

THE TIME OF OUR LIVES

The Amber Decade

A memoir of the 1920s

Part 5

extracted from a manuscript by

Elizabeth Durack – Perth, 1985

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Part 5

Sunday Mornings and the top of the Human Pyramid

We were not Establishment Western Australian - that was much older, that was English and Church of England and Presbyterian and first-footing free settlers to the Swan River Colony. Compared with families like the Bussells, the Cliftons, the Shentons, the Drake-Brockmans, the Forrests, the Edgerton-Warburtons, the Girdlestons, the Roes, the Withnells, the Rows, the Lee Steeres, the Moores, the Shaws, the Campbells, the Hassells, the Molloys - we were a mob of border-hopping parvenus making an unconventional entry to the precinct via the top end of Australia and we were Catholic to boot. To old established types, the time when grandfather died in Fremantle in 1898 was "recently". "The Nest" which Auntie Marie and Uncle Jim occupied in Cottesloe in 1903 was "not long ago", our houses at 11 Goldsmith Road and 263 Adelaide terrace were acquired "lately". Palace Court was "modern".

But our family was largely unaware and certainly unconcerned with any of this for it was completely self-contained, self-relating and self-sufficient. As more branches of it settled in the South it formed a unit of itself - a closed circuit within the general mechanism of the small isolated city of Perth. Fragments of the family remained in the Kimberlies - Cousin

Ambrose, Cousin Patsy - but Grandmother's death at Argyle had led to the belief that the north was no place for white women, while graves here and there, including the little graves beside the Dunham River, served as additional endorsement. The wild days of which it was said that the Kimberlies were almost exclusively inhabited by "Blacks and Duracks" passed quickly.

Mother, whose people were all in South Australia, assimilated with the Durack family as closely as Ruth with Naomi, making no break in the family sheath which, for its part, accepted her with open arms from the beginning - Auntie Marie and Bird so joyful at the prospect of their brother's long delayed marriage. None of our aunts, uncles, first, second or third cousins when once settled into various comfortable premises in and around Perth showed any restlessness within the security of their personal cocoon - with the exception of Auntie Eva: *She was a Hughes, one of the Brisbane Hughes.*

Auntie Eva observed the wider perimeter of the local Establishment and decided to bridge it. This she succeeded in doing when her daughter, our cousin Sheila, married Reg Summerhayes. Dad, too, bridged the gap because of his personal stature, his unique position as a resident-owner in the North, (all similar estates - Vestys, Bovril etc - were London-owned and based), his political and inter-state connections and, as well, his forward-looking philosophy always ready and eager to back any gamble from 'striking oil'

to aerial transport. Most of the others settled for the status quo and for re-living, in endless dialogues, "the early days", in those Sunday morning gatherings at "263" (Adelaide Terrace) during the 1920s.

Years later Henrietta Drake-Brockman (*she was a Jull*) who, by marriage, was steeped in the West Australian Establishment, would come to Mary with 'Kings in Grass Castles' in hand to say "This book was a revelation to me. I was brought up to believe that all Irish Catholics were ne'er-do-wells, anti-British and, if not to be avoided, to be regarded cautiously ..."

So Mary, too, in her way was a bridge-maker who via her chronicles has entered the wider world beyond the family confines.

Even so the picture remains hopelessly confused in the public mind where the generations have become telescoped in, often, a comical way.

My brother Reg has been asked to record some of the high-lights of his past in the trans-Australia cattle trek. Mary has often been taken for and greeted as our Auntie Marie by some old survivor of the latter's Goulburn Convent days, while quite recently, when in Wyndham, I was asked: "How ever did you manage with all those long skirts and big leg-o'-mutton sleeves?" they looked quite confused and disappointed when I said that I actually wore shorts most of the time and pioneered nude bathing in the Ord River.

Uncle Jack was the first member of the family apart, I suppose, from Reg and Mary, who came to see me when I was born - that was at "Bimera" in Goldsmith Road, Claremont on July 6th 1915.

"What's that noise, Bess?" asked Uncle Jack. "It sounds to me like a frog."

"That's not a frog," said Nurse, "that's our new baby - she's singing."

Sometimes Mother told me this story, sometimes Nurse and occasionally Uncle Jack would repeat it too. "Perhaps we could call her Rana or Ranula?" Latin, for little frog.

But Mother didn't fancy that. "You and your Latin, Jack," she said, "we'll call her Elizabeth and Betty for short." (Why, I wonder, should tiny snippets of conversation, such as this, survive out of the vocal welter of our days and years while what could be more relevant and more revealing exchanges never make it into any data bank at all?)

"Can you make up a short sentence," asked Uncle Jack, "that contains the words - defence, defeat and detail?" We tried various constructions but really Uncle Jack was only waiting to give us his own: "When de cat jumps over de fence de feet go before de tail". Dr. Spooner, he said, was an English clergyman who specialised in twisting parts of words around to comical effect, for example: it is kisstomary to cuss the bride - that's a Spoonerism. The comment consisted of praising with faint damns - That's a Spoonerism

too.

A Malapropism was similar except that Mrs. Malaprop's Malapropisms were unconscious while Dr. Spooner Spoonerisms were deliberate. Children, said Uncle Jack, were often good at the former. I wrote - "There are no allegories in Australia, only crocodiles." "Yes", said Uncle, "that's a Malapropism."

But I did it deliberately, so what does that make it? a Bettism?

Uncle Jack was not so much a man of words as a word man. He loved words as a collector loves the separate pieces of his hoard or a numismatist his precious coins knowing their entire history, their pedigrees, the ups and downs of their fortunes; how, at times, from simple origins, they could be upgraded and, in other instances, while of proud lineage, debased.

He was a master of that declared poorest form of wit; he punned continually, played upon words and had everyone laughing in the process - how can that be such a poor form of wit?

He was fascinated with malapropisms, spoonerisms, solecisms and cacography. He disapproved of catachresis and invented conundrums.

Apart from Reg, who is also addicted to punning, I don't think we fully appreciated Uncle Jack's verbal virtuosity though I guess some of it must have rubbed off on us because we would see Uncle Jack at least once a week and were more closely

involved with him than with Dad who we only saw in the summer time.

Along with our cousins, the Davidson's, we were his surrogate children. He had none of his own and by the time he came to see me the day I was born when he brought the 'possum skin rug, he and Auntie Bird were contemplating a shared ménage at Palace Court in the centre of Perth. They were already together in the Fremantle house where Grandfather died and from where Auntie Marie moved to "The Nest" in Cottesloe after she married Uncle Jim Davidson.

It was to the Fremantle house that Auntie Gert Johnstone came to "special" Uncle Jack through an illness thus forging the first link in the chain that was eventually to bring Mother and Dad together in holy matrimony in Adelaide on 22nd September 1909. Auntie Gert returned to Adelaide after her time in the West in love with Uncle Jack - according to Mother - and full of stories about this wonderful family who had opened up the wild Kimberley country and were so rich that they never saved cold meat but gave the remains of the Sunday roast away to the daily help. There was only one fly in the ointment (sic) - they were Roman Catholics. Nevertheless Mother was all ears - she was the only girl still at home, three other sisters, Kate, Ede and Nell, being already married.

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Auntie Kate read *Alice in Wonderland* to us when

she came over from Adelaide to stay for a holiday. She was Mother's oldest and dearest sister. Like Auntie Gert, she was also a trained nurse. When her little sister Bessie lay dying of typhoid fever, with her beautiful hair all cut off, sinking hourly and already abandoned by the doctor, it was Auntie Kate who positioned herself between Mother and the dark Angel - and won the day. "Auntie Kate saved my life," said Mother and she often told us this whole story. And we loved Auntie Kate, too. She was warm and humorous and when she looked at Mum her eyes melted with love and pride. But the trouble was - she never finished reading Alice in Wonderland. As a result, although I have read it right through a hundred times since, it always ends for me at the very place where Auntie Kate stopped reading and turned the book face down on the round table beside the couch in the Drawing room as Mother said: "Just look at the time, Kate! Go to bed now girls!"

"... What else had you to learn?" asked Alice. "Well, there was Mystery," the Mock Turtle replied, counting off the subjects on his flappers, - "Mystery, ancient and modern, with Seaography, then Drawling - the Drawling master was an old conger-eel, that used to come once a week, he taught us Drawling, Stretching and Fainting in coils" ... said the Gryphon, "I went to the Classical master. He was an old crab, he was." "I never went to him," the Mock Turtle said with a sigh. "He Taught Laughing and Grief, they used to say." "So he did, so he did," said the

Gryphon, sighing in his turn, and both creatures hid their faces in their paws ..."

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There were really two Uncle Jacks, perhaps there were more, but there were two for me: the uncle we knew and loved, and who came to see us every Sunday after Mass with Auntie Bird, who wore custom-made Cogan Bros. suits, a red rose-bud in his lapel, and who gave us the National Geographic, books and a pound each at Christmas time - and then there was a young John Durack who belonged to an improbable time known as "the air-ley days in the Kimberlies".

What he looked like then I could not imagine nor the life he lived as he moved swiftly from place to place - now in Wyndham, now in Halls Creek, now down in Kalgoorlie - nor what clothes he might have been wearing on the day Cousin Big Johnny died in his arms from a native spear.

The pre-avuncular character came partly to life in conversations that ran on interminably of a Sunday morning but, even so, that personality and our Uncle Jack never fused. Dad, on the other hand, was always one and the same no matter where he was. Whenever Dad, Uncle Jack and Uncle Pat were together they would set each other off and from some seemingly unconnected remark or the mention of a name or a date would together go hurtling pell-mell down memory lane - Goulburn, Thylungra and their sun-filled boyhood days in south-west Queensland - then further and further

back till the conversation would trail off in sad recall and sometimes dissolve in tears.

When Dad and our uncles got together with the cousins – notably, Long Michael, Jerry Brice and Mantinae Pat – Bedlam ensued and loud argument accompanied by a thumping of fists and a pointing of fingers. This was not in actual quarrelling but in competition, assertiveness and the necessity to win points on accuracy of memory. Their voices would rise to an ever-amplifying level.

They all suffered from deafness in varying degrees due to the quantity of quinine that they had swilled in the continual and running battle with malaria and dengue fever. Big hands cupped themselves around big ears, shaggy eyebrows were drawn frowningly closer, moustaches all but sprang from upper lips that emitted a fine spray in emphatic assertions or denials.

Strangely enough, throughout all the dramatic re-enactments the blacks were hardly mentioned – the conversations were ethnocentric. The deeds, the exploits, the derring-do and, above all else, the subjugation of vast distances were a classic projection of their times: wider still and wider may thy bounds be set. If the blacks were spoken of at all it was in the same manner as other elements with which they had to contend – drought, flood, sickness and so forth. Certain black personalities however, those who had pragmatically thrown in their lot with the new order, came in for their full share of praise and

acknowledgement.

We listened to all this first-hand oral history but, sad to say, without really the deference due to it. Rather the opposite for I, in fact, was inclined to be amused and derisive. As a child I had an over-developed tendency to ridicule. Descriptions of grown-ups' past adventures invoked in me a perverse desire to send them up. My depiction of those Sunday morning faces in action was a send-up, and so too, was a set of drawings that I did called "Mother's India".

These I concocted from the honeymoon photographs in the albums in the Smoke room - Mother and Dad in exaggerated Edwardian costume standing as out-sized foregrounds that dwarfed domed Mosques and crenulated Hindu temples in the background.

For the most part this was my own private fun and games and quite separate from the drawings and tracings that we thought suitable for "Kookaburra and Kangaroo" or the drawings that I did at school for a subject known as "Drawing".

Sometimes I showed the send-up drawings to Mother. She would laugh and say - "Naughty girl!"

Mother, herself, didn't have all the time in the world for raucous reminiscences - "Come on, Bird", she'd say, "we'll take a walk around the garden and leave the men to it".

Three steps led off the back verandah beside which ran a flower bed of hydrangeas edged with English daisies, pink and white. Two climbing

rose - Cecile Brunner and Dorothy Perkins - clambered over a lattice support at one end. Wide beds of mixed flowers - hollyhock, delphiniums, rose bushes, clumps of feathery love-in-the-mist - bordered the lawn on either side. Then there was a slope of more lawn where the clothes-lines were, then another steeper slope, then the grape-vine trellises that stretched half way down "the bottom". The fig tree was loaded with fruit in February and we got up early in the morning to pick it for fig jam. Nobody has ever made jam before or since like the fig jam Mother made. She added ginger and almonds to it and in its final mouth-watering state you could hardly cut it out of the jar it was so solid. The three apple trees beside the old boarded-up well that Mother thought Kim might have fallen down the day we lost him, were duds. They bore tiny bitter fruit always infested with insect spots. The loquat tree was in the Miss' Parker's place but the branches hung over our side. Even so, cross old Miss Eliza would shout at us if we picked them and shake an umbrella menacingly from her balcony. Mary and I would run off laughing.

We had our horizontal bar set up near the loquat tree which was also the spot Mary thought best for placing the boat-swing that we were going to get after we struck oil. But Reg favoured another place lower down where the ground was level because, he said, a boat-swing capable of taking the six of us would need to have a firm foundation.

This was almost the extent of Reg's enjoyment, even so he consulted with Ted Hayes rather than with us and together they drew a careful diagram labelled - "Proposed Boat-swing Construction for Durack Residence, 263 Adelaide Terrace." It showed only a shadowy indication of the swing itself but the cement pads for two tepi-like supports and the cross beam were clearly drawn. We examined this with uncritical interest and respect. I was particularly impressed by the way a dotted line showed the depth to which the struts were intended to be inserted underground.

Come to think of it, there was also another occasion when Reg deviated from his self-imposed isolation. This was during what must go down in history as our most famous breakout. For no particular reason these strange eruptions bubbled up from time to time and they could reach such a state of general excitement and high spirits as to verge on hysteria.

Mother developed special skills for dealing with such situations - she would clap loudly and demand that we "Stop it! Stop it, this very minute!" and shouting over the general bedlam declare - "It'll end in crying!" - as it invariably did.

On this particular evening we had the house to ourselves - it was hot weather and there was thunder around. We converged and in falling darkness started playing hide-and-seek. Up and down the stairs, in and out of cupboards, under the dining-room table, behind the couches, we

pulled mats over our heads, dragged rugs from the camphor chest and froze under them to emerge roaring and screaming.

Out in the kitchen, lost in the art of boiling the nourishment from a pile of Ah Sam's vegetables, Laura grew nervous. She appeared at the swing doors that led from her domain down a passage into the front hall: "Cut it out, yous kids," she murmured and then retreated.

Now Reg was performing an act of daring. He was going one better than Mary's miss-three-miss-four-miss-five-stair leaps or my bottom-searing slides down the banisters. He was inching himself along the jarrah ledge that ran level to the top of the stairway but that, as it continued along and formed a right-angle, stood at a dizzy height from the stairs beneath. This death-defying act brought sudden silence, then, at the moment his hand gained the safety of the far banister pandemonium broke out as, with a graceful gesture, Reg threw down the small pillow he had used to aid his progress. On its descent it struck the pedestal light that stood at the bottom of the stairs. Shrill above our applause there was the sickening sound of broken glass.

Again Laura made an appearance. In a valiant attempt to quell the riot she demanded, hands on hips, "Oo's the ring leader?" We went into shrieks of laughter. But, by now, we were really sober. We fell to devising ways of how to hide the wreckage until Mum and Nurse had had dinner by which time we reckoned they'd be less likely

to rage.

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When Dad came down every summer he brought with him not only the smelly rolls of crocodile and snake and wallaby skins and the bundles of mineral specimens and the sulpha-crested cockatoo or the pink and grey galah for Mary but also a pile of film that he developed himself with assistance from Reg. When a negative finally emerged from the various shallow trays of liquid set up in the Breakfast room it was placed down into a glassed and wooden frame on the development paper and left out in the sun until it produced a positive of varying shades of intensity.

This operation usually took place on a Sunday morning so that the results could be shown to Uncle Jack and company when they came in after Mass. We went to Mass with Dad sometimes at seven o'clock before breakfast but usually at nine. The relatives went to ten or to High Mass at eleven. Auntie Bird always brought us bars of half rod-shaped chocolate with a band around their middle like a cigar. There were cigars on the desk in wooden boxes with a little oval scene of "pure Havanah" painted on them, but Dad smoked only one cigarette after dinner otherwise no one smoked at all in the Smoke room - except Professor Murdoch who smoked a pipe when he came to see Mother and Dad to discuss Mary's Little Poems of Sunshine

and how to set her free for her career.

The year Dad took Professor Elkin around the north was a vintage year for photographs, particularly of Aboriginal rock paintings. Dad knew where a lot of good ones were in rough country back of the Keep River and he wanted to ask Professor Elkin if he thought there might be a connection between South America and Australia because of the former's plumed serpents and our big snakes and Wandjinas. "Dad loves theorising," Mother used to say.

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Weeks before Dad came home everything would start building up to that day. Then, after that, everything built up to Christmas - our Christmas. Christmas was, largely, for us kids. Then the day after Christmas, on Boxing Day, adult life took over completely and, in a great cavalcade the grown-ups all set off for the Races.

The dressing up on the part of Mother and Auntie Bird and Auntie Eva and our cousins Lorna and Sheila who rushed in at the last minute to pick up Lady's tickets - in flowing white dresses and wide-brimmed hats - was intense.

On Boxing Day an early cold lunch was served. Mother, all ready underneath, wore her kimono to this meal and left the final donning of her dress and hat till later. ("Come on Pat", said Auntie Eva in an aside heard only by him and me. "Let's get going. We don't want to wait around another hour while Bess titivates.") Then just as

everyone in the hall below was waiting and wondering why she was taking so long Mother made a theatrical entry down the stairs pulling on her gloves as she descended. On reaching the last two stairs she'd pause and looking at Dad say, "Will I do?" Knowing quite well, of course, that she was looking wonderful.

After they had all gone the house became very, very quiet and we all dispersed into various corners to read our Christmas presents. In the distance I could hear Laura slamming the door of the dresser as she came, at last, to the end of an enormous washing-up.

Then about 4.30 when we knew the first cars would be returning from the Race Course we positioned ourselves up on the front balcony with pencil and paper. Whenever a car passed we made a stroke. There were long pauses in between when no cars passed at all then these pauses would be followed by the excitement of two or three coming almost together. This was the busiest time of the whole year along Adelaide terrace - Boxing Day and New Year's Day and the Race meetings at Ascot. Later on in January Dad often went over to Sydney and onto Canberra which was then just starting up.

"If I didn't go over I really believe that the Eastern States would forget that such a place as the Kimberlies existed at all." Mother sometimes went with Dad on these trips and sometimes in January, too, we went on long motor runs down to the South-west. This was how we came to know the Bellanger family at Nornalup in the cold forest

country beside the Southern Ocean where Pierre Bellanger had staked out the place for his château and where his son George took us rowing up the cold dark rivers where boronia bushes hung into the cold dark water.

We enjoyed these trips but, of course, it was not the real bush - of Dad's panoramas, of Uncle Jack's extraordinary youth and of Bett-Bett's wonderful lonely palace ...

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When Auntie Bird 'phoned Mother, as she did every day, she said - "The holidays are nearly over Bess, and I've seen almost nothing of the girls..."

We loved Auntie Bird but the prospect of a whole day out of the few remaining days of the precious holidays when we had so much to do at home ... But off we went - up the Terrace past Government House, past Alexander Forrest, over Barrack Street to the corner of Howard Street to Palace Court - into the filigreed iron lift and up to the third floor.

"Miss Durack" read the card outside the door, and "Mr J.W.Durack Esq."

We took off our hats in Auntie Bird's bedroom. It had a dressing table with a long centre mirror and drawers down either side. Over the chest of drawers hung a large print of Raphael's *Madonna*. Dangling from the lamp-shade beside the bed was a

pair of baby's booties.

"Whose are these, Auntie?" "They belonged to your cousin Paddy, your Uncle Dermot's little boy."

Oh yes, I remember Auntie Di. I particularly remembered her because of her comment on the picture of roses on the chocolate box. "Isn't it beautiful!" said Mary. "No," said Auntie Di. "It's hideous!" I looked at her to see if she was joking but she was quite serious. So beautiful can be ugly - it is in the eye of the beholder. (and vice versa Auntie Di?)

Auntie Di was a Wentworth. She was very proud of this. We thought her stuck up and snobbish and she thought we were all bush bumpkins - in the end the marriage broke up.

This made Mother sad. She had become very fond of Uncle Dermot during the time she and Dad stayed with him in India during their honeymoon. She said we should do a "Kookaburra and Kangaroo" for Uncle Dermot and send it to him in Ireland to cheer him up. We did this - a whole magazine especially for him as well as the one we had to do for Dad to catch the boat. We were really ever so busy and Uncle Dermot never acknowledged it though he showed it to us again when we went to see him in Dublin in 1936.

Before we went upstairs with Auntie Bird for lunch at Palace Court she put on a big brimmed hat, powdered her cheeks where tiny mauve veins showed through the surface of the skin, and sprinkled Potter and Moore Lavender water on her

handkerchief. We held out our hands for some too. Then she gave us a tiny glass of sherry each - "It'll give you an appetite," she said, pouring a larger one for herself. It burned all the way down our throats.

The dining room was bright, glary really, with the sun streaming through the big windows and the tables set with stiff linen cloths and big napkins so crisply starched they slipped off our knees. Emily brought us the menu. We had soup, then fish fried in breadcrumbs with a slice of lemon and then chicken fricassee. For "after" we had Pêche Melba and ice-cream. All very nice but we were thinking we would just as soon have been having one of Laura's thick tomato sandwiches down the cellar and getting on with our mural which was our on-going project. When we went back to the flat, Auntie Bird took off her hat and shoes and lay down on her bed to have what she called "forty winks." And we stretched out on our stomachs in the lounge room and read from a pile of National Geographics. The time went very slowly.

Exhausting things to look at in the lounge room I wandered into Uncle Jack's. It was cool and dim and smelled of Bay Rum. There were two shirts in their Good Shepherd Laundry wrappers on the bed - not a sign of a blood- stain on either ...

On the walls hung three small etchings of St. Peter's Basilica, Trinity College and Windsor Castle. Near them two funny drawings of a golfer missing a putt. Beside the bed there was also a

book on golf - "The Form of Bobby Jones". On the low-boy stood a photo of Auntie Marie's four children - Ken, Doug, Lorna and John - when they were small. A tightly packed bookcase took up the whole of the other wall. Thinking it would be a book about Our Lord I pulled out "The Martyrdom of Man" and turned to the last page. I quickly saw it was not really a book about Jesus ("*at the name of Jesus every knee should bend*") at all. "Christianity," Winwood Reade was saying, is "a sweet and charming illusion ...". Well, now, here is something completely new, never mind about Auntie Di and the chocolate box lid - (Auntie Di was a Wentworth - all the good it did for her married life) - This book is about the whole of history - move over Kings and Queens of England! Make room there Christianity! Here's universal history and comparative religion. Somewhere in the thalamic recesses of my dunderhead a tiny door sprung open to reveal a chink of light. After the fashion of Alice in Wonderland I've been following it ever since....

When she got up from having her "forty winks" Auntie Bird brought us some lemonade in bottles that had a glass marble for a stopper and a plate of marvellous little iced cakes in the shape of a pear, an apricot, an apple and a banana. "Uncle Jack will be here very soon," she said. "He has a letter from your father for you to take back with you." The letter would have already been read out over the 'phone to Mother as were all Dad's letters to Mum read first over the 'phone to Uncle Jack and then re-read of a Sunday Morning

when he and Auntie Bird came in after Mass.

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"Can I borrow this book, Uncle", I asked when he arrived. He glanced at it - "Yes, of course you can, but remember that Winwood Reade should be taken with a grain of salt in places," and he gave me one of his Uncle Jack sideways winks.

He was really talking to Mary and not taking much notice of me. "Your grandfather", he was saying, "was never for Connor and Doherty coming in with Durack Brothers and joining up the West Australian and Northern territory properties. In this your Uncle Pat supported him. They believed there was enough if we just concentrated on Argyle and Ivanhoe. Perhaps we should have ..."

Both Uncle Jack and Dad often spoke to Mary like this - sometimes voicing their thoughts, sometimes informing her. They seemed to sense she would, in some way and in the fullness of time, become the family scribe. But could they ever have foreseen how faithfully she would fulfil their trust?

Uncle walked part of the way back home with us, over Barrack Street where he doffed his hat to the statue of Alexander Forrest on the corner. And at last the day was over. Even so we had to 'phone Auntie Bird - A2062 - in the morning to thank her.

We knew Nurse was keen on Uncle Jack in a vague sort of a way and we also knew nothing would ever come of it. All the same from time to time Uncle Jack would get enthusiastic crushes on certain people. When it was reported in the paper that Pavlova was to include Perth in her 1926 Australian tour he read up everything about her and the Russian ballet in general. "She's a famous dancer, Bess, the greatest the world has ever known." He booked seats for us all at His Majesty's and we went along all dressed up. The thing I remember about Pavlova's dancing - the dying swan towards the end when the creature was in the last throes to the right of the stage - was the enormous development of the muscles in her calves and how they ballooned out whenever she went up on her toes - "Points Bet, points!" said Uncle Jack.

Another person on whom Uncle Jack had a crush was Eliza Pore-Houghton. She was an American woman, an inveterate traveller whose restless spirit landed her in Perth, (of all "down under" spots) some time in the mid 1920s. [*ref below]

Eliza Pore-Houghton was tall and angular and wore a trailing brown silk dress and a band low on her forehead and beads swinging this way and that across her flat bosom. She uttered long perfectly composed sentences as though from a prepared script and seemed always good humoured and wise. Her accent was decidedly American but different again from that of Mr Fox, the oil-boring expert who came from Texas. Uncle Jack said that she was

a cultured woman.

After she left Perth she wrote long letters to "Dear J.W." that Uncle read out to us. It was thus that we travelled from Cape to Cairo over the ensuing months - a journey of breath-taking scenic and zoological wonders none of which I can now remember other than the enthusiasm on Uncle Jack's face as it reflected his vicarious delight in her adventures.

Eliza Pore-Houghton was a Donner. She sent Uncle a book about the ill-fated Donner expedition that came to grief in a terrible winter when trying to get to California from Illinois across the Rocky Mountains. The book was illustrated with photos of covered wagons sunk above their axles in snow and of members of the Donner family who had perished on the journey, and one of a little girl who was Eliza Pore-Houghton's mother. She had somehow managed to survive although most of the party perished, while some, it was revealed later, had resorted to cannibalism in their extremity.

[*editorial note: facts a little blurred here. memory overlapping with Uncle Jack's personal reminiscences. Eliza Donner Houghton (1841-1922)].

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Some Saturday mornings we went with Auntie Bird to the Royal Perth Hospital to help her with her Red Cross work. In a basement store room area Auntie put on an apron and, taking various goods from various shelves, made up little parcels of cigarettes, matches, sweets, a pair of socks,

book or a magazine. These were then placed in a basket which we took upstairs and distributed to the Returned Soldiers. Down the long wards and out along the verandahs this was all rather scary particularly when some of the men had no legs and were sitting in wheel-chairs with their trousers folded up and fastened over the stumps with safety-pins or when they lay in their bed pale and coughing. "They were gassed," Auntie whispered.

Some called out to each other across the ward and exchanged jokes and banter. Others sat around silent and gazing into space. They all seemed very old to me and already thin and lined ... Earlier memory of World War 1 is more blurred still. I remember - or imagine I remember - looking down on to lines of white tents spread out over green grass, a bird's eye view. Then there is a close-up - I am looking at a leg around which is bound a strip of khaki flannel cloth - or is it one solid piece? I touch it. Yes, it is one continuing strip wound round and round the calf of the leg. The soldier must have felt my exploring finger. He lifted up his leg and slapped it as though at a fly - a brass band was playing and the din filled me with a terror that I still experience whenever I hear the sound of these instruments in action.

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Uncle Pat was my Godfather. This he announced loudly whenever he called on us - "and how is my dear little God child today? Come and talk to

your Godfather!"

The Royal Show was the highlight of Uncle Pat's year, particularly when one of his mighty-fleeced Behn Ord rams won first prize. He'd bring us to see the creature standing in its pen proud and stolid and swathed in a blue satin ribbon.

To watch the ring events Uncle Jack would whisk us all through the Member's Stand gate dismissing any protest from the attendant with an airy wave of his hand and a cheery - "Member's children! Member's children!"

Uncle Pat commuted between his home in South Perth and Behn Ord in much the same way as Dad did between 263 Adelaide Terrace and the stations - except that Wagin, the adjacent town, lay only 250 miles by rail from Perth whereas Argyle, the head station in the Kimberlies was 2,500 miles from the West Australian capital. I recall going only once to Behn Ord with Uncle Pat although our brothers and boy cousins spent most of their holidays there. It was during one Christmas holiday that I went down there. How I was not with Mary on this excursion I can't remember. Perhaps she was with the J.B. cousins in the South west and Mother told Auntie Bird who told Uncle Pat who told Uncle Jack that I was at a loose end without Mary - inter-family telephone conversations went on continually, taking up half Mother's mornings.

Anyway there I was on the evening train to Wagin

with Uncle Pat who introduced me to everyone that he knew. This included Mr. Moran and a friendly Guard - as his "dear little Godchild."

We reached the dark quiet little town of Wagin about midnight and proceeded to the Palace Hotel which was owned by Connor, Doherty and Durack as was, also, the hotel in Wyndham. The next morning we went on to Behn Ord.

The house on this 22,000 acre sheep property was almost the same as the homestead at Argyle. Uncle Pat had helped to build both places and they both retained the shape and the feel of their Irish prototype, but whereas the living room at Argyle was at the rear of the house at Behn Ord it was in the front and contained a large fire-place. The bed-rooms in both houses were on either side of passage-way, and, also in both places, the kitchen, store and living room for the cook were separate from the house. In a horse-drawn buck-board I went all over the property with Uncle Pat on his tour of inspection and visited Charlie Webb (the manager) and his wife in their little house. But although Uncle Pat went out of his way to entertain me, all the time I was at Behn Ord I felt lonely and homesick. I simply couldn't respond to the country, beautiful and productive as I knew it to be. There were wide sweeping vistas and big panoramas from the top of the low hills that were golden and rolling, and the sheep in the shade under the small neat Jam trees were golden too when the sun caught their fleeces. But these were not the panoramas of Dad's photographs

and this was not my own wonderful lonely palace - Behn Ord only intensified my feeling of being an exile.

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I see Auntie Eva down the time corridor not in any continuity but in a series of tableaux and set vocal pieces.

She was by far the most elegant of our aunts - the best dressed and the most socially aware and ambitious. *"She was a Hughes - one of the Brisbane Hughes"* - she fell in love with Uncle Pat but not with the Kimberlies to where Uncle brought her, full of his own enthusiasm for the country, round about 1901 after they were married.

But the nub of her antipathy to the north was not so much its outlandishness, its heat, wild Blacks, flies and ramshackle characters of no account, as the humiliation she felt at going overdressed to the Wyndham races. "I had these two dresses spread out on the bed at the Hotel - one was a simple cotton with flounces and matching hat and the other was an ensemble I had worn to Eagle Farm that same year. And so I asked Pat which was the right one to wear to the Wyndham Cup. Pat said - Oh, the women all dress up, you'll be right in that one. So off I went in my Eagle Farm ensemble - hat, gloves, matching shoes and parasol. Imagine my humiliation when we arrived at the race course to find all the other women dressed in dowdy dust coats, hats held down

with scarves and any old shoes ..." the story gathered embellishments with each retelling.

Auntie Eva and Uncle Pat didn't come every Sunday but whenever they did they always enlivened things for Mother. She described Auntie Eva as "entertaining" and went into peels of laughter when ever she talked Uncle Pat down or bluffed him into silence while she gave her version of some happening, or when she forecast some "Durack bungle" as she so described any of the less successful family business manoeuvres.

In one un-erasable tableau Auntie Eva sits in the Smoke room wearing a tailored black coat with a silver fox collar. Her straight-brimmed black hat has a black and white check ribbon tied in a big bow in front, her high gloss, high heeled patent leather shoes catch the light as, with knees crossed and pendant leg swinging vigorously, she says: "If you ask me, Freney's is going to be just another bungle. I've always said the Duracks are no business men - I say it again and this will confirm it. Of all the nonsense - getting an American over here to bore for oil! Miguel should have his head read. They'll find oil in Australia but they won't find it by getting in Mr. Fox ... oil will be found when and only when the Americans want to find oil and that won't be this year or the next or the year after that - so you can forget your castle on the Bosphorus, Bess!"

Auntie Bird remained completely silent whenever

Auntie Eva held forth. If the conversation drifted towards the subject of the Kimberlies she would shudder and shut her eyes.

Auntie Eva was ambitious, socially ambitious. I don't think Mother was socially ambitious at all. The Adelaide girl, afraid at 23 of being "left on the shelf", achieved her ambition when she married Dad and there was always a note of pride in her voice whenever she said - "Mrs. Durack from 263 Adelaide Terrace speaking..." when, over the phone, she ordered the groceries from Boan's or Stamos, or spoke to Miss Bonnard at the fitting room in Bon Marché, or to the Perth City Council complaining that the pods from the plane trees down Victoria Avenue were getting in the guttering and demanding that the trees be lopped.

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I suppose she was financially ambitious or, at any rate financially expectant. She was deeply into the cargo cult of Striking Oil and on the afternoon when the telegram came from Mr. Kessel "Expect to find yourself an Oil Queen any day now!" - she was enormously excited. Holding the pink paper slip in her hand she ran from the front door to the Breakfast room where Mrs. Coops was ironing, looking for Nurse or for anyone, then she phoned Auntie Bird - A2062...

But wanting desperately to Strike Oil was very

different from being socially ambitious.

However Auntie Eva was ambitious more for her own than for herself. There was never any doubt in her mind as to the direction of her daughter's education - Sheila was to be accomplished. She just had to go to the Sacred Heart Convent in Rose Bay Sydney to "finish" before "coming out".

Auntie Marie was a different personality entirely. She was gentle, humourous, loquacious, forward-looking for her children but close, too, to the past. She talked to Mary about Grandmother and Grandfather, about her long protracted time with Auntie Bird at the Convent in Goulburn where they had to wear a garment even while bathing alone in the chilly convent bathroom - so dire did the nuns consider the naked human form. She was forever turning the heel of perfectly knitted grey woollen socks with four steel needles. She liked the red tips of the gum leaves in her vases. She called on us late in the evening of the day Lorna's first baby was born - "I couldn't help weeping, Bess, when I saw the little darling, and Lorna said to me - don't be so damn silly, Mum!" and she was laughing and crying at the same time and trembling too. Uncle Jim was in Wyndham where he managed the company's various agencies.

Auntie Eva would dearly have liked to see her sons - our cousins Cecil and Eric - set up independently, successful and prosperous and separate from the firm of Connor, Doherty and Durack and the "no business men" which she continually declared the Durack men to be.

But it wasn't so easy. The times themselves were against free-wheeling excursions. Things were contracting, not expanding. So somehow, almost automatically, our handsome Cousin Cecil gravitated to Behn Ord and the breeding of prize Haddon Rigg sheep. Cousin Eric was to be the one his mother concentrated upon in a daring break-away investment. But "Eulina", a sheep property in the Eastern goldfield's area, could not have been embarked upon at a worse time. A dreadful drought denuded the place of most of its stock and the price of wool plummeted. Eric spent a few years in the district but "Eulina" never became the bonanza of Auntie Eva's hopes and ambitions.

After Sheila made a social splash with her marriage to Reg Summerhayes, eldest son of that second generation of the Perth architectural family, Auntie Eva became ambitious for her son-in-law too.

This was about the time when plans for a new University at Crawley were underway.

An architect's competition was held and the firm of E. Summerhayes and Son submitted a design along with many others from all over Australia. Eventually the Rodney Alsop design was first

choice with the Summerhayes entry coming second. Auntie Eva, loyal and emphatic as ever, hit the roof. The winning design, she declared, was "a scandal." It didn't even look like a University. "It is more like a factory with a hideous lift-tower stuck in the middle," whereas the Summerhayes submission was what a University should be - dignified, traditional and in keeping with St. George's College opposite, the walls and turrets of which were already acquiring a patina of ivy as tradition subscribes.

"The Alsop design is a monstrosity!" continued Auntie Eva after Mass on Sunday. How cross she was! "Don't do that, child! You'll lose my place!" This, to me, in an aside as I fiddled with the red, blue, yellow and purple silk markers that dangled from her black and gold embossed Missal.

It was the 12th Sunday after Pentecost and the Gospel according to St Mark told the story of Our Lord curing the deaf and dumb man. He looked up to heaven and sighed: Ephpheta (that is: Be opened). So Auntie Eva's life was not only her children's advancement. Her thoughts and days had their ecclesiastical seasons as well. She was a pious Catholic but worldly too and she always looked a good deal more like a Duchess in her own right than ever dear old Mother Dominica with her wind-blown habit and her restlessly tapping third finger.

Uncle Pat listened and nodded. He nearly always agreed with Aunt Eva and he particularly agreed

with her over the design chosen for the new University. Not that universities meant a great deal to him one way or another. He was more a man of deeds than words, of forthright expression rather than introspection. No academic accolade could ever mean as much to him as seeing that blue ribbon swathed around the body of one of his enormous rams. What was turning a page of the Book of Kells to Uncle Pat compared to parting with his two hands a deep crinkled fleece - brown on the outer edge and deepening to a rich cream colour as he exposed it, six inches deep, to the eye of the judges. Uncle Pat was not in on the long trek from Thylungra to St. Patrick's College in Goulburn when Dad and Uncle Jack went "a thousand miles to school" in 1879. He was too young so he stayed at home learning from grandfather all the manual skills that the latter had brought with him from Ireland - how to make rammed earth walls, how to thatch a roof - and these Uncle Pat applied to the building of both the Argyle homestead and the house at Behn Ord. He was good with his hands. Dad was a brilliant horseman but I can't remember seeing him handling tools or implements, and although he brought the first motor vehicle into the north from the Philippines in 1912 he preferred to be driven rather than take the wheel himself. Uncle Pat was a good talker but when Auntie Eva was with him he became quite silent. He had a way of spreading out the fingers of both hands then drawing them together, matching thumb with thumb and all the fingers in turn. His little finger was stiff and bent at a right angle. This was known as "the

Durack crooked little finger". Dad had it too and Uncle Jack and Auntie Bird and cousin Ken, Auntie Marie's eldest son and also Cousin Vincent, Auntie Eva's youngest son who we called Jim. None of us had it and now it seems to have bred itself out.

"Come and talk to your old Godfather, my dear little Godchild," and with this Uncle Pat would hug me firmly to the gold watch and chain stretched across his ample waist. Like all the Durack men, he had slender feet and prided himself on them, as they all did, and on their fine shoes. A good rider had small dainty feet with a spring in them - only a man too poor to own a horse sloughed through the mud heavy-footed and thick-booted.

Auntie Bird was so vain about the size of her feet that when they broadened with middle age and the increased burden that they had to carry, she had a toe removed in St. John of God's hospital. That is how she became so friendly with Mother Aidan. She persuaded Mother to call Bill - William Aidan after this nun and the saintly man who had converted the north-west of England in the 7th century.

We read the lives of the Saints during our Retreats. Each year this three-day hiatus brought all normal school to a halt. The direction and meaning of our activities was relocated -

lectures on Life, Death and the Resurrection were held in the Chapel morning and afternoon. We imposed upon ourselves a Vow of Silence. After all this introspection and self-denial there was the post-Retreat breakfast party at the Convent, served to us by the nuns themselves all so happy for our spiritual beatitude. It was really quite intoxicating to have a cup of tea poured for one from a big enamel pot by a smiling Mother Dominica, the more so in consideration of her being a Duchess in her own right - noblesse oblige, if ever.

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Between our beautiful glamorous girl cousins - accomplished Sheila Durack (Summerhayes) and laughing Lorna Davidson (Malloch) - there was a certain amount of friendly rivalry. Their mothers were very different characters although their aspirations for their daughters were identical.

As quite a little girl Lorna, so Uncle Jack told us, expressed herself clearly as to her personal aim and intention in life - "I want," said Lorna, "to be a common, ordinary woman like Mum and have lots of children." This ambition was realised to a T. She married in 1926. Mary and I, together with Doreen O'Hara, were her bridesmaids. David, then nearly six years old, was Page Boy - all decked out in a white satin suit and lace jabot made lovingly by Nurse. We were all thrilled and the preparation went on for some time - trips to the Bon Marché fitting room on at least three occasions so that Mary's and my identical pink

chiffon and lace dresses were just so. But oh, how annoyed we were when the social page of the West Australian on November 30th referred to us as "...each wee maid carrying a posy of tiny rose - buds." Wee maids be blowed! I was eleven and Mary thirteen - we were proper brides' maids. We could have murdered the Social editress.

Sheila's marriage a year later was a big social event but we were not involved in this. Afterwards Auntie Eva brought a set of photographs to show Mother and see which ones she thought best - or rather, to see if the ones she considered the best and intended to order coincided with the ones Mother picked. One showed Sheila in her short beaded wedding dress and veil low on her forehead standing against a wall head bent and arms extended, eyes downcast...

Mother stuck to the letter of her bond at marriage that any issue therefrom be raised and educated in the Catholic Faith and there was never a word of religious conflict in our old house. Religion did not, in fact, loom large in Mother's list of priorities although she and Nurse would together attend the Christmas and Easter services at St. George's Cathedral.

Only once did Mother ever show any religious bias. This was shortly after Lorna's marriage when the latter was discussing domestic help and asking for Mother's opinion and advice. "There's one thing Lorna," she said, "don't ever engage a Catholic - they are more bother than they are worth - you'll find they are forever running off

to Mass or Communion or some such thing just at the most inconvenient times and leaving you high and dry ..."

Lorna's new house in Nedlands, which new suburb Uncle Jack immediately referred to as 'Wedlands', was rather lonely she said with Frank away all day. Could Mary and Bet come and stay? So we went along that Christmas holiday. Broadway was a sand track most of the way with some wooden boards laid here and there in the places where the sand was heaviest or where it encroached onto the tram line that ran through it to the Nedlands Park Hotel - the same tram we took from the corner of Victoria Avenue and Hay Street to go to the Crawley Baths for swimming lessons from cross old Madam de Mouncey the same tram out of whose window went flying Nell Miles' music case as we lurched and swayed along beside the river. From Broadway all the streets running off in various directions were also grey sand tracks. "I feel like a meat pie", said Lorna.

She was pregnant but we didn't know it yet.

I always felt like meat pies - "I'll go and get some," I said, "from Broadway." So off I walked. It was a blistering hot day. The tiny Mother-forgot-shop which stood about where Broadway Fair shopping centre is situated today, had a dingle-dangle curtain hanging from its doorway. Lollies and cakes stood in big glass jars and a few bars of chocolate were melting on the shelves. The production of the pies themselves (this is before Peter's mechanised marvels) went on somewhere in

the background. They smelt delicious but by the time they eventually emerged the day had got even hotter. I thought I'd never make it all the way back again to Thomas Street. The sand was burning hot and ran into my old sand shoes and the pies melted to a greasy mess in the brown paper bag ... They weren't fit to eat. In any case I'd been so long that by this time Lorna and Mary had had tomato sandwiches and had completely forgotten about lunch. A few weeks later - "At least," said Lorna, "I'll have a baby before Sheila!"

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It was revealed that Sheila was to have twins - more histrionics from Auntie Eva. "It must be on the Summerhayes side - not the Durack - not the Hughes (*"Auntie Eva was a Hughes - one of the Brisbane Hughes"*) - but now, come to think of it, it could be - my Mother's Uncle's brother was a twin - oh dear, oh dear, oh dear - it's all just too much - poor Sheila!"

We went to see Sheila at the big family house in South Perth that we could see from our place, almost directly opposite across the river. That was where the twins were born. We tip-toed into the house with Mother and tippy-toed even more gingerly into the deeply shaded bed room where the new mother was reclining in full care under the attendance of both a Day and a Night Nurse, and as well, of course, Auntie Eva herself and Uncle Pat.

"Not identical twins, Bess, in fact they're quite

different - Eve was born twenty minutes before Geoffrey but we're going to say it was the other way around. Eve has dark hair, Geoffrey hasn't any at all yet, but I'm sure he will be blonde - I can see from his eye-brows."

By this time histrionics lay in the far past. Auntie Eva and Uncle Pat were euphoric, elated - they were grand-parents.

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We went to see Cousin Pettie too (*she was a Rowe - one of the Edgerton-Warburton Rows' - you know - yes, of course -*) when Peter was born in October 1926.

The big house in Chester Street, Subiaco, was, like the big house in South Perth, hushed. One could feel it almost as soon as one walked through the gate. Even the flowers in the beautiful garden seemed hardly daring to lift their spring heads too exuberantly - the tennis court was a still rectangle of green - not the sign of a white line ready for shrieks or laughs at missed balls.

Cousin Pettie, pretty as a picture, was reclining on a couch in the big drawing-room. "It's a miracle, Bess," she said. "A miracle."

She and Cousin Young Jack had waited a number of years for this, their one and only child.

"It's just a miracle, Bess," Pettie repeated and her eyes filled with tears of joy. They rolled, unmopped, down her cheeks, taking a little of the

powder with them as they fell on to the V of bare skin that was gaping a little as her breasts swelled with the in-coming milk.

Her sister, Irene Harewood, (she, of course, was a Rowe too), whose husband had been killed in the War and who lived with Pettie and Jack, came in holding the miracle in the crook of her left arm. With the forefinger of her right hand she held down the bunny-rug so that we could see Peter's face. His eyes were tightly closed, lost under the puffy lids, but as she touched his cheek his little mouth twitched - "See," she said, "he's smiling already." (It is just as well he started early otherwise Senator Peter Durack might not have been able to survive in the Canberra jungle as long as he did.)

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After the great Welcome Home Concert for Dad which was entirely under the management of "Kookaburra and Kangaroo" and which was exclusively a children's evening Mother held a big party for Dad to which all the relatives were invited. Uncle Jack and Auntie Bird, Uncle Pat and Auntie Eva, Sheila, Cecil, (if not at Behn Ord), and Eric, (if not at "Eulina"), Auntie Marie, Uncle Jim, Ken, Lorna, Douglas - I don't think John came, or if he did he cleared out with Reg somewhere - Cousin Young Jack, and Pettie, Irene Harewood, Cousin Jerry Brice and Cousin Agnes - not Madeline, Gerald, Nancy or Noel -

they were our ages and this was all grown-ups - Cousin M.J. and Bertha, perhaps but not always, but if so, the Levinsons too because Bertha was a Levinson. Cousin Mantinae Pat was a 'perhaps' too as also was Sir John Kirwin who, for some reason that I never discovered, Uncle Jack continually felt sorry for. Uncle Jack's special friend Father McMahan may have come but he was mainly a daytime visitor. One year Uncle Jack brought Tom Minogue - I am not sure why or how he was related and it's too late now to find out. Another year Lord Luke was also in tow with Uncle Jack - he wasn't related at all except in worry why our northern properties (the Connor, Doherty and Durack leases adjoined Bovril Estates) were so slow at proving to be the bonanza hoped for when taken up 40 odd years earlier.

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Mary and I didn't attend these parties though gradually we blended into them in a minor way, but when we were smaller we watched the arrival of the glittering adult assemblage through the upstairs banisters.

All the lights were on everywhere, and everyone was dressed up in evening clothes. The women came swathed in beautiful shawls heavily embroidered and deeply fringed. All the men in dark suits.

"You've lost weight, Michael", said Aunty Bird, "You're much too thin, isn't he, Bess?"

"We'll soon see to that," said Mother - sparkling in a short black sleeveless dress, very low at the back and covered all over with sequins. "We'll soon see to that!" Every evening for pudding, what ever else we had, Dad always had a little baked custard just for himself set before him in a little dish with an expandable paper ruffle around its neck.

Mother carved and served in Perth. Dad carved and served in the north. Nurse sat on Mother's left and served the vegetables. Mary sat on Mother's right. Then me, then Kim, Reg on Dad's right then Bill. For a long time David seemed to sit in a high-chair between Mother and Nurse then, over the years he was wedged in, by 1929 there was room for him because Reg had gone north.

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Dad always looked stunning, whether he was in his bush rig - safari jacket and pith helmet, which he arrived back in from the north and that he was wearing when we went down to meet him as the boat tied up along side the wharf - or whether he was dressed in city clothes. Then he looked like Giuseppe Verdi - there was a photo of this man in "The Complete Opera Book" that Uncle Jack gave us one Christmas. When Dad walked down St George's Terrace people turned round to look at him. I watched them - bursting with pride myself to be walking beside him.

One morning I was up very early looking at the

pansies that Mother had planted along the edge of the front garden on the C.B.C. college side. Mother loved pansies; they were among her favourite flowers. She said they were for thoughts. By 'thoughts', of course, Mother did not mean: is there a God or is there not a God; and if not should we invent one? Thoughts like that were simply boring to her and could lead to argument. There were to be "no arguments at the table." By thoughts Mother meant thinking about people and loved ones - her own Father whom she loved dearly, Auntie Kate who saved her life when she was a little girl, Uncle Dermot's broken marriage - thoughts like that.

The pansies had a little hinge to their necks just below the calyx. If one got up early enough one could witness the very moment that this hinge moved and the pansies lifted up their faces to the in-coming light.

It was at this moment that Dad walked in through the front gate. He was fully dressed, hat, stick, the lot. It was hardly light. "You're up early, Bet," he said. "But so are you Dad." "I'm not up, dear. I haven't been to bed. The House sat all night." What an extraordinary thing for a house to do! In one of my sudden flashes I saw a house on the WC straining all night as once I had after gorging myself on a sack of almonds that Uncle Pat brought us from Wagin. Nurse dosed me with Syrup of Figs and threatened more dire remedies ... I ran to tell Mum about the house that sat all night. She was at the front door in her

dressing gown and all solicitude for Dad. She brushed me aside - "Parliament House, dear, Parliament House ..."

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Irene played the piano and Pettie sang. Tom Minogue sang bracket of songs with Irene accompanying again. They went into a little huddle testing keys and range before they took off together. Sheila played a monologue. I think that was what it was called - speaking, not singing, to a piano background.

First Sheila played a few rippling chords up and down the length of the keys, then, very gradually, her voice came in rising in volume as the full meaning and pathos of the spoken theme emerged. It was a story of love, unrequited love, and death, symbolised by the colour of various butterflies -

"Butterflies" was the name of the piece - first golden butterflies shimmering in the golden sunshine, then dark butterflies a-flutter among the shadows and then, hovering above a lonely grave and after many a pause and many a rippling chord, a flight of butterflies -"all white." By this time I was nearly in tears although I noticed that laughing Lorna caught Mary's eye and winked just as everyone else was applauding.

Fresh lemon juice stood in a jug beside a number of the best crystal tumblers, but, as far as I can remember no other drinks were served, but as they all arrived Dad took the men into the dining

room and they had a couple of whiskies together there while the women fluttered into the Drawing-room and then the two sexes came together when the entertainment started.

Sharp at 10.30 Nurse appeared on the scene for the first time carefully wheeling a big tray-mobile. She then helped Mother with the supper that had all been prepared earlier. Mother made coffee with milk - boiling them together and to this she added "a pinch of salt to bring out the flavour." The food served at this supper was similar to that served at her afternoon teas that followed the exertions of her Kruchen Club.

Several varieties of sandwiches, little 'Sao' biscuits spread with grated cheese and topped with half a stuffed olive, buttered scones and buttered nut loaf, several varieties of cakes including simple sponges topped with cream and strawberries and a very rich chocolate cake thick with walnuts and a dark chocolate ooze in the middle (my mouth waters even to recall it), a silver dish of very little cream puffs - "I really shouldn't" - neither should they - there were never any of these left over.

The gradual demolition of this small feast went on for about an hour. Then Nurse withdrew taking the ruins with her. The party gently folded up about midnight.

Everyone was nice to Nurse and she had put on her best dress but there was a subtle difference between the Nurse of that evening helping Mother

with the supper and the Nurse of a few days previously. When Dad came home Nurse moved from the front to the back seat. I think she loved the day Dad left for the north again and she had Mother all to herself - to influence. I doubt, had Dad been home, she would ever have got away with killing our guinea pigs because Mother would have turned to Dad and Dad would probably have said in the sort of off-hand but not unpleasant way he had of talking when something else was on his mind - "Well, Bim dear, if you ask me I can imagine worse threats to the children than their pet guinea pigs."

It would only have needed a comment such as this and that dire and terrible action would have been averted.

Everyone loved having Mother to themselves - I doubt if Reg ever got over the rest of us. And I always wanted Mother to myself - that was why I had to kill Kim ... Everyone liked to have Mother to themselves. She was someone every one liked to be with. She stayed that way for 96 years.

Christmas was the next big excitement - after our Concert, after Mother's soirée - and this again was a feast day almost exclusively for us kids. We tied pillowslips, not socks, to the bottom of our beds and went to bed early so the morning would come quick. And in the morning - he'd come! He'd come! Father Christmas had come and filled all our pillowslips to the brim. "Chums" for Reg, "Tiger Tim's Annual", Ida Rentoul and May Gibbs ... oh the magic of Christmas morning, the smell

of new books, the shrill of toy whistles from the nursery! Boxing Day and New Year's Day were for the grown-ups. And so a whole New Year started up again. We went to bed but Mother and Dad always saw the New Year in together.

"Well, once again, Happy New Year, Miguel darling."

"Happy New Year, my dear girl. And I wonder what 1929 will bring forth? I think I'd like Reg to come north with me this year - just to see what the boy makes of it - if he doesn't take to the life he can always come back and resume his studies ..."

Reg was Dux of the College again that year and he'd also coxed the C.B.C. rowing team to victory at the Head of the River. As well, because he was light and agile, he was right on top of the Human Pyramid that climaxed the annual College concert. White as a sheet, with folded arms and in the long white trousers that Kim borrowed for the Modern Boy in "Changing Times", he stood there quivering while the vast support system beneath him did likewise. My heart was in my mouth, with fear, with wonder, with admiration.

The curtain came down.

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