pants held up with a belt, which I suspect is yanked into its last hole. His thin face and narrow waist suggest his legs were thin. They are lost in the bloom of trouser fabric.



*Rose and Baron. The photo would have been taken between 1926 and 1930.*

After Rose's lolly shop closed, she moved the family to a smaller home at 12A Humffray Street. There were no stairs for the ailing Baron to negotiate. It was still a weatherboard and much cheaper to rent than the houses near Lake Wendouree. This was a pity because Baron and Rose's spirits may have lifted if they had the calming views of the water and swans. Many families like the Pearlmans, whose breadwinner suffered from the miners' complaint, had to find cheap accommodation along the road that buttressed the Chinese shantytown. Miners' families were often plunged into poverty prompting newspapers to highlight their plight. In 1911, *The Bendigo Independent* described how people, particularly those in the well-to-do parts of towns, were becoming oblivious to the effect of the disease on families who were forced into the cheapest housing:

For over a generation there has been a cruel negligence in regard to this destroying malady, none the less criminal because here and on other goldfields we have grown used to the sight of it and the suffering which it causes...It does not for obvious reasons exhibit itself in the main thoroughfares or in the comfortable residential streets filled with pleasant cottages and villas. Miners' complaint cannot afford such comfortable and desirable quarters. It is driven out by the extreme poverty which it causes to the uttermost fringes of the goldfield often to the furthest out and therefore the cheapest huts and cottages that the afflicted can get.

In 1918, the newspaper continued to highlight the plight of the men who were ‘literally dying on their feet at a time when they should be full of vigour and manhood’. There were over three hundred cases of miners’ complaint in Victoria in 1918. The paper criticised the state government for only contributing £4000 a year to support sick miners, who in turn only received five shillings a week to support themselves and their families. ‘This is a pitiable state of affairs to exist in the fair and sunny land of Australia and [the families] should receive more thorough and sympathetic from the Government than it has done up to the present.’ I do not know if Baron received any government money. In any case, it would have been a pittance.

By 3 October 1930, Baron’s health had deteriorated further. The Jewish community knew; there was no secret. ‘Mr Baron Pearlman of Humffray St Ballarat, is, we are sorry to state, in very ill health,’ *The Hebrew Standard* declared. The mine dust Baron breathed was just like glass. It cut the lungs’ fibrous tissues, maiming and inflaming them, producing scar tissue and nodules. Too much alien matter was growing in Baron’s lungs, preventing him from opening them wide enough to suck in enough oxygen. The sly mine gases Baron breathed in at the expense of oxygen made his condition worse. The miners’ complaint wasted his body, gradually transforming it to a lightness that would have taken an onlooker’s breath away. Rose had to watch her husband waste away and there was nothing she could do about it.

Four days after *The Hebrew Herald’s* announcement, Baron, the bookmaker, died on 7 October at home at 12A Humffray Street. His death certificate says he had suffered from pulmonary coniosis, the miners’ condition, for at least five years. Dr Sloss, the same Dr Sloss who was at the hospital the night Sidney died, saw Baron the day he

died. The following day on 8 October Baron was buried. He was fifty-five, the same age as Rose.

‘She loved her husband Baron,’ Uncle Lloyd says quietly. ‘She thought he was marvellous. In those days you married; you stayed married. She was true to her husband; she was married.’

As Uncle Lloyd describes Rose’s love for her husband in front of me and my mum, it dawns on me that the three of us all have partners who have died. Uncle Lloyd was married for sixty-four years and my mum for fifty years. I was married to Paul, who I met at university, for twenty years. Rose was with Baron for thirty years. Rose must have thought that before Baron took ill that he would have a long life. Baron’s father lived to seventy-nine and his mother to seventy. I also thought Paul, who was never sick, would live at least another forty or more years. There is longevity in his family, too.

**The photo I found of Rose in her pearl dress** when I was nine has stayed in the scented soapbox - until now. It features on the front page of the family archival album I stare at Rose through the clear film protecting it, searching for clues in her face about how she coped after Baron’s death. Does her prominent jaw suggest strength? Practicality? What would she have felt? I have imagined conversations with Rose where she tells me of the fear, sadness and numbness. C.S Lewis felt some of these emotions after his wife of four years died:

I am not afraid, but the sensation is like being afraid. The same fluttering in the stomach, the same restlessness, the yawning. I keep on swallowing. At other times it feels like being mildly drunk, or concussed. There is a sort of invisible blanket between the world and me. I find it hard to take in what anyone says. Or perhaps, hard to want to take it in.



I can identify with C.S Lewis' insights, and perhaps Rose might have, too.

I keep coming back to the pearl dress photo, concentrating on what Rose would have felt. I have a persistent belief – or perhaps a desire – that if I try hard enough, I will break through an imagined barrier and know her thoughts. It would be comforting to know because she is a relative, and I am carrying on her genes. Wise words from a relative can stay for life. My head gets heavier as I concentrate on what Rose would have felt. Nothing comes; I've hit a wall.

I can only imagine the emotions she experienced. I can't speak for her; she is not a fictional character, where I can dabble in make believe. I can interpret her actions and extrapolate from evidence on how she may have behaved and what she did. But it's not my place to say what she was feeling at the time of Baron's death. That would be belittling Rose's emotions and tricking anyone reading this account. Even if I could go back in time and ask Rose what she was feeling when Baron died, she may not have been able to put the emotions into words. She may have just wanted an imaginary conversation with an ancestor.

My insights into watching my husband, Paul, die permit me to imagine what Rose would have seen in Baron's final weeks. The body crumbling; the face becoming almost unrecognisable as fat dissolves, forcing the bones to become prominent. People say they want chiselled cheekbones because they're a sign of beauty; but I can tell you that they're not. Not when the skin is stretched over the cheekbones, looking as if it is ready to give way at any moment. I see Rose gently sponging Baron's withered skin in the last days before his death. She turns over his hands to expose the

cracks in his fingers that have soaked up the dirty yellow from his State Express 333 cigarettes. She can't get those stains out. But the tepid drops of water gently caress the body. The dying can't regulate their temperature, so it's the sensation that counts. They kick sheets off when it's cold and want a blanket when it's hot. Paul did that. I had to wear T-shirts in his overheated room at home in Fitzroy and at The Freemasons Hospital in East Melbourne

Breathing is weird for the dying. I saw that with Paul at home. I'd place a hand against his back and feel the rattling in his lungs as he drew in breath. His lungs were filling with fluid, alien matter, just like Baron's aliens. Breathing becomes an extreme sport. Paul's chest would take ages to rise as he battled to get oxygen into his weary lungs. Sometimes it took too long. 'Is he dead?' I'd whisper. Rose may have had some of those moments, too.

On 19 June 2013, Paul turned a pale grey in hospital and died. There is no sign of blood, especially after death. The lips are so pale you can barely make them out. Eyes are only half closed. Did Rose have to close Baron's? Or was Dr Sloss there at the time? How did Rose control Baron's pain? Paul had a morphine pump. That stopped the pain and agitation in his legs and in his feet, which had turned black. More alien matter had prevented blood flowing to keep the feet alive. It seems to be always about the legs for the sick and dying.

**Baron's tombstone** is in the Ballarat Old Cemetery. It's simple. Square white stone is mounted against a grey block of stone. The '*Baron Pearlman*' is clear, but the Hebrew inscription in lead lettering has deteriorated. When members of the Pearlman

family visited the ceremony in February 2016, none of us could make out the inscription. Jessica Pearlman Fields, one of my Australian-American cousins, knelt by the tombstone. She cupped her hand around lettering that had fallen onto the grave and swept it into a small pile. She selected one letter and tried to fix it to the indentation it had left on the tombstone. It was too fragile.



*Jessica Pearlman Fields at Baron's tombstone, Ballarat Old Cemetery, 2016*

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## **Chapter Nine: Travelling Again.**

### **5 Humffray Street, Ballarat to 36 Lambeth Place, St Kilda, 1932**

Rose moved house again after Baron's death. She swapped her weatherboard at 12A Humffray Street for a smaller and cheaper weatherboard at 5 Humffray Street, owned by the Trustees of St John of God. Rose could have skipped moving house again in Ballarat and gone and lived with her children in Melbourne after Baron died instead of waiting until 1932 to move to St Kilda. Her daughter Millie, my Grandmother, who was married with one child and living in St Kilda, would have welcomed Rose. She had already opened her home to Celia and Lloyd when they moved to Melbourne. The Jacobs' double-storey terrace on Mackenzie Street was also part of Rose's universe. She could have had the comfort of her sisters Millie and Leah and nieces Letty and Thelma and nephew Joe as well as other relatives who often visited. The home was also big enough to accommodate Rose's son Cyril, who began studying at the Melbourne Teachers' College in 1933. Rose's oldest son, Jack, even lived at Mackenzie Street when he moved to Melbourne. But Rose was still in the Jewish way of mourning, which tied her Ballarat. In Jewish tradition, the tombstone is consecrated a year after the death of a person and Rose was waiting to do that.

Ballarat was also etched in Rose's psyche. It was her home and signified the longest time she had spent in any one city or town. Rose gave birth to nine children in Ballarat. Her toddler son, Sidney, died in the Ballarat Hospital and was buried in the Old Cemetery, that grief no doubt still raw. In Ballarat, Rose watched as the miners' cough gradually choked her husband. Her children played tricks on each other in their backyards and their friends had sleep-overs at the Pearlmans. Ballarat had also been

Rose's religious and cultural home, with the Ballarat Synagogue playing a central role. The family went to *Shabbat* services and the children attended Hebrew school. The Rabbis conducted Rose's sons' *bris* and *bar mitzvas*, and a local Jewish family, the Browns, would make cake for the Pearlmans to celebrate Uncle Lloyd's *bar mitzvah*. The *mikvah*, the ritual bath for women, was behind the Synagogue. And, Rose attended charity card games to help raise money for the Synagogue. Despite moving home eight times, Rose was always within walking distance of the Synagogue. She could weave her way along the squiggle of Ballarat streets, which always led to the rectangular building on the gentle hill.

Rose and her family had rituals to cope with Ballarat's notoriously-biting weather. Rose and the children watched the snow become sleet in the backyards of their eight homes. She stood with her children as they eyed Baron warming their homes by burning malley roots in the big open fireplace. He would place a sheet of iron against the fireplaces in order to get the sheet red hot so it would radiate heat across the room and envelope his family in a cosy warmth. Rose wrapped her babies in sheets after their baths, and knitted her boys long socks to protect their skinny legs against the cold at school where they were forced to wear long billowing school shorts. She knitted Uncle Lloyd a jumper, which caught on wood and unraveled as he was playing.

The Ballarat East streets, which were made of little blocks of wood with tar poured over them, were also etched in Rose's psyche. The streets entertained her. Standing on Humffray or Sturt streets she could watch the gasman light the street lamps, a crude lighting that cast shadows along the paths. Rose saw drunks on Ballarat East's

streets, where there was a pub on almost all street corners. She watched her sons and their friends play marbles on the footpaths and cricket on the roads while ducking the horse-drawn carts and jalopies. Rose passed Stone's department store, ogled the frocks at Lucas and sighed as another little shop owned by a Jew closed, Uncle Lloyd tells me while sipping his tea.

Rose's connection to the streets went beyond what she witnessed: her link to the streets was ignited through the Jewish and non-Jewish friends she made. I imagine them gossiping about which houses on Sturt or Humffray streets were gambling dens. The Jews passed information on about how to get *matzos*, after they were no longer made in Ballarat due to the dwindling Jewish population. Rose chatted to Annie Mong, her neighbour, on Main Road, and Annie and her husband Billy gave the family pickles they had made. Uncle Lloyd laughs as he tells me that Rose spat hers out, perplexed about the mix of ingredients that could produce such a putrid taste. They weren't anything like the Jewish dill pickles Rose made with the scrubbed cucumbers, coarse white salt and pickling spices. Rose also had tea with Mae Murphy and dinner with Margorie Vinegrad. 'Pop' Smith, a neighbour, entertained Rose and with silly stories, while old Mrs Vince would come by with lollies.

But Rose's attachment to her immediate family and her Jewish community meant she could not stay in Ballarat beyond 1932. Members of her Ballarat family and many in the Jewish community had found roots elsewhere, leaving a religious and cultural void for Rose. Her oldest son, Jack, was married and living in the Jewish stronghold of Carlton. Celia was living in the nurses' quarters and working as a nurse at The Alfred Hospital, while Millie was living in St Kilda with her husband, Samuel. Harold

had moved to Melbourne to do accounting, Leslie was leaving for Ararat to work in sales, and Cyril was studying in Melbourne to become a primary school teacher. Baron's sisters and cousins were in Melbourne, too. The Pearlmans departure from Ballarat in 1932 would have cut the Jewish population of the gold-mining town by at least ten per cent.

And Rose's youngest son, Lloyd, was desperate to leave Ballarat to escape the anti-Semitism at school, the cold and the poverty. He hadn't reached fourteen when he left for Melbourne on a scorching summer's day in 1931 to find work in Melbourne with the help of his Aunt Lizzie Froomkin, Baron's sister. The Ballarat High School's janitor gave Lloyd a lift in his old jalopy to a tram stop in St Kilda where Millie, his older sister, met him. Rose had to follow her children and community – and rescue Lloyd from his meddling aunt.

Yet it was Rose's connection to people and the maintenance of those links that also saw her visit Ballarat after she moved to St Kilda. Thirteen years after Rose had left the gold-mining town, she still had two sisters and friends to visit. Rose's daughter, Faye, kept diaries, some which still survive, that reveal what mother and daughter did when they had holidays in Ballarat. In January 1945, Rose, who was sixty-nine at the time, and Faye, twenty-two, travelled together by train and stayed at The Railway Hotel, which Rose's sisters Celia and Millie had taken over in 1944. The day Rose arrived in town she went to see her friends, the Tierneys, for lunch, where 'poor old Mrs Tierney was quite silly now'. Later in the day, Rose and Faye saw the De Graffs and their two daughters, Lorna and Mary. Then they went to Mrs Stone's home,

where stories were shared about Millie's time working at the Stone's department store.

The following day after lunch, Rose and Faye met Jessie Rosenthal at the Lydiard Street Canteen and Mrs Bran at the Lyons Street Canteen. There were more people to visit: the Murphys, Speivogels, Torneys and Brazenors. On the way back from *Shule*, Rose and Faye called in to see Agnes Leverett. The next day at Lake Wendouree, they met their St Kilda friends Peggy and Barbara Rubin and went for a ride on the steamer and listened to a brass band. Between their visits to people's homes, Rose and Faye visited the cemetery to see the graves of Baron and other family members. Sidney is never mentioned in Faye's diary entries about holidays in Ballarat. Perhaps, his story was just too painful for Rose to talk about with her daughter.

Mother and daughter also managed to fit in movies at the Regent and the Plaza theatres and a variety show at Alfred Hall. Two men playing in the show, Mr Smith and Mr Cohen, were staying at the Railway and offered to take Rose and Faye to Alfred Hall. Rose could strike up a conversation with anyone, particularly if they played the piano like Mr Smith did for Rose and Faye.

The Ballarat visits were a tonic for Rose. In June 1947 after Rose spent another holiday in Ballarat, Faye remarked in her diary how 'mum looks very well'. She had stayed at the Railway and had visited Majorie and Samuel Vinegrad and Jack and Olga Robinson. She had visited her husband's grave and attended *Shule*. Rose was supposed to come home after the King's Birthday long weekend, but decided to stay the rest of the week.



The following year in May 1948 Rose travelled by bus herself to go to the consecration of her sister Millie's tombstone. '*Daughter of Solomon and Annie Jacobs and loving sister of Rose, Celia and Leah,*' her inscription reads. Millie is buried in the Ballarat Old Cemetery near members of the Pearlman family. Millie had died the year before in the St John of God Hospital on 5 July 1947 at the age of sixty-nine of heart failure and bronchitis. Her death certificate lists her 'usual place of residence' as 'Railway Hotel, Mair Street, Ballarat'. She had only been living in Ballarat for three years running the Railway Hotel with her sister Celia.

Rose only stayed overnight on the Saturday in Ballarat, and her son, Harold, who'd gone to Ballarat for the day on the Sunday, brought her back. Faye, who lived with her mother, thought she'd stay longer. But it was different for Rose this time: her connections to Ballarat were fading. Many of her older generation of friends were dead or dying and now Celia, her sister, was thinking about returning to Melbourne, although she did not transfer the license of The Railway Hotel until four years later in 1952.

Perhaps Rose felt she couldn't stay away from St Kilda for too long now, because her family there was expanding with grandchildren whom she'd often babysit. By May 1948, she had six grandchildren as well as nieces and nephews, most of whom lived close to Rose in St Kilda. Her calendar was also full of celebrations such as *bar mitzvahs* and weddings as well as catch-ups with family and friends. During the week Rose returned from her overnight stay in Ballarat she had lunch with her sister Leah at Mackenzie Street. Lloyd, his wife Edie as well as Celia and her husband Jerry came to Rose's home for dinner. Celia and Jerry came the following night as well. On the

Saturday night, Rose, Faye and a couple of their friends took the tram to the Windsor Theatre to see the films 'Woman on the Beach' and 'Stairway to Heaven'. Having re-established herself, Rose would never leave St Kilda.

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## Section Two: Waiting

### Chapter Ten: The War Letters Arrive at Rose's Home 36 Lambeth Place, St Kilda, 1939 to 1941; 121 Argyle Street, St Kilda, 1941 to 1942

Twice a day Rose waited for the postman's whistle that roused her street. She'd open her front door with its red tulip leadlight window and follow the tessellated path that curled to the right past a lavender bush to her letterbox cocooned in her home's low brick fence. Rose depended on the twice-daily letterbox drops at 36 Lambeth Place to learn if four of her eight surviving children serving in World War II were safe.



*Photo taken in 2017. The interior of the house has been modernised. But the exterior is much the same as it was during Rose's time, according to my mum. Mail was delivered twice a day in Melbourne until January 1969. Saturday morning deliveries ended in 1975.*

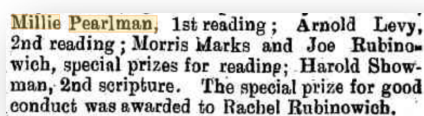
After Rose collected her mail she'd sift through the envelopes to find any with foreign stamps, which alerted her that one of her children serving in World War II had written. If they had contacted Rose, she would take the letters to the sitting room at the end of her long hallway and sit on her chair draped in floral material and read. She'd leave the letters on the dining table for Faye, her daughter, to look at when she got home from school and for Millie, Rose's oldest daughter who lived around the

corner in Argyle Street. Once the letters had been pored over, Rose placed them in a brown case that she had used for moves between Melbourne and Ballarat and back to Melbourne. It was the special place where she also kept clippings of newspaper items about her children.

Lynda Fridman, my cousin, told me the story about the battered brown suitcase in 2017. After her mother Faye, Rose's youngest child, died in 2006, Lynda and her sister and brother found the case in one of Faye's cupboards. It was stuffed with newspaper clippings, many of which pre-dated World War II, as well as photographs of people from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Faye had kept the case, which mice had nibbled at for decades. Rose had been a collector of memories and her daughter had inherited this habit, too. Faye kept diaries and also cut news items from newspapers about the family, which she glued into her diaries and in Rose's *siddur*. Faye became guardian of the *siddur* from the late 1950s and continued Rose's practice of entering births, deaths and marriages. Rose is a fixture in the diaries, because Faye and Rose lived together.

Most of Rose's and Faye's clippings were discarded after Faye's death because they had deteriorated. If they had survived, I am sure Rose would have kept a small report about Leslie winning the Siamese junior race at Humffray Street State School in 1917, and stories about district cricket and football which featured Leslie and Cyril. Rose would have clipped the newspaper lists of scholarships and prizes. Leslie won a scholarship to allow him to do the second year at The Ballarat School of Mines without paying fees, and another scholarship to do night school there. Faye won a commercial scholarship at Mac.Roberston Girls' High School. Jack came first in

reading and second in translation at the Ballarat Hebrew School in 1910 and in the same year Millie came first for Hebrew reading in her age group.



Millie Pearlman, 1st reading; Arnold Levy, 2nd reading; Morris Marks and Joe Rubinowich, special prizes for reading; Harold Showman, 2nd scripture. The special prize for good conduct was awarded to Rachel Rubinowich.

*The Hebrew Standard of Australasia*, 1 July 1910, p.11

Harold came first in scripture in 1923. Celia and Leslie also won prizes on the festival of *Sukkot*. Lloyd was dux of Humffray Street State School in 1930, while *The Age* newspaper announced Cyril as the new head teacher at Lake Condah State School in Victoria.

While the clippings shone a family spotlight on Rose's children, their war letters made Rose the centre of attention on her street. A constant flow of family, friends and neighbours would knock on her door to hear the news but, in reality, they were just as keen to visit Rose and comfort her while she was waiting for the mail. They did this with food and gossip. Rose's friend, Sarah Rubin, was typical of the people who passed by. She'd bring cakes – perhaps the glorious vanilla slices from Patersons on Chapel Street in Prahran – tap on Rose's door, and eat and drink tea with Rose while telling her about the latest wedding or birth.

Rose would do the same: visit friends and family who lived in St Kilda to give them local news and updates about her children at war. Few people had phones in those days, so most people tapped on each other's doors to say hello and spread news. They were like worker ants sculpting their paths, stopping to pass on messages, and then off again along their network of trails.

The visits distracted Rose, but not for too long before she would be wondering again when she'd hear from her war children. They understood this, too. Leslie, Rose's second oldest son, knew his mother would be waiting to hear from him, even when he was still in Victoria doing his army training to prepare for deployment to New Guinea. On 24 October 1940, Leslie wrote a letter to Rose on paper supplied free to the Australian Defence Forces from the YMCA, in a casual, but reassuring way:

Dear Mother, Brothers and Sisters,

Just the usual few lines to let you know I am home safely after a rather quick journey....The weather is good here but cold at night still one can sleep ok. Nothing unusual has happened here to tell you about...Have you had any more letters from Cyril? Will do my washing this week and again with the Persil you gave me.

Dear Mother this is all the news I can think of at the moment,  
Lots of Love,  
Les

Between 1939 and 1940 two of Rose's other sons joined the army and another tried. Harold, her third oldest son, wanted to enlist in each of the armed services but was rejected because he held a public service job. Rose's fourth son, Cyril, now a schoolteacher, joined the army in November 1939 and was sent to Egypt. Rose's youngest son, Lloyd, the former manager of ladies' tailoring and now a trainee fitter, signed up to the army in September 1940 and stayed in Australia. He moved to the Air Force in October 1943 and would later be sent to Jacquinot Bay on the island of New Britain, part of the Australian Territory of New Guinea.

Rose's second oldest daughter, Celia, enlisted as an army nurse in 1940, and left for overseas duty in February 1941. She also knew her mother would be waiting for news. In 1941, Celia gave Rose some comfort:

Arrived safely. Happy Birthday Mother in Advance.  
Love all. Celia Pearlman. 6 March 1941.

The telegram's banner features a sketch of a bird in shades of indigo and cornflower; its underbelly a splash of vermillion and yellow. In the background are calm waters, yachts and run-abouts. Underneath the bird, 'Birthday Greetings' is printed in a white smooth font. Although parts of the seventy-eight-year-old paper are a brownish colour now, the telegram's royal blue type is still as vibrant as the day Celia sent her mother the message that she had arrived safely in India where she would change ships for the Middle East. Celia knew about the unpredictability of mail arriving from overseas during war, and wanted to make sure she had wished her mother a happy sixty-sixth birthday for the first of May.

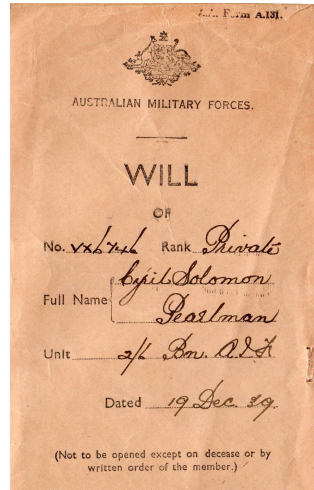
In August 1941 Rose and Faye moved from 36 Lambeth Place to 121 Argyle Street, a two-minute walk from where they had lived previously.



*121 Argyle Street, St Kilda, date unknown.*

Thirty-six Lambeth Place had three bedrooms and had been the permanent home of residence when each of the four war siblings enlisted. It was too big now and cost too much. The rented home on Argyle Street had two bedrooms with a washhouse out the back that stored a black cloth used to cover the windows in case of air raids. The address for 'next-of-kin' on Rose children's military papers changed to Argyle Street.

Cyril also later changed his address to Argyle Street on his will. He left his meagre possessions to Rose. Most soldiers and nurses made wills before they left for overseas.



*Cyril Pearlman's will. His daughter in Perth is guardian of it.*

Rose's new letterbox continued to be the central clearing house for news. But this time the letters came from Egypt, Palestine and Rabaul, the capital of the Australian mandated Territory of New Guinea, not Puckapunyal in Victoria, where Leslie and Cyril trained. Leslie, Cyril and Celia continued to soothe Rose's worries about their safety by using humour in their letters and telling her about their exotic surroundings. The children were master story-tellers.

**Leslie used black ink** to write Rose's Argyle Street address on an envelope stamped with the words 'Australian Imperial Force'. The ink has stood the test of time, but not the stamp. The letters have feathered into a faint purple. Rose would have known immediately the envelope, dated 29 October 1941, was from Leslie. The stamp, costing four pence, has Territory of New Guinea arched across the top and an illustration of a bird of paradise. Trees, hut and a coastline fill out the background of the small sepia stamp.



Leslie flattered his mother with words. 'I bet you looked the best of the lot,' he wrote in reference to a Jewish Ball which Rose had attended. Rose's letter to her son is missing, but she must have told him where the ball was held, who was there and what she wore. Leslie's words of comfort are also peppered with humour as he allayed his mother's worries that she should send him supplies:

There is nothing at all I need in the way of eats and clothes etc. We are pretty well fed and clothed so really there is no need to bother about us. There is not very much beer about at present but still we manage to get enough. The main thing is as long as the [words have faded here and are indecipherable] lasts, the beer will last.

Leslie reminded his mother that he still enjoyed cricket as he had when he was back home playing in Ballarat. 'We play a lot of cricket here! I am just the same as ever, get a wicket now and again. There are also boxing matches but I am a better looker than a boxer.' The cousins on the Facebook page have independently remarked how handsome Leslie indeed is in the photos I have posted of him. They say he is always smiling.

The arrival of Leslie's letter also promised excitement and wonderment. It revealed a world of strange sights and creatures to Rose. Leslie described the Tavurvur volcano he could see in the distance:

The volcano is still very loud at present, it makes Rabaul just about unbearable to go into on leave. The dirt and pumice is terrible to (words are indecipherable) with. Still we are not in there much so it doesn't matter too much.

Leslie slid photos inside the envelopes with his letters. The photos, when put in chronological order, form a picture book story about the landscape, locals and soldiers of Rabaul. While only four of Leslie's letters survive, twenty-four photos exist. The dates on the back of the photos indicate that Leslie wrote about twice a month. One

photo features a giant cavern. On the back of it Leslie wrote, 'This is a view of the chaps climbing up the side of the crater. You can see the steam coming out. The only trouble will be when the steam stops. May 1941. Rabaul'. In another, the bronzed, bare-chested soldiers, including Leslie, hold up a creature Rose would never have seen before.



*Leslie is third from left holding the flying fox's wing and touching its face. Rabaul, 1/7/1941.*

Leslie even sent a picture of a village chief and his home. 'He is the Lului, pronounced Lu-Lu-I loo i. I am in the picture. The thatching is excellent work. December 12 1941,' Leslie wrote on the back of the picture.

Leslie had fun with the photos and pidgin, something Rose probably expected from her son, who always had the widest grin of the brothers in photos taken in Ballarat and St Kilda. On 30 June 1941, he was standing with three other soldiers with white towels wrapped around their waists exposing their bare chests. Each soldier holds up a cake of soap.



‘An advertisement for Lux Soap. We are about to visit the house belong wash wash. Rabaul,’ Leslie, far left, wrote on the back of the photo.

In another, which should be viewed in the context of the times, he made a comment about his bronzed skin in a group picture with twenty-one local children and adults. ‘You can’t tell me from the natives, can you?’ he wrote. Rose’s son, strong and tanned, was discovering a new land and its people. There were cocoa beans drying in the sun and coils of bananas wrapped around tree branches. There were bullocks instead of horses. Children scampered up trees to cut coconuts and there were little girls wearing grass skirts.



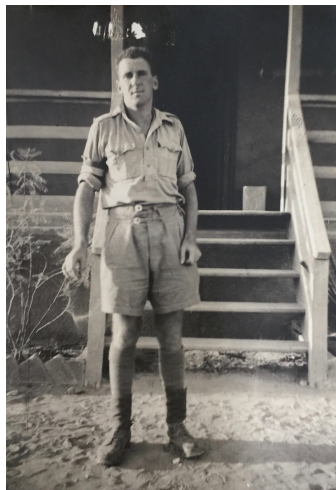
*Leslie Pearlman’s photos sent to his mother, 1941.*



**The letters and photos kept coming.** Cyril’s overlapped with Leslie’s, although only two of his letters survive. However, there is a collection of photographs of Cyril in

Egypt in November 1940 and during 1941. Like Leslie, his letters took Rose on a tour of local daily life. One photo features young girls fetching water and carrying it in vessels on their heads. On the back, he has written, 'Little Arab girls near our camp filling their bottles of water in the well. Even the kids carry everything on their heads.' He has Leslie's sense of humour, which is unsurprising given the tricks the brothers would play on each other in Ballarat and particularly on their little brother Lloyd. One time they lifted five-year-old Lloyd into a bin and rolled it with him inside down a hill. They put sticky fly paper over the toilet seat. And they coaxed Lloyd to sneak a cigarette from Baron's stash from inside the State Express 333 tin.

One photo features Cyril and his mate Phil wearing their long baggy shorts, long socks and work boots. On the back Cyril has written, 'Phil and I seem to be thinking of the stew for dinner – hence the agonised looks. Somewhere in Egypt', November 1940.' In another photo, also from November 1940, Cyril joked about his 'holiness'.



'Your own son with a halo round his head. S'all right, it's only a scratch or two on the negative. Somewhere in Egypt,' Cyril wrote on the back of the picture to Rose.

**Celia's letters**, of which four survive, were longer than her brothers'. Like her brothers' letters they also arrived safely at 36 Lambeth Place and then at 121 Argyle Street, and gave Rose a peek into another world, one away from bats, craters,

volcanoes and water wells. In May 1941 Celia and two other nurses travelled to Tel Aviv and ended up at a place called the Rishon Cellar for dinner, which she mentions halfway through her letter to her mother:

It's supposed to look like a wine cellar and is run by Hungarian people. The ceiling is all raftered and a man plays the piano. I had for my meal a dish called Goulash, pronounced 'Goolash'. It was bits of meat cooked in hot tomato sauce with new potatoes and pickled cucumbers. I had apple strudel to follow and a big pot of beer. We left and went to a cabaret where they play the most divine music. We had a few dances and then went home. The people are very modern and continental in Tel Aviv. Nobody stays home for meals. They all go out and the footpaths are filled with tables and they sit outside by the hour drinking coffee and generally make themselves comfortable.

Menu from Rishon Cellar, showing Goulash. Celia (Pearlman) Leon Collection, Jewish Museum of Australia

FIRST COURSE COLD		פריט קריר (ראשונים)	
Beef Salad	2.50	סלט בשר	2.50
Mayonnaise	1.50	מיונז	1.50
A la Russe	2.50	סלט רוס	2.50
Spring	2.50	סלט ספרינג	2.50
Mixed	2.50	סלט מעורב	2.50
Choufflin	2.50	סלט צ'אוףלין	2.50
Orzo	2.50	סלט אורז	2.50
Liver chopped	2.50	סלט כבד קצוץ	2.50
Mixed Salad Plate	3.00	סלט מעורב פליט	3.00
SOUPS		סופים	
Goulash Soup	4.50	סופ גולאש	4.50
Chicken	4.50	סופ עוף	4.50
Vegetable	4.50	סופ ירקות	4.50
FISH		דגים	
Fish Fillet w. Mayon.	5.50	דג פילט עם מיונז	5.50
Fried	3.00	דג מטוגן	3.00
SPECIAL: HUNG. GOULASH		מיוחד: גולאש הונגרי	
6.50		6.50	
FROM GRILL		פריט גרייל	
Grill mixed	7.50	גרייל מעורב	7.50
Liver from Grill	8.00	כבד גרייל	8.00
Kidney from Grill	8.00	קלון גרייל	8.00
Brains Grill	8.00	מוח גרייל	8.00
Mixed	8.00	מעורב	8.00
Catfish	8.00	קטפיש	8.00
Grill Sausages	8.00	קנוקיות גרייל	8.00
Quail	8.00	קואיל	8.00
Grater Spanish	8.00	גרטר ספרדי	8.00
Escabeche de Vaca	8.00	אסקבכ דה וקא	8.00
Grillsteak	8.00	גריילסטיק	8.00
Chicken from Grill	8.00	חזיר גרייל	8.00
A LA CARTE		באפרט היום	
English steak	10.00	אנגלישטיק	10.00
Steak with eggs	12.00	סטיק עם ביצים	12.00
Steak hungarian	12.00	סטיק הונגרי	12.00
Rumpsteak	12.00	רומפסטיק	12.00
Shnitzel viennese	12.00	שניצל וינאי	12.00
hungarian	12.00	הונגרי	12.00
natural	12.00	טבעי	12.00
Liver shnitzel	12.00	כבד	12.00
Roastbeef Cold	12.00	בשר בקר קר	12.00
Roasted Chicken	12.00	חזיר קרום	12.00
Brains with eggs	12.00	מוח עם ביצים	12.00
Toast	1.00	טוסט	1.00
Bread	1.00	לחם	1.00
Butter	1.00	בטר	1.00
Eggs & Chips		ביצים עם חצי (פרייטס)	
All kinds of Omelettes	7.50/8.00	כל מיני אומלטים	7.50/8.00
Various Sandwiches	2.50/3.00	כל מיני סנדיטשים	2.50/3.00
DESSERTS		פריט	
Fruit Salad	3.00	סלט פירות	3.00
Palaschinken	4.00	פאלאשקין	4.00
Strudel	4.50	סטרודל	4.50
All kinds of Cheese	5.00	כל מיני גבינה	5.00

To get to Tel Aviv, Celia and her companions were picked up along the road by an English sergeant who drove them to Rishon about three kilometres from Rehovat. 'There's very little transport and it's not like Australia where one can get on a tram,' Celia told her mother. From Rishon, the nurses caught a bus to Tel Aviv and headed to the Soldiers' Club, 'a most delightful place', where they met the sergeant again. The strawberries in the strawberries and cream came from the Jewish colony and were

‘beautiful’. Celia told her mother she hoped to go to Jaffa the following week and visit an ‘oriental place where you eat with your fingers’.

The sergeant took the nurses to visit a couple, Mr and Mrs Pintov, who lived in a Tel Aviv apartment where Celia and her friends rang a bell downstairs which activated a buzzing sound in the couple’s apartment. They then pressed a button on their special telephone to open an electronic door to allow the party to come upstairs. Mr Pintov had studied at an American university and was now in the business of exporting citrus products. Rose had only known the dark tenements of East End London, the cold weatherboards of Ballarat and the brick terraces in Melbourne. Now she was being introduced to modern and continental apartments with new-fangled phones that controlled who could enter the block. It was low-tech in Lambeth Place and Argyle Street, where family and friends just appeared at Rose’s door and often let themselves in.

Celia’s letters continued to provide Rose with descriptions of the peculiarities of her Palestinian tent home. The nights were eerie. Celia heard piercing sounds as she crept around with her torch feeling like a ‘real Florence Nightingale’ in the pitch black. She told her mother:

It is very weird here at night. It’s different to Australian weather, where it gets dark gradually, but here without any warning from daylight it suddenly becomes night and is pitch black. There are lots of jackals around and they set up a most blood-curdling yell.

Celia, who had never travelled overseas before, was bemused by the northern hemisphere’s back-to-front seasons and often referred to them and the creatures near the tents:

We are having terribly hot weather. It seems funny to be hot in May. I guess you are wearing winter woollies now. Great excitement yesterday. A snake, a green skinny one was caught in one of the girls' tents. You can imagine the yells.

Rose already knew about the back-to-front seasons that Celia was experiencing.

Rose's ship the *Hohenstaufen* had sailed into Melbourne's Station Pier back in September 1888. The spring warmth circled Rose, not the chill of London heading into winter. Weather had dominated Rose's life: winds whipping up the seas as the *Hohenstaufen* entered South Australian waters, the icy lean-to wash room out the back at Mackenzie Street and the bitter Ballarat winters that covered the ground in sleet. Rose had acclimatised to the seasons, but Celia still couldn't get used to their change in order. November was meant to be spring, a happy time signalling *Chanukah*, the festival of lights, and the summer holidays. But Celia was cold. On 20 November 1941 she told Rose:

At the present moment we are getting into winter. For a little while it was freezing cold at night but the rains have commenced and it isn't at all cold now. You just ought to see me going to work. I wear singlet, bloomers, a sleeveless sweater under my uniform and a cardigan on top of my red cape. On top of that I wear a raincoat and carry my umbrella and take a string bag with all my little twiddly bits I need on duty.

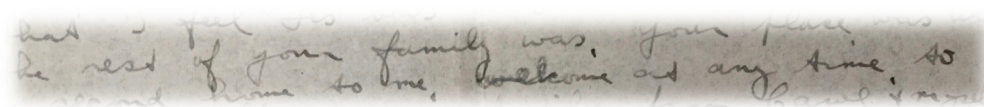
Like her brothers' photographs, Celia's pictures also tell stories about adventures with her colleagues. Most of these stories feature Celia having lunches accompanied by pots of beer with fellow nurses and officers on their days off.





‘As you can see I am looking very well,’ Celia [far left] wrote on the back of this photo perhaps in an attempt to soothe her mother’s concerns that she was eating well. On the back of another, Celia joked that her clothes were feeling tight.

While Celia’s letters and photos showed Rose the different landscapes, food and buildings, there was also a familiarity about their content. Rose and Celia shared a talent for caring for their boys. In Ballarat and St Kilda, Rose not only nurtured her own children but welcomed her sons’ friends, who often stayed overnight. They would bunker down in a Pearlman boy’s bed with the boys sleeping opposite ends to each other. One of the boys was Bernie Karp, who never forgot Rose. In June 1946 Bernie, a friend of Leslie’s and Lloyd’s, wrote to Rose from Auckland, where he was now living, and told Rose what she and the Lambeth Place home meant to him:

A photograph of a handwritten note on a piece of paper. The handwriting is in cursive and reads: "Your place was like a second home to me. Welcome at any time by you and all your family."

‘Your place was like a second home to me. Welcome at any time by you and all your family.’

The camaraderie Celia had with her ‘boys’ in Palestine is palpable in her letters and photographs. They show Celia smiling with the soldiers who are dressed in their



*Celia, third from left.  
Palestine, 1941*



pyjamas, as well as of the tent hospital where she tended her ‘boys’ as Celia called them.



*Celia, Palestine, 1941*

Celia, dubbed ‘Pearlie’ by her army colleagues and patients, was thirty-five at the time. She was older than many of the soldiers and some may have come to see her as a sister or even a mother figure. The following line from one of Celia’s letters reflects this: ‘It was funny here last night. I was tucking in all the boys and one asked me to kiss him goodnight.’

### **An Australian Jew in Tel Aviv**

Celia’s references to Jewish symbols and buildings in her letters also give them a sense of familiarity. Celia may have been nearly fourteen thousand kilometres from home but her Jewish religion, customs and festivals connected her to cities like Tel Aviv and to her family in Melbourne. As one of only two Australian Jewish nurses serving in the Middle East, Celia was excited to tell her mother about the Jews so she sent a photo of a modern building with the caption, ‘This is another view of a street in Tel Aviv. See the Hebrew writing on one of the shop windows?’

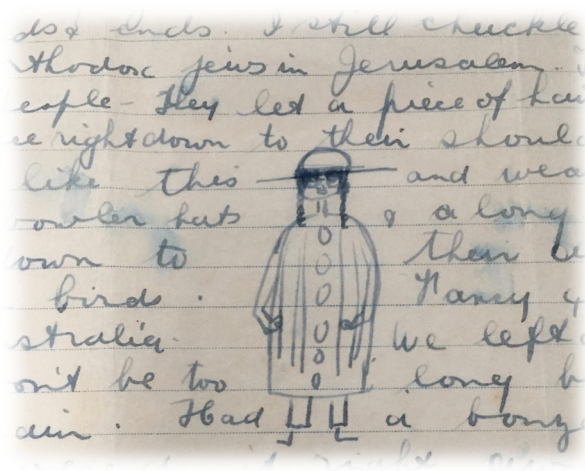


*The Hebrew is in large letters with a white background at the top of shop windows. 1941*

Celia was part of a small minority in Melbourne, but in Tel Aviv almost everyone was Jewish apart from some Arab and British people. Unlike Jews in Melbourne, the Jews in Tel Aviv were spread out over the city because there was always a synagogue close by. The Pearlmans had lived in an enclave in Ballarat East, close to other Jews, and were now in St Kilda near other Jews and their synagogue. Religiously observant Jews need to live near a Synagogue so they can walk to it.

Through her photos and letters, Celia could tell her mother stories about Jews. One photo features a Jew in a long coat holding a *siddur*. ‘A snap of the Wailing Wall. The Wall is twice as high as this snap again,’ Celia wrote on the back of it. She also sent a photo of the ‘Jewish chap’, a soldier, who came to the camp’s canteen. In Jerusalem, Celia discovered ultra-orthodox Jews and found their appearance amusing. In 1941 she told Rose:

I still chuckle when I think of the orthodox Jews in Jerusalem. They are queer looking people. They let a piece of their hair grow each side of their face right down to their shoulders and curl it something like this and wear funny flat looking bowler hats and a long striped coat garment down to their ankles. Gee they look like birds.



*Celia's sketch of ultra-orthodox Jews, the 'birds'.  
Wednesday, May 28, 1941*

The numbers of ultra-orthodox Eastern European Jews only grew in Melbourne after World War II, so it is unsurprising that Celia had not come across them in Melbourne. Even today they are confined to a few streets in Ripponlea, Elsternwick and East St Kilda in Melbourne's inner-south. Tel Aviv was home to the Jews more like Celia and the ones she was used to seeing in Melbourne. The Pearlman children were not ultra-religious, despite being initially exposed to a very religious man, their Grandfather Hyman Pearlman, who had lived with Rose, Baron and the children after his wife died in 1913. He was very much a religious Eastern European Jew, but he didn't grow the *payos*, the sidelocks. Hyman grew a long beard and wore dark clothes, which are usually associated with devout Jews. The children may not have thought this was particularly different from the appearance of many men at the time: many Jewish and non-Jewish men had beards and wore somber suits. Hyman's Grandchildren did not follow his strict adherence to Judaism and prayer throughout the day. They were Jews who were born in Australia: they kept a kosher home, celebrated Jewish festivals and attended Synagogue. They made friends within their community. But they also made friends with non-Jews, and they played cricket, football and went to dances. By

serving in World War II, four of Rose's eight surviving children indicated that they identified as much with Australia as they did with their Jewish heritage.

Celia's identity as an Australian but also as a Jew is reflected in the gifts she chose for her family. Her present to her nephew, Barry, named after his Grandfather Baron, was a *tallis*, a prayer shawl. Celia was organising its purchase as she explained in one of her letters to her mother: 'Mr Goldman called to see me but he wasn't allowed to see me because I was asleep and he left a little prayer book with me, and he'll have Barry's *tallis* by Friday or Sat and I'll send it on.' The prayer book was for Jewish members of the armed forces. The *tallis* was a momentous gift for thirteen-year-old Barry, who was soon to make his *bar mitzvah* at St Kilda Synagogue. It would be the first time he would wear one, and it would have special significance because it was being made in Palestine, the Holy Land. In Synagogue, Barry would wrap himself in the large fringed shawl, a rule handed down from biblical times:

The Lord said to Moshe, 'Speak to the children of Israel and you shall say to them that they shall make for themselves fringes on the corners of their garments, throughout the generations, and they shall affix a thread of sky blue on the fringe of each corner. This shall be fringes for you, and when you see it, you will remember all of the Lord's commandment to perform and you shall not wander after your hearts and after your eyes after which you are going astray (Numbers, chapter 15, 37-41).

Celia did not forget my mum, Barry's younger sister, and bought her a special doll's outfit. 'I've also got a little dolly's dress for Bubs [my mum's nickname]. It is a Jewish Nurse's rigout,' Celia wrote in her letter. Cyril bought Rose a *Magen David*, a Star of David, which Celia posted to Rose.



*Rose's Star of David, which is an intricate and delicate interplay of swirling fine lines of silver that magically form the six-pointed Jewish symbol. There is no way of confirming if this symbol of Jewish identity was the one Cyril chose for his mother. However, the Pearlman family believe it is because the design has a Middle East influence.*

The brother and sister saw each other on occasions during *Pesach* when Jewish soldiers and nurses serving in the Middle East could obtain eight days of leave – and two kilos of *matzos* – for the festival. My cousin Lynda Fridman is custodian of Rose's Star of David, which is kept with three other pieces of Rose's jewellery: her gold wedding band, a locket inscribed with her name and a pretty blue and gold pendant with the Hebrew word and symbol *Chai*, meaning Life.



*Faye, Rose's daughter, inherited the jewellery, and Faye's daughter Lynda Fridman inherited the jewellery after Faye's death. Lynda, for a time, also carried on the tradition of writing the dates of births, deaths and marriages in Rose's Siddur.*

### **Rose mediates from afar**

While the letters told Rose of wild and exotic lands, above all, they reminded her she was still a mother to her adult children, who sometimes had gripes about each other. This is reflected in letters in which Celia and Leslie wrote of their annoyance about their brother Cyril's lack of communication. Celia told her mother in 1941 that she hadn't seen Cyril. 'I haven't seen Cyril for a while. I think he has gone to Cairo. He is so casual, he wouldn't dream of trying to get over to see me, but it is terribly hard to get transport and also time off.' Leslie also wondered about Cyril and asked his mother in one of his letters, 'Have you had any more letters from Cyril?' In another letter Leslie told Rose, 'Cyril writes to me but he doesn't tell me much either.' Rose must have asked Leslie if he'd had more detailed news from Cyril. Still, Leslie explained the silences to Rose this way. 'You can't really expect him to tell you much as the censor is very strict with letters [from] overseas.' Leslie may have been trying to protect Cyril and not cause angst for his mother. But in a letter from Leslie to Celia he confided that there were no excuses for Cyril. 'He does not give much news at any time,' Leslie told his sister.

Rose was still comforting her adult children. Although her children tried to soothe their mother's worries about their safety, Rose also knew they missed home. She would remind them how much she loved them. In November 1941, Rose sent Celia a photograph of herself and on the back of it she wrote:

To my dear  
darling daughter  
Celia. who loves  
you dearly  
your devoted  
mother  
hope you like  
it.  
Nov. 1941



*This photo was taken in the front yard of 122 Argyle Street, St Kilda, where my mother's family lived.*

Rose would also send her children packages of newspapers including *The Argus* and *Jewish Herald* so they could learn about Melbourne news. Celia also longed for news about family and friends:

Mother dear, don't worry if you have no news ever – just keep telling me what you have to eat and how the neighbours are. It is all beaut to hear about. Tell me about the relations now and then – [two words indecipherable] and Auntie Lizzie ok. Cheerio – hope you are OK. I am.  
Your loving daughter, Celia x.

In another letter, Celia asks her mother for gossip on St Kilda streets:

Write and tell me all the gossip. I don't care how little it is. Tell me about Millie Batagol and all the folk around...Lots of love and remember me to all relations and friends. Love from your loving daughter etc Celia xx.

Rose had important work to collect news on her streets and write about it in her letters to her children. Her local post office was only a six-minute walk away in High Street, St Kilda.

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## **Chapter Eleven: Silences in the letters and newspapers**

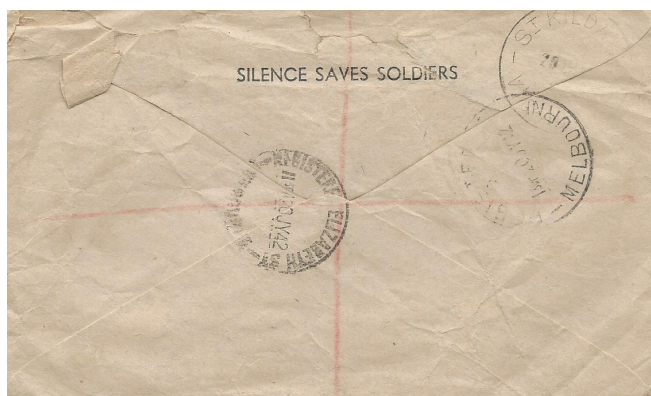
### **121 Argyle Street, St Kilda 1942; Rabaul, 1942**

The letters from Rose's children often brushed over army news. 'We are so busy here that we can be called up on duty any old hour,' Celia told her mother. She was upset that this meant she'd probably miss the chance to visit Jaffa and its 'oriental' restaurant where diners ate food with their fingers. Celia never told her mother why she was so busy. Rose would have probably guessed because she read the newspapers and clipped stories about the war that she placed in her old brown suitcase. Rose knew the battles were producing torn and sick men and that her daughter would be tending them. In another letter, Celia gives a hint that the soldiers are getting hurt. On 20 November 1941 she wrote, 'We will be needing lots of reinforcements soon as they are getting a hospital together in Syria and half the girls attached to our hospital are going up that way.' Celia did not say where in Syria the nurses would be going. Cyril was also vague about locations. 'Somewhere in Egypt' he'd write on the back of his photographs to Rose.

The front of the envelopes Celia used to send her letters reveals why details were omitted about battles and locations. On the bottom left-hand corner, under the red-coloured words, 'Australian Red Cross Society', is a black stamp in the shape of a triangle. A royal crown draws the eye to the triangle's centre. In block letters that scale the inside of the triangle are the words 'PASSED BY CENSOR'. There are similar markings on an envelope which Leslie used to send a letter dated 29 October 1941. On the bottom-left hand corner is a rectangular-shaped stamp. Inside the shape are remnants of words I can't make out even with a magnifying glass. Underneath is



another stamp with the word, PASS, but the rest of the phrase has melted into the envelope. A signature crosses the stamp, indicating Leslie's letter had also passed the military censor.



*The envelope containing the photograph of Rose she sent to her daughter, Celia.*

The gatekeeper, the Federal Department of Information [DOI], was vetting private letters in case a soldier or nurse mentioned sensitive information about location and battles that might fall into enemy hands. The DOI also guarded radio and newspaper reports about military operations for security reasons and insisted the war stories be favourable in order to maintain civilian morale. Newspaper production in Melbourne during the war was smaller, too. It was only sixty per cent of pre-war size, which was a lot less news than Rose was accustomed to.

One way in which the DOI soothed Rose and other mothers' concerns was to show how it was sharing uplifting news with Australians serving overseas. The department distracted the nation with the race-horse season, and Rose and Leslie entertained themselves with talk about the races. Leslie asked his mother in one of his letters if she had done well in the 1941 Caulfield Cup. In the same year on 4 November, *The Argus* reported with much fanfare that a description of the Melbourne Cup would be

flashed to all places where Australian troops were serving. The paper told its readers that the troops had been able to follow the fortunes of the runners during the Spring Racing Season. 'It is interesting to note that when the Queen visited the AIF hospitality bureau at Australia House, London recently the result and story of the Caulfield Cup, still displayed on a blackboard, was the principal topic of conversation,' *The Argus* said.

The upbeat news report buried lurking danger. At the end of the long story a line says that special arrangements would be made for those serving in the Middle East to get a description of the Melbourne Cup Race because the enemy had been jamming the daily news broadcast via short-wave services. Was the DOI trying to bury a worrying turn in the war among the racing season details? The DOI would have understood people's reading habits and have known that few readers persevere to the end of stories. That is part of the reason the inverted pyramid news structure was adopted so the most important news would go at the top and less important at the bottom. On an objective appraisal of the story, the lurking danger should have been higher.

But on a personal level, I'm glad the prowling danger was at the end of the story. If Rose had read it, she may not have seen the lines at the end, which would only have added to her anxiety about Cyril stationed 'somewhere in Egypt', and her daughter in Palestine. Snippets of information can prompt imagined scenarios of what might happen, and Rose already knew about the effect of war. She had comforted her sister Celia after her husband died in Egypt during World War 1.

There were more lurking dangers for Rose to contend with. Celia was in the Middle East when Mr Forde, the Australian army minister, told *The Argus* on 22 November 1941 that nurses in Tobruk, Greece and Crete had been shelled, machine-bombed and dive-bombed. There was nothing to be concerned about, he urged, because no nurse had died and they just carried on with their duties. But there was still the threat of death. Almost as an afterthought, Mr Forde added that two nurses had been killed in the Middle East in a car crash. Rose knew from Celia's letter a couple of days beforehand on 20 November 1941 that she hoped to go to Jaffa and back to Tel Aviv and perhaps visit Jerusalem again. What if Celia was involved in a crash? There were no trains or trams; only cars and a bus. The roads were often narrow, windy and rocky, and treacherous in the hilly areas of Jerusalem.

Rose's son Leslie was also in Rabaul near the angry volcano, which the newspapers reported on. Rose already knew about that, too. Leslie had sent his mother photos of the Tavurvur volcano's fury, which Leslie and his fellow soldiers of the 2/22<sup>nd</sup> Battalion had watched erupt on 6 June 1941.



*'Tavurvur sending up a bit of smoke,'  
Leslie wrote on the back of this snap.  
Rabaul, 25/6/'41*

Leslie assured Rose the soldiers were safe because 'they hardly went into Rabaul'. But Rose never knew how close he was to the volcano. If he had given his exact

location the censor would have carefully cut out the sensitive words with a pair of scissors and burned the offending sliver of paper.

In between Leslie's letters, Rose had to rely on radio and print reports about Tavurvur. The newspaper stories told of light-coloured dust with flecks of crystal raining down on Rabaul and of the ash clouds triggering lightning. Here was Rose's son in a strange and wild land living close to a cauldron, which hurled mud and stone into the air. Would the volcano swallow Leslie and the other soldiers? Rose, like Leslie, thought he would be fighting against the Germans in Europe. But instead Leslie and about a thousand other soldiers had been sent to Rabaul for garrison duty. They were there as a defence force for the isolated outpost where a loud and temperamental inhabitant lived.

Rose, Faye and other family members as well as friends would have known the potential danger Leslie was in. *The Argus* had reported that life in Rabaul had become 'almost intolerable', a term even Rose's son had used in his letter. Water was scarce and there was a strange smell in the air. The story quoted a letter from Captain R.G. Cox of the Administration staff. The Captain pulled no punches:

Dust and grit saturated with sulphurate acid have been settling thickly over all the surfaces. Copper wire of the ship's aerial has turned to a green pulp. Mosquito nets fall from their rings and artificial silk in women's stockings disintegrates.

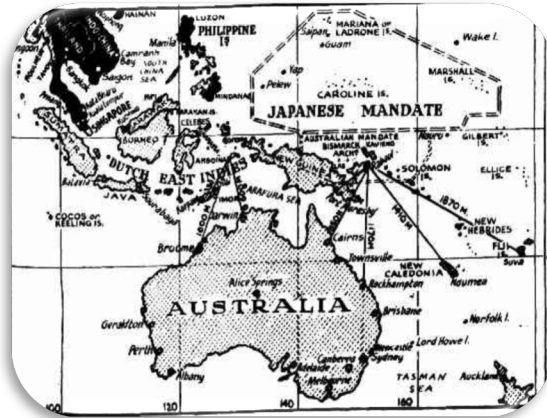
While the Minister was here a few weeks ago the volcano quietened down for the first time for some months. While we were listening to his broadcast from Brisbane in which he declared that Rabaul was now back to normal, the eruption burst forth again with renewed vigour.

The hills are bare, the lawns dead, the hedges, trees and shrubs have dropped all their leaves, leaving a scene of uncanny desolation. The crater has just given off a deafening roar, and at half-hour intervals is throwing up cinders that rattle on the roofs and limit vision to about 100 yards.

Tavuruur continued its fury. On 9 January 1942, a stifling summer's day in St Kilda, *The Argus* reported how Mrs William Brown, who was now back in Melbourne, was out walking in December 1941 in Rabaul when the volcano erupted almost five kilometres from her and spewed lava into the air. Mrs Brown's husband was required to stay in Rabaul because he held a government position. Buried among the details about the high cost of living in Rabaul is a line that carries a sense of a foreboding. Mrs Brown told the reporter she was anxious about the entry of the Japanese into the war.

The threat was real. A small story in *The Argus* on 24 January noted that eight hundred women and children were leaving Rabaul, but not because of the volcano; it was the fear of Japanese invasion. Rose and other mothers must have shared Mrs Brown's anxiety. After all, their sons were on the frontline and Rose and other women were unable to quickly get the information they *really* wanted: the news confirming their sons' safety. They had to rely on the mail or a telegram, and news reports vetted by the DOI.

**A sense of uneasiness now pervaded the newspaper reports about Rabaul.** On 8 January Mr Drakeford, the Air Minister, assured readers of *The Argus* that the third Japanese bombing raid on the aerodrome in Rabaul had caused only 'slight damage' and no casualties. When the Japanese bombers had made their fourth visit, Mr Drakeford told readers there was some damage to aircraft on the ground, but 'as far as is known at RAAF HQ, there were no casualties'. *The Argus* published a map of the 'Pacific War Theatre' on 22 January on page one showing Australia's position in relation to places where the Japanese had attacked.



The areas shaded black on the map indicated where the ‘enemy’, the Japanese, had occupied land. Rabaul, the Australian-mandated territory, ‘has been subjected to heavy Japanese air attacks’, the story accompanying the map said. Silences could no longer be contained. The Japanese were advancing.

Back in St Kilda, residents were aware of the Japanese threat. They heard air-raid drills, covered their windows in black cloth at night and watched as the street lights were dimmed. On January 23, the Prime Minister John Curtin told *The Argus* that all capital cities should be without any visible illumination. ‘We have got to get accustomed to the life we have to lead,’ he said. Rose’s eighteen-year-old daughter Faye understood the message. She joined Air Raid Precautions, where she had duties such as looking after an air raid post and doing first-aid classes.

More maps were published. On 23 January, *The Argus* ran a map on page one of New Guinea and the Bismarck Archipelago, and the ‘towns that have been attacked by the enemy’. Rabaul was shaded black, signifying that the town had become silent. ‘No word has come from Rabaul for two days,’ *The Argus* announced on 24 January. Yet, the silence produced a deafening chorus of questions for Rose. My mum recalls her

mother Millie telling her that during the Japanese threat, the St Kilda neighbours and relatives kept asking Rose about Leslie.

‘Rose, do you have news about your son?’ they would inquire.

‘No, no,’ Rose’s voice would trail off.

‘Rose, you come to my house for tea tonight. *Sholem Aleykhem*, Rose,’ they would say, touching her gently on the arm.

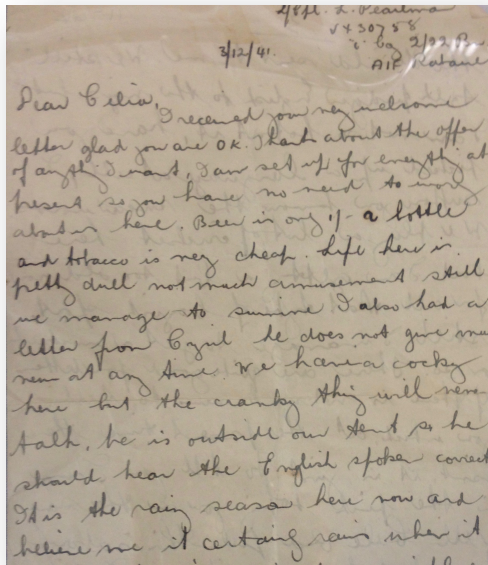
‘*Aleykhem Sholem*,’ Rose responded.

**Bulolo, the site of an airfield on the New Guinea mainland,** had been silent after its radio station was disabled during a fierce Japanese attack on 23 January. It was believed the Japanese had landed in New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, and that Rabaul was in enemy hands. The Japanese, *The Argus* reported, wanted bases in New Guinea. ‘Australia was facing the greatest danger in its history,’ *The Argus* shouted. If the Japanese onslaught was to be stemmed, Australia needed urgent British and American help. The War Cabinet cancelled the Australia Day holiday on the Monday for all factories, mines, dockyards and workshops engaged in war production. There was never a holiday for Rose in the claustrophobic summer heat of 1942, because her mind was occupied with thoughts of Leslie in New Guinea, her daughter Celia in Palestine and son Cyril in the Middle East.

On 27 January, *The Argus* reported on page one about ‘extensive enemy activity in N. Guinea area’. The Japanese were using their naval, military and air forces to advance on New Guinea. Australian troops, most of them Victorian Militia, were fighting desperately against an invading force of ten thousand at Rabaul. They were outnumbered. At the beginning of February, Rose would have learnt from her copy of *The Argus* that Australia was trying to repel the Japanese. The Australian Air Force scored some hits on Japanese ships. ‘Enemy fighters took off to intercept our bombers but they were driven off,’ *The Argus* reported. Perhaps Leslie and his mates were safe. But Rabaul was still silent. Mr Forde said there had been no reports of Australian troops in Rabaul since the Japanese landed there because no news was getting out. ‘It was known that the wireless station had been put out of action when it became certain that the landing would be made,’ Mr Forde said.

**Leslie sent a letter to his sister Celia**, who was still in Palestine, on 3 December 1941, five days before the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbour on 8 December. She had kept it until she died at the age of ninety-six in February 2002. Leslie told his sister that he had been having a ‘rotten time’ with tropical ulcers that started with sandfly bites. Leslie then jumps to a joke; he didn’t want to dwell on the infections. ‘I suppose you have heard the Jewish slogan for V for Victory?’ the joke began. Unfortunately, the writing has blurred and I’m unable to make out the rest of the joke; it is lost. But not the fact that Leslie wanted to soothe his sister’s concerns about him with humour.





*Leslie's letter is held at the Jewish Museum of Australia with Celia's collection. It is three pages.*

In this letter, he also told Celia that the Rabaul camp was like a reunion of friends for him. 'I often meet chaps here I hadn't seen for years. There are a few chaps here with me from Ballarat, I know them from there.' He also said he was delighted with a picture of my mum, Roberta, in the little grass skirt he had sent her as a present from Rabaul. Rose featured in the letter, too. Rose must have sent Leslie a snap of herself, possibly the same one she sent Celia in November 1941, because he told his sister 'mum looks as good as ever'. Leslie had no more news; there wasn't a lot happening. He just wanted to let his sister know he was okay:

(I) just wanted to tell you I am in the pink hoping you are the same. Well, Celie, old pal this is about the extent of my news so I will conclude now with, love from Les. Send my regards to friends and any others I know. Look after yourself.



*Leslie's letter to Celia was accompanied by this photo of Leslie and his fellow soldiers. Leslie is kneeling in the second row on the far left. The Captain has his hand resting on his shoulder. Celia (Pearlman) Leon Collection, Jewish Museum of Australia*

Even though Rose kept checking, there were to be no more letters with a New Guinea postmark delivered to her letterbox.

**The Summer months of 1942 ended.** Uncle Lloyd had celebrated his twenty-third birthday and Celia her thirty-sixth. Cyril had come home to Melbourne at the beginning of autumn after being in the Middle East for two years but would be off again in a week's time to Western Australia for army duty. *Pesach* had come and gone in April in the Hebrew year 5702, and in the same month Rose celebrated the news that Cyril had become engaged to Zelda Grant, a Jewish woman he had met in Western Australia before he had left for duty in the Middle East in 1939.

The following month, on 1 May, Rose turned sixty-seven. Her daughter Millie, who lived across the road from Rose at 122 Argyle Street, prepared a birthday dinner for her mother. Millie was known as the good cook in the family. No one in my generation of the family knew how skillful she was until I found her name in Ballarat's *The Evening Echo* for coming equal first in her cookery certificate while she was still at school. Millie pickled dill cucumbers and onions, and made plum jam with the fruit from friends' trees. She made chicken soup, gefilte fish and grilled lamb chops that melted in the mouth. She scrubbed the carrots, parsnips, turnips and potatoes and boiled and baked them so they still looked like gleaming vegetables and not the casseroled mush, which many Australians served up at the time. Millie and her daughter Roberta, my mother, strolled to the Continental Kosher Butcher shop on High Street near Alma Road, St Kilda to buy chops. But my mum wouldn't go inside because she was too shy; the butcher boy would say hello to her like he always tried to do. They also went to the kosher chicken shop on High Street, but my mum didn't

like that shop either. She was frightened of the old woman dressed in black who plucked the chickens' feathers. Millie and Roberta also walked to Port Melbourne to buy fresh fish from the fisherman. There was also the traveller, the Chinese man, who would drop by Millie's and sell her vegetables and blocks of dark cooking chocolate. She'd grate some of the chocolate and spread the sprinkles of delight over bread. Rose would never go hungry on her birthday with Millie around, despite the war rations.

All during 1942, Rose's friends – the Rosenbaums, Batagols, Gordons, Porters, Langfords and Viders – continued their routine of buying their *challah* Friday morning to eat as part of *Shabbat* celebrations in the evening. They made chicken soup in the morning, too, which wafted up and down Argyle Street. There were more routines during the year. The families, including the Pearlmans, waited each week for the man to deliver big blocks of ice, which he would put in the families' ice-chests to stop their food from going off. The children woke up early to watch the milkman on his horse and cart delivering fresh milk to each house. And the children, including my mum, still tore up Argyle Street to the corner of High Street to buy milkshakes overflowing with icecream and blue syrup at the Ideal Dairy. Rose and Faye walked to The Astor or Windsor or any other movie theatre to which they could snare tickets to watch the newsreels and double features.



*Interior of The Windsor Theatre, Albert Street, Prahran, 1945. It was demolished in the 1960s.  
Image: H2009 177/56 State Library of Victoria*

On the high holy days Rose and Faye went to the St Kilda *Shule* for relatives' and friends' *bar mitzvahs*, weddings and *minyans*. In November 1942, Rose attended the Melbourne Hebrew Congregation's *Shule* on Toorak Road to see her son Lloyd marry Edith [Edie] Cohen, the former Judean League Queen of Beauty of 1939.



*Lloyd and Edith centre. Cyril Pearlman left. Seated in front, Faye (Pearlman) Green. Next to Edith is her sister, 11/1942*

And during 1942, Rose still kept anxious watch over her letterbox at 121 Argyle Street. Celia's letters arrived inside their Red Cross issued envelopes, but there was nothing from Leslie. He was now listed in the newspapers along with hundreds of other soldiers as 'missing abroad'.

**Rose went searching for Leslie.** If she saw a soldier on a Melbourne street from the same regiment as Leslie, Rose would tug on his sleeve to catch his attention and ask if he had heard of a soldier named Leslie Pearlman. Some had heard of him but no one knew where he was. Luna Park and the city were good places to find soldiers. Millie, my Grandmother, would also tug on soldiers' sleeves and ask if they knew her brother. As a little girl my mum, Roberta, would watch her mother Millie do this. 'My mum was really upset; everyone was,' she tells me often.

During 1942, Rose also contacted The Red Cross Bureau for Wounded, Missing and Prisoners of War to help her find Leslie. Mrs White, the bureau's director, offered Rose a glimmer of hope when she wrote to her on 26 September 1942 saying a witness had seen a soldier fitting Leslie's description:

Your son with a party of six or seven others, crossed the river by canoe while our informant set off in a different direction...it may well be that he was taken prisoner then or soon after. We sympathise with you very sincerely in this time of great anxiety and trust that your suspense will soon be relieved by knowing definitely that he is safe, even if he should be a prisoner of war.

The response made sense: Leslie could be in a prisoner-of-war camp and it would be difficult for him to get word out to his family.

The army also gave Rose hope that he was alive in a POW camp because it told her to keep writing to Leslie. Eight of Rose's letters dating from December 1943 to June 1944 survive. Lynda, my cousin, found them along with the clippings in Rose's old brown suitcase. There may have been other letters secreted away in the case that failed to escape the clean out.

The letters are brief and typed in block letters almost like telegrams. They all bear Rose's address in the top-right corner: 'Mrs. R. Pearlman, 121 Argyle Street, St. Kilda. S.2, Victoria, Australia.' In the left-hand corner is Leslie's address: 'Lance Corporal L. PEARLMAN, VX30758, "C" Coy., 2/22<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, A.I.F.' The letters begin with 'DEAR LES', or 'OUR DARLING LES', and end 'LOTS OF LOVE', 'ALL OUR LOVE' or 'LOVE AND BEST WISHES'. No names are mentioned at the end, just: 'FROM MOTHER AND FAMILY.'

The letters provide Leslie with news about the weather, and marriages and births. As I read over the letters, I see time moving. It was important for Leslie to have a sense of time because if he was in a POW camp, the Japanese would have confiscated his watch and calendars. One letter reminded Leslie that the seasons were changing in Melbourne. 'THE WEATHER IS GETTING VERY COLD NOW,' it says. Another told him that, 'ON MOTHER'S DAY FAMILY CAME AND BROUGHT PRESENTS FOR ROSE.' Family news also gave Leslie the sense that life was going on. The first letter dated 4 December 1943 sent Leslie news about his brothers:

DEAR LES,

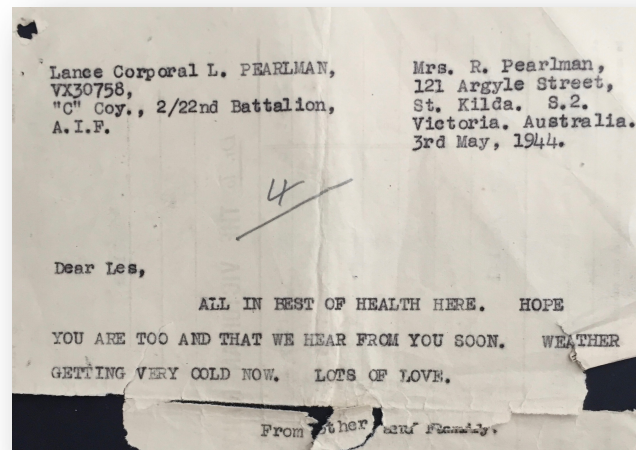
WE HOPE YOU ARE WELL AS WE ARE ALL HERE. LLOYD AND CYRIL ARE MARRIED. HAROLD HAS A SON ANTHONY LESLIE. LOTS OF LOVE FROM EVERYONE.

FROM MOTHER AND FAMILY.

The mix of Ashkenazi and Sephardic tradition was used in the family again to remind the younger generation of older members by giving them the name of an older relative. In the same letter dated 21 January 1944 Leslie is told, 'FAYE HAS TURNED 21.'

Faye would have typed the letters after discussing with Rose the news that was important to Leslie. Perhaps Faye was sparing her mother the achingly difficult task of writing to a son whom she didn't know was dead or live. Faye typed the letters on the back of old railway forms and receipts from the Victorian Railways' Ways and Works Branch, where Faye worked as a secretary. One piece of paper, half the size of an A4 sheet, is a receipt for firewood from Drouin in country Victoria. It's

unsurprising that Faye recycled the receipts: in 1942, the year Leslie was listed as missing, the government introduced more stringent rationing on goods such as paper. Rose's and Faye's hope they would hear from Leslie, who would have turned thirty-six in 1944, spurred them on to keep writing. The second line in a letter sent on the third of May 1944 is so simple, yet speaks of longing and hope:



The letters continued with news. 'MARY LONG AND SYBIL PINCHAS MARRIED.' 'LOUIS AND QUEENIE COHEN HAVE ANOTHER SON.' 'METTA ZIVIN (IS) ENGAGED TO ERNEST JOSEPHS.' It was the St Kilda Jewish community and family news. But Leslie was also reminded of his Ballarat connections, and of Rose's friends, the Murphys. 'CONNIE MURPHY FROM BALLART MARRIED.' The Murphys were important to Rose and her family. On 15 June 1944, Ada Smith, the married sister of Mary Murphy from Ballarat, visited Rose in Argyle Street.

By the end of December 1944 there was still no word from Leslie; he hadn't replied to the letters.

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## Chapter Twelve: The Badge

### Spencer Street Railway Station, Melbourne, 1945; Argyle Street, St Kilda, 1941 to 1945

Rose stood on platform five at Spencer Street Railway Station searching frantically for her next-of-kin badge. It had been pinned to her coat, close to the lapel. The temperature had only reached sixteen degrees Celsius when Rose arrived late morning in Melbourne on 6 February 1945 from a holiday in Ballarat. If it weren't for the unusually cool summer's morning, Rose would have fastened the clasp to her floral dress. It was easier for the badge to grip a cotton frock than the thick coarse threads of a coat. Rose searched her coat pockets, but she couldn't feel the sting of the pin attached to the badge's clasp. There was no sign of it in her small suitcase, or in her calico cloth toiletry bag tied with green string. The round, white metal badge with the raised image of Australia with the words, 'To the Women of Australia', would have stood out against the asphalt railway platform if it had fallen from Rose's coat. Rose had been wearing the badge for four years from late February 1941 when the army started issuing 'the female relative badge', a symbol that united the war mothers and wives.



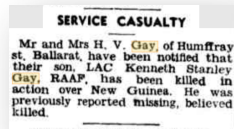
*Australian War Museum, Canberra*



Rose's badge had four gold stars – that looked like starfish – attached to a bar suspended below the silver disc. Each star represented her children at war: Cyril, Leslie, Celia and Lloyd. There was only one badge given to the nearest woman relative of those serving in the war. Rose was the anointed one.

Rose and her daughter Faye, who had also been on the Ballarat holiday, continued searching their luggage and pockets for the silver badge. Nothing. Faye left her mother on a platform seat holding a copy of *The Argus* while she went to report the badge missing at the lost property office. Perhaps Faye hoped the paper would distract Rose, but there were reminders of loss in it. While the newspapers produced guarded stories about military operations, they still reported the dead, hurt and missing. Rose, like all mothers, read the casualty lists to see if she recognised the name of a friend's child or husband. Or the name of a soldier from the same regiment as their child's. Rose also looked for names from the Jewish community because many lived in the St Kilda area. Fifty-eight Jews from Victoria died in the war. Overall, three thousand and eight hundred Australian Jewish men and women served in the Australian Armed Forces during World War II.

If Rose had perused the casualty report on page three of *The Argus* on 6 February, 1945, she would have read that Mr and Mrs H.V Gay of Humffray Street, Ballarat, where Rose also lived in the late 1920s and early 30s, had a twenty-year-old son, Kenneth, serving in the war in New Guinea. Like Leslie, Kenneth had also been listed as missing.



*The Argus, 'Casualty Report,  
6 February, 1945, p.3*

The news that Kenneth was now confirmed killed in action over New Guinea may have given Rose a jolt. Whether Rose knew the Gays or not she would have understood their pain of waiting to hear from a son fighting in a war in New Guinea. All Rose could still do was to go on waiting *and hoping* that Leslie was alive in a POW camp. Faye finally returned to Rose to break the news that the next-of-kin badge had not been handed in at lost property. Over the next few days Faye returned to the office, but there was no sign of it.

Rose was not the only mother or wife who had lost her next-of-kin badge. Daily metropolitan and country newspapers ran advertisements from women desperate for someone to find their Women of Australia war symbol. The women, many of whom did not have telephones, printed their home addresses in the newspapers' 'Lost and Found' sections hoping someone would deliver the badge to them: 'Lost Thursday night between King's Theatre and Princess Bridge, Next of kind badge, No 4930, 37 Harper St Northcote,' is typical of an advertisement. Mothers and wives were so grateful for the return of their badges that they placed 'thank you' notices in their local newspapers. In the *Frankston Standard*, Mrs James of Cranbourne Road 'desires to thank the person who found her next-of-kin badge and left it at the Post Office'. Victorians who found badges placed notices in the 'found' sections of newspapers. They understood the next-of-kin badge's significance.



*The Argus,*  
12/7/'45, p.6

Although most of the women who carried the war symbol did not know each other, they were united in a collective sense of hope that their sons and daughters would return safely. The symbol also saved them from having to explain to relatives and passers-by their weariness and moments of fear. The badge spoke for them. However, some women like Rose were never reunited with their symbols. They could apply for a replacement, but the new next-of-kin badge would not be the same because it was not the original that carried hope and superstition. If the original badge stayed safely pinned to a lapel, then good fortune may prevail. A replacement may spell disaster because the link between mother and child or wife and husband was interrupted.

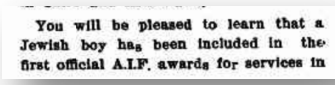
The stars on Rose's original next-of-kin badge had worked some good fortune. Cyril, the first of the children to leave for overseas, returned safely to Melbourne at the end of March 1942 for one week's leave after spending two years serving in the Middle East. In seven days' time, he would be stationed in Western Australia. This gave him little time to show the family, including Rose, the Military Medal he had won for his role in the battle of Bardia, the first of the Western Desert military campaigns. Cyril's military records explain why he won the medal:

Cyril conducted a battle for two days under heavy shellfire. By his devotion to duty and skill in passing back to Bde Headquarters valuable information Lance Corporal Pearlman helped to make possible control of the operations and materially influenced the conduct of the battle.

I don't know if Rose would have been aware that in early January 1941, Cyril was fighting a battle in Bardia, or that one hundred and thirty Australian soldiers were

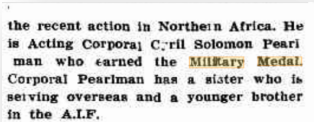
killed and three hundred and twenty-six had been wounded in the battle. Media censorship was tight.

The brown suitcase would have held the clippings announcing Cyril's war medal. *The Hebrew Standard* reported that Cyril had been awarded a Military Medal and in another edition of the newspaper Lazarus Goldman, the Jewish War Chaplain who helped Celia obtain a *tallis* for her nephew Barry, wrote a letter mentioning Cyril:



You will be pleased to learn that a Jewish boy has been included in the first official A.I.F. awards for services in

*The Hebrew Standard*  
of Australasia,  
1/5/'41, p.1



the recent action in Northern Africa. He is Acting Corporal Cyril Solomon Pearlman who earned the Military Medal. Corporal Pearlman has a sister who is serving overseas and a younger brother in the A.I.F.

Celia, who returned to Melbourne a year after Cyril in March 1943, also cheated death. Rose was wearing her original next-of-kin badge at the time. As a young girl, I have vague memories of Celia telling me the story of the troop ships and of the one that unexpectedly turned direction sealing the fate of the soldiers and nurses on board. Celia also told her daughter-in-law Ruth the story of the ships. I have stitched these memories together with details from Celia's military records, others nurses' military records, newspaper reports and war historians' research. The information forms an incredible story of fate.

Celia left Sydney on board the *Aquitania* for overseas duty on 3 February 1941.



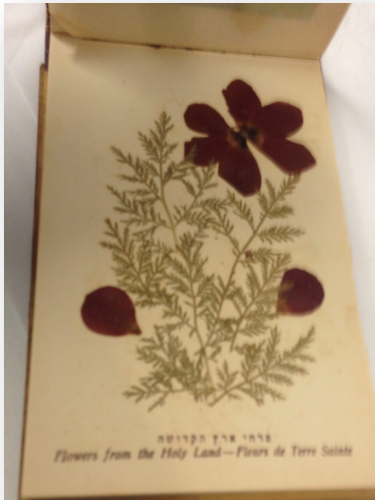
*Photo of the Aquitania in Celia's photo album of her service overseas. Jewish Museum of Australia.*

Leading the *Aquitania*, a former liner, was another former luxury liner, the *Queen Mary*, which had been fitted out as a troop ship carrying soldiers and nurses. Both ships met up with the *Nieuw Amsterdam* off Sydney Heads and sailed for Melbourne escorted by *HMAS Hobart*. They met the *Mauretania* in Bass Strait on 6 February 1941 the very day four years later on which Rose would lose her next-of-kin badge. The convoy of ships, known as US9, arrived in Fremantle three days later on 9 February and departed on the 12th for overseas. Everyone on board the ships thought they were sailing to the Middle East. A few days out from Fremantle, the *Queen Mary* swung around behind the other ships, made a farewell pass and then turned to Singapore. Celia waved goodbye to the *Queen Mary* because some of her nursing colleagues were on it. The other troopships headed for Bombay where soldiers and nurses, including Celia, took other smaller ships to the Middle East. If Celia had been on the *Queen Mary*, she may have been killed or put in a POW camp after the Japanese captured Singapore.

Nurses Dorothy Elmes together with Kathleen Neuss, who was born in Ballarat in 1911 five years after Celia, were two of the nurses who left Sydney on 3 February 1941 on board the *Queen Mary*, the same day as Celia sailed from Sydney on the *Aquitania*. Dorothy and Kathleen sailed to Singapore, and then a year later they were

among sixty-five nurses who had to evacuate on the *Vyner Brooke* with civilians after Singapore fell to the Japanese. While sailing towards Palembang in Sumatra, the *Vyner Brooke* was bombed by prowling Japanese warships. Twelve nurses were killed during the attack or drowned, thirty-two were made internees, and twenty-one shot in the back on Radji Beach on the island of Bangka, now Indonesia. I don't know if Celia knew Kathleen or if she went to school with any of Celia's siblings in Ballarat, or for how long she lived in Ballarat. But Celia did know Vivian Bullwinkel, who survived the massacre on the beach. Ruth says Celia remained 'in shock' for the rest of her life about what had happened to her fellow nurses.

Like her brother Cyril, Celia would remain with the army for the rest of the war, and they would both be elevated to the rank of Captain in the army. After returning home in 1942, Celia served tending soldiers in different locations around Australia. When she had leave from a posting, Celia went home to Rose and Faye and regaled them with stories, but she would always remind them of her time in Palestine. In the Argyle Street house, Celia showed Faye and Rose, who was still wearing her original next-of-kin badge, her photos and mementos from Palestine. The trio would flip through the postcard-sized book of photographs of the Holy Land with their captions written in Hebrew, English and French. The book survives. On alternate pages are flowers of the Holy Land.



The flowers' burgundy petals and fine, wispy stems and leaves had been dried in the Holy Land's sun and skillfully arranged on pages.

*Celia [Pearlman] Leon Collection, Jewish Museum of Australia*

Olive wood front and back covers etched with palm trees and camels protect the flowers and views of the Holy Land. Inside the front cover is an inscription in block letters written in blue ink: 'TO SISTER C. PEARLMAN, FROM A GRATEFUL PATIENT, NX2279T, F.J GRIFFITH.' Rose must have smiled.

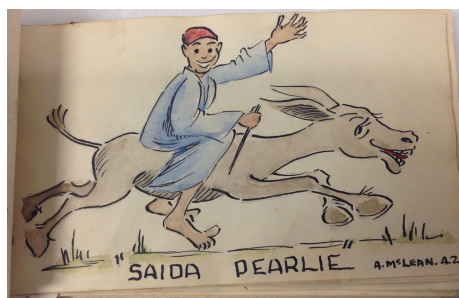
There is another olive wood covered book, Celia's autograph book, that also survives. The front cover features a stenciled picture of a man riding a camel and the word 'Jerusalem' above. A piece of metal with an engraved number is fastened to the top of the cover. Its shiny silver appearance looks out of place against the desert scene. On page twenty-six of the seventy-three page book a soldier explains how the metal became part of the story of the man and his camel. 'On the front of this book I have placed for you a piece of It [Italian] plane from Mersa Matruh. NX 58598, Pte P.H. M McDonald, Ward 12, 22.6.42.' The soldier had taken a piece of metal from an Italian war plane that had crashed during the Battle of Mersa Matruh in Egypt, part of the Western Desert campaign. It was his souvenir to Celia.



*Celia (Pearlman) Leon  
Collection, Jewish Museum of  
Australia*

Celia's autograph book is mesmerising. Australian and South African soldiers as well as three Italian POW have autographed the book with sketches, poems and ditties. Although seventy-eight years have passed since the soldiers created the book, the men seem frozen in time waiting for Pearlie's attention. Rose's family and friends called Rose, Rosy.

The soldiers in the 7th Australian General Hospital in Palestine sketched scenes of the Holy Land in fine pencil and brush strokes. Soldier A. McLean drew a grinning local in a flowing robe riding a donkey who has an equally beaming face. The soldier has expertly used watercolours, which are muted except for the donkey's tongue that is a fiery red.

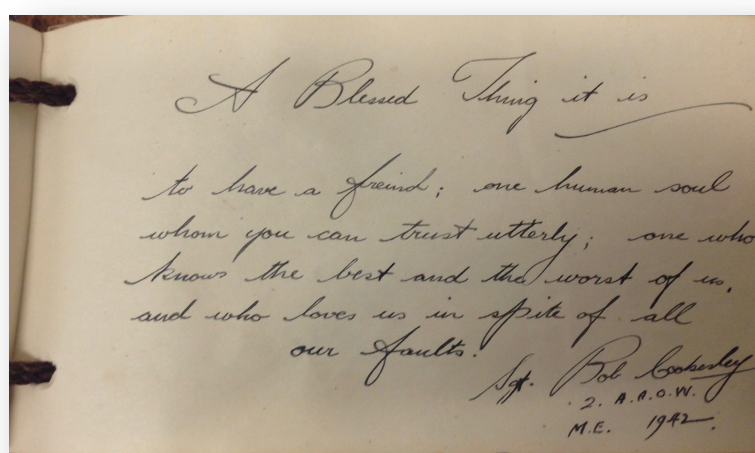


Sergeant Bob Cookesley deftly used his ink pen to draw a bored and grumpy soldier



sitting on an outside dunny with his pants around his ankles. The laughter among the soldiers must have hit a crescendo with the Sergeant's final strokes. 'I dunno, nothin' ever seems to happen round here!' he wrote. A bullet is heading for the soldier from behind.

On the previous page Sergeant Cookesley used his ink pen again to craft exquisite flowing handwriting. It complements what he wrote to Celia:



I imagine Rose and Faye pouring over Celia's photos, many of which now sit in the Rose album I've curated. What stands out are the photos of the tent hospital camouflaged in mud. Inside it are young men in white pyjamas lying or sitting up in bed. The rows of beds are all full. Some soldiers are standing. These are the men who wrote in Celia's autograph book and gave Rose the comfort and pride that her daughter was tending to them. They are also the men who made Celia, Rose and Faye giggle as they read the ditties and traced the fingers around the funny sketches. One soldier lightheartedly points out that the pages in the autograph book are 'getting rough...so for Christssake keep it clean'. Rose's sister Celia Phillips, after whom Celia was named, would have appreciated the bawdy lines as well because she also

had a sense of humour. In a photo of Celia, the aunt, she is balancing a cigarette holder on the tips of her painted fingernails, while affecting a languid Hollywood pose. The two Celias would have found this ditty from the autograph book entertaining:

Pop! Goes the Whiskey  
Pop! Goes the Cider  
Sister Pearlman Pops  
Into the Mess  
I wish I could Pop  
Inside Beside Her  
NX34152, J Williamson, Ward 10, AGH

**Rose's life in Argyle Street** took on a familiar pattern from the time she began wearing her original next-of-kin badge in late 1941. She was now sixty-six and her life had to accommodate government-imposed war rules such as food and clothing rationing. Faye often collected the ration books for herself and Rose. Each night from December 1941, Rose and Faye used black cloth to cover their windows after the government introduced the 'brownout' to protect Melbourne from possible Japanese nighttime attacks. Street lights were also dimmed perhaps reminding Rose of the flicker of light from gas lamps on Ballarat streets. Although the darkness that enveloped Melbourne during the brownout was gradually lifted from mid-1942, Rose and Faye kept the sheets of black cloth in the washhouse tacked onto to the back of the Argyle Street house for years afterwards. Perhaps Rose and Faye thought the cloth would be of some practical use. Or perhaps Rose thought there may be another world war. She had already lived through two, so a third was not out of the question. Then again, she may have been loath to throw anything out because she had experienced the poverty of East End London, Melbourne's 1890s depression and the Great Depression. Whatever her reason, the black cloth was a reminder of the war rules that

dominated her life.

War routines continued. Rose would wave Faye off each week in the evening darkness as she set out for the walk to her Australian Air Raid Precaution Group meetings or to her ARP post. By 1944, Rose would farewell her daughter once a month because the meetings were now less frequent. The threat to Australia from Japanese attack had become remote. But there were still gas restrictions. Rose had to carefully work out when she and Faye could have the family over for dinner because there was a strict limit to how much gas they could use. Sometimes they rationed the family as Faye explained in her diary, 'Gas rationing still on so crowd down for tea.' Government war rules had affected Rose's daily life in many ways. They required her to negotiate recipes using her rations, and to walk up and down her street in darkness to visit friends and family after dinner. The daily rituals signposted her days and in some small way may have comforted her while she waited and hoped for Leslie's letters.

But there were days when the mind could not be swayed to concentrate on the minutiae of daily routines. It may have been years since her toddler Sidney and husband Baron had died, but grief does not slide away with time. It bubbles under the surface waiting for moments to stir it up. Perhaps grief becomes worse when time's cruel march flings the living further from those they loved. There is the aching realisation that the dead are not experiencing and witnessing the same as the living. There is the gap in time that makes the living desperate to hang on to memories of the dead.

Faye's diary reveals the succession of moments in Rose's life between April and May 1944 that may have triggered such intense feelings of loss. Friday 7 April 1944 was the Good Friday Royal Children's Hospital appeal broadcast on radio 3DB. Rose and Faye donated 2/6 each and heard their names read out on radio. Rose and Faye donated the money in memory of Sidney, who had died thirty-one years earlier, at the Ballarat Base Hospital in 1913. Faye hadn't been born when Sidney died. Then a little over a week after the hospital appeal, Rose was at her friend Mrs Porter's house in Neptune Street in St Kilda comforting her after her husband died. Rose, the widow of fourteen years, did not have to say anything; her mere presence was enough.

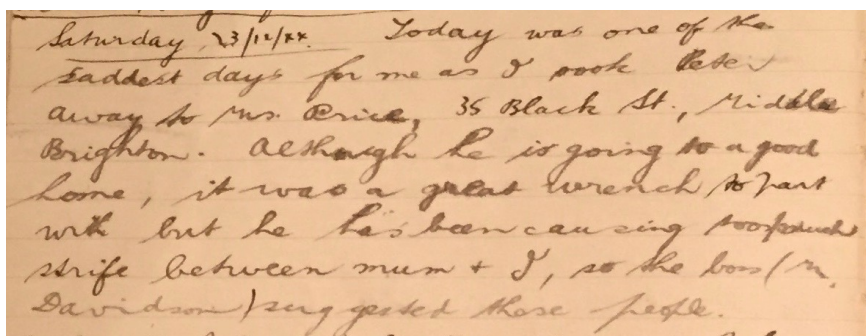
There must have been moments between April and May 1944 when feelings about Leslie's disappearance intensified for Rose. Soldiers were coming home, but not Leslie. On 19 April, there was a large 'Parade of Honour' march in Melbourne's CBD of the 7<sup>th</sup> Division, which Faye watched. *The Argus* and *The Age* newspapers ran photographs of the soldiers and published ten stories, including those leading up to the march on the nineteenth. *The Argus* has a photo of beaming soldiers and excited members of the public cheering them. Although no school holiday was proclaimed, the march was accepted as a reason for children being absent from school. Two thousand, five hundred men of the 7<sup>th</sup> Division marched. Two weeks later, on 5 May a large contingent of allied forces, including American and Dutch soldiers, marched in the city. Faye and Rose, who was still wearing her original next-of-kin badge at the time, saw Lloyd marching with the Air Force.



*The framed photograph of Lloyd in uniform, Freemasons Homes, Melbourne.*

Six days later, Faye wrote to the Red Cross asking them to broadcast a message to Leslie. There was still hope that he was alive in a POW camp.

**Faye had her routines:** work, tennis, dances and caring for her dog Peter. Faye never reveals his breed, but I suspect he was a mixture, a 'bitzer'. The dog, as he is often referred to in her diary, went for long walks around St Kilda with Faye and my mum, who was a small girl at the time. They took Peter to Mrs Porter's to order *matzos* from her for *Pesach*. He also accompanied Faye and my mum to the High Street shops and to the beach. Peter also dug holes under a fence and took himself on adventures, returning after a week, sometimes two. But Peter caused friction between Rose and Faye, resulting in the dog being sent away, as Faye explained in her diary:



*Faye's diary entry, 23/12/'44. She was twenty-one at the time. Her entries were written in exercise books.*

The loss of Peter was too much so Faye visited Mrs Price on 28 December 1944, five days after giving Peter to her, to ask if she could have him back. But Peter had been missing from the Price home all that day. 'I was very, very upset and when I got home

about 6.30pm I went straight to bed,' Faye wrote. Cyril, who was back in Melbourne on leave from Western Australia, was worried about his little sister. He called in to see Faye at work but she was out paying Rose's rent. Cyril wanted to ease Faye's loss. 'He was very anxious to buy me another pup and while I do appreciate it so much it was really Peter I wanted,' Faye penned.

On the day Cyril left for Perth on 30 December 1944, Faye received a letter from Mrs Price to say Peter had returned. Faye went with my mum that afternoon to collect the dog. 'I was really sorry to have to take him back from them after giving him to them but I really wanted Peter back,' Faye wrote in her diary. That night she took my mother and Peter for a walk along the St Kilda beach. There is nothing in Faye's diary to indicate the discussions she must have had with Rose about Peter returning to Argyle Street. Perhaps Cyril spoke to his mother about the comfort and companionship Peter gave Faye. She too was dealing with 'the wait': her brother was missing in New Guinea and she also had a boyfriend, Les Goldsmith, serving overseas in the Middle East.

Had Rose observed the difference in Faye's behaviour? The usually gregarious young woman was often out in the evenings watching movies, visiting friends and attending Red Cross and Jewish dances. She usually went to piano and singing lessons, did some acting and was involved in the Jewish Girl Guides and Rangers. But now she sought solace in her bedroom. From the age of six, Faye had experienced loss: her father's death, watching older brothers and sisters leave home, and waiting to hear if Leslie and her boyfriend were safe serving overseas. Peter, the dog, was her constant good luck charm because he lifted her spirits. 'I am happy again,' Faye wrote in her

diary after reclaiming Peter. Rose had her next-of-kin badge, a symbol of her ties to her children. Perhaps Rose came to realise that Faye needed her own symbol of comfort.

At the end of April in 1945, two months after Rose lost her next-of-kin badge, the army issued her with a replacement. A few days after Rose began wearing her new badge, she learnt that Lloyd, who had been stationed in Darwin, would be sailing to an unknown destination overseas with the Australian Air Force. Now Rose would be waiting to hear from another child serving overseas; she had already been waiting three years and four months for word from Leslie.

None of Rose's descendants know what happened to Rose's replacement next-of-kin badge.

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## Chapter Thirteen: The News

### Argyle Street, St Kilda 1945 to 1946; St Kilda Shule 1946

Nine days after Rose began wearing her new next-of-kin badge, a whirl of war news enveloped her. On Tuesday 8 May 1945, news reached Australia that Germany had surrendered. That evening, Rose's eldest son Jack and his wife Rachel sat with Rose listening to radio programs dissecting the surrender. The following day Australian workers, including Faye, had a holiday to celebrate the victory in Europe. Rose and Faye finished the day attending a thanksgiving service at St Kilda *Shule* that started at 7pm and finished at 9.30pm.

The news in May was like a volley of fire: rapid, startling and unpredictable. Lloyd got his discharge on 19 May 1945, after being in the Pacific. He had served in Jacquinot Bay in New Britain, the same island in New Guinea where Leslie had disappeared. Cyril, who was still stationed in Western Australia, sent Rose a letter on 31 May 1945 telling her he was off overseas again, this time to Borneo and Singapore. He didn't know when he would return.

July and August were also laden with news. On 4 July, Hilda Williams, a friend of Rose's, visited 121 Argyle Street to tell Rose her brother-in-law had died while a POW in Japan. The following day there was stunning news: Labor Prime Minister John Curtin, the war leader, had died aged sixty. Faye, an ardent Labor supporter, wrote in her diary that Ben Chifley would take the top job. Exactly a month later on 5 August, Celia came home on leave from tending soldiers around Australia and would remain in Melbourne for the remainder of the war. Four days later on 9 August Russia



declared war on Japan. 'The war news is very good,' Faye wrote in her diary. 'Japan is expected to surrender any time now.'

Six days later, on Wednesday 15 August 1945, *The World News* broke that the war in the Pacific had ended. Faye described in her diary how the day unfolded:

Soon after I started work the announcement of the end of the war was made so we were given the rest of the day off and tomorrow as well. This is the moment we waited almost six years for and we thank God and our wonderful allied combined forces for its successful conclusion and hope for a permanent and happy peace. When we knocked off work I went with some of the girls from work through town, which was packed and happy. After dinner I went to the Porters and we had a few drinks and a happy afternoon. At night we went to a victory party at Adele's place and I can honestly say I had the best time of my life. There were about twelve Air Force boys we had invited from Air Force House and we had a wonderful night of singing, dancing and games. Lloyd and Edie were at mum's place for tea, and then they came, too.

Celebrations continued the following day with a 'beautiful' thanksgiving service at St Kilda *Shule* in the morning. Faye and Rose took their usual route along Argyle Street past the fledgling palm trees to Lambeth Place, which ended at Alma Road. They crossed the road, weaving their way along Charnwood Crescent to the *Shule* in Charnwood Grove. There they met Celia and my mum, Roberta, who was attending the service with her Jewish Girl Guides. In the afternoon Rose, Celia and Millie, my Grandmother, visited their friend Mrs Konig because she was hoping to return to Palestine now that the war was over. Faye, her best friend Kath and Kath's mother Mrs Porter, went to the city in the afternoon to witness the celebratory singing and dancing. Rose went home instead. In the evening Rose and Faye went to the Porters' house. The familiar surroundings were comforting; a place where they would talk, drink tea and have a game of poker.

Five days after World War II ended, Faye tells the story in her diary of the telegram girl who knocked on Rose's front door and passed a flimsy envelope to her. Rose handed it back because she didn't recognise who it was from. As I read Faye's words, this was how I heard the conversation.

'Can you tell me who it is from, please?' Rose asked the girl. 'I don't have my glasses.'

The telegram girl opened the envelope, surveyed the clipped sentences and found the name.

'Les,' she replied.

Rose recognised the name instantly. 'Our Les,' she whispered. Rose had been waiting three and a half years to hear news from 'Our Les', her son.

The telegram girl then took it upon herself to read aloud the eleven words on the thin tea-coloured paper. 'Dear Faye, Peace greetings. Hope to see you soon. Les Goldsmith,' she said.

In a split second, Rose's joy dissolved. The telegram girl hadn't read Les' last name until now, and it wasn't Pearlman, but Goldsmith. The eleven words were intended for Faye, whose boyfriend, Les Goldsmith, was also serving in World War II. Nothing had prepared Rose for the trickery. She had only contemplated two possibilities: the army delivering a death telegram or the telegram kid waving the flimsy paper, which told her that 'Our Les' was safe.

Rose had been at home by herself when the telegram girl came knocking on the door of her rented home. She had to wait until Faye got home from work to unburden herself of the misunderstanding. That night Faye wrote in her diary, 'Mum thought

the telegram was from 'Our Les.' Faye repeated the sentence in what was possibly an attempt to grasp what had happened to her mother. No words could describe it. Rose would have to go on waiting for Leslie.

**It was now January 1946** and there was still no news about Leslie. The silence had a menacing effect on Rose. Faye wrote for the first time in her diary that her seventy-year-old mother was going to see a doctor. Rose never seemed ill. She was the strong and resilient woman who gave birth nine times and witnessed the deaths of her toddler and husband. She opened a lollyshop to support her family and babysat other people's children. She didn't languish at home. Rose went to the cinema and theatre and played the piano by ear. She produced children who told jokes, so it comes as a thud to learn she was unwell. On Monday 14 January, Faye accompanied Rose to see Dr Madden. He did not say much and just told Rose her 'nerves were in a bad state' and prescribed her some medicine. As I read Faye's line, I mouth that Dr Madden should know what's wrong with Rose: she is waiting for Leslie. 'Why doesn't he talk to her? Medication won't make the grief go away,' I want to shout at the doctor.

Faye took the day off work to look after Rose, but went back the following day and came home at lunchtime to check on her mother. 'She is improving but far from well,' Faye wrote in her diary. On Tuesday 4 February, Rose attended her fifth doctor's visit in three weeks, but he didn't say much except to note a 'nervous rash' on Rose's arm. Rose had to distract herself on the Tuesday so she went with Faye and my mum to see the movie *Irish Eyes Are Smiling* at the Windsor Theatre, a twelve-minute walk from Argyle Street. Faye also wanted to lose herself in a story. Peter, her dog, had been missing for two weeks.

Rose had fewer medical appointments after February. She continued going to the movies like she had always done when she first moved to St Kilda. The Catholic family next door celebrated St Patrick's Day. A few days later Millie and Rose went to their friends' home, the Kleins, for an engagement party. Living amongst the Jewish community and family and friends meant there was always a birthday, *bris*, *bar mitzvah* or wedding to celebrate. At the beginning of April, there was more excitement when Rose's sister Celia travelled from Ballarat to see Rose. She'd have lots of stories about the people who drank at her hotel and would give Rose an early present for her seventy-first birthday on 1 May. There was never a day that Rose sat by herself. There was always contact with the outside world.

Still, it was unusual for Rose to get a knock on the door while preparing for *Shabbat*. On Friday 10 May 1946, she laid the *challah* on the table and lit the two candles. Rose and Faye covered their eyes with one hand and started reciting, *Baruk atah Adonai Eloheinu Melekh ha-olam* [Blessed are You HASHEM our G-d, Ruler of the Universe...] over the *Shabbat* candles when a noise at the door interrupted them. Faye went to investigate thinking it may have been Roberta wanting Faye because she was forever following her auntie who was like a big sister to her. But it wasn't. Faye records the surprise visit in her diary:

A telegram came at 6.30pm tonight from the army that they now presume Les is dead and although we were expecting it, it came as a dreadful blow. Mum went across to Millie's and I went to the Issacs tonight.

The following day, a Saturday, Millie and Celia skipped the horse races, a favourite past time for the women, out of respect for Leslie and stayed home in the evening. Faye stayed in, too, to remember and to grieve for Leslie. The family had practised

the Jewish rules and customs to guide them on mourning for little Sidney and for Baron. For Leslie, however, it was confusing. Rose did not have his body to give to the *Chevra Kadisha*, the Jewish burial society, to wash and say prayers over. She had no body that could be buried the next day in a consecrated Jewish cemetery. There would be no grave where the family could leave their calling cards – stones – when they visited.

The following Sunday was Mother's Day. Rose's children arrived at 121 Argyle Street with gifts. Lloyd and Edie gave Rose a handbag, Millie and Celia a bottle of wine and Faye a pair of underpants, a singlet and two pairs of stockings. But the telegram had marred celebrations. As most of the family was together, they could discuss Leslie's *Minyan* where prayers would be said for him. His obituary in Deaths on Active Duty in *The Argus* announced the details for the *Minyan*:

Pearlman. VX30753. Leslie 2/22<sup>nd</sup> Battalion previously reported missing now presumed deceased (inserted by mother, brothers, sisters, 121 Argyle Street St Kilda). Minyan 8pm, May 19, St Kilda Synagogue.

About fifty people greeted Rose at the *Shule*, '*Hamakom Yenachem Etchem Betoch She'ar Aveilei Tzion v'Yerushalayim* [May you be comforted among the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem and know no more sorrow]. They sat in the Byzantine style *Shule* listening to Rabbi Jacob Danglow recite the *Kaddish*, the mourning prayer. Rabbi Danglow knew the effect of war on families. He had served as the Jewish chaplain for Australia for several months towards the end of World War I and was senior Jewish chaplain to the Australian army in World War II. The Rabbi had also visited New Guinea and the Pacific Islands.

Rose sat in the women's gallery comforted by her sister-in-law Lizzie Froomkin, and friends Mrs Finkleston, Sarah Rubin, Amy Myer and Gertie, who had lived at 121 Argyle Street before Rose and Faye. Rose's sisters and daughters surrounded Rose. From their vantage point in the women's gallery upstairs, the women could look down to the *Bimah*, reading desk, and behind it the Holy Ark housing the Torah. The women were closer to the magnificent dome roof, clad in Wunderlich metal tiles. While the men recited prayers, the women whispered, 'How is Rose?' 'Oh, what a terrible ordeal!' 'Did you know that Fanny Friedman's husband died?' 'That's Harold Cowen, a cousin of Rose's in the fourth row.' 'That's her son Jack.' Women always talk amongst themselves in traditional Synagogues, and Faye liked to record in her diary what they said.

Rose received telegrams in the days that followed. 'PLEASE ACCEPT OUR HEARTFELT SYMPATHY VERY USPET TO HEAR YOUR NEWS...GREEN AND SALAMONOW', one reads. The following day a letter arrived for Rose from the Victorian Jewish Returned Soldiers' Circle.

THE VICTORIAN JEWISH RETURNED SOLDIERS' CIRCLE.  
Phone WA.2158 20 Stewart Street,  
HAWTHORN, E.3.  
19th May, 1946

Mrs R. Pearlman,  
122 Argyle Street,  
ST KILDA, S.2.

Dear Mrs Pearlman,

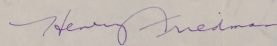
On behalf of the President (Mr Lou Orbuck) and members of the Victorian Jewish Returned Soldiers' Circle, I wish to extend to you and your family their deepest sympathy in the sad loss you have sustained by the passing on active service of your son Leslie.

May you be comforted by the thought that your son, in making the supreme sacrifice, has done a noble part in his country's service.

Wishing you and the members of your family a Long Life free from further care and anxiety,

I am,

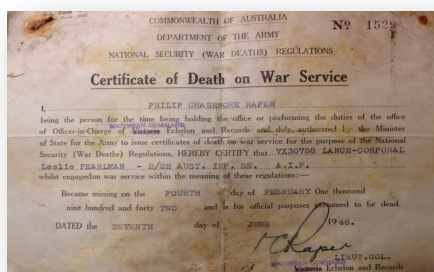
Yours sincerely,



Hon. Secretary

The army returned the letters that Rose and Faye had written to Leslie. My cousin Lynda distinctly remembers her mother Faye telling her this. Perhaps Faye was the one who received the small parcel.

The nervous rash on Rose's arm returned, disappeared and returned. The only news she had about Leslie's death was on the army death certificate issued by Phillip Chasemore Raper.



There were no other details about what happened to him on that day. No location; no body.

## Chapter Fourteen: Leslie

### Freemasons Retirement Homes, Melbourne, September 2016; Rabaul 1941 to 1942

Leslie's army records comprise ten pages. The service and casualty page is short. He enlisted at Royal Park in Melbourne and was posted to Balcombe and Puckapunyal before leaving for Rabaul on 12 March 1941 on the troop ship, *Katoomba*, from Sydney. Five months later in August, Leslie was promoted to Lance Corporal. All the entries are handwritten in shades of black ink and in variations of copperplate. The second last entry written in watery black ink stands out. There is only one word: 'Missing.' Each letter is scrawny, giving the impression the word was written quickly. I do not know how many times the army officer had to write 'missing' at the end of January and early February after the Japanese invaded Rabaul.

The official had a blue stamp for the final entry on 4 February 1942. 'BECAME MISSING & FOR OFFICIAL PURPOSES PRESUMED DeAD.' The stamp looks as if it were made quickly because the 'e' in the word 'DeAD' is in lower case. I'm glad he had the stamp. The rapid motion of stamping allowed the official to barely register the word, 'dead', as he reached for the next soldier's casualty page. Under the stamp another army official has used a red pencil to write the date 24 July 1946, signalling the end of Leslie's casualty report and anymore news about him.

Leslie's army records include two headshots of him. There's the familiar grin and smiling eyes I had seen in other photographs. The photos, which I post to the



Pearlman Facebook page, startle my cousin, Jennifer Maschler, who is a Great-Niece of Leslie's and Great-Granddaughter of Rose.



Her words, which she posted to the Facebook page, brilliantly sum up her reaction and mine: 'I got such a shock seeing his (Leslie's) face. It's so alive.'

No member of the Pearlman Facebook group knows how Leslie came to be killed in Rabaul. But Uncle Lloyd, who doesn't use Facebook, has kept the story of what happened to Leslie on 4 February 1942 to himself. Not even Uncle Lloyd's children know.

I'm sitting with Uncle Lloyd and my mum at The Freemasons Homes in August 2016, the day I broach the subject of Leslie. We look at photos of Leslie, which we have admired before. Many are of Leslie in his army uniform surrounded by his army mates.

'Uncle Lloyd do you know what happened to Leslie?' I ask quietly.

'Oh, it was terrible,' he says taking a deep breath. 'It was a horrible death. You see the Japanese tortured the men. They shot them in the back.'

Uncle Lloyd looks straight at me while shaking his head and repeating that his brother was tortured. It's as if he is trying to fathom the cruelty of war and the loss of a brother. Uncle Lloyd looked up to Leslie.

'Oh, poor Les. You know, he'd have been a test cricketer. He really was a wonderful cricketer, a wonderful sportsman. He always had a job; he always got a job even in the Depression. He opened up a printing shop for the Kleinsteins in Ararat', Uncle Lloyd says immediately, after telling me that the Japanese tortured Leslie.

Uncle Lloyd quickly moves the conversation to his oldest brother Jack, who was eighteen years older than Uncle Lloyd. They only lived under the same roof for three years, because Jack left home in 1923 at the age of twenty-one to get married.

Uncle Lloyd tells me again about the story of Jack, the 'big fat bloke' who got a job as a postman in Kyneton and broke the bikes because he was too heavy for them.



*Jack Pearlman, 1949. Photograph by Bob Kent of employees of the Melbourne Telegraphy Office. State Library of Victoria, Image H2010.120/121.*

Uncle Lloyd can barely get the words out without laughing. He also reminds me that Jack was a sook because he felt awkward that his mother was in the latter stages of her pregnancy with Faye when he became engaged to Rachel [Ray] Nissen in late 1922. Jack didn't play with Uncle Lloyd, but Leslie played cricket with him and let

him bowl and bat. Leslie may have had a temper but Uncle Lloyd loved him. Leslie helped Rose in the lollyshop after school and was the first in the family to buy a car. And like Harold, Cyril and Uncle Lloyd, Leslie told jokes.

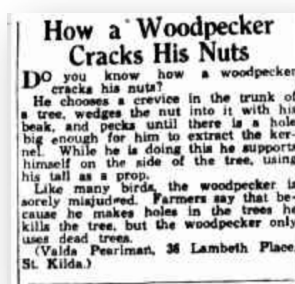
Did the younger brothers pick up telling jokes from Leslie? I ask Uncle Lloyd

‘Oh, cut it out. I don’t know,’ he responds with a grin.

‘Nearly everyone in your family was a joker,’ I say with a big smile in anticipation of Uncle Lloyd telling another of his jokes.

‘We liked to have a laugh. See, it was hard in Ballarat so you had to tell a joke,’ he says.

‘Faye liked to tell jokes, too,’ I add. ‘As a kid she sent jokes to *The Herald*.’



*The Herald, Junior Section, February and May, 1936. Faye's birth name was Valda Raphael, but family always referred to her as Faye from Raphael. Faye would have been thirteen at the time. She was also commended for short stories and her knowledge of airplanes.*

It seems cruel to return to the day Leslie died, seventy-seven years ago in 1942.

Uncle Lloyd was twenty-three at the time and he is now approaching one hundred. He has rarely spoken about Leslie's death. It would be different if Uncle Lloyd was initiating the talk about Leslie, but I am doing that and the responsibility is weighing

heavily. I decide that I won't ask Uncle Lloyd many questions, because it's not an interrogation or television interview where the reporter often prods the talent for displays of emotion. I also decide that I won't bring up how Leslie died on other visits unless Uncle Lloyd broaches the subject.

Not long after making this decision, I'm taken aback when Uncle Lloyd starts to recall the trying conditions in the New Guinean jungle. He knows from experience because Uncle Lloyd served in Jacquinot Bay himself, not far from where Leslie was stationed in Rabaul. 'Gee it was stinkn' hot there and it rained; it was hot,' he says. Then he interrupts himself after remembering the letter from Leslie he has kept for seventy-five years. Uncle Lloyd starts chuckling as he recalls the jokes Leslie made in the letter about the people he met in Rabaul. Uncle Lloyd knows the jokes word-for-word from the letter and I wonder how often he removes it from his cupboard to read it. Uncle Lloyd threw out much of his memorabilia, so it is significant that he has kept Leslie's letter.

I finally realise that Uncle Lloyd's telling of jokes is his tonic for coping with dark thoughts. On one occasion when I was in Uncle Lloyd's room at the Freemasons he confided that he does get down because he misses Edie, his wife, who died in 2006. But he quickly told me that 'telling a yarn and having a laugh' lifts his mood. Now I can see that Uncle Lloyd was steering the talk away from Leslie's death to funny stories about his brother Jack and the jokes in Leslie's letter. Public records, government reports, newspapers and Leslie's war records will help to fill the gaps on what happened to him on 4 February.

The story of Leslie and the other men in his 2/22nd Battalion is largely unknown in Australia. The official government report into Japanese atrocities and war crimes, which includes details about events on 4 February 1942, was not released until 1988, forty-seven years after it was written. The government was concerned the report might prompt the Japanese to retaliate against POWs. In addition, the government wanted to protect families from the horrific details contained in the report. But authorities were also intent on massaging messages and maintaining public morale. The stories of what happened on the 23 January when Rabaul fell to the Japanese and on the twelve days that followed failed to fit the Australian war narrative of strength and confidence. Nor did the stories fit narratives about authorities protecting the soldiers and nurses. The War Cabinet, stationed in Melbourne, had no escape plans for the soldiers and civilians of Rabaul, part of the Australian territory at the time. The Australian soldiers were also hopelessly outnumbered when the Japanese landed at Rabaul at 2.30am on 23 January. The soldiers tried to counter the attack, but it was clear it was a lost battle. Colonel J.J Scanlon, who was in charge, gave the rarely used order for the soldiers to 'break up and fend for themselves'. About four hundred soldiers managed to escape and return to Australia. Others were killed on the day, while another group started their trek south to the Tol Plantation, a coconut plantation.

The Curtin government appointed Sir William Webb, Chief Justice of Queensland, to report on whether there had been atrocities or breaches of the rules of warfare by the Japanese armed forces in the Pacific. Webb completed his first report in March 1944. A controlled release of fragments from the report appeared in major Australian newspapers on Tuesday 11 September 1945. The lead paragraph in the stories summarised the 'shocking outrages':

Japanese in the Pacific tied Australian soldiers to trees, bayoneted them and left them dying with their bowels hanging out, raped and killed two Roman Catholic nuns, dissected two American soldiers alive and removed their livers, horribly mutilated native women, and burnt alive at least two Australian soldiers who took refuge in a hut. Flesh cut from the bodies of dead Australian and American soldiers was cooked and eaten.

The story includes a few paragraphs on what happened on 4 February. After the fall of Rabaul on 23 January 1942, soldiers arrived at the Tol Plantation on February 2. The following day five Japanese craft landed troops there, trapping the Australians, who needed canoes or boats to cross two rivers to escape. The soldiers, who the Japanese had rounded up, were now POWs and had to surrender their belongings such as identity tags and paybooks. On 4 February most of the soldiers were tied together in groups of two and three and marched into the jungle where the Japanese shot or bayoneted them, or both. Six men survived the massacre. They were able to tell the inquiry what happened that day.

Faye's diary makes no mention of the Tol Plantation news reports. Perhaps she did not connect Leslie to the massacre. On the day of their publication, Faye wrote to Les Goldsmith, who was still serving in the Middle East. After penning her letter, Faye had a fitting for her tennis frock. In the evening, Rose's sister Leah and her daughter Letty visited 121 Argyle Street, and after they left Faye answered Les' letters. In contrast, Faye linked Leslie to a news report on 27 September 1945. The dread in her diary entry is palpable; she described the report as 'bad news'. *The Argus* ran the unnerving news that a ship carrying men of the 2/22nd Battalion, Leslie's battalion, never arrived at its destination:

No trace could be found of a Japanese troopship which left Rabaul in June, 1942, carrying from 700 to 1,000 Australian prisoners of war, Mr Forde, Army Minister, told the House of Representatives yesterday. Most of the prisoners, he said, were men of 2/22nd Battalion,

which defended Rabaul. It had not been possible to trace the movements of the vessel after its departure from Rabaul. Its rumoured destination was Hainan, but apprehension was felt that it failed to reach there.

If Leslie had survived the Japanese invasion of Rabaul and been taken a POW, as the Pearlmans believed, he may have perished on the voyage to China. Faye did not go out the day she read that story nor for the next few nights. Her habit was to stay at home when upset and stay close to Rose, who was now seventy.

At the end of the war, some families would learn that the names of their relatives were on a list of people believed killed on a Japanese prison ship, *Montevideo Maru*, carrying eight hundred and forty-eight POWs and two hundred and eight civilians. While in the South China Sea on its way to Hainan, a US submarine, *The Sturgeon*, torpedoed the ship. It sank in eleven minutes. Internees and all prisoners, most of them Australian, were killed on the ship that was not marked POW.

Someone has meticulously typed the three hundred and sixty-one page Webb report, whose pages are yellowing with age. Many names of soldiers were deleted from the report because it was believed the details were too gruesome for families to read. Fortunately Rose did not see those pages. The details would have conjured scenarios of how the Japanese played mind games with the soldiers and would have provided images of Leslie's ravaged body. Two photos held at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra suggest that the Japanese did not bury the bodies of those captured at the Tol Planation, but tossed them in the jungle undergrowth. An intact pelvic bone and a tin helmet litter the ground, while dead palm leaves are scattered among other remains. Skulls with their deep eye sockets stare back at the viewer. At the end of the war the allies found one hundred and fifty-eight unburied sets of bones.



*Australian War Memorial, P09455.001*

There are details that are impossible to know about Leslie's final twelve days after he left Rabaul. But Uncle Lloyd's knowledge, together with information from The Webb Report and the volume of exhibits provide insights. The soldiers who travelled south to the Tol Plantation had to climb the rugged Baining mountains and cross mosquito-infested rivers. The men were untrained in navigating the jungle, and they were starving. Some subsisted on a biscuit a day each. Some hadn't any food for four or five days. Many were suffering from malaria, dysentery and tropical ulcers. Leslie had explained in his last letter to Celia that he had developed painful lesions on his feet and lower legs. The ulcers were chronic and necrotic and mixed with different bacteria. The lesions were feeding on the hot, humid climate. It is likely that Leslie and other soldiers with their sores had to trudge the jungle and wade the waters. Few had guns because they were too weak to carry them in the heavy rain.

Leslie is in a photo with three army mates: Vincent Kavanagh from Caulfield in Melbourne, J Brenally from Carlton and W Waugh. On the back of the photo Leslie



has written the date 'January 1942', so it must have been taken just before the fall of Rabaul. In the picture, the men have their arms curled behind their backs; their army shorts and short-sleeve shirts are wrinkled. Kavanagh is to the left of Leslie but isn't grinning like Leslie. At least two of Leslie's mates weren't with him when he tried to make his way to the Tol Plantation.



*From left: V. Kavanagh, L. Pearlman, J. Brenally and W. Waugh.*

Kavanagh's military record shows the thirty-five-year-old went missing on 23 January, the day Rabaul fell to the Japanese, and was declared presumed dead. He has the same stamp in his military records as Leslie: there is even the lower case 'e' in the word 'DeAD'. Kavanagh, a farmer and truck driver, was born in Wychiproof. He had malaria and was released from hospital a month before the fall of Rabaul.

Private Brenally, the welterweight champion at the camp, served in Salamaua on the north-eastern coastline of Papua New Guinea. He got away in the wake of the fall of Rabaul. He must have. His captain and three other soldiers including Brenally, were written up in *The Sydney Morning Herald* for their heroism in fighting the Japanese in April 1942. I have been unable to locate military record for W. Waugh.

Leslie was with another group of soldiers trekking the jungle to the Tol Plantation. An eyewitness, most likely a soldier, saw Leslie with them. The Red Cross Bureau for

Wounded, Missing and Prisoners of War sent Rose letters in August and September 1942 telling her this news. The eyewitness had been talking to Leslie at a plantation on 3 February. Soon after the Japanese attacked, Leslie and the other soldier went in different directions. Some soldiers managed to escape. But not Leslie.

This witness described Lance Cpl. Pearlman as a short dark man, aged about 26 to 28 years, and added that they were both at a plantation on the 3rd February and spoke together, your son being quite well at the time. Soon after this the Japanese attacked and the two men left. Your son with a party of six or seven others, crossed the river by canoe while our informant set off in a different direction. This is all our witness knew about your son but it may well be that he was taken prisoner then or soon after.

*Extract from  
September 1942  
letter to Rose*

The Japanese had made Leslie a POW for not much more than a day. Clues to what happened on 3 and 4 February come from what the soldiers told the Webb Inquiry. Lieutenant Commander Alexander Mackenzie, who passed through the Tol Plantation on 15 February, told the Inquiry he saw four heaps of burnt Australian equipment: tin helmets, gas masks and paybooks. Mackenzie counted over one hundred water bottles and found soldiers' personal belongings including photographs. A bad smell hung in the air like rotting flesh, but Mackenzie didn't see any blood. Survivors told the inquiry that the Japanese took their personal belongings including letters and identity discs. The Japanese wanted the men to die anonymously.

On 4 February the Japanese massacred the Australian soldiers in four separate incidents. The Australians could hear their fellow soldiers being murdered. Private William Cook, one of the survivors, told the inquiry in exacting detail what happened on that day:

The officer, by signs, asked us would we sooner be bayoneted or shot. We asked to be shot. We were taken down the track. When we reached the bottom of the track three other Japanese

with fixed bayonets intercepted us and walked behind us. They then stabbed us in the backs with their bayonets. The first blow knocked the three of us to the ground. Our thumbs were tied behind our backs, and native laplaps were used to connect us together through the arms. They stood above us and stabbed us several more times. I received five stabs. I pretended death and held my breath.

The Japanese then walked away. The soldier who was lying next to me groaned. One Japanese came back and stabbed him again. I could not hold my breath any longer, and when I breathed he heard it, and stabbed me another six times. The last thrust went through my ear, face and into my mouth, severing an artery, which caused the blood to gush out of my mouth. He then placed coconut fronds and vines over the three of us. I lay there and heard the last two men being shot.

Cook made it to the beach, followed a path into the jungle and met Colonel Scanlon.

He showed the Inquiry his scars, which were consistent with his story.

**Six months after the army** told Rose that Leslie was presumed dead, the Pearlman men went to a memorial service for Jewish soldiers at the Melbourne General Cemetery in Carlton. A fine marble obelisk was unveiled revealing the names of fifty-eight Victorian Jewish soldiers killed in World War II. ‘Les’s name was on it,’ Faye announced in her diary. One of the Pearlman men would have told her. It was Sunday 9 November 1947 and the women were at home preparing for Celia’s wedding the following day to Jerry Leon. Rose’s house was full of friends and relatives, including Cyril, her son, from Perth. Many of the women who attended Leslie’s *Minyan* were at Rose’s home on that Sunday.

Rose and Faye attended the memorial service at the obelisk the following year on Sunday 7 November 1948. Jerry, Celia’s husband of a year, drove them to the Melbourne General Cemetery. My Grandfather, Samuel, and Rose’s son Harold, also hitched a ride in Jerry’s car. There is nothing in Faye’s diary about conversations at the memorial between the Pearlmans and Rabbi Lazarus Goldman, who conducted the service. He was the Australian Jewish chaplain in the Middle East between 1940 and

1943, at the time Celia and her brother Cyril were stationed there and was the Rabbi who organised Barry's *tallis*. He is also the Rabbi who gave Celia her *Jewish Prayer Book for Sailors and Soldiers* and wrote an inscription inside the front cover: 'To Sister Pearlman, With Best Wishes, L.M Goldman, CF, AIF, 17/11/41. Palestine.' Rabbi Goldman also served in the Pacific, but after Leslie was killed.

There is a dedication to Leslie in the book of remembrance for 'fallen soldiers' held by the Victorian Association of Soldiers and Ex-Servicemen and Women. Captain Celia Pearlman A.A.N.S initiated the dedication.

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## Chapter Fifteen: Argyle Street

### Argyle Street, St Kilda 1946; Argyle Street, St Kilda, 2016

Rose had been living at 121 Argyle Street for five years when the army sent her the telegram telling her that Leslie was dead. She would never leave the street. It was Rose's centre of the universe, one which reached out and drew in her family and friends.



*Rose, second from left, in a group in St Kilda. The woman on the far right is her sister-in-law Ruby Cohen, Baron's sister, who was five when she arrived in Melbourne from Russia. Date unknown.*

In aerial pictures, Argyle Street resembles a long stream with tributaries of thin streets flowing into it. This was a perfect set-up for Rose; everyone could find her home and she could wander to theirs. This to-ing and fro-ing was all within a kilometre of Argyle Street. The neighbours chatted around kitchen tables, ate tea at each other's homes, and comforted women, like Mrs Porter, when their husbands died. They visited number 121 and went to check on Rose throughout the years she clung to hope that Leslie was alive in a POW camp.

Faye's diary is liberally sprinkled with the names of families who visited Rose and Faye, and with whom the pair also interacted. In Argyle Street there were the Vidors, Batagols, Rosenbaums, Landfords and Wallers. Millie Klein, a friend, stayed with

Rose and Faye for a time. In Henryville Street, which weaves into Argyle, lived Mrs Porter and her two daughters. The Gordons and Rubins, who were Rose's neighbours when she lived in Lambeth Place, often dropped into 121. Sarah Rubin was often at Rose's or opposite at her daughter Millie's place at 122. Sarah would bring gifts of chocolate, fruit and nuts for the Jewish New Year. Family also lived on the main stream or in one of the tributaries. Lizzie Froomkin, Rose's sister-in-law, lived at 143 Argyle Street and the Cowens, cousins, at 5 Lambeth Place.

Argyle Street also gave Rose freedom. She could walk to the St Kilda *Shule*, to the High Street Kosher butcher and the Kosher chicken shop, where the woman dressed in black plucked the chooks. Rose had tram routes at the High and Chapel street ends of Argyle Street, which allowed her to visit her sister and niece in Mackenzie Street and, if she had time, to catch the Newsreel Hour at a movie house in the city. The tram gave her the opportunity to visit family and friends like Fanny Friedman in Carlton and while in the inner-northern suburb eat at Cohen's Kosher Restaurant. She could take the tram to the city to shop with her daughter Celia for shoes at Georges, the glamorous department store in Collins Street. I suspect Celia lavished her mother, who had wide feet, with a gift of shoes. Georges was in the blood: my Grandmother, Millie, had an account with the store and so did my mother.

Rose was within walking or tram travelling distance of The Windsor, The Astor, State Theatre and His Majesty's. While on their weekly or twice-weekly jaunts to the pictures, Rose and Faye often bumped into friends on the tram, episodes that Faye enjoyed recording in her diary:

When I came home [after work] Mum and I decided to go to The Astor. On the tram we met Sid and Mary Levy, who were going there. We also saw Kath and Mrs Porter. They intended going to see “Claudia” at the Windsor, but they decided to go to the Astor with us. We saw a good show at The Astor – an English picture “The Adventures of Tartu” with Robert Donat and Valerie Hobson, and a revived picture “Stronger Than Desire” with Walter Pidgeon and Virginia Bruce.

**Today Argyle Street** is just wide enough to allow two-way car traffic. It runs between St Kilda Road, formerly High Street, and Chapel Street and then a short distance over Chapel to Queen Street in St Kilda East. The footpath is a patchwork of charcoal asphalt and concrete speckled with grey. A few adult palms in the front yards of people’s homes act as sun umbrellas for those walking along the street during daylight. Thin tree trunks with flimsy branches are partly encased in ribbed plastic tubes embedded in the footpath. It’s as if the trunks have sprouted from concrete, not dirt and grass.

The housing now, as it was then, is eclectic. Orange-brick flats built in the 1950s and 60s tower over the inter-war housing. Some blocks are now painted cream in an attempt to give them a facelift. But the makeover can’t extinguish the flats’ motel-style architecture or the fact there are no trees in the courtyards, just concrete. Vegetation would get in the way of people trying to park their cars next to their front doors or beneath their flat. Only half a dozen Victorian weatherboard cottages remain, and most appear unrenovated: their paint is peeling and their tin roofs are red with rust. However, some have newish fences suggesting that someone wants to protect them from the outside elements. Next to one weatherboard whose veranda is teetering on splintered wooden poles are millennial townhouses whose dark grey concrete blocks have been assembled like a simple jigsaw puzzle. They have garages, the few

houses in the street that do. Their isolationist-inspired construction would have prevented Rose and her friends chatting over their low wooden fences.

Rose's home still stands at 121. A mature lemon tree now obscures part of the two-bedroom home, but there was no tree when Rose lived there; only a young hedge that had started to crawl up the wire front fence. That has been replaced with an aqua-coloured picket fence that's more suited to protecting a pretty Victorian terrace, than the austere lines of an interwar home. Photos from the 1940s and 50s of the home's façade show that it hasn't changed much over the years. Apart from a recent coat of cream paint to cover the rendered walls, the mission brown bricks remain. They form a border around the square front of the home. The roof tiles are the originals.



When Rose lived in the home, there were 159 houses in Argyle Street. Like Rose, most people in the street rented their homes from owners who lived in the salubrious suburbs of Toorak, Hawthorn and Malvern. They were doctors and business people; they didn't do the jobs their renters did. Rose lived among soldiers, truck drivers, labourers, factory hands, a wood merchant, motor mechanic, clerk, broadcaster, and



council and tram employees. Few women are listed in council rates books as renting homes, except for Myrtle Oates, a saleswoman, and Rose and her friend Lottie Deering who lived next door to Rose at 119. The women show up only because they were unmarried or widowed.

Eunice Angliss owned Rose's home from 1935 as well as the one next door at 121A, which is attached to 121. Rates notices reveal why the houses were numbered this way. In 1937, Eunice divided 121 into two homes perhaps to make more rentals available because of the housing shortage. This also explains why pictures of 121 and 121A look strange. The images give the impression of one house, not two, until you notice the side fence dividing them. Eunice's sister, Ethel May Angliss, also rented out a few houses in Argyle Street. Ethel owned the home which Rose's daughter, Millie, lived in with her husband Samuel and their children, Barry and Roberta. Samuel lived in the home for 50 years, but he never owned it. The post-war story for other family members was different. After Faye married Ken, the couple ended up buying 121 Argyle Street and later 119 Argyle Street.



*Rose with Faye on her wedding day, Monday, 4 December 1950 at St Kilda Shule. Rose was seventy-five and Faye twenty-seven. Rose wears the same set of pearls in other photos I have of her. Her daughter, Celia, also loved wearing pearls. I wonder if Celia inherited her strand from her mother.*

It was the first time in her life that Rose had a home for which she did not pay rent.

All of Rose's children would go on to become homeowners in suburbs such as

Caulfield and Glenhuntly. They always returned to Argyle Street to visit Rose.

Although 121 was a small home of four rooms, Rose managed to accommodate family and friends for Jewish festivals. In September 1946, Faye listed all the people who came to 121 for *Rosh Hashana*, Jewish New Year, celebrations in her diary:

This afternoon Lloyd and Edie came in for a few minutes, also Ette, Mrs Salmanov and Harold, who was already here for dinner (lunch), Anthony, Beverley, Auntie Leah and Letty, Celia, Barry, Roberta, Sam and Millie and Ann Vidor; so we had a houseful. Gertie Bryer called in for a few minutes about 5 o'clock.

The following night, after two days of going to *Shule*, Rose and Faye entertained more people. 'Ray, Jack, Betty, Millie, Sam, Mrs Porter and Kath, Adele, Norma, Stella were here tonight so it was quite lively,' Faye wrote excitedly in her diary.

The hospitality was reciprocated. Rose and Faye would go to Millie's house at 122 Argyle Street to break their fast on *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement, the holiest day of the year. Because they had abstained from food and drink for the day, they would ease into dinner so as not to upset their stomachs. They began with Millie's homemade sandwiches of egg and salad. Later she would serve chicken soup, homemade gefilte fish and roast chicken. Rose and Faye would go to the Isaacs in St Kilda for the first night of *Seder*, which marks the beginning of the Passover. At the *Seder*, Rose and her friends ate *matzos*, unleavened bread, and other foods symbolising the Jews' escape from slavery in Egypt. During the evening they would read from the *Haggadah*, where the story of the exodus was retold. Rose's sister-in-law, Lizzie Froomkin, one of Baron's sisters, held the last day of Passover for the family at her home in Argyle Street.

Argyle Street had other spin-offs for Rose. Her connection to the Jewish community in and around the street meant that she was invited to a constant stream of weddings and *Bar Mitzvahs*. There was always a celebration jostling for space with Rose's grief. In July 1946, a month after the army confirmed Leslie's death, Rose attended Geoffrey Granat's *Bar Mitzvah* with all her family at 9 Darling Street, a reception centre in South Yarra. Around the same time, she went with her daughters Celia, Faye and Millie and Millie's husband Samuel to Millie Klein's engagement party at Maison de Luxe in Elwood, where they all had supper in the reception and cabaret venue. The next month in August, Rose was at the Caulfield Town Hall for the wedding of Fay Gerber and Alec Gordon, the son of her neighbour. Rose was already at the town hall because she, but not Faye, had been invited to the wedding breakfast earlier in the day.

But Rose did not need a reason to celebrate with family and friends; just being with them was joy for her. One of the clearest memories my mum has of Rose is of her playing the piano and drinking tea at Argyle Street with the family. This is what she told me:

Over the years, relatives and friends would meet at grandma's place and would gather around the piano and grandma [Rose] would bash out a current song. I mean there were a few bad notes, but the melody was okay. Grandma was very clever; she would hear a song on the radio and would go to the piano and play it by ear. I loved those days when we were all together with grandma it made me very happy. After our sing-a-long, we would have a drink or cup of tea. My grandma would also have tea. As a child I was always fascinated to watch her drink her tea because she always poured the tea in the saucer, would blow on it and drink it. I have no idea why she did that.

No one in the extended family definitively knows how Rose came to own a piano.

Lynda, my cousin, has a recollection of her mother Faye telling her that Baron bought

it for Rose in Ballarat as a wedding present. But this would have meant that the piano would have had to be carted from the gold-rush town to St Kilda. Perhaps Faye bought the piano because she learnt it as an adult, but I doubt she would have had the spare pounds to afford the instrument. Maybe all the children and Rose chipped in to buy the piano, because they had form for helping their mother financially. During the two years of interviewing Uncle Lloyd about life in Ballarat and his mother, he always made the point that Rose's life got materially better once she moved to St Kilda because her children were working and helped her out. Rose could have also chipped in to buy the piano because she was still working as a babysitter for local Jewish families such as the Rosengartens at 10 Springfield Street, St Kilda East. No one knows where that piano and its three candelabras that jutted out from their specially made holes is now.

Rose's home was not only the centre of her universe, but her comfort. Although she was a widow, Rose was never alone and until the end of her life she lived with her daughter, Faye. It's a well-known family story that when Ken Green [Kurt Greenbaum] asked Faye to marry him, she responded, 'Only if mum can live with us.' Ken moved to 121 Argyle Street, and even when the couple's children started arriving Rose remained in the two-bedroom home. It worked both ways: the home was as much a comfort to Rose as it was to Faye, who lived in the home for thirty years.

But at times even Argyle Street harboured an undercurrent of menace. The night after Rose's birthday on 18 March 1948 when she turned seventy-three, she comforted Faye, who was twenty-five at the time, by sleeping beside her. It had been a normal evening. Rose's other adult children Harold and Lloyd and Lloyd's wife Edie, as well

as Celia and her new husband Jerry were over at 121 for tea. Faye went out afterwards to visit friends as she usually did after dinner. This time she went to the Isaacs', who had a Jewish refugee staying with them. On her way home she spotted a man bending over and tying his shoelaces in Argyle Street. Faye recounted what happened in her diary:

When I passed him, he crossed over behind me but I didn't take any notice of him as I was home by this time. When I got home, mum was already in bed. I was just about to go to bed when I had a funny feeling that the man in the street might be still loitering so I looked out the window and I nearly passed out to see a man in our front garden just outside my window. I got such a fright I didn't know what to do so I banged on the window and yelled at him to get out and he ran for his life towards High Street. After I got over the shock I went over to Millie's place and rang the Russell St Police, but they said there wasn't much they could do seeing the man had gone; that he was probably only a peeping tom of which there were lots about and now that I had frightened him away he wouldn't come back. When I got home I locked the windows and mum slept with me but it was some time before I could get to sleep.

The following night, Faye remained wary. On the Saturday she had intended to go to a dance at the Samuel Myers Hall at St Kilda *Shule* by herself because her two friends were going to a twenty-first birthday. But the thought struck her that evening that she might have to come home by herself after the dance. After her scare she didn't feel like doing that and stayed home. But her friends and family made sure that life would return to normal for Faye. She was at a dance the following week, and at the movies with Rose the day after the Peeping Tom upset the street.

Everything else had remained constant on Argyle Street for Faye and Rose. The Chinese door-to-door salesman still came to Argyle Street to sell his vegetables and thick cooking chocolate to Millie. On Rose's walks to Acland Street, known by locals as the 'Belle' because the landmark Village Belle Hotel stood at the end of the street, she still saw the babies in prams parked outside pubs while the women and men went inside to drink. She also spied the prostitutes with their tatty fur stoles and rouged

cheeks. Rose continued visiting her family and friends on the tributaries: Dora Bryer in Alma Grove and Ruby Cohen in Gurner Street. Argyle Street was Rose's *home* for sixteen years.

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## **Chapter Sixteen: Life Cycle**

### **Argyle Street, St Kilda 1946 to 1956; Hillingdon Place, Prahran 2018**

As they did on any other street, deaths and births descended on Argyle Street. Thomas Bennett, who lived opposite Rose at 120 Argyle Street died on September 13, 1946. He was forty-eight, leaving behind his wife, Ivy, and three children. A day later, Lottie Deering, who lived next door to Rose at 119, died at home four months after Rose received the army telegram that Leslie was presumed dead. Lottie, the widow, was sixty-seven.

Births also encircled Rose's home. During the 1930s and 1940s the Catholic couple, the Spences, who lived at 124 Argyle Street, opposite Rose and next door to my mum's home, produced eight children. They brought squeals of laughter to the street as they played their games in their front yard and cricket and football on the road. Few people had cars in those days, which allowed children to tear up and down the street. My mother laughs as she recalls hearing the increasing number of Spence children running up and down the hall of their home that was attached to my mum's house. 'We'd giggle and say the Spences have had another one,' my mum says.

The street was always teeming with children visiting friends and their Grandparents. During the 1940s, Rose entertained a growing number of grandchildren, many of whom lived in St Kilda and neighbouring suburbs. Harold, Rose's third oldest son, and his wife Ette had two children, a boy and girl. Rose often babysat the boy, Anthony, whose middle name is Leslie. Cyril and Zelda had two boys and would go on to have two daughters in the 1950s. Uncle Lloyd and Edie had their first child,

Lesley, who is named after Leslie, in November 1949. In the same month, another grandchild, Derek, whose middle name is also Leslie, arrived to Rose's daughter Celia and her husband Jerry, who had married in 1947. By 1950, Rose had eight grandchildren, and was babysitting many of them. My mum recalls a story her mother told her about Rose minding her one evening and how Rose was scolded for keeping my mum up late:

When Barry and I were very little my grandma Rose would baby sit. On one occasion when I was a baby – my mother told me – when she and my father came home at midnight, they found me very happily walking around in my cot, and grandma was very happy because it was the first time I had walked. However, my mum told me that she was not happy because grandma Rose had kept me up so late.

By the 1950 Rose's limp was getting worse, which slowed her down. No one in the family knows why she limped. Rose was now seventy-five and was spending increasing amounts of time in her chair. My mum remembers a woman with white hair whose curls had calmed with age sitting in an armchair snoozing:

Grandma seemed to be getting tired and she would doze off while I was around there as a young teenager. She was still going to the pictures and walking around but she looked tired. I think her lungs or heart were a problem and I know that she would go to the doctor's. She probably also got run down a bit worrying about my mother, Millie, (Rose's daughter), who was ill and in an out of hospital. We would go to The Alfred to visit her. It was a horrible place in those days because it was dark and had big wards.

Rose was suffering from myocardial degeneration, a disease of the heart muscle. She had been living with the disorder since 1946, the year in which she had learnt that Leslie had died.



But there was also much to revive Rose, which usually involved having her family around her. The image of Rose dressed in her skirt, sensible shoes and cardigan, and dozing in her chair is in stark contrast to the photograph of a seemingly carefree Rose holidaying with her family. In 1950, Rose and the family went on holiday to Hepburn Springs, famous for its mineral spring waters.



*Rose in Hepburn Springs, 1950. A popular holiday spot for Jews.*



*Rose, Faye and Samuel Josephs, my Grandfather, at The Grande, 1950. Samuel, like Rose, was born in Whitechapel and brought up in the Spitalfields. Samuel's parents and two older sisters were born in Poland.*

The family often went to Hepburn Springs around Easter, because it was a favourite holiday destination for European Jews, who saw health benefits in savouring and bathing in the mineral springs. Rose and the family often stayed at the Continental

House, built by a Polish Jewish couple in the mid-1920s. This time, however, Rose, Faye, Millie, Samuel and my mum went to the guesthouse, The Grande. Rose and Millie had come by bus on the morning of Holy Thursday, and the others took the 4.40pm train from Spencer Street because they had work and school during the day. A bus from Daylesford Railway Station took them to The Grande and they had arrived at 9pm for supper. Their hotel had hot and cold water in all rooms, and all guests had access to log fires, a tennis court, a swimming pool, a ballroom, a free library, and dance and dinner music. When Rose stayed at The Grande, there were thirty-two small rooms with bathrooms at the end of the corridor. Today, The Grande is a luxurious guesthouse that has been reconfigured to accommodate ten rooms, each with an ensuite, and with a price tag Rose could never have contemplated.

It was as if Argyle Street life had been transplanted to Hepburn Springs for the Easter Holidays. On Good Friday, Rose and the family went for a walk. When they got back to The Grande, their friends Mr and Mrs Jacoby and their daughter, Eve, pulled up at the house. George and Susi Rosner from Faye's Judean Tennis Club were also there. They went to supper as a group at 10pm at the Wanda Inn. Rose, Faye, Millie and my mum went to the pictures in Daylesford the following day and saw Cary Grant in the movie, *Night and Day*. Rose missed going on a walk the next day, not because of her limp but because she became pre-occupied talking to another woman, who was staying at The Grande. On Easter Tuesday, Rose took a bus from Daylesford to Ballarat to visit her sister Celia, who was running the Railway Hotel.

In 1951, Rose developed atrial fibrillation in which the heart beat is fast and irregular, a medical condition that increases with age. But her weariness did not preclude her

from holding the babies. In 1954, Faye's first child Lynda was born, a special birth because Rose was still living with Faye, her husband and the baby in the two-bedroom house at 121 Argyle Street.



*A black and white photograph from 1954 shows Rose beaming as she cradles Lynda.*

Faye was pregnant again with her second daughter, Rhonda, when she had a dream. It was the night of New Year's Day 1956 when she dreamt of a white light at the foot of her bed, a kind of mystical force, which soon disappeared. Faye thought the dream could have been connected to Rose, because she was in hospital at the time and Faye was worried about her. She also believed her emotions were heightened because she was seven months pregnant.

When she woke in the morning on 2 January, Faye was convinced that her dream was related to her mother. In fact, Rose had died during the night in a little private hospital called Normandy in Mitford Street in Elwood. Her lungs had been full of pneumonia for two days. Rose was eighty.

The day after Rose died, there were ten death notices for her in *The Argus* newspaper. Rose's children and her two surviving sisters each wrote a notice. No one else on 3rd January had as many acknowledgements as Rose. Telegrams flowed from friends

telling the Pearlman family how sad it was that Rose had died. News had travelled fast: there was a telegram from friends living in Perth. 'OUR SINCERE SYMPATHY TO ALL CONCERNED IN YOUR SAD LOSS, NETTA, LEO SILBERT FAMILY.' Friends holidaying in Hepburn Springs also sent a telegram. 'OUR SYMPATHY IN YOUR SAD BEREAVEMENT, SOPHIE AND HARRY ROSS.'

Rose's funeral procession left the Chevra Kadisha on the corner of Pitt and Canning streets in Carlton for the Fawkner Cemetery, where she was buried in the Jewish section. Sixty years after Rose's death, I visit her grave. Someone else has been there recently because a new small, white stone has been placed on her grave. I later learn that it was my cousin Jessica, who left the stone, on one of her frequent visits to Melbourne from California, where she lives.



*The Hebrew on the tombstone reads: 'Here lies Sholmo Bat Rachel [Rose's Hebrew name]. 5719 Tevet 2 passed away. May her dear soul rest in peace.' Ephraim Finch, the former head of the Melbourne Chevra Kadisha, burial society, translated the text. He says it is rudimentary Hebrew.*

In the Jewish tradition the stone symbolises the permanence of memory – that death cannot deprive of us the past. Rose and my husband Paul will always remain a living presence symbolized by the stones I have placed at their grave sites. As I walk through the Fawkner Cemetery and Melbourne Cemetery, where Paul's ashes are buried under a tree, I'm struck by the withering flowers hanging limply over vases on

tombstones. The petals and leaves will soon fall and their crackling mess will get trampled on by passers-by. This doesn't happen to stones.

There was another way to both preserve and evoke memories of Rose. Among Faye's possessions is a sheet given to her by the Chevra Kadisha. It provides instructions for remembering Rose with light on her anniversary. It reads:

*IN MEMORY  
OF THE DAY OF THE DEATH OF MY NEVER-TO BE FORGOTTEN DEAREST  
MOTHER  
Rose Pearlman*

*Deceased on January 2, 1956*

*THE LIGHT TO BURN THE NIGHT BEFORE*

*Teveth 18, 5716*

*On Jahrzeit Day's Eve the Neshama-light is to be lightened and the following prayer said:*

*A light from God is human soul.*

*This be for my mother's soul, may her soul enjoy eternal life with the souls of Abraham, Issac, Sarah, Rachel, Leah and the rest of the righteous,  
That are in Paradise.*

*Amen*

And I have written this *Yizkor* for Rose to hold her in memory.

**Prahran, January 2018**

The photo I found of Rose in her pearl dress when I was nine is now framed and hanging on a wall in my apartment in Prahran. I still don't know why the photograph was produced and can only speculate that it may have been taken on Rose's twenty-first birthday or on her engagement. Or perhaps Rose was just having fun. People

used to go to photographers' studios to have their portraits taken dressed up in fancy clothes. I spent so long trying to trace it, but the reason for the photo's existence is not a big concern any longer. Lives are shrouded in mystery as well as revelation and the unknown keeps us wondering about our ancestors.

My move across the Yarra River from Fitzroy to Prahran means I'm now living one-and-half kilometres from where Rose did on Argyle Street and three kilometres from my mum in central St Kilda. From my south-facing balcony, I can see the St Kilda Synagogue's dome roof clad in green Wunderlich tiles. At night *The Astor* cinema's red neon sign shines. Rose would have been familiar with the sign as she walked or took the number 78 tram along Chapel Street to the grand cinema, which opened in 1936 showing double features. It still has a program of double-features today.

When I crane my neck to the right while standing on my balcony, I can see the faded painted words 'Maples Furniture' on the side of a building on the south-west corner of High and Chapel streets. On the northern side of the intersection was another Maples store, known as Maples Corner.



*I walk past this corner almost every day. Rose passed this spot countless time in the 1930s, 40s and early 50s. State Library of Victoria.*

The department store was built in 1910 and converted into offices in the 1980s. Rose was only a short tram ride away from the department store. She even taught her

grandson, Derek, whose middle name is Leslie, to spell the word Maples by using matchsticks to build each letter of the word. Rose must have been patient.

I'm becoming familiar with the grand buildings that used to house the large emporiums along Chapel Street. During Rose's time she had the choice of shopping at Love and Lewis, Maples, The Colosseum and The Big Store. Reads, on the corner of Chapel Street and Commercial Road, was the most majestic with its domed roof. Rose would have been chuffed when her daughter, Faye, secured a Friday night job there in the office after school. Rose would take my mum on the 78 tram to collect Faye after work. I'm sure Rose enticed my mum with an ice-cream. Reads is now Pran Central, a mix of shops and apartments.

I'm also now in walking distance to the area on High Street, now St Kilda Road, that once housed the Continental Kosher Butcher and kosher chicken shop where the old woman dressed in black would pluck the chickens' feathers. And, I'm only a fifteen minute walk to the Freemasons home, where Uncle Lloyd lives. Soon after moving into the apartment, I visit Uncle Lloyd for his ninety-ninth birthday. He is chirpy and tells me again how wonderful it is to have family. His dresser and desk are festooned with photographs of his Children, Grandchildren and Great-Grandchildren. His bedspread is patchwork of family photographs that have been printed onto the cloth.

We joke about how I've come home to Prahran.

### **Prahran August 2018**

**It's August 15th**, and it's freezing in Melbourne and icy in Ballarat. It's too cold to get up but I have a thesis to write. In my morning fog, I do not hear the buzz of my

phone or the ping sounding a text. Later in the morning I find the message. It's from my mum, who uses my nickname, Murgy\*:

'Hi Murgy, Lesley just rang. Uncle Lloyd died last night. Funeral tomorrow 2pm Springvale.'

I'm stunned. So is my mum. We both tell each other over the phone that Uncle Lloyd's death has come as a shock. For the past three years we had grown accustomed to visiting Uncle Lloyd; it had become a ritual. There were stories to tell each other and photos to share. There were Uncle Lloyd's jokes and news about residents at the homes. There were the homemade cakes that Uncle Lloyd urged us to eat. You have to have food for any kind of family gathering no matter how casual or formal. It was the way the Pearlmans did things.

I loved learning about Uncle Lloyd's philosophy on life; he was so resilient, just like I imagine Rose was. At Uncle Lloyd's funeral his son Rodney told family and friends about Uncle Lloyd's tough life in Ballarat and how he had wanted to study medicine. He told us that he thought his father may not have been able to cope after Edith's [Uncle Lloyd's wife] death in 2006. But he did survive: he adjusted to his different life using his jokes, relying on his remarkable memory and loving his family. Rose, too, didn't wallow. Even after being diagnosed with a nervous rash after waiting for news of Leslie, she was at the movies the next day and in the following months she visited friends whose husbands had died. Uncle Lloyd used to tell me in our chats about widowhood that, 'You have to get on with life.'

\* Murgy is derived from Murgatroyd's Mind Twisters, a word quiz, that once ran in *The Age* newspaper. I was obsessed with doing them as a child.



In the days after Uncle Lloyd's funeral, relatives commented on the Pearlman Facebook page that his death signified 'the last of his generation of Pearlmans'. This realisation hits heavy. A whole family, beginning in 1875 with the births of Rose and Baron and ending with Uncle Lloyd's death in 2018, has gone. That's one hundred and forty-three years of history. But as I tread Rose's paths along Chapel Street past the old department stores and follow her tracks along Alma Road to the squiggle of streets leading to the St Kilda *Shule*, I know that the area I now live in is filled with my family's historical and religious footprints. It's a comforting thought.



*The Pearlman family. Back row from left: Celia (1906-2002), Baron (1875-1931) and Jack (1901-1960). Second row: Cyril (1915-1992, Harold (1913-1995), Millie (1903-1963) and Rose (1875-1956). Front row: Faye 1923-2007), Lloyd (1919-2018) and Leslie (1908-1942). Photo: about 1927.*

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## Notes

Many of the written and photographic sources used to piece together the creative project have already been cited in the text. Therefore I have not repeated, for example, the names and dates of newspaper articles that are woven into the narrative. The notes below provide further details on where I have obtained background historical material to support the creative project. In addition, I extrapolate on some details about the Pearlman family members. I have provided thematic sub-headings in order to help readers to identify information in the chapters.

### Abbreviations

AWM: Australian War Memorial  
NAA: National Archives of Australia  
NLA: National Library of Australia  
PROV: Public Record Office of Victoria  
SLV: State Library of Victoria

### **Chapter One: The Pearlman Descendants Eat Cake pp.31-34**

#### The Rag Trade: p.31

Uncle Lloyd also had a tailoring business in Richmond. For specific information on Jews involved in the clothes industry see Lesley S. Rosenthal (2005) *Schmattes: Stories of Fabulous Frocks, Funky Fashion and Flinders Lane*, South Yarra: Rosenthal, Lesley S. Rosenthal.

#### Ballarat: p.32

Background reading on Ballarat included:

Bate, W (1978) *Lucky City: The First Generation in Ballarat 1851-1901*, Carlton: Melbourne University Press.

Bate, W, McGillivray E, Nickson, M, eds, (1986) *Private Lives – Public Heritage Family Snapshots As History*, Hawthorn: Century Hutchinson.

Bramwell, W (originally published 1870 Ballarat Star, 1999), *History of Ballarat and Some Ballarat Reminiscences*, Ballarat Heritage Services – from the original edition.

Roberts, P (1982) *The History of Ballarat High School 1907-1982*, Maryborough: The Ballarat High School Council. The Pearlman children are among students listed as having attended the school and the years they attended. Faye attended secondary school in Melbourne.

Strange, A.W (1971) *Ballarat: A Brief History*, No.2 Historical Briefs Series, Kilmore: Lowden Publishing.

For photographic views of old Ballarat see:

<https://victoriancollections.net.au/items/4f72bee897f83e0308606a49> This is from the collection of Federation University Australia Historical Collection (Geoffrey Blainey Research Centre) Federation University Australia E.J. Barker Library, Mount Helen Victoria.

For numbers of Jews living in Ballarat during Rose's time see, Price C.A, *Jewish Settlers in Australia* (1964), The Australian National University Social Science Monograph.

The Ballarat Historical Society has a host of photographs of specific Ballarat streets such as Lydiard Street. I draw on these photographs to try to gain an understanding of the streetscapes Rose would have seen and how she would have navigated her streets in dodging trams and horses. See, for example,

<http://www.ballarathistoricalsociety.com/collection/Listings/Lydiard001.htm>

Ballarat Weather: pp.33-34

Historical temperatures are gleaned from weather reports in Ballarat newspapers accessed through the National Library of Australia's database, Trove. In addition, the Australian Bureau of Meteorology has a database of historical temperatures.

## **Chapter Two: The Jacobs 1881 to 1888 pp.35-46**

Fashion Street/Fashion Court: p.38

For further information about Fashion Street and surrounding streets see Jerry White (2011), *Rothschild Buildings: Life in an East-End Tenement Block 1887 – 1920*, Random House. Kindle Edition. White describes the area around Fashion and Dean and Flower streets as unusual because they were different from the other wider streets: 'The streets were narrower and the tenements more densely packed here than elsewhere.' (Kindle Locations 214-215). He also reports that Fashion Court, where Rose and her family lived, was home to Polish and Dutch Jews. See also Dan Cruickshank (2016) *Spitalfields: The History of a Nation in a Handful of Street*, rhbooks: London; Brian Girling (2009) *Images of London: East End Neighbourhoods*, The History Press London.

For information about synagogues on Fashion Street/Court see Jewish Community Records UK: [www.jewishgen.org/jcr-uk/london/EE\\_bikkur-cholim/index.htm](http://www.jewishgen.org/jcr-uk/london/EE_bikkur-cholim/index.htm)

For details about Jewish chain migration to Melbourne see, Margaret Taft and Andrew Markus' 2018 book, *A Second Chance: The Making of Yiddish Melbourne*, Clayton: Monash University Publishing, pp.12-16.

Jews' Free School: pp.39-41

For details about Rose's school in the Spitalfields see Gerry Black (1998), *The History of the Jews' Free School, London Since 1732*, p.1 and pp. 25-29 and pp.97-98. For specific information on individual students see Jews' Free School Admission Registers, Spitalfields 1856-1907, JewishGen Online, Rose Jacobs number 11994. [http://www.jewishgen.org/databases/jgdetail\\_2.php](http://www.jewishgen.org/databases/jgdetail_2.php). The database also contains some school board reports. In addition, *The Times* newspaper reports on how much donors contribute to the school, how much it costs to educate students and the

curriculum. Between 1883 and 1888, the years Rose attended the school, *The Times* published 917 stories about the Jews' Free School. These can be accessed via *The Times* Archives database: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/archive/>

Israel Zangwill's six books of the ghetto are available in one volume through A Timeless Wisdom Collection Book, 2015, Kindle edition. The books include: *Children of the Ghetto* (which has many references to the Jews' Free School) *Grandchildren of the Ghetto*, *Dreamers of the Ghetto*, *Ghetto Tragedies*, *Ghetto Comedies* and *Chosen People*. Lines quoted in the creative project are from *Children of the Ghetto*, Kindle Loc 997.

*Jewish Migration/Annie and Solomon Jacobs: pp.42-44*

Many texts have documented the migration of Jews to escape poverty, persecution and pogroms from the mid-18<sup>th</sup> Century to the 1920s. See, for example, Johnson, P (1988) *A History of the Jews*, New York: Harper Perennial.

Solomon Jacobs' naturalisation details identify the town he is from. This was accessed through the National Archives of Australia, A712, 1900/M2212. The certificate also shows the date Solomon arrived in Melbourne and provides the name of the ship he sailed on. The birth certificates of Samuel Jacobs and his sister Rose confirm the date of their births and the fact they were born in London.

*The Jacobs and the Hohenstaufen: p.45*

Background details on the steamer obtained from Encyclopedia Britannica Online, <http://www.britannica.com/topic/Hohenstaufen-dynasty>  
Details about the Jacobs sea journey are gleaned from reports in *The Argus* and *The Age* newspaper by accessing NLA database, Trove. See for example, *The Argus*, 1 October, 1888, p.11. *The Age*, advertising, 28 May, 1888, p.1. For passenger details: Public Record Office of Victoria, Assisted and Unassisted Passenger Lists, Jacobs Family, Hohenstaufen, 1888, digital image, 225.

### **Chapter Three: The Pearlmans pp.47-57**

*The Pearlmans, the Sommerfeld and Gera: pp.47-49*

For passenger lists see the Public Record Office of Victoria, Assisted and Unassisted Passenger Lists, Pearlman [Perlmann] family, Sommerfeld, 1891, Digital copy. <https://www.prov.vic.gov.au/node/1194> (page 2). For details about their journey to Australia on board the Sommerfeld see *The Age*, 19 October 1891, p.5 and *The Argus* 14 October 1891, p.5.

Naturalisation certificates for Hyman and Baron Pearlman accessed through National Archives of Australia, Baron Pearlman naturalisation certificate, Digital copy, series number: A712. Details about the steamer Baron and Dora travelled on are held at the Public Record Office of Victoria, Assisted and Unassisted Passenger Lists, Baron and Dora Pearlman, Gera, Digital copy, 1895, image128. Digital copy, [page one] <https://www.prov.vic.gov.au/node/1194>.

Reports of the journey are gleaned from a brief story in *The Argus*, 2 May 1895, p.4 accessed through Trove.

For further information about the number of Jews who came to Australia in the 1880s and 1890s see S.Rutland (2001), p.82.

Hyman Pearlman: p.51

The Jewish press reported on Hyman's roles as a *shammash*, personal assistant to the synagogue's officer, and as a second-reader. The *Jewish Herald* mentions Hyman when he is re-elected to his position or given a wage rise. See, for example, <http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/149329461?searchTerm=pearlman%20jacob&searchLimits=l-state=Victoria%7C%7C%7C-l-availability=y>  
In addition Hyman's position is mentioned in Nathan Rosenthal (1979), *Formula for Survival: The Saga of the Ballarat Hebrew Congregation*, The Hawthorn Press, Melbourne, p.60-61.

The story of why the Pearlmans migrated to Melbourne: pp.52-57

Eighteen-year-old Asher Jacob Pearlman is buried at the Old Ballarat Cemetery. I viewed his grave on 26 April 2015 and 1 March 2016. According to his death certificate he died of infections.

In Jewish law, a Jewish divorce is a separate requirement to a civil divorce. The Jewish divorce is known as a *get*.

Hanna Pearlman's will is available online at the Public Record Office of Victoria, Hanna [Anna] Pearlman's will. <http://access.prov.vic.gov.au/public/veo-download?objectId=090fe27380386e72&format=pdf&docTitle=07591P00020004912210pdf&encodingId=Revision-2-Document-1-Encoding-1-DocumentData> p.53

Jessica Fields Pearlman posted on the Pearlman Facebook page Metta [Zivin] Joseph's story of how the Pearlman's came to be in Melbourne.  
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/331775007027315/>

Supplementary material to confirm aspects of Metta's story includes the passenger lists. See PROV, Assisted and Unassisted Passenger Lists, Granat family, Sommerfeld, 1891. <https://www.prov.vic.gov.au/node/1194>

To confirm that Moses Rapken did have a business see Public Record Office, Rate Books, 1891, image 486, digital copy.

I already had some knowledge of department stores on Smith Street, Collingwood and Fitzroy. See, for example, Erica Cervini, "The Faded Glory of Smith Street", *The Melbourne Times*, 21 April 1993, p.6; Erica Cervini, "Tunnel Visions, Buried Treasures," *The Sunday Age*, 11 February 2001, p.7

Sir Zelman's memoirs: Zelman Cowen (2006), *A Public Life: The Memoirs of Zelman Cowen*, Miegunyah Press, Carlton, pp. 9-11. This is where he explains why his grandmother and her sister Hanna Pearlman settled in Melbourne.

Zelman Cowen, Metta [Zivin] Joseph and Lloyd Pearlman were second cousins and were all born in the same year, 1919. Sir Zelman died in 2011 and Metta died in 2018. Before her death, she was not in a position to be interviewed. I did speak with Sir Zelman's sister Shirley Spivakovsky on 18 September, 2018, but she had little knowledge about the how the Pearlmans came to be in Melbourne. However, she did

fill some gaps in the Pearlman family history because she knew Baron Pearlman's sister, Lizzie Froomkin and Baron's sister-in-law Ruby Cohen.

#### **Chapter Four: Rose Jacobs' Family Home pp.58-78**

##### 45 Mackenzie Street, Melbourne: pp.60-63

Details about when the home was built, who lived on Mackenzie Street, and the address of the Jacobs' shoe factory were obtained from *Melbourne Rates Books*, held at PROV 5708/P9, Vol 31, 35, 38: 1892, 1899 and 1901, Gipps Wards. In addition, a search of newspaper stories and advertisements about Jewish shops close to where Rose was living on Mackenzie Street revealed, for example, kosher butchers. See, *Jewish Herald*, 23 June, p.3; *The Argus*, 'The Art of Cookery', 15 December, p.13. There are further details about the provision of kosher food in Melbourne (and squabbles over the manufacture of matzos) in Morris C. Davis, *History of the East Melbourne Congregation "Mickva Yisrael"*, 1857-1977. Publication via private subscription.

As a young girl I already knew about the Acland Street Cake shops owned by Jews because my brothers and I would accompany my parents when they visited them. As a cub reporter, I also wrote a piece, 'Carlton's Kosher Commune', for *The Melbourne Times*, 6/11/1991, p.13.

The rates books also indicated that the Jacobs once lived at 1 Mackenzie Street. A search of the address and names of people who lived close to the Jacobs in newspapers revealed the curious story about a robbery very close to where Rose's family lived. See, *The Argus*, 'Robbery in Mackenzie Street,' 10 May 1887, p.6.

In addition, to confirm that members of the Jacobs family lived at 45 Mackenzie I also referred to Sands & McDougall's Melbourne and Suburban Directory for 1895; 1900; 1905; 1910; 1915; 1920; 1925; 1930; 1930; 1935; 1940; 1944/1945; 1950; 1955; 1960 and 1965. The directories are available online through SLV.

[http://cedric.slv.vic.gov.au/R/NKXRURSE7DTP3F532CHSMKAVGQIG5HTB3EXANI3MRTC4S9Y19J-01543?func=collections-result&collection\\_id=3908](http://cedric.slv.vic.gov.au/R/NKXRURSE7DTP3F532CHSMKAVGQIG5HTB3EXANI3MRTC4S9Y19J-01543?func=collections-result&collection_id=3908)

[http://cedric.slv.vic.gov.au/R/NKXRURSE7DTP3F532CHSMKAVGQIG5HTB3EXANI3MRTC4S9Y19J-01545?func=collections-result&collection\\_id=3909](http://cedric.slv.vic.gov.au/R/NKXRURSE7DTP3F532CHSMKAVGQIG5HTB3EXANI3MRTC4S9Y19J-01545?func=collections-result&collection_id=3909)

[http://cedric.slv.vic.gov.au/R/NKXRURSE7DTP3F532CHSMKAVGQIG5HTB3EXANI3MRTC4S9Y19J-01547?func=collections-result&collection\\_id=3910](http://cedric.slv.vic.gov.au/R/NKXRURSE7DTP3F532CHSMKAVGQIG5HTB3EXANI3MRTC4S9Y19J-01547?func=collections-result&collection_id=3910)

Electoral rolls were also consulted for addresses. These were available through [ancestry.com.au](http://ancestry.com.au)

Kovno is listed as the town that Solomon Jacobs' lived in on his naturalisation certificate. Kovno, a Lithuanian town, is variously listed as being part of Poland or Russia during Solomon's time because of the changing borders in Europe. As part of the worldwide Holocaust Research Project, Kovno has been written about.

[www.holocaustresearchproject.org/ghettos/kovno.html](http://www.holocaustresearchproject.org/ghettos/kovno.html)

The East Melbourne Synagogue: p.66

For a history of the East Melbourne Synagogue see Morris C. Davis, *History of the East Melbourne Hebrew Congregation, 'Mickva Yisrael' 1857-1977*, published by the East Melbourne Hebrew Congregation. A hard copy is held at the National Library of Australia.

Rose and Baron Meet: pp.66-67

See *The Ballarat Star*, 27 June 1901, p.2 (The Police Courts: City Courts) for the robbery story that prompted thoughts that the Jacobs and Pearlmans had met each other in the 1890s. Hyman, who is described as a clothier, was also robbed of £20 from his premises on Main Road, Ballarat. *The Bendigo Advertiser*, 14 January, 1908, p.3.

On one of my visits to the East Melbourne Synagogue, I located the entry for Rose and Baron's wedding.

The Jewish press reported on the activities, including fundraising events, the East Melbourne Synagogue congregation organised. As indicated in this chapter families and young people could meet each other at these events. See, *The Hebrew Standard of Australasia*, 30 December, 1898, p.5. Rose and her sister Millie are mentioned in the article because they had key roles in running stalls to raise money. Davis' book about the history of the East Melbourne Synagogue also contains details about fundraising activities as well as dances. See, for example, *The Jewish Herald*, 1 December 1916, p.8 for examples of events organised by the Young Jewish Social Club.

Antisemitism: pp.67-68

Jewish, city and country newspapers reported on anti-Semitic attacks overseas. See, *The Bendigo Advertiser*, 'Anti-Jewish Riots in France, 14 February 1898, p.2 and *Leader (Melbourne)*, 'Estimates of Victims', 23 June 1906, p.25.

Marriages: p.68

Marriage certificates were obtained for Rose and Baron Pearlman, Leah and Solomon Cohen, and Celia and Samuel Phillips from The Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages, Victoria. Newspapers also reported on Celia's marriage. See, *The Jewish Herald*, 2 April 1909, p.8 for a report on Celia's wedding dress, and *The Ballarat Star*, 17 April 1909, p.2. The very short report describes the wedding as 'very pretty'. Rabbi Jacob Lenzer conducted the service, the same Rabbi who married Rose and Baron. For the description of Millie's dress see, *Table Talk*, 26 January, 1928, p.64.

Leah and Solomon: pp.71-73

Details about Leah and Solomon Cohen's divorce were obtained from PROV, Petition for Dissolution, Cohen v. Cohen, 1904, no. 167. The document is 44-pages. There was also a report about the divorce in *The Age* 10 August 1905, p.8. For general information about husbands who deserted wives see, for example, *The Jewish Herald* 31 July 1900, p.4 and 19 July 1901, p.9; *The Age* 'Wives and Husbands' 24 January



1903, p.14 and 16 August 1909, p.9; *The Argus* 'Divorce Law', 25 May 1901, p.15. Her Coroner's Court Inquest report of 14-pages is held at PROV, 22 August 1957, 1411. Leah's death certificate obtained from Birth, Deaths and Marriages Registry, Victoria.

Leah and Samuel's daughter Letty: pp.73-75

Letty's birth certificate obtained from the PROV. City of Melbourne rates notices indicate the year that Letty took over the lease of 45 Mackenzie Street. Details about her husband Raymond Keast were obtained from his World War One military records, NAA, B2455. Also see the Australian War Memorial for details:

[www.awm.gov.au/collection/R1894044](http://www.awm.gov.au/collection/R1894044) and  
[https://emhs.org.au/person/keast/raymond\\_fairbairn](https://emhs.org.au/person/keast/raymond_fairbairn)

Celia and Samuel: pp.76-78

Details about Celia's husband Samuel Isaac Phillips were obtained from his 54-page military record, NAA, B2455. Information about Celia obtaining hotel licences were obtained from newspaper reports. See, *The Argus* 18 January 1936, p.16; *The Argus* 21 October 1944, p.18; *The Argus* 5 March 1952 p.13. For disturbances at her Williamstown hotel see, *The Williamstown Chronicle* 3 February 1940, p.1, 25 May 1940, p.8 and 27 March 1942, p.1. For details about her final venture, a café with her daughter, see Sands and McDougall entry on Celia Phillips. Celia's death certificate obtained from Birth, Deaths and Marriages Registry, Victoria.

**Chapter Five: Rose's Synagogue pp.79-87**

Rose's homes in Ballarat: p.79

To identify Rose's addresses in Ballarat, I consulted electoral rolls available through [ancestry.com.au](http://ancestry.com.au). This investigation also unearthed information suggesting that when Rose and Baron moved to Ballarat they first lived with Baron's parents Hannah and Hyman. To confirm the addresses, I also examined Ballarat Rate Notices, which are held at the PROV Ballarat. The information gleaned from these hard copy books was invaluable in revealing how many people lived in Rose homes, how many rooms in the homes, who owned the houses and for how long Rose and her family stayed in each home. An article I wrote for the PROV and published online (8/8/2018) explains how I gained an idea of what Rose's homes would have looked like. The piece also highlights the importance of talking to the archivists who, in this case, had in-depth knowledge of the Ballarat district and got me thinking laterally about how to track down information on how Rose's homes may have appeared on the interior. The article is printed below.



I desire to have a Private Hospital registered in accordance with the provisions of the Health Act 1890, and with the particulars given hereunder:—

Situation of Premises	11 Yulle Street
General description of premises: Area of ground, materials of building (brick, wood, &c.), number and size of rooms, number of stories, method of drainage.	26 x 120' Wooden Building 6 rooms 14 x 12. Patients rooms (2) 14 x 12 x 14. Brick drainage - open.

*Ballarat General Correspondence Files VPRS 2500 P0 Unit 101.*

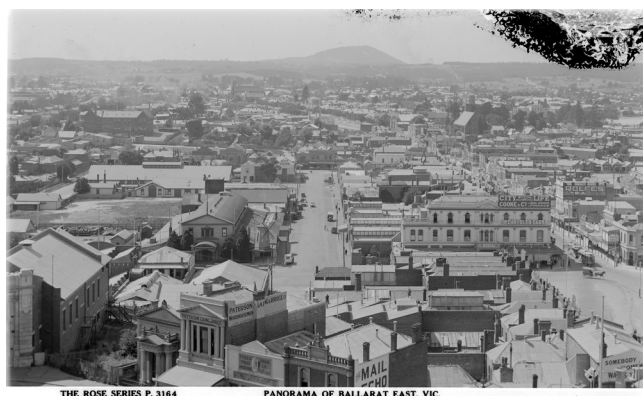
## **Researching houses that are no longer there**

At the Ballarat Archives Centre

Author: Erica Cervini

*A visit to the Ballarat Archives Centre taught me the power of creative thinking.*

*I am researching the life of my Great-Grandmother Rose Pearlman for a doctoral thesis and had traipsed to all eight Ballarat East addresses she lived at between 1900 and 1932, to find that only one of the eight houses still exists.*



*Panorama of Ballarat East c1920-1954 from State Library Victoria's Rose postcard collection.*

*How would I know what her Ballarat homes looked like? This was vitally important because, at the time, I was writing about how Rose's children were all born at home. Elizabeth Denny from the Ballarat Archives had an idea. She suggested I look at a collection of documents from the Ballarat Correspondence Files 1912-13 detailing applications from women who wanted a room or two in their modest homes to become "private hospitals" for midwifery purposes.*

*The applications, Ms Denny said, would give basic details about the houses and could provide insights into the type of home my Great-Grandmother and her family lived in.*

*We determined that my Great-Grandmother was of the same socio-economic class as the women wanting to make a bit of money by turning their houses into private hospitals. Rose and the women's homes would have been very similar.*

*While sifting through the documents I also found health inspectors' reports of the homes. These gave even more details about the layout and interior of the houses as well as the height dimensions of the walls.*

*From gleaning the handwritten and typed papers, I worked out that my Great-Grandmother probably lived in weatherboard homes where the wooden walls were lined with hessian and paper. If the family was lucky they may have had plastered walls. Rose and her husband Baron probably scattered threadbare rugs over the wooden floors. Rose's homes would have had a washhouse and bathroom out the back.*

*I know from speaking to her last surviving son, my Great-Uncle Lloyd, who is approaching one hundred, that at least one of the homes had an open drain down at the end of the yard. The documents confirm that many homes had effluent flowing not far from their back doors.*

*My Great-Uncle Lloyd only has some memories of one of the homes he lived in. I would never have known about the documents that Elizabeth Denny had found unless I had visited the Ballarat Archives Centre. The answers I gave to Ms Denny's questions prompted her to focus her capacious knowledge of Ballarat's history on the types of houses the poorer people of Ballarat inhabited.*

*With some lateral and creative thought, I now have an idea of what Rose Pearlman's weatherboard homes on the lively Ballarat East streets looked like.*

<https://prov.vic.gov.au/about-us/our-blog/researching-houses-are-no-longer-there>

While on my visits to Ballarat, I also consulted the Sands & McDougall's Ballarat and District Directory for 1896, housed at the Ballarat Library. Information gleaned from the directory also helped to confirm some of Rose and Baron's addresses.

In addition, postcards sent to Rose from her sisters were also marked with some of her addresses such as 5 Eureka Street.

### *The Ballarat Synagogue: pp.80-86*

Substantial information about the Ballarat Synagogue came from my personal observations of to the synagogue. Two of the visits were with family members, and one by myself. The visits with family members reflect the importance of Maggie O'Neill's theory on walking as a means of invigorating the task of writing about a person [O'Neill, M, 'Participatory Biographies: Walking, Sensing, Belonging' in O'Neill, M, Roberts, B and Sparkes, A, eds, (2015) *Advances in Biographical Methods: Creative Applications*, London: Routledge, pp.73-89]. As we walked, we talked, pointing out aspects of the Synagogue's architecture and appearance. I asked family members to relate their observations to the time Rose visited the synagogue, which produced insightful comments about Rose's Jewish life. In addition, Bernard Stone, president of the Ballarat Synagogue, was generous in providing his insights about the history of the synagogue.

For background about the history and politics associated with the Synagogue see, Rosenthal, N.C (1979) *Formula For Survival: The Saga of the Ballarat Hebrew Congregation*, Melbourne: The Hawthorn Press.

To view additional internal and external photographs of the Ballarat Synagogue see Film Victoria's website: <https://www.film.vic.gov.au/choose-victoria/locations/ballarat-synagogue>

Hyman Pearlman, a shammas: p.83

No one in the extended family knew that Hyman was so closely associated with the Ballarat Synagogue. However, I recall my Great-Aunt Celia telling me when I was young girl that her Grandfather was religious and wore black. There is also a well-known family story that another Great-Aunt, Faye, the youngest of Rose's children, was afraid of her father as a very young girl because he said prayers a lot and wore dark clothes.

A search of Jewish newspapers revealed that Hyman worked as *shammas* for the Ballarat Synagogue and was very active doing readings, particularly on the Holy Days. The papers also report how much he earned. See, for example, *The Jewish Herald*, 12 April, 1912, p.5. Hyman is also mentioned in Rosenthal's history of the Synagogue.

Samuel Solomon Josephs: p.84

The English Census of 1911 shows that eleven-year-old Samuel, although his middles name Solomon is used, lived in two rooms at 25 Heneage Street, Spitalfields with his widowed mother Leah [forty-six], sisters Annie [twenty-three, a cap maker] and Bessie [twenty, a cap maker] and brother Marks [seventeen, a furrier cutter]. Leah and the sisters were born in Poland and their nationality is listed as Russian. Marks and Samuel were born in Whitechapel. The family's move to the wealthier suburb of Golders Green in North London, is reminiscent of the movement of Jews in Melbourne. Many Jews who first settled in Carlton in the inner-north, eventually moved across the Yarra River to south and settled in St Kilda and Caulfield.

Nellie Jacobs: p.85

Nellie married Annie and Solomon's son Samuel, who died in 1931. He sold the boot-making business and with Nellie set up the Perfecta company. Uncle Lloyd says Nellie was the driving force behind it and ran the company until her death in 1945. Uncle Lloyd told me a number of times during the course of our interviews that he felt upset that Rose was left out of Nellie's will. Rose's daughter-in-law, Rachel, who married Jack, inherited all Nellie's jewels and £1500. Nellie's total assets amounted to almost £15,900 pounds. I viewed Nellie's will at the PROV, VPRS 28/ [P3](#) unit [4255](#), item 372/409 and VPRS 7591/ [P2](#) unit [1307](#), item 372/409.

## **Chapter Six: The Babies pp.88-106**

Rose's Siddur: p.88

*The Form of the Daily Prayers: According to the German and Polish Jews*, Frankfort on-the-Maine: J. Kauffman Publisher, 1893.

*The weather on the day of Lloyd Pearlman's birth: p.90*

Details about the weather were gleaned from weather reports in Ballarat newspapers as well as *The Argus* and *The Age* newspapers. See, for example, *The Ballarat Star*, 3 February, 1919, p.4, and for the start of the fires, *The Ballarat Star*, January 25, p.2.

The front page in *The Ballarat Star* on the day of Uncle Lloyd was born warned of an influenza epidemic in Ballarat and urged residents to take precautions.

*Giving birth at home and in private hospitals: pp.91-94*

As explained in the notes in Chapter Five and in the PROV article I wrote, the archivist in Ballarat had recently found applications from local women who wished to turn a room or two into a 'private hospital'. *Ballarat General Correspondence Files VPRS 2500 P0 Unit 101*.

For details about how the wealthier women in Ballarat gave birth, I consulted Crow, Ruth (1989) *Memories of the Golden Years of Childhood* (unpublished), held at Victoria University library, Footscray campus. Special collections, Ruth Crow papers.

Ruth Crow, a social worker and political activist, was born into a prosperous Ballarat family in 1916 and lived in a large house. She was born at home and explains in her memoirs the routine for when her mother gave birth. "My mother would have had Sister Allen, a midwife and friend, living in the home for a few days before and for several weeks after my birth," she writes. "Also she would have had her closest sister, Anna, staying in our home to give her support. The housework and cooking would have been the responsibility of Effie and Maggie (the two "maids" who worked for the family.

Ruth attended a state primary school and then went to Ballarat Church of England Girls' Grammar. This anecdote provides insights into the stereotypes the non-Jewish population held about Jewish school children. Ruth writes, 'When I told my mother my place in the class test she would always subtract the Jewish girl. "You say you came third but where did Miriam come, did she come first or second ? You can't count her, the Jews are too smart and its not fair competition."' However our family was friendly with several Jewish families and had a very high regard for several of the Jewish professional and business people.'

The Melbourne Lying-in Hospital was founded in 1856 in East Melbourne and later moved to Carlton. In 2008 it moved to Parkville. The hospital was initially set up as a charity hospital to care for the poor, including pregnant unmarried women.

*Sidney: pp.94-97 and p.99*

Sidney's location is Area G; section 6; Row 1; Grave 7.

Sidney's Hebrew name was Copul. Rose spelt it Kopple in her Siddur. His middle name was Solomon, named after Rose's father, Solomon. This is the name he was known by and it was Anglicised to Sidney.

Jewish Funerals: p.99

For a history of the Chevra Kadisha see Aron, Yossi (2011) *The Melbourne Chevra Kadisha: A Century of Devoted Work 1909 -2009*, Melbourne: Chevra Kadisha Inc.

For a comprehensive account of the rules governing Jewish funerals see Lamm, M (2000), *The Jewish Way of Death and Mourning*, New York: Johnathan David Publishers. The six phases of mourning are *Aninut* [moment of death to the end of the funeral]; *Aveilut* [end of funeral and the next six days. Seven days of *shiva*, sitting]; *Sheloshim* [thirty days]; *Shanah* [eleven months from time of funeral]; *Yahrzeit* [anniversary of the day of death]; *Yizkor* [recite memorial prayers]. Observance of the phases depends on how religious the Jew is.

## **Chapter Seven: The Lolly Shop pp.107-115**

Baron Pearlman's brushes with the law: p.108

Rose could not escape the publicity surrounding Baron's brushes with the law. A Trove search reveals there are at least twenty-four articles about Baron's alleged crimes and court proceedings. Stories appeared in *The Ballarat Star*, *The Ballarat Courier*, *The Melbourne Herald*, *The Argus*, *The Bendigo Advertiser* and *The Emerald Hill*. See, for example, *The Ballarat Star*, 'Beak v Pearlman', 1 May 1903, p.4, and *The Ballarat Courier*, City Court, 20 May, 1914, p.7.

Annie and Billy Mong: p.110-111

Rates Notice books held at the PROV Ballarat established the home address of Annie and Billy Mong.

Education in Ballarat: p.114

The Pearlman children, except for Faye who went to secondary school in Melbourne, are listed in the roll call of students in Roberts, P (1982) *The History of Ballarat High School 1907-1982*, Maryborough: The Ballarat High School Council.

## **Chapter Eight: Husbands pp.116-12**

Ballarat Old Cemetery started operating in 1856.

## **Chapter Nine: Travelling Again pp.123-129**

Rose – and other women – are mentioned for winning card games in a roundup of news from Ballarat. The games were organised as a fundraiser for the Jewish congregation in Ballarat. See, *Table Talk*, 28 April 1932, p.46.

Rose also enjoyed card games after she settled in St Kilda. My Grandmother, Millie, was also fond of them and my cousin, Lynda Fridman, has told me stories of being mesmerised by all the stacks of cards stored in a glass cabinet in Millie's home in Argyle Street, St Kilda. Lynda says my Grandmother, who died when I was twenty months old, was her like a Grandmother to her. Millie was Lynda's aunt. Millie was for a time an SP bookie, p.124.

Faye's wrote her diaries in A5 sized exercise books. Two provide details during World War II and in the four years following it. Her diaries' pages are numbered continuously so this is why the second diary begins on page 237. Faye numbered each page. The first diary, which goes from 22/3/1944 to 7/7/1946, is 234 pages. The first twenty are missing and so are the final three pages. The second diary goes from 13/7/1946 to 21/2/1949. Faye has numbered the pages from 237 to 484, pp.125-128.

## **Section Two: Waiting**

### **Chapter Ten: The War Letters Arrive at Rose's Home pp.130-150**

#### 36 Lambeth Place: pp.130-132 and p.134

I visited Lambeth Place five times to observe its exterior and the street. The house was for sale in 2016, so I was able to view its interior with my mother on one of the 'open for inspection' times.

Rates Notices, held at the Emerald Hill Library, South Melbourne indicate when Rose started living at 36 Lambeth Place and when she moved to 121 Argyle Street.

Uncle Lloyd told me how his mother, Rose, would leave the letters on a table for her daughter and others to read. This is confirmed in references to the letters in Faye's diaries. She also mentions in her diaries a 'brown case' Rose stored letters in.

Leslie wins the Siamese junior race at Humffray Street State School and wins a scholarship to Ballarat School of Mines: *The Ballarat Courier*, 13/12/1919, p.6; *The Ballarat Star* 1/2/1923, p.14.

There are many stories about district cricket and football which feature Leslie and Cyril: See, for example, *The Argus* 24/2/1936, p.11 and *The Age* 31/12/1935, p.8. Faye wins a commercial scholarship at Mac.Roberston Girls' High School and passes her public exams: *The Age* 9/12/1937, p.14; *The Argus*, 10/3,1938, p.7.

Jack came first in reading and second in translation at the Ballarat Hebrew School in 1910 and in the same year Millie came first for Hebrew reading in her age group: *The Jewish Herald* 5/8/1910, p.5 and *The Jewish Herald* 8/7/ 1910, p.4. Millie is also mentioned in *The Ballarat Star* [15/2/1918, p.2] for passing her Pitman's Shorthand exam at Ballarat High School.

Harold came first in scripture in 1923 at the Ballarat Hebrew and Sabbath School: *The Hebrew Standard of Australasia*, 13/4/1923, p.11. He is also mentioned for passing his accountancy exams: *The Age*, 23/5/1939, p.11.



War Service: p.133-135

War service records are available on the NAA website. However, a fee is charged to 'unlock' some of them.

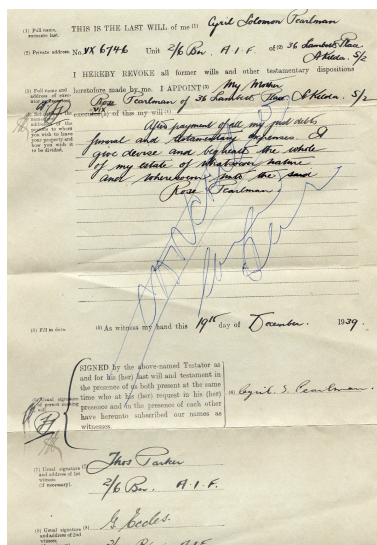
Leslie Pearlman, NAA B883, VX30758

Cyril Pearlman, NAA B883, VX6747

Celia Pearlman, NAA B883 VX45572

Lloyd Pearlman, NAA A9301, 145306/B4747

The Pearlman children who served in the war were cited *In the Footsteps of Monash: Jews in the Australian Armed Forces in World War 2*, Exhibition and Program, Jewish Museum of Australia, September-December 1995.



Cyril Pearlman's will. After payment of all debts and funeral experiences, Cyril left his estate to Rose Pearlman.

Celia, Cyril are also mentioned in Mark Dapin's *Jewish Anzacs: Jews in the Australian Military*, NSW: NewSouth Publishing 2017, pp.179 and 190. Leslie and Lloyd are not mentioned by name on page 179 but are referred to as the 'brothers'. The name of Leslie's battalion is incorrect. Dapin writes a paragraph about Cyril winning the Military Medal and notes that he was promoted to Captain. Lieutenant Celia Pearlman is correctly identified as serving with the Australian Army Nursing Service in the Middle East. However, Dapin fails to state that Celia was also promoted to Captain. This is an important omission in light of the analysis in Chapter One of the exegesis about Jewish history texts and their emphasis on men and power.

In addition, Dapin's text provides some insights on the way some servicemen viewed servicewomen. On page 190, Dapin writes that Hymie Pearlman [no relation to the Pearlmans], was a soldier, who saw no action in the Middle East, but kept a diary of his travels to tourist sites. Hymie was also 'always hungry for the company of women'. In January 1942 he was in Tel Aviv waiting to be shipped to battle and applied for leave to visit my Great-Aunt Celia, who at the time was serving at 7 Australian General Hospital in Rehovot, on the pretext that she was his cousin, which she was not. In his diary, Hymie writes that Celia 'turned out to be quite a nice little girl'. Celia was a very experienced nurse and was thirty-six at the time. Hymie also states that Celia was surprised to see him because she was expecting her brother Cyril.

Celia Pearlman in Palestine: pp.134-135

In 2006, The Jewish Museum of Australia in Melbourne held an exhibition on Jewish women who served in wars. Celia (Pearlman) Leon was one of six women featured.

*Women of Courage: Jewish Women in the Australian Armed Services*, Exhibition and Program, Melbourne Hebrew Congregation, April 2006.

The Jewish Museum of Australia also holds a collection of Celia's photographs and other memorabilia such as a prayer book and autograph book of hers during her time serving overseas. However, I also have a personal collection of her photographs and her letters, which were handed down to me by my mother and the extended family.

**Chapter Eleven: Silences in the letters and newspapers pp.151-166**

Life in Rabaul: pp.154-157

Leslie's letters provide insights into the scenery, weather conditions and people of in Rabaul. Newspaper reports provide some detail about life in Rabaul, particularly about the difficult living conditions caused by the erupting Tavurvur volcano. See, for example, *The Argus*, 'Rabaul Eruptions Continue' 13 June, 1941, p.4 and *The Argus* 'Dust, Fumes and Acid from Crater: Rabaul's Ordeal', 8 September, 1941, p.4.

Living in Melbourne During World War II: pp.157-166

For details about day-to-day living during the war time in Melbourne see, Kate Darian-Smith's *On the Home Front: Melbourne During War Time 1939-1945*, Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2009. In particular, see pages 19-21 for an account of the brown-outs in Melbourne.

Newspapers during the time also provided readers with recipes on how to use their food rations. See, for example, *The Herald*, 'War Time Cooking', 17 September, 1941, p.9; and *The Age*, 'Cheerful Rationing Recipe', 26 July, 1941, p.7.

1942 in Melbourne

Details about what the Pearlman family did during the year are gleaned from Faye's diaries as well as from stories Uncle Lloyd told me. During interviews with my mum, she expressed delight about her mother's cooking skills. None of her recipes survive.

The story about Edith [Cohen] Pearlman winning the Judean League Queen of Beauty in 1939 appeared in *The Age*, 7 September, 1939, p.4. The paper reported that she wore a 'gown of silver lame and a silver train', pp.162-163.

**Chapter Twelve: The Badge pp.167-182**

The Female Relative Badge: pp.167-168

For details about the female relative badge, see the Australian War Museum: [https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/encyclopedia/badges/female\\_relative](https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/encyclopedia/badges/female_relative) The website also contains access to photographs of the badge.



Celia's Voyage on the Aquitania: pp.171-173

Details about Celia's voyage were gleaned from interviews with Celia's daughter-in-law Ruth Leon. Celia had spoken at length to Ruth about her voyage on board the *Aquitania*. To ascertain dates the *Aquitania* left Australia and the formation of the convoy, I referred to Peter Plowman's 2003 text *Australian and NZ Troop Convoys from 1865 through Two World Wars to Korea and Vietnam*, NSW: Rosenberg. Specific details about the *Aquitania's*, size and history are contained in Alister Satchell's 2001 *Running the Gauntlet: How Three Liners Carried A Million Men to War*, Naval Institute Press. Despite the title female nurses were also on board the ships. Also see, the Australian War Memorial for photographs of the *Aquitania* and further details about its role in the war <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/005574/>

The 'Brown Out' in Melbourne: pp.177-181

Faye writes about the 'blackout/brownout' and gas restrictions in her diary. I also consulted newspaper article to ascertain what the public was being told. See, for example, 'Gas Rationing Announced', *The Sun-News Pictorial* 13 May, 1940; 'How The Lights Went Out Over Melbourne', *The Sun-News Pictorial* 24 July, 1941, 'Blackout Advice For Thought', *The Sun-News Pictorial*, 23 September, 1941. Melburnians were told not to treat the 'blackout as a joke'; not to smoke or strike matches in the open and go out to see 'what the blackout looks like'. I also referred to Kate Darian-Smith's 2009 edition of *On the Home Front: Melbourne In Wartime: 1939-1945, Melbourne*: Melbourne University Press, pp. 19-21.

### **Chapter Thirteen: The News pp.183-190**

Rabbi Danglow: p.188

John S. Levi's 1995 biography, *Rabbi Jacob Danglow: The Uncrowned Monarch of the Jews*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, is the most comprehensive account of the Rabbi's life.

### **Chapter Fourteen: Leslie pp.191-203**

In attempting to piece together what happened to Leslie on 4 February, 1942, I relied on what my Great-Uncle Lloyd told me. After conversations with him, I learned that Leslie was killed at the Tol Planation. He mentioned the Tol Planation a number of times, and the details about what happened to soldiers there tallied with reports from survivors mentioned in the Webb Inquiry. The following sources were also used to try to ascertain what happened to the soldiers, including Leslie, on 4 February.

The National Archives of Australia holds Leslie's military records:  
<https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRetrieve/Interface/ListingReports/ItemsListing.aspx>, pp.191-192.

A report by Sir William Webb on Japanese Atrocities can be viewed at NAA, or online. The report comprises a number of components:

<https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRetrieve/Interface/ListingReports/ItemsListing.aspx> pp.196, 199, 201, 202.

The Australian War Memorial has some brief details about 2/22<sup>nd</sup> Battalion and Lark Force <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/U56065>

Rabaul Memorial Panel 1939-1945. 'Register of those who fell with no known grave' Leslie Pearlman's name is inscribed on panel 18.

<http://www.jje.info/lostlives/exhib/rabaulmemorial/alpha/p.html>

Nominal lists of those killed at the Tol Plantation. Leslie is on the list:

<http://www.australian-stamp-covers.info/SOLDIERS%20of%20LARK%20FORCE%201942.pdf>

Bruce Gamble, an American, wrote the book, *Invasion Rabaul: The Epic Story of the Lark Force, The Forgotten Garrison January – July 1942*, US: Zenith Press. It is telling that an American wrote a book about the invasion of Rabaul. Gamble has written other books about the US Marine Corp Pilots in the South-West Pacific. There are three Australian books about Lark Force. Each has a chapter on the Tol Plantation.

Aplin, Douglas (1980) *Rabaul 1942*, Melbourne: 2/22<sup>nd</sup> Battalion AIF, Lark Force Association. This is based on the accounts of those who escaped Rabaul.

Gunner Bloomfield, David (2001) *Rabaul Diary: Escaping Capture in New Britain, The fate of 'Lark Force' 1942*, NSW: Australian Military History Publications.

Reeson, Margaret (2000) *A Very Long War: The Families Who Waited*, Carlton: Melbourne University Press.

### **Chapter Fifteen: Argyle Street pp.204-213**

Rates books held by the City of Port Phillip library, Emerald Hill, have been instrumental in working out the exact dates Rose had been living in Lambeth Place and Argyle Street. Council rates books also provide details on the names and occupations of people who lived in Argyle Street. In addition, house titles indicate when Faye and her husband Ken bought 121 and 119 Argyle Street, pp 207-208. Names of people living on Argyle Street were also gleaned from *Sands & McDougall, Directory of Victoria*, 1944/5, Argyle Street, pp. 632-3. The directories are available online through the SLV:

[http://cedric.slv.vic.gov.au/R/NKXRURSE7DTP3F532CHSMKAVGQIG5HTB3EXANI3MRTC4S9Y19J-01545?func=collections-result&collection\\_id=3909](http://cedric.slv.vic.gov.au/R/NKXRURSE7DTP3F532CHSMKAVGQIG5HTB3EXANI3MRTC4S9Y19J-01545?func=collections-result&collection_id=3909) pp.207-208.

Details about Rose's everyday activities were gleaned from Faye's diary. My mother recalls the food her mother, Millie, prepared for High Holy Days, pp.209-210.

Historical details about St Kilda were found in Anne Longmire's 1989 book, *St Kilda, The Show Goes On: The History of St Kilda, 1930-July 1983*, Vol 3, Melbourne: N.S Hudson Publishing.

### **Chapter Sixteen: Life-Cycles pp.214-224**

The deaths of Rose's neighbours were gleaned from death notices in *The Argus* newspaper, p.214.

Newspaper advertisements for The Grande boasted its amenities. See, for example, *The Argus*, 16 November, 1942, Advertising. The Grande is still operating in Hepburn Springs, p.217.

Prahran 2018: pp.220-224

Background reading for this chapter included Wilde, S (1993) *The History of Prahran*, Vol 11, 1925-1990, Carlton: Melbourne University Press, and Betty Malone's 1984 Chapel Street Prahran 1919-1984, Prahran: Prahran Mechanics Institute. The author was a friend of Celia (Pearlman) Leon and refers to her in the book. She writes, 'Gone too is the wine bar near Paterson's in Chapel Street, Windsor which specialised in the early 1930s in glasses of 4d dark or 3d light. Mrs Celia Leon (although she wasn't married at this stage), then a trainee nurse at the Alfred Hospital, remembers that she and her friends, tired after lectures, would daringly enter to warm themselves and enjoy the atmosphere. She describes the inmates as mainly old men and women, and the place as warm, dark, cosy and friendly.'

## **EXEGESIS**

### **'BUT SHE DIDN'T LEAVE A DIARY!': MAKING SENSE OF FRAGMENTS OF A LIFE**

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## **Chapter One: ‘The Hidden Woman’: Upsetting the Status Quo**

### Introduction

This chapter explains why and how this thesis is situated within theories of life-writing as utilised by historians, including family historians, and writers of literature, who call for the ‘hidden woman’ to be revealed.<sup>37</sup> This woman can be broadly identified as one who has been marginalised through gender and class and has therefore been considered too ordinary and obscure to be written about.

Following on from this exploration, this chapter illuminates how the theoretical situating of my work contributes to a significant argument in this thesis about the vital role that family members play in researching and writing about their forebears in order to reveal the lives of women who have not traditionally been the focus in histories. These researched lives can fill gaps and add to our knowledge of the past.

This is important because, as Tanya Evans points out, family historians’ research may

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<sup>37</sup> As will be explained in this chapter writers and historians such as Virginia Woolf and Barbara Caine have urged that the ‘ordinary’ woman be more visible in texts. Australian author Kate Grenville and historian Graeme Davison have written about their families and importance of focusing on women who get overlooked in history and families.

prompt historians to challenge established Australian narratives. For example, Evans explains that because many Australians now have family trees that include convict and/or Aboriginal ancestry, 'pioneer myths' have had to be cast aside.<sup>38</sup>

Within this context, I argue that illuminating the life of Rose Pearlman prompts us to question the dominant narratives in Australian historical texts about the development of Jewish communities in Victoria. These stories have primarily been about men and their role in various power struggles over the establishment of Jewish institutions in Victoria from the nineteenth century to the end of World War II. This focus on power and politics, I argue, has had the effect of largely excluding women's experiences and underplays the importance of 'ordinary' Jewish women's distinctive voices as well as their social, cultural and economic contribution to their families, and their Jewish communities. In addition, I contend that Rose Pearlman's experience as a mother of children who served in World War II sheds some light on the war mother's own struggles. I am not arguing that the particularities in the life story about Rose Pearlman can become exemplary. I do maintain, however, that this piece of life-writing challenges silences and assumptions about the value of researching and writing about specific individuals.

As part of this examination, it is important to note that researching and writing about individual lives has the potential to resonate with readers. In this, I am guided by Australian historian Susan Magarey's contention that life-writing helps individuals to understand the past by enabling the reader to 'identify with a life story that becomes a

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<sup>38</sup> Evan, T 'Secrets and Lies: The Radical Potential of Family History,' *History Workshop Journal*, 71: 2011, p.52.

“prism of history”, bringing together at the same moment both the individual and their social, cultural and political context’.<sup>39</sup>

This chapter begins with an examination of Virginia Woolf’s musings about the ‘obscure woman’ with reference to some of her essays and novels and how she addresses the lack of women’s voices. I acknowledge that women’s history has changed in the past thirty years or more, but it has, in a sense, built on some of Woolf’s arguments she made in 1920s and answered her call to write about ‘obscure’ women’s lives.

This examination leads to an exploration of the ideas of historian Barbara Caine, writer Tilly Olsen and academic and writer Liz Stanley, who argue in favour of the power of life-stories to illuminate gender, class and ethnicity. Within this discussion, I refer to other life-writing works by historians, writers and journalists that tell stories about women that challenge established narratives. The chapter, then, specifically explores texts about Victoria’s Jewish history to establish the extent to which they include the experiences of women. Jewish academic texts, as well as life-writing works, are examined that cover the period from 1788 to the end of World War II.

### 1.1 Virginia Woolf to Halle Rubenhold: Giving voice to women overlooked in the past.

In her essays and novels, Virginia Woolf often muses about the obscure person, who does not write and who is rarely the subject of ‘life-writing’, a term she uses in her

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<sup>39</sup> Magarey, S and Round, K, eds, (2005) *Living History: Essays on History as Biography*, Australian Humanities Press, p.1.

work, *Sketch of the Past*.<sup>40</sup> Many of her meditations are about the absence of women as subjects in biographies and histories. In 1927, after Woolf had read copious tomes, she declared, ‘Very little is known about women.’<sup>41</sup> Two years later she opines in *A Room of One’s Own* that her reading is getting boring, ‘That history is too much about wars; that biography is too much about great men.’<sup>42</sup> These musings prompted Woolf to question what is meant by ‘greatness’ and ‘smallness’ and to urge biographers to ‘revise their standards’ by writing about a diversity of lives.<sup>43</sup> In *The Art of Biography*, Woolf writes:

And again, since so much is known that used to be unknown, the question now inevitably asks itself, whether the lives of great men only should be recorded. Is not anyone who has lived a life, and left a record of that life, worthy of biography – failures as well as successes, the humble of as well as the illustrious? And what is greatness? And what is smallness? We must revise our standards of merit and set up new heroes for admiration.<sup>44</sup>

Woolf encourages her female friends to pen their life stories because she wants them to ‘fill a gap’, in which few women had written about others and themselves.<sup>45</sup> According to Woolf’s proto-feminist position, this can be seen as an act to empower women. In Lee’s view, Woolf’s biographical and life-writing cannot be separated from her feminism because they both involve taking authorship of one’s life.<sup>46</sup> This symbiotic relationship between Woolf’s urging of women to experiment with life-writing and its role in promoting women’s narratives has had a profound impact on my thesis. Woolf has shown through her experimentation with and polemics about the

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<sup>40</sup> Woolf, V (1939) ‘Sketch of the Past’ in *Moments of Being*, Delphi Complete Works of Virginia Woolf, e-pub, pp.15,459-15,875. Woolf uses the term to both signify writing about the self and writings about others, but that the self underpins the writing.

<sup>41</sup> Lee, H (1997) *Virginia Woolf*, Random House e-books, Kindle Location, 456.

<sup>42</sup> Woolf, V (1929), *A Room of One’s Own*, Wordsworth Edition (2012), p.626.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Woolf, V(1942) ‘The Art of Biography’ in *Virginia Woolf: Selected Essays*, Oxford University Press, 2009, p.121.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, loc, 452.

<sup>46</sup> Lee, H, Kindle Location, 447. Lee asserts, ‘When she [Woolf] writes about biography, she is also writing about feminism.’

possibilities of life-writing that it is plausible and possible to write the stories of women like my Great-Grandmother. Life-writing, I maintain, has opened up an avenue to tell Rose Pearlman's story, a woman's narrative without the conventions of biography that have historically examined the great lives of men. This is further explored later in this chapter and in Chapter Two on genres.

Woolf also wonders about the lives of women who vanish, leaving few traces that they ever existed. *In a Room of One's Own*, she imagines a woman of about eighty crossing a road arm-in-arm with her middle-aged daughter.<sup>47</sup> Woolf writes that if the woman was asked 'what her life meant to her' she would recall public moments in history, but would be unable to provide details about what she did on a given day:

For all the dinners are cooked; the plates and cups washed; the children sent to school and gone out into the world. Nothing remains of it all. All has vanished. No biography or history has a word to say about it. And, the novels without meaning to, inevitably lie. All these infinitely obscure lives remain to be recorded...<sup>48</sup>

However as Woolf's fictional works make clear, the relationships women have with family members, particularly between mother and daughter, are important in understanding the complexities of their domestic roles during this period. In so doing, she gives the women a distinctive voice by relaying their experiences of how social mores of the time often trapped women – and for that matter, men.<sup>49</sup> In *Mrs*

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<sup>47</sup> Woolf, V (1929) 'A Room of One's Own' in *The Selected Works of Virginia Woolf*, Wordsworth Edition: Hertfordshire, 2012, pp.557-630.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, p.614.

<sup>49</sup> In her novel, *Middlemarch*, George Eliot also focuses on relational and domestic roles to give her heroine Dorothea Brook a strong and distinctive voice. Despite living a quiet life as a wife, Eliot concludes that Dorothea had an immense impact on those around her. The final paragraph explains that her 'unhistoric acts' of kindness had lasting impressions on those around her: 'Her finely touched spirit had still its fine issues, though they were not widely visible. Her full nature, like that river of which Cyrus broke the strength, spent itself in channels which had no great name on the earth. But the effect of her being on those around her was incalculably diffusive: for the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs.' Eliot, G



*Dalloway*, Woolf provides the distinctive voice of an older woman realising her invisibility in the eyes of a world where women are defined by their relationships to men:

But often now this body she wore (she stopped to look at a Dutch picture), this body with all its capacities, seemed nothing – nothing at all. She had the oddest sense of being herself invisible; unseen; unknown; there being no more marrying, no more having of children now, but only this astonishing and rather solemn progress with the rest of them, up Bond Street, this being Mrs Dalloway; not even Clarissa any more; this being Mrs Richard Dalloway.<sup>50</sup>

While the domestic lives of women are important, Woolf is also interested in the women's lives played out on London streets. In *A Room of One's Own* she paints a vivid image of them:

...the women at the street corners with their arms akimbo, and the rings embedded in their fat swollen fingers, talking with a gesticulation like the swing of Shakespeare's words; or from the violet-sellers and match-sellers and old crones stationed under doorways; or from drifting girls whose faces, like waves in sun and cloud, signal the coming of men and women and the flickering lights of shop windows.<sup>51</sup>

Woolf evokes the economic struggles confronting some of these women, but also provides an eyewitness view of their public rituals, particularly of the women talking and gesticulating. She gives voice to those who have been largely hidden in history and biographies, and as a result shows how these women build a collective identity on the streets. Reading Woolf's lines, published in 1929, prompts images of my Great-Grandmother's impromptu social gatherings on street corners in Ballarat in 1929 with other women of her socio-economic class, giving rise to their public identity as

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Middlemarch, Kindle Locs 12681-12683. The book is available through Project Gutenberg. Interestingly, Woolf called Middlemarch 'One of the Few English novels written for grown-up people.'

<sup>50</sup> Woolf, Virginia (1925) *Mrs Dalloway* Kindle Loc 119  
<https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/w/woolf/virginia/w91md/>

<sup>51</sup> Woolf, V (1929) *A Room of One's Own* in Wordsworth Library Collection, pp. 613-4.

Ballarat's working-class poor.<sup>52</sup>

Like Woolf, Australian historian Barbara Caine has pointed out that the more traditional model of biography has mostly made women feel marginalised because only a few can fit into its framework of the study of great and exceptional people, as documented usually in the public record. 'It reinforces the idea that only public achievement is significant and that those women who lead predominately domestic lives are of no particular interest,' Caine writes.<sup>53</sup> She argues that writing about 'ordinary' women can illuminate how they negotiate their economic struggles, their relationships with their partners and children as well as showing the 'constant interaction between the private and public spheres'.<sup>54</sup> In addition, their domestic lives also reflect the strategies they employ to support their families.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, writing about the individual woman can shed light on the impact of national policies on the woman and family. In Rose Pearlman's case, there were no sickness benefits for her husband in the 1920s: sickness benefits were not introduced until after World War II. Rose, like many other women in her financially precarious position, had to negotiate ways to make money or develop relationships with charitable organisations.

Caine notes that the rise in second wave feminism in the early 1960s prompted women to become more interested in writing about women's lives.<sup>56</sup> Novelist and

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<sup>52</sup> Bate, W (1978) *Lucky City: The First Generation of Ballarat 1851-1901*, Carlton: Melbourne University Press and Bate, W (1993) *Life After Gold: Twentieth Century Ballarat*, Carlton: Miegunyah Press. In both books Bate writes about Ballarat East and its working class roots and poverty, particularly during the depressions of the 1890s and late 1920s-early 30s. Ballarat East had its own council from 1857 to 1921.

<sup>53</sup> Caine, B (1994) 'Feminist Biography and Feminist History', *Women's History Review*, 3:2, p.250

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, p.251. Historians and sociologists also use life-writing as part of case-study work. See, for example, Swain, S (2008) 'The Value of the Vignette in the Writing of Welfare History', *Australian Historical Studies*, 39:2, 199-212, and Stanley, L, ed, (1990) *Feminist Praxis: Research, Theory and Epistemology in Feminist Sociology*, London: Routledge.

<sup>55</sup> As highlighted in the creative project, some women breast-fed other women's children for money. Rose opened a lolly shop to help support her family.

<sup>56</sup> Caine, B (2010) *Biography and History*, England: Palgrave MacMillan pp.44-5.

essayist Tilly Olsen, for example, attributes the women's and freedom movements with creating an 'atmosphere' that made writing about women and the silences imposed on them 'possible'.<sup>57</sup> She is particularly interested in using individual women's stories to tell the lives of 'the many':

Teach women's lives through the lives of the women who wrote the books, as well as through the books themselves; and through autobiography, biography, journals, letters. Because most literature concerns itself with the lives of the few, know and teach the few books closer to the lives of the many.<sup>58</sup>

Caine suggests that stories about ordinary, quiet people are necessary because of their capacity to illustrate class, gender, ethnicity, and how particular historical events shape people and 'facets of that world which are not available in other ways'.<sup>59</sup> She also asserts that the life-histories of individual women can provide insights into the 'general situation' of women. This idea frames the creative component where I examine the plight of mothers whose children have left Australia to serve overseas in World War II. More specifically, in Chapter Twelve 'The Badge', I tell the story of Rose's angst at losing her tangible badge, the symbol indicating she had a daughter and three sons serving in the war. From the particular, I then illuminate other women's desperation at trying to recover their lost badges in order to cast a broader light on the experience of women's longing during war. This is extrapolated by referring to the advertisements they placed in newspapers offering a reward to people who found them. The agonies of the long wait Rose experiences to hear news about her children is palpable and may resonate with readers about their times of longing, and also prompt them to imagine women's experience of war in the past. This harks back to Magarey's contention that life-writing helps individuals to understand the past

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<sup>57</sup> Olsen, T, *Silences*, The Feminist Press at City University of New York, Kindle Edition, p.44.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Caine (2010), p.126.

by enabling the reader to 'identify with a life story'.<sup>60</sup>

Women writers, therefore, have aimed to revalue the lives of those who did not lead public lives.<sup>61</sup> British academic Liz Stanley adds a further and nuanced layer to this notion and argues that constructing the lives of the obscure can often tell us more about society than writing about the famous.<sup>62</sup> She contends that this is because the views from the margins will provide a different and sometimes richer perspective. An example is reflected in *The Diaries of Hannah Cullwick: Victorian Maidservant*.<sup>63</sup> Stanley edits and writes an introduction to the text and maintains that Cullwick was 'never famous, indeed who was born, lived, wrote and died in total obscurity'.<sup>64</sup> Yet the Cullwick diaries, published in 1984, illuminate at least something of what it means to live and work as a lower-class woman in England in the nineteenth century. In addition, the Cullwick diaries provide an avenue to question established narratives that 'lower class' women like Hannah Cullwick lacked agency in her relationship with an upper class man. In her introduction to the diaries, Stanley describes Cullwick as 'a woman of great character and of much power and pride'.<sup>65</sup> She argues that through her diaries she displays resilience, resourcefulness and is able to assert herself in her relationship with the Cambridge educated Arthur Munby, for whom she worked for as his servant and later became his wife.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Magarey, S (2005) *Living History: Essays on History as Biography*, Australian Humanities Press, p.1 See, also, Ostrov Weissner, S 'What Kind of Life Have I Got? Gender in the Life Story of an Ordinary Woman' in Smith, S and Watson, J (1996) *Getting a Life: Everyday Uses of Autobiography*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, p.252. This reflects how every day practices in life writing

<sup>61</sup> Caine, p.45; Ferres, K, (2002) 'Gender, Biography and the Public Sphere' in France, P and St Clair, W (eds) *Biographical Theory and Practice in the Early Twentieth Century*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 303-321.

<sup>62</sup> Stanley, L (1992) *The Auto/Biographical I: The Theory and Practice of Feminist Auto/Biography*, and Manchester UK: Manchester University Press, p.8.

<sup>63</sup> Stanley, L (1984) *The Diaries of Hannah Cullwick, Victorian Maidservant*, Rutgers University Press. The diaries were written between 1854 and 1873.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, p.9.

<sup>66</sup> Opinion is divided on whether Hannah did have power as Stanley suggests or was manipulated by Arthur Munby. See, for example, Martha Dana Rust (1994), 'In the Humble Service of Her

These notions of women's agency, reliance and resourcefulness are further reflected in Rhonda Wilson's *Good Talk: the Extraordinary lives of Ten Ordinary Australian Women*. This text not only reflects how women negotiate their domestic existence but provides an entrée into lives that are unknown to many in society and illuminates universal themes women can identify with.<sup>67</sup> The women profiled in this book are mostly married to wharf workers and live in Port Melbourne. These are women about whom society rarely hears because they are not publicly recognised for their achievements. However, Wilson shows how these women negotiate their relationships with their partners, some of whom are violent. She reveals how they navigate laws that determine their private lives during the time of illegal abortion, and she conveys how they keep their children together, despite having little money. Some of the mothers had been placed in orphanages themselves because of family poverty and are determined that would not be their children's fate. Apart from the particulars of these individual women's lives, we also learn about the 'general situation' of women through their stories. Sensitivity, depth and humour found in their everyday lives. As one of the editors eloquently writes, 'For in the experience of every individual there are small events that can capture, perhaps only fleetingly the emotions, the loyalties, the humour of not only a past generation but of all women.'<sup>68</sup>

Magarey further suggests that the feminist endeavour to 'recover the lives and work of individual women from a resounding silence in the established historical record

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Emancipation: Hannah Cullwick Maid-Of-All Work Diaries', *Pacific Coast Philology*, Penn State University, 29:1, pp.95-108.

<sup>67</sup> Wilson, R, ed, (1985) *Good Talk: The Extraordinary Lives of Ten Ordinary Australian Women*, Melbourne: McPhee Gribble/Penguin.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, p.196.

also has the potential to rewrite the culture in which women live'.<sup>69</sup> This is reflected in Clare Wright's *The Forgotten Rebels of Eureka*, which seeks to highlight gender issues on the goldfields and uncover the hidden women who played important roles in the Eureka rebellion.<sup>70</sup> By examining the role of women in this way, revaluing their contributions, she wants to 'reinvigorate' the Eureka story and provide a fuller picture of society in Ballarat at the time instead of re-examining the well-known stories of the men involved in the rebellion. Wright argues that her work upsets the gender bias in narratives about the gold-fields:

Instead of a rough and ready outpost of bachelors out for a quick buck, we find a heterogeneous and largely orderly community of 'working families' intent on building a new life of freedom and independence. Ultimately, as we'll see, it was the intimate, ambitious matrix of expectations, associations, disappointments and frustrations that culminated in the brief but bloody moment that aired miners' grievances and elicited official reprisals. Women's presence does not just add colour to the picture; it changes its very outline.<sup>71</sup>

Furthermore, British journalist Rachel Cooke's *Brilliant Career: Ten Extraordinary Women of the '50s* is another example of how writing about the lives of women produces a rethinking of accepted narratives about their roles in society – and thus about the fabric and values of society itself. Cooke writes a collective biography of ten women to challenge clichés that women were mainly cleaners and cooks in the 1950s. She indicates that images of the 'compliant' and 'smiling creature' 1950's woman are reflected in books and plays primarily written by male authors.<sup>72</sup> Cooke adds that history texts about the decade are also written by men, who are 'less

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<sup>69</sup> Magarey, S, ed, (1992) *Writing Lives: Feminist Biography and Autobiography*, Adelaide: Australian Feminist Studies Press, University of Adelaide, p.v.

<sup>70</sup> Wright, C (2013) *The Forgotten Rebels of Eureka*, Melbourne: Text Publishing, Kindle Edition.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, Kindle Location 104-108.

<sup>72</sup> Cooke, R (2013) *Her Brilliant Career: Ten Extraordinary Women of the Fifties*, London: Virago. Kindle Location 111. See also The Oxford Centre for Life-Writing podcast <https://resourcespace.wolf.ox.ac.uk/resourcespace/pages/view.php?ref=9397&k=dc4df933e1>

forthcoming about the lives of women'.<sup>73</sup>

Halle Rubenhold's *The Five: The Untold Lives of the Women Killed by Jack the Ripper*<sup>74</sup> reveals other reasons for telling the stories of women who have been ignored in history. She explains in the Introduction, 'A Tale of Two Cities', that she wrote the book because she wanted to restore the women's dignity that was taken away by the murderer, and to debunk assumptions the media has made about their lives, just because they lived in some of the poorest areas in the Spitalfields.<sup>75</sup> Although Rubenhold examines the particularities in these women's lives, she also reminds us that they shared experiences with many other women who lived in the Victorian age:

They are worth more to us than the empty human shells we have taken them for: they were children who cried for their mothers; they were young women who fell in love; they endured childbirth and the deaths of parents; they laughed and celebrated Christmas. They argued with their siblings, they wept, they dreamed, they hurt, they enjoyed small triumphs. The courses their lives took mirrored that of so many other women of the Victorian age, and yet were so singular in the way they ended.<sup>76</sup>

Magarey sums up how writing about women can provide different layers to understanding the past. She suggests that narratives about women introduce the reader to the 'domestic as well as the political, to the personal as well as the cultural, to the particular as well as the social'.<sup>77</sup> I build upon and adapt this concept, which is more fully explained in the following section and throughout this exegesis.

### 1.2 Family history's role in revealing the 'ordinary' women's contribution to society.

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<sup>73</sup> Cooke, R Kindle Location 126.

<sup>74</sup> Rubenhold, H (2019) *The Five: the Untold Lives of the Women Killed by Jack the Ripper*, London: Doubleday (e-book).

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, pp.10-32.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, p.32.

<sup>77</sup> Magarey, S (2005), p.1.

Julia Watson argues that genealogy is a ‘disciplinary practice for ordering the family’.<sup>78</sup> For the creative project, this ordering can be understood in terms of the meanings and knowledge derived from arranging the family members into a pattern with Rose as the focus. Watson contends that her understanding of this ordering is focused on the ‘pedigree’ of lineage, which acknowledges that ‘one’s roots signify being someone; it reaffirms old values of hierarchy and origin that are arguably at odds with the egalitarian ideology of democracy’.<sup>79</sup> Watson maintains that because the practice of genealogy is highly organised along male and class lines it has the effect of actively limiting autobiographical voices, content and narrators.<sup>80</sup> In addition, she argues that genealogy has enabled some people ‘to “get” lives’, but for others genealogy has had the power to ‘suppress stories of enslavement, colonisation, and appropriation that underlie American history’.<sup>81</sup> However since writing this seminal paper, Watson now acknowledges that family history has become more democratised because of the swell in people researching and writing about family lives that reflects a ‘combination of autobiographical and biographical detail relying on genealogy in collective family stories’.<sup>82</sup>

However, the impact of gender bias in family history in obscuring women’s lives remains palpable. Graeme Davison is cognisant of this bias and therefore urges family historians to follow the female line because too many women become lost in the entanglement of changed surnames upon marriage.<sup>83</sup> This was the reality for Davison who discovered that it was, in fact, a female ancestor who was the custodian of a

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<sup>78</sup> Watson, J (1996) ‘Ordering The Family: Genealogy As Autobiographical Pedigree’ in Smith, A & Watson, J, (2016), *Life-Writing in the Long Run: Autobiography Studies Reader*, Michigan Publishing, Kindle Location 3873.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, 3884.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 3902-3919.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid 3917-19.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid 298.

<sup>83</sup> Davison, G (2015) *Lost Relations: Fortunes of My Family in Australia’s Golden Age*, Melbourne: Allen&Unwin, p.14.



family story that was integral to Davison's own search for meaning and 'order'. In his text, *Lost Relations*, Davison's main subject in his family history is a woman who is little known, and therefore has no political, economic or social status.<sup>84</sup> However, through his research and philosophical musings about her life we learn how a widow in the nineteenth century coped migrating to Australia and the ensuing physical and mental challenges she faced. Davison's book reflects Caine's notion that an ordinary person's experiences are illustrative of a world that we may not know about but which can cast light on a broader social experience.

In a similar vein, Australian author Kate Grenville<sup>85</sup> has written about another woman, her mother, whose life was obscured from the public gaze. She argues that her mother was not the 'sort of person biographies are usually written about', because her mother was not famous and she did not do anything that historians would have picked up.<sup>86</sup> However, Grenville thinks her mother's story is significant because it puts our image of the past into new perspective:

They often believed their lives weren't important enough to write down, and in many cases they lacked the literacy and the leisure time to do so. As a result, our picture of the past is skewed towards the top lot.<sup>87</sup>

My creative component fits with these family histories of women who have led private rather than public lives. It is situated along a continuum of works that seek to recover and reclaim the 'ordinary' woman in order to reveal a richer connection to the past. In so doing, I borrow ideas from life-writing and history about privileging women's stories and am guided by Lee's assertion that a life story is 'never just the

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> I have mostly considered the non-fiction works in this thesis as exemplars for my creative project.

<sup>86</sup> Grenville, K (2015) *One Life: My Mother's Story*, Melbourne: Text Publishing, p.29.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, p.40.

personal story of one life. It always has political and social implications'.<sup>88</sup> I also build upon the sentiments that underpin Davison's and Grenville's works to argue that family history has an important role to play in locating a woman's position within the family and in society.

This argument is also informed by recent work from Evans, who contends that family history has a vital role to play in upsetting assumptions about the past.<sup>89</sup> Evans makes this assessment about the power of family history:

The construction of a family tree, the discovery of manifold secrets and lies, throw into question the solidarity not only of the history of family, class and relationships between men and women but also of the history of nation and empire. Each newly discovered document encourages the historian to add to or question the narrative so far.<sup>90</sup>

Furthermore, as highlighted in this chapter's introduction, Evans has shown that historians and family historians can work together to challenge established narratives. In so doing, the family historians' documents have opened an avenue for Evans to examine a wider cross-section of society:

My blending of traditional social and cultural historiographical methods with an appeal for the help of family historians, who use a paper trail of birth, death, marriage, legal and civil records to reconstruct their ancestors' lives, has made me concentrate on the experiences of women of different classes and to look to the links between them. It has allowed me to explore a broader cross-section of class experience (in as much as historians do) as well as the structural aspects of motherhood during this periods. It also lets me draw on family historians' emotional engagement with the past.<sup>91</sup>

In exploring the contributions that family history makes to the work of historians, Evans suggests that family historians are motivated by a desire to fill gaps in 'official history' with their stories and to challenge 'the elitism in the academy'.<sup>92</sup> The next part of this chapter relates to Evans' contentions and in doing so explores the lack of historical accounts about the poor Jewish women in Victoria, and why this should be redressed.

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<sup>88</sup> Lee, H (2009) *Biography A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, p.63.

<sup>89</sup> Evans, T 'Secret and Lies': The Radical Potential of Family History, *History Workshop Journal*, 71:2011, Oxford University Press, p.51.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, p.54.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid, p.55. Evans also says that family historians need the help of academics to interpret data.

### 1.3 Jewish history texts, autobiographies and biographies (1788-1939).

An understanding of Rose Pearlman's life, however inevitably partial it might be, alerts us to gaps in historical scholarship, which has largely failed to examine the lives of poor, Jewish women in Victoria before 1945. Therefore, in this section I critically survey the main historical works about Jews in Australia, with a particular reference to the state of Victoria. The research identifies gaps in the historical literature about working class Jewish women who came to Victoria before World War II, and makes reference to and identifies biographical/autobiographical works by Jews in Victoria. In his landmark study of Australian Jewish autobiography, Richard Freadman says that most works in this category have been life-stories about the Holocaust, with few existing between 1788<sup>93</sup> and before the outbreak of WWII. I argue, therefore, that a woman such as Rose should be redeemed from anonymity because her life provides important social insights before and during World II about how a Jewish woman sustained her family and contributed to her Jewish community, but also how she negotiated her domestic role with work outside the home. This also tells another story about how the life of an 'ordinary' woman has been afforded much less significance in Jewish texts, or for that matter many books on the history of different community groups in Australia. Many of the major historical texts about the Australian Jewish community have tended to ignore the domestic experiences of working-class Jewish women before and during World War II. Instead, major works on Australian Jewish history have concentrated mainly on the development of Jewish institutions and the men involved in those establishments. When women are written about, they are often

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<sup>93</sup> Freadman, R (2007) *This Crazy Thing a Life: Australian Jewish Autobiography*, University of Western Australian Press, p.14.

from the middle-classes and have succeeded in professional or business roles.<sup>94</sup> Other women have been highlighted because of their public position in political and social organisations. For example, medical doctor Fanny Reading is widely acknowledged in texts for the role she played in establishing the National Council of Jewish Women in 1927.<sup>95</sup>

It is, therefore, essential to illuminate the life of the Jewish working-class woman.

Rose's life-story helps us to question the dominant narrative that it was mostly powerful men developing institutions that forged Jewish development in Victoria. Her life also illuminates the fact that Ballarat once housed a relatively strong Jewish community, and dispels misconceptions that most Jews arrived in Australia after World War II.<sup>96</sup> Despite writing about an individual woman, Marianne Hirsch reminds us that the individual life story can serve as a challenge and a 'counter memory' to assumptions and beliefs held by sections of society who have only been exposed to a narrow set of stories.<sup>97</sup>

When the First Fleet arrived at Port Jackson in 1789, it carried seven hundred and fifty-one convicts, including at least eight Jewish convicts, three of whom were

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<sup>94</sup> See, for example, Cohen, R.L (1987) *Beginning with Esther: Jewish Women in NSW from 1788*, Sydney: Heritage Books.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid. Also see Suzanne Rutland on Reading

<http://www.womenaustralia.info/leaders/biogs/WLE0403b.htm> and Rubinstein, H, 'Reading, Fanny (1884-1974)', in *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University (ANU), 2006, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/reading-fanny-8168/text14279>.

Reading lived in Ballarat in her earlier years and her time there overlapped with Rose Pearlman's.

<sup>96</sup> Marlow, D 'The Jews of Melbourne' talk given on September 4, 2017 at Jewish Community Council of Victoria. Marlow, chief executive officer of JCCV, expounded on the misconception that many Australians believed Jews migrated to Australia after World War II. He remarked that the Jewish Museum of Australia is trying to dispel this myth. Also see, *The Jewish population of Australia and Victoria: Key Findings of the 2011 Census*, Monash University Centre for Jewish Civilisation, The enumerated Jewish population has, on average, steadily increased from under 20,000 in 1911 to almost 100,000 in 2011 <http://artsonline.monash.edu.au/wp-content/arts-files/gen08/Australian-Census-2011.pdf> and <http://artsonline.monash.edu.au/wp-content/arts-files/gen08/Victorian-Census-2011.pdf>

<sup>97</sup> Hirsch, M (1997/2012) *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory*, Harvard University Press, p.63

women.<sup>98</sup> Rabbi John Levi has documented the lives of the eight Jewish convicts on the first fleet and the hundreds who came later as convicts or free settlers. He has produced books and articles on the topic, including a nine hundred and twenty-one-page biographical dictionary of the more than one thousand six hundred Jews who came to Australia as convicts or free settlers from 1788 to 1850.<sup>99</sup>

This scholarly composition of colonial Jewry is important to this thesis for three main reasons. Firstly, it reveals that Jews had been living in Australia since 1788, thereby dispelling misconceptions that Jews mainly came to Australia after the end of World War 11. Secondly, the biographical dictionary illustrates the diversity among Jews: the poor, rich, professional, working-class and criminal.<sup>100</sup> Levi's research also reveals that, apart from England, Jews were also born in Germany, Poland and Australia. Finally, Levi's mammoth and encyclopedic text provides brief facts about the lives of Jewish convict and free settler women.<sup>101</sup> My thesis adds substance and depth to what is currently a slender body of work about poor Jewish women.

Other histories of Australian Jewry have continued the work of Levi and have documented the growth of Jewish migration in the twentieth century.<sup>102</sup> In addition many major texts have also emphasised the development of Jewish institutions such as Synagogues. However, these texts are not as inclusive of the Jewish community as

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<sup>98</sup> Levi, J.S and Bergman, G.F.J (1974) *Australian Genesis: Jewish Convicts and Settlers 1788-1850*, Melbourne: Rigby, p.14.

<sup>99</sup> Levi, J.S (2013) *These Are the Names: Jewish Lives in Australia 1788-1850*, Melbourne: the Miegunyah Press.

<sup>100</sup> Listed occupations of Jews in Levi's text include: dealer, convict, watchmaker, labourer, shopkeeper, hawker, pencil-maker, carpenter, gentleman's servant, attorney's assistant, servant and actress.

<sup>101</sup> See for example p.174 Sarah de Abraham Torres Cohen, who was left a widow with five children after her husband committed suicide. She owned and ran a confectionary shop in Hobart Town.

<sup>102</sup> See, for example, Rubinstein H and Rubinstein W.D (1991) *The Jews in Australia: A Thematic History 1788 to 1945*, Vol 1, Melbourne: William Heinemann.

Levi's biographical dictionary. Many of the books and articles explore Jewish political and religious establishments, and because men dominated them, the histories are primarily about men. Suzanne Rutland explains in *Jews in the Sixth Continent* why women were sidelined from 1778 until the 1920s in playing important roles in the organisational or political aspects of communal Jewish life:

This was because of strong male opposition to any possible interference by women in the running of the community. The Jewish woman's role was seen as wife and mother and where she did venture outside the home and hearth it was mainly in the field of philanthropic endeavours or as ladies auxiliaries, assisting but subordinate to the male efforts.<sup>103</sup>

Newman Rosenthal's history of the Ballarat Synagogue reflects the very observation Rutland makes about the divide between women's and men's role in the Jewish community. Rosenthal's book is wonderfully detailed about how the Synagogue developed, but the references are primarily to men and their jostling for power. Women are briefly mentioned for their role as charity workers.<sup>104</sup> Other historical writing about Jews has continued to detail men's triumphs and battles within the Jewish community. Lazarus Goldman's *Jews in Nineteenth Century Victoria*, the only text devoted to the history of Jews during this period is, according to the Bibliography of Australian Judaica, 'a groundbreaking record of Jewish life in Victoria'.<sup>105</sup> While the book is informative and provides a thematic approach to charting Jewish settlements in Victoria, including Ballarat, it provides a narrow interpretation of 'Jewish life in Victoria'. There is ample detail on the achievements of men [and their conflicts] who established and ran Jewish institutions and set up businesses, but there is scant documentation offered on what daily life was like for

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<sup>103</sup> Rutland, S 'The Changing Role of Women in Australian Jewry's Communal Structure in Rubinstein, W (1987) *Jews in the Sixth Continent*, Sydney: Allen&Unwin, p.101.

<sup>104</sup> Rosenthal, N.C (1979) *Formula For Survival: The Saga of the Ballarat Hebrew Congregation*, Melbourne: The Hawthorn Press, chapters 2-4.

<sup>105</sup> Liberman, S (2011) *The Bibliography of Australasian Judaica 1788-2008*, Monash University Centre for Jewish Civilisation: Hybrid Publishing, p.413.

Jewish women – or men - in the nineteenth century.<sup>106</sup> The lack of detail about different sections of the Jewish community confirms Howard Nathan's assertion in his forward to Levi's text that, 'So often history is reserved for the powerful or wealthy.'<sup>107</sup>

Similarly, the first volume of Hilary and William Rubinstein's account of Jews in Australia provides thematic insights into the growth of the Jewish population in Australia and Victoria before 1945. The emphasis is on economic, demographic and assimilation issues. Within these discussions many references are to prominent men, although there is one citation to ordinary Jewish men who eked out a living as travelling salesmen.<sup>108</sup>

An examination of the subject index of *The Bibliography of Australian Judaica 1788-2008* highlights women's marginalised presence in books and articles. This is reflected in the small number of specific references to Jewish women in the index. There are twenty-six books or articles that refer to women as a group, but there are few specific references to women by name. While the subject 'men' is not highlighted in the index, there are copious male names listed indicating that many more men than women have been written about and cited in texts and articles.<sup>109</sup>

The Australian books that have specifically examined Jewish women tend to concentrate on women from the middle-classes or make the case for the 'rags to

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<sup>106</sup> Goldman, L (1954) *Jews in Nineteenth Century Victoria*, self-published. The text provides figures on numbers of Jews in Victoria, however, it does not provide source material.

<sup>107</sup> Levi, J.S (2013) *These Are The Names*, forward viii.

<sup>108</sup> Rubinstein H and Rubinstein W.D (1991) *The Jews in Australia: A Thematic History 1788 to 1945*, Vol 1, pp. 74-143.

<sup>109</sup> Liberman, S (2011), pp 780-836.

riches' story, where a woman who struggles economically ends up making a fortune or enters the professional classes. Helena Rubenstein's story is cited as a case of successful Jewish woman before World War II.<sup>110</sup> The Polish immigrant started out in regional Victoria with little money yet became known worldwide as a cosmetics entrepreneur.<sup>111</sup> Other books and articles also focus on Jewish women who have gained recognition outside the home. Lysbeth Rose Cohen's text, *Beginning With Esther: Jewish Women in New South Wales from 1788*, is a case in point. It is a fascinating book that celebrates two hundred Jewish women who have gained prominence through their public work. However, we do not read about the private and ordinary Jewish woman, which would present a broader range of perspectives and enhance our understanding of their daily lives. Nevertheless, Cohen is cognisant of the fact that women's stories are often buried in favour of their husband's. When writing about one woman she asks, 'What of Annette Abigail? Historians seem to tell the stories of men – their wives receive scant mention.'<sup>112</sup> This is a similar complaint made by Liz Stanley in her introduction to the diaries of Hannah Cullwick. She asserts that Derek Hudson's biography of Arthur Munby, a barrister and writer as well as Cullwick's husband, hardly mentions Cullwick.<sup>113</sup>

This survey of texts on Jews in Australia reveals there is scant mention of poor Jewish women and their contribution to the Jewish community. However, as Levi's research reveals, there were some very poor Jewish women living in Australia and Victoria before 1850. It is not inconceivable, therefore, to assume that some of these women

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<sup>110</sup> Australian Dictionary of Biography <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/rubinstein-helena-8293>

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Cohen, R.L (1987) p.8. See, also, Radi, H (1989) *200 Australian Women: A Redress Anthology*, NSW: Women's Redress Press. There is an entry on Fanny Reading, a Jew and doctor, who founded the Council of Jewish Women pp.142-4, and one on Fanny Cohen, a Jew and 'headmistress' pp.156-7.

<sup>113</sup> Stanley, L (1984), p.7.



had female descendants who also found themselves in troubling economic circumstances forcing them to rely on Jewish charities that were set up in the nineteenth century. I would also argue that poor Jewish women had as important a role as the wealthier and more prominent women and men in fostering the Jewish community through their family connections. This is revealed in Rose's story where she ensured her children attended *shule* and Hebrew school, passed on Jewish stories and kept the Sabbath. However, there are perceptions that women's domestic lives maybe uninteresting as reflected in the title of Cohen's 1981 article, 'Not Merely Housewives'.<sup>114</sup> Once again, we are reminded of Caine's argument that an absence in historical texts about the domestic lives of women reinforces ideas that these lives are uninspiring and unimportant.<sup>115</sup>

Jews have also written about their own lives and those of others. These accounts provide more of an insight into the domestic lives of Jews. Few, however, have dealt with lives in Australia before 1945. Freadman estimates that of the three hundred published volumes of Australian Jewish autobiographies and memoirs, seventy-five per cent deal with the Holocaust.<sup>116</sup> He has shown that one volume was published in the nineteenth century, none between 1901 and 1940 and two from 1941 to 1950.<sup>117</sup> From the 1980s onwards dozens of volumes of Jewish autobiography and memoir

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<sup>114</sup> Cohen, R.L 'Not Merely Housewives', *Australian Jewish Historical Society: Journal and Proceedings*, 9:1, 1987, pp.8-24.

<sup>115</sup> See, also, Scates, B 'The Unknown Sock Knitter: Voluntary Work, Emotional Labour, Bereavement and the Great War' *Labour History*, No. 81 (Nov, 2001), pp. 29-49. Scates points out that in the past, labour history has neglected to highlight the importance of women's unpaid work because it was designated 'women's work'. He considers how women, through their unpaid work during World War 1, played a crucial role as mediators of loss and bereavement.

<sup>116</sup> Freadman, R (2007) *This Crazy Thing a Life: Australian Jewish Autobiography*, p.14.

<sup>117</sup> *ibid*, p.15. However, an extract from the diary of Rebecca Blashki is published in Hammer, G who compiled *Pomegranates: A Century of Jewish Writing* in 1988. See pages 31-5. Blashki was born in Melbourne in 1876, and became an accomplished pianist, had six children and died in childbirth in 1920.

have been written, some by Holocaust survivors but mostly by their children. Of the three hundred published volumes, women have penned forty-three per cent.<sup>118</sup>

There are exceptions to Freadman's findings in Victoria. One is the memoir by Estelle Grinblat, who wrote about six generations of her Jewish family growing up in Ballarat and Melbourne. However, her story is different from my Great-Grandmother's because Estelle Grinblat's family was from a different economic and social class to Rose Pearlman's.<sup>119</sup> Grinblat was from the Stone family, a wealthy clan that owned Stone's department store in Ballarat. Nevertheless, the Grinblat family alerts us to the once lively Jewish Ballarat community and is illustrative of the stories of Jews from the gold-mining town, who left for Melbourne to further their education and careers. The other text, *A Shtetl In Ek Velt*, contains fifty-four vignettes by Jews who were brought up in Carlton between 1925 and 1945. The stories provide insights into Yiddish culture, the work performed by Jews, many who were hawkers, and Jewish businesses at the time.<sup>120</sup>

#### 1.4 Conclusion

Historians such as Rutland, Rosenthal and the Rubinsteins have made enormous contributions to charting the history of Jews in Australia. Without their works people would be unaware, for example, of the number of regional towns where Jews settled before 1900. The aim of pointing out the absence of poor Jewish women's stories in

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<sup>118</sup> Freadman (2007), p.16.

<sup>119</sup> Grinblat, E (2005) *Memories for the Keeping: Six Generation of a Ballarat Jewish Family*, Melbourne: Makor Publishing. Grinblat's memoir is part of a Lamm (Jewish) Library project in which Jews write their stories.

<sup>120</sup> Meadows, J, ed, (2011) *A Shtetl In Ek Velt (A Shtetl At The End of The World): 54 Stories of Growing up in Jewish Carlton 1925-1945*, Melbourne: Australian Centre for Jewish Civilisation Monash University.

these texts is to highlight that a significant proportion of Jews have not had their history documented. I, therefore, contend that it is important to research and write about this group of Jews because their experiences reveal that the Jewish community has been – and remains – far from homogenous. Their stories also challenge the narratives of the ‘rags to riches’ Jew as well as serving as a counter to the well-known stories about Sir John Monash and Sidney Myer. Rose Pearlman’s domestic life illustrates the vital role she played in family life in not only keeping the family unit together but in passing on Jewish customs and contributing to the fabric of Australian culture. The articulation of aspects of Rose’s life adds to the rich Jewish tradition of telling stories.<sup>121</sup>

In addition, Rose’s story has the potential for providing insights into the mothers’ wait to hear if their children serving overseas during World War II were safe. This type of story is often absent from Australian war narratives, which tend to emphasise the masculine hero and their active experience. However, stories about women such as my Great-Grandmother illustrate that women, and in this case mothers, were also affected by war and have stories to tell. The narratives add breadth to our understanding of life in Australia during the war by narrating the experiences of war mothers at home.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> See, for example, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, ‘The Jewish People Are a National of Storytellers’, *The Algemeiner*, September 11, 2014 <https://www.algemeiner.com/2014/09/11/the-jewish-people-are-a-nation-of-storytellers/> In the article, Rabbi Sacks writes that the Jews fleeing Egypt signified ‘the first time the retelling of the nation’s history becomes an obligation for every citizen of the nation. In this act, known as *vidui bikkurim*, ‘the confession made over first fruits, ‘Jews were commanded, as it were, to become a nation of storytellers.

<sup>122</sup> See, also, Damousi J (1999) *The Labour of Loss: Mourning, Memory and Wartime Bereavement in Australia*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. This text explores through letters and diaries how mothers, fathers, widows, relatives and friends dealt with grief during and after World Wars One and Two. And, Damousi J, (2001) *Living with the Aftermath: Trauma, Nostalgia and Grief in Post-War Australia*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. This text examines the experiences of war widows during World War Two and the Korean and Vietnam wars.

Finally, this chapter has situated my thesis along the continuum of works that seek to reclaim the ‘hidden woman’ as such it provides an avenue for me – and for other readers - to reach out to my Great-Grandmother and make connections to her past. In addition, this chapter has established the basis for the argument that family history provides an opportunity to explore obscure lives. These explorations can add to a more nuanced and wider interpretation of Jewish society, or for that matter any community. Both the creative component and exegesis of this thesis offer a space to interweave stories from Rose Pearlman’s life with reflections on privileging a woman’s story and probing how this can be achieved through the process of life-writing. This is further explored in Chapter Three on methodology and in Chapter Four on the imagination.

## **Chapter Two: Biography, memoir and life-writing: Criss-crossing Paths**

### Introduction

This chapter explores why the creative component of this thesis is situated within the capacious genre of life-writing. While the creative project reflects tenets of biography and memoir, I argue that they are ultimately inadequate terms in which to describe the nature and purpose of the creative project. Life-writing is the preferred term because it can be understood as being inclusive of a variety of writings and has been used by writers and some academics to illuminate the lives of the marginalised and/or obscure.

As highlighted in the Introduction, life-writing can be described as an inclusive term that might include for example biography, memoir, autobiography or a combination of these genres, but should also reveal aspects of the self of the writer. Furthermore, Chapter One established that theorists and writers have looked to life-writing as a literary form in which to open a space that allows for writing about marginalised individuals who do not fit into the conventional biographical genre, which has often focused on the ‘well known’ individual. In this discussion I highlighted that Virginia Woolf was a significant influence on my work, because of the way she shaped life-writing as a feminist pursuit and method.

This chapter further examines the nature and purpose of using life-writing and its relationship to the genres of biography, memoir and family story-telling with specific reference to my creative project. These considerations are guided by memoirist Thomas Couser’s argument that ‘merely’ classifying genres neglects their purpose and impact:

We can't fully understand what a particular author or story is doing without some sense of the operative conventions, which are a function of its genre. Especially in life writing, then, genre is not about mere literary form; it's about force—what a narrative's purpose is, what impact it seeks to have on the world.<sup>1</sup>

Couser's statement leads to a clarification of three reasons why life-writing is at the core of key considerations in this thesis. Firstly, life-writing provides an avenue for the recording and ordering of the content in family narratives also known as family history story-telling. According to American academics Kristin Langellier and Eric Paterson, family story-telling, like all narratives, involves people making meaning out of what happened to them as well as deriving meanings from the 'experiences of their family lives'.<sup>2</sup> Within this context, I contend that life-writing helps the family story-teller to find the narrative within the fragments of a life and to ultimately shape those fragments into a story. This idea will be further explored in Chapter Three, 'Fossicking as a Methodology for Life-Writing'.

Secondly – and related to the first consideration – is the prominent role which memoir plays in my work, where I use parts of my own life to analyse emotions such as grief. This action has the purpose of opening a space to probe whether I can come to some understanding of the strong emotions my Great-Grandmother experienced at certain key events in her life. This is a crucial interrogation given that one of the major questions underpinning the creative and exegetical components is the extent to which we can provide a sense of another person – whether they are dead or alive. In this

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<sup>1</sup> Couser, G, T (2011) *Memoir: An Introduction*, Oxford University Press, Kindle Loc:185-88.

<sup>2</sup> Langellier, K & Peterson, E (2004) *Story-Telling in Daily Life: Performing Narrative*, Temple University Press, p.68.

regard, my creative component reflects contemporary trends towards naming pieces of writing that mix genres as life-writing.<sup>3</sup>

Finally, employing life-writing reflects one of the overall goals of this thesis, which is to contribute to the growing body of works that aim to forge connections between the scholarly community and people who write about their families, and hence to a broader readership. This goal is important because, as highlighted in the Introduction, the painstaking research performed by family historians can help academics in their pursuit of new knowledge as illustrated in Evans' work.<sup>4</sup> Academics can also illuminate for the family historian how their research can be contextualised in order to produce a more profound understanding of how a family unit<sup>5</sup> fits within history. I, therefore, concur with the powerful statement by academic Julia Novak that there is an academic and outreach dimension of life-writing, which seeks to challenge and extend traditional genres.<sup>6</sup>

## 2.1 Definitions of and Innovations in Biography and Memoir

On one level, my creative project might be partly viewed as biography because, put simply, it is about a person whose life has been researched and written by someone else. Biography is generally defined as an account or written record of a person's life

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<sup>3</sup> Novak, J, 'Experiments in Life-Writing: Introduction' in Boldrini, L and Novak, J, eds, (2017) *Experiments in Life-Writing: Intersections of Auto/Biography and Fiction*, London: Palgrave Studies in Life-Writing, pp 1-2.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Evans T (2011) *Fractured Families: Life on the Margins in Colonial New South Wales*, NSW: New Wales Press. In a guest blog for [ancestry.com](http://ancestry.com), Evans says in this book she wanted 'to bring together the work of family historians, recovering the histories of their poor ancestors, with academic research on the history of the organisation and the wider historical context of this particular nineteenth-century charity.

<sup>5</sup> In this thesis, the family is defined as one in which members are united by common ancestors and/or laws related, for example, to marriage and adoption. It is acknowledged that definitions of 'family' are contested and that definitions of family change with the times.

<sup>6</sup> Novak, J in Boldrini, L and Novak, J eds, (2017), pp 14-20.

and is considered a branch of history or literature.<sup>7</sup> Smith and Watson's exploration of biography adds another layer to this definition by highlighting the biographer's interpretative action. 'Scholars of other people's lives,' they write, 'document and interpret those lives from a point of view external to the subject.'<sup>8</sup>

Lee offers another definition, which centres on the narrative. She proffers that biography is the 'story of a person told by someone else'.<sup>9</sup> Lee also maintains that 'told' is a better word to use than 'written' because biography is not just about writing, but also involves an oral dimension such as the recounting of memories and 'much-repeated' anecdotes.<sup>10</sup> However, she acknowledges that this basic definition underplays the complexities of the genre that does not take account of the broad spectrum of biographies and their different approaches.<sup>11</sup>

Lee points out there are also political, celebrity, literary and scholarly biographies that are often defined by their authorial approaches and reader expectations.<sup>12</sup> For example, this is reflected in Jenny Hocking's two-volume biography of former Australian prime minister Gough Whitlam, which is an authoritative scholarly biography where readers expect a meticulous collection and interpretation of primary documents.<sup>13</sup> In contrast to Hocking's works, there is a range of other biographies, including fictional biographies. However, this is not to say that the fictionalised biography is all made-up. Roe argues that while British author Hilary Mantel writes a fictionalised biography of Thomas Cromwell, her work 'rests on four centuries of

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<sup>7</sup> Cuddon, J.A (2013) *Dictionary of Literary Terms & Literary Theory*, England: Penguin Reference Library p.78.

<sup>8</sup> Smith, S & Watson, J (2010) *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, University of Minnesota Press, Kindle Edition, p.5.

<sup>9</sup> Lee, H (2009) *A Very Short Introduction to Biography*, England: Oxford University Press, p.5.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, p.6.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, pp 17-18.

<sup>13</sup> Hocking, J (2012) *Gough Whitlam: His Time*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press; Hocking, J (2008) *Gough Whitlam: A Moment in History*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press.



history, research, writing, and understanding'.<sup>14</sup> Mantel's work captures another complexity in defining biography: what is meant by 'truth' in writing about a person. This question is more fully explored question in Chapter Four of the exegesis, which discusses the role of interpretation, speculation and imagination in life-writing.

The fact that biography is still evolving as a genre also makes it difficult to provide a sufficiently adequate definition. It has been developing for centuries and continues to do so. Biography has its roots in the ancient world where, for example, stories were written about the pharaohs, typically in first person to highlight their extraordinary characteristics.<sup>15</sup> Later, biographers wrote hagiographies about saints and other heroes to provide readers with moral stories on how they should behave. These stories were different from fairy-tales because they were based on representing the lives of real people, not fictional characters. Interestingly, the words 'biography' and 'biographer' did not appear in modern European languages until the seventeenth century.<sup>16</sup>

The early twentieth century ushered in the Modernist movement, and within Modernist literature a movement that sought to break away from what it believed were the traditions, rules and conventions of biography. Of particular relevance to this thesis is how the movement reacted against the notion that biographers write hagiographies and called for an emphasis on personalities and their nuances.<sup>17</sup> As a result, writers experimented with the biographical genre, giving rise to the term 'modern biography'.<sup>18</sup> Virginia Woolf, who was at the forefront of the movement, was sceptical about traditional biography and its conventions, particularly the notion

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<sup>14</sup> Roe, J 'Biography Today: A Commentary', *Australian Historical Studies*, 43:1, p116.

<sup>15</sup> Parke, C N, (2002) *Biography: Writing Lives*, New York: Routledge, p.6

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p.1.

<sup>17</sup> Roe, J, (2012), p. 108 and also see Spongberg, M, Caine, B, Curthoys, A, eds, (2005) *Companion to Women's Historical Writing*, Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, pp. 608-610

<sup>18</sup> Lee, H (2009), pp.79-80; Caine (2010), pp.103-20; Parke, C (2002), pp.1-34.

that biography, or life-writing as she later re-titled her understanding of biography, should be steeped in so-called facts.<sup>19</sup> This was because it was difficult to get to know an individual if the writer only had facts to rely on, and Woolf was always interested in knowing the interior life of a person.<sup>20</sup> Woolf defines facts as those that can be ‘verified by other people besides the artist’, whereas in the ‘invented world, the facts are verified by one person only’.<sup>21</sup> She experimented using novelistic techniques, such as the use of the non-linear structure, for accessing the inner lives of her characters and for dealing with time and memory.<sup>22</sup> In some of her works, she blurs the distinction between non-fiction and fiction.<sup>23</sup> Woolf laid the foundations for future writers to experiment with the biographical form and – as I have indicated in Chapter One of this exegesis – she has been an important influence on my work in encouraging me to transcend a strict classification of genres.

Despite biography’s complexities, Lee offers another description of the genre that captures its fluidity and possibilities. In her *Very Short Introduction to Biography* she writes that the ‘instability of definitions and rules for biography suggest that it is a shape shifting, contradictory and variable form’.<sup>24</sup> Lee echoes these sentiments in an interview with *The Literateur* where she comments that biography is becoming ‘more

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<sup>19</sup> In *The Art of Biography*, Woolf wrestles with the idea of fictionalised and factual biographies. She states, ‘The novelist is free; the biographer is tied.’ Woolf, V, *The Death of the Moth*, and other essays: Chapter 23, ‘The Art of Biography’ <https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/w/woolf/virginia/w91d/chapter23.html>.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, section II. In Woolf’s *Sketch of the Past* and in many of her other works she asks, ‘How do you tell the life of a person.’ She grappled with this question throughout her life.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, section II.

<sup>22</sup> Lee, H (1997) *Virginia Woolf*, Great Britain: Vintage, Kindle Loc 421-440.

<sup>23</sup> See, for example, *Orlando* in which Woolf dabbles in fictionalised biography inspired by the bohemian life of Vita Sackville West. *Flush: A Biography* (1933) is cross-genre and tells the story of Flush the dog. It is a method of telling the life of the dog’s owner, the poet Elizabeth Barrett. Wordsworth. The works are included in *Selected Works of Virginia Woolf* (1987) Wordsworth Editions.

<sup>24</sup> Lee, H (2009), p.18.

fluid, and various, and less constricted by convention'.<sup>25</sup> Following on from Lee, Backscheider asserts there has been an explosion in the forms, style, subjects and methodologies used in biography in recent times because of the 'blending of genres' and the blurring of the borders between 'entertainment and historical record and academics and journalists'.<sup>26</sup> She adds that authors are also blending genres to capture the richness and intricacy of people's lives. British biographer Michael Holroyd further illuminates the genre's capacity for innovation, particularly in literary biographies. 'Biography will continue to change, will become more personal, more idiosyncratic, imaginative, experimental, more hybrid and will move away from the comprehensive "life and letter" structure,' Holroyd writes.<sup>27</sup>

It is outside the parameters of my exegesis to mount an in-depth discussion of innovations in biography and how that might lead to contestations regarding the function and style of the genre. My purpose in sketching the range of biographies and innovations is to show the complexities involved in defining the genre. Within this context, I contend that my creative project fits the notion of what I will describe as a variable form of biography. The narrative is about someone, is steeped in historiography, feminism and Jewish studies, but is also a very personal exploration of a life, which contains explicit authorial interventions. In addition, it draws on novelistic techniques such as using suspense to draw in the reader. This is illuminated in the second section of the creative component in which Rose is waiting for news of her children who have gone off to war.

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<sup>25</sup> Vashist, U 'The Life Biographic: An Interview with Hermione Lee', *The Literateur*, 21 June, 2012 <http://literateur.com/hermione-lee/>

<sup>26</sup> Backscheider, P (2013) Kindle Loc 144-5.

<sup>27</sup> Holroyd, M (2003) *Works on Paper: the Craft of Biography and Autobiography*, London: Abacas, pp. 3-31.

There is a precedent for biographers using novelistic techniques in their works. Brien has mapped the history of experimentation in biography and has identified the use of novelistic skills such as dialogue.<sup>28</sup> Other biographies use the narrative device of author as character. For example, in his 1987 biography, *Louisa*, Australian writer Brian Matthews creates an alter ego to analyse evidence from different perspectives and to highlight his struggles and disappointments about documents while narrating Louisa Lawson's story.<sup>29</sup> His objective to find an innovative or non-conventional way to tell Louisa's story in the absence of some written evidence resonates with my overarching questions about how to narrate Rose Pearlman's story with so few forms of documentation to guide my way.

However, innovation in biography is not without its critics. Roe is unimpressed with Matthews's intrusion into his text because, she argues, it produces a 'dubious effect' from an historical perspective:

Personally I think putting one's self in is a waste of time and space if readers cannot tell from the style or approach that it is me at work, they surely are not paying proper attention! If I recall correctly, the word appears only once in my biography on Miles Franklin, and that in the very last section...<sup>30</sup>

Roe admits that she was at an advantage in writing about Miles Franklin because her subject left behind copious evidence – documents and her writings – for Roe to sift through and interpret.<sup>31</sup> The following section explains my use of first person and memoir in my creative work to further the argument that life-writing is the appropriate and inclusive term in which to describe my work.

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<sup>28</sup> Brien, D, L (2014) 'Welcome creative subversions: Experiment and innovation in recent biographical writing' *TEXT* 18(1) pp. 1-20.

<sup>29</sup> Matthews, B, (1987) *Louisa*, Fitzroy: McPhee Gribble/Penguin Books.

<sup>30</sup> Roe, J 'Biography Today: A Commentary', *Australian Historical Studies*, 43, 2012, p. 113.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

## 2.2 Biography and Memoir: Straddling the Boundaries

The creative component of this thesis is peppered with authorial intrusions and is therefore liberally sprinkled with 'I's. On one level, this is similar to Matthews' aim to find a way to narrate a story in the absence of documents. However, there is another dimension to my creative project that is not a feature of Matthews' work or of most of the others I have cited in this chapter so far. My subject, Rose, is a family member with whom I feel a sense of attachment through ancestry and inheritance. On a physiological level, about 12.5 per cent of my DNA comes from her.<sup>32</sup> But beyond this physical connection are the family and Jewish traditions and values that Rose handed to her daughters and, in turn, they handed to their daughters and to the next generation of daughters. This inheritance poses questions about the extent to which these rituals, customs and behaviours have shaped women in the extended family and how the women have moulded or rebelled against them. These interrogations are essential given the repeated statement among the generations of women in the extended family that 'women in the family are strong'. This harks back to my mother telling me this and also informing me that her mother, Millie, repeated this statement. My Great-Aunt Celia also used these words in my presence. Millie and Celia were Rose's daughters. There is a tantalising proposition, related to inheritance, that the words 'women in the family are strong' may have first been uttered by Rose and/or her daughters.<sup>33</sup> I would maintain that these words, passed down in a family, can help to shape a woman's sense of self because they seep into the psyche.

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<sup>32</sup> Kenneally, C (2014) *The Invisible History of the Human Race: How DNA and History Shape Our Identities and Our Futures*, New York: Viking, p.31 and pp. 269-285.

<sup>33</sup> I also acknowledge that family and religious customs have influenced men in the extended family. One of Rose's grandsons rebelled against Judaism to the extent that one of his daughters only learnt he was Jewish as a young adult.

As a result, I use the genre of memoir to recount personal stories in the search for my Great-Grandmother. Within this context, my use of memoir conforms to established definitions of the genre. According to Cuddon, it signifies a type of work that is a person's own account of their memories.<sup>34</sup> Smith and Watson add that the genre has historically been understood as 'memoire (*les memoires*), recollections by the publicly prominent who chronicled their social accomplishments'.<sup>35</sup> However, biographer Nigel Hamilton writes that from the 1960s the genre morphed into a 'hybrid combination of ruthless autobiographical self-depiction and reminiscences'.<sup>36</sup> It is now considered part of a publishing boom,<sup>37</sup> where individuals write about their experiences and moments in time that deals with subjects such as autism as a means to gain some self-understanding.<sup>38</sup> Within this context Couser writes that memoir has become a space for self-interrogation:

Memoir is the literary face of a very common and fundamental human activity: the narration of our lives in our own terms. It is rooted in deep human needs, desires, and habitual practices. Nearly everyone engages in some form of this.<sup>39</sup>

Like biography, memoir is also a genre that can be viewed as malleable, and one that can combine with biography. Academic and literary biographer Lyndall Gordon demonstrates in her 2014 family memoir, *Divided Lives: Dreams of a Mother and a Daughter*, her skills of intertwining memoir and biography.<sup>40</sup> In *Divided Lives*, Gordon writes about her mother, Rhoda Press, a poet and Jew, but she also interrogates her memories and emotions, thereby blurring the lines between biography

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<sup>34</sup> Cuddon (2014), pp.60-1.

<sup>35</sup> Smith, S & Watson, J (2010), Kindle Edition, p.2

<sup>36</sup> Hamilton, N (2008) *How To Do Biography: A Primer Biography*: Massachusetts: Cambridge University Press, p.306.

<sup>37</sup> Boldrini, L and Novak J eds (2017), Kindle Loc, 201.

<sup>38</sup> Smith S & Watson J (2010) Kindle Edition, pp.3-4.

<sup>39</sup> Couser, T (2016) *Memoir: An Introduction*, Oxford University Press, e-book, pp175-6.

<sup>40</sup> Gordon, L (2014) *Divided Lives: Dreams of a Mother and a Daughter*, England: Virago.

and memoir. In a podcast of a lecture Gordon gave at Oxford University's Wolfson College in 2014, she explains why it is vital for biographers to consider themselves in narratives. 'The practice of biography compels a biographer to consider her own life and in mine, I was bound up with my mother's even as our ways divided.'<sup>41</sup> Although Gordon's relationship with her mother's life has an undercurrent of tension, their stories of migration and feminism unite them. The family element of the story is also integral: Rhoda instilled in her daughter a love of stories and in a sense paved the way for Gordon to take up her chosen career telling stories about lives. Gordon's practice also allows her to move between time and space while recollecting her memories of her mother. This has the illuminating effect of producing a portrait of her mother as well as of Gordon herself.

Similarly, the 2018 co-authored book about US filmmaker David Lynch, *Room to Dream*, is an example of the 'ever-changing' nature of life narratives that seeks to combine biography and memoir.<sup>42</sup> The text provides traditional tenets of 'definitive biography' such as facts, figures and dates, but is also a memoir that contains the voice of the subject of the biography, David Lynch. However, *Room to Move* differs from Gordon's work, because two authors penned it. Journalist Kristine McKenna writes the biographical chapters and David Lynch responds to each one of the chapters. In the introduction to the book the authors explain their reason for this unusual approach:

When we decided to write *Room to Dream* together a few years back there were two things we wanted to achieve. The first was to get as close as we could to producing a definitive biography; that means all the facts, figures, and dates are correct, and all the pertinent participants are present and accounted for. Second, we wanted the voice of the subject to play a prominent role in the narrative. Toward that end we devised a way of working that some

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<sup>41</sup> Gordon, L, Family memoir, 19 May, 2014. <https://www.wolfson.ox.ac.uk/clusters/life-writing/podcasts>

<sup>42</sup> Lynch, D & McKenna K (2018) *Room to Dream*, Text Publishing Company: Kindle Edition, loc 64-6.

might find strange; our hope, however, is that the reader is able to discern a kind of rhythm in it. First, one of us (Kristine) would write a chapter employing the customary tools of biography, including research and interviews with more than one hundred people—family members, friends, ex-wives, collaborators, actors, and producers. Then, the other (David) would review that chapter, correct any errors or inaccuracies, and produce his own chapter in response using the memories of others to unearth his own. What you’re reading here is basically a person having a conversation with his own biography.<sup>43</sup>

Memoir is also integral to my work because it reveals my various links to Rose. Like Lynch, other people’s recollections, specifically my Great-Uncle’s and my mother’s, as well as stories gleaned from other family members via the Pearlman Facebook page<sup>44</sup> prompt my own memories about the family and my experience of it. As I am writing about a family member, memoir encourages me to access buried stories of what I had been told as a child about Rose, and as a result my memories enter and shape my telling of my Great-Grandmother’s story. Most notably, these personal recollections are expressed and felt through the childhood memory of finding a photograph of Rose Pearlman when I was nine years old. The sense of attachment I felt to Rose after chancing upon her photograph endured, even though I knew few details about her. She was someone intimately connected to me whom I did not know, a figure seemingly tantalising on the edge of my experience. An interrogation of that experience has illuminated for me how childhood experiences can leave indelible imprints, prompting investigation of those experiences later in life. This was further illuminated when I read the final chapter of Lee’s biography of Virginia Woolf. In the chapter titled, ‘Biographer’, Lee narrates the story of how she discovered *The Waves* by Woolf on a bedside table when she was also about eight or nine years of age. She read some pages but did not fully comprehend them, but she felt that she had stumbled upon a ‘secret language’ and the experience remained with her. ‘This was my discovery. I didn’t get very far, and I don’t remember my subsequent return to the

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid, Kindle Loc 66-72.

<sup>44</sup> The Pearlman Facebook group was established for the purpose of gathering data for this thesis.



novel. But that sense of a secret discovery remained with me, and left an echo-track in later readings,' Lee writes.<sup>45</sup>

As already indicated, I have had to interrogate my memories and identify the slivers of information stored away in my search for Rose. This has prompted a slew of memories of the conversations I had as a child and teenager with my Great-Aunt Celia Pearlman. These have also been moulded and integrated into the creative project as memoirs that retell, for example, the death of Rose's toddler. There are my childhood memories of visiting relatives in Argyle Street in St Kilda, where Rose once lived. The street produces specific sensations of belonging to a place, because those memories are etched as a child and are inter-linked to family. These memories are once again moulded into written memoirs in the final chapter in my creative project as I try to gain a sense of how Rose lived her life on the street when interacting with neighbours and friends.

More recent memories also flood my work. My recollections of my conversations, interviews and walks with my Great-Uncle Lloyd and mother Roberta are integral to understanding the familial links to Rose and the idea of inheritance, the complex legacies of the past. Recounting travels with cousins in search of fragments of Rose's life in Ballarat also are part of this theatre of memory. These memoirs do not play a secondary role in the biography but are on equal footing. In a sense, my memoirs signal that I am also a character within the creative project whose life has been influenced by the trace – call it the ghost – of Rose Pearlman. In addition, I concur with Smith and Watson's suggestion that because memoir is obviously steeped in personal memory it acts as a 'means of passing on or sharing a social past that may

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<sup>45</sup> Lee, H (1997) Kindle Loc 17802.

have been obscured, thereby activating its potential for reshaping a future of and for other subjects'.<sup>46</sup> In sum, my acts of memory produce a sequence of family narratives that can be passed on to a broader readership.

My memoirs serve another major purpose. I use them to gain some understanding of the grief and mourning my Great-Grandmother experienced and, in turn, how these emotions connect me to Rose. The piecing together of how Rose's husband died and imagining Rose witnessing his death is partly achieved through interrogating my memory of how my own husband died. My memories provide some insight into the physical manifestations of a body dying as well as the emotions involved in witnessing the body deteriorating. The intertwining of Rose's and my story can also be seen in another context. My construction of Rose's husband's death is a composite story in contrast to my eyewitness account of my husband dying. In other words I would not be able to record it in writing unless there was another story I could draw on. Death, grief and mourning are central to many biographies and memoirs, because these are inherently stories about what is past and our relationship to that past. However, to address mourning and trauma directly can be too difficult a concept for writers to contemplate. Hence, my experience here would suggest that authors may use composite stories to ease their way into exploring mourning and trauma.<sup>47</sup>

In addition, in efforts to evoke a fabric of an often elusive life, life-writers may also employ 'intertexts', for example, extracts from novels and poems that are woven into their works. This technique helps authors to try to make sense of and understand grief and the myriad emotions associated with it by allowing them to have conversations

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<sup>46</sup> Smith, S & Watson J (2010) Kindle Edition, p.26.

<sup>47</sup> See, for example, Michaels, E, 'I watched These Spots on My Legs Announce Themselves' from Whitlock, G E, ed, *Autographs: Contemporary Australian Autobiography*, St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1996, pp.255-259.

with themselves. It is only after re-reading my creative component that I realised I was also incorporating intertext by quoting from C.S Lewis', *A Grief Observed*, to try to make sense of grief.<sup>48</sup> By employing this extract, I feel as if I am having a conversation with the text. Smith and Watson delve further on using intertext and explain how author Joan Didion uses it to 'enable her to continue to write about loss', while at the same time evoking her vulnerability:

Crafting a raw prose to evoke her feelings of pain and rage, Didion refuses conventional frames for understanding how this uncharted experience redefines being a "partner" and "mother." She interweaves citations from poets, psychologists, doctors, and etiquette advisers, as intertexts to her own sense of chaos that enable her to continue writing about loss. Refusing the comfort that writing such a story is supposed to bring—the healing of "scriptotherapy"—Didion insists on the fragmentary process of writing grief and articulates vulnerability.<sup>49</sup>

This section has explained why my creative component as a form of life-writing contains memoir as well as biographical elements. Memoir allows me to muse and write about my attempts to follow in Rose's footsteps, and in so doing make comment about the tangible and emotional links to her. As discussed above, memoir also serves a purpose in allowing me to draw links between Rose's grief and mourning and my own and thus becomes a vital component of my work.

This section and the previous discussions have also shown that biography and memoir are inextricably linked. Woolf laid the foundations for taking a mixed genre approach to writing, one which Lee contends influences all Woolf's works, both novelistic and essayistic Lee writes, 'All Woolf's writing goes in for this mixing and merging of genres: fiction, history, biography, essay, elegy, poetry, drama, are always

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<sup>48</sup> Lewis, C.S (1961, 1988) *A Grief Observed*, London: Faber and Faber, pp.5-6.

<sup>49</sup> Smith, S & Watson, J (2010) Kindle Edition, p.139.

crisscrossing and influencing each other in her work.’<sup>50</sup> Lee comments further on the concept of genres and disciplines influencing each other, and says there is now more overlap between different kinds of life-writing and in particular the ‘whole huge wave of interest in memoir has obviously affected the way that biography does it stuff’.<sup>51</sup> The next section situates this thesis within contemporary trends to refer to mixed-genre works as life-writing. This continues the argument that the terms ‘biography’ and/or ‘memoir’ fall short of fully signalling the nature and purpose of the creative project.

### 2.3 Life-Writing – Dissolving the Boundaries

How might one write the story of a life? Life-writing is a generous and inclusive term: it is open, crosses boundaries and blurs genres. Most importantly, through the telling of stories the narrator shapes and constructs a life. However, for all life-writing’s complications, intricacies and nuances there is one element that must always be present. While it can contain tenets of autobiography and biography, Evans and Robert Reynolds explain that the term life-writing ‘always involves construction of the self’.<sup>52</sup> These words are integral to life-writing, particularly in light of Julia Novak’s statement that biography and autobiography are now ‘commonly subsumed under life-writing’.<sup>53</sup> As indicated in the previous section, biographers may weave autobiography or memoir in their works. Smith and Watson observe that authors such as Drusilla Modjeska in her book *Poppy*<sup>54</sup> blur the ‘boundary separating autobiographical and biographical modes by embedding their versions of the life of a

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<sup>50</sup> Lee, H *Introduction to A Room of One’s Own and Three Guineas* by Woolf, V, London: Random House@e-Books, Kindle edition, loc 128.

<sup>51</sup> <http://literateur.com/hermione-lee/>

<sup>52</sup> Evans, T & Reynolds, R ‘Introduction to this Special Issue on Biography and Life-Writing’, *Australian Historical Studies*, 43, 2012, p.1.

<sup>53</sup> Boldrini, L, & Novak, J (2017) Kindle Edition, Loc 205-6.

<sup>54</sup> Modjeska, D (1990) *Poppy*, Ringwood: McPhee Gribble.

family member in their own personal narratives'.<sup>55</sup> Backscheider suggests that life-writing is 'protected from the inherited genre demands of "autobiography" and "biography"' because it allows a multitude of experimentation.<sup>56</sup> For example, Backscheider encourages her students to treat some poets' texts as life-writing.<sup>57</sup>

I concur with Backscheider that life-writing opens opportunities to mix genres and disciplines and is a more personal way of writing than biography. However, it is important to highlight that throughout my creative component I set parameters, which are informed by traditional tenets and demands of biography and memoir. My creative component is steeped in historical and archival research in order to produce a non-fiction work, yet it also contains novelistic techniques and I use imagination to speculate on Rose's life. I grapple with these latter considerations in the fourth chapter of the exegesis where I explore what it means to use the imagination in life-writing.

Apart from biography, autobiography and memoir, life-writing can include other forms of writing. Smith and Watson have identified sixty genres of life-writing, some of which mix biography with autobiography, which is often referred to as 'Auto/biography', or 'a/b'.<sup>58</sup> Even this term, the authors suggest, is riven with complexities:

This term signals the interrelatedness of autobiographical narrative and biography. Although the slash marks their fluid boundary, they are in several senses different, even opposed, forms. The term also designates a mode of the autobiographical that inserts biography/ies within an autobiography, or the converse, a personal narrative within a biography. While earlier forms tended to distinguish biography from autobiography, contemporary writers often intermix biographical and autobiographical narrating into a "relational" story.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Smith, S & Watson, J (2010) Kindle Edition, pp.7-8.

<sup>56</sup> Backscheider P.R (2013) e-book p.186.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Smith, S & Watson, J (2010) Kindle Edition, p.129.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

The Oxford University's Centre for Life-Writing website further indicates how life-writing crosses disciplines:

It encompasses everything from the complete life to the day-in-the-life, from the fictional to the factional. It embraces the lives of objects and institutions as well as the lives of individuals, families and groups. Life-writing includes autobiography, memoirs, letters, diaries, journals (written and documentary), anthropological data, oral testimony, and eyewitness accounts. It is not only a literary or historical specialism, but is relevant across the arts and sciences, and can involve philosophers, psychologists, sociologists, ethnographers and anthropologists.<sup>60</sup>

Rather than seeing life-writing as a clumsy and unwieldy descriptor of an 'undifferentiated body of narratives', Couser embraces the capacious possibilities of the genre.<sup>61</sup> He maintains that the rise of 'umbrella terms life writing and life narrative' indicates the growing diversity of texts and the 'reluctance to establish or acknowledge any hierarchy among them'.<sup>62</sup> The democratic nature of life-writing captures the spirit of my creative component, which seeks to uncover a woman otherwise hidden in history; a woman who would not have been traditionally thought of as a biographical subject. Within this context lies a major purpose for employing life-writing – that of revealing lives and communities hitherto unknown. It is a similar reason that Evans and Reynolds give for using life-writing in their historical practices:

Others, like us, cannot imagine practising and writing history in any other way. With thorough and imaginative research, the potential for learning about individuals, their communities, the worlds in which they lived and their times are huge. Subjects may not be 'representative' of society as a whole (though historians cannot agree on what we mean by this term) but it is clear that we can learn much about the world through their eyes and minds.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup>Oxford Centre for Life-Writing <https://oxlifewriting.wordpress.com/what-is-life-writing/>

<sup>61</sup> Couser, T (2016) Kindle Edition, pp.42-3.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Evans, T & Reynolds R, p.2.

Evans further articulated the importance of family history in revealing marginalised women in a recent presentation paper she gave at The University of Melbourne in July 2018.<sup>64</sup> She told the audience that Julie Poulter, a family historian, who collaborated with Evans on *Fractured Lives*, became fascinated in history because of the family stories women in her family shared with Julie. In a sense, Julie's work became a 'feminist project'. 'Julie is giving voice to this long line of marginalised women [from the past] in the present,' Evans said. As such her insights have particular resonance for my work. In the creative component and in the first chapter of the exegesis, we gain insights about Jewish migration to Melbourne and are alerted to the existence of a strong Jewish community in Ballarat. Rose Pearlman's life narrative also prompts side-stories to further illuminate the period in which she lived. These side-stories provide details about where poor and richer women gave birth to their babies in Melbourne and Ballarat as well as the fate of unmarried mothers. More specifically, we glimpse a poor Jewish woman negotiating her life within the Jewish and wider communities. This is particularly pertinent in piecing together the narrative of Rose Pearlman as a 'war mother'. These narratives probe key events in my Great-Grandmother's life and the intersections of that life with wider social, political, or familial upheaval.<sup>65</sup> They display energy and animation because they are situated in the rich tapestries of daily life, a key ingredient of life-writing according to Backscheider.<sup>66</sup>

Another essential ingredient of life-writing is the range of techniques which can be utilised. In this regard, I am drawn to Backscheider's observation that life-writing techniques help to 'solve problems most biographers know well, problems serious

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<sup>64</sup> Evans, T, Presentation on family history, The University of Melbourne, 23 July 2018.

<sup>65</sup> Backscheider, P, R (2013) Kindle Loc 288-9.

<sup>66</sup> Couser, T (2016) Kindle Edition, p.26.

enough to rule against attempting some biographies'. She maintains that even when only fragments of a life exist, a 'life-writing book is still possible'.<sup>67</sup> One technique she cites is to alternate quotations with the subject's writing and with the author's own conversation. She nominates this as a 'powerful choice'.<sup>68</sup> This approach is reminiscent of Matthews' book, *Louisa*, with his authorial interventions on attempting to fill gaps where evidence is scant or absent.

I had already written a first draft of the first section of the creative component when I read Backscheider's text, and was buoyed by her reference to the importance of discerning genre techniques. Further to her observation, illuminating techniques associated with genre have informed my practice in employing and explaining the role of life-writing in revealing and honouring the life of my Great-grandmother. There are the conversations I have with myself as I meditate about Rose's life as well as the conversation with Ephraim Finch, the former head of the Melbourne Chevra Kadisha, the Jewish Burial Society. I employ conversation in another way to bridge the divide between present and past. The time element, for example, is illuminated early in the creative project where I muse about my Great-Grandmother while making comparisons with the weather which Rose was likely to have experienced in London's East End and in Ballarat and the climatic conditions I confront on a winter's day in Melbourne.

Some writers now suggest that life-writing should be used as an alternative term for biography. Joanna Scutts argues that because biography can be both a 'stodgy and slippery as a term, the more inclusive expression 'life-writing' may be a useful alternative that incorporates both writing about the self or about someone

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<sup>67</sup> Backscheider, P, R (2013) Kindle Loc 194-5.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.



else'.<sup>69</sup> There are shadings of these that can range from an author's selection of material to the author imposing themselves in the text. Life-writing allows me to use memoir where fragments from Rose's life are un-recoverable.

## 2.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I have made the claim that life-writing is important in shaping narrative and for making new meanings. In so doing, it has considered the purpose of employing the genre to allow for a mix of biography and memoir in the work as well as further highlighting that the democratic nature of life-writing is able to prise open a space in which to construct the life of the more obscure and marginalised in society. In addition, the techniques and strategies, in particular the use of conversation associated with life-writing, as indeed with fiction, add a valuable dimension to my creative component in the absence of any personal papers. The next step in exploring how life-writing helps to locate and foster an understanding of my Great-Grandmother is to consider what is involved in piecing together the different fragments from her life to produce a narrative. This is explored in the next chapter.

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<sup>69</sup> Scutts, J, 'Writing Biography is Not A Love Affair: Hermione Lee and Life-Writing', *Signature*, Dec 2, 2014.

### Chapter Three: Fossicking as a Methodology for Life-Writing

*The study and practice of family history is fraught with methodological, historiographical, practical, ethical, and cultural concerns for scholars and practitioners alike.<sup>1</sup>*

#### Introduction

This chapter explores a methodological framework for uncovering fragments of a family member's life when few personal papers exist. The complementary action to this is the piecing together and linking of the fragments to form a narrative. These are complex processes that draw on a mix of methods and theoretical ideas.

In undertaking this dual activity of retrieval and narrative formation, I make use of Niamh Moore, Andrea Salter, Liz Stanley and Maria Tamboukou's definition of methodology to inform my approach. 'Methodology', they write, 'signals a framework that harnesses both method or specific research tools, and also theory in the sense of a framework of ideas.'<sup>2</sup> Within the methodological framework, I illuminate further the ideas of Moore et al as well as explore Richard Holmes' modus operandi of following in his subject's 'footsteps'.<sup>3</sup> I also build upon his approach with reference to Maggie O'Neill's theory on walking as a means of invigorating the task of writing about a person.<sup>4</sup> Explaining the vital role of memory work as extolled by Annette Kuhn further illuminates the approach to uncovering my Great-

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<sup>1</sup> Jerome de Groot and Tanya Evans for the National Council of Public History website blog History@work: <http://ncph.org/history-at-work/hold-for-international-family-history-post-from-jermoe-degroot>, 4 May 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Moore et al (2016) *The Archive Project: Archival Research in the Social Sciences*, London: Routledge, p.1.

<sup>3</sup> Holmes, R, *Footsteps: Adventures of a Romantic Biographer*, Harper Collins e-books

<sup>4</sup> O'Neill, M, 'Participatory Biographies: Walking, Sensing, Belonging' in O'Neill, M, Roberts, B and Sparkes, A, eds, (2015) *Advances in Biographical Methods: Creative Applications*, London: Routledge, pp.73-89.

Grandmother's life.<sup>5</sup> Kuhn defines memory work as a 'method and a practice of unearthing and making public untold stories'.<sup>6</sup> She further explains that this involves examining 'the lives of those whose ways of knowing and ways of seeing the world are rarely acknowledged'.<sup>7</sup> Kuhn's pithy explanation of one of the major purposes of her memory work has powerful resonance for this thesis. This is because one of its stated aims is to reveal and interpret aspects of an 'ordinary' Jewish woman's life in Victoria before and during World War II. As I have highlighted throughout this thesis, examining the life of a relative, Rose Pearlman, opens up a space to challenge silences in texts about working-class Jewish women in order to provide a more nuanced and diverse understanding of Victoria's Jewish history.

It is also important to note that as Moore et al argue that methodologies generally should be viewed in the context of political, social and intellectual principles.<sup>8</sup> They suggest that a feminist sensibility underpins their Archive Project, which is concerned with methodology and methodology of archival research in particular.<sup>9</sup> In light of this, my methodology is also informed by a feminist sensibility because of the way I challenge the framing of much of Victoria's Jewish history around male contribution to the development of Jewish institutions. In doing so, this reinstates agency to women like Rose, who are also crucial to the growth and wellbeing of Jewish communities through their economic, social and cultural contributions.

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<sup>5</sup> Kuhn, A (2002) *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination*, London: Verso.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p.9.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. Also see, Paula Hamilton's video 'On Memory Studies'. Australian Centre for Public History, University of Technology, Sydney  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ZI3dOXYRVc&t=0s&list=PLEPGOgFAdgV\\_sGbB3vjKZgDohpW6l2gCg&index=16](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ZI3dOXYRVc&t=0s&list=PLEPGOgFAdgV_sGbB3vjKZgDohpW6l2gCg&index=16)

<sup>8</sup> Stanley, L 'Archival Methodology Inside the Black Box' in Moore et al (2016), p.37.

<sup>9</sup> Moore et al (2016) Prologue ix-xi.

Within this framing, I refer to my methodological approach as a form of ‘fossicking’ and explain my reasons for doing so under the heading, ‘Fossicking for fragments’. I have understood this approach to involve three actions: the first is to rummage for wisps of information, such as from documents and interviews; the second is to select and curate an archive by means of finding narrative threads in the found fragments and the third is to thread together the fragments from the archive to produce the shape of the represented narrative. However, these three actions are inextricably linked. They are also predicated on the idea of an individual who employs whatever tools there are at hand to collect fragments – a *bricoleur*, a term coined by French ethnologist and anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss.<sup>10</sup> For this thesis, I have adapted the idea of the *bricoleur* to mean an individual who is searching for anything - objects, documents, but also the less tangible, relatives’ memories - that could have potential to be used to form a narrative later.<sup>11</sup>

As indicated above, the fragments I have collected in the course of my research are by definition diverse. They include archival source material such as wills, birth certificates, photographs and oral interviews. Other non-traditional sources include my interpretative acts of walking Rose’s streets as well as gleaning comments from relatives who contributed to the Pearlman Facebook page. The variety of sources I use reflect the overall approach of this thesis, which draws on a mix of genres and disciplines such as social history and Jewish history. Furthermore, given that I am writing about a life, my technique of borrowing from different methods and research

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<sup>10</sup> Levi Strauss, C (1962) *The Savage Mind*, University of Chicago Press, pp.11-22.

<http://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/levistrauss.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p.11

methods reflects Lee and Holmes' proposition that a life cannot be neatly packaged.<sup>12</sup>

A life that is lived contains many layers that cannot be smoothly and seamlessly constructed from birth to death; how it is understood and narrated also have many layers. A significant reason for this – as I discovered while researching and writing the creative project – is that people have their interpretations, including my own, of aspects of an individual's life. In addition, in order to capture their subjects, life-writers are required to 'work hard to use a diversity of sources', according to historian Richard Broome.<sup>13</sup>

My approach of using different methods framed by a variety of complementary ideas sits within current developments in life-writing research. While undertaking this thesis, I became buoyed after reading recent texts suggesting that there is excitement around life-writing research because of innovations in methods that cross disciplinary boundaries. Liz Stanley's unpacking of feminist and archival methodologies has inspired me to uncover fragments from Rose's life and for finding meaning in them.<sup>14</sup> Complementing Stanley's work is the research of Smith and Dean, who are also enthusiastic about the ways in which the creative arts are influencing different ways of imagining research and methodologies. They assert that the turn to creative practice in universities is 'exciting' and 'revolutionary':

It is bringing with it dynamic new ways of thinking about research and new methodologies for conducting it, a raised awareness of the different kinds of knowledge that creative practice can convey and an illuminating body of information about the creative process.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Lee, H (2009), *Biography: A Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press; Holmes, R (2016), *This Long Pursuit: Reflections of a Romantic Biographer*, London: William Collins; Holmes, R (2001) *Sidetracks: Explorations of a Romantic Biographer*, London: Flamingo; Holmes, R (1996) *Footsteps: Adventures of a Romantic Biographer*, London: Harper Perennial.

<sup>13</sup> Broome, R ed (1995) *Tracing Past Lives: The Writing of Historical Biography*, Carlton: History Institute of Victoria, ix.

<sup>14</sup> Stanley, J, ed, (1990) *Feminist Praxis: Research, Theory and Epistemology in Feminist Sociology*, London: Routledge pp.3-60 & 'Archival Methodology Inside the Black Box' in Moore et al (1996), pp.33-67.

<sup>15</sup> Smith, H & Dean, R.T (2009) *Practice-led Research, Research-led Practice in the Creative Arts*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, p.1.

### 3.1 Fossicking for fragments

‘Fossicking’ is a verb that most Australians are familiar with. School children learn the word in conjunction with nineteenth-century stories of gold rush fever when diggers from the Australian colonies as well as those from overseas descended on Ballarat to search for the precious mineral. The *Collins Concise Dictionary of the English Language* defines fossicking as searching for ‘gold or precious stones in abandoned working rivers’, and to ‘rummage or search for [something]’.<sup>16</sup> The *Macquarie ABC Dictionary* adds that fossicking is to search ‘unsystematically or in a small way for mineral deposits usually over ground previously worked by others [and] to search similarly for small items’.<sup>17</sup> The etymology of fossicking is variously deemed to derive from an English dialect such as Cornish and is used in Cornwall, Australia and New Zealand.<sup>18</sup>

When I began searching and picking over the small fragments of Rose’s life that remained in the family, I unconsciously started using the word ‘fossick’ to express what I was doing. As I continued the work, fossicking became the method in which I communicated to myself and to others the action of sifting through the abandoned threads from Rose’s life and drawing connections among the strands. Like the nineteenth century gold diggers, I was determined to find precious gems but also endured disappointments after extensive rummaging and sifting only yielded dead-ends. I was often unsure what was coming next, but was always hopeful of a discovery. During my acts of fossicking I was particularly mindful of using my senses

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<sup>16</sup> The Collins Concise Dictionary of the English Language (1989), Australian Edition, p.442.

<sup>17</sup> The Macquarie ABC Dictionary, 2003, p.384.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

of smell, sight, touch and sound to try to make sense of the discoveries, this kind of research method was thus both intellectual and sensory. This prompted musings about the connection between present and past. What sounds did Rose hear? What did she smell? This thinking calls to mind Anne Brewster's acts of fossicking along a beach.<sup>19</sup> She provides a visceral sense of what it means to rummage and how it might prompt questions about the past:

To walk along the beach is to fossick, to write. You don't know what is coming next. You anticipate the discovery of minor yet engaging objects, a special shell among the banks of shells. You meander onwards, occasionally pausing or turning to retrace a few steps. You make a mental note to take a plastic shopping bag with you next time to pick up the junk – a broken water pistol, the section of a snorkel, plastic bottles and part of a bathing suit. You move at the pace that the sand, tugging at your ankles, will allow. You feel your toes splaying as they mould themselves to the sand. You plough it with your heavy feet, eyes down, thinking of the bullocks and horses that were used in the region for the timber industry.<sup>20</sup>

In addition, I am guided in the recovery mission of my Great-Grandmother by Ashley Barnwell's references to the dominant image of the archaeologist's act of reassembling a 'fractured' life. However, I do add a caveat here. While Rose's life requires reassembling, her life itself is not fractured or broken; it only appears that way because so few of the pieces of the puzzle are extant. I am also buoyed by Barnwell's contention that the 'fragmentary, bricolage approach to investigating a family member need not be less authentic than a meticulously recorded pedigree'.<sup>21</sup>

Fossicking is also the way I articulate the process of interpreting and reflecting on information obtained from documents, oral interviews, photographs and personal objects such as jewellery as well as observing and experiencing the places Rose inhabited. During the process of fossicking, I am continually sifting information and

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<sup>19</sup> Brewster, A 'Beachcombing: A Fossicker's Guide to Whiteness and Indigenous Sovereignty', in Smith, H & Dean, R.T (2009), pp.126-150.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, pp.130-1.

<sup>21</sup> Barnwell, A (2013) 'The Genealogy Craze: Authoring an Authentic Identity through Family History Research', *Life Writing*, 10:3, p.273.

interpreting it. Examples of how I do this are reported below. From these interpretations and recollections, I am producing knowledge about methods for assembling a piece of life-writing where the subject has left few personal documents. In addition, fossicking also reveals my motivations and fascinations: I walk in Rose's footsteps to try to build notions of my sense of place in the present and past, and how this connects me to family – those still living and those who are not. This goes beyond the standard definitions of 'fossicking' because I am motivated by subjective, emotional and personal concerns.

### 3.2 Digging for documents and threads of stories

Fossicking begins with what is tangible: documents such as wills, birth, marriage and death certificates. They are starting points that give the fossicker some confidence that a discovery will lead to more findings. Nineteenth-century gold diggers also began with maps that told them about the twists and turns to take on their travels to Ballarat and where on the goldfields they could fossick for hopefully a fortune.

In this sense, my documents are akin to maps, which provide directions on where Rose and her family were born, where they married and died as well as their life-cycle dates. But gold-digging maps can be misread or details can be wrong, which makes fossicking filled with potential disappointments, surprises and the unknown.

Documents can also harbour mistakes if the person producing them has, with a brush of a stroke, miswritten a date. This is part of the fossicking process: to trek in unknown territory and draw connections among the abandoned threads. As discussed below, two examples from my creative project illuminate the process of locating and rummaging through documents, picking over them, plunging into the unknown,



drawing connections, and telling a story from linking the abandoned threads. They also illuminate an intangible factor: the excitement at unearthing detail that encourages the fossicker to dig further.

The two examples also shed light on methods of interpretation. According to Stanley, this is not straightforward. However, her explanation of the interpretative process best sums up the approach I use for finding meaning in the fragments I collected. Stanley writes:

Working out what it means is hard work: interpretation is an iterative procedure involving going back and forth between conceptual, methodological, analytical and interpretative matter and working out links and connections across the relevant traces until something making sense of all of them eventuates. Good defensive interpretation requires analysis. It also requires a feel or a 'nose' for what is interpretationally interesting. However, this is not magic or a special gift, but results from close familiarity with the archival sources, carrying out detailed analyses of specific documents, and working across things to discern the wider picture. This archigraphical skill is honed by being repeatedly used and mistakes learned from it.<sup>22</sup>

The first example examines the steps as well as the disappointments and joys in the fossicking process. For example, while rummaging through and scouring documents, I was unable to locate the 'Pearlmans' on the *Sommerfeld* passenger lists. I had established from Hyman Pearlman's naturalisation certificate that he had sailed on the *Sommerfeld*. I believed if I had the information it would lead to more discoveries about who accompanied him on the steamship and would help to confirm stories about how he came to be in the colony of Victoria. Just as a sliver of gold would excite diggers, the morsel of detail I had found about Hyman spurred my enthusiasm about gems I might discover:

The chase has captured me again. It began with locating Hyman's Australian naturalisation certificate, which revealed he arrived in Melbourne in 1891 on board the German Sommerfeld steamer from Hamburg. I search for Hyman on passenger ship lists to confirm the details and to see if unearthing the name will lead me to other family members who travelled with him. Nothing, no Pearlmans. I use different combinations of spellings of the ship. The English

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<sup>22</sup> Stanley, L in Moore at el (2016), p.63.

spelling is Sommerfield, the same on Hyman's certificate. Absolutely zilch.<sup>23</sup>

The determination to find the names led to an examination of numerous passenger lists, shipping news reports and Jewish archives. However, the search produced no results and the disappointment of this line of inquiry forced a more lateral way of thinking. I began unpicking the spelling of 'Pearlman' and linking it to Hebrew and German spellings:

It dawns on me that Pearlman is an unusual spelling of the name because it contains two 'As'. A search of Victorian passenger lists of Perlman reveals a Chaim Perlmann, forty-one, Henne Perlmann, forty-one, and two of their children, Jacob, nine, and Blume, two, arrived in Melbourne on 17 October 1891. It has to be the Pearlmans because Hyman and Hannah did have children with those names. Besides, Chaim is the Hebrew of Hyman and Perlmann is the German spelling. They were boarding a German steamer.<sup>24</sup>

Fossicking, once again, is the action that best illuminates the process of repeatedly picking over information to arrive at a decision to unpack the spelling of Pearlman. I have a mental picture of gold-diggers repeatedly sifting abandoned earth from rivers until they identify speckles of gold, which may indicate the place they should dig. While the process entails repetitive actions, each rhythmic motion is underpinned with questions: Where should I fossick? What have I learnt? What links can I make? Are stories emerging?

The second example draws on Stanley's idea for having a 'nose' for identifying which fragments have the potential for exploration. In addition, this example illuminates Stanley's assertion that 'working out links and connections across the relevant traces' can produce 'something making sense of all of them'. The idea of having a 'nose' for what is important and stimulating is not new. It is a concept that journalists,

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<sup>23</sup> Cervini, E (2018), *Yizkor for Rose*, p.48.

<sup>24</sup> Cervini, E (2018), *Ibid.*

constantly consider as they try to identify which stories or an angle in a story will not only appeal to their editors but to the public – or in some objective sense, might be important. Yet, it is a difficult idea to define because it relies on the abstract concept of the individual's ability to sense something, which tends to lie outside logic.<sup>25</sup> The second example also demonstrates how fossicking for links can produce new knowledge that is central to illuminating Rose's character. In addition, it is important to note that Tamboukou's ideas on the 'force of narratives' are helpful in analysing this example.<sup>26</sup> Through her examination of home-based dressmakers, she sheds light on the interrelations between their work and the public arena. In doing so, she had to collect, archive and analyse the women's stories in order to produce a narrative.

To obtain concrete details for the creative project I acquired birth, marriage and death certificates, the maps to start plotting the Rose narrative. While turning over each of the forty-two certificates to locate dates and places, anomalies became apparent. For instance, I discovered two different marriage dates for Rose's younger sister Leah [Jacobs] Cohen, who married at eighteen. The official marriage certificate stated it was 26 May 1897, while Leah's daughter's birth certificate said it was 26 June 1897. More intrigue ensued as I noted the birth date of Leah's child, Charlotte [Letty], which was 2 June 1897.<sup>27</sup> These isolated dates produced a whirl of inquiry: Was Leah heavily pregnant when she married? Or had she already given birth? Given the times that unwed mothers were largely frowned upon, how did the Jacobs family react? What effect did this have on Rose? What happened to Leah's husband? Why did no one in the family know anything about him?

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<sup>25</sup> White, S. A (1996) *Reporting in Australia*, South Melbourne: Macmillan, pp.1-23.

<sup>26</sup> Tamboukou, M, 'Archival Rhythms' in Moore et al (2016), p.87.

<sup>27</sup> Cervini, E (2018), p.pp.72-3.

These questions prompted further fossicking, which included sifting through the marriage and birth dates of the Cohen family and a search of the names ‘Leah Jacobs’, ‘Leah Cohen’, ‘Solomon Cohen’ and ‘Charlotte Cohen’ on Trove, the National Library’s online newspaper archive (<http://trove.nla.gov.au>). Each sliver of detail was noted, although they failed to further the inquiry. Finally, I located a gold nugget of news, an abandoned thread that would link the fossicked details about Leah. The fragment said Leah Cohen had petitioned for divorce in 1905 on the grounds of desertion because her husband Solomon Cohen had gone to Sydney and then to England. It confirmed Leah had married on May 26, 1897 and was therefore heavily pregnant with Letty, who was born a month later. Leah and Solomon had a religious marriage ceremony at the East Melbourne Synagogue on 27 January 1898. The news item about the divorce led me to the Public Record Office of Victoria details, where I viewed the divorce papers. This action had more meaning than just confirming the divorce details in *The Argus* newspaper. The act of physically taking notes from the papers gave me time to mull over the poignancy of Leah’s situation as a deserted wife with a young child, and what this meant at the beginning of the twentieth century when there no government support benefits. In addition, poring over the letters Leah wrote as part of the divorce papers provided insights into her personality. The letters reveal Leah’s strength and determination to obtain the divorce, which was not straightforward one hundred and fourteen years ago. This episode in Leah’s life also revealed her determination to keep her child.<sup>28</sup>

This fossicking also opened up threads of thoughts about the babies and children whom Rose had come into contact with, and her own parents’ possible reaction to

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<sup>28</sup> The theme of an unmarried woman, Maryanne, wanting to keep her child in 1917 in Melbourne is explored in Steven Carroll’s 2019 *The Year of the Beast* [Australia: Fourth Estate]. The book traces the lives of a family, which is based on Carroll’s own family.

Leah's baby. Connecting the fragments of stories about children in Rose's life pointed to a woman who cherished not only her own babies but also those of others. In the creative component I suggest that a range of experiences contributed to Rose's love for children, and which might provide explanation for drawing links between Rose's care for babies and the birth of Leah's daughter. In examining the birth through the prism of late nineteenth century mores, it was clear that Leah's parents, unlike some parents of the time, did not abandon their teenage daughter or send her away when she became pregnant out of wedlock. This experience, along with other episodes in Rose's life, I suggest, may have exposed Rose to the importance of caring for babies and family – and of sticking together. This suggestion is also based on the idea of establishing patterns. According to Holmes, 'the biographer sees every act as part of a constantly unfolding pattern'.<sup>29</sup>

### 3.3 Following Rose's paths is a physical and existential pursuit

Part of the process of fossicking as I undertook it in this project has been identifying and sometimes visiting the physical places – streets, towns and suburbs - to explore and scour for fragments. In my quest to uncover the fragments from Rose's life, I travelled to her streets in East London, East Melbourne, Ballarat and St Kilda to view where she lived, went shopping and where she attended Synagogue. 'Echo-tracks'<sup>30</sup> of this pursuit can be traced back to when I found the photograph of Rose in her pearl dress. These echo-tracks prompted me to follow in Rose's footsteps in an attempt to try and empathise with aspects of her life - such as the death of her husband - and

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<sup>29</sup> Holmes, R (1995), p.174.

<sup>30</sup> Hermione Lee uses the term 'echo-track' in the final chapter of her biography of Hermione Lee to show the effect on herself of finding Woolf's novel, *The Waves*, as an eight or nine-year-old. She didn't read the book then but it left an enduring feeling of discovery with her, echo-tracks. Lee, H (1997), Kindle Loc 17797.

imagine her life talking to friends and neighbours on the streets in Ballarat and in St Kilda with her family and friends. While imagining Rose on her streets, it struck me that day-to-day activities - like shopping and meeting up with neighbours that are also part of my life - helped me to connect with Rose, at least with the Rose I imagined. Imagining Rose performing these activities also opened up a space to try to gain some sense of the community in which she lived. This is further explored below.

The complementary reason for travelling Rose's paths is explained by reference to biographer Richard Holmes' principle of 'footsteps'. In his latest book, *This Long Pursuit*, he concluded that the serious biographer must physically pursue their subject through the past.<sup>31</sup> Holmes argues that this entails going beyond the archives and visiting the places the subject had 'ever lived or worked, or travelled or dreamed'.

He – or she – must examine them as intelligently as possible, looking for the clues, looking for the visible and the invisible, for the history, the geography and the atmosphere. He must feel how they were; must imagine what impact they might once have had. He must be alert to 'unknown nods of being'. He must step back, step down and step inside the story.<sup>32</sup>

Holmes' analysis of his 'footsteps' principle resonates with and falls within the realms of my methodological framework of fossicking. In this regard it is also important to note that a fossicker can also be defined as a pursuer.<sup>33</sup> I am, therefore, in this sense on the prowl for clues and am highly sensitive to the absences, gaps, missing evidence and knowledge that give rise to narratives.

Also embedded in this pursuit is the experience of walking, which captured the atmosphere and geography of the paths I took. In this regard, Maggie O'Neill's theory on walking as a useful biographical research method has influenced me. She

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<sup>31</sup> Holmes, R (2016) *This Long Pursuit: Reflections of a Romantic Biographer*, London: William Collins, p.11.

<sup>32</sup> Holmes, R (1995), p.27.

<sup>33</sup> Macquarie Concise Thesaurus (2003), p.309.

maintains that walking can reinvigorate biographical methods, connect different aspects of biographical research and open up possibilities for innovative research methods.<sup>34</sup> She argues that through ‘walking biographies’ and the visual representations of the walks that ‘we are able to get in touch with our ‘realities’ in sensory and corporeal ways that foster ‘understanding’ and critical reflection’.<sup>35</sup> She adds that this involves ‘reflection on *ways of knowing* and *understanding*’ the lives and experiences of others as well as a formidable way of communicating experiences.<sup>36</sup>

O’Neill’s walking theory is particularly relevant to two aspects of my creative project. As I have already highlighted, the paths I travelled gave me a sense of how Rose may have lived her life, but they also forced me to ‘reflect on ways of knowing and understanding’. My journey to the Spitalfields prompted philosophical musings about how much I could glean from Rose’s past from walking the same streets she did. I realised that just because I was travelling my Great-Grandmother’s paths, this did not magically give me intimate knowledge of how she lived her life. Despite this, however, I began to understand the meaning and knowledge which I could derive from traipsing the streets:

Treading Rose’s streets in the Spitalfields provides an understanding of the daily paths she would have taken to get to school and synagogue and how long it would have taken her to walk to the Old Spitalfields Market. My trip to Rose’s Spitalfields also gives greater appreciations of how the squiggle of streets and lanes connected my great-grandmother to the Jewish community, which was a colourful part of East-End life from the 1880s to the first part of the twentieth century.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> O’Neill, M in O’Neill, M, Roberts, B, & Sparkes C, eds (2015), pp.5-6.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, p.73.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Cervini, E (2018), p.42.

The second aspect of O'Neill's theory I want to address is the sharing of narratives while walking. O'Neill suggests, 'Through walking with another we can engage in an embodied/corporeal way and attune to the narratives and lived experiences of research participants.'<sup>38</sup> In this regard, I would suggest that O'Neill's walking theory is relevant in the context of walking together with family members while sharing experiences and information about their ancestors. She also helpfully indicates that walking with interviewees opens up a space for storytelling in order to create the 'space for dialogue, listening and understanding'.<sup>39</sup> Her ideas, therefore, are pertinent to the experiences of walking with and interviewing my mother. We tread the street in St Kilda where she and Rose once lived, went inside the Lambeth Place home that Rose used to inhabit<sup>40</sup> and visited the St Kilda Synagogue. The built environment as well as the noises, smells and the touch of a wooden gate prompted memories in my mother she had previously not shared with me about her life and what she could remember of Rose, her Grand-Mother. Her memories were a combination of jumbled slivers of flashbacks and clear family memories embedded in narratives with a beginning, middle and end.

However, the experience of walking with the Pearlman descendants inside and around the perimeter of the Ballarat Synagogue, around the Jewish section of the Old Ballarat Cemetery and viewing the tombstones of family members, produced another layer to 'walking theories'. Instead of being the interviewer, I was catapulted into the role of the interviewee as family members questioned me about their observations of Rose's surrounds. This experience resonates with Holmes' notion of the role of the researcher

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<sup>38</sup> O'Neill, M in O'Neill, M, Roberts, B & Sparkes C (2015), p.74.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, p.75.

<sup>40</sup> My mother and I visited 36 Lambeth Place in October 2016 after I noticed it was for sale. We attended an open for inspection.



as a ‘conduit between the dead and living’.<sup>41</sup> It also illuminates his overall proposition that empathy is central to this craft, this ability ‘to enter imaginatively into another place, another time, another life’.<sup>42</sup> This particular contention will be more fully explored in the next chapter on the relationship between imagination and writing about another person.

Furthermore, the action of walking with and interviewing my mother as well as other family members illuminated the prompts that helped to unravel their stored memories. For example, the act of touching the Hebrew inscriptions on tombstones and observing the streetscapes made explicit the symbiotic relationship between fragments and memory. Annette Kuhn succinctly sums up this link:

The past is like a scene of a crime: if indeed itself is irrecoverable, its traces may still remain. From these traces, markers that point towards a past presence, to something that has happened in this place, a (re) construction, if not a simulacrum, of the event can be pieced together. Memory work has a great deal in common with forms of inquiry which – like detective work and archaeology, say – involve working backwards – searching for clues, deciphering signs and traces, making deduction, patching together reconstructions out of fragments of evidence.<sup>43</sup>

The ideas of public historian Grace Karskens further complement the work of Holmes and O’Neill’s and also contribute to framing my approach. In her book, *The Colony: History of Early Sydney*, Karskens asserts that while the visions of governors helped to shape the colony, the story of Sydney is also about - as historian Tom Griffiths describes it - ‘the feel of the past’.<sup>44</sup> Karskens identifies that landscape, buildings and

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<sup>41</sup> Richard Holmes’ three volumes exploring the theoretical dimensions of biography as well as, his personal attachment to his subjects and his practice give rise the idea that he is providing up with fleeting present-day images of writers from the past and is a kind of a go-between the dead and living.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Kuhn, A (2002), p.4.

<sup>44</sup> Karskens GE, 2009, *The Colony: A History of Early Sydney*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, Sydney, p. 10, and see Griffiths, T (2016) *The Art of Time Travel: Historians and Their Craft*, Melbourne: Black Inc, chapter 13.

its people produce ‘threads and echoes’ that need to be observed and listened to.<sup>45</sup> Additionally, the ‘cycles of seasons and generations’ provide attachments to place.<sup>46</sup> I concur with these sentiments and demonstrate in the creative component how weather and, in particular, the bitterly cold Ballarat winds, provide a visceral sense of attachment to Rose’s places. Further to this concept, the seasons and weather also act as motifs to help tell the story of a woman confronted with physical as well as emotional challenges in her life.

### 3.4 Curating Rose’s archive

A vital component of this thesis is the archive, which is both a physical archive of artefacts and one of memory, I have created. For this thesis, curating an archive involves sifting through the found documents, photographs, artefacts and pondering details from interviews and from the Pearlman Facebook page to identify those that provide insights into Rose’s life. As Rose cannot be viewed in isolation from people around her, choices also have to be made about which of the found pieces to include in the archive to illuminate her relationship to them. Curating, or ordering, making sense of these elements of the archive is a way of maintaining memories as well as transmitting those memories to the public, which includes family members and anyone else who may be interested in viewing the archive. However, it is also important to acknowledge that curating this archive is not a static process. I still add pieces, such as photographs and family memories gleaned from the Pearlman Facebook page. This provides avenues for further interpretation of Rose’s life; it is not static either.

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<sup>45</sup> Karskens, GE, ‘Public History: The Common Ground’, *Public History Review*, 1, 1992, pp.14-25.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

My archive is unlike traditional ones. Archives are often thought of in an institutional sense where boxes of materials are kept in special rooms for viewing by the public. However, Moore *et al* state that an archive can also ‘be a building, cardboard box, photograph album, internet website, shared memory, written texts postcards, material objects’.<sup>47</sup> They suggest that professionals, amateur genealogists and historians, community groups are motivated to collect and create their archives in order to make or remake historical records. My endeavours resonate with this broad motivation: I fossicked and collected fragments to create an archive to produce records that have been selected and classified for a purpose. Embedded within this framework, I draw and build upon Levi Strauss’ idea of a *bricoleur*, who ‘makes do with whatever is at hand’ in order to conduct fieldwork.<sup>48</sup> In chapter one of *The Savage Mind* he writes, ‘The *bricoleur* is adept at performing a large number of diverse tasks; but unlike the engineer, he does not subordinate each of them to the availability of raw materials and tools conceived for the purpose of the project.’<sup>49</sup> I would add that during the act of *bricolage* I also select fragments from disparate sources for the archive.

The Rose Pearlman archive consists of the following:

- A curated photo album (the album is discussed in this section).
- Archival material such as birth, marriage, death and naturalisation certificates.
- Maps of Ballarat, East Melbourne and St Kilda during Rose’s time.

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<sup>47</sup> Moore et al (2016), p.1. See, also, Woodham, Anna, King, Laura, Gloyne Liz, Crewe Vicky and Blair, Fiona (2017) ‘We Are What We Keep: The “Family Archive”, Identity and Public/Private’, *Heritage, Heritage & Society*, 10:3, 203-220. Part of the article argues for a broadening of the term, ‘archive’ because of the increasing number of people now collecting family objects for their own archives.

<sup>48</sup> Levi Strauss (1962), ‘The Science of the Concrete’ in *The Savage Mind*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p.11.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

- Objects such as Rose's prayer book, her wedding ring and Star of David.
- Personal papers such as Rose's children's letters.
- Selections from the Pearlman Facebook Page. In addition, the Facebook page is situated within Stanley's idea that an archive can also be 'shared memories', and therefore in a sense we, the extended family, are creating memories together.
- Audio interviews with Pearlman Family members.
- My notes from travelling Rose's paths in East Melbourne, Ballarat and St Kilda.
- A collection of books on Jewish history in Australia I built up during the course of this thesis. Some of these texts were purchased from second-hand bookshops in Castlemaine and Ballarat as well as Golds in Balaclava.
- The scholarly works that have shaped how I have made meaning from fragments.

However, almost by definition, the archive is overwhelming in size and scope because it contains many items and objects and a collection of notes. To conceptualise the relationship between the archive and crafting a narrative I draw on and build upon Nancy K. Miller's image of a picture frame. In *What They Saved: Pieces of a Jewish Past*, she explains that the image of the frame and its supporting splines, the narrow ridges of wood at the edges of a frame help her to 'navigate unknown spaces as a way to frame the fragmentary map of my discoveries and 'conjuring stories from the objects' within the frame.<sup>50</sup> Inspired by Miller, I picture a thick, multi-layered black picture frame and its splines, which support the corners of the frame. The frame

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<sup>50</sup> Miller, K. Miller (2011) *What They Saved: Pieces of a Jewish Past*, University of Nebraska Press/Lincoln and London Kindle Edition, Kindle Loc: 42.

represents the genre of life-writing and the multi-layered ways it supports the various tenets of my thesis – the practical and philosophical considerations.



It is a way to frame the discoveries in order to produce a narrative, which comes from connecting the supporting parts, the splines, of the frame. The supporting parts, the materials in the archive, are the disparate fragments, which include photos, interviews, bits of paper, observations of streetscapes that I have collected for curating the archive of Rose.

The archive, therefore, resembles a storyboard within the picture frame, a graphic organisational linking of the fragments of Rose's life – at least the fragments I am aware of. This sequence, which is based around the themes of 'travelling' and 'waiting', prepares for the writing. However, it is also important to note that many of the implicit narratives about Rose's life can be gleaned from the archive without constructing written storylines to accompany them. Exploring the photograph album, a significant item in the archive, best illuminates this.

The photo album reflects the privileged position I have afforded Rose. Most of the

thirty-two photographs<sup>51</sup> I have collected of Rose are arranged in the album; the photos of other family members play a secondary role to her character. From viewing the photographs, the observer can glean the life-cycles in Rose's life: youth, marriage, the birth of children, death. In addition, the clothes she wears provide clues about the period in which she lived as well as her socio-economic class. The Star of David around her neck indicates her Jewish heritage. The urban and country settings offer clues to the different streetscapes she inhabited. This resonates with Antonio Lunardi's work on using family photographs to build life stories and narratives. In 'A Family Album as Autobiography: Intermedial Readings of Lalla Romano's *Romanzo di figure*' he writes:

Family albums are very common. Few of us would see them as biographies, and yet it can be argued that that is exactly what they are. Materially, a photo album is a book containing the life of a family. The text may comprise photographs rather than words, but both can be seen as ways of narrating reality. The sequence of images in an album, usually chronological, allows one to follow the development of family life, building something similar to a plot: a narrative thread with untold twists, most of which (though not all) can be easily guessed and followed by the viewer.<sup>52</sup>

While the photo album featuring Rose contains elements of chronology, it is also important to note that the photographs draw in the observer to muse over and interpret the psychology and mood of the people depicted. This is an important concept that fits within the domain of Marianne Hirsch's work as she engages in the process of reading family photographs.<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, her study reveals the multiple meanings

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<sup>51</sup> In her video, Hamilton refers to photographs as 'technology of remembering'. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ZI3dOXYRVc&t=0s&list=PLEPGOGFAdgV\\_sGbB3vjKZgDohpW6l2gCg&index=16](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ZI3dOXYRVc&t=0s&list=PLEPGOGFAdgV_sGbB3vjKZgDohpW6l2gCg&index=16).

<sup>52</sup> Lunardi, A 'A Family Album as Autobiography: Intermedial Readings of Lalla Romano's *Romanzo di figure*' in Boldrini, L & Novak J, eds, (2017), *Experiments in Life-Writing, Palgrave Studies in Life Writing*, iBook Location, 1882.

<sup>53</sup> Hirsch, M (2012) *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, preface and pp.41-77.

inherent in photographs, and their role in postmemory.<sup>54</sup> According to Hirsch ‘Postmemory describes the relationship that the “generation after” bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before-to experiences they “remember” only by means of the stories, images, and behaviours’.<sup>55</sup>

In addition, it is also important to note that my memories and narrating voice influence how I arrange the album. It begins with the photograph of Rose in her ‘pearl dress’, because that image is intimately connected to *my* childhood memory of finding the photograph, and signifies the moment I learnt of Rose’s name and the fact she was my Great-Grandmother. Similarly, Kuhn explains that ‘the clues’ that form the beginning of her ‘excursion into memory work’ are largely the images and memories associated with traces from her own past.<sup>56</sup>

However, the photo album is also significant in revealing who is absent from the photographs. In the case of Rose, it became apparent that her husband Baron is rarely photographed with her. There are various explanations for this absence depending on which fragments I give more meaning to. If the emphasis is on Baron’s chequered work history, then he may have been away from home with his bookmaking business or travelling the countryside as a hawker. In later years, he may have been too ill to leave his bed to have his photograph taken. Perhaps, his relationship with Rose and his children was strained at times, because of his gambling habit and his run-ins with the law. Alternatively, the explanation for his absence may be as simple as Baron may have been taking the photographs. However in his chapter, ‘Writing the Biography of the Family’, John Rickard asserts that ambiguities are important to highlight in order

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid, pp.79-112, Also see Kuhn (2002), pp.8-9.

<sup>55</sup> Hirsch’s website contains further readings into her research about postmemory <https://www.postmemory.net>

<sup>56</sup> Kuhn A (2002), pp. 1-10.

to demonstrate how plots can take ‘subtly different forms’.<sup>57</sup> The Rose album, therefore, offers methodological rigour because it provides ‘layer upon layer of meaning’ which, in turn, can reveal ‘greater knowledge’.<sup>58</sup>

Within the fossicking framework, I have referred to and highlighted narratives that have emerged from piecing fragments of information together. This narrativity approach is one in which I trace documents, photographs, diaries – the ‘documents of life’<sup>59</sup> and follow storylines. According to Ken Plummer, ‘They [documents of life] can turn personal chaos into order. They can help us to make sense of our lives.’<sup>60</sup> Threading the fragments around the themes of travelling, motherhood, waiting and community helps to illuminate the interrelationships between Rose’s position as a working-class Jew and her personal, domestic and public spaces as well as her migration stories.

I am helped in my quest to find the storylines in the fragments by referring to the work of Maria Tamboukou on how narrative fragments create their own rhythms of archival existence. ‘It is here where narrativity becomes a way of assembling disparate and sometimes disconnected pieces and fragments into a design that has a meaning,’ she writes.<sup>61</sup> She asserts that the narrative fabric of archival work must consider plot, character, place and atmosphere.<sup>62</sup> These elements give meaning and shape to the fundamental elusiveness of my Great-Grandmother’s life, indeed of any life we might seek to know and understand.

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<sup>57</sup> Rickard, J ‘Writing the Biography of the Family: The Case of Catherine and Pattie Deakin’ in Broome (1995), p.14

<sup>58</sup> Kuhn, A (2002), p.6

<sup>59</sup> Plummer, K ‘A Manifesto for Social Stories’ in Stanley, L (2013) *The Documents of Life Revisited: Narrative and Biographical Methodology for a 21st Century Critical Humanism*, London; Ashgate, p.209-20.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid

<sup>61</sup> Tamboukou, M, ‘Archival Rhythms’ in Moore et al (2016), p. 81.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, p.85



### 3.5 Conclusion

This chapter has teased out, analysed and reflected on the mix of methods I have used in this project to underpin the process of writing about a life. I have referred to my methodological framework as fossicking, which encompasses picking over fragments, travelling Rose's paths, walking and interviewing, building an archive and drawing links among the disparate objects and documents. From this intermixing of sources and the reading of their layers and silences, narratives begin to emerge which reflect plot and character as well as a sense of place, time and atmosphere. As already highlighted, I argue that these elements give meaning and shape to my Great-Grandmother's life. This process contributes to epistemological concerns about the extent to which knowledge resides in and can be derived from the fragmentary and partial, the extent to which an individual can be known and how imagination is employed to illuminate the specificities of a life. This will be explored in the next chapter.

In addition, this chapter has interrogated the conceptual framework involved in arranging the fragments to construct a narrative. My method is underpinned by the interplay of ideas and practices of biographers, sociologists and historians, which I apply, modify and build upon in the context of writing about a family member. In this regard, the framing of my approach to the physical act of research is a kind of collage because I employ diverse but interrelated ideas from practitioners and theorists.

In the course of the chapter, I add to methods of inquiry in order to take account of the fact that I am producing a family story. For example, I demonstrate how social media plays an integral role in informing aspects of Rose Pearlman's life by setting up a

‘Pearlman Facebook’ page to post photographs, documents as well as details I have uncovered about my Great-Grandmother’s life. This allowed me to share my progress with family members and for them to comment on my posts, make connections between information and photographs as well as pose questions. The Facebook page is itself a storybook album of a collective endeavour to uncover a life that has particular significance because she is related to us. This act, which is part of the methodology of fossicking, is versed in scholarly discourse about the role of family history in the creation of ‘clan’ identities.<sup>63</sup>

Overall, I have argued that the approaches I take open up paths to explore a life when few personal documents exist. This brings into focus an overall theme throughout this thesis regarding how biographers and historians have been drawn to biographical studies of ‘ordinary’ lives in order to examine the societies in which they lived and how these individuals may be understood and responded to. Building upon this, I have argued that this is a useful approach that can be adapted to family history to reveal women who have been largely absent in family narratives. Finally, this chapter has also illuminated my role as a ‘collector, archivist, researcher, writer and reader’.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Research about the relationship between family history and identity is growing. See, for example Popkin, J.D (2015) ‘Family Memoir and Self-Discovery’, *Life Writing*, 12.2, 127-138

<sup>64</sup> Moore et al (2016), p.170.

## Chapter Four: The Role of the Imagination in ‘Re-creative Writing’

### Introduction

This chapter complements the previous section on fossicking and further illuminates how I make sense of the fragments from Rose Pearlman’s life by exploring the link between employing the writer’s imagination and constructing a narrative. In so doing, I define what I mean by imagination by drawing on the ideas of historians and life-writers such as Greg Denning, Hermione Lee, Richard Holmes and Michael Holroyd.

This chapter also explains how imagination is used in the creative component to drive the narrative. I am not using imagination in the sense of making up episodes to fill gaps, and/or the invention of conversation and characters’ thoughts<sup>1</sup>. Rather, imagination is the creative faculty used to arrange, weld together and interpret verified details to craft a narrative about a person.<sup>2</sup> Within this notion of imagination, is the possibility of speculating on and/or drawing conclusions from the traced details. To explore this concept of imagination that frames the creative component, I draw on the works of Australian and British academics and life-writers such as Michael Holroyd, Sally Cline and Sylvia Martin. In addition, I demonstrate how imagination works in practice by referring to examples from the creative project. These examples show how the ordering of details to give them meaning produces a sense of anticipation and suspense, which require imagination but not the addition of made-up episodes. Delving into the imagination also goes to the heart of the epistemological

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<sup>1</sup> Invention in literature has meant the ‘production of fiction as opposed to historical truth’. See Cuddon, J.A (2014) *Dictionary of Literary Terms & Literary Theory*, London: Penguin Books, p.370.

<sup>2</sup> In *Body Parts: Essays on Life-Writing*, Hermione Lee writes that other the kind of information such as the date of the outbreak of World War I or a ‘time and time for tea written a person’s diary’, most facts about a person are ‘open to interpretation’. However, she says that facts ‘do exist, and lie around biographers in huge files and boxes, waiting to be turned into story’. Kindle Locs 575-577).

exploration in this thesis about the extent to which it is ever possible to know another person.

Within the parameters of this discourse about imagination, I mount an overall argument proposing caution in ‘making things up’ when writing about a relative by referencing the ethical responsibilities of the author who is operating as a kind of custodian of family knowledge. This also extends to the writer’s responsibilities towards the reader, and to the person who is being written about. Among the works referenced in this section is the doctoral thesis of James Vicars, who argues in favour of fictional biographies.<sup>3</sup> He wrote a narrative about his great-grandmother, who is Australia’s first woman pilot. In so doing, he added invented episodes to fill gaps from earlier in her life.<sup>4</sup> I also explore Australian historian Kiera Lindsey’s fictionalised history about her great-great- great aunt.<sup>5</sup> Interspersed in this exploration are insights from academics and life-writers such as Sylvia Martin, Michael Holroyd and Susan Bordo.

Before proceeding with this chapter, it is important to note that I would describe any representations of the past as predicated on the idea that works about the lives of others can be located on an epistemological continuum. At one end of the continuum are ‘fictional’ narratives about people in which many episodes and details are entirely invented, while at the other end are lists of facts that are not interpreted or speculated upon. These can be characterised, according to Donald J. Winslow, ‘as a detailed and continuous register of events; an historical record without philosophic treatment; a

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<sup>3</sup> Vicars, B. J (2013) *Flights of Imagination: Fictional Biography and Writing the Life of Australia’s First Woman Pilot, Millicent Bryant* (unpublished doctoral thesis), University of New England.

<sup>4</sup> Vicars, B. J Part 2 (PhD, creative project), *The Fortunes of Family*.

<sup>5</sup> Lindsey, K (2016) *The Convict’s Daughter*, Sydney: Daughter, Allen & Unwin, Kindle Edition.

record register, narrative, account'.<sup>6</sup> Early English royal lives, he notes by way of example, are mainly chronicles of facts and events during their reigns.<sup>7</sup> However, it is acknowledged that writers who construct lists of verifiable facts are still making selections about what to include and what to dismiss, thereby making subjective assessments. It is also important to note that facts can be unstable because documents may be incorrect or new information may be unearthed that sheds a different light or angle on what is considered already known.

My creative component is situated in the middle of the two endpoints on the continuum. My representation of Rose is a researched life, in which some facts are identified, and can be verified or triangulated by other pieces of evidence such as documents, interviews, public records. Imagination, in the form of interpretation, speculation, having 'a nose' for what might be important, is used to piece threads of her life together in order to craft a storyline, but there are no invented details and no added episodes to create drama. My creative project, I would argue, is an example of what life-writer and family history narrator Michael Holroyd calls 're-creative' writing, because it relies on the imagination to recreate<sup>8</sup> the past in order 'to chart illuminating connections between past and present, life and work'.<sup>9</sup> In *Life-Writing: A Writers' Companion and Artists' Guide*, Holroyd explains that imagination is a key ingredient in the process of writing about another person. However, he emphasises that this does not include the dreaming up of material. 'Of course they are not "creative works" in the sense of being invented, but re-creative works in the sense of

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<sup>6</sup> Winslow J D (1978) 'Glossary of Terms in Life-Writing, Part 1, *Biography*, Vol.1, No:1, p.69.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Re-creating, like re-presenting, can never reproduce the original only a facsimilia, the simulacra or evocation of what is past.

<sup>9</sup> Holroyd, M (2013) *Works on Paper: The Craft of Biography and Autobiography*, California: Counterpoint, p.19.

that they recreate the past,' he writes.<sup>10</sup> Holroyd further illuminates that imagination is not the preserve of the author, but is also relevant to how readers receive that recreation:

Biographies create, or re-create, a world that the reader may enter, where his or her imagination may be stimulated, and some of the emotions, thoughts and laughter experienced in reading—as well as the information—may remain with the reader after the book is finished.<sup>11</sup>

Similarly, an overall aim in my creative component has been to prompt readers to use their imagination to muse about their own past and lost family members. Instead of Rose's portrait, which partly inspired this exploration for me personally, I wonder what photo of a family member readers would pursue? How might they interpret details in my text that I had not anticipated?<sup>12</sup>

#### 4.1 Defining imagination in Rose's story

Imagination is not always synonymous with the invention of facts, make-believe and fantasy. This is the point Australian historian Greg Denning consistently made throughout his career in order to encourage his colleagues and students to use imagination in their historical research and writing. In his chapter, 'Writing: Praxis and Performance', Denning illuminates what he means by the imagination:

Imagination scares many scholars. They equate it with fantasy. But imagination is not really fantasy. Imagination is catching a glimpse of the end of the trail before we make the first step.

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<sup>10</sup> Angier, C and Cline, S (2010) *Life Writing: A Writer's and Artist's Companion*, London: Methuen Drama, p.121.

<sup>11</sup> Holroyd, M (1988) 'How I Fell into Biography' in *The Troubled Face of Biography*, ed Homberger, E & Charmley 94-103, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan quoted in McVeigh, J (2017) *In Collaboration With British Literary Biography: Haunting Conversations*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, p.23 (iBooks).

<sup>12</sup> Literary critic Jane Tompkins has collected twelve essays (and written the introduction and conclusion) for the 1994 edition of *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalising to Post-Structural Criticism*, US: The John Hopkins University Press. The kinds of questions I pose about readers' responses to the creative project are reflected in the Tompkins' introduction. One of the issues she is concerned with is 'the role that actual readers play in determining the determination of literary text'.

Imagination is finding a word that someone else will hear, a metaphor that someone else will see. Imagination is seeing what's absent, hearing the silence as well as the noise. Imagination is taking the cliché out of what has been said over and over again. Imagination is taking the purpose of the rules that confine us and running with it. Imagination is working the fictions in our non-fiction the better to do what we want to do with our writing.<sup>13</sup>

Dening's analysis of what constitutes imagination is important for my creative practice. Firstly, his urging to find meaning in the absences makes clearer my quest to understand the gaps and silences in what I have described as the archive of Rose's life. Secondly, Dening's encouragement to question and detect unexplored angles in history reflects the stated endeavour in this thesis to reveal the life of a poor Jewish woman in order to bring her to the notice of scholars and readers as a subject which is equally important – albeit in different ways – as any well-known public life. Thirdly, and related to point two, is Dening's suggestion to use the imagination to locate the 'fine-lined' and 'faint-webs' of significance.<sup>14</sup> In this thesis, these are the incomplete traces from Rose's life that I try to make sense of and place in the context of the significant role she played in her family, in her Jewish community and as mother of children who served in World War II.

Interestingly, Dening's analysis also complements Holmes' technique of following in a subject's footsteps, explored in Chapter Three of this exegesis, to help imagine and at least to some extent, to re-animate the past. Part of Holmes' method in re-creating the past is to use literary techniques such as the 'form of modern epic, to frame the life he wants to tell, in which the biographer and his subject are both in motion, in pursuit'.<sup>15</sup> The creative component provides the crafted narrative of my Great-Grandmother to show Rose and myself 'in motion' by weaving the story of my pursuit of her into the narrative about her life. This is bolstered by providing chapter

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<sup>13</sup> Dening, G (2009) 'Writing: Praxis and Performance', Chapter 6 in Curthoys, A and McGrath, A, eds, (2011) *Writing Histories and Imagination*, Monash University ePress.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> McVeigh, J (2017), p.266.

headings with dates from the past and in the present that indicate a sense of time's fluidity as the present dips into and attempts to understand the past.

However, within this discussion, it is important to note Denning's metaphor pointing to the dangers of viewing ourselves as though we were actually inhabiting the past. In 1998 he wrote, 'The humanness we share with the past is at the one time the same and different. The most unhistorical thing we can do is to imagine that the past is us in funny clothes.'<sup>16</sup> It is a different type of imagination that writers need in order to try to understand the past. In *Reading/Writings* Denning says:

Our imagination has to allow us to experience what we share with the past and see difference at the same time. When we write history, if we are young, we have to imagine what it is to be old; if we are old we have to imagine what it is to be young; if we are male, we have to imagine what it is to be female, and female, male; black, white and white, black; poor, rich and rich, poor; strong, weak and weak, strong. Imagination is our capacity to see ourselves as somebody else.<sup>17</sup>

Claire Tomalin, a British biographer, makes a similar suggestion to Denning's that writing about other people requires understanding and imagination as well as approaching the biographical subject with an open-mind.<sup>18</sup> In response to British academic Jane McVeigh's question: 'What kind of imagination do you need to write biography?' Tomalin comments:

You need imagination, not in the sense that you invent things, but you need to have your mind open to thinking about how other people might be. When I wrote my first book my editor said, 'Couldn't you actually fictionalise it a bit?'; and when I was working on Ternan it was suggested to me that I should make it into a novel. But I like the challenge of making a narrative out of the material you've got. It is a challenge and it is demanding and it requires ingenuity and sometimes it's very difficult.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Denning, G (1998) *Readings/Writings*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, p.209.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> McVeigh, J (2017) *In Collaboration with British Literary Biography: Haunting Conversations*, Palgrave Macmillan, pp.491-3; p.594. (e-book)

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p.594.



It is also important to note within this discussion that writing about the past does not give us access to individuals' inner voices. This is an overall theme permeating the creative component of this thesis, and which is also referred to throughout this exegesis. In *Life Writing: A Writers' and Artists' Companion*, British biographer Sally Cline quotes the late historian and political biographer Ben Pimlott, who eloquently sums up the impossibility of knowing another person's inner thoughts. 'However scrupulous the research, nobody has access to another's soul, and the character on the page is the author's unique creation,' he writes.<sup>20</sup> This quote, I would argue, is important in illuminating the distinction between non-fiction and fiction when writing about a life. Although both forms of writing require the author to use their imagination, it is, according to Australian historian Tom Griffiths, 'of quite different kinds'.<sup>21</sup> The fiction writer has the freedom to invent characters that can tell the reader what they are thinking and feeling.<sup>22</sup> Non-fiction writers, Griffiths suggests, tell their readers 'what they think happened' based on evidence, and can only provide theories on what their subjects are thinking at the time.<sup>23</sup>

This point is further illuminated in the following examples found in historical fiction. The examples also illustrate - as is indicated in Chapter Two on genre - that authors can mix fact and fiction as in the case of Hilary Mantel's historical fiction, which reflects a different type of imagination. While Mantel's texts are scrupulously

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<sup>20</sup> Pimlott quoted in Cline, S & Angier, C (2010), p.43.

<sup>21</sup> Griffiths, T 'The Intriguing Dance of History and Fiction' in *Text* Special Issue, 'Fictional Histories and Historical Fictions: Writing History in the Twenty-First Century', eds Nelson, C & de Matos, C, 28, April 25, p.17.

<sup>22</sup> This distinction is further illuminated in a University of Technology, Sydney podcast featuring Australian author Anna Funder. She contends that if author say their book is non-fiction they are telling the reader that everything in it is 'factually true, there maybe mistakes but I'm trying to be true'. A fictional work is 'not necessarily factually true but if the novel is going to work it's got to be emotionally true; it has to make sense.'

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o\\_uZlZ6VAs4&list=PLEPGOGFAdgV\\_sGbB3vjKZgDohpW6l2gCg&index=31&t=0s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o_uZlZ6VAs4&list=PLEPGOGFAdgV_sGbB3vjKZgDohpW6l2gCg&index=31&t=0s)

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, pp.1-21. My creative project reflects non-fiction life-writing.

researched, they focus on the ‘interior drama’ of her characters who tell us their inner thoughts.<sup>24</sup> If Mantel were writing conventional history, she would face creative tensions in reconciling the history with the inner life of her characters. As she explains, ‘From history, I know what they [characters] do, but I can’t with any certainty know what they think or feel.’<sup>25</sup> From the genre of fiction, Mantel provides the reader with an entrée into what they are possibly thinking, or what she interprets them as thinking.<sup>26</sup>

In a similar vein, Australian historian Kiera Lindsey’s fictionalised biography of her ancestor Mary Ann Gill is grounded in academic research but in her representation Lindsey veers consciously into fiction because of the emphasis she places on the drama played out in her characters’ minds. Lindsey explains in the afterward that she had to get to know the everyday lives of her characters to ‘gain any sense of how they thought and felt’.<sup>27</sup> This is integral to her work because, she argues, her narrative is ‘a romantic tale of sense and sensibility in which feelings are integral’.<sup>28</sup>

To illuminate and progress the story, Lindsey draws on romantic conventions and social fiction of the time to explain what her characters say and do and why. ‘In several such instances,’ Lindsey explains, ‘I have imbued these historical characters with the sort of interior world their fictional counterparts enjoyed and in so doing I have woven a thread of fiction into a book that is otherwise solidly grounded in historical research.’<sup>29</sup> Her explanation further highlights that it is only through fiction that life-writers can be more definitive about a person’s inner thoughts. It is unlikely

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<sup>24</sup> Mantel, H, ‘Why I Became a Historical Novelist’ *The Guardian*, 3 June, 2017

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/jun/03/hilary-mantel-why-i-became-a-historical-novelist>.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Lindsey, K (2016), Kindle Loc: 4422.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, Kindle Loc: 4501-4502.

that the following line from Lindsey's text would appear in a work deemed non-fiction unless she had access to the subject's thoughts in a diary. 'Immediately she [Mary Ann Gill] saw James Butler her heart lifted at the sight of him but then plunged suddenly as she considered all that was to unfold.'<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, I am unsure how Mary Ann Gill would have known what would happen to her in the future. This is an awkward invention of the author, irrespective of what genre she might be using.

However, this distinction between fictionalised and non-fiction life-writing produces a creative tension for people writing about family members or about any other individual for that matter.<sup>31</sup> Although they cannot know the inner thoughts of another, readers instinctively seek this information. As humans, we want to know not only what other humans *did*, but also what they thought, and felt, and what motivated them. Lee is cognisant of such demands from her readers. In *Body Parts*, she writes that 'whether we think of biography as more like history or more like fiction,' readers want a 'vivid sense of the person':

The reader's first question of the biographer is always going to be, what was she, or he, like? Other questions (like why, or how do you know, or do we approve, or does it matter?) may follow. But 'likeness' must be there...we are always drawn to moments of intimacy, revelation, or particular inwardness.<sup>32</sup>

#### 4.2 Weaving storylines from facts

How can life-writers give a 'vivid sense of the person'? In her narrative about Virginia Woolf, Lee provides the reader with a strong sense of her version of Woolf's 'many selves' through detail, the telling of anecdotes and the thematic structure of her

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid, Kindle loc: 1621-1622.

<sup>31</sup> It is this tension that Woolf referred to in her essays such as *The Art of Biography*. The problem, she says, in writing about an individual are the limits of non-fiction life-writing to get at 'the soul'.

<sup>32</sup> Lee, H (2008) *Body Parts: Essays on Life-Writing*, London: Vintage Digital, Kindle Loc: 100.

book.<sup>33</sup> In particular, Lee uses stories that reflect a turning point in lives, because ‘such moments can reveal a great deal about the people involved’.<sup>34</sup> Inherent in this statement is the practice of judiciously selecting details and anecdotes to reveal character and an unfolding story until they reach a crescendo. The narrative, therefore, relies not on invention but on the imaginative use of details to produce, for example, suspense in the story.

The second section of the creative project of this thesis employs the novelistic technique of suspense. This is done to engage readers and to illuminate Rose and her family’s wait for news about her son Leslie, who was stationed during World War II in New Guinea. I purposely release the details about Leslie’s war experiences slowly to help mimic Rose’s long wait. This protracted release of information is juxtaposed in Chapter Nine, ‘The News’, with rapid details about events leading up to the end of the war at the beginning of the chapter.<sup>35</sup> Arranging Leslie’s details slowly is important to convey suspense and to illuminate the gulf between the happiness some would have been feeling at the time with the mixed emotions of others who were still waiting to hear news of a family member who was missing overseas.

However, it is important to remain alert to accusations that employing novelistic techniques in life-writing may amount to invention. British biographer Carole Angier points out that some writers – such as the late American academic and biographer Matthew Bruccoli – are suspicious of novelistic approaches to writing about a life.<sup>36</sup> She states that Bruccoli is a firm believer in the theory that facts alone make for a

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<sup>33</sup> Lee, H, *Virginia Woolf*, Random House, eBooks.

<sup>34</sup> McVeigh (2017), Kindle Edition, p.157.

<sup>35</sup> Cervini, E, p.

<sup>36</sup> Cline, S & Angier, C (2010), p.42.

satisfying read because verified facts are the only elements that writers and readers trust.<sup>37</sup> This view, I would argue, is at the one end of the continuum that rejects notions of applying imagination [in Denning, Lee, Holroyd and Holmes' meaning of the word] in constructing a life. Holmes is clear that the pursuit of his subjects is not an 'exercise in retrieval information',<sup>38</sup> but is a process in threading together pieces in order to form a narrative. His view of life-writing therefore draws on both non-fiction and novelistic techniques, although as previously indicated above this does not mean that episodes are simply invented and added. It is important to note at this juncture, therefore, the similarities between fiction and non-fiction in the production of life-writing and how they can influence each other, as highlighted by Griffiths. He writes that:

The necessary and creative tension between history and fiction is not a turf war....The past – the full sum of human experience – is all we have on which to base our hopes and plans, and from which to draw our conversations, ideas and stories. Eleanor Dark, when asked 'Do you draw your characters from life', responded in exasperation, 'In heaven's name, what else is there to draw them from?' History and fiction journey together and separately into the past, they are sometimes uneasy partners, but they are also magnetically drawn to one another in the quest for deeper understanding.<sup>39</sup>

Holroyd goes further to explain how life-writers have learnt from the practice of novelists, writers of detective stories and thrillers which, as a result, has spurred a variety of ways of writing about a person. 'So biography is beginning to have as many forms as fiction: it exists as detective work, as melodrama, as crime reconstruction, as pastiche, as physical and metaphysical travel, as interrelated non-fiction stories,' he writes in his chapter, 'What Justifies Biography?'.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Holroyd, M (2015) *Basil Street Blues: A Family Story*, Head of Zeus, 2015. ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/vu/detail.action?docID=4754526>.

<sup>39</sup> Griffiths (2015), p.17-18.

<sup>40</sup> Holroyd (2013), p.26.

In addition, I argue in Chapter Two that life-writing is a flexible form that encompasses fictional and non-fiction narratives and that it can also blur the distinction between biography and memoir –or the ways in which the ‘story’ of the other will always be intertwined with the position of the self. Furthermore, I have indicated in this chapter that narratives about a life are inevitably on a continuum, depending on the degree of invention, use of novelistic techniques and approaches to using evidence. In addition, it is important to consider whether authors tell readers what their characters are thinking and feeling, whether they leave this up to readers to decide based on the evidence presented or whether they admit to their readers that they do not know. Having said this, Lee points out that whether a life-story is fiction or non-fiction they are artificial constructs, because they ‘inevitably’ involve selection and shaping.<sup>41</sup> Lee also reminds us, ‘There is no such thing as an entirely neutral biographical narrative’.<sup>42</sup> Therefore writing about a life is akin to pattern-making: it is an exercise in piecing together fragments that produce a portrait of a person. This involves placing the pieces in a social context and employing a measure of ‘personal analysis’.<sup>43</sup> British academic and biographer Sally Cline explains that this approach cannot be defined as invention:

The fiction writer imaginatively invents their story. The life writer imaginatively reinvents their biography. They draw on a past and recreate it using facts but adding interpretations. Biographers should be able to extricate a personality from the facts about that character. Facts give us the foundation and from that concrete base we build up a picture of how each person became who they became...if facts are dull and prosaic they won’t let readers in. It is interpretation which makes them light up.<sup>44</sup>

Cline’s reference to the vital role which interpretation - and I would add speculation – play in life-writing, is explored in the next section. These elements are particularly

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<sup>41</sup> Lee, H *Biography: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, Kindle Edition, p.122.

<sup>42</sup> Lee, H ‘Biomythographers: Rewriting the Lives of Virginia Woolf’, *Essays in Criticism*, Vol. 46, No: 2, April 1996, p.95.

<sup>43</sup> Angier, C & Cline, S (2010), p. 43.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

important to consider when the life-writer is confronted with missing documents or a non-existent written record.

### 4.3 Interpretation and Speculation

Biographies are full of verifiable facts, but they are also full of things that aren't there: absences, gaps, missing evidence, knowledge or information that has been passed from person to person losing credibility or shifting shape on the way...<sup>45</sup>

Lee has often reflected on her practice of researching and writing about prominent literary figures and of the challenges in constructing their lives when documents are absent. For instance, while researching her biography of Virginia Woolf, Lee was confronted with a paucity of correspondence between Woolf and her brother Adrian Stephen, a relationship that Lee deduced was 'awkward' after reading fragments of negative remarks between the siblings and realising their lack of letters.<sup>46</sup> This example illustrates that even some of the most studious of writers such as Woolf leave silences in their archives that life-writers feel compelled to speculate upon.

Missing objects, an absence of letters and diaries, and even contested documents are to be expected when researching an individual life because they represent the flux and discord inevitable within people's lived experiences.<sup>47</sup> This disruption in individual lives also suggests that life-writers cannot write seamless narratives about their subjects, despite the linear approach some authors take to packaging a life from birth to death. Woolf, herself, was critical of life-writers, a term she often used, who attempted to give their subject an 'illusion of wholeness'.<sup>48</sup> Managing the presences

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<sup>45</sup> Lee, H (2005) *Virginia Woolf's Nose: Essays on Biography*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

<sup>46</sup> Lee, H (1999) *Virginia Woolf*, New York: Vintage Press, p.112.

<sup>47</sup> Barnwell, A (2013) 'The Genealogy Craze: Authoring an Authentic Identity through Family History Research', *Life Writing*, 10:3, p.272.

<sup>48</sup> Woolf, V (1938) *Three Guineas* in *Selected Works of Virginia Woolf* (2012) Wordsworth Editions.

as well as the absences – and the continuum between – thus becomes a critical aspect of narrating a life.

In addition, the often chaotic process of constructing a life reflects the changeability in people's private worlds. Lee and Holmes acknowledge how messy the task is to assemble a narrative about an individual life from fragments that may include photographs, diaries, and scattered notebooks and manuscripts.<sup>49</sup> Arguably, the task is even messier when the life-writer has few personal papers such as letters, diaries and memoirs to draw on. In the final chapter of her text about Ida Leeson, the first woman appointed Sydney's Mitchell librarian, Sylvia Martin acknowledges the hurdles involved in writing about subjects who left little documented trail:

Writing a version of Ida Leeson's life has been challenging, the fragments just too few and the holes gaping to even attempt a seamless whole. Once a prominent public figure, she has almost disappeared from view: she left few papers, she wrote no memoirs, she did not make provisions for awards to commemorate her name after her death, no volume of essays has been written to commemorate her career. Her life did not conform to the usual trajectories laid down for women either: she did not marry and have children nor did she live the conventional life of a 'spinster', as many of her female contemporaries in the library world did.<sup>50</sup>

Because Martin was the first to write about Leeson there were no previously published works for her to consider, agree with or debunk. Lee, on the other hand, had to tease out a fresh approach to writing about Virginia Woolf because of the copious articles and books that had already been written about her. Despite the difference in the amount of material these life-writers worked with, both authors produced works in which they interpreted and speculated on details. As Martin acknowledges in the quotation above, she wrote *a* version of Leeson's life. Martin and Lee's versions of lives are scrupulously researched and episodes are not invented and added. They explore the gaps and silences in their material, an action that Denning urges historians

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<sup>49</sup> Lee, H (1999), p.4; Also see: Holmes, R (1985) *Footsteps: Adventures of a Romantic Biographer*, London: Harper Perennial, e-book.

<sup>50</sup> Martin S (2006) *Ida Leeson: A Life*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, p.197-8.



to undertake. Life-writer and journalist Victoria Glendinning adds that interpretation is the key to giving meaning to facts about a life. In her contribution to Cline and Angier's text, she writes:

We can research the trajectory of a life and its social and historical context until we are blue in the face. But material facts, though they are the backbone of responsible biography, must be interpreted and given meaning if they are to have any more significance than a railway timetable.<sup>51</sup>

In the process of interpreting and speculating on a life, the life-writer's voice is often heard in the text. In Martin's narrative about Leeson, the reader can hear her voice, particularly in the final chapter where she describes the hurdles in trying to piece Leeson's story together. In addition, Martin's strong and confident voice is discernable in Chapter Thirteen, 'The Spinster's Bloomers', in which she criticises eminent historian Manning Clark for perpetuating a story about Leeson's 'mythical underwear'.<sup>52</sup> Martin's analysis of the myths about Leeson's wearing of bloomers provides a deeper understanding of the masculine environment in which Leeson worked and lived in and of her strength of character in the face of derisory comments. Angier suggests that life-writers' voices are present when they want to make a point and/or speculate when evidence is missing.<sup>53</sup>

In the creative component of this thesis, I have also speculated on aspects of Rose Pearlman's life. These speculations include imagining and then suggesting which kosher shops Rose Pearlman frequented in inner-Melbourne based on their proximity to where Rose lived and from the knowledge that the Pearlman's kept a kosher house. Other speculations are at a more emotional level, where I suggest possible motivations for Rose to set up a lolly shop during her time in Ballarat. These include

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<sup>51</sup> Glendinning, V contribution to Angier, C and Cline, S (2010), p.113.

<sup>52</sup> Martin S (2006), p.184-189.

<sup>53</sup> Angier, C and Cline, S (2010), p.5-7.

her need to make money for her family as her husband was very ill, and to keep her children together. Throughout I am attentive to telling readers that I am only suggesting motivations, which in turn, I hope will encourage readers to come to their own conclusions about what they have read.

#### 4.4 Responsibilities of life-writers when writing about family members

At the beginning of her chapter on Virginia Woolf in her text, *Body Parts: Essays on Life-Writing*, Lee recalls a 1995 conference in London on ‘Writing the Lives of Writers’, when during a discussion a biographer of a philosopher stood up and told the audience: ‘But there is such a thing as a fact’.<sup>54</sup> Lee states that while many biographical facts are open to interpretation, they do exist and lie around in boxes that are ‘waiting to be turned into stories’.<sup>55</sup> The nub of her story is that facts of a life have owners: they belong to the subject being written about, their relatives and basically anyone who has come into contact with the subject.<sup>56</sup> People, therefore, claim ownership of facts that involve them.

Lee also recalls this story to pose a question about how people would feel if facts about their own lives were made up by writers. She tells another story to illuminate this question when she became the subject of an incorrect fact about her life.<sup>57</sup> Lee recounts:

My first experience of being on the receiving end of this was to read, in a biography of my friend the novelist Brian Moore, that I and my husband got lost on our way to visit Brian and Jean Moore at their remote house in Nova Scotia in the mid-1990s, and had to spend the night in a hotel. No such thing happened, and – although this ‘fact’ didn’t have the slightest bearing on Brian Moore’s story, except as a useful way of describing how out-of-the-way his house

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<sup>54</sup> Lee, H, Kindle Loc:569-570.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, Kindle Loc: 574.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, Kindle Loc: 573-574.

was – I felt a twinge of outrage and bafflement on reading it, as though a tiny part of my life had been forever traduced. I imagined, then, what it might be like (as for Ted Hughes, for instance) to feel that one's whole life had been falsely 'made over' by biographers: hence his despairing, angry and futile cry: 'I hope each one of us owns the facts of his or her own life.'<sup>58</sup>

As I was threading together the fragments from Rose Pearlman's life to produce a narrative, I often fretted over whether in my interpretations I was doing justice to the 'facts' of Rose's life as I knew them. I felt an abiding responsibility to accurately present material from interviews with family members such as my mother and my Great-Uncle Lloyd Pearlman. This was because of the strong feeling that I was custodian of *their* stories and recollections of Rose and needed to respect and render them as faithfully as possible. This involved the delicate task of accurately writing about what they told me, while still fashioning a story line. It is possible that this sense of responsibility also stems from an innate feeling that my family's stories should not be 'made-over' to suit any preconceived ideas that I might have had about Rose. As Angier points out, life-writers, including family story-tellers, 'take the lives our families and friends in our hands'.<sup>59</sup> Those ten words underline the huge responsibility towards family members. The sense of responsibility also stems, I suspect, from my background in journalism, where my practice is to report accurately what interviewees have told me, and to place their comments in a storyline. The production of any 'story', like the economy of the gift, needs both to honour the subject of the story as well as the agenda of the person telling that story. Furthermore, I have an ethical responsibility to individuals who have signed the university ethics forms for undertaking research by creative project to not fabricate their comments and take out of context their responses to interview questions. However, whether they had signed forms or not, the life-writer still has an ethical duty to accurately report what

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid, Kindle Loc: 580-581.

<sup>59</sup> Angier, C and Cline, S (2010) p.15.

interviewees have said: otherwise, this undermines the integrity of this project.

In addition, I believe that I have a moral responsibility towards Rose herself and to her memory in the world. I have to interpret her life to produce, what Lee calls, a ‘likeness’ not ‘making up’ and ‘making over’.<sup>60</sup> Although long dead, Rose the individual did live, and I would, therefore, argue that it would be a betrayal of her life to invent episodes. This thinking is also predicated on concerns American author and journalist Janet Malcolm expresses about biography. She vividly describes how writers can be guilty of ‘burglary’ and readers of voyeurism:

The biographer at work, indeed, is like the professional burglar, breaking into a house, rifling through certain drawers that he has good reason to think contain the jewelry and money, and triumphantly bearing his loot away. The voyeurism and busybodyism that impel writers and readers of biography alike are obscured by an apparatus of scholarship designed to give the enterprise an appearance of banklike blandness and solidity.<sup>61</sup>

As noted throughout this thesis, the creative component is offered as a form of a *Yizkor*, a memorial to Rose. In order to honour and to memorialise, this recreative process requires a sense of getting as close a ‘likeness’ to Rose as possible. With this in mind, it is important to indicate that life stories passed down through families can contain myths and fictions, which have been perpetuated by people writing family histories. As Lee points out, it is incumbent on life-writers ‘to sort the myths from the facts’ otherwise the myths end up undermining the ‘coherent narrative’ the life-writer is constructing.<sup>62</sup> However, I acknowledge that life stories are not stagnant and that a descendant of mine may interpret and speculate on Rose’s narrative in a different way.

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid, Kindle Loc: 564.

<sup>61</sup> Malcolm, J *The Silent Woman: Sylvia Plath And Ted Hughes* Granta Books. Kindle Edition. Loc: 144.

<sup>62</sup> Lee, H (2010) *Body Parts*, Kindle Loc 178 and 574. As already highlighted, Sylvia Martin criticises eminent historian Manning Clark for perpetuating a story about Ida Leeson’s ‘mythical underwear’.

I argue in this section, therefore, that caution should be taken in making up details when writing about a life. As indicated, this is predicated on acknowledging the author's responsibility to the descendants of the person being written about, to the subject of a piece of life-writing and to the readers. However, I also point out that the decision regarding the approach to penning a life using non-fiction, fiction or a mix of the two depend on a writer's motivations for investigating that life.

In his doctoral thesis, which also contains a creative component and an exegesis, Vicars uses fiction 'as a useful tool' to write about his great-grand mother, who is Australia's first woman aviator.<sup>63</sup> His source material is only abundant in the latter years of Millicent Bryant's life, so Vicars adopts a fictional form of biography in order to fill some of the gaps in her life<sup>64</sup>. In his exegesis, Vicars explains that he was motivated to use the genre of fictional biography to give readers a sense of Millicent, the woman:

...the fact that, with Millicent's life almost unknown and even her flying achievement little remembered, it seemed most important to tell her life in a way that would address the obscurity into which she had fallen. While it was essential to be true to her real life, it seemed my responsibility to the family, the community and Millicent herself, to present this life in its colour and fullness and to make it accessible to as wide a contemporary readership as possible. Such a portrayal might then open up a sense of 'who' Millicent was as a woman ... enabling readers to gain insight into the formation of the personality...<sup>65</sup>

Vicars maintains that his family was happy for him to take a more inventive approach to Millicent's story and imbue it with colour and drama, provided the narrative was consistent with what is known, 'especially if it stood a better chance of being

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<sup>63</sup> Vicars, B, J (2013) Exegesis, p.3.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, p.19.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, p.11.

published this way'.<sup>66</sup> This notion is reminiscent of Kate Grenville's pithy explanation of why she wrote *The Secret River*, which is inspired by her great-great-grandfather Wiseman. In *Searching for the Secret River*, Grenville writes, 'As a work of fiction I could either write a truthful book that would be so dull as to be unreadable, or I could write a made-up book that might be read but not believed.'<sup>67</sup>

As I read Vicars' creative composition about Millicent Bryant, I wondered which sections are a 'likeness' of Millicent and which are 'make up' and 'makeovers'.

However, I also wondered if this blurring of fact and fiction actually mattered.

American academic and author Susan academics and life- offers a way to explore this question by pointing out that what is viewed as objectionable depends on what people care about.<sup>68</sup> In Vicars' case, he is concerned to investigate his great-grandmother through the form of fictional biography in order to tackle the 'obscurity into which she had fallen',<sup>69</sup> and to illuminate a sense of his great-grandmother's personality.

While filling in absences is an enticing technique, I would argue that the gaps can also be a powerful motif in life-writing. The reasons for this are explained in the following paragraphs.

The strength in Sylvia Martin's portrait of Leeson is her determination to retrieve a woman's experience lost in the male-dominated culture of libraries in the first part of the twentieth century. While reading Martin's text, I can see dramas in Leeson's life against a background of seething discrimination. The existence of only scant fragments from her life adds to the poignancy of the story that Lesson is yet another

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid, p.33.

<sup>67</sup> Grenville, Kate. *Searching for the Secret River* (Kindle Locations 2004-2005). The Text Publishing Company. Kindle Edition.

<sup>68</sup> Bordo, S 'When Fictionalised Facts Matter, *The Chronicle Review*, 6 May, 2012, <https://www.chronicle.com/article/When-Fictionalized-Facts/131759>.

<sup>69</sup> Vicars B.J (2013), p.11.

woman who is hidden in the annals of Australian history. If Martin had invented episodes to produce more colour and drama as well as a fuller picture of Leeson, then these would have undermined the notion of a largely forgotten woman who, until Martin's text, was literally a footnote in history. Martin's biography, therefore, can be viewed in the wider context of and an important counterpoint to the social and political forces that relegate women like Ida Lesson to history's sidelines.

The flip-side to Martin's non-fictional exploration is Kiera Lindsey's fictionalised history, *The Convict's Daughter: The Scandal That Shocked a Nation*. While it provides insights into colonial women, historian Babette Smith questions its impact.<sup>70</sup> She argues that the book's power to provide discussion of the wider implication of gender and colonial abduction is 'limited by its emphasis on story'.<sup>71</sup> Smith's comment could perhaps also apply to Vicars' life-story of his great-grandmother: the story could be at the expense of encouraging readers to consider gender relations in Australia's aviation history. While reading Vicars' creative component, for example, I wanted to know *why* aviators as well as other people such as Millicent's family members have almost forgotten her. However, this is not to say that fictionalised family stories and histories cannot have a powerful impact on truth-telling within a social and political context. For instance, Grenville's fictionalised *The Secret River* informed a wide Australian audience about Aboriginal massacres in colonial Australia, even if it fabricated elements of her family history.<sup>72</sup>

The creative component of this thesis tells a story using novelistic techniques in order to draw readers to the text. This is where the creative tensions that I have been

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<sup>70</sup> Smith, B 'The Girl, Her Lover, Her Father and His Outrage, Spectrum, *The Age & Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 June 2016, p. 25

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Grenville, K (2015) *The Secret River*, Melbourne: Text Publishing.

referring to begin to surface. Generally speaking, my assessment is that life-writers want to assemble fragments from a life ‘as dispassionately as possible’ but many also feel compelled to tell a narrative that has shape and meaning. In addition, I am keen to produce, like *Vicars*, an artifact that can be shared with family and descendants as well as with a wider readership. As Holroyd points out the sharing of family stories justifies writing about lives:

By recreating the past we are calling on the same magic as our forebears did with stories of their ancestors round the fires under the night skies. The need to do this, to keep death in its place lies deep in human nature, and the art of biography arises from that need. This is its justification.<sup>73</sup>

#### 4.5 Conclusion

This chapter has explored how the imagination can be a key a driver in welding together facts and storylines without inventing episodes and forging them adding into life story. Within this exploration I argue that, depending on the life-writer’s motivation, there should be an element of caution when writing about other people. This is predicated on the notion of the life-writer’s responsibilities to the dead and to other people involved in the story, and of the pitfalls in blurring fact and fiction. This blurring has particular resonance now because of the notion of ‘fake’ news, which is used in traditional media and across social media to seduce people to accept certain ‘facts’.<sup>74</sup> The ‘fake’ news appears to be making it more difficult for people to distinguish between fact and fiction.<sup>75</sup> Moreover, in this era of talk about ‘fake news,

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<sup>73</sup> Holroyd, M (2013), p.31.

<sup>74</sup> Kupe, T (2019) ‘Why science matters so much in the sea of fake news and fallacies’, *The Conversation*, March 18, <https://theconversation.com/why-science-matters-so-much-in-the-era-of-fake-news-and-fallacies-113298>

<sup>75</sup> Farid, H (2019) ‘Don’t be fooled by fake images and videos online’, *The Conversation*, February 20, <https://theconversation.com/dont-be-fooled-by-fake-images-and-videos-online-111873> and Williams, K and Nettlefold, Jocelyn (2018) Can you tell fact from fiction in news? Most students can’t’ *The Conversation*, September 10, <https://theconversation.com/can-you-tell-fact-from-fiction-in-the-news-most-students-cant-102580>



Michael Wood, a professor in public history at the University of Manchester, wonders if there is more of an obligation for film-makers of historical movies to not ‘play fast and loose with the facts’.<sup>76</sup> Hence, there is further scope for discussion about blurring fact and fiction in life-writing and its role in adding to a culture in which it is becoming increasingly difficult to differentiate between what has happened and what is fiction and the product of a particular point of view.

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<sup>76</sup> Wood, M (2019) ‘Does it matter that film-makers play fast and loose with the facts’, *BBC History Magazine*, March, p.4.

## Conclusion

Two weeks before completing the final draft of this thesis I had a conversation with a woman who was a child survivor of the Holocaust. Nina was now seventy-eight and had already written 20,000 words about her family's life in Poland before the outbreak of World War II.<sup>1</sup> But she'd hit a roadblock in her writing.

Nina was dependent on family stories that had been handed down because there were few documents, not even passports, to refer to. She was clear that she didn't want to make things up to fill gaps in the narrative, but she also wished to use dialogue to break up the text in her family story. 'How can I reconcile these two things?' she asked. A deep sense of responsibility to her family members, who lived in the 1920s and 30s, underpinned this concern of Nina's in terms of writing about them without making up episodes. 'They are dead; they have no right of reply,' Nina said.

The conversation with Nina transported me back to the beginning of this thesis to the kinds of methodological challenges and philosophical considerations I had talked about with my supervisors. The discussion with Nina also reminded me of feeling overwhelmed by the seemingly insurmountable challenges of writing about an individual family member who had left no diaries or memoirs, and little to speak of on the public record. However, the conversation also illuminated how this thesis had come full circle. While I still ponder this thesis' double-barrelled overarching question – *How can the genre of life-writing help to locate and foster an understanding of a female family member, who left few personal documents, as well*

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<sup>1</sup> Conversation with Nina Bassat 24 March 2019, Elsternwick, Victoria.

*as provide wider insights about the extent to which a life might ever be available to someone else to know and to represent within narrative form?* – I could now explain to Nina what I had discovered and try to help her figure out how she could progress writing her family narrative. This conversation with Nina, therefore, indicated in practice why this thesis is significant. It shows – as indicated in the Introduction of this thesis - how there is the potential for family historians and academics to work together.

In this thesis by creative project and exegesis, I have demonstrated and intellectualised how the inclusive nature of life-writing accompanied and enhanced by the research method of fossicking make it possible to produce a narrative about a family member who left no diaries or memoirs. Furthermore, I have shown and argued that this narrative about Rose Pearlman could be achieved without employing the ‘make-ups’ and ‘make-overs’ Lee has referred to.<sup>2</sup>

As highlighted throughout this thesis, life-writing has been crucial to framing and binding together fragments of a life to produce a narrative. In addition, it opened up space in the creative project to embed my own memoirs, which have been pivotal to gaining a sense of empathy for Rose’s life – and, if I’m honest, were pivotal in why I focused on Rose as a subject in the first place. This was particularly important in trying to understand Rose’s grief by drawing connections between my own losses and hers. Life-writing also gave me the capacity to muse on Rose’s life, its place in time and its relationship to mine; in doing so, I was able to grapple with the extent to which we can know another life. The closest I can get to know an ancestor is to gain a

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<sup>2</sup> Lee H (2008) *Body Parts*, Kindle Locs 586 and 593.

sense of empathy for what they may have experienced in their lives. It is impossible to know Rose's inner thoughts.

In order to gain empathy, I now see that the writer should come to a life-writing project with 'an open heart', a quality Lee has identified in Thomas Carlyle's biographical writing. 'With that [an open heart] comes the feeling for detail, the evocation of personality, and the commitment to truth-telling, which Carlyle [like Johnson and Boswell before him] thought were the marks of the best kind of life-writing,' Lee writes.<sup>3</sup> Nina and I also described this writing about a life as an 'act of kindness'. This did not mean that the life-writer ignored a family member's foibles in any attempt to tidy up or idealise another's life, but that the writer came to the writing project as 'an act of sympathy'.<sup>4</sup>

During the course of this project I have gained a clearer understanding of Rose as a woman who was shaped by the precariousness of social and economic circumstances as well as by the changing geography of place. These discordants in her life were countered by her personal anchors: her connection to family, her Jewish identity and her St Kilda streets, where Rose constantly met friends and visited their homes. This sense of community, I maintain, enveloped her in supportive warmth that, to an extent, helped her through the traumas of losing a husband and two sons.

It is crucial to point out, however, that this construction of Rose's life is, of course, *my* representation of her life. However, it is one that is informed by fossicking for fragments about her life, evaluating the pieces that remain and/or have been available

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid Kindle Loc 70.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

to me and knitting them together to tell a narrative. As because it is one representation of Rose's life, it is open to further interpretation by the extended family and descendants of ours, as it is also open for them to rectify any mistakes of detail or 'fact' they might find. An important insight emerges from this statement. I have come to the realisation that the dead are in no time; they are neither in the past or present. We can, however, take them along with us in our memories and stories.

In the final months of completing my PhD, I also had conversations with another woman, who had been researching her family history for at least two decades. These conversations reminded me of the other reasons for pursuing this thesis and of the possibilities for academics and family historians to work together on historical projects.

Andrea Williams, of The Rabaul and Montevideo Maru Society, contacted me after seeing a social media post of mine about Rose Pearlman's son being killed in Rabaul. She told me that the association, which she had helped to set up, had little contact with descendants whose family members were killed at the Tol Plantation.<sup>5</sup> She speculated that this was likely because many of the soldiers' descendants were unaware of where and how these men had died.

What piqued Andrea's interest in my thesis was the fact that I had written about Rose Pearlman's agonising four-year wait to hear what had happened to her son, Leslie. '[I] would love to hear more about this Erica,' she wrote. 'The women and children are

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<sup>5</sup> Phone conversation with Andrea Williams 25/3/2019.

also a much forgotten part of this story.’<sup>6</sup> After providing Andrea with more information about my thesis, she again empathised with the women. ‘What the women endured was terrible too – and lifelong,’ she added.<sup>7</sup>

Rose Pearlman’s experience of waiting for news about her son provides insights into how it affected her mental and physical health. This type of research about women’s trauma associated with the war in New Guinea could be a topic for further investigation to examine the effect of war in New Guinea. Andrea told me something that I had never heard before: that some women had committed suicide as a result of the anguish associated with losing family members in the war in New Guinea. In addition, this research could be expanded to ask if family trauma associated with the war in New Guinea has affected future generations.<sup>8</sup> Andrea said she had been told family stories of grief being passed down through the generations, because families did not know when and how family members came to be killed in New Guinea.<sup>9</sup> It also appears they had felt that successive governments had largely forgotten and ignored the experiences of soldiers and civilians.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Conversation with Andrea Williams via the Rabaul and Montevideo Maru Society Facebook Page, 23/1/2019.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> A body of scholarly works examines and continues to investigate intergenerational trauma. In Australia, these works have looked at Indigenous Australians. In 2018, a Federal Government commissioned report was released showing for the first time the link between forcible removal of Indigenous children and real life experience of intergenerational trauma <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/indigenous-australians/stolen-generations-descendants/contents/table-of-contents> There is also a body of work about the intergenerational transmission of trauma across generations as a result of the Holocaust. See, for example, Hirsch, M (2012) and the novels of Australian Lily Brett, who explores intergenerational trauma in many of her works such as *Just Like That*.

<sup>9</sup> Phone conversation with Andrea Williams, 25/3/2019.

<sup>10</sup> Thwaites, Gayle, compiler, (2017) *When The War Came: New Guinea Islands 1942: Personal Stories Of Those Who Faced WWII On Australian Territory And Our Greatest Maritime Disaster – The Sinking Of Montevideo Maru*, Roseville, NSW: Papua New Guinea Association of Australia Inc. This book is a collection of personal and family stories about the Australian settlers in New Guinea, civilians and soldiers. Families of the civilians feel their relatives’ experiences had been ignored. Max Uechtritz, a former journalist, has written online articles about the forgotten soldiers of Rabaul. See, for example, <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/our-national-myopia-history-forgotten-max-uechtritz/>

During my conversations with Andrea, I became even more acutely aware of the vital role that family history plays in helping to lift the silence on episodes in history. For example, Andrea's family had a plantation in Rabaul before the outbreak of World War II. As the Japanese were edging closer to Rabaul, European women and children were evacuated to different parts of Australia, but when they arrived in Australia they were essentially homeless. There was little government support and their friends from Rabaul had been sent to different parts of Australia. Male family members were forced to stay in Rabaul. In total, about 1400 civilians died in New Guinea. Despite this, many women returned to New Guinea after the war because it was their home.<sup>11</sup>

Questions come to mind about this historical episode that is revealed through family history. They include: Why has there been such pervasive silence about this story when Rabaul was the first Australian territory to be attacked in World War II? Why did successive governments shelve inquiries into what happened to the civilians in Rabaul?<sup>12</sup> Similarly, questions could be asked about the little known Tol Plantation massacre in order to place it in a political and cultural context. Why do we embrace certain war stories and not others with reference to the war in New Guinea? Why is the war in Rabaul not part of the national narrative? These types of questions are ripe for academics to explore and contextualise within the realms of the research that families have conducted about their ancestors' experiences in Rabaul during World War II.

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<sup>11</sup> Phone conversation with Andrea Williams, 25/3/2019.

<sup>12</sup> Thwaites, Gayle (2017). In many of the personal stories, families lament that there had been no inquiry into the plight of civilians during and after World War II. Also see the Introduction by Andrea Williams.

A major rationale for me in pursuing this thesis has been to uncover what I have described as a version the ‘hidden woman’: a working-class Jewish woman, who migrated to Victoria before World War II. As noted in the Introduction and exegesis more generally, I wanted to challenge and therefore enrich the common image of the development of Victoria’s Jewish history as largely as the result of men’s feats in setting up Jewish institutions. Women, such as Rose, had important roles to play in developing a Jewish-Australian identity among their children. I would argue that this was crucial in the development of Judaism in Victoria before World War II because of the integral role they played in terms of on passing on their Jewish traditions, culture and sense of family to the next generation in a largely Christian society. This, however, requires further exploration to tease out the specific Jewish-Australian identity that the first and second-generation developed, and how women like Rose accommodated this fashioning of an identity.

Overall, this thesis adds to creative and scholarly works that seek to understand why family history matters. This thesis has shown that constructing a narrative about a family member provides insights into social groups that have largely been ignored in historical texts. In doing so, this thesis illuminates the fact that the Jewish community was and is a diverse community comprising people with a range of economic and social backgrounds.

In addition, this thesis adds to methods and ways of inquiry regarding how any of us might seek to understand those who have gone before us and who are now lost to us. Therefore, this thesis contends that knowledge and whispers of stories do reside in and can be derived from the fragmentary and partial to produce a narrative using a



fossicking method as demonstrated in this creative project and extrapolated upon in the exegesis. Furthermore, telling this story about Rose Pearlman helps us to bridge that impossible gap between present and past, between what we grieve and what we retain and can pass on to others. The fashioning of this narrative is a part of what I can pass on to my relatives.

There was also an unexpected outcome from pursuing this thesis. The process of fossicking for details about Rose Pearlman has acted as a catalyst for bringing my extended family closer together. We all have an interest in Rose as a kind of matriarchal figure in our family history and stories we all continue to discuss what kinds of positive influences she had on her children. A common refrain among the extended family is, ‘All her children did so well.’ What the family means, I think, is that Rose’s children were educated and developed a strong sense of supporting the immediate and extended family. Rose, I believe, helped to set those foundations for her children and for their children.

This thesis has shown that researching and writing about a family member has myriad technical challenges as well as epistemological conundrums. But writing a family narrative can help individuals to understand their historical, cultural and religious connections to family and communities, and to ultimately inform the assembly of their identity.

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### **Family Sources**

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Hyman Pearlman, naturalisation certificate, NAA A712, 1901/0138

Baron Pearlman, naturalization certificate, NAA A712, 1901/0136

#### Birth certificates

Rose (Jacobs) Pearlman, General Register Office, England BXCG 473447

Births, Deaths, Marriages (**Births, Deaths and Marriages, Victoria**)

Jack Pearlman 16305/1901

Millie (Amelia) Pearlman 15295/1903

Celia Pearlman 7879/1906

Leslie Pearlman 24280/1908

Sidney Pearlman 496/1911

Harold Pearlman 9264/1913

Cyril Pearlman 18404/1915

#### Marriage certificates

Rose Jacobs and Baron Pearlman 4236/1900. Their marriage records are also held at the East Melbourne Shule.

Millie Pearlman and Samuel Josephs 13655/1927

#### Death certificates

Jacob Pearlman 7826/1900  
Morris Jacobs 11239/1904  
Solomon Jacobs 1304/1911  
Hanna Jacobs 316/1913  
Sidney Jacobs 7965/1913  
Hyman Pearlman 12240/1924  
Annie Jacobs 11239/1928  
Baron Pearlman 14769/1930  
Millie Jacobs 19589/1947  
Elizabeth (Pearlman) Froomkin 2294/1953  
Rose Pearlman 1244/1956  
Leah Cohen 10372/1957  
Celia Phillips 10372/1964

#### *Wills (PROV)*

Hanna Pearlman 128/642.  
Solomon Jacobs 118/982  
Nellie Jacobs Nellie's VPRS 28/ [P3](#) unit [4255](#), item 372/409 and VPRS 7591/ [P2](#) unit [1307](#), item 372/409

#### *War records*

Samuel Issac Phillips NAA B2455 Phillips S I  
Leslie Pearlman, NAA B883, VX30758  
Cyril Pearlman, NAA B883, VX6747  
Celia Pearlman, NAA B883 VX45572  
Lloyd Pearlman, NAA A9301, 145306/B4747

The Jewish Museum of Australia has held two exhibitions about Jews who served for Australia during wars. I attended both exhibitions and kept the programs.

*In the Footsteps of Monash: Jews in the Australian Armed Forces in World War 2*, Exhibition and Program, Jewish Museum of Australia, September-December 1995. This exhibition mentioned all the Pearlman children who served in the war.

*Women of Courage: Jewish Women in the Australian Armed Services, Exhibition and Program*, Melbourne Hebrew Congregation, April 2006. Celia (Pearlman) Leon was one of six women featured in this exhibition.

#### *Addresses*

Ballarat addresses obtained from Victorian Electoral Rolls, 1903,1909, 1912, 1919, 1914, 1924, 1931. Also from private collection of postcards sent to Rose from her sisters.

Sands and McDougall's Ballarat and District Directory for 1896-Accessed through National Library of Australia:  
<http://naa12.naa.gov.au/SearchNRRetrieve/Gallery151/dist/JGalleryViewer.aspx?B=66>

## Interviews

Lloyd Pearlman  
 Roberta Cervini  
 Ruth Leon  
 Jennifer Leon  
 Lynda Fridman  
 Jessica Pearlman Fields  
 Rodney Pearlman  
 Leslie Wise  
 Roslyn Bettane  
 Barbara Buchbinder  
 Ephraim Finch  
 Dr Ian Calcutt, 6 March, 2016 for an explanation of the miners' condition  
 Shirley and David Spivakovsky

Approval to conduct the interviews was given in September 2015.

The screenshot shows the Victoria University ResearchMaster system interface. At the top, the Victoria University logo and 'QUEST FOR EXCELLENCE' are visible. The user is logged in as 's4534533 MS Erica Cervini'. The main navigation bar includes 'Home', 'Ethics', 'HDR', and 'Help'. The 'Applications' section is active, showing a list of applications. One application, 'HRE15-268 Rose Pearlman: the blending of gen...', is highlighted as 'Finalised - Approved'. The application details show it is a 'Human Ethics' application, reviewed by 'DR MARY WEAVER', and approved on '02/09/2015'.

Application ID	Application Title	Status	Primary Investigator	Process Stage	Stage Due Date	Template Name	Date Created
HRE15-268	Rose Pearlman: the blending of gen...	Finalised - Approved	DR MARY WEAVER	Review complete: Application Approved		v.15-01 Human Research Ethics Appl...	02/09/2015

The following are the information sheets and consent forms given to family members and community participants.

1. Form (1a) information to participants involved in research: Pearlman Facebook page.
2. Form (1b) information to participants involved in research interviews: family members.
3. Form (2a) consent form for participants involved in research: family interviews
4. Form (2b) consent form for participants involved in research: Facebook.
5. Form (3a) information to participants involved in research: interviews – community members.
6. Form (3b) consent form for participants involved in research: Jewish community.



## **(1) Form (1a) INFORMATION TO PARTICIPANTS INVOLVED IN RESEARCH: PEARLMAN FACEBOOK PAGE**

### **You are invited to participate**

You are invited to participate in a research project entitled *Travelling with My Great-Grandmother Across the East End to Ballarat and St Kilda: Unravelling the hidden story of a Jewish woman between 1888 and 1946*. This project is being conducted by PhD student Erica Cervini. Dr Mary Weaven and Dr Rose Lucas from Victoria University are Erica's supervisors.

### **Project explanation**

This project's research objective is to take an innovative approach to family history by blending different genres and disciplines to determine a way of researching and writing about the other when few personal papers exist. The research objective will be achieved by constructing a biography of my great-grandmother Rose Pearlman (1875-1956), who left few personal documents.

### **What will I be asked to do?**

You will be invited to share your thoughts about Rose Pearlman via the Facebook page 'The Pearlmans', and will be asked if these thoughts can be used in the biography of Rose Pearlman. A consent form will be emailed to you.

### **What will I gain from participating?**

You will be adding to knowledge about Melbourne's Jewish community, particularly about Jewish women who migrated to Victoria during the nineteenth century and lived through World War II. You will also learn about Rose Pearlman from other family members by participating in the Facebook discussion group.

### **How will the information I give be used?**



The information you provide on Facebook may be used in the creative project aspect of the PhD thesis. This includes photos and documents as well as comments you upload to the page. You will be asked in the consent form if your name, comments and materials can be used in the biography of Rose Pearlman.

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**What are the potential risks of participating in this project?**

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There is a small risk that you may become upset thinking about family members while using the FACEbook page. If this occurs, you are welcome to contact Carolyn Deans from Victoria University to speak, free of charge, about your feelings. Carolyn is a clinical psychologist and she can be contacted on 9919 2334 or by her email [Carolyn.Deans@vu.edu.au](mailto:Carolyn.Deans@vu.edu.au). You have the right to withdraw from the project at any time.

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**How will this project be conducted?**

---

This is a doctoral study, which involves gathering details via social media and interviewing a small cohort of participants. It also involves gleaning details from archival material as well observations from the places Rose Pearlman visited.

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**Who is conducting the study?**

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Erica Cervini, a PhD student. She can be contacted via email. [erica.cervini@live.vu.edu.au](mailto:erica.cervini@live.vu.edu.au). Any queries about your participation in this project may be directed to the Chief Investigators Dr Mary Weaven [mary.weaven@vu.edu.au](mailto:mary.weaven@vu.edu.au) and Dr Rose Lucas [rose.lucas@vu.edu.au](mailto:rose.lucas@vu.edu.au) listed above.

If you have any queries or complaints about the way you have been treated, you may contact the Ethics Secretary, Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee, Office for Research, Victoria University, PO Box 14428, Melbourne, VIC, 8001, email [researchethics@vu.edu.au](mailto:researchethics@vu.edu.au) or phone (03) 9919 4781 or 4461.

## **(2) Form (1b) INFORMATION TO PARTICIPANTS INVOLVED IN RESEARCH: INTERVIEWS: FAMILY MEMBERS**

### **You are invited to participate**

You are invited to participate in a research project entitled *Travelling with My Great-Grandmother Across the East End to Ballarat and St Kilda: Unravelling the hidden story of a Jewish woman between 1888 and 1946*. This project is being conducted by PhD student Erica Cervini. Dr Mary Weaven and Dr Rose Lucas from Victoria University are Erica's supervisors.

### **Project explanation**

This project's research objective is to take an innovative approach to family history by blending different genres and disciplines to determine a way of researching and writing about the other when few personal papers exist. The research objective will be achieved by constructing a biography of my great-grandmother Rose Pearlman (1875-1956), who left few personal documents.

### **What will I be asked to do?**

You will be invited to participate in a face-to-face interview with the PhD student. It is estimated that this interview will take about 30 minutes. There may be follow-up interviews. You will be asked to sign a consent form indicating your willingness to allow the interview to be digitally recorded (voice only). The time and location of this interview will be mutually agreed upon. You will also be asked if your name can be used in the creative project aspect of the PhD thesis. A consent form will be emailed or posted to you.

### **What will I gain from participating?**

You will be adding to knowledge about Melbourne's Jewish community, particularly about Jewish women who migrated to Victoria during the nineteenth century and lived through World War II.

### **How will the information I give be used?**

The information you provide will be used in the writing of a biography of Rose Pearlman on Facebook may be used in the creative project aspect of the PhD thesis. This includes photos and documents as well as comments you upload to the page. You will be asked in the consent form if your name and materials can be used in the biography of Rose Pearlman.

**What are the potential risks of participating in this project?**

There is a small risk that you may become upset thinking about family members while using the FACEbook page. If this occurs, you are welcome to contact Carolyn Deans from Victoria University to speak, free of charge, about your feelings. Carolyn is a clinical psychologist and she can be contacted on 9919 2334 or by her email [Carolyn.Deans@vu.edu.au](mailto:Carolyn.Deans@vu.edu.au). You have the right to withdraw from the project at any time.

**How will this project be conducted?**

This is a doctoral study, which involves gathering details via social media and interviewing a small cohort of participants. It also involves collecting and interpreting archival material as well as doing observations of the places Rose Pearlman visited.

**Who is conducting the study?**

Erica Cervini, a PhD student. She can be contacted via email. [erica.cervini@live.vu.edu.au](mailto:erica.cervini@live.vu.edu.au). Any queries about your participation in this project may be directed to the Chief Investigators Dr Mary Weaven [mary.weaven@vu.edu.au](mailto:mary.weaven@vu.edu.au) and Dr Rose Lucas [rose.lucas@vu.edu.au](mailto:rose.lucas@vu.edu.au) listed above.

If you have any queries or complaints about the way you have been treated, you may contact the Ethics Secretary, Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee, Office for Research, Victoria University, PO Box 14428, Melbourne, VIC, 8001, email [researchethics@vu.edu.au](mailto:researchethics@vu.edu.au) or phone (03) 9919 4781 or 4461.

**(3) CONSENT FORM 3a FOR PARTICIPANTS INVOLVED IN RESEARCH:  
FAMILY INTERVIEWS**

**INFORMATION TO PARTICIPANTS:**

We would like to invite you to be a part of a PhD study on the life of Rose Pearlman.

**CERTIFICATION BY SUBJECT**

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (Name)

of \_\_\_\_\_ (Suburb)

certify that I am at least 18 years old and that I am voluntarily giving my consent to participate in the study: ***Rose Pearlman: the blending of genres and disciplines to research and write family history*** being conducted by Erica Cervini, a PhD students from the College of Education, Victoria University

I certify that the objectives of the study, together with any risks and safeguards associated with the procedures listed hereunder to be carried out in the research, have been fully explained to me by:

Erica Cervini

I freely consent to participation involving the below mentioned procedures. Please tick to accept

- A 30-minute interview by Erica Cervini where I will be asked about my memories of Rose Pearlman. ☐
- Recording of the interview (voice only) ☐
- Allowing my name to be used in the creative project ☐

I certify that I have had the opportunity to have any questions answered and that I understand that I can withdraw from this study at any time and that this withdrawal will not jeopardise me in any way.

I have been informed that the information I provide will be kept confidential.

Signed:

Date:

Any queries about your participation in this project may be directed to the PhD student, Erica Cervini,

[Erica.cervini@live.vu.edu.au](mailto:Erica.cervini@live.vu.edu.au)

If you have any queries or complaints about the way you have been treated, you may contact the Ethics Secretary, Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee, Office for Research, Victoria University, PO Box 14428, Melbourne, VIC, 8001, email [Researchethics@vu.edu.au](mailto:Researchethics@vu.edu.au) or phone (03) 9919 4781 or 4461.



#### (4) CONSENT FORM (2b) FOR PARTICIPANTS INVOLVED IN RESEARCH: FACEBOOK

##### INFORMATION TO PARTICIPANTS:

We would like to invite you to be a part of a PhD study on the life of Rose Pearlman.

##### CERTIFICATION BY SUBJECT

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (Name)

of \_\_\_\_\_ (Suburb)

certify that I am at least 18 years old and that I am voluntarily giving my consent to participate in the study: ***Rose Pearlman: the blending of genres and disciplines to research and write family history*** being conducted by Erica Cervini, a PhD students from the College of Education, Victoria University

I certify that the objectives of the study, together with any risks and safeguards associated with the procedures listed hereunder to be carried out in the research, have been fully explained to me by:

Erica Cervini

I freely consent to participation involving the below mentioned procedures: Please tick to accept, and provide details at the end.

- Allowing my Facebook comments to be used in Rose Pearlman's biography ☐
- Allowing my name to be used in the biography ☐
- Allowing my materials eg photos to be used in the biography ☐

I certify that I have had the opportunity to have any questions answered and that I understand that I can withdraw from this study at any time and that this withdrawal will not jeopardise me in any way.

I have been informed that the information I provide will be kept confidential.

Signed:

Date:

Any queries about your participation in this project may be directed to the PhD student, Erica Cervini,

[Erica.cervini@live.vu.edu.au](mailto:Erica.cervini@live.vu.edu.au)

If you have any queries or complaints about the way you have been treated, you may contact the Ethics Secretary, Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee, Office for Research, Victoria University, PO Box 14428, Melbourne, VIC, 8001, email [Researchethics@vu.edu.au](mailto:Researchethics@vu.edu.au) or phone (03) 9919 4781 or 4461.

**(5) Form (3a) INFORMATION TO PARTICIPANTS INVOLVED IN RESEARCH:  
INTERVIEWS – COMMUNITY MEMBERS**

**You are invited to participate**

You are invited to participate in a research project entitled *Travelling with My Great-Grandmother Across the East End to Ballarat and St Kilda: Unravelling the hidden story of a Jewish woman between 1888 and 1946*. This project is being conducted by PhD student Erica Cervini. Dr Mary Weaven and Dr Rose Lucas from Victoria University are Erica's supervisors.

**Project explanation**

This project's research objective is to take an innovative approach to family history by blending different genres and disciplines to determine a way of researching and writing about the other when few personal papers exist. The research objective will be achieved by constructing a biography of my great-grandmother Rose Pearlman (1875-1956), who left few personal documents.

**What will I be asked to do?**

You will be invited to participate in a face-to-face interview with the PhD student. It is estimated that this interview will take about 60 minutes. You will be asked to sign a consent form indicating your willingness to allow the interview to be digitally recorded (voice only). The time of this interview will be mutually agreed upon. The locations may include Fawkner Cemetery and St Kilda Synagogue, or another location of Jewish importance.

Transcripts of your interview will be analysed by the researcher and parts of it will be used in the biography of Rose Pearlman

**What will I gain from participating?**

You will be adding to knowledge about Melbourne's Jewish community, particularly about Jewish women who migrated to Victoria during the nineteenth century and lived through World War II.

**How will the information I give be used?**

The information you provide will be used in the writing of a biography of Rose Pearlman. The information will provide context to Rose's life eg explaining why Jews were buried at Fawkner Cemetery.



**What are the potential risks of participating in this project?**

There is a small risk that you may become upset thinking about the history of the Jewish community in Melbourne. If this occurs, you are welcome to contact Carolyn Deans from Victoria University to speak, free of charge, about your feelings. Carolyn is a clinical psychologist and she can be contacted on 9919 2334 or by her email [Carolyn.Deans@vu.edu.au](mailto:Carolyn.Deans@vu.edu.au). You have the right to withdraw from the project at any time.

**How will this project be conducted?**

This is a doctoral study, which involves gathering details via social media and interviewing a small cohort of participants. It also involves collecting and interpreting archival material as well as doing observations of the places Rose Pearlman visited.

**Who is conducting the study?**

Erica Cervini, a PhD student. She can be contacted via email. [erica.cervini@live.vu.edu.au](mailto:erica.cervini@live.vu.edu.au). Any queries about your participation in this project may be directed to the Chief Investigators listed above: Dr Mary Weaven [mary.weaven@vu.edu.au](mailto:mary.weaven@vu.edu.au) and Dr Rose Lucas [rose.lucas@vu.edu.au](mailto:rose.lucas@vu.edu.au) from Victoria University

If you have any queries or complaints about the way you have been treated, you may contact the Ethics Secretary, Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee, Office for Research, Victoria University, PO Box 14428, Melbourne, VIC, 8001, email [researchethics@vu.edu.au](mailto:researchethics@vu.edu.au) or phone (03) 9919 4781 or 4461.

**(6) CONSENT FORM (3b) FOR PARTICIPANTS INVOLVED IN RESEARCH:  
JEWISH COMMUNITY**

**INFORMATION TO PARTICIPANTS:**

We would like to invite you to be a part of a PhD study on the life of Rose Pearlman.

**CERTIFICATION BY SUBJECT**

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (Name)

of \_\_\_\_\_ (Suburb)

certify that I am at least 18 years old and that I am voluntarily giving my consent to participate in the study: **Rose Pearlman: the blending of genres and disciplines to research and write family history**, being conducted by Erica Cervini, a PhD students from the College of Education, Victoria University

I certify that the objectives of the study, together with any risks and safeguards associated with the procedures listed hereunder to be carried out in the research, have been fully explained to me by:

Erica Cervini

I freely consent to participation involving the below mentioned procedures. Please tick to accept

- A 30-minute interview by Erica Cervini where I will be asked about the history of Jewish communities. ☐
- Recording of the interview (voice only) ☐
- Allowing my name to be used in the creative project ☐

I certify that I have had the opportunity to have any questions answered and that I understand that I can withdraw from this study at any time and that this withdrawal will not jeopardise me in any way.

I have been informed that the information I provide will be kept confidential.

Signed:

Date:

Any queries about your participation in this project may be directed to the PhD student, Erica Cervini, [Erica.cervini@live.vu.edu.au](mailto:Erica.cervini@live.vu.edu.au)

If you have any queries or complaints about the way you have been treated, you may contact the Ethics Secretary, Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee, Office for Research, Victoria

University, PO Box 14428, Melbourne, VIC, 8001, email [Researchethics@vu.edu.au](mailto:Researchethics@vu.edu.au) or phone (03) 9919 4781 or 4461.

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