

# Stories of Ageing

By Ruth Crow, May 1997.



These stories have been written as part of a *Research Project Looking at Women's Experience of Ageing*. This three year project is being funded by an Australian Research Council grant and is being undertaken by women researchers from Deakin University, Monash University and Melbourne University; Dr Barbara Kamler, a Senior Lecturer in Education at Deakin University, Ms Susan Feldman, Director of the Alma Unit on Women and Ageing at the University of Melbourne and Professor Terry Threadgold, English Department at Monash University.

This collection of stories is the result of a seven week (one day a week) workshop during May/June 1997. I hope to attend a follow-up workshop in 1998. For me, attending the workshop has provided a much appreciated opportunity for exchanging ideas with women in my own age group. At the beginning of the project I, privately, set myself the task of practising writing concisely, and of trying to unveil hidden meanings behind what seems to be apparent.

I have included a few extra writings in rhymed verse in order to set the collection in a readable context for my daughters, grand-children and friends. In this folder the stories are placed in chronological order.

These stories are not for publication, but I may consider adapting some for Ecoso Newsletter or other such publications.

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## INTRODUCTION.

These stories are being introduced by two "poems". Firstly, lines from memory of a "piece" I used to recite at my Mother's "At Homes" in the 1920s.

This is followed by a parody of this "piece" which I have written in order to show that the expectations of children (and grandparents) are not always fulfilled !!!! (and just as well too !)

### MY GRAND-MAMA IS GROWING OLD A Piece I Learnt in the 1920s

Contributed by Ruth Crow

My Grand-mama is growing old  
She sits in her armchair  
She wears a shawl and a sweet lace 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 this to her  
My Grand-mama 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 armchair  
And wear a shawl and a sweet lace cap  
To cover my snow white hair  
I mean to have the nicest thoughts  
To think of when I'm there !

#### Notes :-

1. As I had no grandparents this word picture of happy old age was very real to me.

2. My mother seemed to fear growing old so I added a special prayer each night "Don't let Mummy grow old and then die"

PARODY  
→  
See over page

# Stories of Ageing

## A Collection of Stories by Ruth Crow

May/June 1997

These Stories are in Chronological Order

- | Topics                                  | Titles   |
|---|--|
| 1. Childhood, 1920s                     | .... <i>Fie-Fie and Toddy</i>  |
| 2. Growing Up, 1934.                    | ... <i>The Day the World Stood Still</i>   |
| 3. Marriage, 1937                       | ... <i>Smiles That Stay for Ever.</i>  |
| 4. 3rd Person Exercise (on 3 above),    | <i>My Neighbour's Memories.</i>  |
| 5. Letter About Dandenongs 1939...      | <i>Corina's School Project</i><br>This story was not requested but it fills a gap in the chronology. |
| 6. Hospitalisation of Children, 1942... | <i>"A Broken Tree"</i>   |
| 7. Home in 1940s/50s.                   | ..... <i>Above the Brunswick Shops.</i>  |
| 8. Death, 1988.                         | .... <i>"I Just Want To Go Home !"</i>   |
| 9. A Retirement Village 1990.           | .. <i>A Ship of Widows</i>   |
| 10. A Retirement Village 1990..         | <i>"Nobody Asked Before !"</i>   |
| 11. Public Housing, 1997                | .. <i>"I wouldn't Mind Living Here !"</i>  |
| 12 Reflections, 1997                    | ... <i>"When I Look in the Mirror"</i>   |
| 13. An Explanation, 1997                | .... <i>To My Daughters.</i>   |
|   | Late Addition  |
| 14. Family Life in 1920s/30s...         | <i>The Three Graces</i>  |

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## Fie-Fie and Toddy.

The Story of a Naughty, Bad, Wickedly Wayward Girl.

By Ruth Crow, May 1997 (known in the family as Toddy)

*In those simple relationships of loving husband and wife, affectionate sisters, children and grandchildren there are innumerable shades of sweetness and anguish which make up the pattern of our lives. (Katharine Mansfield)*

.....

When she was about four years old Fie-Fie would tightly clasp my hand and take me visiting.

Good morning Miss Bradley, Mother's love and how are you today ?

Oh, good morning Fie-Fie, so you have brought your little sister today. Hello Toddy, you were the baby with a smile, weren't you ? Give me a smile please. Would you like to come in I have some special cake for you."

Fie-Fie must have enjoyed the fuss Miss Bradley and other old family friends made of us, for she repeated the visits again and again despite the scoldings when we returned home. I was not scolded.

*Naughty*

*naughty*

Fie-Fie you are a very bad girl. You must not go out the gate again. What will neighbours say if they see you and Toddy wandering the streets alone ?

When Fie-Fie was about eight she would straddle any push bike that the boys or their friends left on the porch, and she would fly away like the wind, none of us knew where.

*Bad*

Oh Fie-Fie you are a very, bad, BAD girl. Don't you know you are giving the whole family a bad name ?

The most unspeakable thing happened when Fie-Fie was about 12 and she was sent home from holidaying on my aunty's farm.

*Wickedly  
Wayward*

Oh, Fie-Fie, Fie-Fie what have you been doing ? Aunty Bell phoned and told me you had asked one of the farm boys for a ride on his horse. Didn't I warn you to keep away from the farm workers. You should have had more sense. You are becoming a very, wicked, wayward girl. I don't want to talk about it any more. You are home now and please don't tell anybody you were sent home. You must make them think you came back because you were homesick.

When Fie-Fie was about seventy she said to me :-

As you know Ruth I was a very good little girl.

The wisdom of years helped me to appreciate that what she was telling me was true, so I could honestly answer

Yes of course you were.

But I was shocked, and still am shocked and after all these years I can't adjust to the shock. If Fie-Fie was a good little girl I no longer have the monopoly of goodness.

What do you think ? Do I still deserve the title of Ruth the Good Girl ?

#### NOTES

I did work hard to gain the title of "Ruth the Good Girl". I would race home and set the table so that my sisters could not be praised for doing it; I was up early to clean the fireplace and set the fire, I was "mother's little willing foot" doing any of the messages that were needed. I often heard my mother say that "Ruth is the sunshine after the storm". (Fie-Fie being "the storm") I loved being introduced as "Yes this is Ruth, she was the baby with a smile"..

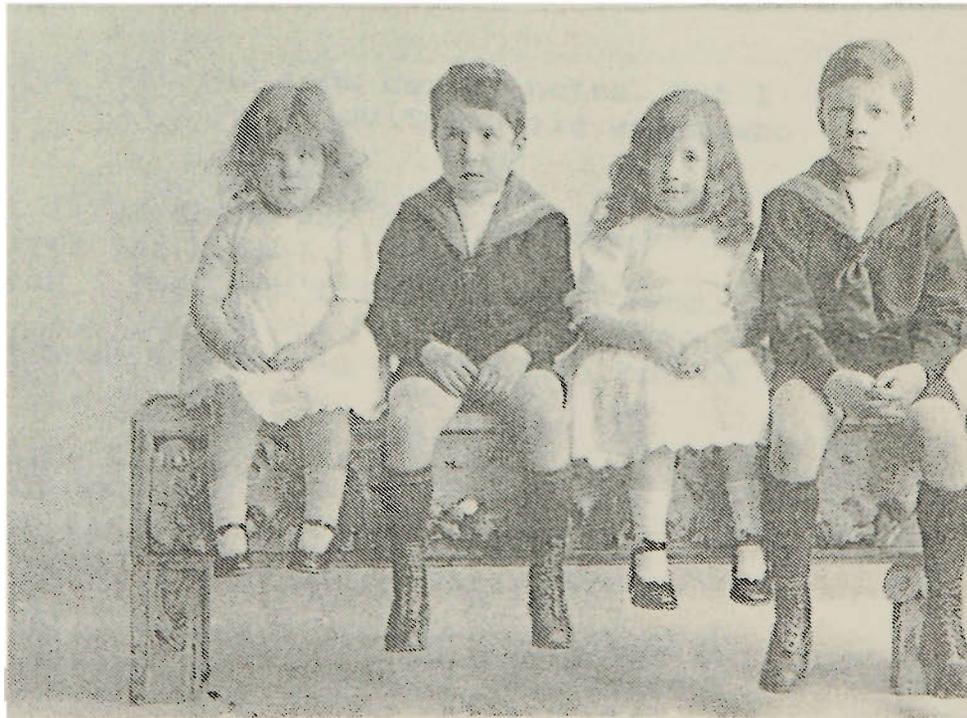
Fie-Fie held no grudges against me or any other members of our family. She was of course a very loving mother and grandmother.

Of all the members of the family she was the most loyal and, in her own way the most supportive of other family members.

In 1932 my father died and the family was left penniless. Our sole income for 5 years was from the wages of the three eldest members of the family. From those days until 1989 I always believed that my two brothers were the breadwinner for the family. Fie-Fie's remarks about her view of her childhood behaviour made me reflect on our teenage lives and I then realised that Fie-Fie was a bread winner, contributing a higher proportion of her wages than did either of my brothers !!! I tried to explain this to her, but she was not interested in thinking about the way she was denied the dignity of being part of the bread winning team. (a copy of the 1932 family budget is available on request)

By the time, she died in her early 70, Fie-Fie had a vast network of neighbours, friends and relations. She enjoyed visiting them.

*Fie-Fie and Toddy,  
and two brothers.  
Toddy has left a  
space for the 5th  
child in the family.  
Isn't she a good  
little girl !  
(Photo 1918)*



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## The Day the World Stood Still

"Brush Up, Paint Up for the Centenary !"

By Ruth Crow, May 1997

It was hard to study for the end of the year exams in 1934... the Year of the Melbourne Centenary.

I was tempted to join the cheering crowds as Prince Henry's cavalcade drove through the streets, and even more tempted to follow the Grenadier Guards... those tall soldiers with huge black hats, loud drums and catchy marching tunes..I would have loved to have gone to the Fitzroy Gardens. I had heard it was like a magic fairy land, especially when it was all lit up at night.

But I stuck to swotting. I was determined to keep my place at the top of the exam results. In terms one and two I had beaten all the boys in chemistry and physics and only 2 of the girls had even passed in these subjects.

The exam time was set for 7 o'clock in the evening. Summer came early in 1934 and it was hot and sultry as I walked to the station.

My pre-occupation with silently reciting my swot notes was rudely interrupted when a young boy handed me a leaflet. Rather resentfully I took it and stuffed it into my pocket.

As I walked down the ramp I was suddenly startled by what was happening on the platform.... people were talking in little knots... no-one seemed to be in a hurry to go home. Obviously there was something interesting being discussed, but I couldn't join in as I didn't know anyone.

When the train came, I found a seat and took out my notes. But I was again rudely interrupted, This time by quite an old woman who handed around the same leaflet.

I was a captive listener. At first there was some antagonism ...  
... "Aw ! Go home and look after yer kids !"  
... Shut up ! Can't yer read ! They won't let this man land. "

I reluctantly closed my note book and pulled the leaflet out of my pocket. I read :

STOP WAR !  
STOP NAZISM !  
STOP FASCISM !  
KISCH MUST LAND !

I was at first bewildered. Who was Kisch ? I wasn't sure how to pronounce "fascism" and as for the word "nazism" I associated that with those tall, fair, clean, proud, young sailors who visited Melbourne on the German Warship "Klon". Hadn't I been one of the teenagers welcoming them when they berthed at Port Melbourne a year or so ago ?

# Smiles That Will Stay With Me For Ever.

A Story About Courtship and Marriage  
By Ruth Crow. May 26th 1997.

*What does it matter when you come to think of it, whether the child isd yours or not. All the children of our generation are the responsibility of the adults of the generation and deserve our care (Thomas Hardy in "Jude the Obscure")*

Now Ruthie if we were married we could look after Enid, Helen and David. Wally and Susan have never, ever had a holiday together and they have been married for seven years. Seven years and no time without kids, just imagine it ! We could live for ten days in their house if you married me. But we can't live together unless we are married. So what about it ?

Well, let's - the sooner the better. I have told mum I would marry you as soon as I was twenty one. There is no legal reason for us to delay. So lets do it !

I'd better get a move on and paint your bed room, then your mum will be able to let it and that will help make up for the money you pay her from your job. If we scrape and save we will also be able to pay her a bit out of our pay. We can't let her down, whatever else happens..

The sooner I know the date the better. I'll have to arrange leave from work. I can't tell them I am getting married. I would immediately get the sack. We will have to make up some sort of story.

What can we do so that your mum won't take it too hard

Well I can't tell her until the day before, otherwise all the relations will interfere. But how about if we invite her to have a cup of tea with us after we've been to the registry office. Let's go to the Robur Tearooms. It only costs a bob for a cup of tea and biscuits. So that would be 3/-. We can afford that.

We set the date and decided on two mates who could be witnesses at the Registry Office, then off we went for our usual evening stroll around the block and on the way we skipped our usual dance around the petrol bowsers.

*In and out the windows, in and out the windows  
As you have done before  
Stand and face you partner, stand and face your partner  
As you have done before  
Now your married I wish you joy,  
First a girl and then a boy  
Kiss together and then your done  
Join the in the circle and have some fun !*

(This image reminds me of the week after we first met and Maurie and I made our very first sand castle.....oh the warm, WARM hand under the cold, COLD sand, and the query in the shining eyes !!!!!....)

But, what other vivid memories do I have of living with Maurie and the three children ? Ah, yes of course, the home coming.

Imagine the clamour !

Oh mummy, mummy, David wet his bed every night !

Oh daddy Maurie said I don't have to eat up all my porridge every day.

Ruth doesn't care about our teeth. We had hundreds and thousands on our bread and one day we had an ice cream !

Daddy there was a big spider on the slide and David was nearly bitten !

Ruth didn't make Helen wash her hands before meals but I reminded her !

And David, well he sat in his high chair SMILING !!!! A smile that will stay with me for ever.

Notes :-

1. I met Maurie in April 1936 and we were married in December 1937.

2. We prepared for marriage by buying (and reading) two books by Van de Velde "Ideal Marriage" and "Fertility and Sterility in Marriage". I went to the out patients clinic at the Women's Hospital and asked about birth control. The answer was that they only gave advice to married women whose lives were endangered by future births. Maurie enquired amongst friends about chemists where he could buy condoms. Our birth control was effective and we did have our children exactly when we wanted them, (by good luck or good management !)

3. In the 1930s the petrol bowsers were on the edge of the footpath and each one stood in its own separate space. Dancing around the petrol bowsers was part of our nightly courtship.

4. Maurie was very tall and gaunt and I was also pretty boney, when young.

3. The children's rejection of us on their parents return was a surprise to both, but we have experienced it many times since..

# My Neighbour's Memories

by Ruth Crow, May 1997.

(Looking at one of my stories through another's eyes.. writing in 3rd person)

The other day I showed my wedding photos to my neighbour, Ruth. I think she is probably in her eighties. I was most surprised to find out that she remembers right back to the 1920s.

After we had looked through the albums I asked her to show me her wedding photos.

"I don't have any." she said. "I can describe it to you if you like," she added.

More out of politeness than interest I asked her when and where she was married and, to my surprise, I soon found out I was listening to a real live romance.

We'd been sweethearts for about eighteen months and although I kept telling my mother I was soon going to marry Maurie she chose to disbelieve me. She liked Maurie, but thought we should wait until HE had a house and all that goes with it. So, in a sort of way we eloped, in December 1937."

Her secret smile intrigued me and as I wasn't pushed for time I asked her to tell me a bit more.

Well, we were both 21 and did not need parental permission. We knew of a place where we could live together. It would be vacant in a month or two, so we set a date but we did not tell my mother until the night before. We wanted no interference with our plans. Having set the date, we bought some paint and we worked together to paint out my bedroom. We thought if it was freshly painted my mother could let it, and this would make up for the money I paid to her each week. My mother was not at all suspicious about our enthusiasm for house painting !

I thought she was loosing the track of her story a bit. I wanted to hear about the elopement. So I asked her

"Where did you actually get married ? "

"In the registry office, I think it was in William Street, anyhow it was in the city, Maurie gave me his mother's ring (she died when he was a baby) but I didn't wear it for years as if I did I would have got the sack. Oh about eloping ! I suppose I exaggerate by using the word "elope". What I meant was that we married against my mothers wishes. We tried to smooth away her tears by inviting her to have afternoon tea with us in the Robur Tearooms after the registration ceremony.

Then Ruth embarked, with most amazing detail on how they looked after three children in the first fortnight of their married life.

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"Wally and Susan had been married for seven years. They had 3 kiddies and had never had a day off from the children. They had a chance to go to Sydney so we offered to live at their home and look after the family. So in a way we **HAD** to get married so we could live together in their house. Oh ! I have such happy memories of those wonderful days." she said.

The more we chatted the more things puzzled me -

Why did they have to get married to mind the children ?  
Why did they have to provide income for Ruth's mother ?  
Why did marriage mean woman lost their jobs ?  
Why couldn't they afford photos ?  
What was their first home like ?  
Did they ever buy their own home ?  
Did they practise birth control ?  
How did they spend their leisure ?

And so many, many more...

Now that we have broken the ice I am looking forward to having more chats with Ruth.

A letter to my great-grand-  
daughter.  
Puth Coar

49/9 Pampas St.,  
North Melbourne 3051  
12/ 6/ '96

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Dear Corina,

I am looking forward to talking with you about your school project interviews with grandparents. I cannot come to your home for a while, but in the meantime I am sending you this information about when Maurie and I lived at Mt Dandenong. Here it is :-

From 1938 to 1942 Maurie and I ran the Observatory Tearooms at the very top of Mt Dandenong. (It is now called the Sky High)

We lived in two very small rooms, a bedroom and a sitting room, each about 10 feet by 10 feet. We had a tiny bathroom (no hot water, we had to heat the water in a kerosene tin and carry it to the bathroom, the tin bath made the water lose its heat very quickly). We had an outside lavatory, and the good thing about that was that we could see a wonderful view (there was no need to shut the door as it was impossible for anyone to look in). From our fairly large kitchen we had a view across the Silvan Dam right to Donna Buang and the Baw Baws. The tearoom was quite large (about 20 feet by 20 feet), it also had windows which looked over to the Silvan Dam (you can't see the Dam now as the trees are too high). In the summer time we had red, green and yellow umbrellas on the terrace. Eating outside was not as popular as it is today but we found that the tables under the umbrellas were popular with newly arrived migrants (at that time quite a few people were migrating from Hitler's Germany). We also had a small kiosk where we sold lollies, flowers, postcards, homemade jam and home-made biscuit and hot water. In the summer time we sold soft drinks, but as we had no electricity we could not cool them in a refrigerator. We had a cellar in the kiosk and this seemed to keep the soft drinks cold enough for the customers.

We mainly made our living by selling afternoon teas (scones, jam and cream). During the week people from the guest houses would walk up for afternoon tea, and, in the weekend we had hikers and a few families that came by car.

I made the jam from berries grown by local farmers. We grew some of the flowers and potplants that we sold, but sometimes we resold flowers from neighbours. We bought the scalded cream from the Bowman's farm which was on Ridge Road near the beginning of Observatory Road. Monica Bowman would walk up with the milk and cream every day, no matter what the weather was like. Our groceries were delivered once a week and the baker and butcher came every second day. A green-grocer called in his van once a week. So we had no problems about buying food, except the cost !

We belonged to the Victorian Public Library and it would send books to us free but we had to pay the return postage. When June was born in 1940 I was one of the first mothers to be enrolled as a "correspondence mother" with the Infant Welfare Centre

Services. I would receive a bulletin each month about the progress my baby should be making and the Sister visited me every six months. We belonged to the Mount Dandenong Progress Association and while we were there it successfully lobbied for phones in the neighbourhood to have access to a continuous exchange. I belonged to the Country Women' Association and in 1940 gave a series of talks on emergency catering in case there were wartime evacuations..

Part of our lease was that we had to be open every day to provide hot water for picnickers. We had no electricity so we had to do all the cooking on a fire stove. We turned our lack of electricity to advantage by placing candle-holders around the tearoom walls. (People were selling their pianos to buy radios and candle-holders from pianos were quite cheap). When the tearoom was lit by candle-light it looked very pretty. We did not open every night but sometimes there would be hikers at the hike hostel (next door) and occasionally a city social club would arrange a special night out. An attraction at night was to read the neon lights. In those days there was no T.V and neon lights were used to advertise much more than they are today. Neons are still used, but the signs are not so eye catching, and, in any case the high buildings hide some of the neons from viewers in the Dandenongs.

*by telescope*

I would like to tell you about hiking in the Dandenongs. This was very popular. Sometimes the Herald or some other newspaper would hire a whole train and have a "mystery hike". We did not go on these but I remember seeing hundreds of people arriving at Ferntree Gully from such a special train. Maurie and I were very keen on hiking and we were the "Wardens" of the Mt Dandenong Hike Hostel. This was on the land where the TV poles now are, very close to the mountain top. The hikers had a big shed where they stored tents and palliases (straw mattresses) and blankets. They would have their tea and breakfast at our tearooms and we would also supply them with bread, butter etc for the next days' lunch.

The usual hike was from Croydon Station (up the Old Coach Road from Montrose), then overnight at the hike hostel and then the next day down to Ferntree Gully. (there was no electric train station at Belgrave). There was another Hike Hostel at the Patch so on holiday weekends some hikers would make a three day trip, staying one night at Mt Dandenong and the other at the Patch.

It is important to know that 50 years ago there were no plastic, or nylon; tents and sleeping bags were very heavy, that very few people (especially young people) had cars and that fares were quite expensive, especially when young people were very poorly paid. Thus hike hostels in the Dandenongs was very popular. Today young people go "bush walking" to far away places and carry their tent and other light camping gear with them.

When the hikers were at Mt Dandenong we usually had a dance in the tearooms. To dance the foxtrot and the waltz you needed a floor which was a bit slippery... it was called "making the floor fast". You could buy "palais wax" to polish up the floor, but we found that grated candlesticks were quite satisfactory. So we would grind up the candle ends and then pull each other around on

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5/3

mat and the floor would be as shiny as silver paper.

We had a gramophone for dance music. Each record would last for about 5 minutes then you would have to wind the gramophone and change the needle. So most dances lasted about 4 or 5 minutes. The popular music in 1939 was "Grandma Says". "Under the Spreading Chestnut Tree", "One Day When We Were Young" and then later on in the 1940s, "I'll Hang My Washing on the Seigfried Line", "Run Rabbit Run Rabbit Run Run Run" and "There will be Blue Birds Over the White Cliffs of Dover".

There were terrible bushfires in January 1938 but we did not go to live at Mount Dandenong until April that year. From our windows we could see how the bush fire burnt all the bush from the edge of the Dandenongs to the edge of Mount Donna Buang.

We had to spread our "work" over the week, .. making jam and biscuits etc on the weekdays when there were few customers, Our custom was very erratic, depending on the weather...we had to work out how to cope with that. Sometimes we would be covered with fog and then no customers would come, and down on the Main Road there would be no fog and lots of customers. The first year we were there a fog came down and did not rise for three weeks ! Sometimes when Melbourne was foggy there would be a "mystic lake" stretching from our back fence to Donna Buang and then to the east right as far as the eye could see. It was truly magical, but that did not attract customers !

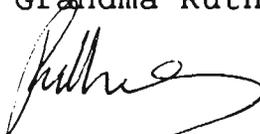
We sometimes had to work at night, not only at cleaning up after the customers but peeling gladioli corms, potting plants, grating candles and so on. But we did have lots of time to read and to listen to music, We did not have a radio but others did. We had very little time to hike through the Dandenongs as we had to be on hand at the tearooms and kiosk every day.

We left the Dandenongs in 1942 soon after Japan came into the War. Although many more people live in the Dandenongs now they still have the same kind of beauty as they had over 50 years ago. However, now that there are fewer farms and that some of the residents grow lots of trees, there are fewer visits than there were when we lived there.

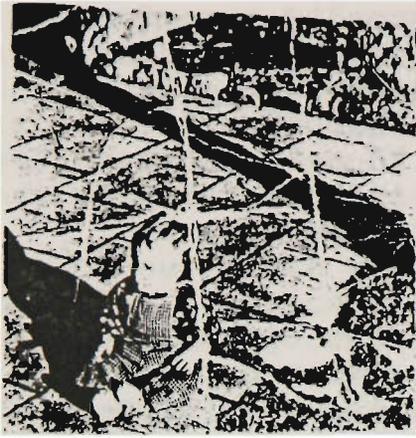
Farms

I am a member of Save the Dandenongs League and have been a member since the campaign to save Jeeves' Farm (nearly 50s I think ). I always pause to give thanks to May Moon and her committee members when I am at Five Ways.

Love to you Corina,  
From your Great Grandma Ruth Crow



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# "A Broken Tree" And Near Broken Hearts

By Ruth Crow

A Story About a Child In Hospital in 1942.

"Look mummy, a broken Tree".

June seemed to be pointing at an eight foot high pine sapling, but I could not see why. So non-committedly, I said

"Yes June a broken tree".

This encouragement resulted in the next sentence,

*Father Christmas and a broken tree."*

Ah, of course June had a reason for pointing to the young pine tree, she thought it was a Christmas tree; so I repeated her sentence saying :-

*Yes, Father Christmas and a broken tree, a Christmas tree.*

Then out flooded a whole long conversation, which concluded with this question,

*"Yes Father Christmas and the broken tree, and what did Father Christmas give June ?" (using her own name as she had not, then, mastered speaking in the first person)*

I did not know what she had been given as she was in hospital over Christmas 1942, So imitating her questioning style of conversation I asked.

*"Well, what did Father Christmas give June ?"*

And she excitedly called out,

*"A birdie on a stick, a birdie on a stick. A birdie, a birdie, a BIRDIE ON A STICK !"*

Ah, the penny dropped. I remembered seeing the children's ward decorated with birds on a stick. My thoughts were interrupted by June angrily asking,

*"What did the sister say ? WHAT DID THE SISTER SAY ?!  
MUMMY ! WHAT DID THE SISTER SAY ?"*

*"Well, what did she say June ? "*

I asked.

*You're not to have it ! YOU'RE NOT TO HAVE IT !*

Then I remembered our visit on Christmas Sunday and how the birdies were all up high, fluttering on their string attached to the ventilators. They could be seen but not touched.

June was in the Children's hospital when she was two and a half. When I took her there I had no idea she would be admitted, but she was whisked away from me and I was told to come back the next day at a certain time, to a certain place and they would tell me what illness she had.

So the next day, with my "new" baby in my arms, I was in a large, hospital corridor with about 50 other worried women. As each of our names were called we were interviewed in the middle of the corridor, standing up.

The doctor told me the medical name of her illness, which meant very little to me. So I asked.

"What does that mean? Is she very ill?"

And the answer was that there was a 60% 70% chance that she would get better. The doctor tried to reassure me by saying :-

The death rate is now only 30% to 40%

I was given an information sheet which said that I could visit June once a month for a certain length of time on a certain day each month. ONE DAY A MONTH!

Fortunately, for us, June was in hospital over Christmas and there was a special visiting day on Christmas Sunday, about two weeks after she was admitted, but we were only allowed to see her one at a time.

Maurie went first and he always remembered her words of greeting,

"So YOU are MY daddy! Are you my daddy!"

June was "discharged" from hospital about the end of January. I tried to find out what treatment she was given and what special care I should give her, but there was no-one to ask. We said our farewells to a young nurse who said :-

Aren't you lucky to be taking her home."

I have <sup>e</sup>ver known if it was luck or hospital care that we had to thank. I have no idea of what care was given her at the hospital.

Is it any wonder that until the age of 12 June would tear away frantically if ever she saw a nurse in a flowing white cap.

#### Footnote

Footnote 1. During the Infantile Paralysis epidemic in Victoria in the 1930s the children's wards were closed to visitors. It seems that the Hospital administration believed that the children behaved better without visits from their parents. Thus the practice of only monthly visit continued well into the 1940s.

Footnote 2. A month after "discharge" I had to take June to the outpatients at the Children's for a check up. This meant wheeling the two children in a pram from Flinders Street Station to RCH in Drummond St. Carlton.

## "HOME"

# From 1936 We Were Determined That I Would Not be "A Slave of a Slave"

By Ruth Crow, June 1996.

In 1936 Maurie and I rejected Hitler's three Ks statement... "That the world of women is the kitchen, the church and children" and in doing so we rejected the prevailing values on home life in Australia.

We were determined that we would not perpetuate the relationships in society which resulted in homes being both a HAVEN and a HELL. We believed that the key to do this was to ensure that I (the future wife/mother) was not a "SLAVE OF A SLAVE".

In the 1940s/50s when we were responsible for our children we aimed at combining the protection of a NEST with the outlook and participatory opportunities of an EYRIE. Here is some factual information about how we did this.

"Home" to me is the place where we nurtured our daughters. Thus I am writing about our "home-life" in Brunswick between 1943 and 1957, a period during which our daughters were aged three to seventeen years and one year to fifteen years.

To do this I have to write not about one place but a number of places which we used simultaneously. Our homelife was so mixed up with life beyond the four walls of the dwelling that I cannot sift one from the other.

For those who want to know the address of our dwelling, the way it was furnished and so on I have included an attachment. (attachment 1) Suffice it to say that it was above the shops, close to the Brunswick Town Hall and that our living space was an area 30 feet by 20 feet (plus a bathroom and toilet which we shared, there was no laundry). For the first few years it was one large room, but gradually, as our needs changed it was partitioned.

There were many other "home" places in the immediate neighbourhood; the bookshop (200 yards away where there were always friends, especially women); the Brunswick Baths (where we went swimming every evening, thus saving time and effort on using the shared bath); the lawn and asphalt court beside the Presbyterian Church (where the children could practice their acrobats, play ball against the wall, and other such vigorous outdoor pastimes); the Brunswick Children's Centre (see attachment 2); the Mechanics Institute Library (well stocked with Enid Blyton books); and, of course Albert Street School (where the teachers spent many extra hours coaching sports teams). All these were within a quarter of a mile or less of our dwelling.

Moreover, we were only 100 yards from the tram stop and that gave us access to far away places such as the Dandenongs, the beaches, the parks and gardens and city entertainment. Such recreation places were familiar to us and the children, and, so also, was a holiday camp in the hills.

So what memories do I cherish ?

## "HOME" (2)

Sunday mornings and the great constructions June and Julie made by dragging chairs, tables, cushions, the doll's pram and anything else that could be pushed and shoved together into a "train" a "house" or some nameless object over which they could scramble. Or the fun they had "diving" from a bench into their imaginary swimming pool (a small blue carpet) And all the time the patter of feet and the chatter, chatter chatter as Maurie and I drowsed-on a few feet away.

The Saturday outings when we would catch a very early tram or train (often the first train) and go off for the day to the beach, or bush, Sometimes we took milk and chocolates to eat for breakfast on our early journeys, and always we would sing (silly/"rude" songs) when the train noises deadened our voices. (We aimed at leaving very, very early and coming back in the early afternoon so the children could rest and we could do the housework). The steam rising from the heated swimming pool at the "Brunny Baths", especially on wintery evenings; the feverish way Maurie and I worked together to finish our carpentry or painting and so on, before our daughters came home from where-ever they were.

So, my memories dart from what we did in the dwelling, what we did in the neighbourhood, and what we did in the far away places And often there are people sharing the joys and sorrows... Marge and Mabel, Audrey and Margaret, Frank and Lloyd and many, many others.

What are my daughters' memories ? Well, this has to be left for them to tell (footnote 1).

When we shifted to a dwelling with a garden and traditional rooms people would say "You must love living here after that cramped flat in Brunswick". But I was uncertain what to say. We did love our new home, but Brunswick had a very special meaning to me (and Maurie too, I should think). We really did have time to enjoy our children, and equally important I was not imprisoned in the four walls of the house.(footnote 2)

Life in the Brunswick flat, the rich neighbourhood life in Brunswick and the social and political life of the 1940s and 1950s enabled us to put some of our theories on family/home/society relationships into practice. From this experience we believed they were practical !.

### FOOTNOTES

Footnote 1. Although we seldom talk about Brunswick days both daughters seem to regard our life there as nothing unusual...after all when we lived above the shops lots of other families did too, and lots of other kids went to the "Brunny Baths" frequently. Our life may seem strange in retrospect, but it was not strange when we were living it.

Footnote 2. I was in the paid work force for most of the time we lived in Brunswick. Sometimes full time, sometimes part time. Our original reason for going to live in Brunswick in 1943 was my appointment as Secretary Organiser to the Brunswick Children's Centre... the first wartime federally funded centre. Thus some of my paid work was quite inovative for the period.

7/3

abrasive particles, perforce, the stench which comes from the neighbouring paper mills against which closed doors and windows are no defence."

"Some of the workers here sought to escape the coal rain, the stench and the atmosphere of suffocating paternalism by going to live outside the jurisdiction of the Commission. There your Commissioners believe they are living comparatively deplorably unplanned lives.

Yallourn Power Station - A History 1919 to 1989" by Colin Harvey is available from Gippslands Printers, Driffield Road, Morwell, 3840.

## A Dwelling Above the Shops

"CROW'S NEST" IN BRUNSWICK  
Contributed by Ruth Crow

The launching of the Inner Metropolitan Regional Association's report "Streetwise...Inner City Living on Main Streets" has prompted me to describe what it was like to live above the shops in the 1940s.

In 1943 when I had the opportunity of helping to establish the Brunswick Children's Centre we had to live near the proposed centre. This meant the family (Maurie, two preschool age daughters and I) had to shift to Brunswick. So our first problem was to find a home. There was a great housing shortage, lots and lots of families were sharing houses, living in apartments and in all sorts of make shift accommodation. The story about our trials and tribulations in finding a home must be left to another time. We did eventually find a large space above the shops in Sydney Road, and we settled down so comfortably that we lived there for fourteen years.

### TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THE LOCATION

We greatly enjoyed the social advantages of the location...the access to shops, kindergarten, schools, library, swimming pool, public transport and to our work places. We appreciated the building's physical characteristics... the privacy provided by its thick walls, the large windows which let in lots of sun and provided an uninterrupted view across Sydney Road and down Merri Street to the Dandenong Ranges, the large (undifferentiated) floor space which, over the years, we adapted to changing needs of the family, the high ceilings which enabled us to build mezzanine storage areas. We also took full advantage of having no garden to maintain by using our weekend time on picnics and other family outings, and, as we were so close to public transport we could reach the beaches, the hills and the theatres, the parks and gardens very easily and quite cheaply (on family excursion tickets for public transport which ran very frequently... even on Sundays we could look out our window and see a tram in Sydney Road any time of the day).

An added bonus was the cheap rent which enabled us to have enough money to spend on outings and an occasional weekend away.

PLANNING TO COMBINE PRIVACY AND COMMUNITY

We shared a bathroom and lavatory and had some storage space on the landing. Not counting these areas our own private living space measured 20 feet by 30 foot. Within those six squares we were able to provide for a combination of privacy and community. Each of the family members had their own spaces, we had family spaces, and our furniture was so flexible and moveable we could arrange our whole flat for entertainment. For example we could seat 14 people at our table and squeeze in an extra child or two.

In later years I have observed that our family enjoyed a higher standard of privacy and community than is achieved by some families in three bedroom homes (possibly the families observed had little consciousness of the need for arranging spaces with this objective ...maybe, the more spacious homes did not make them aware of the need,)

Through necessity we made most of our fittings and furniture ourselves, for example cupboards into which the beds folded, tables which folded down, tables which could be easily extended, benches which could be used for seating and also for spare beds (and for gymnastic exercises), clothes lines which came down by pulleys, storage spaces in the mezzanines and also some ingenious devices for retrieving material stored behind shelves.

These were the days when folding beds, divans and stack-away-chairs were just coming on to the market, we actually made our own before we had seen any. We did not look for models for our furniture as it had to meet our own need, in any case we had no money to spend on "ready mades". We haunted the junk yards and second hand shops to find timber and furniture which we could dismantle to make fit our spaces. We were mainly driven by necessity."

PART OF LOCAL COMMUNITY

There was nothing unusual about families living above the shops in the 1940s. It was accepted that bank managers, fruiterers, butchers, and milk bar proprietors lived with their families in the shopping centres. All the dwelling spaces in the shops in our block were used as residences and there were about ten or twelve children on the block. So, we did not feel we were doing anything unusual. We felt very much part of our street and part of our local community.

In recent months our former home, 211 Sydney Road, Brunswick, has been advertised as a prestigious dwelling and home/ work place.

.....

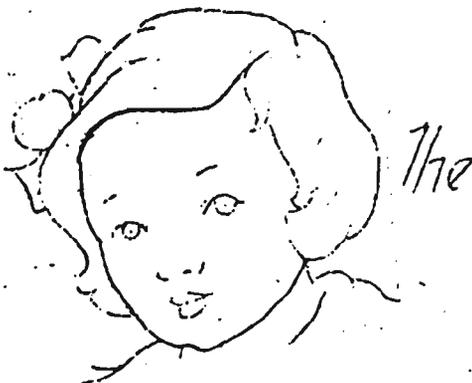
~~Over the Hills and Far Away.!~~

~~BUSH WALKING IN THE 1940S - Contributed by Eureka~~

~~"Do you long to be up and away ? Then ride a BSA !" (Footnote 1.) This was the catchcry of a 1930s poster which showed a young couple on a hill top. Few youths could afford to respond, but it was not so expensive to heed another poster. This showed a young woman with an armful of wattle catching a train. It's V.R. slogan was "Travel by train to the hills !" (Footnote 2)~~

The Brunswick Children's Centre  
First leaflet published for this first wartime centre.  
1943

Sept 1943



# BRUNSWICK

## CHILDRENS CENTRE

For children of mothers working  
in essential industries.

The Story so far:

### BRUNSWICK IS TO SHOW HOW

It has been decided that a demonstration Children's Centre shall be established at Brunswick.

### FOR CHILDREN UNDER SIX YEARS.

The Nursery Kindergarten is being organised by co-operation between the Creche and Kindergarten in Glenlyon Road. Mothers will be able to leave their little ones from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. knowing that they will receive nourishing meals, have adequate rest and sleep, and play with other children under expert supervision.

### FOR CHILDREN OF SCHOOL AGE

A school canteen will be opened next door to the Albert Street School in the Salvation Army Hall (lent for this purpose). A good nourishing hot meal will be served at a little more than the cost of the food. Later in the year games and hobbies will be organised after school. If there is a need, a lighter evening meal will be served to the children whose mothers have to return home late from work.

### Who is in Charge of the Scheme for the School Children's Centre?

The Albert Street State School Committee (Mrs. Niven - Chairman) helped by:

The Mayor of Brunswick, Cr. C. C. Fisher  
Mr. Chambers, Head Master of Albert Street School.  
Captain Everett of the Salvation Army  
- Rev. L. E. Hartshorn of the Methodist Church and representing the Minister's fraternity.

Mrs. D. Russell of the Housewives' Association and other prominent Brunswick citizens.

### How is the Scheme being Financed?

By a grant from the Commonwealth Government.  
By a grant from the Brunswick Council.  
By payment by the children for their meals.

### HOW WILL THE STORY CONTINUE?

It all depends on US. Everybody's help is needed to show that by using already existing buildings and organisations, and with a little government assistance, we CAN set up a Children's Centre which will be an example to inspire other municipalities to do likewise. It all depends on YOU and ME. This scheme for the Brunswick Children's Centre came into being as a result of the activities of the Committee for Co-ordinating Child Care in Wartime.

(size reduced)

# I Just Want To Go HOME !

The Day We Marched to Peter's Tune...Dah, Dah A Dumpty Dee.

Ruth Crow 19/5/97

"If you go home, Mr Crow, you'll be dead within six weeks"

"I just want to go home !".

"Mr Crow, if you go home you won't have access to our life saving machines. You will be dead within six weeks.

"I just want to go home !!

"If you go home, Mr Crow, it may not be possible for you to be readmitted to hospital. You will be dead within six weeks."

Were my heart beats breaking the silence ? What would happen if I burst into tears ? What if Maurie caved in ? He hung his head even lower.

"I just want to go home !!!"

.....

Over night the news of Maurie's decision must have reached some of his friends who were employed at the hospital. So,

## IMAGINE THE PROCESSION

First, came MAURIE in a wheel chair,  
then a couple of social workers,  
after them a wardsman, walking beside a nursing aide.,  
next came a doctor in his white coat

An occupational therapist joined in and soon after  
a physio-student, .

And I was trailing the rear,  
HUMMING

A dah, dah a dumpty dee, a dumpty, dunpty dumpty dee, A dah  
dumpty dah, dumpty dee.....

Dah dah a dumpty dee, Maurie's coming home with me !  
For one whole month we will be free... a dah dumpty dah dumpty  
dee...

*But what if he had said "I don't want to die, let me stay in hospital", What then ?*

DAH, DAH, A DUMPTY DEE !! MAURIE'S COMING HOME WITH ME !! A DAH.  
DUMPTY DAH.

Explanations :-

1. No doctor ever sat down during this or any other interview.
2. In actual practice there were many more people in the farewell procession.; Poetic licence and respect for Prokofieve's meter limited my numbers
3. The word "free" had strong, sentimental signifigance to Maurie and me.
4. The doctors correctly predicted the length of time Maurie would live, but can you compare six weeks at home to a few months coupled to a machine in an intensive care ward ?
5. Maurie had participated in and helped to organise numerous processions, but he did not directly organise this one, perhaps he did spiritually..

9/1

## A Ship of Widows

by Ruth Crow, May 12th, 1997

From 1990 to 1995 I lived in a *Retirement Village*. The *Village* was actually a four storey block of 96 self-contained flats and included a dining room and spacious social facilities..

I knew the administration of the *Village* had a reputation for being rather conservative, or some may say oppressive (1). Despite this I decided to live there (2). The deciding point for me was the flat roof, with views to north, south, east and west.

The roof was like a ship's deck and I enjoyed promenading the deck at sunset each day. I, privately, called the *Village* a SHIP OF WIDOWS (3).

I soon found that the rules were not the only form of oppression. The building design fostered supervision and this combined with management practices, meant that the villagers had no threshold....there were no in-between-spaces separating public and private spheres of the villager's lives. For example there was no street number, (I was told my address was "The ... *Village*), we had no letterboxes (we collected our letters from the "office" at a certain time each day); the receptionist used a number to identify us, (we lost our personal names); the entrance to our homes was a door onto a corridor with a number on it, no place for a name (we lost our sense of arriving "home").. Moreover, the management could see all comings and goings through the only entrance foyer. At first, I felt rather overwhelmed by the possibility of losing my identity.

Despite this I really enjoyed living at the *Village*. It was a challenging, social-learning time for me. I had to relearn my skills in community relationships.

It is necessary to pause here and state that, during all my adult life, I have been involved with a great variety of community organisations, this has meant continually making deliberate efforts to mix with all sorts of people. However, going to live at the *Village* introduced quite different elements into my knowledge of community relationships.

*Village* life meant more frequent mixing, both formally and informally, with the other villagers than I had been used to in my former neighbourhood; feeling that certain social behaviour was expected of me; recognising that the villagers had their code for acceptable behaviour and that the *management* had another. In other words, there was considerable, constant pressure "to fit in"; but there were two sets of values.

In practice the *Village* population was more homo-geneous than the usual suburban neighbourhood. Firstly, even though there was a wide age range of villagers most tended to regard themselves as "old".(4). So there was homo-geneity in attitude to life's stage. Secondly, nearly everyone had been born in Australia.(5).

Nevertheless it was not "white, protestant and Anglo Saxon"

9/2

...its predominant ethos was "white, Roman Catholic, and Irish Celtic".(5)

At this stage I have to admit that my four grandparents were from Scotland and were staunch Presbyterians. In adult life I have tried to overcome the religious prejudices I inherited with my mother's milk, and, in later years, to overcome other prejudices developed in response to the political dogmatism of some of the Roman Catholic Church leaders and the sectarianism of some political groups to which I have belonged. However, it was not until I lived at the Village that I began to realise the damage that such prejudices ~~reck~~<sup>wreck</sup> on every-day cultural relationships.

My years at the Village taught me to begin to appreciate the contribution that Irish migration has made to Australian community life. I learnt that body language is one way of answering oppression. Secondly I learnt to appreciate the value of a sense for the absurd, and thirdly I learnt to use every day political acumen (such as protecting each other by at least two approaching any authoritative person). These lessons may seem to be just common sense; but this common sense had not been nurtured in me. I found that the descendants of the Irish migrants practised it unwittingly, but with superb skill.(6)

Reflecting on my years at the Village helps me to have a deeper understanding of the significance of developing Australia as a truly multi-cultural nation. There is a popular trend to regard multiculturalism as passively enjoying the singing, dancing, cooking and other obvious contributions to public life...my years at the Village helped me to see a more elusive, private side to multiculturalism, ...to appreciate more fully that part of the answer to oppressive conditions is the process of continually, creating community relationships. How can these innate skills be used to further the aim of Australia as a multi-cultural nation ?

#### Footnotes

1. The rules were a list of what the villagers must NOT do... (Do NOT leave your flat unless fully dressed... )
2. For me, the advantages of living at the Village were its location in a familiar neighbourhood, the north facing flat and the affordable rent,
3. There were about 75 single women (mostly widows), about 5 married couples and, perhaps ten men (mostly bachelors).
4. The ages ranged from mid 60s to late 90s... a range of over 30 years.
5. The Village was not run by the Roman Catholic Church. The majority of Villagers were not members of that church. However, the Village had a higher proportion of Roman Catholics than the general population. Rituals such as the Rosary and Mass were the only religious practices on the Village premises.
6. Most of the people I am writing about were born in Australia. Their Irish migrant descendants came to Australia two or three generations ago

These three stories each have one thing in common. The administrators at the "Retirement Village", the members of parliament visiting a public housing flat and the doctor in a public hospital refused invitations to sit down.

A STORY ABOUT FEELING POWERLESS, May 1990.

# Nobody Has Asked For One Before.

(With Appreciation of Oliver Twist's Feelings)

*Ruth Crow 14/5/99*

My north facing room was full of sunshine. The tawny chrysanthemums added just the right sort of homeliness. I was really pleased with how I managed to arrange my bed-sitter so that the three of us could chat in comfort, I was so pleased I had chosen to wear my new dress.

Then the expected knock. "Mrs Crow, meet Mr Blank. He is the Administrator for all our retirement villages. As you know he is here to admit you."

"How do you do. Would you like to sit down ?"

"No, <sup>thank you</sup> we haven't time. We have others to admit today. We just want to make sure you know the rules so that you can be admitted. Mrs Black, please read out the rules to Mrs Crow."

"Number 1. Residents will keep their flats clean and tidy and free from rats, mice, silverfish and other pests. Do you understand, Mrs Crow ? Number 2. Residents should be fully clothed before leaving their flat; that means that you are not to wear slippers or dressing gowns in the passage way. Is this clear, Mrs Crow ?.... "

"Now, you sign here Mrs Crow, and Mrs Black will also sign. Good, you are now admitted to the Retirement Village. You are now one of us. We hope you will be very happy here".

"Thank you, I am sure I will be happy, but I would be happier still if only I had my own letterbox.

"But nobody has ever asked for a letterbox before !Has anybody ever asked Mrs Black ?"

Suddenly the sun went behind a cloud, the chrisssies looked wilted, my cushions seemed faded and I was sure my visitors thought that my dress came from the op.shop.

1. Rules and regulations as read out by Mrs Black are available on requestt.

//

ANOTHER STORY ABOUT FEELING POWERLESS, 1997.

## I Wouldn't Mind Living Here Myself !

With Appreciation of how Alice felt in Wonderland

Ruth Crow 29/5/97

It was a most extraordinary feeling! Suddenly I was shrinking. My shoulders were sagging, I seemed to be half crouching, making myself small. I could feel that I was gaping. I knew that I was frowning. I made a great effort to stand straight, I reminded myself of my mother's axiom "Brooches out and buckles in" and then I remembered to smile as sweetly as I could "It costs nothing to smile". But at the same time I looked around for some place to hide.

Then, suddenly, my own sitting room came into focus. However, I became pre-occupied with puzzling out the season. There were the tawny chrysanthemums in the green vase. The fruit bowl was full of grapes and mandarines, Ah it must be an Autumn day. (Go to the top of the class Ruth !) Well, what would be the time of day. I looked around for the clue and spied the filigree shadow of my maiden hair fern on the wall near my armchair. So I calculated that it must be near midday. (Good lawyer Ruth, for reading your maiden hair as a sundial !). The world was beginning to be real again. But who were these four dark suited strangers who were so genially chatting ? Why wasn't I included in the discussion ? Why were they standing up ?

Surely I would have invited visitors to sit down. So why were they standing up ? Perhaps if I can find the answer to this question I would remember who they were. Well, if I can use my powers of detection to find out the season and the time, surely I will eventually puzzle out who they are, and why they are here.

I was just beginning to enjoy this challenge when their conversation ended and they walked to my door. They didn't wait for the formality of the hostess opening it, but they did at least pause, and one of them turned to me and said.

"Well, Mrs Crow, thank you. Its not every day you are visited by members of the Victorian Ministry is it ? Mr So and so was just saying he wouldn't mind living her himself. Goodbye".

I smiled inanely and limply shook their hands. Then quietly closing fast the door I put on the kettle for a good strong cup of coffee, deeply regretting that there was nothing stronger in the flat. Oh. if only Maurie was around, with his appreciation of "The Good Soldier Sveik" !

Svejk.

### Notes

1. It so happens that folklore between Maurie and me included signifying a patronising attitude by saying "I wouldn't mind eating it myself" This sentence was popular amongst charity workers in the soup kitchen era.
2. It so happens that our home has been visited by many more MPs than came on this inspection tour to the public housing estate where I live.
3. The ~~Sveik~~ stories were used to parody the brass hats in the army.  
(spelling of name may be incorrect)

# When I Look in My Mirror I Don't Only See Me.

By Ruth Crow, May 1997.

*(My mirror reflects an uninterrupted view west from my fifth floor flat)*

When I look in my mirror I don't want to see  
Two watery eyes peering at me,  
False teeth reminding of the seering pain  
That I suffered from toothache again and again,  
Sunspots which seem to get bigger each night,  
Lank hair turning white, like a witch in a fright.

When I look in the mirror, I do want to see  
Out to the World that is all around me,  
So, I have hung my mirror in a special place  
Where I see a view instead of my face.  
Wheat silos standing straight and tall  
And in their shadows wool sheds sprawl.  
On the horizon, towering into the sky  
The high rise flats dwarf the church nearby  
And sometimes, glittering in the sun  
A train snakes by on its suburban run.  
There are houses too with roofs, green red  
and white

And thousands of lights doubling stars at night.

I look to the east for the western sky  
Left changes to right and I know that I  
Am PART OF THE WORLD AND  
THE WORLD'S PART OF ME

When I look in the mirror that's what I like to see!

*(But before I finish this I must confess  
I do use my mirror to check on my dress.  
When I look in my mirror I like to see  
That the clothes that I am wearing are OK for me.)*

# To My Daughters, June and Julie

from Ruth Crow, June 1997.

I can write stories about love,  
courtship and marriage

And the days when we dreamed of  
a baby carriage.

I can write about death and a widow's  
life

But I will not write about being a  
mother and wife.

I have plenty of stories I am eager  
to write

But deep in my heart I know its  
not right

To describe life in our home from  
one point of view

Even though I might think every  
detail is true.

Perhaps, when you're eighty  
you may have the time

To write your own memories in  
prose or in rhyme.

As you grow older I hope you will find  
That writing such stories helps clear  
up your mind

And that unresolved problems become  
simple at last.

Now that's a good enough reason to  
write of the past,

Anyhow I do enjoy it !

# The Three Graces

by Ruth Crow

July 1997

*Your children are not your children. They are Life's longing for itself*

Kahlil Gibran, a Persian Poet.

According to family folk lore, and verified by a family photo, my mother, Winsome, and her sisters, Anna and Ruby, were the THREE GRACES in Ballarat in the 1890s when they were in their late teens or early twenties. But my memories of them are of three middle aged women.

The photo really fascinates me. At first I was struck by the old fashioned narrative style of photography, but then I looked more closely at the three young women and wondered whether it was possible to read in their expressions the sort of people they were to become, or would my knowledge of their lives trick me to see what really was not there when they were young.

On first glance the sisters appear to be almost identical but if we look at how they are standing there are differences. Ruby has struck a pretty pose but she is not too sure of herself. All the same she is quite determined to be the centre of attention. Wise and wistful Winsome is half turned to Anna; and Anna looks as if she will walk right out of the picture to embrace you yet she seems to be positioning herself so that the other two can have pride of place.

So let me collect my thoughts about Ruby, Winsome and Anna as I remember them at the end of the 1920s. In these memories Ruby is very elegantly dressed and living in a very elegant modern house on the shores of lake Wendouree. (Footnote 1) Visits to Aunt Ruby's was like playing a part in a play. Both the house and the garden were the stage and frequently the passers-by were the audience. Perhaps an explanation is necessary.

Ruby had succeeded in life. She had married a solicitor, but he was not only a solicitor, he was A WAR HERO from both the South African War and the Great War and he was a MEMBER of PARLIAMENT and a MINISTER of the CROWN. So Ruby's husband's life was very public and she strove to make hers equally so, or even more so..

On public holidays she would invite us to an alfresco lunch. That meant lunch under the shady trees in her front garden. There, wearing our prettiest dresses, or best suits, we would be-sport ourselves on deck chairs, or swing in the hammock, or lie on the cane lounge and we would WAVE TO THE PASSERS-BY.

And hundreds and thousands of people did pass by on such public holidays as Boxing Day and New Year's Day and Australia Day. There would be walkers and cyclists, overflowing trams, charabancs bursting with song, gigs and drays and a few cars and motor cycles. The Ballarat Gardens and lakeside would be the gala attraction. And there, in Ruby's front garden, we would picnic in our own little private oasis and wave to the plebians who had to pass her house to get to their public picnic spots.

2

To be honest, it wasn't much fun, and sometimes there wasn't much food. If extra people happened to call in, Ruby would nudge us and say "It FHB", (Family Hold Back) and we would have to couteously (if not cheerfully) hand around the strawberry cake, knowing that it was most unlikely that any would be left for us.

But there was always plenty of food at Aunty Anna's. We loved the smell of her cooking. When we ate her cakes we would sigh and say "Yum, I just love the Tanna essence, where do you get it from Tanna ? (using the pet-name "Tanna" which made her a very special person, an equal person, to her nephews and neices). I remember the jonquils blooming in Anna's garden in mid-winter and the peacefulness of the wintry evenings when her husband would sit in his easy chair with a purring cat on his lap.

She lived in a very cottagey home and although she did not have any children of her own she had brought up other people's children (her own younger brothers and sisters when her mother died, her neices and nephews when her sister died and later her neice's child when she was divorced). In some ways we were brought up by her, as she was always ready to come and stay in any emergency.

I owe Aunty Anna a big debt for the domestic skills she taught me. When I stayed with her she would always explain why something should be done in a particular way. Not only was she an excellent cook but she was good at making starch, at knowing the exact right dampness for ironing starched table cloths. She showed me how to mitre corners when bed making (she had been a nurse), how to crochet the frayed end of a blanket and many other skills. But most importantly she knew how to make a home really comfortable and beautiful.

This vase is just right for some of those stylos iris, see if there are enough in bloom and pick some, please, Ruth..

Now, such detailed memories of Aunty Anna are in sharp contrast to Aunty Ruby. I lived with her for six months so that I could continue to go to school in Ballarat after the family had shifted. She would interrupt my studies and say.

Come Ruth, you'll get stale. Here take this cloth and go out on the front verandah and polish the asphidestra leaves.

Now let me turn to the photo of my mother, Winsome. Like Ruby, she married successfully, but not quite so successfully as Ruby. Her husband, my father, was a dentist, but was not such a public figure as Ruby's husband. However he was very well known in Ballarat for his interest in culture, art and science, especially through his help in organising Workers Education Lectures (later known as the Council for Adult Education). Every year he was the speaker at the Robbie Burns Memorial and he frequently lectured on Lake Wendouree and its fish, birds and plants.

I believe my mother and father met through looking down a microscope. They had a mutual interest in natural history as popularised by Haldane and Huxley. Be that as it may. They did have lots in common.

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Trying to piece together their lives it seems to me that they had an unnecessarily long engagement period. Maybe my mother wanted to have "everything just as it should be" before she married and they had to wait for an assured income, In recent years I have other notions. Perhaps, I will be able to hint at them later..

I have never ceased searching the photo to try to find out if Winsome, (my future mother) really is looking wise and wistful or am I reading into it my memories of her wistfulness in the 1930s. Am I thinking she looks wise because I know that she was better educated than either of her sisters and that she had been a teacher before her marriage ?

Whether she looks wistful in the photo or not, in real life she was a very romantic person. By this I don't mean to imply that she was not a practical person, she was, and she coped very, very well with tremendous hardship and heart breaking disappointments as will be appreciated by those who are persevering to read these memories. But she seemed to have an inner vision of what she expected family life to be like. And not only family life, her vision extended to the lives her children should live when they were grown up. You could say she was ambitious, ambitious for her family; but it wasn't just ambition, it was idealism, or romanticism. She tried to really believe that our family was a perfect family. Sometimes it was, But our dreams were not her dreams, especially as we became adults.

I remember when I was a child reading "Alice in Wonderland" I particularly liked the story about Alice thinking she is carrying a beautiful baby, but when she looked down she found it was a pig. I used to think that that must be how my mother felt when "the family let her down".

I really tried to live up to her expectations, but they kept expanding. Sometimes I thought of Tennyson's words

*Yet all experience is an arch where thro'  
Gleams that untravelled world whose margin fades  
Forever and for ever when I move.*

Such a quote also reminds me of the wonderful gift my mother bequeathed to me (and most probably my brothers and sisters), She had a wonderful knowledge of British literature and as she ironed she would share this with me. (Footnote 2) And, of course she and my father helped to instil into us a great love of nature. However our nature excursions would give us more information about introduced species than Australian species. We knew about trout and each year attended the ceremony at the Hatchery to see the roe being taken from the fish. Spring time we went to collect buttercups and daisies in Victoria Park. We learnt how to draw the Oak, the Ash and the Elm.(?)

Now we come to where I will describe the home over which Winsome presided.

We lived in the family home in which my mother had been born in 1877 or thereabouts (footnote 3). It was very much the head-

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quarters for relations and friends, we frequently had guests for meals and for stopping over for the night or a few days. Thus I have chosen to say my mother presided over our home,

The house was one of the first brick dwellings in Ballarat. The original building was a two story 8 roomed house (I can identify it in one of the illustrations in Withers History of Ballarat): It had been added to over the year and when we lived in it, there were five other rooms. So it was a rambling old family home with a truly beautiful, large rambling garden, with towering fruit trees, but not one native plant. (Footnote 4)

We had an amazing supply of books, having inherited my grandparent's library (and the children's books that had belonged to my uncles and aunts). In any case my father indulged himself in buying books and magazines.

I think Winsome's romanticism served her well until the 1930s, but, she was not ready for realities which the Depression forced upon our family.

In the 1920s we knew there were poor people, especially in Ballarat East, and among the potato growing area of Bungaree. My mother used to visit homes in the "slums" as she was president of the Baby Health Centre. I think she also visited some of the same homes when she was canvassing for my uncle's election, but in any case she did "visit the poor". She would come home and tell us hair-raising stories about the "slatternly" homes she visited.

Also, we saw poor people with our own eyes. Nearly every day there would be some "poor beggar" having his lunch on our back verandah. And, as the Depression continued there would be whole families in tattered clothing walking up Sturt Street, some pushing their possessions in prams and others with wheel barrows. Some of them may have been swaggies, but I saw hundreds of gaunt, poverty stricken, homeless men and women in 1931

But poverty was remote to us.

However, early in 1931 my cousins had to "walk off their farm" in the Mallee and double up in Aunty Anna's home. Not long after we had to wave goodby to the Painters who had been our next door neighbours for many years. Their father, a very prominent Ballarat business man was bankrupt. Their home was sold over their heads. Another family of cousins walked off their Mallee farm

These three distressing cases were from our own circle of kith and kin and thus brought the Depression much closer to us.

But it came right into our home in 1932 when my father died..

Suddenly we were left penniless. He was bankrupt. The proceeds from the sale of the house, the furniture, the dental equipment, the photography equipment, the microscopes, the library were not enough to cover our debts.

Just imagine what it was like to have to shift from a home that had been the family home for over 70 years ! Imagine cleaning out

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the loft, the tool shed, the wash-house, the cupboards under the stairs, the pantry; finding the special treasure which had been placed in the ceilings and so on and so forth ? Can you imagine the heart wrenching of such a clean out ?

Everything had to be sold. In some ways it was good that we did not have to make decisions on most of what we unearthed.

But there was worse to come, When the house was put on the market and later when the household goods were auctioned we had a constant procession of people traipsing through. Very few were potential buyers,

How we could ever have shifted if we did not have Aunty Anna is more than I can imagine ! She was there to sort things out and to make a joke just as my mother was about to burst into tears.

Winsome's idealism was sorely tested, but there were compensations for her. At this stage her sons and daughters did pull together as a loyal team and thus her vision of a united family was untarnished.

Fortunately my brothers had good positions in Melbourne so we shifted to be with them. Well the others shifted, but I stayed behind with Aunty Ruby. She was praised for enabling me to stay on at school, but in reality I was her little maid of all work.

The three eldest became the breadwinners. We rented a small house with a "good address" and through skimpy housekeeping, wearing cast-off clothes, and saving fares by walking the family managed "to keep the wolf from the door" (Footnote 4).

For about 5 years we were a family that stayed together because we paid together. Winsome's romantic dream of us all caring and sharing must have appeared to her to be a reality. On the face of it, we seemed to be an ideal family. *But then things fell apart..*

In the year 1937 all five of us left home. Three of us married, and two pursued careers which took them away from home. It seemed clear to me at the time, and it still seems clear, that each of us individually decided that we just had to make a break for it. The family ties were too tight.

Not only did we all leave home but several of us rejected the conservative political values which had been imposed on us in Ballarat.

Each in our own way tried to ensure that Winsome wasn't left in the lurch, but of course she was. Anna smoothed her bitter path and eventually she and Anna lived together in Ballarat.

I know very little about the last 6 or 7 years of Winsome's life. I don't say that with regret. I am stating it as a fact. We drifted apart in so many ways, particularly as she could not abide the way we were bringing up our daughters, nor could she accept the fact that we liked living in Brunswick.

On the whole Winsome's years in Ballarat, when Anna was alive,

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were probably as congenial as any years she had lived. We were not worried about her. We assumed she had resumed her network of friends and was enjoying familiar places. We also knew that she was disappointed by the life we were leading, for example the fact that we sent our daughters to a child care centre. We thought the less we confronted her with our different values, the better. We took comfort in the knowledge that she had Anna's constant companionship, knowing that Anna would help her to accept the realities of life.

Perhaps the above was rationalising, but such thinking served its purpose for us, and we got on with our own life.

But Anna died and it was only natural for Winsome to live with Ruby.

Quite suddenly, in 1952, Winsome arrived at my brother's home in Melbourne and said she was never going back to Ruby's. Ruby had apparently hurt her feelings beyond repair. My brother, who had a very young family, had only a couch to offer her. While other arrangements were being worked out it was decided that Winsome should stay with a cousin in Warburton. So I took her to the bus (Footnote 5). Usually, she expected me to wait until the bus left and to wave. But on this day, she said,

There is no need for you to stop, Ruth, I'll be alright.

To my credit I did go through the routine of waving to her. She died a few days later.

I have often wondered over the physical cause of Winsome's death. But whether it was a genuine heart attack or not is not important. I do know that she died of a broken heart.

Furthermore I think her heart was broken by the deliberate destruction of her most basic dream, and that Ruby had the weapon to carry out this deed.

Her basic dream was of a happy family established by a loving husband and wife.

I think the weapon Ruby used was to taunt my mother with the fact that my father had had an illegitimate child before he was married. Today, morality has changed so much that it is almost impossible to think that there could be any heart felt concern about such a situation; but Winsome had the values of a different era. In any case it would not only be the smearch on Winsome's husband's name, but, more importantly, the spite with which Ruby would have detailed her knowledge that not only destroyed their relationship, but destroyed Winsome's memories of happy families.

I did not know my father had had an illegitimate child until well after my mother died. I first had an inkling of it when I met an elderly teacher from a Ballarat school and he said "How is your brother Dougald?" And I said, "I haven't a brother Dougald, that was my father's name." He coloured up in an embarrassed way. And, although I put it at the back of my mind, it sometimes slipped forward and gradually, over the years, I have remembered enough

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instances to know that, before his marriage, my father must have had an illegitimate son. Was my parents delayed marriage due t/o this ?

One particular memory stands out. When I was fifteen and living with Ruby, she as much as told me that my father had an illegitimate son. But I chose not to believe her. If she was capable of attempting to break a family secret in this way she was also capable of taunting my mother with it.

So there in a photograph, like the figures on a Grecian urn are the "three graces" Anna, Winsome and Ruby. Am I just imagining it, or does the photo give us a glimpse of how each of them will face up to the anguish and sweetness that life will deal out to them ?.

#### COMMENTS

This story over-simplifies very complicated human relationships. It is impossible to find words to express some of the really harrowing incidence in those years. Despite these limitation it is hoped the story provokes thought on two issues :-

1. That homelessness does not mean the lack of a dwelling but it may mean living with people who are incompatible and sometimes cruel, not necessarily with weapons but with words and gestures.
2. That an ideal family is a complete myth (!!!!!).

#### FOOTNOTES

Footnote 1.. Ruby lived on Wendouree Parade opposite where the olympic monument now stands.

Footnote 2. My mother had a huge amount of ironing as it included the napkins and white coats from my father's dental surgery.

Footnote 3. I have never been sure of my mother's birth date. It was written in the family bible but the date page was carefully covered with a piece of paper so that children couldn't read it.

Footnote 4. We lived at 802 Mair Street and our garden is described by Gary Dowling in his book "Mud Eye". This book gives a useful insight into "society" life in Ballarat in 1930s.

Footnote 5. A copy of the family budget for this period is available.

Footnote 6. The way I completely refused to accept the knowledge Ruby gave me about my father, was similar to the way children, although they have conclusivbe evidence that there is no Father Christmas, still kid themselves that he does. I completely dismissed her very obvious hints and did not "put two and two together" until the chance comment by the old Ballarat teacher.'

Extra Note My mother identified herself through my father. Amongst the old photographs there is one of a group of people at Auntie Rue's. The list of names, on the back (in my mother's handwriting) is a curious mixture... some first names are used but my mother identifies herself as Mrs D.F S Miller.

WINSOMY

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ANN #

Ruby



1927?

Ruby

Row Row  
 Ruth Miller  
 Mat Beach  
Front Row  
 Peggy Zylar  
 Bob Brasner  
 (mixed)  
 Nancy Brasner  
 Ewen Zylar  
 Betty Miller  
 Bobby Zylar  
 Winifred Miller  
 Ronald Scott  
 den behind Winifred  
 Gordon Zylar  
 white Meade

---

all behind

Back Row

from Mat Beach  
 Mrs John Walker  
 Marn Buchanan  
 & Johnnie  
 Mrs Gladys Bond  
 Jack Bond  
 Row John Walker  
 Betty Gubble  
 Mrs Gubble  
 Mrs Brasner  
 & Mrs Gey  
 Mrs Anna  
 Mrs Fran  
 Mrs S Zylar  
 Mrs Peter  
 all back  
 Mrs Scott  
 Mrs S S Miller  
 Mrs Zylar Scott