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Tales that Grandma Told



Short Stories

by

Ruth Crow

1993

Tales That Grandma Told
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These stories have been written by Ruth Crow for her grand-son Robert and grand-daughters, Margaret, Kylie, Lindy and Julie, and for her great-grand-daughters Simone, Maxine, Corina and Ellen.

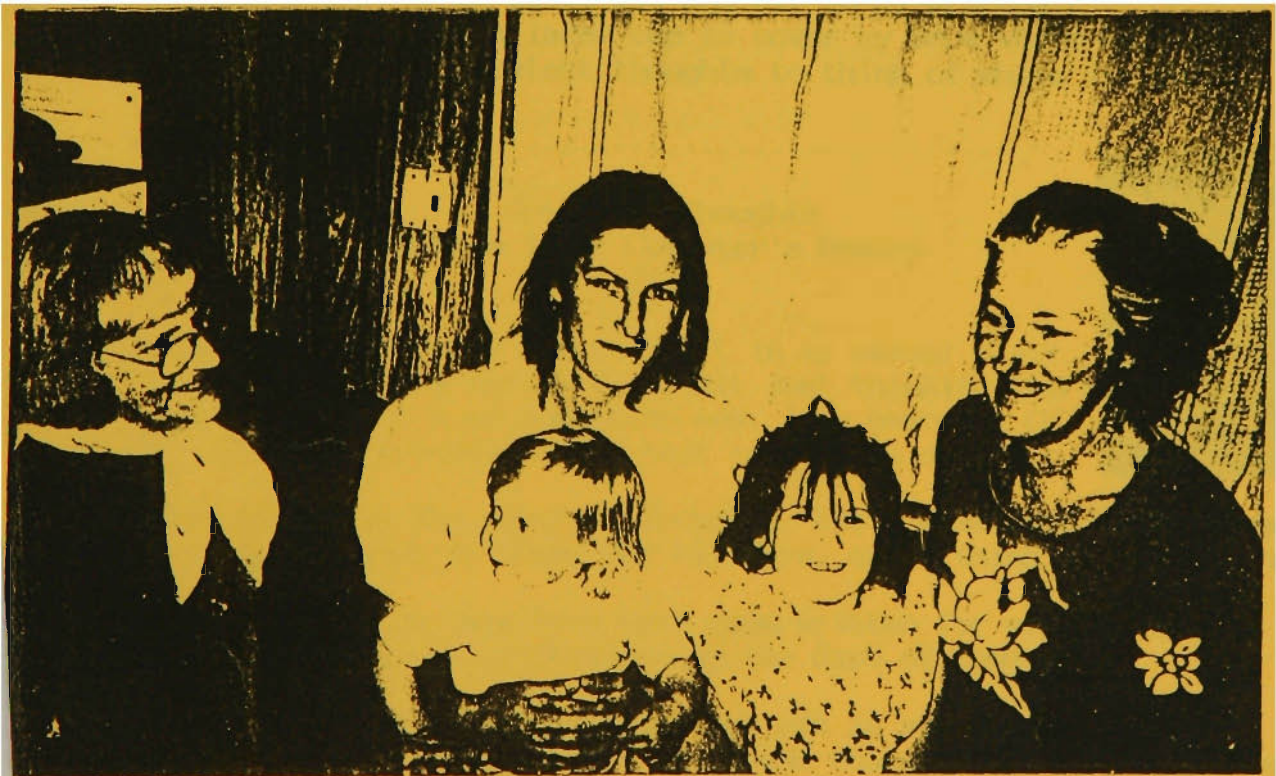


Photo of four generations. Left to right, Ruth, grand-daughter Margaret and daughter June. The two children are great-grand-daughters Simone and Maxine. Photo taken on Simone's sixth birthday 1980.

Introduction

Tales that Grandma Told
by
Grandma Ruthie

Please persevere with reading these stories. At first glance they may seem sickly nostalgic and the introductory poems may strengthen this impression, but please read on.

Grandma's Thoughts
A Poem I Learnt at Mother's Knee
1923

My grandmama is very old, she sits in her armchair,
She wears a shawl and a lacey cap to cover her snow white hair.
She knits a little now and then or sits just thinking there.

I think it must be very dull to spend one's day time so,
But when I mention it to her, my grandmama says "No !
"I think of all the pleasant things that happened long ago,

"Remember you are making now, your memories" she said,
"So make some very pleasant ones to store up in your head.
Or some day you'll be sighing and regretting them instead."

So, when I grow to be quite old and sit in my arm chair
And wear a shawl and a lacey cap to cover my snow white hair
I mean to have the sweetest thoughts to think of while I'm there.

.....

Grandma's Thoughts
A Poem in My Computer's Memory
1993

Today my hair is snowy white, I sit in my swivel chair,
I type a little now and then, or sit just thinking there
My word processor's my companion now, it's memory's OK
Its' very user-friendly and I talk to it each day



Sometimes I have the sweetest thoughts, but I must type what's true,
There was anguish in those far off days, and I think of those things
too.

All the stories in this book have been written for you to know
About the real lives of children in the days of long ago.

So, when you grow to be quite old and sit in your chosen chair
Remember there's anguish and sweetness too and the future will hold
less fear.



Tales That Grandma Told

for

Her Grown-up Grandchildren

These tales are about childhood,
but they are not tales for children.

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Fancy Freed

Jack and I called our family sayings "ghost words" because they conjured up the ghosts of those who first used them.

Family sayings are not a secret language, but a language mainly used in the secrecy of the home. Every day words are used and they are strung together in common-place phrases. To a certain extent the blandness of the phrase and the accurate copying of an inflection are the central features of family sayings. At least that was true of our ghost language.

You will have to imagine the tone of voice used in these few examples :-
 "Thanks, Mrs Wilson !"..... "How yer now ?"..... "We got uster him".....
 "Just bung a hole in it !"..... "One, Two Three ! Every one look at me !".....
 "Its only Mabel !"..... "Rain forest country"..... "Broken tree"..... "The big, high dark"..... "The Hurly Burly Brute"..... "Whacko the Diddle oh !"....
 "Fie Fie"..... "Boo Boo"..... and many, many more

Stated like that they are pretty senseless, aren't they ? Perhaps a bit more explanation may help you to appreciate how some ghost words defused potentially tense domestic situations.

Mrs Wilson was a neighbour who thoroughly irritated us by her constant use of platitudes; so imitating Mrs Wilson's voice, "Thanks, Mrs Wilson" was our way of saying to each other "Shut Up, you bore !"

"How yer now ?" was the constant refrain of the landlady in the Fitzroy apartment terrace house where Jack was living before we were married. Every time we tried to sneak up or down the stairs she would appear as if by magic and searchingly ask "How yer now ?". Not only that, she would knock on the door at the most inconvenient times repeating the same query. So in our family language her phrase warned "Don't be a sticky beak !" "Can't yer leave me alone !"

We first heard the phrase "We got uster him" when a young mother explained to us "It's funny how you get uster people. We did not like Ken (the baby) when we first saw him, but we got uster him". So to us the phrase meant it was worthwhile trying to persevere in some relationship or other. In other words, don't "wipe off" a person too quickly there is always the possibility of "getting uster them". For goodness sake be a bit more tolerant !

We learnt "Just bung a hole in it" from a bush carpenter/plumber. It meant it's not worth all the fuss you are making. Get on with it !

"Sonly Mabel !" was a phrase we learnt from one of Alan Marshall's stories. He described the hustle and bustle when there was an unexpected knock on the door and the sigh of relief when the visitor turns out to be "only Mabel !" We used this term to say that the guest was very welcome indeed and part of the family.

"Sonly Me !" we borrowed from the way children introduce themselves on the telephone. Jack and I used it as our common phone signature.

"One, two, three ! Everyone look at me" were the words of a precocious three year old and thus meant "Stop showing off will you, please, please, please !"

Looking back I now realise that, as fond grandparents, Jack and I used ghost words to indulge ourselves in "baby talk", or perhaps I should say in "young child talk" (kid-speak). A few examples will explain what I mean.

A quarter of a century ago I was driving my six year old grandchild through Toorak when he called out; "Stop ! Stop ! This is rain forest country !" So from then on "rain forest country" meant the suburbs where the posh people live.

"The broken trees" was the way a very young child described Christmas trees" and another child described night-time as "the big high dark". We enjoyed using these accurate descriptions but soon found that the grandchildren quickly outgrew them, treating us as being slightly peculiar when we tried to relate to them through their own "kidspeak".

I'll not bore you by more examples. Anyhow, for the last few years I have been living on my own and I have few opportunities to use our ghost language. Now it is like a dead language. Well, that is not quite true. I still use one ghost word, and I use it frequently, and I really enjoy using it, in fact, I LOVE using it. Especially when I am chatting with my neighbours. So some information on the origin of this relic of a ghost language will not go amiss.

Long, long ago, when young people hiked through the Dandenongs, Jack and I caught the train to the Gully. We walked up and up, and away and away, right into the clouds. When the clouds lifted we found ourselves at a cross roads, unsure of which way to go.

But, as luck would have it we saw a cottage nearby. So we knocked on the front door. No answer. We knocked a second time and listened carefully. We heard a conversation going on inside. We knocked again, more hopefully, but still no answer, but the conversation became louder and we could distinguish two women's voices. One was low and monotonous, the other, would interrupt every now and again with a high pitched screech. It seemed to be repeating a word that sounded like "Nancy" or "Fancy" or maybe "Clancy". We strained our ears. The gossiping continued

The muffled conversation sounded like this :-

Da, de, da, de. da, da. FANCY !
Da da de. Fancy !
Da, de, da, de, da, daa de da, FANCY ! Fancy Fancy !

Perhaps they could not hear our knocking because they were so absorbed in their conversation. So, we decided to venture around to the back of the house. We were greeted by :-

Cocky wants a biscuit. FANCY !
Scratch Cocky. Fancy !
Cocky wants a drink, poor cocky .FANCY ! Fancy ! Fancy !

So "fancy" became the very first "ghost word" for Jack and me. Years later however, our teenage daughters banned us from using it :-

"Look mum ! Its me speaking. Its ME !. The answer is not `Fancy !' Its important. Just listen to ME, YOUR daughter ! Don't use that word again !"

And from another daughter ...

"Dad, I want to tell you something but before I begin promise you won't say `Fancy' !"

But, now, hurrah ! Hurrah ! I am living in my own "independent living unit". Its a bit like the life style of the merry miller on the River Dee "I care for nobody, no not I and nobody cares for me" and this means that just fancy I can now use "FANCY !" whenever and however I fancy to do so.

And fancy the fancies that "FANCY!" helps me to fancy !



"Let Me Tell You Something"

1.

I've been feeling quite nostalgic lately. It started when I began to tidy up the shed and found a box of old documents from the 1950s when I was teaching at a school which, for the purpose of anonymity, I shall call the "Best School of All".

Amongst the time-tables, model exercise books and school photos I came across my diary. It was more than a diary, as, between its pages, it was stuffed with pages and pages of scribbled descriptions of how I felt about my early days as a budding teacher.

My first teaching practice was at the "Best School of All" and as I thumbed through the old papers I felt once again a heavy stone in my stomach, reminding me of how daunted I felt after my first day there. It began with the school assembly. I can see now the three sided quadrangle filled with hundreds of uniformed girls, the teachers standing, arms akimbo, like custodians around the edge, the prefects with their special badges standing in a very straight line at the back. I can even see every wrinkle on the face of the vice-principal as she addressed the girls from the podium which was painted in the school colours.

I now remember how upset I was when I got home. My scribbling shows that I wanted to just pour out words as an antidote to the depression which overcame me. I was shocked to the core ! In such a school how could I practise the teaching principles I was learning in College ? Today we would use the word "unreal" to describe that traumatic day.

Here are some extracts from my scribbled notes about my first school assembly :-

"There will be a uniform inspection at tomorrow's assembly. Girls without hats and gloves and who have long tunics will not be going to the school sports on Wednesday.

"Tunics must be one inch above the knee when kneeling. The Form Captains are to bring a tape measure to help the Form Teachers to measure the length. There is to be no pulling up the tunics by tightening the belt, and there is to be no tucking of the shoulder straps. The tunics must be shortened by fixing the hem. Is that clear ?

"Girls in the sports teams are to bring their sports uniform for inspection tomorrow.....sports tunic, white socks, white sandshoes, CLEAN white sandshoes, white blouse, well-IRONED white blouse... all of these must have a name tag. You will take the sports uniform to Miss Standby in the library before school assembly. At lunch time the House Captains will help Miss Standby with this inspection.

"Another thing, no girl will go to the sports if her hair is not tidy. Bobbed hair should be no longer than half an inch below the ear. All other hair must be tied back with navy blue ribbons, and NO earrings or other jewellery may be worn. You may wear a watch.

Now girls step closer. This is the first Monday in the month. The day we have our special talk. Marion, please turn off the microphone. Come closer still please, girls. Good !

"That girl, fall out !. No ! not you ! THAT girl over there ! Yes, You !. See me in the staff room immediately after assembly.

"Now are we ready for our special little talk ? Em, Aw !

"You know what I am going to talk about, I don't need to tell you. It happens to all women and girls. To the Queen and the young Princesses too. But we don't talk about it, do we ? It is a very private matter. But we must be clean. You know what to do. There is no need for me to tell you. Mm... aw ! But if you need to know come and see me after school in room 22. Now you know what I'm talking about and why we have turned off the microphone. It's very private isn't it ? Just between ourselves.

"Another thing we have to tell you. On Wednesday, when we are all going to the school sports you must GO before you go. I don't want to have to remind you about this before we get on the bus. When you are at the sports only the competitors will be allowed to leave the grandstand. I don't want any of you to ask to Go when we are there. But if you really do have to go, then you must see me or Miss Row and we will go too. Is that clear ?

"Now for a very serious matter. Aw, em. I want you to help me find a sick person. She is writing things in private places. We don't like that, do we ? We know she is really sick and we need to know who she is so we can help her. If you see some writing in private places, don't read it ! Come straight to me and I will clean it off. Don't talk about it ! Its not nice ! We want to be nice don't we ? We want to keep our private places clean, don't we ? So please help me find this sick person.

"I am also asking you to help me find out the names of the the boys from the Technical School who are coming to the back fence. The principal at the Technical School, Mr Singleton, wants to know the boys' names. He wants to co-operate with us. You know what co-operation means ? We help each other, don't we, when we co-operate. So, if you know their names come and see me. From now on no girl is to leave by the back gate. We have to stop the boys from coming to the fence. You will help do this, won't you ?

"Now I'll let you in to a secret. Next week the School Inspectors are coming to the school. We want to show them that we are living up to our name the "Best School of All"; so, now is the time to tidy up your books. Rule margins with red ink, cover your exercise books with brown paper. Your form teachers will help you to find some pretty pictures for the covers of your exercise books.

"And we WILL show the inspectors how we really care for our school. Won't we ? Even if we are not on yard duty we will all help pick up papers, won't we ?, Em, aw ! Perhaps some girls who have flower gardens at home could bring some flowers for the classrooms. The inspection is a chance to show how proud we are of the "Best School of All".

"Well I think that is all for this special assembly. Five things :-

- "1. Uniform inspection tomorrow, Tuesday.
- 2. Remember to GO before you go on Wednesday
- 3. Please help us find the "sick person"
- 4. There are to be no boys on the back fence.
- 5. The School Inspectors will be here next week.

"You can turn on the microphone now Marion. Girls re-assemble in your forms ! Have you got the record of the "Best School of All" ready, Marion ? Forward march !"

That is a fairly accurate description of my first assembly, I went to dozens of others. On one occasion we sang "The Queen" and repeated the Declaration and then the Principal gave out the school announcements. She paused and said :-

"Oh, we have forgotten "The Queen" ! Put the record on Marion !"

So we all, teachers, students, prefects, house captains and form captains obediently sang the National Anthem and recited the Declaration without a trace of a smirk.

On another day the marching order was :-

"Girls take your partners, in single file, quick march !"

Again no smirking.

As time went on I felt less and less daunted and began to feel confident enough to look at the students and teachers to see how they reacted in these assemblies. Their inscrutability reminded me of the "The Good Soldier Swiek" who passively accepted the absurdity of army life.

Reading this extract through I now remember another memorable day at the "Best School of All". The day on which the Vice Principal retired. When I arrived at the school the Vice Principal was waiting for me at the sign-on desk. She pulled me to one side and whispered :-

"I like you. Let me tell you something I have never told any other teacher. INSPECTORS ARE NOT ALWAYS RIGHT !"

On this day the School Principal was taking the Assembly when the Vice Principal suddenly walked across to the podium and requested to address the girls. She said :-

"You all know it is my last day at this school I have been teaching here since 1926. You are all going down to the Town Hall to my farewell. Yes, em. Well, aw ! I hope you all have your hats ! Its a school rule. We all wear hats in the street. But let me tell you girls something I have never told any other girls. If ever I had been a principal I WOULD HAVE ABOLISHED HATS ALTOGETHER !"

After the Town Hall ceremony the teachers went back to the school for afternoon tea. The celebration was interrupted when the Vice Principal was called to the door. When she re-entered, she walked to the head of the table, squared her shoulders and put on her most attention commanding face, waited for complete silence and stated :-

"That girl said there were boys on the back fence. So I said to her, "Let me tell you something, THERE HAVE BEEN BOYS ON THE BACK FENCE SINCE 1926, and now it is 1956 and I have retired !"



Nobody Knows

"That gave me a great deal of satisfaction," said the Senior Mistress after she told Maree that she could not go to the school concert.

Then she turned to me and said, "That's three up and two to go." I must have looked a bit blank and so she explained that she was determined to stop the "boy-mad" girls from going to the concert at the Town Hall.

"I'm just not going to take responsibility for those five bold girls, Ameila, Maree, Susan Thompson and that new girl, Sonia. The fifth one is that girl Tucky, Ann Tucky. There will be boys at the concert and they just don't know how to behave. I now have only two more girls to leave behind and I will find some misdemeanour for them, too," she explained.

I had never had much to do with Ameila, Susan, Ann and Sonia but I did know Maree fairly well. She lived in the same direction as I did and she frequently joined me in the walk to school.

I rather resented this intrusion as I treasured my morning walk as a time "to come up for air".... a time when I could shake off my family responsibilities and get my mind ready for the hours in the classroom.

On the way to school Maree would chat about the films she had seen. She admired Tony Curtis and Rock Hudson. She had detailed knowledge about the terrible way Liz Taylor was treated by Richard Burton. She talked for several days about the film "Rock Around the Clock" and on some days she hummed the tunes of the songs that were being popularised by Nat King Cole. I did not take much notice of what she was saying. I acquired a way of "Em-ing" or "Ha-ing" or occasionally saying "Fancy !"

She didn't strike me as being "boy-mad". My main impression of her was that she was a rather lonely teenager. I thought of her as one of the few students who was making a conscious effort to bridge the generation gap.

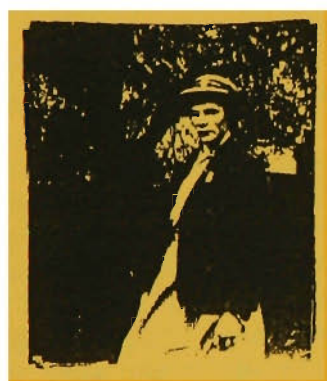
On one of my walks to school I was finding it a bit difficult to put my family worries behind me. I was more than a bit pre-occupied about a quip my teenage daughter had made at breakfast time. "Oh mum !," she said "Can't you be a mother at home and a teacher at school, instead of a teacher at home and a mother at school, I'm just sick of it all." I was also worried about how I would cope with some of the new teaching methods which were being introduced into the school. I was finding it difficult to do the necessary extra study and felt that my inadequacies were beginning to become obvious.

I was a bit put out when Maree joined me so I was not listening to what she was chattering about when the word "boy friend" hit my ear and reminded me that she was regarded by some teachers as being "boy mad". So I begged her pardon and asked her to repeat what she said.

"I was just telling you that I have a boy friend, but nobody knows," she said.

To carry on the conversation I said "What do you mean 'nobody knows' ?".

"Well" said Maree, "I haven't told my girl friend, and I wouldn't tell my sister, and I'm not going to tell my mother and he doesn't know either."



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The Sermon on the Cradle Ship

Once upon a time, a long, long while ago there was a town called Sleepy Hollow where every garden had a row of cabbages and at least one gooseberry bush. But if you go there today there will be no cabbages and no gooseberry bushes.

This year it has been my job to find out why Sleepy Hollow is a cabbage and gooseberry free zone. The only reference books I have been able to find are a book called "The Cradle Ship" which was published in 1928 and another one called "Out of Focus and Other Stories" which was published in 1927. Using those dates (1927/28) I researched the "Sleepy Hollow Courier" files and I came across a most remarkable story about the miracle of natural conception which I am about to share with you.

My research entailed finding out about belief in miracles in those far off days in Sleepy Hollow. I managed to find some octogenarians who had lived in Sleepy Hollow seventy to sixty five years ago. I worked out a questionnaire so that I could accurately research their childhood memories of miracles. 90 % strongly believed that Father Christmas came down a chimney in every home throughout the whole world on the one night. 89.5 % strongly believed in the tooth fairy. 95 % strongly believed that Easter Bunnies brought eggs. But when it came to belief in the miracle of birth there seemed to be considerable confusion. 10 % gave evidence to show that they had believed that babies were heaven-sent and proved this by having actually seen wool in the little hands which showed that they had grabbed the clouds as they floated by. Another proved this by pointing out that navels are God's thumb prints, made when He pushed the baby earthward and said, "You're Done !" They were backed up by another 8 % who claimed that the little babies had red faces when first born because they were sun-burnt on the way down. Some blamed the stork for being careless. However, the majority, 82% believed babies were found either under the cabbages or under gooseberry bushes. When they were children not one of them believed that little babies came from a silken bag in the mother's tummy... this fact is crucial in my research.

To test the sanity of the octogenarians I asked them to describe the greatest miracle they had ever seen in their childhood - that is in the 1920s and early 1930s. This had a most unexpected result. 66 % said that the greatest miracle was for a teacher to keep 65 children deadly quiet for 4 to 5 hours each day. I classified them as being very sane indeed. 7 % (all women) said the greatest miracle was to live on the basic wage. I classified them as quite sane. 2 % I classified as on the borderline, they said that the greatest miracle they had ever witnessed was the way ugly ducklings turned into swans. I had to discard the other 25 % as they gave as examples things like Bradman's batting and Phariap's racing and the Sydney Harbour Bridge.

I then turned my attention to the "Sleepy Hollow Courier" in the late 1920s. Well, during those years there was the Great Timber Strike, the opening of Canberra and the election of a Labour Federal Government (the unexpected defeat of Stanley Bruce), a "Back to Sleepy Hollow Home Coming Celebration". An outsider won the Melbourne Cup, Charlie Chaplin married again, the Duke of York visited Australia and a little Royal Prince was born. But you would not know of these events by reading the files of the

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"Sleepy Hollow Courier": Well, that is NOT quite true = there was a supplement about the Back to Sleepy Hollow Picnic, reporting that the Mayor and his wife had won the three-legged race and that the Prim family won the prize for the "longest family". This was judged by all Prim sons and daughters who were at the picnic, lying head to toe. The 10 Prim sons and 6 Prim daughters measured over a hundred feet and when the grandchildren and great grandchildren (remember they had to be at the picnic to be in the competition) were added, then, the Prim line stretched right across the oval. The "Courier" published ten photos pasted together to prove this.

In the Spring of 1928, the "Sleepy Hollow Courier" carried banner headlines such as :- "Minister is a Monster", "Kick Him Out of the Kirk", "Pulpit Defiled", "Children Corrupted", "Keep Young Innocence", "A Mother Tells - My Daughter Knows All", "Burn the Cradle Ship" "Don't Go to the Kirk", "Replant Your Cabbages", "Parson's Prattie Shocks", "Special Gooseberry Plants Free", "Keep Your Faith in the Stork Story", "Send Him Back in the Cradle Ship", "Keep the Pulpit Pure", "Don't Let Your Daughter Keep Frogs", "The Danger of Bird Watching for Young Boys", and so on and on week after week.

What sparked this great witch hunt ? Who was this monster ?

The Kirk Minister seemed to be the cause of this outrage. Quite clearly my next task was to advertise in the "Age" asking for information about this parson.

There were three surprises in the seven replies I received.

The respondents were all women. The age range was between 74 and 77. Thus in 1928 they would have been aged between ten and fourteen. They had all read the Cradle Ship in the last months of 1928.

I would like to share with you some parts of their letters :-

From Isobel :-

I went to the Kirk twice every Sunday, just to hear him roll his "Rs". He had such a broad Scottish accent. When the "Sleepy Hollow Courier" published his photo I cut it out and put in the frame over my photo of Rupert Brooke.

From Peggy :-

I joined the Girls Order of the Covenant. Before he came to Sleepy Hollow there were no clubs for girls. In the GOC we sang songs like "Don't Bring a Frown to Old Broadway", and "Where-ever You Go" as well as hymns. It was GREAT ! They were the first jazz songs I could sing right through. I still sing them around the house.

From Adele

He upset my mother by stating, in the pulpit, that he was the Minister of the Kirk and that his wife had her own life to lead and he hoped that the congregation would respect this fact.

From Joy :-

He only wore a dog-collar on Sundays and for official functions. He would wave to you when he saw you in the street. This was quite strange as we were all used to formally shaking hands with the parson.

From Winifred :-

He went bush walking with us, that is with the girls who belonged to the Girls Order of the Covenant. There was heath on the hills quite near Sleepy Hollow but until I joined the GOC I had never seen it growing wild. You know, in those days, only a few people had cars. On our GOC picnics we had to catch a bus and then walk and walk until we came to the hills. No-one thought of doing this until the new minister came.

From Betty :-

I loved his children's sermons. He helped me to understand the meaning of some world famous poems. I will give you four examples "Pippa Passes", "The Hound of Heaven", "Invictus" and "Say Not the Struggle Nought Availeth".

And, from Alison :-

He was a BONZA BLOKE.

All the women referred to the fateful sermon in 1928. Here is Alison's description :-

It was Spring Sunday, the church was decked with cherry plum blossom, the organist played the Spring Anthem and the sun shone on the stained glass windows making the whole building sombrely beautiful. The Minister was in a very high pulpit and between him and the rest of us were the choir stalls. He did not use a microphone. However he had a wonderful voice which he knew how to use, so that although all the congregation could hear him, he was not orating. You felt he was just speaking directly to you.

I was all ears to hear his children's sermon. I loved listening to him but I also liked watching my mother's face. I secretly believed that the adults enjoyed the children's sermon more than the one that was meant to be for them.

In the sermon about the Cradle Ship he first told us about how the fishes made their little fishes by laying eggs which were fertilised by the daddy fish, the bees helped the flowers to grow by fertilising them, how both mummy bird and daddy bird were needed to make the egg from which their little fledgelings pecked their way into the world.

Up to that stage mum was smiling. You know the secret, pious smile adults give when they think they know more than children.

I was really absorbed in what he was saying. I knew it was true because I had kept frogs and seen them lay eggs and I knew about hens and chickens. But I liked to hear an adult talk about these things.

I was suddenly distracted from my secret thoughts by a restlessness that seemed to be spreading in the congregation. The children were as good as gold, but the adults were coughing, aheming, scraping their feet and rolling their shoulders. Mum was frowning.

It was very annoying as it made it difficult for me to think about what the minister was saying. He was telling us about how real mummies carried babies in a little silken bag close to their heart and how it grew and grew for nine long months.

No one loitered at the church door that day. We hurried home to our roast lamb and green peas, followed by appie pie and cream.

After dinner dad said, "Oh well, I may as well do it now, the better the day the better the deed !" He walked down the garden and pulled up all the cabbages and he poisoned the gooseberry bushes.

I felt so confused. I did not want to talk to anyone. I climbed up into my hidey place on top of the wash-house, just to be on my own. What did I see. In every yard of Sleepy Hollow there were men pulling up the cabbages and poisoning the gooseberry bushes. I was shocked, it was bad enough my father sneaking out to work in the garden on a Sunday, but everyone, even the Kirk Elders, were breaking the Sabbath !

According to my research the "Sleepy Hollow Courier" tried to get the cabbages and gooseberries replanted, but even though they offered free seeds and free fertilisers it was to no avail. From the Spring of 1928 onwards the good citizens of Sleepy Hollow have relied on natural conception and every Spring Sunday the organist plays the anthem "Doin' What Comes Naturally".

My research also showed that since 1928 the citizens of Sleepy Hollow have lived happily ever after.

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Let's Go and Talk

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I've been dithering around these last few days. In fact I have been quite disturbed. All the time I have four well-known sayings that keep on chasing each other in my mind :- "Empty cans make the most noise"; "I wish to God the Gift to give us to see our selves as others see us"; "Let your head do more work than your tongue" and "Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings".

Even more annoying every now and again I find myself repeating the childhood taunt my brother used to use when I my chattering annoyed him :-

There was an owl lived in an oak
The more he heard the less he spoke
The less he spoke the more he heard
I would my sister was like that bird.

It all began when Isobel came to stay. I'm a pretty good grandma, really. I have one of the grand-kids every weekend. It gives their mum a rest and the kids can have a bit of special attention from me and Pop. As a matter of fact I can get an outing too.

Well last weekend it was Isobel's turn and when we were having breakfast on Saturday I said to her; "Well, let's go into Town and have a look at the South Bank, and we can then go in the tram up to the Museum and perhaps we may have time to go the Daimaru."

I had not been to South Bank so I was disappointed when Isobel said, "But I want to go down the street and talk, like Susie did last time she was here." I remembered that I had taken Susie shopping, but that had not been meant to be a special outing. Kids really are peculiar these days.

I tried to persuade her to come to Town but although she seems quiet and timid she is also a determined little miss. I always pride myself on being democratic on family decisions so I agreed to go down the street.

As luck would have it Percy Smith was on his verandah. I don't usually do more than nod to him but seeing that Isobel wanted "to go down the street and talk" I stopped and said, "Good morning Percy, This is Isobel my granddaughter, Sandra's girl. The dear old fellow then asked Isobel her age. "I'm nine now but I will be ten in September" was her reply. So I then chatted away to him about the other grandchildren and he seemed to be quite interested, but after a while he excused himself saying nature was calling him. So off I went with Isobel.

I saw Mrs Oliver leaving her house and so I slowed down our walk so that she could catch up with us. I introduced Isobel and she asked the kiddie how old she was. I was a bit annoyed with the kid the way she became bashful and mumbled her reply through her hand. We did not have time to talk to Mrs Oliver as she then said she had a train to catch and she sprinted off, running ten steps, waiking ten steps like the scouts do.

We reached the shops and I saw Mary Champion sitting on one of the seats so I sat down next to her, and after saying good morning and so on, I told her that Isobel was my granddaughter, and to bring Isobel into the conversation I said "Tell Mrs Champion how old you are Isobel, and she might like to know about your new baby brother and what you are going to call him."

(2)

Mrs Champion, the dear old thing, has a way with children and for a few minutes Isobel chatted away with her. I wanted to tell Mrs Champion about how successful Trudy and Dick are now they are at High School, so I had really good chat with her until she said she was feeling a bit cold and had better move on.

I gave Isobel a dollar to buy some chips and while she was in the shop I saw Fred and Shirley Somerton walking by so I said "Hi" to them and asked them to wait a while and Isobel would be back and they could see Sandra's daughter. Sandra and Pixie Somerton wear bosom pais all through school so I knew they would wait to see Isobel.

When Isobel came back she was so busy stuffing herself with chips she did not answer when Shirley asked her how old she was so I tried to divert them by telling them about the other grand-kids and we stood there chatting for quite a while. Frances Patches came by and Shirley suddenly lost interest in what I was saying and went over to talk with her.

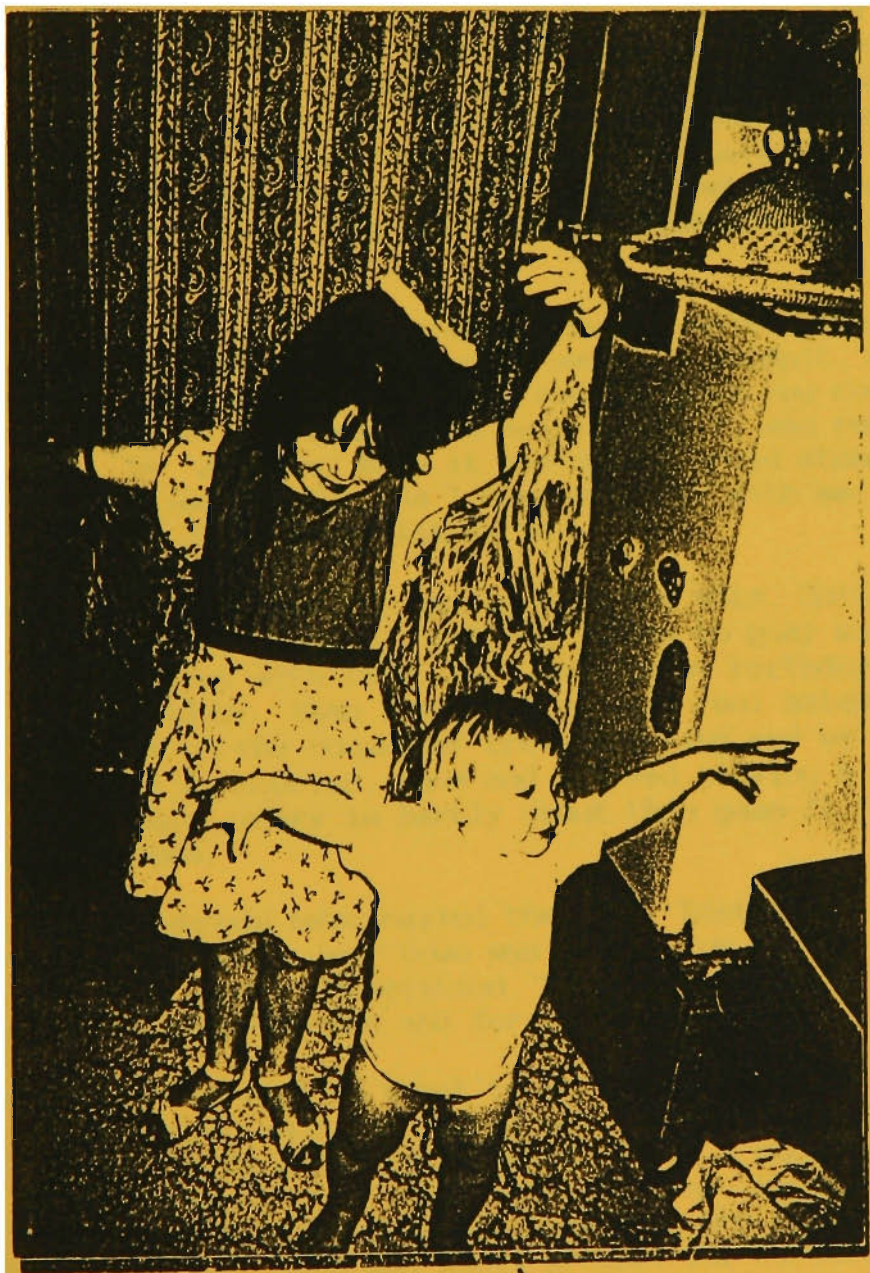
I had done my shopping the day before but thought I'd drop into the fruit shop and have a chat with young Fay who is the cashier there. She used to go to school with my youngest daughter. She is a beaut kid, and before I had time to say "Good Day!" she had spotted Isobel and said "Ah, I know you your Isobel, I bet you are nearly ten now." Isobel smiled very sweetly indeed. "Ow, You've made her day" I said and thanked her very much and began to tell her about the new baby. But there were a lot of people in the shop and she said "Excuse me I'll see you later, I get into if I chat." So off we went.

By this time I was feeling a bit peckish so I said "What about going home now Isobel." She just nodded her head and shrugged her shoulders so that I was not sure what she meant, but I took her hand and we started off for home. As we crossed the road we bumped into Ted who used to be one of Sandra's boy friend. I did not want to speak to him so we hurried on.

When I was having my cup of tea I said to Isobel, "Well, how did you like that ? We did talk to lots of people, didn't we ? You enjoyed that didn't you ?"

Isobel looked down at her feet, she frowned and to fill the silence I said; "Well you wanted to go down the street and talk, and we did what you wanted didn't we ?"

I had to strain to hear what she said. It was something like "I would have enjoyed it better if they had been interested, grandma."



(1)

Playmates

When I was a little kid I really thought there were three kinds of children.; girls and boys and "gurlies". My confusion was caused by the choice of names of the two big girls in the next door family. They were called June and Julie after the months in which they were born.

When I grew older my mother explained that I had invented the word "gurlies" from combining three words, June, Julie and Girlies. My mum called them the "Girlies" but to me, even to this day, they are the "Gurlies"

The Gurlies were not twins but they were the same size and wore much the same clothes. In the summer they wore navy blue cotton dresses to school, crepe de chene dresses to Sunday School and in the weekend they wore home-made trobralco play dresses. June had pink roses on hers and Julie's were blue roses. In the Winter their play dresses were hand-knitted, they wore tunics to school and on Sunday they wore velvet dresses. Julie's was blue and June's was pink. They both had straight bobbed hair and a fringe.

The Gurlies lived in a house called "Nirvana" which had a big rambling garden, a hill you could roll down, a swing, a sandpit, a fish pond, a doll's house a pussy and a dog and on the hot days you could play under the hose. Our backyard was much, much smaller but it was connected to the "Nirvana" garden by a gate. When it was shut I would stand at this gate and call out "Gurlies ! Gurlies ! Come and play with me." I would keep this up until June or Julie would let me in.

I liked it best when June was the one to open the gate. Julie was the same age as my big sister, Gwenie, and they liked to play with dolls, they would not let me play with them. But June was my birthday mate. She was exactly six years older than I was but we were real mates. We'd play in the sandpit and sit on the boughs of trees and sing and we would dress up and June would tell me stories. June and I loved playing a game we called "Easterford". As this story is partly about this game it is necessary to make a few explanations.

I now know that we should have called the game "Eistedfod", but what's in a name for children ? Well, our town was famous for its spring Eisteffod. It was not just a music competition. There were competitions for brass bands, gymnasts, acrobats dancers and for vaudeville items.

It was a much looked forward to treat to go to the Eistedfod and for weeks after this great experience we would act out what we saw on the stage. June and I loved to do acrobats together. I was a puny little thing and she was a rather robust ten year old so she could carry me on her shoulders, and I could balance on her back when she crawled. Most of all we loved imitating the song and dance groups. Our favourite was "Coming through the Rye". We would hide in the bushes, not too far from each other, and then when one of us would start to sing "When a Body Meets a Body" we would both emerge and skip gleefully around together. Sometimes we would dress up, but mostly it didn't matter what we had on.

Lots of kids played in the "Nirvana" garden. My mum had six children and there were five children in the "Nirvana" family. My mum and her neighbour used to say they had 11 children between them. In addition there were quite a few kids living over the road in the flats.

Now before I go any further I want to tell you about the dog called Freckles who lived at "Nirvana", because he was like the twelfth child for the two families to share.

He was a very clever dog and could shake hands, jump over your leg and beg. But he was also very good at playing chasey. He could run so fast none of the children could catch him. He could dodge around the garden beds, speed around the house. Pause to make out he would be easy to catch and then dash down and around the trees at the very back of the garden. He knew the rules and if he cheated by racing across a garden bed we would call "foul" and he would stop and sit until we said "Sgo ! "Let's Go !" We did not have a name for this popular game. We just played it on summer nights.

The boys began to train Freckles to perform as a circus dog and dressed him up in their old school blazer and pants. He just loved showing off. One of his tricks was to be the parson. He would jump onto a chair, peering over the back of it, praying by piously waving one paw and blessing the congregation with up-raised paws. The boys also taught him to count and he appeared to be better at arithmetic than quite a few of the neighbourhood kids. For example with the question "If a bottle and a cork cost ten pence and the bottle cost eight pence more than the cork, how much was the cork and how much was the bottle ?"

One summer day we kids decided to put on a concert in the garden at "Nirvana". The boys main item was to be performed by Freckles. Gwenie and Julie wanted to sing a couple of songs they had learnt at school and June and I wanted to do some of our song and dance routines.

We all worked hard that day, putting out the chairs, decorating the trees with streamers. We had a ready made stage because of the hill and the bushes on each side provided wings and dressing rooms.

We wrote out a few invitations. We had to invite some of the adults, like my mum and dad and the uncle and aunt who were staying at "Nirvana". We didn't really want too many adults, we only wanted the kids as an audience but we had to invite the "Nirvana" mum and dad, and aunt and uncle.

June made some special dancing costumes for our items. She got four crocheted milk jug covers to make brasiers for me and for her. She joined these lacey circles with ribbon and also added ribbon straps for over our shoulders. She made short skirts out of old dresses, and she and I made daisy chain headbands, necklaces and bracelets. For make up we used red geraniums for lip stick and rouge and washing blue bags for eye shadows.

Well, the concert started with the dog's tricks and everyone clapped this item. Then June and I were on next. We started with "Coming Through the Rye". I sang the first line and danced out from the bushes and then June came pirouetting towards me. I was expecting a big clap, but instead of that I heard June's uncle say "Gee, this should be called the elephant and the mosquito."

It was only recently, after more than 60 years, that I realised that after that day June and I never played at "Easterfords" again.



(1)

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The Flower Game

"I'm going to stay with my real daddy in the holidays," said seven year old Penny. He'll take me to the Zoo and the circus. He gave me this watch last time I stayed with him," she skited.

"I've got a real daddy too and he will come and get me one day," said Anne, "Any way I hope he will," she added wistfully.

"What's a real daddy?" queried Veronica

"Well," said Penny thoughtfully, "I think it is when your mum is living with 'uncle', then there is this other man called your real daddy."

"I've only got a father, I wish I had a real daddy like you and I could go to the Zoo and get a watch, too," said Veronica. "Anyhow lets have a game. Mum asked you over, Penny, so that we could give Anne a good holiday while she is here on foster care. Anne is going to be my little sister every second weekend. So what'll we play."

"I know, let's play the flower game. Haven't you played it before? Well just look at all the flowers that are blooming. We pick them and some, the big ones like roses, we call mothers and some others, like petunias are the fathers and then the little ones are the children. We can make little houses for them in the sandpit, or under the trees," Penny explained.

"But I'm not allowed to pick the flowers. I'll get into it if I do," warned Veronica.

"That's stupid, at my place mum let's me pick any I like to, and look at how many flowers there are here. Well, your garden is much neater than ours but what's the good of it. Don't be mean, Anne would like to play the flower game wouldn't you Anne? Come on Veronica don't be a spoii sports."

"O.K. then," Veronica reluctantly agreed "But we mustn't pick too many flowers. Gran is coming over next Sunday and dad has been telling mum how much he wants to show her our garden. Well anyhow let's play the flower game and just take a few flowers from where they won't be missed," said Veronica.

"Well I bags the richest family" said Penny.

"What do you mean?" queried Anne.

"Well you can be another family, you can't be rich because I have bagged that but you can be happy or pretty or clever, or country cousins, or you can bags being the school; but you have to bag something so we know what your family is like," Penny patiently explained.

Then Veronica quickly bagged the prettiest family and after some careful consideration Anne decided on the happiest family.

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"But what about the school ? Aw. I know. we can all run the school and call it a community school. But we will have to get our families together first. I bags the roots under the peppercorn tree for my house." said Penny.

"That's not fair. This is my home and I should have first choice," said Veronica.

"Don't you know. you should let your visitor have first choice ? I would have thought your mum would have told you that," chided Penny.

Poor Veronica felt so shame-faced. Her mother had told her to set a good example to Anne and to help her to learn good manners and now Penny was showing her up. She was ready to agree to whatever Penny wanted. But she did want to have her flower home under the peppercorn tree. So she searched for an amicable solution and suggested "Its a big peppercorn tree. There is room for both families You can have whatever side of it you want and I will have the other. Anne can make her home under the bamboos. The school can be in the sandpit." And then with considerable enthusiasm she said, "Let's get going and if we have time we can build a whole city in the sandpit."

So Penny picked a big dahlia for her mother and the other two picked different coloured roses for the mothers of their flower families. Veronica chose an all girls family. She cautiously picked pink and white miniature roses from the climbers on the back fence, hoping she would not be seen from the house. Penny had girls and boys using nasturtiums for girls and snapdragons for boys while Anne concentrated on having a mixture of ages in her family. She carefully chose different sized foxgloves for the boys and brightly coloured poppies for the girls. The little baby was a blue violet which she placed in a pink rose leaf cradle and covered with a white rose petal on which she fastidiously placed a pattern of blue forget-me-nots.

Veronica and Penny used twigs to drawn rooms of their houses in the dust under the peppercorn tree and Anne designed her house by making caves in the roots of the bamboos. She used bamboo sticks to make a fence around her flower home, and lavender heads for the hedge.

At first each child was absorbed in her own game. Penny was the first to get bored. "It's time we started on our school. So let's all go to the sand pit," she suggested. She ran across to the sandpit and started to sketch out the ground floor of the school. By the time the others joined her she had it all finished.

"Here's the school, that's the hubs' room, that 's the staff room, that's my class-room and here's the shelter shed. Now we'll get the kids.

"We'll use blue flowers for the school kids, because that's the colour I wear to school." Pointing to the Canterbury Bells she said "Those big flowers will be the big girls, you get iots of them Veronica and I'll get the middle sized kids from this pretty blue flower," and she plucked all the delphinium spikes. While she was doing this she instructed Anne to pick the lobelia, saying. "Anne those little blue and white flowers over there are just like school kids in a tunic and blouse, you can pick them for the hubs grades."

So off they all ran and very soon they had a school of some hundreds of pupils and about 20 teachers.

But Penny got bored again, so she stood up to survey the garden. "I'll tell you what I'll get some of those white and pink flowers for our ballet dancers. No sooner said than done and she came back with a skirtful of white and pink carnations which she lined up in rows in another part of the sandpit. "What will I use for the prima ballerina", she asked but without waiting for an answer she plucked the one and only camelia from the new pot plant on the terrace. Having completed the ballet scene to her satisfaction she again stood up to look around and said "My family's going to the theatre, but what will I use for a car?" queried Veronica.

She soon solved this saying "I'm the richest family so my family has a stretch limousine." She pulled at a big lily leaf and raced over to the peppercorn tree to load it up with the nasturtiums and snap dragons and then she vroomed her way across to the sand-pit.

"My pretty family has a pretty green car," said Veronica and she searched the hydrangea bushes for a big leaf.

But before she had time to find one her mother came out into the garden.

"Penny, your mother has just rung to say she wants you home by 5 o'clock. I've got the lemonade on the front verandah, you have just time for a drink before you go. Finish off your game and then come round the front."

Then she saw the flowers in the sandpit. Oh! What have you done! Oh, Veronica! I have told you time and again not to pick the flowers. Oh! Oh dear! What will your father say when he comes home! Oh dear, Oh dear!"

She was so upset she gave Veronica a slap and she told Penny to go straight home without any lemonade.

To the mother's surprise Anne started to cry.

"What're you crying for?" She said crossly. "I didn't slap you or tell you to go home, so why the tears? Penny and Veronica are not crying and I have punished them not you. I'm not cross with you Anne, dear," she said, softening her voice and patting her shoulder, trying to be really nice to the poor little girl from the Home.

"That's just the trouble," said Anne "you never ever punish me, no-one really loves me, I'm never punished like Penny."



30

"Which One Can It Be ?" (1)

Tales That Grandma Told - A Story for Children

This really happened a long time ago when grand-dad Bill was a pupil at Princes Hill School. Bill liked to run and skip, and hop and jump and he practised to be the very best jumper in the whole world.

One day Bill came home from school and he called out; "Mummy ! Mummy ! Come quick there is a boy who can jump better than me. He is on our roof and he has just jumped across to Tom's roof. See, there he is ! He's going to jump back across to our roof. Aw gee mum ! Do you think I can ever do that ?"

"Don't be silly Bill", said his mother. "Of course you won't. That is not a boy, its a monkey. It must have escaped from the Zoo".

While they were watching, the monkey jumped off the roof, swung from the light post, raced like lightning up the trees, grunted and squeaked and threw handfuls of twigs and leaves at Bill and his mother.

Timothy and Margaret were on their way home from school. Tim was striding ahead as he did not like to be seen walking with his sister. Margaret was the first to see the monkey and she ran up to Tim and said, "Look Tim, who is that boy who is throwing things at Mrs Smith and Billy ? We'd better go and stop him."

Then they got closer and found out it was a monkey. They called out to Vera and Bobby who were on the opposite side of the street. Soon the monkey had quite a big audience. He just loved to show off. Playing chasey and escaping by jumping on the the high fence, and playing hide and seek among the leaves on the oak tree, cocking his head, standing on his hind legs, turning somersaults and bouncing up and down.

Some of the children raced off to get cakes, bananas and biscuits. Frank, who lived in the milk bar, brought a chocolate covered ice-cream. The monkey had quite a party. He threw the banana skins up in the air and caught them and then shied them at Bobby. He ate most of the ice-cream and you should have seen the mess he made all over his face !

Bill went inside and brought out a rope and threw it over one of the branches of the tree. The monkey swung on it, upside down, the right way up, holding with both hands and holding with one hand and then slid down it to land right at Margaret's feet. Margaret really thought she could catch him, but he slithered away and sat on the very top of the street light.

Soon the zoo man arrived with a monkey cage in which he put some nuts. But the monkey was not hungry. He took absolutely no notice of his master. He just kept on showing off and the more the children laughed the more agile he seemed to become.

He seemed to be teasing the keeper. He would go quite close to him and then dance around the children and quickly scamper back up the post. The keeper borrowed a ladder and tried to get him down from the post but he made a tremendous leap across to the verandah. The children all sang out "Hurrah, Hurrah Good on yer Monk !"

This made the keeper very angry. "Come on now you kids, give us a go !" he pleaded. "I've got to get the monkey back. If he is not captured he will be in danger from traffic and dogs. So fair go ! Let's sit down and talk about what we can best do together".

So the children and the man had a meeting and they decided that it would be best for the monkey to be returned to the safety of the zoo. The children agreed not to feed the monkey and not to encourage him to show off. The man said "If you buzz off now you can come to the Zoo for free next Saturday. Just ask for Jim Brown and they'll let you in. Well, there are twelve of you here. I will arrange for fifteen free tickets so some of your mums can come too".

So the children went to their own homes and the man and Bili sat quietly on the veranda until it was quite dark. By this time the monkey was hungry and he very wearily slid down the tree trunk and sedately crawled into the cage.

The next Saturday Tim, Vera, Frank, Margaret and Bill and all the other children in the neighbourhood walked across to the Zoo.

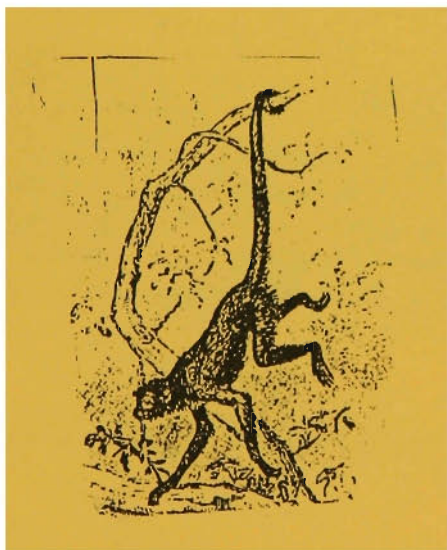
"I bet he will come over to me first", said Bili. "Why should he ?" asked Margaret. "Because I saw him first", was Bill's reply. "But he'll come to me, I gave him the ice-cream, I bet he remembers me", said Frank.

But when they stood in front of the monkey cage there were so many monkeys and they all moved so fast that it was impossible for the children to know which was their pet monkey. They stood in silence for a few minutes, each one trying to recall what was so special about the monkey.

Bill broke the silence when he mused aloud "Which one can it be ?" Then everyone wanted to talk at once, as if to prove they had a some very special knowledge about the monkey.

"That's him for sure, the one with the bushy eyebrows," shouted little Bobbie. "Aw Pooh, they all have bushy eyebrows, it's that one" said Tim. "'snot that one, its the one on the rope, 'member our monkey swung on the rope like that", said Bill. "But there are three of them swinging like that, so which can it be ?" queried Margaret. "Let's see which one likes bananas", suggested Vera, but when she poked a banana through the bars three monkeys competed to grab it.

But they did not want to quarrel and spoil their picnic so they moved on the see the kangaroos.



Tales That Grandma Told

Acknowledgements and Notes

Fancy Freed

All the sayings were part of Maurie's and my life together and we did meet the gossiping cockatoo when we were lost near Sassafras.

"Let Me Tell You Something"

This is factually true and bears out the need to "get uster people", as sometimes it takes time to unearth the heart of gold.

"Nobody Knows"

A true story, in appreciation of how much I have learnt from teenagers.

The Sermon on the Cradle Ship

This is based on a sermon by the Rev. Dr. Clifford Norman Button at St Andrews Kirk in Ballarat. After hearing this sermon my brother, Ken, (then about 15 years of age) came home and said "Uncle Bob (Baird) has pulled up his cabbages and poisoned his gooseberries". So the whimsy in this story is his. By the way "Out of Focus and Other Stories" was a collection of stories by Dr Button. I recently found a copy of the "Cradle Ship" (published 1928) on the bookshelves of a Brownie Cottage holiday home.

"Let's Go and Talk"

It would not be really fair to say which grandchild was on this visit.

Playmates

This is based on happy memories of my birthday mate Peggy Tyler. "Nirvana" (heaven) was the name of Tyler's home, but the home with the garden was the one in which we lived. The word "Gurlies" was coined by a young child who played with my two daughters June and Julie.

The Flower Game

My sisters, Winifred, Betty and I spent many golden summer days playing this game. My friend, Daphne Rankin, who used to be a neighbour in Brunswick, told me about a "foster child" who cried when she punished her own children and not the visiting child.

"Which One Can It be?"

This was partly written by my sister Winifred for her children who really did witness the capturing of a monkey that had escaped from the Ballarat Zoo (now this does not exist).