

Mim Egan information and photos- her stories

Obtained by email from Mim Egan in 2013.

MY EARLIEST MEMORY

The rain drummed steadily on the roof of the tiny cottage, perched on the rocky hillside above the flooded river. The young family was warm and secure in front of the stove with the ~~fish~~ dog on the hearth. A glow of light from the kerosene lamp on the table lit the centre of the room. The rest was in shadow. My mother was in her rocking chair, feeding the baby and reading a book, while Dad sat relaxed, recovering from his battle against the wind and rain on his walk home through the bush. Napkins were strung on a makeshift line across the front of the fire and his clothes too were there to dry.

I was ready for bed. While waiting I pushed a chair up to the sink and climbed up to help myself to a drink of water from the dipper resting there. A lovely cool ~~draft~~^{draught} which I enjoyed greatly. But oh, what a to-do this caused. The dipper was there to catch the drips from a leaking roof and I had drunk the drips!

THE CHICKEN POX

We loved living in our house above the river, ~~but the house was a long way from the store and the railway station and you walked to get there.~~ We lived quite a way from the store and the railway station and you walked to get there. Our house was quite isolated. There were no neighbours to help out with baby-sitting. ~~So~~ when the three children developed chicken pox our mother cared for us as best she could. The time came when a shortage of food made it imperative for her to go to the store. The two younger children were put in the pram and despite the excessive heat we set off up the steep, rocky track. I was not happy, ~~I was~~ very miserable, itching all over, especially my head. There were even sores in my mouth. I complained, but what could my mother do? We were far too young to be left alone in the house so I must go on. Mum said "Well try not to think about it and it won't hurt nearly so much". Well I did and it didn't.

THE INTRUDER

After a blistering day with still not a breath of air we all went to bed, windows wide open. Our sleep was restless. We girls woke to find someone standing in our room. It wasn't our mother because when we had asked "Is that you Mum?" there had been no answer.

Then came the screams. All hell broke loose and the fellow put out his hand. Convinced that we were about to be shot we pulled the sheet over our heads. When next we peeped out he was nowhere to be seen.

Our mother clutching the baby was in the hall, ~~vaguely~~^{vaguely} lighting matches. Our father was attempting to light a candle but told how he had been holding a match under the clock in his befuddled state. Dad appeared and climbed on the bed in order to light the gas lamp. With that the fellow came from behind the door and escaped.

Though nothing really had happened the fear engendered by this incident was with us until we were grown women.

Holidays..

Our hard working parents gave us a wonderfully happy childhood, without fear and with little restraint. Money was short, but we had great holidays.

They were good planners. We were proud of them. As holiday time neared, a supply of groceries would build up in boxes, beside a heap of cooking utensils, bedding and clothing.. Our lighting was provided by a carbide lamp, a brilliant light but it gave out a horrible smell. This too, had to be part of our luggage, plus the tent, made by mum and the fishing gear..

With suitcases at a premium, all this was bundled into sugar bags and corn sacks to be transported to the railway station, two kilometres away. How this happened, I have no idea. There must have been a carrier or did dad cart it there in the wheel barrow?

The day arrived and we'd set off in the steam train to Albion Park, 60 miles south of Sydney. Travelling by train was paramount excitement. The great black engine, chuffed along, belching out clouds of smoke and cinders. The carriages swayed and bumped along behind. Never could we resist looking out the window and had all suffered the agony of getting a cinder in an eye.

The luggage was stowed in the guard's van, while we were settled into a box carriage. Each compartment held about ten people and opened onto the platform. One seat lifted up to provide access to the toilet. You can imagine the smell, and the embarrassment of anyone unfortunate enough to need the place. With a bit of luck we'd get a compartment to ourselves.

No matter how clean we'd been, by the end of the trip we'd be grubby. Soot drifted in the windows, which needed to be kept open, because of the heat. Tunnels, meant we surged into blackness and sat frozen, until the light burst upon us. There were three tunnels, one was very long. If a window was left open, we'd be overcome by sulphurous fumes until it was hastily shut.

The rushing scenery absorbed us. At Christmas time the bush blazed with masses of red christmas bush. Waves of christmas bells floated over the swampy areas and waratahs lorded it over all. Patches of gold announced yet another wattle to lighten the scene, while blending it all, were the greens and greys of the eucalypts.

All too quickly the journey ended. The train stopped at the tiny station, at the foot of a towering range. A carter with a horse and dray was waiting, as we scrambled out onto the platform. We were soon happily moving, we three children and the baggage piled in the dray, while the parents sat up front with the driver. Then came the trip, along a sandy bush track in the burning sun and plenty of flies, out to the coast and Lake Illawarra.

The only sign of habitation was one cottage with the front room, set up as a tiny store. Here they sold milk, the daily papers and a few basic groceries. The lake was large, with a barrier of land and sandhills between it and the ocean. We camped at the south end, near the entrance. A paradise for children who could play there in almost complete safety.

Not only was there a lake, but close to the entrance was an island, a great rocky mass, where we could explore, though we needed to wait until low tide to get there.

Setting up camp, meant dad going off into the bush to get a load of saplings. These were used as struts for the tent and to make beds. Mum attended to the meals and making the camp fire. A pump near the beach provided our only water supply, brackish, but healthy. Condi's crystals ensured that we would have no problems.

How tired our parents must have been when we all were settled into bed that first night. Sacks had been stuffed with bracken to make mattresses and the tent had finally been erected.

Never a holiday passed without a good storm to provide excitement. The tent often flapped in our faces through the night and many were the warnings not to touch it or it would leak. And often it did leak, even though no-one had touched it. By some grace our tent always seemed to survive these gales. In the early morning scene, tents could be found wrapped around trees or missing completely, with goods scattered widely across the sand.

We were not the only family who came to camp in the area and many life long friends were made here. Sometimes at night, a camp fire would be built. Everyone gathered around, telling tales or singing ditties. Hordes of mosquitoes came to feast, but citronella was our insect repellent.

If the tide was right, the excitement was always high, as evening approached. At dusk, families would begin the long trek across the sand to the lake, armed with hurricane lanterns, cone shaped nets on long handles and kerosene buckets to hold the catch. The wearing of shoes, a protection against stone fish and barbs, was essential. canvases - called
sand shoes.

Off we went, wading into the cool shallow water, lanterns held high to catch the gleam of the flathead or the prawns, whichever it happened to be. When the prawns were running well, we couldn't scoop them up fast enough. Tins were soon full and ready to be placed on the camp fire for cooking.

Capturing flathead was more of a team effort and always fraught with the risk of a drenching, if you happened to tread in a hole. As the fish darted to escape, the cluster of bodies racing after it surged from side to side. The successful hunter often trapped his trophy only by falling on it with his net. Rarely did anyone return to camp without more than enough food for the next day or the day to come.

A range of sandhills separated the camps from the surf. We soon became efficient at scaling them, solely for the purpose of racing down.

Some years later, we managed to buy a car and enlarged our horizons, south and west. We loved exploring. We stayed in beautiful valleys, discovered caves and wandered along rivers. Bateman's Bay was a special place where we spent so much time on the rocks, feasting on the oysters.

I remember these adventures with great pleasure, but remember nothing as clearly as those early days when the world was all so new to us and untrammelled by civilization. As in Pippa's song, "God was in his heaven, all was right with the world."

I didn't ever say thank you to my parents. I wish I had.

Grandfather Mayne.

My earliest memories of my grandfather are when he used to come, on a Sunday afternoon to take us for a drive, in one of his carriages. The one I remember was a governess' cart, with a seat across the front, where grandfather sat with our parents, while the children sat at the back where seats were built around three sides. We had no governess, whom I guess would have been relegated to the back with the children. We had only strict instructions to sit still and behave.

Grandfather was the driver, with reins to guide the horse and a whip in a slot, waiting for the moment when the horse needed a little more encouragement. He treated his horses well. I never saw him use his whip. His family had come from Ireland and bred horses in their paddocks, in Canterbury Road, Sydney. His father was known as a horse doctor. There were lots of carriages and carts. They were also carriers, a lucrative occupation in those early days. This was grandfather's job. His horses were always shining and full of life, a strong contrast to the only other horses we saw; the ones that pulled the carts for the baker, the butcher and the milkman, who came every day to our front gate. These horses were docile old nags, who knew their work and did it well.

Their visits provided our only excitement, apart from the postman. Every one lived for the postman's visit. He came twice a day. We would wait at the gate for him, far ahead of time, then race in to take the letters to our mother. He always blew his whistle. There was no need to wait; but our mother encouraged us, she did need some peace.

Grandfather's visits broadened our lives. We drove to all the special haunts along the river, on sandy tracks, jogging along in the sunshine. Once we had an especially long drive, to a punt, which took us across the river. The punt had cables on either side and we were propelled along by a man turning a wheel. The passengers helped too.

Having reached our destination, there was always a great picnic coming from the basket, while the billy was boiled, over an open fire. Our mum was a good cook. I never remember much about the journey home. We probably slept.

When we needed to move to our new house, closer to the school and the shops, grandfather came with a flat topped dray. He was perched on the front, sitting on a box like seat. The cart was pulled by two great draught horses, which snorted and stamped their feet. They were handsome and strong. Unlike the other horses, they had a fringe of long silky hair, hanging over their hoofs.

All our belongings were stacked on the tray and well tied down. So many neighbours came to help, or to say good bye, our good friends in this remote area. Then my grandfather and my dad set off up the rocky slope and out onto the road to our new house. There, for the first time, we had a proper bath, of galvanized iron, on four legs, set up in the large wash house. Gone forever was the large round tub, in front of the fire. Now we had running water and a plug, so that the water ran away into the garden! What luxury!

A memorable feature of these days was the Sunday dinners at grandmothers, when four sons, came home with their families. Roy, the second eldest was rarely there. He was a train driver and the hero of all the little boys. Unmarried! Some female had accused him of being the father of her child and despite his strong denial of any involvement, had been forced to pay her money, for sixteen years. This had devastated the whole family. At the end of the years, the female had snarled, 'Well, she wasn't your brat, anyway.'

Grandfather was lanky, with a wispy beard and just slightly crazy, very much resembling the version we are given of Don Quixote. When the families arrived, it was his job, to entertain the children, while all the cooking went on. His special trick was making a noise in his throat, while holding his nose with one hand and strumming his throat with the other, producing a very odd noise, much resembling the sound coming from an aboriginal corroboree. Had he learned it from the natives, on his long trips to Wollongong, where he had carted goods and met his first wife? We were encouraged to join in. Then we had to view his treasures, in the work shop. All neatly set out on the bench; shells and bits of drift wood, coloured pebbles, nothing of any value, except to him.

How did our grandmother manage? There was always a massive roast dinner, followed by baked rice custard and preserved fruit. Imagine the heat in the summer time from the fuel stove. It was a happy time and all the females helped, accompanied by lots of chatter and good odours.

Auntie Eva was the thorn. She was always beautifully corseted and never became involved in the kitchen. Maybe she set the table and arranged some flowers, then talked to the men. No one minded if Eva didn't turn up. She always appeared to be suffering from a bad smell.

When eventually we were called to dinner and were squeezed into our seats, the uncles began their tricks. Things were passed around the table, but never reached the one who wanted them; when almost there the direction would be reversed. This amused the children and annoyed the mothers. Grandmother was long suffering. Tired of these tricks, the uncles would start teasing, telling tales about grandfather's misadventures or of one another's.

By now the meal would have been eaten and out would come the tea and cakes. Now was grandfather's turn to take the stage. He instructed the little girls on how to hold their tea cups, with their tiny finger cocked in the air. The mothers fumed, but we would hear all about it in the train, going home.

The big family dinners faded out as the families developed their own interests and Gran could no longer cope with feeding so many people. We visited separately whenever we could.

Life was not so easy for our grandparents. Motor transport had come and horse drawn vehicles were no longer needed. In the original home there had been lots of horses and carriages. Now there was just one horse and a dray. Grandfather went to market and brought back loads of produce for the local shops. Not a lucrative business, but it saw him out.

I was sixteen when grandfather died. I don't remember much about the funeral. Immediately after the service dad drove us to visit a family, further along the river at South Hurstville. The mother was dad's eldest sister. She had four sons and a little daughter. None of us had ever heard of her. She and dad were the off springs of grand dad's first marriage.

Grand father had married Louise Harrigan, the youngest daughter of a large family. Her father, Edward was a land owner in the Corrimal district. She came to the marriage, well provided for, bringing solid cedar furniture, fashioned from the timber on the property and her piano. Her mother had run a school in Wollongong, before marrying Edward. Louise was well educated.

The marriage was to be short lived. Soon after my father's birth, Louise had died and Irene, at the age of three, had been fostered out, a common practice in those days. This was tantamount to

slavery. She was cruelly treated and at times, chained to her bed, because she'd tried to run away. The baby was sent to live with his mother's sister in Corrimal. She was still alive, when I began teaching at Fairy, Meadow, my first appointment. I could have talked to her, .If only I had known.. .

When Grandfather married Julia Harris, eighteen months later, my father was brought back to his home. Julia loved him dearly and treated him as one of her own, Irene only returned home, when she was twelve. The family fortune had deteriorated because of the bank crash in the 1890's. She was sent out to service, for which she earned two shillings and sixpence. (My father, at the age of eight, helped the milkman, before and after school. There is a reference written as a result of this. It was only after WW2 that this shocking practice ceased. Women had learned of their capabilities; never again would they be treated so badly!

Irene became friendly with the boy next door, a little too friendly. While ~~only sixteen~~^{twenty-one}, she became pregnant and was shown the door, by her father. A fine Christian gentleman! No love could compensate for the disgrace to his family her name was never to be mentioned again, nor was she to be contacted. The boy's family took her in. The young couple married and made a good life for themselves. One of their sons became a member of the Commonwealth parliament, Ray Whittorn, who represented the Balaclava area, in Victoria.

Grandfather's death had released my father from his promises. But it was only with the death of my father, so many years later, that we were to learn so much more about our family background. Dad didn't ever tell. On the very day of his funeral, came a letter from someone in Wollongong, who was researching their family tree. We were to learn so much. If only dad had been alive to tell his tale!

Addendum No1.LLewellan St

The first house we lived in was No1 Llewellyn St Gungah Bay, Oatley (1914 to 1920). Before this, mum and dad had lived in two tents on a block of land owned by Grandfather Jones, near the railway bridge. It was a few blocks up from the corner. I think, in Yarra Rd. (The road went along side the railway line, out to the bridge across the river to Como.) They lived there for two years.

There were few homes in this area and these people became good friends of my parents who must have needed quite a bit of support. I'm imagining the heat, the cold, the rain and the storms. Two years in a tent with no where else to go. How was the laundry done and where did the water come from? The names I remember were the Dockseys, the Renfews and the Steads. I do not know the name of the old man who lived adjacent to them but he sold them the house in Llewellyn St. just before I was born, for four hundred pounds. He really cared about them.

There, the three children were born. They both worked hard to better themselves. Dad landscaped the garden, making steps from the prevalent sandstone. He grew vegetables. They had chooks. Mum did the house work, really hard in those days. Each activity seemed to need a whole day. Washing on Mondays, ironing on Tuesdays, mending on Wednesdays, baking on Thursdays, cleaning on Fridays was the routine, strictly adhered to.

The clothes were dried on lines strung across the lawn, the lines were held up by props. These often broke, letting the clothes fall in the dirt. The prop sellers, driving a horse and cart, laden with props, wandered the streets on Mondays, calling their wares. "Props for sale," The calls filled the air.

The washing fell on the ground on windy days. I loved the winds. They lifted the washing into the air. It made great flapping noises. It twisted and billowed, as though it would be ripped to pieces, or even take off into space. Sometimes it did. The props came up too and then fell off. Down went the washing, grovelling in the dirt.

The lines were on the opposite side of the house from the laundry. Wet washing is very heavy and had to be carried in a basket. Once mum thought she would try a new method. She piled all the dry washing onto a sheet, spread on the ground. Gathered up the corners and put the load on her back. It didn't work. She fell over.

Getting the washing dry could be a great problem. It could rain for a week. Lines were strung along the verandahs and in front of the fuel stove. Getting the napkins dry was the great need. Only once, did we have a fire, when this was being done. The rain had gone on for days. There were floods. Mum was desperate. She'd hung the napkins too close to the chimney and they caught fire. With the broom, she knocked the blaze onto the floor and smothered it with the mat. I remember the smoke and her distress..... We still had no dry napkins and there was such a mess to be cleaned up.

Very good.

The floors were covered in linoleum. This had to be polished with bee's wax. First the floor needed to be scrubbed, then the wax was applied, by hand and the polishing began. All done on your hands and knees! There were no rubber gloves and the soaps were stringent. Hands became reddened and sore. Knees suffered. Unfortunate girls, who worked as servants, developed housemaid's knees, something very painful.

The house was perched on a steep hillside, which stretched down to the water's edge. The view from the front verandah, across the river to the ranges, enriched our lives with its ever changing patterns. The storms were the most exciting, when the lightening flashed and the clouds tumbled across the sky, jockeying for a place. The rain lashed the verandahs. We raced up and down, while mum and the dog, hid under the bed. My memories of these pictures, the sunsets and the mists in the folds of the hills, inspired my creations when so many years later I joined the Embroiderer's Guild.

The children were brought up to do as they were told.. Being belted with the razor strap ensured that you kept the rules. My spirit was broken early in the piece .I went along with whatever my mother said, for the rest of her days.

I can remember only once being strapped. The marks were still on my legs when dad came home. There was a fuss about that. What I had done I can't remember, but I'd probably hit my sister, because she wasn't doing as she was told. Copying my mother!

There was one time, when I refused to eat the barley soup that was served for lunch.. I was sent away from the table. I went. At tea time, there was the barley soup. I wouldn't eat it. I was sent from the table and eventually to bed. Some hours later, I came out and ate the barley soup. I could have been three.

My mother can't be blamed for the way she behaved. Her mother had died when she was only five. There was no one to love her or care for her. Nor to teach her how to behave! Grandfather was a migrant to Australia. He had no family to help him. Grandmother had died with the birth of her fourth child. Her parents were too old to help very much.

The three children were put in a children's home, some where in the city. Grandfather went on with his work to keep them. They were there for five years and went to Petersham Public School, as they were old enough.. The baby was adopted out. My mother never recovered from the loss of her mother. She was inconsolable and became a very badly behaved child, fighting everyone.

The discipline she metered out to us was probably the treatment she had received. Or maybe that was the accepted way of treating children.in those days.

Handwritten signature

SCHOOL DAYS.2

The four class room school opened in 1920 in Letitia St. Oatley was meant to cater for the needs of the district. However it was full to overflowing the day it opened, with more than sixty pupils in each room. The two cloakrooms at each end of the building were stripped of their coat hooks and turned into classrooms. With a desk on each side, there was just room to sidle up the aisle between them. A blackboard on an easel and plenty of chalk completed the set-up. Slates and slate pencils were our writing equipment. Each piece of completed work was doomed to be erased with a wet sponge. In hot weather the sponge soon dried out. Then we used spit!

Books made of brown paper and boxes of coloured chalk met the needs of our art classes. The chalk was really soft and very messy. Our master-pieces soon became blurred and the atmosphere heavy with chalk dust. Whatever equipment was used was free of charge. Education was free to all.

The infants occupied one of these rooms and there I was installed. I immediately fell in love with the beautiful young teacher, Miss Stenhouse. My seat was towards the back of the class. Sydney Mills sat behind me and delighted in pulling my long curls. I consulted with my mother. She suggested that I turn round and hit him, which I did. I was the one that the teacher slapped over the affair. However, Syd didn't ever pull my hair again.

Going to school meant that I was in contact with all the ailments suffered by children. Whooping cough was ~~our~~ first, very nasty, especially for babies and we had a baby. It was a very contagious disease. Worn out by the whooping of all three, our mum decided to take us to the Blue Mountains to live. She'd heard that a change of altitude was a sure cure. A flat was rented and we departed, leaving dad to fend for himself. He visited us at the weekends.

I was sent off to school, a school with only one class room to accommodate all the grades. Each grade sat on forms at a long bench which stretched half the width of the room. The floor went up in layers with the sixth graders high at the back. I was promoted to the grade two level and became very distressed. Dictation began the day and I couldn't spell "adopt". I have no further memories of school in Blackheath.

There was to be an Eisteddfod, and Mum decided that I would take part. With a poem to be recited, hours were spent instructing me. I had it word perfect. Then it was discovered that my five year old sister knew it too, so her name was added to the list of participants. She won the first prize.

Empire Day arrived while we were in the mountains, always a great celebration for Queen Victoria's birthday, a day celebrated throughout the British Empire. An Empire upon which 'the sun never sets' we were told.

The best part was a bonfire at the end of the day with fireworks. Each family took their own, tiny crackers called squibs, safe for the children, then gradually increasing in size up to the 'double bungers' which were very dangerous. Fingers could be blown off. The bonfire had been built up by the locals bringing all the spare branches they could find over many weeks. Every one gathered round, being roasted in the front and frozen at the back, in the chilly autumn air. The big moments were when the sky rockets went up and when we waved our sparklers.

Local bands provided entertainment through the day and there was lots of marching. Then came the races for all age groups, foot races, three legged races, sack races, egg and spoon races, until the late afternoon. Just before dark the picnics began. A copper on the corner of the field provided boiling water for the people who came with their billies, to make their tea. Then the bonfire! A wonderful memory!

After three months, we returned home and only lost our coughs the day we arrived. I went back to school and by the time I was nine had reached the sixth grade, Mr. Firzgerald's class. He was the headmaster, a

stumpy, roly-poly man dressed in shirt sleeves, with a waist coat to support his watch and chain. A bamboo cane, continually waving was a part of his being. His very tall wife and his daughter came at times to help with our education. These days they would be called specialist teachers

Fitzzy had a mania for mathematics. We had the mathematics tables drilled into us. First the times-tables, then all the others. Weights and measures, sixteen ounces one pound, twenty-eight pounds, one bushell, so it went on. Then came the distances. Twelve inches one foot, three feet one yard. On it went, until we came to the last possible knowledge we might need to know. Sixty-three-thousand-three-hundred and sixty inches in a mile

The recitation happened first thing every morning, with the long cane being used to conduct the chorus. Full attention was demanded. The cane would crash on the desk in front of you should you waver. Though it was the poor boys who caught his attention, never the girls. We sat on opposite sides of the room.

Then would come the mental arithmetic. Testing the tables we had just recited, then testing our skill in using them. Such teaching methods are scorned to-day, but we all became very good at maths. It was like an instinct.

There were no text-books. A school magazine appeared once a month, This contained some general knowledge articles, stories from literature, poems and always on the back page, a song. Mrs. Fitzgerald and her daughter Mary, came each week to teach us singing. We learnt, using the Tonic- sol-fa, displayed in a chart on the wall. Mary brought along her portable organ. With no car to transport it, how did she get it there?

We learnt our songs in four parts. Four aisles in the class room, each aisle took a part. I can still remember some of the songs, even the sol-fa. We all learnt all the parts and in the middle of a song could switch. One thing, I enjoyed was changing the key. Using the sol-fa chart, the pointer would move across. " Call it doh," she would call and off we would go.

There were no textbooks. For things like history and geography, charts, written on large sheets of brown paper, telling the details we should know, hung on the wall. One set for each subject and one page for each topic. A new page was turned each week or each month, during which time, we copied them down. This was called transcription. The writing was done, using a steel nibbed pen, dipped in ink. Not my skill! I didn't ever learn. My book was full of blots and terrible writing, my fingers covered in ink and dented with the pressure from the effort. There was blotting paper to mop up the mess. I had so much.

Maps of Australia and the World hung on the wall. We copied them and filled in all sorts of detail, capitals, rivers, mountains, products and lots more.

It was in this class that I had my first boy friend, though I don't think we ever had much to do with one another. Everyone knew that Ronald Hince was my boy friend. I wouldn't have had any other! He was the only boy who had clean shoes, probably cleaned by his mother, but beautifully black and shiney.

Only when we left this district and I went to an established school did we realise what a very good education I had had. I am forever grateful to the Fitzgerald family, a chubby cane-waving man and his two fine women. I attended the seventy-fifth anniversary celebrations of the Oatley School and there met the Fitzgerald's granddaughter. She was teaching mathematics in a Girl's High School. Just as beautiful as her mother! I wish her well.

Frederick William Mayne

My father, Frederick William Mayne was born on 15-4-1889 to Louise Mayne, nee Harrigan, (her second child) at Crystal Street Petersham. She died about three months later. He was cared for by an aunt or grandmother, at Corrimal until he was eighteen months old, by which time grandfather had remarried, to Julia Harris. Julia was a wonderful mother to him, determined that no one would accuse her of being a bad mother to her step-child. There was a remark about how long it had taken to remove the splinters from his bottom. His three year old sister was sent to live with a relative of grandfather's.

They now lived in Cliff Street Arncliffe. This may be the wrong name, but it was high on an area behind Arncliffe Park, which fronted onto Wollongong Rd., close to the end of the street and overlooked the local dairy. At the age of eight, Willy was delivering milk for this dairy before and after school. School entailed a walk to Kogarah, a couple of miles away. Among my papers, I have a tiny scrap of paper, a reference stating that Willy Mayne was an honest and reliable worker.

Grandfather was a carter and I can remember stables and horses at the back of the old weatherboard house, which fronted right onto the street, with only a very narrow veranda, about a foot below the level of the road. Sand came down from the street onto it. The house was crammed with furniture, a piano and beautifully studded chairs with cabriole legs, in the parlour, a massive cedar chest of drawers and brass studded bed, with a large canopy for the mosquito net in the front bedroom, while the round dining table, with two extension panels, plus a cedar sideboard, the top of it, crammed with crystal glasses and bowls, filled the living room. (Perhaps the Crystal street residence had been more spacious!)

This house featured a bath room, at the end of the back veranda, with a galvanised iron bath tub on four legs. A great luxury, where you could lie in the bath and stretch out, in contrast to the round tub, in front of the kitchen fire in Winter and in the wash house in Summer. I can still remember the smell of the soap. Pink carbolic! Previously to this, people had made their own soap, using the fat accumulated from the cooking and caustic soda. The veranda was sheltered from the elements by a massive curtain of asparagus fern, dusty and thorny. It had tiny black berries on it and I didn't like it

Dad talked little of his childhood, but we often heard about the fun he had in his early teen age, belonging to a gang of local boys; the Willington boys and Leo Skelton are names I recall. Church going was a must and their favourite prank was taking with them, match boxes full of ants, to be released at some strategic moment, they then sat back and enjoyed the scuffling and scraping the ants produced among the congregation. Depending on the season, stinking beetles and cicadas also kept the congregation busy. All this in the tiny church of old St David!

The Willington boys had an elder sister, Edith, who kept a stern eye on these lads and accordingly was much hated. Years later, when Edith and my dad were well into their eighties, their paths crossed. Edith was a keen organiser of the local historical society and she begged dad to join, because of all he could contribute. He wouldn't even give it a thought. He was not going to be bossed by Edith.

Dad began working for J.T. Fieldings at the age of eighteen, but sometime after he turned fourteen and then he went prospecting for opals at Lightening Ridge. He never talked about it, but the

samples he brought home were there. By this time, there would have been four young step brothers in the home and possibly finances were stressed, after the crash of the banks, at the end of the nineteenth century. When aged twelve, his sister Irene had been brought home and sent out to service, for which she earned two shillings and six pence.

Lightning Ridge is a long way from Sydney and I wonder how did he get there? Did he have companions? How did he manage to survive? I have tried, without success to find some clues. The book by Ian Idriess was no help, but gave some idea of the life there. We do know that he had a mate, Hugh Carey, an older man, who later went off to the war. Hugh came into our lives, in 1928, when Dad found him in the city, a broken man, ill and homeless. Hugh lived with us for quite a time while Edie nursed him.

I have just contacted the Lightning Ridge Historical Society, who have no record of my dad or his partner, but are pleased to hear from me. Dad and Hughey are now on their records. She suggested that he would have travelled by bicycle.

Mr. Fielding had set up a printing and box manufacturing company, in Buckingham Street Redfern. This was a private co-op and the loyal employees were welded to the establishment, well and truly, by the bonus they received each Christmas in the form of shares. It was quite a long time before their shares appeared on the market and they were among the best at the time.

Dad had a skill in putting together the machinery which came from America in crates, apparently without any instructions. Mr Fielding appreciated this and saw that my father attended technical school to further his knowledge. Eventually it was suggested that he go to America to learn even more. This did not happen, perhaps due to the intervention of WW1.

My father married on 12-11-1912, in St Davids C of E Arncliffe, to Edith, nee Jones. For the first two years of their marriage they lived in two tents, linked by a tent fly, set up on a block of land belonging to her father, in Yarram Rd. Oatley, close to the overhead bridge. An enterprising young couple, determined to get on, by the end of two years they were able to buy, the house in no.1 Llewellyn Street Gungah Bay for four hundred pounds.

Before their marriage Edie, a seamstress, had worked for Ward Bros. She continued to do this; whether by travelling into the city or doing piece work on her machine in the tent, I do not know. But she certainly did piece work, once they had moved, setting up her machine in a children's playground, with the children outside. Overcoats for the soldiers were part of the production. Piece work was absolute slavery, with such a few pence for each garment, but it was money.

The three roomed weather board house, with front and back verandas, was perched on the rocky slopes above the Georges River, with a boat and a boathouse, part of the deal. At the week-ends they sailed and explored the bays and inlets of the Georges River, needing to carefully watch the time of the tides. It was not unusual to be stranded on a sandbank or unable to reach the shore, because the tide had gone out. Boats of all varieties, dotted the river on these sunny occasions and strains of music filled the air, coming from banjos, guitars and mouth organs, played by crews. Will was a skilled player of the mouth organ while Edie played the mandolin. Their way of providing a musical background for their children!

With so much beautiful sand stone, surrounding them, Will chipped and chopped blocks to build a laundry, called a washhouse and to landscape their home, terracing the slopes. There was even a fish pond, close to the back door, which in summer time attracted snakes. My mother took no risk that her children would be bitten. On such occasions, she would order us to keep still and pin the snake down with a crow bar, then, with a spade she would cut off its head.

Most of the community along the river were fishermen, who were rather poor, with large families to be supported. The wives of these families often came to my mother for help and advice. She had a large book, called the Doctor at Home, which was so often consulted, with the only doctor, so far away, at Hurstville. Such strange remedies could be found in his book. Infected wounds could have a plaster of soap and Epson salts applied, or a bread poultice. This was made by pouring boiling water over a slice of bread, wrapped in a cloth. With the water squeezed out as much as possible, this was then applied to the wound. Horrible torture and what good could it have done? Another form of torture was the remedy for boils. A pickle bottle, (they had narrow necks) was filled with boiling water, which was poured out and the neck of the bottle immediately applied to the boil and pressed down very hard. As the bottle cooled, a vacuum was created and the core of the boil would be extracted. When wounds on the feet were bursting with pus, they could be lanced with a cut throat razor, by dad while we were held down by mum.

Especially do I remember the times in summer, when the tanks were down to the last few rungs; people, mostly the children, would come, with their buckets, to 'borrow' some drinking- water. It was never refused and we always managed

The northern end of Gungah Bay was fringed with a Mangrove swamp, where there were muddy flats when the tide went out. This mud was dotted with sharp little spikes, uninviting when it came to walking there in bare feet. Never-the-less a pleasurable pastime was squeezing the mud through our toes, like toothpaste. Rocks, there were in abundance along the shores, pitted with little holes, which, after the tide had gone out, remained filled with water and little water plants, like ,anemones. A great play ground for the children! These rocks were coated in oysters, which provided a great feast, but the part of the shell left behind, cut viciously into bare feet. Infection always set in, for which the oysters were blamed; not the dirt that got into the cuts. Oyster shells were poisonous we believed.

When people died, they had to be laid out and Edie was sometimes recruited for this.. Strangely enough, that seemed to be the time for much giggling. No one really had much knowledge of what to do, except that all openings had to be blocked. Pennies were always used for the eyes. The bodies, once in the coffin, must have been transported to the station, by horse and cart. At two-thirty every day, the funeral train arrived. A carriage at the back was fitted out to hold the coffins, while the mourners occupied the front carriages. The Woronora cemetery was a little further south. What went on there remained a mystery to me for a very long time.

With the arrival of the pneumonic 'flu in 1918 Edie became a sort of district nurse, going from house to house each day, washing and feeding the people who were ill. She didn't lose a patient, due she believed, to her special remedy, rum, taken under great protest by some, for medicinal purposes only. With no baby sitters, of necessity the children were taken along and left to stand at the gate, with the strict instructions (Don't you dare move). No one ever did.

When Will and Edie were living in the tents they became firm friends with the people living around them; the Dockeys, the Renfrews, the Ludwigs and then the people further down the Hodgkins, the Browns and another family of Ludwigs. Further along the Bay were the Horsefields, the Courtneys, the Irisons, the Mc Ewans and others I don't remember. They were a wonderful community of people, keenly organising ways to raise money to improve their village or give support to someone in distress. Concerts, fetes and dances made up quite a bit of their social life. People formed groups and put on one act plays, which always featured the villain, with his handle bar moustache and the fair maiden whom he was about to ravish. Mr. Hodgkins was a bass singer and rendered his version of 'Asleep in the Deep' or 'The earl King'. Elocution was a popular skill and my dad recited from The tales of The Sentimental Bloke, then recently published by C.J.Dennison. He had quite a good memory. But when the time arose that he forgot the next line, he always managed to get a coughing fit and need to get a drink of water. After which, of course, he was able to carry on quite happily. Hilda Hamilton, the local ballet teacher, did her act, at the same time providing advertisement for her business, no doubt.

There was the tale that early on, the community had raised enough money to build a church, seven hundred pounds. This sum had been given to the local builder, who had promptly taken off, perhaps to visit his parents in England and then returned to serve his sentence in prison. His sentence completed, he had returned to his family home, though with a somewhat reduced status. His wonderful wife was a nurse, who while he was absent, ran a hospital in their large home, to support her family. This hospital remained a feature of the Oatley district for many years.

During these years and for the rest of his life, my father was a member of the Masonic Lodge, Lodge Arncliffe, in which, his father-in-law was a founding member. The meetings happened regularly. He would rush home from work, entailing a train journey and then the long walk from the railway station. His dress suit and shirt, with its highly polished starched front and a stiffly starched collar and cuffs, plus cuff links and studs, would be laid out on the bed, ready for the quick change. In a little black case, there was a white calf skin apron and all sorts of regalia, to be worn with it, like boy scouts displaying their badges for the standard they had reached. There was a Lodge Oatley and no doubt he had some connection with this, too.

21 Belgravia Ave.
Mont Albert North
3129

5-2-13

Dear Rodger.

Thank you for the calendar. I have enjoyed it very much and see the sort of material you are looking for; photos more than tales, perhaps. I wonder if you would send a copy of it to my sister-in-law; she is ninety and grew up in Oatley. She may have some photos. Her father was a famous footballer, Rick ? Her address, Grace Mayne and family, 7, Glandore Ave., North Cronulla 2230.

I remember George Kendall was quite a character and Hedley Mallard rings a bell. It was good to see the picture of the old School of Arts, the centre of our early lives. When the bazaars were held, Mr.Hodges used to set up in the little annex at the front of the building and would sell mushy peas, for one penny on a saucer and tuppence in a bread roll. A lucrative business!

After the masonic hall was built the School of Arts was less popular for dances and balls.

My maternal grandfather built the picket fence behind the war memorial at the Oatley School.

Sorry I am taking so long to find the photos, I'll get there. It's all making me get my effects in order, so there'll be less for my unfortunate off springs to do, when I pop off. And I'm having a lot of fun, remembering things, for which I have to thank you and Cliff.

Enclosing a cheque And thank you. Regards

Mimi Jan



P. A. F. S. OF AUSTRALASIA.

Trafalgar Lodge, No 122.

— THE ABOVE LODGE WILL HOLD —

A River Excursion and Picnic

On George's River, Landing at Parksvale,

—o—o—o— SATURDAY, MARCH 8th, 1913. —o—o—o—

SOFT DRINKS AND HOT WATER PROVIDED.

DANCING, SPORTS, &c.

ALL INVITED.

Launches leave Sans Souci 2 p.m., Como 2.30 p.m. and 3 p.m., returning to
Como and Sans Souci about 10 p.m.

TICKETS. 1/6.

Children under 15, 1/-

F. W. MAYNE, Social Sec.

Mildred, Hilda Hamilton, (dance tch)
Esma Easter 1931,







Mildred 5y 9mth first ball.

Mildred Allana Esma. 1922. Letitia St.





1921

X Mildred & Esma & Alfred Hoels.

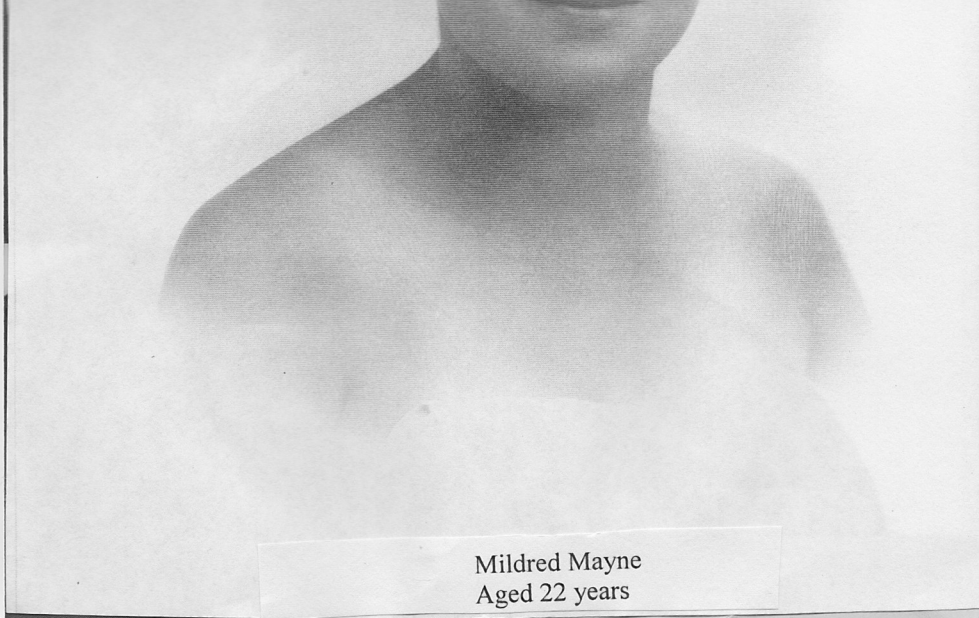


Esma, Edie and Mildred
1 year and 3 years old

*Mildred
3 years*



Here aged about 10
Esma, 8 yrs
Alan, 4 yrs
1924



Mildred Mayne
Aged 22 years



Mildred, Hilda Hamilton, (dance tch)
Esma Easter 1931,



St David's Sunday School
Oatley, 1930
Mildred, Marie Hart, Ada Clarke,
Jean, Mary O'Connor

1921 X mildred 9 Esma 9 Abbey Hoole



Esma, Edie and Mildred
1 year and 3 years old



Wollongong Road, Ardenne
Mildred, Alan and Esma
1926



Mildred Allana Esma. 1920. Letitia St.



Mildred 5y 9mth first ball



Mildred Aged one



Mildred with her parents, Will and Edie

Mim Egan at Oatley Public School in 1992.



Mim Egan and Cousin 1992 OPS