Life Story of Alex Coory

CHAPTER ONE

No man is an island. Events that shape a life are many and varied. Our forbears, their births and cultures in different lands, all have an effect that is ultimately ourselves. Likewise we ourselves affect others to the same degree. This is what we mean when we say no man is an island.

Interest in ones own early life comes at different stages. In this case it was in the late seventies due mainly to the children's interest in their lineage, they as a family urged me to write some account of my life experiences of all my eighty plus years. The public libraries have rows and rows of biographies and autobiographies, to add another would seem presumptuous.

We hear so much about changing times, in a changing world. One often wonders if previous generations said the same thing, those hundreds of years ago. There are many who pay lip service to a creed maintaining that the more things change, the more they stay the same! It would take years of my life to ponder this belief, as its meaning escapes me. Some of these trite sayings require an athletic mind to interpret intelligently. I suspect these hackneyed sayings in any conversation are used as puffery to eke out the allotted time for speaking; or used to air ones knowledge of the subject under discussion. Much like using punctuation in writing.

A strictly chronological account of ones life is difficult to maintain interest. The people who had a profound effect on our lives, have to be taken in conjunction with events that do not always coincide. I write this for my family to streamline a long list of isolated incidents. A family album of photos gives a still life version, whereas a moving picture gives a bit of life.

The first seven years of my life are shrouded in mystery. All who could verify the details have passed on. Some of those details are conflicting, due mainly I have no memories of six years of them. An accurate account would be like finding a safe path through a minefield; but with less disastrous results of course. The best part was I never cried as a baby, which must have been the envy of every mother on earth. I did check with my father many years later who verified this, saying instead of crying, my face would turn black. Allowing for Dad's limited English this was the alternative to crying. As will be explained later, this state of affairs was due to my eardrums not opening at birth, until I was six years old. It was a silent world.

My theory is those early silent years preserved my mind from too early compulsion to do and say things, before the real necessity to do so. I feel sure some minds are worn out from some enthusiastic parents to have their offspring perform before they are ready. The exact opposite is claimed by parents of gifted children, that they were never held back from developing their natural potential. I have no argument with either view at all, just in my case making a claim to a pet theory.

My father Joseph, my mother Elizabeth, and 3 year old John, came from Lebanon via Australia, to New Zealand in 1908. Dad's brother Jacob had preceded him and was already settled in Walker Street In Dunedin. Walker Street was later renamed Carroll Street. Jacob's family was fairly well established in a semi detached unit one of four, in a block built right on the street frontage, in the fashion of Coronation Street. The land was unencumbered and plenty of it in comparison with the situation back in Lebanese villages. As I recall, each section would amount to nearly a quarter of an acre, though narrow and deep to the rear. At first Dad and Uncle got along well, both working on the waterfront, or as they termed it "on the wharf".

Five more children were born to our family after settling in Dunedin. Mary in 1910, Alma in 1911, myself Elias in 1915, and Michael in 1917. One child died between Alma and me, the records customary at the time not stating whether male or female. John and Mary have both died at time of writing, John in 1972, Mary in 1997. Our mother died in 1920 of pneumonia in 1920 aged 32, leaving quite a young family. My father died, never remarrying, at the age of 92. When our mother took ill after Michael was born, Alma was allowed home three of us were fostered to an institution very similar to an orphanage. After Alma was allowed home, Michael and I remained behind till we were finally fostered out to Mrs le Fevre, a childless elderly widow who had a farm in Hampden in North Otago. She had a history of fostering children to assist her working a mixed dairy farm of cows, chickens, and pigs. More of this later.

The year was 1922 when Michael and I arrived in Hampden. It was at this time I was learning to talk, and was the beginning of any memory. My life until then is blank absolutely. The disability of deafness had been removed prior to leaving the institution we had been living, my presence there at the age of six was as too old because of the rules. I owe the deafness removal to the casual visit of a doctor, taking an interest in me and discovering the eardrums had never opened at birth. He arranged this minor operation and it was many years before this fact was made known to me by my brother John. Rather than separate us two boys, Michael and I were fostered out as above.

Discussions of earliest memories are rarely short of interest. Mine were of holding someone's hand and listening to the strange sounds of talking marvelling at the words and trying to form them as well. I must have spent a large part of my time at the monosyllabic stage of "yes" and "no". In 1922, we were enrolled in the Hampden school, Michael aged five, me seven, with everything to learn and the world to know. There was no memory of my mother, and strange to say I did not miss her. The life around me from now on was the only world I'd know as normal. Of course, at school and meeting others, mums and dads were what other kids had, but not us. It's quite true: *"what you never know you never miss".* Until I married and had a family of my own, I never knew what being reared in a family meant. Now after over fifty years of happily married life, I realise what I missed. When my father managed to get us boys home I was fourteen and Michael twelve. The intimacy between father and son never came until I was much older, and seldom fully until it was too late. Never did I enjoy the familiarity my own children gave me, towards him. My brother Michael had less difficulty in this respect.

My father must have had a grudge against life, due to the misfortune of a war on, a young family, an ailing wife who succumbed to her illness in dying so young. On top of this, to have to surrender three of his motherless children to the social services of the time, and then to have to suffer the transfer of his two youngest sons to a widow far away on a farm. For seven years he had nobody it seems, to champion his cause. Lebanon was not a land of officialdom like a distant land of the British Dominion. Whether I was a victim of a fractured family more than another is a moot question. The more that is revealed of family life in New Zealand and his own in Lebanon, there is a similarity to both. Both my father and my uncle were the only boys, and there were five girls in between, who all left home after Dad. Some to Cuba and some to America. Lebanon in those days were getting over being ruled by Turks. Keeping in touch with each other after emigrating was not their strong point, and it was many years before any contact was made by a member of one of the Cuban families, and then only fitfully.

Hampden was a small town 56 miles north of Dunedin, and 22 miles south of Oamaru on the main South Island trunk road. During World War One where the primary school is now, a military training camp was established there. In those days

a gymnasium was essential, which passed into the school complex. I was amazed when attending the 125th school jubilee in 1989, to see the same building still in use, and very little changed. Its lofty ceiling and spaciousness lent an air to the place providing ample room for any occasion. A lot of the appurtenances I remember as a boy had largely disappeared, along with its military association.

Hampden in 1922 was truly rural. No electricity in the village despite the fact it lay on the main South Island highway running through the centre of the village. A few years later reticulation finally went through, spelling the demise of the ten kerosene street lamps on the main road, It was a novelty for me to follow the lamplighter on his journey to light the street lamps just before dark. He carried a ladder the whole way to light each lamp, and between 10-11pm did the same journey putting them out. Some of those nights were truly dark, and hand torches were necessary though by modern standards, even torches were pretty primitive. Most residents had kerosene lanterns instead.

The days of the reticulation was an exciting time. I am jumping ahead in telling this, it was Michael's or my job to deliver milk to some households. I was detailed to take milk to the campsites of the workmen who were erecting poles, cross bars and insulators, along the highway. I don't know about my brother, but one time when I took the milk, the cook in the camp kitchen gave me a teacake, my very first. Another time I was given a raspberry drink. Alas! The taste was out of this world. The experience never came again, the delivery of milk never coincided with that particular cook on duty. Us boys were not accustomed to luxuries in food. Another household I delivered milk to, the eldest daughter had some pets including two magpies she trained to whistle *Bye Bye Blackbird* as a duet. I often think I must have imagined this story, by the doubtful reception it's received, when telling it.

CHAPTER TWO

The main road in Hampden goes up and down, and approaching and leaving, is a rise. My childish interest was aroused when a hoarding was erected at each end of the town. This heralded the advent of advertising to the country scene. Coming or going to were welcomed in large letters, "WELCOME TO HAMPDEN A FAIR REXONA TOWN". On leaving you were greeted with "FAREWELL TO HAMPDEN A FAIR REXONA TOWN". This was my introduction to multinationals power on village life. Though the road undulated up and down it formed an irregular valley close to a cliff edged seashore, and hills to the west. As lads my brother and I got to know both the hills and the beach pretty intimately, as we had to take the cows to paddocks all over the place including the beach. Mrs le Fevre's farm was not a compact one all in one piece. She had paddocks here there and everywhere it seemed. My seniority always put me in charge of the destinations.

The house we settled in 1922, was on the main road, completely detached from the farm across the road, where the dairy, poultry, and milking sheds were, also a stable housing two buggies, and a lot of saddlery. In 1964 when Michael attended the Hampden School 100th Jubilee, found a class mate Gladys Murcott in residence with her husband, and was privileged to enter the old house and renew acquaintance. No luck on my visit in 1989 for the 125th School Jubilee, when speaking to another occupant. Even saying I used to live there sixty years ago was lost on him. taking a photo of the house was all I could get. However Gladys who did live there till her husband died, had moved to live with her spinster sister Nessie close by. These two sisters were in our class at school, so some happy memories were revived at the Jubilee, as Michael and our wives were with us on this occasion. I regret missing the 100th reunion.

Mrs le Fevre lived with her aged mother Mrs Harris, a lovable motherly soul; in appearance, the very epitome of such a description, white haired and plump. For all of the seven years we lived there, Mrs le Fevre was the only name she was known by to us boys. Another girl in her late teens (a word unknown then) Molly, was also part of the household. Her duties were domestic only I presume. She left after three years and was much sought after by the driver of the local grocery van. The van was parked outside in the street while the driver did his wooing with Molly The tailboard of the van was fastened only at one end, so it was easy to pull the unfastened end out and help oneself to some goodies. Mick, (Michael's name shortened by school mates) who had a more impish streak in him , helped himself to some matches. Matches have a fascination for boys. The wax matches could be struck alight on any rough surface, not like the safety ones today. Safety matches in later times we found, could be struck alight on glass or green surfaces.

The farm consisted of about twenty pure bred Jersey cows, a hundred or so hens, two horses, and a few pigs, and two cats. The farm's main income was milk for neighbours, cream for the dairy factories, eggs, and a few porker pigs. The dairy housed the milk separator, a butter churn of the rocker type, never used at all to my knowledge, except to house a few kittens that occasionally were born to the tabby we had, and used to get under my feet when separating the milk. Three particular lovely kittens mysteriously disappeared. When a new crop of kittens appeared, the missing kittens reappeared very much deceased, when popping the new ones into the churn.

The dairy, a brick building was originally a bakehouse. The oven iron doors gave access to cavernous space beyond. We boys began to explore the nooks and crannies above and beyond the roof, playing hide and seek. Once a week a truck would call to collect the cream that stood on a platform on the side of the road. Another would call for the eggs. I don't recall there was an off season for the milk or cream. Wine making was one of Mrs le Fevre's hobbies. Elderberries was a favourite source for wine, the trees prolific on the farm. One time she made a parsnip and other wines for rare occasions. During a visit by a fellow wine maker, she heard that elderberry flowers made wine. Recipes were swapped, and the elderberry flower wine was the only one I ever tasted. The taste still lives with me as sweet, mild and fragrant.

When Mrs Harris died, not many years after our arrival, she was the first dead person I saw . Mrs le Fevre was not above putting Mick and I to bed without anything to eat, nor indulging in corporal punishment. Mrs Harris would on these occasions come in later with something to eat for two hungry boys. To the best of my knowledge Mrs Harris had two daughters and a son. The son Mr Harris lived in Dunedin North, and unfailingly came at Christmas each year. Like his mother he had snow white hair, and a quiet dignified manner in speech and bearing. I never knew either his Christian name nor Mrs le Fevre. The other daughters name I know was Brenda, married to James Marlow, a prominent business man, city councillor, and mayor for South Dunedin for many years. James Marlow owned a furniture business in Princess St. They had a large family, three of the daughters were nuns, one son a priest, another a Christian Brother among them. Mr Harris may have been an accountant, and to the best of my knowledge was unmarried, but more of him later.

On the corner over the road leading to the beach adjacent to the dairy, was the stable housing horse gig and trap, harness and saddlery. It was our job to keep the harness in tiptop condition, though we never had occasion to saddle up a horse to any thing. The unlined walls were luxuriously draped with cobwebs, contrasting with the spic and span harness kept maintained with pride and joy. The cobwebs fascinated Mick. He dragged me in to show his latest attraction. With the matches,

he lit the cobwebs and they streaked up the walls like fireworks. Unlined walls between the studs and dwangs provided cobwebs aplenty to keep a boy happy for some time.

Disaster awaited. During one night we both woke up suddenly when the blankets were whipped off and our bottoms flailed with a stick. The building of the cobwebs was completely gutted by fire and razed to the ground. I was innocent of course but blood froze me from revealing the truth. We shared the blame. I'd be either nine or ten then. Losing all those beautiful trappings must have galled her. She was only a slight woman of sixty plus perhaps, and had no children of her own.

The farm as I said was not a conventional one. Most farms are considered composite in nature, the land all in one piece. Not so Mrs le Fevre's. As remarked before, paddocks for grazing the cows were here, there and everywhere. This meant the cows had to be taken to various places about the village, after the morning milking. At night they were always confined to the holding paddock close to the milking shed. Two of the furthest away was up to the west I called Baghdad, the other called the three paddocks, along the beach was the only access. The Baghdad one was a good mile away, climbing a lot of the way. This paddock was divided in the middle with a brook very like one of Lord Tennyson's that, "*I chatter , chatter as I go, to join the brimming river, For men may come and men may go, but I go on forever".*

On the way up if it was my turn, we would pass one of the farm paddocks where a draught horse lazily grazed, I used to ride him up and back again. On one of my explorations in Baghdad, I discovered over the far fence, the remains of a house long since demolished with only the chimney standing. What intrigued me more than the chimney, was an orchard of mainly apple trees, and a magnificent walnut tree. To this day I dream of going back to see if it's still there. I was thirteen when I last saw it, but I never told my brother about this, wanting the pleasure all to myself. A few years ago with my eldest son David and his wife Marie, we passed through Hampden and expressed my childhood desire. David offered to take me there, but after 70 years, the road to Baghdad was non existent. The dream remains.

Another paddock was only accessible by a good half mile along the beach. A short road past the burnt down stable, over the railway line, then down through a steep cutting to the beach. The Hampden beach is a magnificent one, guarded on the land side, to my boyish eyes anyway, by very lofty cliffs indeed. Along their seaward face protruded half emerged boulders, similar to the famous and well known Moeraki ones. I often wished to witness one day one of the boulders falling down below. During some of the spring tides, the surf receded to unbelievable distances. As we emerged onto the beach, the cows and I would turn south for about half a mile to where the cliffs parted to allow two creeks to join up and flow out to sea. One creek was bigger than the other, known locally as the Big Kuri and the Little Kuri rivers. To call them rivers was an exaggeration or a compliment. They originated from different sources, joining together to exit to the Pacific Ocean. Most cows negotiated these flows without any bother, the older ones leading the way.

These railway paddocks as they were known, the three of them, called one, two and three, rose from sea level to the railway line level. Otherwise they were rolling downs, separated by dilapidated fencing, the sea one boundary, the other, the railway fence line, in good repair by contrast. The land dipped and rose so much, it had to be traversed to find the cows. The beach over the years provided lots of interest for me, such as stranded fish, and once a dead albatross, which I lugged all the way home. The reception this got me as well as the odd fish escapes me. I had often been requested to watch out for "frost fish" a rare delicacy I was told, but never eventuated. Apparently they only beached themselves in winter. I did hear one

had to be up early to find one, so by the time the cows were milked, it would be too late.

Occasionally going to bring the cows home from the railway paddock, Mick and I would go along the railway line and climb the fence where they were. This meant using the Kuri rivers railway bridge, getting terrified a train would come when we were halfway across. You either bolted for dear life or climbed over the edge to cling for dear life by your fingertips. Visibility each way was not the best, but no mishap ever occurred.

Milking was always by hand, and when I heard of milking machines, looked forward to seeing them. When I did, it was a toss up whether it was better by hand or machines, so fickle were the early ones. Today they are highly efficient.

Mrs le Fevre's cows were all Jerseys and her herd had a reputation for being pure bred. When she hired a bull, it was case of taking care, for Jersey bulls are notorious for aggressive natures. They were ringed by the nose, with a lengthy chain threaded through it. Looking back, it must have been wracking for the bull when walking with the herd, all the way along the beach or elsewhere. One bull I recall, when coming home along the beach was furiously pawing the sand with its front feet, and the holding the cows up from getting to the cutting for the road. I rushed at him with a big stick and copped my eyes full of sand. That solved the mystery for me why bulls paw the ground; to disable anyone coming from behind. Mrs le Fevre had a penchant for giving her cows fancy names. A few I remember were Georgina, Primrose, Priscilla, and Marianne. Many years later, the opportunity to name cows under my charge, had names like Scrubby, (as a young heifer she emerged out of nowhere in scrubby bush) Jazz, Brindle, Patch, or Maggie.

Our foster parent was a mixture of contradictions. There was no doubt about it, but she instilled manners in us boys, and old fashioned values. But she took a prejudice to Mick and favoured me in many things. I would dearly love to have known more of her background, and her husband. (I do know he was a runaway from the American Navy) He was a Catholic like the Harrises, and the Marlowes. He died long before we came. The parish of Hampden was controlled by Father Cavanagh, the parish priest of Palmerston. Every first and third (or fifth if there was one) Sunday of the month, he came to say mass in the local Parish church. I was trained with another local boy Jack Woods to serve mass or any other service as necessary. The two of us served from 1922 till the end of 1929 continuously until I left Hampden. The incident of the stable fire and the thrashing did not diminish her favours towards me.

As far as Memory serves, Hampden school only had two teachers, the one for me was a Mr Arnold, nicknamed Stroppy Arnold, because of his love of the strap as an aid to education. Being left handed, he successfully eliminated that sinister trait to make me normal. But some left handedness remains to this day.

CHAPTER THREE.

Frequently Mrs le Fevre would check up on the lessons and subjects covered , at school and rectify them in the light of her Catholic faith. One of the corrections never forgotten was the truth about Henry the Eighth, his wives, and his trouble with the Church of Rome. Secular schools were strong on the history of the kings and queens of England, as well as the dates of famous wars, and the expansion of the British Empire. It seemed to me she did not trouble Mick with all this, deeming him incapable of appreciating these fine nuances in history. Yet we attended the same school, but admit I had leaped ahead two classes, despite both starting the same year. Maybe the 22 months age difference was the reason. Once Mr Stroppy

Arnold after strapping me for not doing an assignment, told the class I was the laziest and the cleverest of them all.

Midway in the 1920's a polio epidemic was so rife, all schools throughout New Zealand were closed for six months. Many parents did fill up these months with private tuition at home, Mrs le Fevre was no exception. She was a teacher of singing and she played the piano for these lessons in the lounge, a room I never ventured nor saw the inside, all the seven years with her. It was forbidden territory to us boys and nor did I in the seven years there, even venture within. My brother told me many years later during a nostalgic session we were having, that he did go in sometimes only to get whacked for his bravery. Sounds of the piano and the singing came through the walls. Two songs heard so often they form the part of my earliest musical memories, *"If you were the only Girl in the World"* and the other, *"Only a Rose".* They are as popular today as ever.

The practice of our religion as born Catholics was carried on unabated. In 1927, she learned a new day school for catholic boys run by the Christian Brothers was to open in Oamaru the following year, and proposed to send me. I don't know whether Mick was even offered or had any desire to go. I strongly believe he had no opportunity, and as obedience was so ingrained in my nature I had no will to accept or reject. I was one of the original pupils to attend St Patrick's School, to augment St Kevin's College, a secondary boarding school also in Oamaru, also run by the Christian Brothers. A whole new world opened up, of which vivid memories remain. Travelling by a Palmerston - Oamaru goods train every day, with two carriages attached, stopping at every station to shunt trucks, widened my experience of this new world.

The distance to the Hampden station was one and a quarter miles. Leaving at 7.20 am, I arrived at 9.25 to school, in Oamaru. I did this for two years.

Hampden had the distinction of having the first pupils to catch the train, others joining up further along. The two others with me, were Waitaki Boys High School students for Oamaru, and various other schools had theirs, a few girls among them.

The first year I was the only Catholic. The three of us who travelled the furthest, developed a sense of superiority over all those who joined the train later. We designed an initiation ceremony for each fresh student who was not enrolled at the beginning of the year. Seating in these carriages was one long seat each side, covered with a squab on slats and empty spaces below. Any candidate for initiation was forcibly pushed under the seat, then the squabs bounced up and down to give a generous baptism of dust. The more they resisted the more honour was bestowed, the victim emerging from the ordeal suitably decorated.

Whether pupils travelled by train before our day, is doubtful. The first year about ten students in all, but the following year the numbers trebled to finish up with about thirty or more, enough anyway to add a carriage for the girls only. On Fridays the numbers were augmented by shoppers for the day. The girls were banished, I'm ashamed to say, from the boys carriage. The usual bantering went on when either boys or girls ventured to go through the others carriage. Magnus Lang, a son of the local Hampden Shoe Shop, a popular member of the crowd, failed to show up one Monday morning. We had to tell them all the news Magnus had been killed on the weekend, riding his bicycle, hit by a car from behind. It put a pall on us all for a few days.

St Patrick's School catered for only four classes the first year, standards 3- 4- 5-6. The second year, was added a seventh standard, denying me the honour of being dux for the year, one of its four pupils gaining that honour. The school an old wooden building of only two rooms, Brother Moore taking the lower classes, and Brother McAllum, the two senior ones. I made my first confession and first

communion in Oamaru, and was allowed to stay overnight for this and similar occasions at the home of the Cooney family. Mr Cooney was mayor of the town, but how I came under the wings of this family was quite an incident. I missed catching the train home once, which was due to leave at 4 pm. I'd gone to the shop opposite the station to buy a confection with the name of "Sunny Jim", only on returning to see the train pulling out. There was no later train. I started roaming the streets for hours till dark, at a complete loss what to do. Few people were about, but my guardian angel must have taken pity on me for who should pass me but the boy Pat Cooney who sat next to me in class. Naturally he wanted to know what I was doing. When he was told he insisted on me going home with him.

Pat's father, trying to settle my worries at not arriving home that night, used his mayoral influence to try and get a message through to Hampden. It was not easy. Small town telephone exchanges closed down for the night. He did manage to get through to the local policeman, Mr Woodley, to say I was safe.

Brother McAllum was a disciplinarian with a wry sense of humour. It amused him to have a Coory and a Cooney at the same desk, at the very front of the class. He would sit on our desk to give some lessons, tweaking our ears or cuffing them to emphasise some point in his teaching. At the end we'd finish up with burning and red ears. Christian doctrine was taught per the penny Catechism, a tiny booklet much loved in later years by old students, but now just a memory. Each hour the clock chimed, we all rose and said a Hail Mary and at midday always recited the Angelus. Brother was ascetic looking, of athletic build, and if rumour was rife was only on loan from Australia for two years on account of his health. Brother Moore who taught the junior classes was the opposite, being big portly and florid, laughed a lot and easy going by comparison. We never had the chance to sample his teaching methods.

Life on the farm carried on without a lot from me, leaving home at 7.20 am and returning at 5.45 pm. Homework was done on the train. Spare time was used to memorise poetry or reading. I memorised the first five chapters of the *Rime of the Ancient Mariner,* without much effort. Schooling ended for me before adding the remaining two chapters six and seven, of the Ancient mariner. The Catholic school and the years as an altar boy plus during vacations, when some seminarians on holiday from Holy Cross College would come to the farm, fired my imagination to be a priest one day. Mrs Marlowe with so many of her children in the service of the church was instrumental in arranging these visits. Us boys enjoyed their company, as doubtless the elderberry wine flowed freely at the time. To join them was the only ambition I had at twelve to thirteen years.

The question of my age gave rise to the only occasion I challenged my foster guardian. She showed me a document showing I was born on the 16th of October in 1916. Then I noted she was paid a sum of money to foster us. This shocked me, why I don't know. Maybe it was because other boys had a few pennies to play with or buy things which we never had, nobody we could call mum or dad. Mick used to gaze at a toy in the drapery shop window with a yearning only a deprived waif could muster. I begged to be able to buy it for him, remembering the time he gazed at it as if hypnotised. Whether I was actually refused at the time, I don't recall, but I do recall saying, "Anyway you are paid to look after us".

We did hang up our stockings at Christmas, but anything to set our hearts on fire doesn't come to mind. I strongly suspect Mr Harris and his mother Mrs Harris while alive, contrived to fill the stockings. The presence of Mr Harris over the holidays proved to be a boon one New Years Day over fireworks. One of the fireworks did not explode, one we called a super bang. It was six inches long and an inch thick and now minus its wick. I was determined to set it off, so during a lull one afternoon, I gathered a some old papers, made a bundle in the street outside

the fence, put the banger on top, lit the paper and waited. Nothing. Creeping cautiously closer, I poked my toe among the ashes, it seemed dead. Just then Mrs le Fevre called out for me to get some water from the well. Picking up the banger I quickly shoved it in my pants pocket. She gave me a large enamel basin to go to the pump at the well. Then filling it, took it in to her waiting at the kitchen door. I took the banger out of my pocket, saw it was charred at one end, rubbed it with my finger. I blew the dust. I saw a spark for a lightning second and a terrific explosion. My screams and the bang brought Mrs le Fevre out still carrying the basin of water. They say I plunged my face into it and passed out.

One must wonder at the reaction of an incident like this if it had happened in the year 2000, compared to 1926. No doctor was called, no ambulance, no hospital entry. My face was black, eyebrows burnt off, and never woke for two days. When I did, my eyelids wouldn't move. But Mr Harris had been beside me, waiting for me to wake up. All the foolish questions I asked, like who brought the cows home, and what had happened. I couldn't see. He only said be quiet and lie still, adding the room was darkened. He stayed beside me, frequently putting castor oil into the eyes. Each time I woke the heat of the inflamed eyes congealed the castor oil, which had to be bathed, and add more oil to them. I don't know how long it was before the eyelids barely opened sufficiently to feel them move. Mr Harris would get me to tilt my head back to see if any vision penetrated the narrow slits the eyelids would allow. Outside one window were some tall blue gum trees, these were the first glimmer I could verify but very indistinct. Gradually, Mr Harris with the help of the castor oil triumphed. It was a long process of three months. I think a lot of prayer went into the process as well. I've often pondered what the consequences would have been, had the banger exploded in my shorts pocket. I may have had to eke out my life as a eunuch!

The two years at the Christian Brothers was fated to be all the formal education for me. My sister Mary tells me she visited us boys in Hampden and got so upset, she deliberately missed the return train to get more background to the terrible life her brothers lived. I never recall this ever happening. I do remember My father coming and asking me would I like to come and live in Dunedin. This must have been during the time of the Oamaru schooling, as by this time I was reasonably happy, not having known any other kind of life. I did well at school, though conceding I did not get the dux medal, Frank Ross in standard seven, deservedly the winner.

Most years a Lebanese hawker, Nievy Isaac drove his horse and caravan through Hampden and never failed to see us boys and give a few pennies each. Many Lebanese men plied this trade, and a few women too. Nievy told me his mother was my godmother and she was. When I met Mrs Isaac the mother of twelve children she was bedridden and old. She clasped me and kissed me, the very first time this had ever happened to me in my fourteen years of life. Overtures of this kind was to be avoided at all costs. Motherly affection was a foreign non existent quality to her godson, never experienced nor even missed.

The onset of puberty was not unattendant by incidents. Compared with the attitude of self styled experts who pontificate on the subject in these days of writing, I wonder at the naivety as if it was just newly discovered. The emphasis on purity in religious education was strong in my school days as well as family life. This virtue was not treated in isolation from other virtues. In the times I write of, sex and sexuality as far as the schools were concerned did not exist, but these days seemingly nothing else exists. Like most areas of knowledge, evolution grinds on in the physical world; the excesses will probably taper off eventually to balance the old with the new - hopefully. Once when during the Christmas holidays, Mr Harris brought with him a young girl who may have been nine or ten. What relation she

was to him I don't know, nor whether he was ever married or just a confirmed bachelor. I remember the girl was of an age to me, and she used to follow me about my duties on the farm, and made the suggestion once, we put our wee wees together. I was so shocked, slapping her on the face. She started bawling and ran off and I carried on with what I was doing not giving it another thought. Soon I was called into the presence of Mr Harris, and given a man to man talk on treating girls and women with respect; and never, *repeat never,* raise your hands to them. I was then asked why but said nothing. His silvery white hair, the utter personification of true gentleness, plus his quiet and gentle voice, made me downright ashamed of myself. I could not bear to repeat the words the girl had said. Mr Harris so impressed me, from that day forward I've never raised my hand to girl or woman since, nor received any.

A highlight of farm life remains with the slaughtering of the pigs. Anything from one to three or four. If more than one, two butchers would arrive to perform the task. My job was to light a large copper to provide boiling water ahead of the drama, as it was indeed to us boys. There was the catching of the pig who had the run of their own lot of ground. When caught it was put on its back, the butcher sitting on its belly, made an incision in its throat. A large knife was then thrust through to reach the heart. Squeals rent the air and pig would run bleeding profusely around and suddenly collapse. It was dragged to the boiler, thrown on a large trough, hot water poured all over to remove the bristles. The hoisting onto a frame for the gutting created more interest for boys like us than all the TV dramas of later years. More, it was a real live show. The supreme moment for Mick and me was the bladder when given to us to blow up eventually, to play ball with. We must have been deprived of male toys to expend out masculine tendencies. The ratio of work versus recreation was weighted heavily on the former. As I remarked, the life I lived always seemed normal.

CHAPTER FOUR

Another unforgettable incident was flying the American Flag, the Stars and Stripes, on the fourth of July each year. Just inside the front fence facing the main road, was a flagpole with all the trappings for hoisting and lowering flags. The motorists who drove through and saw the flag of America flying aloft must have scratched their heads. I distinctly remember one year, standing with a few others on the cliffs above the beach one night to see the American Naval Fleet all lit up sailing past out at sea, after leaving Dunedin during a goodwill visit to New Zealand.

To return to the subject of my true age, the visit of my father, who told me I was a year older than I thought asking me if I wanted to go home, he said my age allowed me if I chose. When I elected to stay, it must have been a bitter blow not only for him but also for my sisters. Hind sight revealed if I was fourteen I could legally decide to stay or go home to Dunedin. Blissfully unaware of the tug of war going on between my sisters and Dad's friends, the legal situation was, the choice was mine after age fourteen, affected Mick as well. Dad's Lebanese nature never assimilated the European Culture his two young sons were soaking up daily, nor could he read or write English, though he could do both in Arabic. This question whether the claim of my father to my age, and the birth certificate our foster parent possessed, of which was correct, must have influenced him and my sisters to plot how to extricate us from the perception Mrs le Fevre was a cruel taskmaster and a child slave driver. Yet there was I happy as a lark, blissfully unaware of the plots going on to get the boys home, rescued from slavery to our rightful heritage. My consent was all that was needed. Truly a Gilbertian situation. Family and friends in Dunedin could never realise I did not know such a place as home, nor any of the

members of it. Carroll Street was a Lebanese ghetto, a close knit community with their own language and customs. Other Mediterranean communities as the Greeks and Italians formed their own associations, the latter adding a commercial activity to supply Middle east commodities like olives, olive oil, spices and such luxuries.

It seems strange that the rights of parents to their own children, could be thwarted by a weak bureaucracy, yielding enough power to do so. This must have been frustrating to a father in a strange country not knowing how to handle these situations. Motherless children seem fair game to anyone with a sense of justice. A person in my situation, having rights not known to him, is a victim of sorts. My sense of being content, was almost at loggerheads with the parental desire of a family to be together. Dad's education was not of the formal European type, unlike his brother Jacob, who was fluent in Arabic, English, and French, through his early training for the priesthood in the Maronite Rite. This did not benefit my uncle economically, due possibly to prejudice because of his nationality. But in his adopted land, he could grow grapes from a cutting he brought with him to make a drink called arrack, having an aniseed flavour. This particular grape is growing yet to this day from the cutting taken then, nearly a hundred ago.

My school career ended at the last term of 1929, coming second for the class with a prize of *Tom Browns School Days* and a proficiency certificate. School terms for the year, ended much closer to Christmas than these days. Mick and I were on the verge of a big turning point in our lives. Our Father made a special trip to ask me could I come home for Christmas Day. Mrs le Fevre wanted to spend Christmas with her sister Brenda in Dunedin. This special request made me feel mean if I refused so agreed on the condition that when Mrs le Fevre would be returning two days after Christmas, we would return with her. One of the Marlow boys had a car, would drive both ways. The feeling was, a great sacrifice was being made by me. Filial duty was not a paramount consideration. Alas!

We were delivered two days prior to Christmas Day, to 122 Carroll Street. All I took with me were the clothes I stood in, plus my school prize. No extra clothes. I met my sisters for what I thought was the first time. Mary at 18, Alma 17. Lots of visitors came, but the language was mostly Arabic and a patois of English mixed up with it, sounded gibberish to me. I was in an atmosphere so foreign I could not find any response to all the strangeness surrounding me. Mick by comparison was like a prisoner just out of jail. The longing for something familiar to me was oppressive. The aspect of only a few days only of all this strangeness was some consolation.

The first few meals brought a most unusual experience, cabbage rolls and yoghurt. The taste immediately dragged up from way back deep down, the fact, I had tasted them before. It stunned me into a well kept secret. The stunning knowledge I had eaten this food before, penetrated a deep memory that had played truant of all other remembrances. Conscious and the sub conscious natures perhaps have parallel paths of their own that never cross, or maybe the appetite has its own memories. Meals continued to have a fascination, because plain English for articles on the table was non existent. Bread was *hubis, s*alt was *milh,* milk was *haleebh,* and butter was *sumneh.* These are the phonetic soundings for them. I became aware I had another brother John, nobody had told us about, who was not around anywhere, referred to as *Hun'nah.* Mary was *Wadfah,* Alma, N*uzha,* mine *Ilyos.* What sort of dizzy world had I been pitch forked into, I kept thinking. Everything had two names. Only a few days to go, and I'd be back in a logical world, where sanity prevailed, things had one name, and life return to normal. Craving for normality was all I wanted.

Mick who was two classes behind me, immediately found his niche with the neighbouring children, the Michaels who lived next door. Eight of their children ranged from eleven to one years of age. Children abounded in the neighbouring

community and they abounded for us if we wanted them or not. All I wanted was for the days to fly to escape the environment. My nature was to be obedient and submissive to any sign of authority, no resistance to those who were older than me. Mick as I said was like a prisoner just out of jail, while I was his counterpart being the one in jail.

Where was John? Why wasn't he here for Christmas as well? His room where I was sleeping was chock full of books occupying the half of one wall. Most interest for me were about fifty slim linen covered books called *The Penny Poets.* Lots of Shakespeare's plays, and leading English language poets. At the age of fourteen I was wrapped in Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice,* as we'd dealt with this during the school year. It was the majestic quality his writing that fascinated, rather than what he was saying. Portia's defence of Antonio at the trial in Venice, the cringing obsequious Shylock fired my imagination. I felt as if John was a kindred soul would be good to meet one day. All they told me, he was away and be some months before he'd be home. A few doggerel verses I found among the books;

1. *Christmas comes but once a year, 2. Yule's come and Yule's gane,*
And when it comes it brings good cheer. And we ha'e feasted weel,
And when it goes it leaves us here So jock maun to his flail ag'in
So what'll we do for the rest of the year? And Jenny to her wheel.

Unlike Jock and Jenny, a different fate awaited us. The fateful days passed slowly, till the day arrived for the expectant knock on the door, anticipating freedom and escape. I was waiting in my room along the passage. I heard the voices plainly.

"Were the boys ready?"

I heard my fathers voice saying, that they were staying, and don't want to go back. I was stunned. It was Dad's voice, there had been absolutely no sign given this was going to happen. My nature was such as not to protest to my elders. At this distance of time, it would be unfair to question the family motives for this sudden action on their part too harshly. No round table conference had taken place to prepare the parties for so sudden an arbitrary decision. Impressions remain stronger than details. The impression at this turn in events was of extreme resentment and hurt. No children and young persons act to appeal to. I cried and refused comfort. though to be honest very little was offered at the time. All my possessions were what I stood up in plus my proficiency certificate and my school prize. Everything I had back in Hampden of whatever treasures a boy has, including diaries stayed there, and I never saw them again. A more complete adrift from the past is hard to imagine. It was akin to an amputation of one life for another.

The days passed and my submissive nature began to accept the situation that now presented itself. Meeting all my cousins who also lived in Carroll Street at number 67, while we lived in 122. And being welcomed by them and Uncle Jacob and Aunty Howah helped me to realise all was not lost. I had to get used to the Lebanese way of treating all the senior male members as Um'me which is Arabic for uncle. The women were always referred to as Murrah' um'me or Auntie. Uncle Jacob was called Um'me Ya'oub ibn Usef. My father was Usef ibn Habib, ("ibn" meaning son of). There were ten in his family, all senior to ours. Um'me Ya'oub was a fatherly figure, large, stout, with a deep voice particularly avuncular in bearing and speech. My father was Usef to everybody, or Usef Habib, to distinguish him from others also called Usef. He was renowned for his strength, and very robust. The difference in the two families is best illustrated by Uncle Jacob's eldest daughter Lizzie. Lizzie, and my mother were both pregnant at the same time, and gave birth within the same week. Though lots of Lebanese lived in Carroll Street, well known English families lived there as well, notably the Stedmans, and the Sidey's. Thomas Sidey

(later Sir Thomas) as politician fought for many years to bring in daylight saving time before succeeding.

As Mrs le Fevre drove away out of my life, other aspects of her life could be mentioned. No doubt the perception of the hardness of her personality at times, existed in the community. She had strict ideas of her Catholic faith, and the observance of good manners. Mick who is still alive stresses this point, even realising the way he was less favoured in her estimation. Her general conversation was peppered with aphorisms, like guiding stars to a mariner at sea. Some of them were:

If wishes were horses beggars would ride.
Clean the corners and the middle will do itself.
Don't believe everything you hear.
Tell the truth and shame the devil

The partiality she showed to me in the Catholic faith over Michael, we will have to leave to the judgement of an all-wise God. She did perceive the making and nurturing of a vocation to the priesthood, and to be truthful she succeeded. In saying the Lords prayer, we often substitute the words *Thy will be done,* to, *let my will be done,* instead. A couple of anecdotes about the apostle St Peter, she was fond of relating. Each time St Peter remembered his three denials of his Saviour, he wept so often the tears made furrows down his cheeks. The other one, when he was crucified he protested he was not worthy to be crucified like his Lord, beseeching to be nailed upside down. Another time when I couldn't find a hammer I'd just been using, I was urged to pray to St Anthony, who sensing he had a new customer impressed me by finding it immediately.

I was asked did I thank St Anthony. I hadn't. Nothing to eat until I did. Then there was her great love for America especially the navy. I strongly suspect her husband was an naval officer in the French Navy, and the source of her flying the Stars and stripes on the fourth of July. He may even have erected the impressive flagpole.

CHAPTER FIVE

New Year came and went with little change in my dejection. Now it was 1930, and commercial life in the city of Dunedin was waking up. Dad took me into town, revealing the unfolding of the plan the family had of getting me a city job, and Mick going to back school. We arrived at a business in St Andrews Street called Home Heating Supplies. We were obviously expected, shown to the managers office in the showroom, and introduced to Mr O'Sullivan. He had a ruddy complexion, was middle aged, looked every inch a manager; one who never got his hands dirty. Dad and he had some words while I remained silent, and then we were taken out the back to a store and yard full of concrete washtubs and washhouse copper boilers, and introduced to George the foreman. George was told I'd be starting work the next day, wages at 15 shillings a week. George said I would need boots. Further back was another yard, where these two kinds of merchandise were made. In this area were heaps of pumice and sand and a large shed holding a lot of various moulds for the assembly of the items. The entrance to these areas was from Filleul Street for the workers, 8 o'clock in the morning. The showroom opened at 9 o'clock.

The ample showroom in the front displayed few items to justify the grand name of HOME HEATING SUPPLIES LTD**.** The firm was a subsidiary of a large concern in Christchurch called CROMPTONS LTD. Clad in boots I turned up next day ready for work. Working with me was Bill Trainor, aptly named as he was the one to train me in my new career. Tools for the trade were shovels, trowels and a

pair of tender hands, which last item were rapidly to lose their tenderness. A quantity from the large piles of pumice and sand which were never allowed to dwindle, was taken and mixed with cement at the ratio of six to one. Water was added then the mixture poured into moulds to settle and firm up. A few days later the moulds were removed, and the moulded object washed with a mixture of cement and water, to fill the tiny holes caused by air bubbles. This would provide a smooth surface for George to paint in due course, when dry. This washing with cement and water had a painful downside to it, causing tiny pinholes in the balls of the fingers, extremely painful especially in winter. Workers in some trades had little or no protection, and industrial gloves were unheard of. !930 had few unions to speak of, the Arbitration Court had been dissolved to disable any clout they may have had. What did a boy just out of school know about rights and wrongs, or the privileges in the workplace?

Mr O'Sullivan poked his nose occasionally on the scene, to enquire how things were. There was an occasion Bill had a rash on his arms that persisted, Mr O'Sullivan gave some hints on healthy living. Some days later the manager, his face ruddier than usual, came to ask after Bill's rash, if it was getting better. It wasn't. The manager stood there with his hands in his pockets, stated pompously,

"Trouble with you Bill, your bloody blood's rotten".

Fridays were paydays. Pay was fifteen shillings and that was what you got. No deductions then. This refinement was to come many years later. Compared with nowadays, a stated wage is always less in your hand by the time you get it. Rapacious governments over the years has dwindled a workers wage by deductions for any funds they can find a name for. This appertained throughout the country, adjustments were made at the end of the year for Income Tax. This system survived until 1938 when Social Security was introduced by a Labour Government. When the Social Security Bill was being debated in Parliament, Sydney Holland as leader of the opposition, called the provisions in the Bill as *'applied lunacy".* Michael Savage rejoined by declaring them as "*applied Christianity".*

The first weeks pay, I took home and gave to my sisters, who ran the household budget. At their ages they were capable and wiser than me, making rules I never dreamed of contesting. I was to hand over my pay and get half a crown for pocket money, and share that with Mick. So decided on a shilling a week for him, the rest for me. This at least was my big decision. I presume our clothes were taken care of, but do remember that other boys were dressed much smarter than us. Dad got me a bike to go to work, it had suicidal brakes, totally unreliable downhill. Dunedin is notorious for hills, and negotiating trams and cars around the Octagon and into Princess Street was hair raising at times.

I gradually made friends with other boys, Henry my cousin, Eric George, and Jimmy Morris particularly. We'd go to the pictures, and they led me into the mystery of teasing the girls. They were much more forward in this regard than their new country hick, who was very shy and embarrassed in girl company. I had to invent ruses to escape the girls when the boys fobbed me off with one when they had too many or did not want. One ruse I concocted was to get to a corner where a phone box was, and pretend I had a call to make urgently. She was asked to wait out of sight while I skedaddled for dear life. The poor girl waited in vain for her curly headed boy, but I did not enjoy the ruse. As the only one with curly hair of the quartet, I was saving it up for a girl of my own choice. If ever!

Then began a season of hate. The job was hateful, the weather for three months

was rain every day, especially that drizzly rain so common to Dunedin. The longing to see a slice of farm life where there was never a dull moment where animals were concerned. Though animal life was seven days a week, work in the

city was six and a half days a week. The novelty of going weekly to the talking pictures was enjoyable. I had only seen one talking picture while in Hampden, called *The Woman in White,* from the Wilkie Collins novel. Five theatres in Dunedin all showing American talking pictures, us young fellows soaked up much of the American way of talking. The "Yankee Lingo" as it was termed, began to enter our own favourite expressions. OK and OK Baby, and OK Chief became part of the vernacular. One of the popular jokes of the time was, "if OK Chief was the father of OK Baby, who was OK Baby's mother?" Answer: "And How!" Another was, "What's the difference between a cow chewing its cud and an American chewing gum?" Answer: "The Intelligent look on the cow's face." That may appear oblique to the modern generation, but for me if the word American was replaced by Australian Cricketers, it would be more apt!

Months into the first year in Dunedin, a sudden desire came to see Mrs le Fevre in Hampden. This I did as a day trip by train one Sunday. This was the one and only visit I made to the scene of boyhood days, until 1989, when attending the 125th Jubilee of the Hampden School, a gap of 59 years. Some of my actual classmates were still around, but more of this further on. I remember very little of this meeting, Mrs le Fevre made me welcome, and actually laughed as we recalled little incidents. Her eyesight was failing and the farm was wound down after us boys left. She had to give up the fostering care of children, and hoped one day to go and live with Brenda in Dunedin.

She had aged visibly even to my young eyes, yet seemed brighter than usual. A visitor she had recently, brought with her a young lad.

"I told his mother as they were leaving" she said, 'he's as good as Alex Coory". I pondered this on the way home on the train, feeling very humbled and wanting to hide myself, not knowing why. Four years later after this visit, I was back in Dunedin on a short visit from a farm on which I was working. I rang the Marlows in South Dunedin asking after her but left no name. I really wanted to find out if she was alive or dead. Taking the tram out to Musselburgh Rise, I found the address and nervously knocked on the door. The lady herself opened the door.

"Who is it?" she inquired. By her appearance she was blind and this she confirmed. She was home on her own, but admitted me. It was not a pleasant half hour, the infirmities of blindness and old age was almost more than I could bear. Her hearing was alright. The memories of her courage in running a farm and fostering unwanted and deprived children had taken their toll. She was ready to die. I never knew when. Being out on a farm somewhere and no newspapers. I was never in the habit of scanning the death notices like most of my peers anyway. She had passed on the practice of our catholic faith, and good manners, that Mick and I have always been grateful for. My family kept up the unpopular belief we were exploited, but our silence was refutation enough. At the School Jubilee, I raised the question of Mrs le Fevre's popularity in the village. It was one of firmness, rather than hardness of heart she was known for. Many yardsticks can be used to judge others by, but I think it is safe to withhold them and leave it to the one who has this balance of power. Our own judgement awaits us too, one day.

Life in the future would be dictated by others in the years ahead. Each life at birth is presented with a blank sheet of paper having two columns. Column one registers the effects on us, column two the effects we have on others. Opportunities arise to affect both sides, the profit and loss balance is decided at the end. The end product is either a masterpiece, a daub, or all the possibilities between. An echo from Gray's Elegy……

Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,
And waste its sweetness on the desert air.

The hateful job with Home Heating Supplies lasted for nearly a couple of years, my hatred for it was well known. Mr George, a Lebanese farmer who farmed down in the Catlin's District, was one of many farmers during the depression who had to leave their farms and live in the larger towns. That or starve literally. Farmer George was trying desperately to sell. He had two boys and a girl, called Joe, Jock, and Kate. Joe at sixteen was the youngest, and it was suggested Joe and I would go down and run the farm till it could be sold. The three children were born on the farm so there must have been some ability to survive economically before the depression ground them down. Some arable land had been cleared to run dairy stock, but at least half was still in native bush. Six months was the time allotted to effect a sale. No wages were mentioned but the inference was I wouldn't lose by it. I agreed. In 1932, nobody seemed to have any money. The fifteen shillings a week I was getting for a hateful job was a luxury I in my ignorance was giving up.

Joe and I left Dunedin by train for Balclutha, caught a bus for a four hour trip to Tahakopa, unlisted on any map. The house when we arrived was fair enough to our social scale, the rooms entered into one another without benefit of any passages. The nearest town was Owaka two hours away. "So this was IT," I thought. We rounded up the stock consisting of six cows and two horses. That was IT too I facetiously thought. The cows in milk had been attended to by a neighbour pending our arrival. Joe for all his sixteen years was cook and finance manager, credit for everything needed was paid for in Dunedin. Though winter time, heating was in time honoured fashion by a huge fireplace in one half of a wall, that hardly ever went out. Wood abounded on the land without the necessity to fell any trees, nature providing by old trees just lying about. Just hitch one of the horses to a sledge, and fill it up.

Arable and grazing land I estimated would be at least a half, the rest native bush. What knowledge of trees and their special qualities for burning or building Joe taught me. Limbs of matai trees would spark dangerously while the trunk wouldn't. Manuka and kamai gave the most heat, the latter, had little flame but glowed like coke for hours. There was no electricity. Candles and kerosene lamps providing the necessary illumination. The George family were not readers, reading material in the whole place was limited to a couple of tatty magazines, or the remains of old tinned food cans. How I yearned for a book or newspaper. The advertisements in the two magazines to hand were much less forgettable than the features. Beechams Pills; Every Picture Tells a Story. Kruschen Salts, (take as much as a threepenny bit holds in a glass of water each morning). Another illustration featuring a man standing with a large fish hanging beside him, recommended Cod Liver Oil (or was it Lanes Emulsion?).

Essential commodities for the larder was plenty of flour and baking needs. We lived on apple pie, scones and home made bread all from the hands of Joe. The day Joe made an enormous apple pie in a kitchen hand basin, was the time a heavy snowfall closed the road to Owaka for a week. Bread ran out but the resourceful Joe was not stumped. Taking a rifle, we went to where tall miro trees stood in native bush, to shoot some wood pigeons. Miro berries were what these beautiful plump birds loved. Even in those days wood pigeons were protected. The miro trees were beautiful like the birds they hosted, and the pigeon pie too was unforgettable. No reading material, no radio, no phone. Where was the recreation? The two horses named Janet and Dolly.

Dolly was a bay thorough bred hack, Janet blackish, round barrelled and nuggetty. We'd go for rides racing them, but no matter which one I rode it always won. Joe was good natured about this. One day he decided we ride out to McLennans Beach to show me where the coastal ship Manuka sank recently. He recounted how all the folks around for weeks combed the beaches for provisions

that kept being cast up on the beaches. It was a bare back ride with no saddles. Part of the wreck was still visible close to shore and some onions lying about on the sand. The return journey was beginning to show up the lack of comfort without saddles. For days after it was more comfortable to stand than sit. At the end of each ride we had away from the farm, the horses would bolt for dear life when close to nearing home.

Compatibility and camaraderie are tested, when two young men are cooped up in a non paying situation. When the six months were up it was enough for me. Clothing

CHAPTER SIX

was a problem. Only two sets I had - put on and take off. The clothes too had enough. If the farm sold or not, I couldn't care. Mentally Joe and I were poles apart. We both

decided to call it quits and returned to Dunedin, with no immediate remuneration nor any even hinted at. Time passed for several months when a much used envelope arrived with a five pound note in it. No note or thanks with it. The coolness between the George family and me took some time to dissipate.

At home I found Mick had finished school and apprenticed to a firm of plasterers owned by the Idours at South Dunedin. The Lebanese Idours were not of the ghetto crowd in Carroll Street, living where their business operated from. This would tidy Mick over his shortage of pocket money. The hankering for the country persisted. , I haunted the few employment agencies to get away from city life. Home conditions failed to satisfy, as the lack of clothes and impossibility to buy any. Nobody had money to spare. I wanted money to buy my own clothes and some books. I looked for a cowman gardener job to get these.

At last I landed a job that would be furthest distance from home. It was recommended by the agency as not too demanding. To Milk about six cows and do the vegetable garden. The name was Hume, they ran a large estate called THE PRIORY**,** up in the Dart Valley twenty miles above Glenorchy on Lake Wakatipu. The fare would be paid provided I stay six months or so, the pay would be ten shillings a week. Deciding to take it, the family greeted this, being now prepared to give me enough rope to get whatever it was bugging me out of my system. Ever since coming to Dunedin I had a loss of freedom to do what I wanted. Dad had another idea. He took me into his bedroom, and shut the door. This was going to be dramatic I thought. Then he said:

"You always wanted to be priest; you still want? I pay." To say I was oppressed by the offer is to put it mildly. I felt as if a cloud had enveloped me. I had to refused the offer saying, everybody doing things for me when all I wanted was to choose for myself. No matter how hard they tried, they assumed I was never satisfied. . How far away can one get to find some sort of happiness? Two kinds of happiness I was seeking, spiritual and material. The spiritual happiness was the Hampden days with Jack Woods as altar boys, and the religious education that opened doors to a life beckoning irresistibly forward though murky in form. A prayer book containing the Sunday Epistles and Gospels I used to read, and doing my homework on the train, would recur at times to unsettle me and feed my misery.

Approaching seventeen, I decided to take control of my life by earning money and educating myself for something like astronomy for instance. The presumption of these few following years knew no bounds. Truly, *if wishes were horses beggars would ride,* indeed. That I had a lot to learn was a gradual discovery. A rich diet of boys reading like Sexton Blake, Boys Champion weekly, Jeffrey Farnol, gave me the

ambition to write a book. It took four years to find out my incompetence in the writing field. Friends and others egged me on till the truth dawned at last I had not the technique nor the education. The book was written and submitted to various agents and rejected. All this lay ahead of course, of that part of my life.

I was soon on my way to the Dart Valley and thinking it a land of dreams. Catching the Invercargill express at Dunedin to change to the Kingston Express at Gore, was nearly an all day trip. To this day a scene I'll never forget was when approaching Kingston, the train takes a wide sweep to give a panoramic view of the southern end of Lake Wakatipu. The deep blue of the lake bordered as far as the eye could see, by the white fringe of the waters edge, the blue sky and the snow capped Remarkable Mountains, was breathtakingly beautiful. Earnslaw, the lake ferry plies the length of the lake and a paddle wheeled ferry Ben Lomond. This day it was the Earnslaw I was catching to meet my new employer at Glenorchy, the northernmost point on the lake. Leaving Kingston I went up on deck to enjoy the scenery, a robust well built man joined me, asking where I was going. He introduced himself as Joseph Maroon, and learning my name, discovered we were both Lebanese and both from Dunedin. He spent little time in Dunedin, being a more sophisticated hawker than any of his fellow confreres of Dunedin, not depending on his own countrymen to enjoy a full social life he told me. He was at home with anybody and everybody.

As we chatted it started to get cool and not dressed in warm clothing I went to get some shelter from the wind. He protested saying he came this way every month, and spent every minute on deck to admire the mountains. Such affability made me stay. Was disappointed when we parted at Queenstown. Our paths crossed very seldom afterwards. When he retired, he met a tragic end. A horse he grazed in the hills above Wellington kicked him on the head and he was found dead.

Landing in Glenorchy, I was met by the two sons of my employer, aged twenty and twenty two. Their conveyance was a large farm truck. They told me we had 18 miles up the valley to the farm. No room in the cab, so it was hoist up on the tray which was covered in. They asked when the truck stopped, would I get out and open any gates to let the truck through, and close it before getting back on. Twice this was necessary. This was a private farm road. When arrived, I was allotted a two berth cabin, a hundred yards from the homestead. I wasn't to meet Mrs Hume till the evening meal. Skirting the path between the cabin and homestead, was a channel of running water driving a generator to supply electricity to the house. A tinkling bell indicated the water was flowing and the generator turning over. Needless to say electricity did not extend to the cabin.

The first thing I learned there was no Mr Hume, he was deceased. The two elder sons I already met were followed by two daughters eighteen and sixteen, and two younger sons, thirteen and eleven. The last pair were to assist me in the milking if necessary. One other of the household was a governess who attended to the young boys schooling. I shared the cabin with an elderly portly farmhand Jim Kelly. We got along pretty well but hardly saw each other except at evening meals and at bedtime.

The cows to be milked were five in number, and brought by one of the younger boys till I became acquainted with the layout of the farm. At the end of the week the herd had increased to seven, and during the next fortnight increased further to thirteen. By this time the young boys were to help, but they proved more of a nuisance by skylarking and squirting each other from the cows teats. I growled at them severely, They downed tools and sped away while I finished on my own. Taking the milk to the house I was confronted by an angry Mrs Hume.

"How dare you raise your hand to the children".

"I deny hitting them" I replied. "Incidentally, how many cows am I expected to milk? This is not what I was led to believe when I accepted the job." I was fuming at the boys telling lies, but tried to control my temper. After a few more words, she

said she did not know how many cows would be in milk, but would find out. I had been nearly four weeks, and if the boys did behave themselves and the herd did not increase, perhaps I could manage. Mrs Hume had a matronly figure and a decisive and assured manner. I'll never forget the first Sunday dinner. I had not shaved for a couple of days, and when entering the dining room, my eyes boggled at the sight of the table. Spotless white tablecloth, an array of silverware set at each place. When the lady of the house saw me she stopped in her tracks.

"We expect you to shave and dress tidy for Sunday dinner," was all she said.

The vegetable garden was a neat plot the length of the house on one side, shaded on the other by a row of mature lawsonia trees. Late summers were subject to early frosts but always followed by fine sunny days. Dart Valley was 2000 feet above sea level, nestling comfortably between the Humbodlt and Richardson mountain ranges. The Dart river was not in the big league as far as rivers go, emptying from the Snowball Glacier into Lake Wakatipu.

On a fine sunny day it was a peaceful scene to delight the most critical taste. But it takes more than an aesthetic appreciation of the environment to satisfy my other troubles of increasing duties. Chief among these was of being misled. A hungry man may be at peace with the world after eating, but the hunger will soon return as time passes. Days later after the incident of the likely number of cows I was advised there would be "about twenty odd maybe".

I was in the garden in full view of Mrs Hume, apparently at the kitchen window. A hot sunny day, I was perspiring freely from hoeing and digging, and resting typically on the hoe handle. The lady herself leaned out the window and yelled, "to get on with the job". This was the last straw. I threw the hoe down and said,

"Blast the job! I've had enough. I'm leaving the end of the week. You can pay me and get someone else."

"You don't get a penny. You haven't earned the fare we paid you."

."Then I'm finished here and now." I trotted off to get my things, then remembered I'd left my jacket in the garden. It was 18 miles to Glenorchy. I'd have to walk. Going back to retrieve my jacket, Mrs Hume came out and said,

"We are taking a load of wool down to the boat this afternoon. Please yourself, but you can have a lift if you want it". Realising beggars can't be choosers I accepted. The question of money worried me. I wondered did Jim Kelly have any to lend. His clothes hung on a nail behind the door, particularly his trousers with braces attached. The lack of money when I did arrive in Glenorchy worried me. Hearing the truck start up I grabbed my things, looked again at Jim's trousers. Shaking them I heard the sound of money, dived my hand in, grabbed what I could, and made for the free ride. The wool bales were stacked high, with enough room to squeeze between two of them. We hadn't gone far when the truck stopped. Mrs Hume came to the rear and addressed me in lofty tones.

"Call yourself a gentleman! At least you could have opened the gate." With a snort she opened it and waited to close it. This didn't improve the situation one bit. I cowered deeper in the bales and contemplated what the heroes I had read about, would do in similar situations. Surreptitiously counting the money I had stolen, it came to eleven shillings. How far would that get me?

In Glenorchy, the ferry had not arrived, so it was wait around. No office to buy tickets or get information was open, but a few shops were. I was keeping out of sight in case any of the Hume clan were about. I never wanted to see any of them again. I had not eaten since breakfast and was feeling peckish as well as worried. The truck had disappeared as it was nowhere in view. A youngish fellow stopped me in the street and asked me if my name was Coory. When I admitted to this dismal fact he said there were some letters for me. Could I go to the post office to collect them. He

said Mrs Hume had called to say she would not be responsible for any mail in my name. He hesitated, before handing over a few letters.

"She also said incidentally, and warned others not to assist you in any way. I just thought you might like to know." I could hardly believe my ears, though in some

way felt flattered. Maybe I was a villain after all, not some ne'er-do-well.

I managed to pay the fare to Queenstown. Drawing on the confidence in my Catholic faith, called on the parish priest Father Ardath. Telling my story, and asked if he could assist me to get back to Dunedin. Father listened attentively, and then gave me a lecture on the duties of circumspection, and the further duty to avoid getting into trouble. I should have stayed long enough in the job to get some money without embarrassing other people. My heart gradually sought refuge somewhere down in my boots, despite me saying all I wanted was a loan, not a gift. At the end we both stood up. Disheartened, turning to go, he said,

"In the morning, if you call at the booking office for the boat, there will be tickets for you to Dunedin" This just about choked me, the swift transition from despair to thankfulness. He also told me a place to stay for the night.

Queenstown of today bears no resemblance to the Queenstown of the early thirties. I had never been back there until the 1997. I do remember vividly the last time I saw it. A diary I fitfully kept in those days described it as a "tourist insanity". About every alternate shop had the word "tourist" in its name. *Tourist Hairdresser, Tourist Drapery, Tourist Fish,* etc, etc. I doubt if the population reached even six hundred. There were no paved footpaths, nor tarsealed roads. Grass even grew in the street. Today it is one of New Zealand's prime attractions for tourists. The lake fascinated me with some of its particulars. The Kingston part of the lake is estimated to be 1000 feet above sea level, the bottom plumbed to 1200 feet below. An item I read said the lake at the Kingston end was bottomless! I quite believed this at the time.

Next morning I picked up my tickets, vowing to repay the money to Jim Kelly and Fr Ardath as soon as possible. If life was not treating me right, that was no excuse to add to my sins. Prayer at this time was a great solace, sufficient faith in the power of prayer is made stronger in adversity. In this period of my life, devotions recommended by various missions of wearing medals, scapulars, reinforced by Catholic magazines, or missioners from the pulpit, guaranteed release from spiritual penury. Never mind the material penury. Ask and you shall receive, says the bible. Bruce Marshall wrote a novel, where a priest described medals and scapulars etc, as pious groceries. We grow out of devotional aids but they serve a purpose for some no doubt. Buried in our nature lies some secret talisman liable to surface when we are under any pressure.

I arrived home with my tail between my legs. If I expected a prodigal son's reception there wasn't any. They were getting to be used to my disappearances and reappearances. The attitude of my sisters varied. Alma asked if I brought any money home, while Mary's response was, "Never mind, better luck next time." I soon became obsessed to repay the money I had stolen and begged, to get home. In this I had a bit of luck. I returned to the agency that gave me the last disaster, on the principle lightning never strikes twice in the same place. There was a job going alright as an assistant milker out at Brighton only ten miles south. The owner was coming in later, and would like to interview anyone interested.

The man I met, Mr Walters said he wanted a helper to milk his herd, but the job was a temporary one of five or six months at the most. He had a milk run in the city, and one would need to rise early for him to commence deliveries at six in the morning. The wages were to be twenty five shillings a week and live on the premises. The cows were milked by machines. Gosh! I thought the prospect of all that money

in the depression, plus no more hand milking, I had it made. He seemed too young to be a boss, no more than thirty. Yes was my answer, and the pay was weekly. Not even a week out of work, and here I was with all my troubles possibly behind me, provided I stuck at it. With the power of prayer my luck was going to change.

Arriving at the farm I met the others. Mac, an elderly man in his sixties, ancient to my youthful standards, was a great student of racehorses and their form, though he protested he never bet on them. Next was a younger man than me, named Alex. This posed a problem with two Alexs'. He was fifteen against my seventeen years. By general consensus it would be Young Alex and Old Alex. I am glad to say this happy arrangement stayed the whole time the job lasted for the five and a half months, when the herd was reduced for the winter. City milk suppliers had their own system of keeping the market supplied.

This job was one where nothing ever went wrong. Mr Walters and Mac had their own living quarters. It was Mac who got everyone out of bed by 3.20 am at the latest. Young fellows like us two Alex's, were not natural early risers, and no matter how many times we turned over for a few more precious minutes sleep, or got called for being "*worse than the bloody birds",* when dressed, the hands of the clock always pointed to 3.20.

First thing in the morning, Mac let a dog off the chain which scooted off in the dark to have the cows milling round the milking shed by the time we arrived. I soon learned the methods of washing the udders and handling the milking cups. More docile cows I had never experienced previously. As soon as one was finished, another meekly took its place. The only slight niggling chore was the stripping after the cups were removed from the udder. The theory was the last of the milk left in the udder was the creamiest part which the machines were not capable of extracting. If your financial returns depended on the quality of the butterfat in the milk, efficient stripping was essential. These days this is laughed at on the presumption what you don't get in the morning you get in the evening. The cows never minded one little bit. The gauge on the rail above each set of cups, displayed the flow of milk. Once this ceased the suction cups came off as too much suction had the danger of drawing blood. Or so it was inferred, in case supposingly some careless person was on the job. Forty to fifty cows could be milked in an hour by the four of us all going without any hitches. Between 5 and 5.30 after washing the machinery and hosing down the floor and cowshed, we'd all go into the porch for a hot cup of tea and either biscuits or bread and butter. Then crawl back into bed and rise for breakfast at 8 o'clock.

What we did until the evening milking is a bit hazy from this distance of time. Sometimes the hosing down was left till after breakfast. A high pressure hose facilitated the cleaning of the floor of the cowshed which gravitated to a settling pond, to be pasture spread when ready or advised. Milk cans had to be cleaned, machinery maintained. Of course there were no such things as milk bottles. Delivery of milk was a bit spartan, you either left a billy if a regular customer, or waited with your own container. Milk was either of three quantities, pints, quarts, or gallons. Milkmen and postmen were on a par, delivery every day, except Sundays for the postmen. In large cities like Dunedin, it was the practice for the postie to make two deliveries daily.

Occasionally the boss would return from his city run with a load of barley and hops from a brewery. This was fed to the cows in the bail during milking, a shovel full each. The smell used to just drive the cows frantic to get their share. The incentive to

bail up was doubled. With my first few wages, I was able to send the money I owed plus a little extra to Jim Kelly and Father Ardath. No acknowledgment was received from either, which disappointed me. I dearly wanted to hear from them

what an honest fellow I was. Those that seek praise are the type to guild the lilies. Who was it wrote that *"....virtue is its own reward."* Courteous to be thanked now and again.

I believe I gained my name of Alex from a milkman. My birth in St Helens Hospital was registered as the heaviest baby ever born there. The family milkman was also a well endowed figure physically, and when he was told how big a baby I was he declared, it should be called his name Alex, as it was his milk that contributed to my size. The Elias my parents gave me (pronounced Il'yos) must have been abandoned at some stage, because I never knew any other name than Alex, till going home when fourteen.

In 1942, when I was called up for military service at twenty seven years of age, one of the conditions was to produce a birth certificate. Duly presenting myself at the Wellington Registry Office, I passed over a half crown for the simple piece of paper. Reaching the street to read what I was given, dashed back up the stairs and said it was wrong. My name was not Ellis Coory. The large tome the details the officer had copied the certificate from still lay on the counter. The evidence was there as to my parentage, brothers and sisters, Uncle Tom Cobbleigh and all. Descending the stairs I wondered of all the legal and official papers signed as Alex Coory, whether they would be legal. Mick advised me to see his lawyer Pat Foote ,who advised me it was no big deal, not worth worrying about. Simply sign as E A Coory, commonly known as Alex. Whoever filled in the birth details, misspelt Elias to look like Ellis.

The ability at last to buy my own clothes and anything else gave me that independence, my nature revelled in. Joining a lending library in the Octagon called the Athenaeum, a name that fascinated my imagination as redolent of great learning and literature, I spent many happy hours browsing among the books, some as ancient as the times they dealt with. From this distance, it was only a stepping stone to some of my secret desires to improve my mind, to get among the classics my last year at school hinted at. Names and places in the poetry of Byron, or Greek and Latin Mythology, were scattered like confetti, I found annoying.

Like all good things that never last, the job with Mr Walters came to an end. Farm life so far did not fulfil any deep yearning, so back to the Lebanese community to find I had not been forgotten. The feeling I was not indebted to anybody plus sweet independence, gave me time to assess the future. The only peers in my life were the characters in the books I read. Jeffrey Farnol was avid reading, along with pirates and detectives. Freeman Wills Croft's Inspector French, was my favourite detective, Edgar Wallace was a second favourite for a while till he got fairly predictable.

My sister Mary was full of her new job as usher in the Grand Theatre. She brought the manager Hector Olsen and his pretty wife to dinner sometimes. The Grand was one of a chain of Amalgamated Theatres throughout New Zealand owned in Auckland by the Lebanese Moodabe Brothers. The Olsens had been transferred to the

CHAPTER SEVEN

Grand in Dunedin in the winter. This winter was one of the snowiest and coldest for many a year. The climate conditions shortened the Olsen's tenure as manager with dire results later on for me. The personal details of the Olsens supplied conversational topics for my sisters, who found their social standing one to envy. Alma was always one to relate tit bits, told me Mrs Olsen ironed Mr Olsens pyjamas every night and put a crease in the trousers.

My friend Eric George, had access to a clothing warehouse where I could fit myself out in decent clothes. Gone were the days of handing over all my wages to my sisters. The independence I had craved was now a reality. Now I could boast a crease in my long trousers, wide 22 inch bottoms, and above all a fob pocket. All previously unknown luxuries. My enhanced appearance must have made Hector Olsen persuade Mary to ask me would I like a job as assistant projectionist at the theatre where she worked. Mary took me and introduced me to chief projectionist Mr Gar Raines, a chap my own build, perhaps more slight, very dapper in appearance. It was agreed I was suitable but I imagine Mary's popularity with the staff had some bearing on my acceptance. Wages were the princely sum of ten shillings a week, six days a week. Farm work was seven days a week whether you got paid or not. The opportunity to learn a clean job, with set hours, and a glamorous life of watching film stars that the hoi polloi would give their eye teeth to hobnob with at any distance.

The grand theatre in Dunedin during the early and mid thirties was the Cinderella of the four main picture theatres, and the only Amalgamated one. There were plans to have another in George Street, the northern part of the city. The Grand had some features to distinguish it from the rest. It ran three shows a day, 11.am, 2.pm, and 8. pm. The best job in the projection box is the one the chief has, the assistant does most of the work. You have to rewind each film after shown, continually feed the carbons illuminating the film to the screen each minute, and thread the next machine. Two minutes was the maximum one could relax. When a change of program came, each reel had to be double wound. The first wind to check the film for breaks by coursing it between finger and thumb which soon got very expert after a while. The second wind to put it back for showing. When necessary the film is cut and rejoined, an intricate process soon learnt. Each frame must have four sprocket holes. If sections have to removed, the sound was also removed which didn't matter, as the sound part was always ahead of the matching frame. Early talkies didn't have a sound track, it was a nightmare to synchronise both sound and film if an accident happened.

Gar Raines was an artist at work. He could not tolerate shoddy performances such as sloppy change overs from one machine to the next. Nor the faulty fading of the dimmer lights as the curtains parted for the opening of the show. The evening shows began with an overture, After the intermission began with an entr'acte, all supplied by Beggs Music Store, or McCracken & Walls. They were always classics or semi classics, I grew to love them, Gar had impeccable taste. Overtures such as, *Poet and Peasant, Orpheus in Hades, William Tell,* or *Strauss Waltzes,* and for the ent'racts *Alwyns Dream, Rosamonde,* were some of the samples. To this day they remain some of my favourite pieces. Gar Raines had one musical prejudice I could never understand, he hated anything composed by Felix Mendelssohn. Mendelssohn was a Jew, died at thirty eight. I found his music entrancing. Was Gar an anti Semite by any chance?

As assistant projectionist, I set out to learn as much as possible. I loved the machinery, the workings of electricity, and all the tricks of the trade. Since leaving school all learning had ceased. Talking pictures were still a novelty in New Zealand, and occasionally out in the country areas, some silent films were yet popular including those featuring Norma Talmage, Rudolf Valentino, Charles Chaplin, and others. As early as 1934, the New Zealand Film Unit was established. Their first Major work was a full length documentary feature of New Zealand life on land and sea, town and country. It was so successful it ran four weeks, three shows a day, to both the schools and the public. Some Hollywood Films ran for many weeks; *Little Women,* and a real tear jerker *Are These Our Children* both ran for six weeks. The latter one brought most of the audience to tears. Gar Raines and I would take turns

at going to the back of the dress circle to listen to the weeping ones. Entrance to the projection box was through the rear of the dress circle and up the fire escape. The final film scene was harrowing alright. The young hero was crying, his arms through prison bars, his family were crying, his sentence was death on the scaffold.

On summer nights I used to lean out on the fire escape railing on Friday and Saturday evenings watching my friends walking to the pictures or going to parties and dances and envy them. Working from ten in the morning till after eleven at night, except for a couple of breaks for lunch and dinner, began to chafe a little. This possie on top of the fire escape had some advantages. When Harry Holland the popular leader of the labour Party died, he had a big civic funeral with a procession down the two main streets. I had the best view bar none. His death made way for Michael Joseph Savage, who was to have the biggest landslide victory in New Zealand at the next election. I was so impressed I began to take an interest in politics. Now my life has been long enough to see the rise and fall of politicians from the pinnacle of prestige, to a share of the popularity down at the bottom with tow truck drivers and second hand car dealers. The public estimate can be ruthless.

The affable and popular manager Mr Olsen left, and we had Mr Tano Fama with an accent to match to replace him. Another change in the working conditions took place after his taking over. Wages were unbelievably low, and businesses tried to reduce staff and increase the workload of the remainder. If you did not like it, others were only too glad to take your place. One of the staff who was door keeper, ticket collector, and maintained the furnace heating the theatre, was the first to go. Then the floor sweepers, this handed over to the ushers. Then the dapper Gar Raines left and at Ten Shillings a week still, I had to carry on till a new projectionist was found. One boon about the depression, was jobs were easily filled. The new fellow Leon from Invercargill, got a pound a week less than Gar Raines at Two Pounds five shillings weekly.

With my low wages, the depression seemed to be waxing instead of waning. Workers were still seething at the abolition of the Arbitration Court and the demise of trade unions. The new Amalgamated Theatre at the other end of town was nearing completion, and I wanted a transfer from the Grand because of its Cinderella status. As it happened I was not successful. Tano Fama cultivated a whole lot of new friends and boosted attendances. His favourite ploy was to arrange among influential friends to have a preview of coming attractions on Sunday Evenings. One month I did this three times with no help. One occasion I got very angry. The Admiral Byrd Expedition was in town, Mr Fama invited them all for a evening showing as a treat. Would you believe it by the time I wound things up, the projection room, the party had gone and I had to lock up. No thanks or gratitude. And no thanks nor extra pay!

But more aggro was to come. Tano in the early days had taken part in a new Zealand made silent movie in the late 1920's called The Bush Cinderella starring Dale Austin who had won a New Zealand Beauty Contest. He either had a copy or more likely managed to hire one. This was a Sunday showing too, and preparing the reels of the movie, it was in a dusty dreadful state, lots of breaks and repairs needed. I never had to nurse a film so much before. This was a private showing, and muggins me who thought I was being flattered at the time, agreed to all Tano Fama's wheedling and flattery. I was watching as much of the film to see where Tano did his acting. It was bit piece near the end where he took the part of police inspector to rescue the fair damsel from the jaws of a fate worse than death. Very dramatic with not a second to spare, where the damsel fell into the arms of the nearly thwarted lover.

The sacking of the door keeper and ticket collector left the attending to the furnace job vacant. This was not offered to me but handed to me. I was told the

doorkeeper had refused the furnace job without a rise in pay. I don't know whether it was the paltry glamour of the job that made me say I'd try. It was a revelation. The furnace was a huge firebox with heaps of litter from the sweepings off the floor, old tickets, paper, debris from the refreshment counter, plus a heap of coke. A few days later at a staff conference including the head projectionist, I decided to call it a day with the furnace job. With my heart pounding I entered the office and told Mr Fama my job was in the projection box, and nothing else. Hearing me out, without saying a word, I said my piece and walked out, heart pounding more than ever. Next Friday,

my pay envelope had a letter to say, my insubordination was a bad example to staff harmony. It would be better to change my mind or leave as soon as possible. I left.

Things started happening on the home front. My two sisters were meeting opposition from Dad in having boy friends. Mary cajoled me to pretend we were going to the pictures, when in fact she was going with her latest Romeo, called Gordon Slyfield. Gordon and I got along very well, and much better when he learned I was interested in writing a book. He introduced me to the writings of Beverly Nicholls, a popular English columnist, essayist, and novelist. I read all of Beverly Nicholls books I could get through the library or buy from bookshops. Nothing was wrong with my seventeen or eighteen year old imagination. Instead of stifling my mind, it was whetted more than ever, to some day be a writer. In hindsight my naivety knew no bounds. I copied out words I did not know the meaning of, scrupulously widening my vocabulary with a dictionary always beside me.

The taste for city life and writing a book was not a good combination. It was common knowledge I was writing a book among some in the Lebanese community. No lack of encouragement was wanting. Tony Millan, working in the publishing firm

of Coulls Somerville Wilkie, promised to take me and my manuscript to the firms publisher, Mr Smith when it was ready. This was all hand written. Mr Smith was gentle in letting me down, and the most telling advice I do remember was There were 2 “c’s” and only 1 “s” in the word occasional.

The employment market in the city was in the doldrums. With a job in the country, shopping became an event. Whereas in the city a few minutes walk brought you to lots of shops to spend your miserable wages if you were lucky to have a job. Brother Mick was content, while here was I chasing a will'o'the’wisp. Convinced that the wide open spaces was the chance to write a best seller, I set about achieving this.

Among my precious possessions was a portable wind-up gramophone and some records, in spite of the prevailing poverty. Also on demonstration, from radio shops was a radio we had no hope of buying. In Dunedin alone there were seven private broadcasting stations. They catered for all tastes, and in due course they broadcast in rostered hours to suit each other, as well as the listening public. 4ZL only broadcast on Saturdays with a request program. While walking along the Octagon I passed an appliance musical shop that had station 4ZO. It was broadcasting a piece of music I just loved. Going inside I asked name of it, but was directed to nip up the stairs to the studio to find out. Only one person was there. He said it was called *Aye Aye Aye,* then surprised me by taking it off the turntable and giving it to me. We chatted for some minutes, then he made a request; "Aunty Molly is sick and could I do the children’s session this afternoon? Would I like to take her place as Uncle Ben?" Too shy and modest, I took my record and fled down the stairs. Looking back I cursed my shyness as an obstacle to achieve the status of some future Clive Drummond, who was popular chiefly when the National Station was closing down for the evening. His goodnight was extended to Goooooooooood Night.

Back at the Agency for a country job. There was one on a sheep station at Moa Flat for Fifteen shillings a week. The owner was Charles Weatherall, and I was assured there were only a few cows and some gardening. It was not a dairy farm. Saying I'd take it, went home and announced this decision. Playing gooseberry for my sisters romantic affairs now came to and end. No ripples of resentment this time. The train took me to Milton, where I changed to a bus for Millers Flat, almost a days journey. Mr Weatherall met me with a nephew of his who owned the car, and worked for him as a teamster. We set off on a gravel and narrow winding road, with little traffic. The land was rolling, flattish and tussocky.

Mrs Weatherall went out of her way to make me very welcome, and put me at ease. Other members of the household were two children, a girl Ann aged five, a boy Kevin three, Barbara sixteen a niece of Mr Weatherall and also a cousin of Ray Strachan the nephew who drove the car. Ray was the farm teamster and ploughman. The last member was an elderly rouseabout called Paddy McSweeney. Casual labour was boosted when demand for extra hands during harvesting, shearing and docking.

Red headed Barbara 16, was Mrs Weatherall's helper with the housework. Ann was a fair haired sweet little girl who could have graced a chocolate box, popular even in those days. Just the sort I'd like to have if I ever married. Kevin too was fair but backward in learning to talk, much loved by his mum on this account. He was normal otherwise. Little grunts was about his repertoire. Ray, Paddy, and myself had sleeping quarters outside the house. Paddy had a hut in a distant clearing in the land behind the house, while Ray and I shared quarters in an enormous corrugated iron barn also in the clearing. Paddy was Irish, and went on drinking binges now and again, using the farm job to dry out when his money also ran dry. The craving for drink gave him the DT"s but I only witnessed one spell of these all the time I was there. I was to share the hut with him later because Ray was a terrible person to share sleeping quarters in the same place. He shouted in his sleep, using lurid language enough to make my blood curdle. A condition common to a ploughman working with teams of horses I believe. The DT's alluded to above, happened one summer evening we were lying in bed having a quiet read, when Paddy's head was looking up and down the wall,

"What's the matter" I asked. "Is anything wrong?"

"Its them earwigs, with straw hats on, walking up and down." My interruption must have put them to flight, because he resumed reading soon after. There were a few little tantrums Paddy would get up to during our quiet reading sessions. He'd fling a book down yelling, "Drat that fool, that's no way to treat a sheila!" Some of his expressions were not of the drawing room level by any means. My resistance to some of his outlandish musings on women were disgusting, like you don't love a woman unless you'd eat a yard of her shit. Poor Barbara would have been shocked if she knew the type of suggestions he made to me in reference to her. I am sure Mr Weatherall would have murdered him.

Charles Weatherall was a big brawny man. He kept the homestead supplied with meat by doing the butchery himself. An enclosure near the house where the sheep selected for slaughter grazed contentedly. The nearest shopping area was Roxburgh, but I never managed a visit to the town all the thirteen months on the job. In spite of Charles size he was gentle fellow, I can honestly say I never heard him rant or rave when things went wrong; just said his piece and it was done for good. He rode a horse as if born to it. and besides his team of draught horses, kept a few hacks for mustering or shepherding the thousands of sheep he owned. Dogs! Never having had much to do with dogs, I learned a lot about them on this farm. They taught me working dogs had a hierarchy, and jealousy could erupt at times among them, when or if one would try to usurp another’s speciality.

One doggy incident affected me a lot. Charles had acquired a pup for training. It was usually tied up under a row of macrocarpa trees sheltering the kennels, when the other dogs were away. Working nearby I heard some dogs squabbling as if fighting, and going to investigate found two dogs giving the pup what-ho. Sheep dogs are fairly obedient and I called them off, and tied them up leaving the pup loose for his own good. A couple of hours later I was on my way to a distant part of the farm to check up on a couple of calves weaned recently. As I said the country is rolling, with ups and downs, and very little flats. Every now and then I could hear a tinkle, and looking back could not see what it was. It kept persisting, then felt as if it was following me. Falling flat in one of the hollows what should come over the top but the little pup I had saved from the mauling rescued earlier. He cowered in the grass seeing me but I soothed the little fellow and he followed me the rest of the day. The tinkling was caused by a couple of links attached to his collar. I always gave him a pat when I could, though as dogs can't have two masters, the friendship had to end. His destiny was as a sheep dog.

Mrs Weatherall was no oil painting but one of the most lovable persons I'd met so far. Of normal build, her nature was most compatible with everybody. We were all treated the same. English born, she came out during the South Seas Exhibition to Dunedin as a cook, finding work there as well as a husband. The quality of her cooking and her gardening expertise was of immense benefit to me in later life. She introduced me to the delights of Yorkshire pudding, and I swear to never tasting better since. Mutton was the only meat for main meals except for trips to Roxburgh when beef was a welcome change. The men always breakfasted first, Charles doing the cooking which was always porridge and chops. It was mutton three times a day, cold for lunch and hot for dinner, but we got used to it. It was a tribute to her cooking she managed to give us good meals. After a few weeks I was startled out of my wits at dinner one evening she instructed the children sitting opposite me, to do at the table what I did, while eating and behaving. I wondered did she realise this put me on my mettle as regards table manners. As a role model, for their ages and mine, it was flattering.

The red haired Barbara and I had the job of doing the dishes most evenings. It must have been a comedy as two more bashful and shy people would be hard to find in a days march. Mrs Weatherall did do her best to draw the Roxburgh born lass out of her timidity, and my two years seniority and coming from Dunedin as a city slicker was little help to a country cousin. No radio, or phone at this stage, no electricity either, entertainment was nonexistent. I had brought my wind up HMV portable gramophone and records with me and shyly offered to lend it to them. I had to come with it. Mrs W must have had a deep ingrained matchmaking streak in her, as she tried to get me to teach Barbara to dance. I didn't like dancing, but succumbed a few times. The hall way was the only place one could practise. After few attempts we both gave up with immense relief I should say on both sides. We were a pair of innocent doves.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The farm was on a bigger scale than I thought. Lots of agriculture, in addition to the sheep. The man power would increase with shearing, docking, crutching, dipping, mustering the sheep, harvesting the crops as winter feed for the horses, cows, and if necessary for sheep as well, in case of a hard winter. My job was easy and no great expectations were demanded. Mrs W made suggestions for the garden which was some distance from the house but not out of sight. The preparations of the soil was done initially by machine, a boon really as the time saved from having

to dig. Some of Mrs W's suggestions about growing vegetables sounded like old wives tales but then mine weren't much better. She herself came from a rural part on England. That was the source of every short cut to achieve results, and abounded with some funny ideas as well as old wives tales. We achieved moderate success, with me learning the most. Manuring was not a problem on a farm but water certainly was. Central Otago doesn't get water like their city friends. The huge barn could always caught enough in an emergency with huge storage tanks.

My job included making the butter. Home made butter does not have the palatability of the factory product the big dairy companies produce. To get the factory flavour, most farms do not have the water resources or the cooling systems to extract the buttermilk thoroughly. The shopping binge in Roxburgh always included butter in addition to beef.

Mrs W was pregnant five months before I was aware of this. It was to alter the routine running of the farm. Though with two previous pregnancies, a bit of experience was available to cope with this. Long term arrangements well before hand were being made to accommodate the baby's arrival, which was due at a busy time for the shearing. Ray had twin sisters Rhoda and Alice - commonly called Blackie and Whitey because of the colour of their hair - aged eighteen, who volunteered to come and tide things over for the busy period. They were Charles nieces in Roxburgh, so quite a family affair. And of course cousins to Barbara who was going with Mrs W to help look after her and have a break from her job - like a busman's holiday I presume.

How the situation for every body changes when the mother of the family is taken away. When Mrs W's time came for the birth of number three, she was off to Roxburgh a week before it was due. What a difference then and now. Mothers spent about two weeks in hospital before allowed home. Nowadays they are home the next day or very shortly after. Meeting Rhoda was sudden. She was on her knees scrubbing the doorstep, her dress well tucked above her knees revealing plenty of them. This was Blackie the dark haired one of the twins. She was a vibrant smiling person not a bit embarrassed in being found thus. Alice, (or Whitey) as she was called, wouldn't be coming for a week. Whitey was the clever one, always the top of class every year except once it was her twin sister who toppled her.

Blackie filled the role of housekeeper admirably, every bit as good as Mrs W. It was the time of the year when summer was at its height, and long twilight evenings. Drying the dishes one evening, Blackie suggested she'd like to go for a horse ride some evening, would I take her? We had been talking about horses, so I suggested we'd go that night. I caught the two best hacks and saddled them up with the best saddle for her and waited as arranged at the rear of the stables. Standing between the horses heads, one of them lifted his head suddenly. Turning round I beheld a radiant figure dressed from head to toe completely in red. Not only was the horse startled. I was too. Blackie looked really grand but I didn't know how to say so. She looked the most glamorous girl on earth, far too good for humble me. Up she mounted with a leg up, from me and off we went. With my guidance we took a course over the farm to where a creek trickled fitfully. Crossing the creek I said,

"If horses think, I wonder what yours is thinking of the person on its back"

In typical feminine fashion, she asked,

"Why would he?"

"Perhaps he's wondering if he's had better or worse company on his saddle"

I instinctively knew I'd blown it. The art of coquetry was in its infancy, and flattery was not my long suit, but I remember no lasting harm was done. I was still trying to recover from the initial shock of her radiant appearance. My sisters never looked like her nor the girls in the street of the Lebanese ghetto. Whitey's arrival was the beginning of a conversational livelihood. All us eighteen year olds were

beginning to sharpen our tongues while doing the dishes. The book I was writing came up for discussion when Whitey said she'd like to read a chapter of it. So bravely I did submit one. The next night while Blackie was baking, and Whitey wiping the sink down, Blackie remarked on a sentence where I used the words "*what with".* The sentence was, "*They were about to land, and what with the atrocious conditions, all landed safely".* Whitey defended the use of the words, so we bowed to her approval.

The twins stay was all too short and I was sorry when they had to return after Mrs W came home with the new baby. I was fast becoming one of the family. A little drama took place unexpectedly at the dinner table soon after the new baby's arrival. We'd finished our meal and waiting for a cup of tea. I was humouring little mute Kevin sitting across from me, and saying, *cuppa tea Kevin, cuppa tea,* repeating the words for no reason at all, *cuppa tea Kevin, cuppa tea, cuppa tea....*when all of a sudden he said *Cuppa tea, cuppa tea.* You could have heard a pin drop for a few moments before we all realised Kevin had spoken his first words at three and a half years old. His mother drew up behind him tears welling up in her eyes, not knowing how to react. Neither did anyone else for that matter. For a wild moment I thought the victory was mine in stead of Kevin's. It was a thrilling time for everybody. It seemed as if some vocal chord was severed and released from captivity.

Life went on and winter approached. The contrasts of winter and summer in Central Otago was brought home to me quite forcibly. At the height of summer when I was still in the barn, the lack of electricity meant reading and writing was by time honoured candle power. One morning I replaced my candle stump with a brand new one as well as Ray's. The day was particularly hot, The barns corrugated iron cladding made the interior hotter still. That evening my candle was in the form of a U, while Ray's was a right angle shape. The following winter was the opposite with both frost and snow. I was in the hut with Paddy for the winter, deserting Ray's quarters because of his talking and shouting in his sleep. My working trousers made of a material called parmanap, similar to modern jeans only dark with a grey stripe, would stand up with the cold when removed. Young men of my age don't feel the cold. Working in the open hardens one. Today with electric blankets this nostalgia is barely credible.

Larry a big tomcat, slept on the foot of my bed acting like a hot water bottle. Larry would paw my face to be let out the window beside my bed to get out during the night. One week a frost continued day and night to penetrate the ground to a depth of two inches. It is hard to imagine the granite nature of frozen soil to that depth. A lump of soil the size of a cherry would make a horse stumble. Then the snow. My first experience of high country snow where it lay for days. Combined with wind, snow would enter keyholes like sand. The snowdrifts would pile up against obstacles like windows and doors. Not unusual to open a door to be faced with a wall of snow.

This job allowed me to pay visits to Dunedin without begging for the privilege. Indeed Charles and Mrs W bent over backwards to make it easy for me in the way of transport and wages as required. I'm sure this period in my life, while not ridding me of my bashfulness, at least put me on the road to self confidence. My teeth bothered me a great deal while on the farm, always sensitive to hot and cold food. The first visit to Dunedin was to go to a Chinese dentist Mr Low. I had gone to before, who diagnosed me with gingivitis. He recommended under the circumstances to have all my teeth removed, the twenty five of them! Chloroform was used, and waking up toothless, bleeding, in pain, had to go to bed for some days. Cousin Henry came to see me saying he'd brought me a present; a packet of toothpicks. I could hardly talk. I did manage to write to the farm to tell them what happened. The dentist told me to return in three months to prepare for dentures. I

did return to find the process of fitting dentures was a leisurely affair, and when finished to come and get them or send for them, plus twelve guineas. The waiting extended to months. Mrs W was kindness itself tolerating my mainly vegetarian diet and difficulty in eating meat.

I must mention the first Christmas on the farm before my toothless days. Weeks before we had to say what was our favourite Christmas dinner. This included Paddy, Ray, Norman an Australian shearer recently hired, Barbara, and myself all apart from the actual household. When Christmas arrived, lo and behold, all our preferences were there in front of us. Mine was lamb and mint sauce, new potatoes, and green peas. It was kept as a pleasant surprise, but it must have been a lot of extra work for a mother of two children, without the aid of gas or electricity or modern appliances. The spirit of the pioneers was alive and well in Moa Flat.

No sign of the dentures, and by gum I was getting anxious. Months had passed and no word. Another trip to Dunedin to find out why. Mr low had died since Part making but not completing mine and another dentist had taken over. The arrangements Mr Low had made must have been kept in his head gone to the grave with him. Checking up on the dates of my visits, the new incumbent unearthed my details and I eventually departed with a mouthful of crockery. I was glad to have the peace and quiet of the country to learn the use of them and to speak, The sympathy and patience of everybody was a help also. Learning to talk seemed to be a vocation thrust upon me for one more time.

All good things come to an end willingly or not. The end of this job where I'd been reasonably happy, was due to some mixed motives. The year was 1935 and into my twentieth year. Where was my life heading? Reviewing my achievements so far was depressing. The time spent at Home Heating Supplies to a trade I hated, six months on the Catlin's farm for the George's unpaid, six weeks up the Dart Valley unpaid, seven months on a milk farm fairly well remunerated, nearly two years assistant projectionist for slave wages, and this Moa Flat sheep station for a year plus. I was not even a farmer in the true sense of the term. I could milk cows, look after poultry, do gardening, show talking pictures that gave no leisure in the evenings; what sort of life was this for anybody wanting to be an author. More experience and education was urgently needed. Mentally, the voice of fate was laughing over my shoulder. Maybe I was going to leap out of the frying pan into the fire. The economic depression that rampaged all my working life began to seethe with the advent of the coming election in November. This election was going to solve all these problems. I was getting fifteen shillings a week plus board when on a short visit to home in Dunedin my father said;

"What for you work every day? You get same pay working in Unemployment Camp, and have half Saturday off and Sundays too." At first it seemed to make sense. Some of my close friends I used to hobnob with were going to do the same, seek work in unemployment camps, a scheme engineered by the Reform Government as a vote catching exercise. My friends gave the push to my fathers argument, and reluctantly decided to leave the farm job. The catch was one had to be twenty one to qualify for the scheme to get enrolled. I rolled up to be registered, said I was twenty one, was given a cheque like book of coupons for quarterly payments of five shillings. Handing over my first five bob, hid the fact I was only nineteen years and ten months of age.

I had to go back to the farm to collect my things, and give notice about leaving. I had promised Mrs W to buy a gramophone record of a whistling number to play for Kevin; he loved one I had called *Whistling Rufus.* I bought *The Whistler and his Dog,* which made my leaving a little sad. The situation was fast becoming poignant. My treatment had been as one of the family, but I was getting nowhere. I hated what I was doing, yet the tiny spark of ambition was flickering into life. If quenched now, it

might go out forever. It was a few days before Charles saw me. He rode up on horseback as I was working and said;

"I'm very disappointed you're leaving just while the lambing season is coming. .Any other time would have been better. I didn't think you'd do this to me." If he'd asked me to change my mind or offered a rise, I'd have reconsidered, but he was not the type to wheedle. He took everything at face value. At least I did give three weeks notice.

Back in Dunedin, a minor family crisis was looming over my sister Mary. She had fallen in love with a Jewish widower, Louis Morris. His mother and father, were taking instructions in the Catholic faith. They had changed their name from Cohen to Morris, obviously to facilitate the transition from Judaism. Louis parents were Harry and Ada, they had two adult sons both married, Louis and Horace. Louis who only recently lost his wife Olga, while being nursed by Mary when she was working in the hospital before changing to be usher in the Grand theatre. Horace refused to change with the others. His wife Lil was childless and she ruled the roost. Louis had a two year old toddler daughter Rae from his short marriage, now transferred to her grandparents Harry and Ada on the death of Olga.

THE STORY OF MY LIFE PART TWO

CHAPTER NINE

The Lebanese who emigrated to New Zealand from the turn of the century and at the time I am writing of, also brought with them the racial prejudices they had. One of these was a congenital hatred of Jews. I was not fully unaware of this, but coming home from Moa Flat, into the turmoil of Mary with Lou Morris, I became aware how deep-seated this was. Even the English, referred to as *Inglesi,* Lebanese blood was purer than theirs also. Babies born to the early families inherited these prejudices with their mothers milk; fortified by the attitudes of their parents in everyday life.

When I came home at fourteen and sat listening to the men talking in Arabic, I was overcome by the vehemence of their expressions, in spite of the fact I could not understand the language. Once when they were discussing some scoundrel with a litany of evil deeds, I remember my father saying at the end of a tirade, "Must be Jew! Must be Jew!" To me whose only worldly experience was in *"some village hamlet",* of Gray's Elegy, this attitude was all new to me. These Lebanese elders could talk for hours on the iniquities of the "chosen race". The *"Inglesi",* as they referred to the English, came also in for a good deal of adverse criticism. If the *Inglesi"* mothers fed their babies with cows milk, can you blame them for the mental quality of the English? Lebanese mothers never used cows milk for babies; as a last resort it would be goats milk. Evidently, goats milk led to a higher mentality than that of cows

That Mary could even consider Lou Morris for a friend and even contemplate to marry a Jew, was a disaster for Dad. I had by now overcome my early strangeness to calling my father Dad. My sisters and brothers called him nothing else but Dad, and it was getting easy for me to do so. Dad's hatred for Lou grew day by day as Mary defiantly continued to see him. Mary was the apple of Dad's eye. He would stalk them and furiously argue with them both.

The story Uncle Jacob had learned Dad had purchased a revolver he alerted two of his sons (Fred and Phillip) to try and ward off any possibility of it being used.

Dad did state he would kill Lou, and Uncle believed he would. A lot of the early drama lad transpired in my absence from home. Us siblings were on the side of the angels, except Alma, who had no hard feelings one way or the other. She viewed herself as a and of Cinderella who had no affair to pitchfork her into the limelight like her sister. The lovers had their own solution made up for them eventually when Lou's parents Harry and Ada decided to go to Wellington to live, taking Lou and his daughter Rae with them. This was to affect my life considerably but not immediately.

It was now election year 1935. I had enrolled in a new Government Unemployment Scheme and waiting for the next move. The political situation was hotting up, the United Party was getting desperate to get re-elected. The details of the government scheme were revealed for the one we were enrolled for. Word came we were going to a state forestry area in Conical Hills near Heriot. Now, late August and September I was thinking of the Weatherall's, and a feeling depressed about leaving when all those lambs were coming into the world. Then cheering news came that cousin Henry was also going on the scheme. On the day we left Dunedin to proceed to Heriot, a crowd gathered at the railway station on a sunny day of blue skies, fit to match the hearts of us all on our way to work and fortune at fifteen shillings a week for single men. I don't recall the going married rate. I think it was two pound ten shillings a week, enough to sway some voters.

We were en route to fame and fortune, and just waiting for the train to arrive when a buzz of excitement rose among the men. A rumour went around that the rate of pay had been altered for those engaged for the scheme we were bound for.. Someone had a morning paper, the Otago Daily Times with an article declaring the rate of pay would be nine shillings a day for single men, twelve shillings a day for married men; to take effect immediately. An increase of thirty-four shillings and sixpence, bringing our weekly wage to forty-nine shillings and sixpence. This was clearly the current Reform Party's desperate move to keep power against the rising popularity of the Labour Party. Sixty years later, *some* things have not changed. The elections were only six weeks away, and some us had attended meetings of candidates. I, and some of my friends were innocent babes in the woods as far as politics went. Our electorate for Henry and Myself was Dunedin Central, and all I remember was a candidate with white hair advocating a guaranteed price for butterfat. Farmers were entitled he stated, like city workers, to know what their weekly income was. Like the police or factory workers the candidate added.

Arriving at our destination, it seemed as if we were on a different planet. We lad to scale up a hill to get there A large clearing in the bush high up on the hill surrounded by millions of trees of Pinus Insignus and Pinus Radiata. There stood three groups of about a dozen tents erected with a fly front and extra canopy, a chimney of corrugated iron at one end. Two men to a tent so Henry and I claimed one for ourselves and settled in. A large central building housed the cookhouse and acted as he eating and gathering area. There followed exhortations on our conduct and general information of which I have forgotten. They dealt mainly with wandering and health. the weather was dry and a cool spring still in the air..

The work consisted of making roads to act as fire breaks, as well as access for he eventual milling of the timber. The days of allowing firebreaks during the tree Wanting was in its infancy and became policy in later years. The tools of our trade were picks and shovels, wheelbarrows and muscle. The days of Bob Semple to replace these with earthmoving machines was to come, in the lively days of the first Labour government. We were formed into gangs with a foreman to each. The foreman's job vas to put in an occasional appearance with each gang, give a few comments and disappear. Half of the men were of our age, the other half were of any age from ours o geriatrics. The older hands gave out advice discreetly to do as

little as possible of he hard yacka. Some old hands proved good teachers how best to do this as quickly is possible. Our first job was to make a cutting in a bank from which the trees were already removed. Picks loosened the earth, clay, and stones, others shovelled this into wheelbarrows wheeling it away where directed. This type of work was called navvying, and if it was your job in life you were a navvy.

Before a week was out, we had elected a watchman whose duty was to be a lookout for the foreman's approach and whistle an agreed signal. As time wore members of the gang came and went from other gangs. After a few weeks, a newcomer Ronald, a fair haired student fellow wearing gold rimmed spectacles started working alongside me. He came from the Bay of Islands was a university student who couldn't afford to go home, or continue his studies. He certainly was not cut out for manual labour. This shows the depth of the depression in 1935, and the poverty of the job market. The older members of the party talked politics and the coming elections.

One of the cooks managed to get a radio in the dining room, which was our popular entertainment. The news of the day only came on the radio at nine o'clock each evening. No such thing as night-time radio.

A better amusement organised by Henry was playing euchre for so much a game, and always played in our hut. We organised a few tricks to beat the opposition so we were always partners. When the cards were dealt, the players said if they were "away" or whatever. The general idea was how to let your partner know whether you had a good hand to match the turn up card or not, without making it too obvious. Instead of saying "I'm away", Henry or I would say, *"oum away". Oum* in Lebanese means "up". This meant he took the turn-up card and made it trumps, whereas in the normal run of play he may've turned it down. Depending on the wealth of the players, the stakes were either a tray bit (threepence) or a sprat (sixpence).

Amusing incidents surrounded the primitive facilities in the matter of latrines. It was into the bush to relieve oneself for both kinds of relief. One incident happened to me and was the only one of its kind for the duration of our stay. Being of a modest nature I ventured a little further than necessary merely for urinating, when I looked up and saw a young red deer kid almost within reach. We gazed at each other for some moments then the kid edged a little closer sniffing and stretching his head towards me. They are such appealing animals. I touched the little fellow and gently stroked him. Thought I'd better get back, but it followed me to where the gang was working. With me trotting out with a kid deer in tow provided light relief to the labourers. When the kid followed us to the camp at night, the authorities said this was not on, and the deer had to be returned to the wild. Whatever happened during the night, it was gone the next morning. Maybe Mum found her errant kid.

Two other events worthy of note. On Election Day in November we were all allowed off in the afternoon to descend the hill to a polling booth down on the flat in order to vote. We were expected to vote for the generous Government who upped our wages from fifteen bob to two pound nine and six a week. I was not on the electoral roll as I had only just turned twenty. I made a pretence of voting and enjoyed the half day off. We all piled in to the cookhouse at 9pm to hear the election results on the radio. It was about eleven before the final sweeping victory by Labour was certain. The political wise men started picking the cabinet, while us saner lads started to retire, when someone noticed a chap called Shortie was missing. He was nowhere to be found so a search was organised to retrace our steps and look for Shortie in the bush. We kept yelling his name but no response. Then I remembered he was deaf and probably wouldn't hear, so we called the search off.

Next morning as we trooped into breakfast, there was Shortie halfway through his meal. Some of those who had looked for him the night before tore into him for losing his way, and cause us to stay up late losing sleep, looking for a deaf n'dumb no-hoper. But he calmly listened and went on with his breakfast. His tent mate verified he was out all-night and turned up none the worse for being lost.

The next occurrence on note happened while playing euchre in our hut curing one of those long twilight's of Otago. Our foreman Gus poked his head through the fly entrance and asked.

"You guys name Coory?" He asked Henry and me.

"Yes", we agreed.

"Do you live in Carroll Street in Dunedin⁰"

'Yes " We agreed again.

"Well your house is burnt down, according to this morning's paper. There's one in my cabin if you want to read it." When we got it, it was at the bottom of the page, no heading, about four or five lines, which said:

The residence of Mr J Coory in Carroll Street was burnt down by fire, and attended to by the Fire Brigade last night.

Well, we both lived in Carroll Street, Henry in 67, me in 122. Henry's father's name was Jacob, mine was Joseph. Both were the residence of Mr J Coory. Neither family in those days had the phone, very few families did for that matter. We got permission to leave at once when we learnt there was a train leaving Balclutha in two hours. No transport was available so we walked across country to save time, getting there puffing and blowing only to wait for the train running late. In town at last it was a short walk from there to Carroll Street, maybe nearly a mile. The first house was 67 and it was intact. We both went in and were greeted with the news the house at 122 was not livable, and told us where the family were domiciled meanwhile.

We were given some refreshments and decided to walk up and view the remains of 122. Emerging into the street, I saw my father across the road under a street light rolling a cigarette. He was tilting the cigarette paper to the light to see the gummed edge to lick, and saw me. He had a huge smile on his face which I never expected to see in the circumstances.

"What for you come; to put out fire?" he grinned. Henry and I explained briefly why and proceeded on up to 122 Carroll Street. What a sorry sight. My bedroom was gutted, and all my possessions including my good clothes gone up in flames. Not a vestige of any personal effects whatever. Of course I was not the only loser. Again all I had for the umpteenth time in my short life, was what I stood up in. In the camp, we had what you could say, two changes of clothes; put on and take off. As it was the beginning of the weekend, we went back to camp the next working day. Within the next few weeks following the fire, Mary went to Wellington to marry Lou Morris, but this fact was hidden from Dad that Lou was there too. By a coincidence, Mary was living with a Lebanese family, also of the name of Morris, but well known to the family, who had not long ago gone to live there too.

After the fire Dad made up his mind to go and live in Australia, where he had a widowed married sister in Adelaide.. His main reason was to get some relief for his bronchitis and Alma agreed to join him. First he visited Broken Hill briefly to see some cousins where he had lived and worked for a small period, before emigrating on to New Zealand. All this in the year of 1936. Mary had written to me saying she was married, and advised work opportunities galore were available in Wellington. She pleaded with me to come up there, and further she was going to have a baby. It was lucky Dad didn't know. I persevered with the Government Employment Camp through 1936 till close on winter. The only members of the family left in Dunedin were Michael and Jack, living with friends after our home was practically razed to

the ground. Alma and Dad in Australia, Mary begging me to come to Wellington, all this coupled with no home left in Dunedin to speak of, all my belongings up in smoke, the future had to be seriously reconsidered. I had done previous serious considerations like this before, a case of deja vu. The moot questions about the course of my life were raised again. 1 came down to accept the Wellington offer for Mary's sake, who, of the whole family was the only one to show a little understanding.

I have said very little about my brother Jack in my life so far. At fourteen, when references were made of-him, I wondered about him because if you recall I was occupying his room with all the poetry books and literature that was my consolation for the rupture to my life. When Mrs le Fevre called to pick us up after Christmas and went away without us, my life was split in two, like some photographs of before and after. It was the end of any school education. From now on, the university of life would be my tutor. Well I wouldn't be the first I mused philosophically. It may have been somewhere a year into my new life, when the question of Jack arose from the ashes of my self-pity to get to the bottom of his non appearance in the bosom of the family. I asked Mary,

"Where is Jack, and when is he coming home?" There was a pause. Then she said "Why?"

"I just want to write to him." I replied. At the back of my mind was the fact he had all these penny poets of the great masters in English literature in the room occupied by me and I just felt like writing to him. The answer came that sends a chill whenever I hear the name again because of that first association of Jack and the place where he was; *Mount Eden jail.* I did write when the address was given to me, and had a pleasant answer in reply. We kept up a correspondence until his release which I can't remember when exactly. Jack's letters were not as many as I would've wished due to the restriction of prison mail. He had a nice humour and was good at comparing ideas. I still remember a joke in one of his letters. *If a man asks you he doesn't know what to do with his week-end, tell him to put his hat on it.* It took me a year to see through that one. Sophistication was not my strong point. Years later, walking along one of the streets of Wellington, Dad and I were talking about Jack and his life. I was struck by Dad's disappointment with Jack's first thirty years:

"He spend half his life in jail" Dad said. Jack's weakness, was his enthusiasm for motor bikes and stealing parts for them. He had an unfortunate manner as an adolescent when working, and differing with his employer's orders. He could not hold down a job for long, and depended on his wits and card gambling to supply most of his needs. When this Mount Eden stint expired, it was the finish of that part of his life, and prison never saw him again. But like me, he was in and out of home as the whim took him. I was never a long term occupant myself. Jack was an incorrigible night owl, and it was nothing for him to spend most of the night playing cards with a set of his Lebanese cronies that were his close friends. We soon found it was difficult for him to go to bed, and equally difficult to get him out of it. There was few fundamental views in life that kept us apart. One was my Catholic faith, and things Catholic. We never argued about it, for the simple reason I let him have his way and I went mine. I suspect he hated religion and it overflowed in particular to the one I belonged to. The vast majority of the Lebanese in Dunedin belonged to the Maronite Rite who were in complete union with the Roman Catholic church. A few did belong to the Melkite Rite, who acknowledged the Patriarch of the Byzantium Church in preference to the Pope. He deplored the wealth of churches. Catholic in particular, and regarded as scandalous their accumulated wealth. I have written elsewhere my thoughts on this subject in my South Island Tour, when visiting some cathedrals.

Though out of context, when I married in 1946. 1 had Jack as my best man, and he really loved that. He made a jolly good job of it too. Jack married eventually in 1950, and we remained good friends as brothers should. He and Nancy had three daughters. I fancied he would have liked sons, as his daughters all had feminised boys names; Stephanie, Claudia and Josephine. I was not at their wedding, which was soon after ours but Jack's girls grew up contemporary with ours and the family chose to live in Featherston. Claudia was the apple of her fathers eye, and when she was due to marry, Jack was a very ill man, not able to perform the customary duties of giving her away and gave me the pleasure though a very sad one. He died soon afterwards.

Jack was ten years older than me. We were living in Palmerston North during his last few years. Nancy taught elocution, and was a member of the Competition Association Judges Panel judging throughout the country. In Featherston, Jack ran a combined business of a garage and a second hand mart, which proved useful in getting a bargain among family members. None of us took advantage of him. There came a time eventually when in the matter of connubial bliss, they separated for a while, except for weekends. Jack had a job in Wellington, while Nancy kept up with her coterie of clubs and friends in Featherston. They did not own their home paying rent all their lives.

In Jack's last years, Nancy took him home and nursed him to the end devotedly In those days I never owned a car, borrowing one from my son Noel, commuting every weekend to Featherston. When Jack could no longer drive, he handed over his old Vauxhall LIP languishing away its years in a friends garage. Every car owner feels his car has special attributes, my brother was no different. This car "Pulls like the devil on hills" and had a host of other virtues. Of course this was to be the first car to call my very own, and I was flattered. On the weekends I visited, I usually came on my own and stayed overnight on occasions. This time my wife came with me, to take possession of the car.

My driving was average. The cars I drove belonged to my employers and to a limited extent, had them for private transport as well. So I knew the car I was driving was a lemon or not. It was! Both my wife Bonnie and I were grateful for our very own first car. It was dark when we left Featherston, the familiar road by now under our own wheels as we drove home. We hadn't driven very far before realisation dawned, the Vauxhall had her own way of doing things. Every car has some sort of character. Caution was the key word. My dear passenger wife blissfully unaware on my growing uneasiness, I decided not to pass them on. I recalled the story of a chap who bought a used car on the strength of the salesman's glowing account. He returned some time later to request the salesman to recount all he had said at the time of purchase, because he was beginning to lose heart! I was fast entering a similar situation. The steering was difficult, there was so much play to keep a straight path. With the winding Manawatu Gorge road looming closer and closer I was getting worried. The chit-chat on the journey was mixed with prayers for a safe arrival. The darkness of night was a blessing, as oncoming cars lights gave warning of their approach, evasive action could be prepared. I consider this drive one of the heroic episodes of my career. The car did get a warrant from a sympathetic garage, but failed ignominiously the next time, and was sold for $50 to a grateful couple of young men with high expectations.

CHAPTER TEN THE WELLINGTON YEARS

Arriving in Wellington was jumping out of the frying pan into the fire. If I'd known what was in store for me for the next twelve months, it may have been better

if I'd stayed where I was. But at the end of two years everything got better, and I grew to love the city making lifelong friends the first time in my life. My sister Mary and Lou were my saviours in providing food and-shelter. The employment boom was not as rosy as Mary's letter indicated. Mary and Lou lived in a *"place"* in Brooklyn, which can hardly be described in any other word. They had living quarters behind and above an empty shop in Cleveland Street.. Lots of empty shops in Cleveland Street, and nothing depresses so much as grimy windows of empty shops having bedrooms upstairs and commercial living rooms downstairs. The furniture consisted of one table with butter boxes for chairs. There were two beds, two bedrooms, one for the married personnel, and one for a boarder Frank Stairmand, who was there to boost the flagging economy patently obvious by the meagre furnishings. The only way I could sleep was top and tail with Frank in the single bed. We both tolerated this desperate measure, until I purchased another from a second hand shop in Kent Terrace, owned by Harry Smith.

Mary's pregnancy was about half term, but she kept reasonably well. Lou worked for General Motors in their Lower Hutt Bond Store, where cars were stored for dispatch to the various agencies in the city and immediate suburbs. These cars were in storage for checking up on paintwork and upholstery defects. Mary and Lou had married for love on the principle that two can live as cheap as one, and have a lot of fun with it. Wages were only on a level of extending subsistence and not for luxury. None of us had savings in the bank, merely living from payday to payday. These were the days of industrial insurance policies where the agents called to collect the monthly premiums at the rate of a shilling or half a crown a week. The number of lapsed policies amounted to thousands of pounds throughout the country, and must have provided petty cash to the insurance companies for many years.

Jobs were not plentiful to anyone like me who had only three qualifications of doubtful value as far as city life was concerned. Washday boilers and concrete tubs, cowman-gardeners, assistant projectionists, the latter were not in great demand. I did try the theatres for the latter, leaving my name if a temporary position became available. Before a week was out, I received a call for one. Did I have a car? No I didn't. Well at Porirua, they had a picture showing on Saturday in the local hall. If they lent me one could I drive there, taking the film with me and bring it back. Well I could not drive and it was nearly four years since I'd shown a film and I only had knowledge of one brand of projector, Simplex.

Frank Stairmand came to the rescue and offered to drive me out and teach me to drive. The car was a model T Ford with a tatty canvas hood, and it was a wet night. We got there and the projector was a Simplex but only one machine. This meant stopping the show to change reels. No plush seating, only long forms and a large vacant floor area divided equally between form seated, and floor seated patrons. The projector rested on the floor at the rear so a clearing down the middle was needed for a clear passage of the film to the screen. Porirua then and today bears no comparison whatsoever. With all the children sitting on the floor in front of me, the noise during the changeover when enough lights came on for me to thread the next reel was alarming. The fire risk was horrendous when I think of it with no protection considering the inflammable nature of film and unprotected arc lights. Enough to raise the hackles of the fire service if they only knew. City theatres had stringent fire regulations. I sincerely doubt Porirua had a fire brigade to boast about.

Most feature films had four reels of two thousand feet, all about a hundred minutes. Usually enough shorts for the first half, would last about thirty minutes. No facilities existed for breakdowns, and I was grateful none occurred that night. It was a vast change from the days of Gar Raines to the primitive Porirua Saturday

nights especially along that tortuous road in the pre Bob Sample days. I took the wheel of the car for half the journey back, and it was a miracle the two of us survived. Twenty years-would elapse before I learnt to drive a car, and get a license. I decided after that experience not to take on casual work in that profession again, under those conditions.

Walking along Ghuznee St I saw a building site in progress with a sign on the footpath LABOUR HANDS WANTED. I applied and started the next day. I am not heavily built, and the foreman noting my struggles with wheelbarrows of cement mix along some planks, said to me at lunch time, "This is not your line of work." He gave me five bob and I shamefaced slunk off the scene. In adversity, things come in threes :hey say. Number three was not long in coming. An exhibition was being built in Rongotai, many men were required so I ambled along prepared to commence at once which was the information given. I was assigned to a pile of timber and asked to carry them to a spot indicated. On the way to the job, I had to catch a number 2 tram and running late I made a dive for it as it started off, nearly missed it, copped a few bruises and a scratch on one leg, but triumphantly made it. It was a blazing hot day and I peeled off my shirt after a couple of hours and noticed a slight rash on my arms. Just a heat rash I thought and carried on. An hour later, wiping the sweat off my chest I saw I was covered in a rash.

"Good God man; you got the measles," someone said. "You'd better get home quick!" This time I didn't even last till lunch time!

Recovering from the measles, I became convinced the Cleveland Street *"place"* was not the best of recuperation centres nor a fit dwelling place to bring a new born baby into, let alone the world. But of all the streets I've lived in, this street was the most convenient in some respects. Across the road was a picture theatre, beside it was a fish and chip shop, along to the right was a Post Office, on a corner opposite a library. To the left a few doors along a butcher, then a dairy-cum-grocery, round the corner a fruit and veggie shop and a hairdresser. But all these facilities did not compensate for the bare essentials we all lived in.

"Mary," I said one morning, "I'm going out and I'm not coming home until I get another place to live". I did the rounds of the few Estate Agents in those days, with an eye for closeness to transport. Signs abounded that the depression was ending, the new Labour Government was getting business moving into top gear. I arrived home with the news I was successful with a place right in the middle of Cambridge Terrace, and next door to the Urgent Pharmacy. Vacant possession and move in as soon as possible. The meagre contents were easily accounted for and one pleasing feature, we lived right opposite the second hand dealer, Harry Smith. He said he would shift us for a very-modest sum. He was the dealer I'd purchased the extra bed from. We became friendly with the dealer who was only too ready to supply our wants as they arose. Mary's pregnancy was less of a worry from now on for Lou, who working out of town was relieved I was there with her. He left General Motors soon after when he was offered a job taxi driving. We were now able to afford a phone, and solve some transport problems at the same time with the taxi job

But these benefits did not stop there. Lou’s parents who were looking after Rae, were living in Home Street just a few minutes walk away. Home Street was a small L shaped cul-de-sac off Kent Terrace. Cambridge Terrace and Kent Terrace ran parallel as sides of a wide boulevard, garden plots separating the traffic lanes down the centre. In a strange city, to know and live near to such close relatives was a big boost to morale all round. Lou's father Harry and his wife Ada were a big help to both Mary and Lou, who were about to make them grandparents again in addition to Rae. Harry was a tailor working for various firms chiefly as an alteration expert. His newly found conversion from Judaism to the Roman Catholic faith took up some of his spare time in cultivating new associations. His home was littered with

evidence of this in the way of literature and pious objects. Lou's brother Horace's marriage remained childless, with no expectation of providing grand children to doting parents. In the irreverent circles I was later to circulate in the university of life, we referred to the man in a childless marriage as a seedless raisin. How often in life we designate people by the fruits of life!

Harry was a tall spare man with sharp features, dogmatic, in contrast to his wife Ada, she was buxom, and very meek and mild. Harry could be very categorical, and loved to show off his knowledge of the bible, various devotions and practices of his new found faith. Ada had a reputation of being a good cook, most Jewish women are. They were both born within sound of Bowbells in London, a condition to qualify as cockneys. The family were well grounded in Judaism and up to the time of their Dunedin conversion, were full members of the synagogue In no time at all he had me enrolled in various confraternities. Jews never forget their Jewish background and Lou was proud of the fact Jesus was of the same blood as he was. On one occasion he referred to Christ as his cousin.

Mary never forgot her Lebanese blood either. In no time she had become friends of several families; Moosey Peter's family in particular. When I met Moosey, the father ruled his family very much along Mafia lines. Moosey's large family of about three girls who waited on him hand and foot and six boys, the youngest aged about sixteen. He had a large residence on the corner of Jessie and Tory Streets, built right on the footpath. The two eldest sons Sam and Alex were stout and portly like their father, worked on a farm in the King Country near Ohura. The two next eldest Michael and Joseph were small of stature and had corresponding small businesses. One had a dairy and gift shop near the Wellington hospital, the other a bookmaker. These four were married with families The front of the Moosey Peter's residence was a shirt factory where female machinists by repute, worked for miserly wages. Three of the daughters I got to know reasonably well, Anita, Mary and Kathleen. Anita the eldest had a reasonable figure, the other two were big girls, buxom plus. Any young unattached swain like myself always had the virtues of these girls pointed out to them by their mother, who also was built on generous lines. Mary the youngest, later on, was to play quite a significant part in my life, but not on romantic lines, but as a good friend. Opposite the Wellington Hospital in Riddiford Street lived another Lebanese family, the Brookies. They also had a shop similar to the dairy mentioned above, and the eldest girl was married to Mick Peters who ran the other shop on the same side as the hospital. I used to visit both families a lot. sometimes for meals. Mr Brookie had passed on before I met the family. The next eldest Ada was a fine handsome dark haired girl who went to Adelaide with my sister Alma and Dad, but returned home on her own. Ada was only home two months when she died prematurely. Ivy another married daughter managed the shop proficiently. The others were Peter the only male in the family who lost an arm in a terrific motor bike accident. The family had mixed fortunes. There was another unattached daughter the youngest of the brood about my age. The mother had designs of an early marriage for her. I was welcomed profusely and found this gratifying until slowly the match making behind the welcomes began to intrude rather persistently. It became patent the girl - whose name I have forgotten, -was a willing party to the game as well. Evidently our penury was not obvious, I'd prove a poor catch. I started to avoid the house but remained distant friends.

There was another family of Peters living in Brougham Street unrelated to the Moosey clan, who also had no father in residence. Five girls in the family of whom I heard the middle one Imelda was of a beauty to match her intelligence. I should meet her I was strongly advised. She was also well educated. Well I went and a more dowdy lot I never met. Imelda did have a conversational manner but a little arch with her witty remarks. I was invited back but did not return too often.

The main thing on my mind was to get a job and it wasn't for the lack of trying A seasonal job at the Radio Corporation of New Zealand was offering, though at the time the fact it was seasonal came to light after I started. Being interested in anything connected to radio, I was delighted. To know such an industry existed was fascinating. I gradually pieced together a potted history of its existence from the staff as follows.

The general Manager, Mr Bill Marks was a Russian Jew who emigrated to New Zealand. He was first employed by the Wellington City Council in their engineering workshops because of his qualifications. What exactly were the qualifications wasn't told me. He had 2 sons who were educated in this country, and with their help he learned English but retained a strong accent.

He founded the Radio Corporation of New Zealand in Courtenay Place, the factory covering three large floors and was well ahead in production techniques. In the production of radios they made all the parts except the valves. What Marks had built up in a few years was truly amazing. The Radio Corporation worked on a seasonal system by employing a lot of workers for several months of the year to keep production up to meet market requirements. At the time I came to work for the Corporation it was highly organised. The economic depression was fast slipping away due to the dynamic plans of the new government, the market had a job to catch up with the new optimism. Workers were in demand but most were lacking in expertise. To counter this, The Government made moves to resurrect apprenticeships which were in abeyance during six years of depression. Additional apprenticeships for adults were authorised at reduced periods. Mostly apprenticeships were for five years, adult ones were reduced to three years.

The Radio Corporation advertised for seasonal workers. I duly applied and had my first job working on a chain. I had two stints with the Corporation and this first one was an eye opener. The assembly lines with two men at the head of each. A string of about fourteen to eighteen girls seated in a long line with coloured charts in front of each, electric soldering irons in their hands, a bundle of short coloured wires beside them. The two us at the head would take a blank chassis already punched out, would mount it on a cradle, fasten a few of the parts like the electrolytic condensers, the tuning condenser, the unwired controls etc, then pass it down to the first girl on the line. Each girl would solder the bits of colour-coded wires per the chart in front of her. The supervisor walked up and down and when each girl had done her part he rang a bell and every one would pass the cradle down to the next girl. In full flight a radio would roll off the line regularly, the cheapest model every four minutes. The more sophisticated models could take up to twenty minutes each. The time allocated was dictated by the slowest operator.

This job was enjoyable because it was my first experience working with a lot of fellow workers. There were three floors, and one never met the entire staff". On one occasion when I had to descend to the engineering basement. I had my first ever glimpse of metal sheeting cut-outs and lathes in action. Here also the resistors were wound and colour coded, as well as the various transformers Copper wiring by the mile went into radios and each girl operator on the lines had to be kept supplied with the bits and pieces for her particular operation. My fellow worker on this stint said he was a son of Bishop Sirnkin of Auckland, but had no desire to follow in his fathers vocation. Mr Bill Marks the big boss of Radio Corporation seldom missed a day touring round the factory. His nickname in our department was Yes-No. He would ask a question like, "Have any trouble with earth tag spot weld? Yes-No?" It was an idiom frequently in his repertoire, he still spoke with a strong foreign accent. He was friendly as were one of his two sons Dave, who brought round the pay on paydays. We seldom saw Alex the other son, who was buried in the office of a

remote part of the factory. The casuals like myself came to the end of our stint of four months.

Unemployed again, I had an offer from Moosey Peters to contract for scrub-cutting on his farm that Sam and Alex managed in Ohura in the heart of the King Country. Mick Peters and his wife Mary had shifted to Ohura and they invited me to stay with them while I sussed the situation out on the farm some four miles distant from the town. Arriving in Ohura, they warned me in a gentle way, that old Moosey was a hard bargainer and to be careful. Mick's sister Mary was staying there helping them to settle down. Mick's wife Mary (nee Brookie) had started a tea room in front of their house, while Mick ran a home brew Beer-House. This is the only way to describe Mick's business. Right in the heart and soul of the North Island, the King Country was one of the largest prohibition areas in the country. The sale of alcoholic liquor was forbidden, but home brewers were allowed to make and sell their own beer as long as the alcohol content did not exceed 2%. Most home brewers strove for slightly less. Mick ran his home brewing business in premises across the road, selling beer by the glass like a small pub. By modem modest standards one could confidently say they were both in the hospitality business; his wife in the tea rooms, Mick in the harder stuff. They had a family of four, the eldest Diana, seven years old.

Going out to the farm I met Sam and his brother Alex, and to my mind two nicer fellows would be hard to meet. Both were big and brawny. Sam was married and had a daughter sixteen, confined to bed with tuberculosis. I fail to remember her name but she had a most saintly face of ethereal beauty, the dark hair enhancing the pallor of her skin. Lying there, she knew she was dying, and spoke of meeting God soon. A sentence she said to me in a conversation I've never forgotten for its simplicity. "They say if you saw God you would die of His beauty; you just couldn't live." She died not long after I left Ohura. She must be in heaven now.

Sam and I went for a walk and saw the proposed land to be cleared of gorse. I was a real novice to this sort of thing, contracting so much per acre. I presumed a grubber would be all I needed, plus maybe a spade and an axe. We sat by a small stream you could easily step over, and chatted away while having a cigarette. We looked at the country around and Sam remarked on the different shades of green in the hills and the babbling brook. Sam was a poet at heart aware of his surroundings and a meditative thinker.

"You know" Sam said, "the sound of running water is so soothing; I could listen to it all day." I mentioned something from my school days about *Sermons in stones* ..... forgetting the rest. It took me a couple of days to work out a price. Submitting it, Sam said the quote was a bit steep and disappointing. He was pretty affable about it and we agreed to call it off. It was a nice evening so I started to walk home though it was getting dark. After a couple of miles the moon disappeared and it was all I could do to see the road. I remember saying the rosary to help shorten the journey, when suddenly I was surrounded by a pack of dogs barking furiously. They came from a nearby house on the high side of the road. And just as suddenly they disappeared. I never heard their approach and had the fright of my life.

I was pretty comfortable with Mick and the two Marys. The children loved me and I loved them. After being pressed, I decided to stay a few more days. I thought what a God forsaken place Ohura was apart from where I was living. Mick used to work at night, the most lucrative part of the day for him. His beer was good and though there were other houses like his, Mick Peters beer was the best according to his patrons; and I didn't have to pay for mine.

The next night I went for a walk, aiming to call and spend the evening with Mick and his beer parlour until he finished. A sound of clicking I could hear now and then, and ascertaining which direction it was coming from mooched off in that

direction. It led to a park where the clicking I heard was a cricket match in progress. As soon as I walked in a chap ran up and said, "Thank goodness. We're desperate for a batsman, what about filling in for us, our team is short." Before I could do or say anything, a bat was put in my hand and I rolled up to the pitch and faced the bowler. "Aha! A left-hander." someone remarked. Then the field rearranged itself. All this was new to me, except to hit the ball anywhere I could. What was the difference, left handed from right handed? It was years before I found out.

These days in Ohura were a kind of a cultural learning curve that was to change my life for the better. Ruminating about my life I communicated my thoughts to Mary, the physically well-endowed daughter of Moosey. She suggested I should take up a hobby. My path through life was being dominated by a lot of Marys'.

"What about learning to play the piano?" She played but fairly average.

"What," I replied. "With my big fingers I'd never strike less than two notes."

"Nonsense! Sit down and practice the five finger exercises.". I did after a lot of persuasion while she shouted corrections from the kitchen. She made me persevere with both hands, while she'd yell out anytime I made a mistake.

At this time the new Government was introducing new employment schemes of various kinds, subsidising them through local bodies. The Ohura County Council applied for one under the Noxious Weeds Eradication Act. The town clerk, Mr Seerup was in charge of works, and jobs were available for a gang to work on the noxious weeds on county roads and reserves. I applied with four others and we were engaged right away. We assembled in the County yard, and were briefed on our duties. Gus the eldest man among us was elected foreman. Seems all the foremen in the country were named Gus. He was a firm believer in democracy, and preferred to work with us instead of over us. The honour rested lightly on his shoulders and it was a pleasure to work with the whole lot of them. The second eldest Tom was his deputy, and the rest of us dwindled down in ages to me, the baby in years of the whole gang at twenty-one years old. We were being paid for milling round, planning the campaign like army generals before an attack.

A small utility truck was put at our disposal, but only one of us could drive. This was Norman, a bucolic husky fellow forty years of age. We learned among other things he had never been out of the County of Ohura in all those years. I learned this when our conversation was on beaches, he confessed to never having seen a beach or the sea. Could you believe it! Mind you, I've read of this in England about elderly men going to Brighton for their first sight of the ocean.

There were two ways of eradicating weeds, by knapsack sprayers, or by dusting the plants with the dry powder using a jam tin with holes punched in the bottom. The weeds to be eradicated were 90% ragwort, the remaining 10% foxgloves and thistles. Ragwort, like gorse became widespread in the climate of New Zealand, whereas in other countries was more modest in growth. Left unchecked it could take over pastures at an alarming rate and because of its toxic nature dangerous to nearly all domestic farm animals. The roadways provided a continual supply of seeding opportunities and farmers were concerned that if the local authorities could keep their land clear this would greatly help the farmers to control theirs.

With heavily infested areas we mixed the powder with water in a knapsack sprayer, mounted the sprayer on our backs activating a side lever to spray the plants. The County roads followed the river and these were very picturesque. It was early spring, and if one was lucky to be on a rise, the view of the river and roadsides were bordered by weeping willows and kowhai. The combination of gold and green for miles was worth going a long way to see. Tuis were prolific their liquid notes a joy to the ear. Sight and sound enraptured the soul, and like my first view of Kingston on Lake Wakatipu, unforgettable.

Arriving at the scene of operation for the first day, was a quaint affair. Only room for one in the driver seat, the passenger space there all taken up with our gear. The other five of us sat on the open deck. I was in the habit each morning, arriving at the days objective saying, "Well! We're here because we're here". One morning I forgot to say it. It was such a nice day and we all seemed reluctant to move off sprightly, when Gus our foreman said,

"*Laddie, if you're not going to say it, I'll say it. We're here because we're here. Let's get going."* At last we had our own mantra to initiate proceedings. Nothing was nicer than sitting under the willows and kowhais on the riverbank having lunch and billy tea. If we were lucky a tui would sound his approval at our conversation. A kingfisher one day perched on a branch watching us when one of the men left his sandwiches lying open on the ground while he went to get something out of his jacket. The kingfisher swooped down in a flash and grabbed one of his sandwiches in spite of us all sitting around.

Our work involved doing roadsides, council reserves and properties like the cemetery. Some of the Maori farms had their own cemeteries located arbitrarily. In one case a particular farm was leased out and I was detailed to do a small plot visible from the road that looked a bit overgrown. Approaching it, from a nearby building a man emerged yelling out what the heck did I think I was doing. My instinct told me there was something wrong and my fellow workers were gesticulating furiously from the roadway so I beat a hasty retreat. The plot proved later to be a Maori burial ground, and probably tapu to any miserable pakeha like me. I took the shortest distance that brought me to pass near the building the man came from. The door was wide open revealing an untidy scene, a one-roomed bach evidently. But in the midst of all the squalor stood as if enthroned, a highly polished console model radio.

While everything was going along fine, the work pleasant, the buxom Mary Peters was at me to continue with the piano practice, telling me she'd found a lady who gave beginners lessons. Mary prevailed upon me to take lessons and the other Mary gave her blessing on full use of her piano. The piano teacher was Mrs. Seerup the wife of the town clerk. She was Irish, fortyish, and buxom too. She gave me a tutor called Smallwoods Pianoforte First Tutor for Beginners. For a start I took two weekly lessons and this went on for three months. As the lessons progressed, the tuition came less and less as my tutor took the opportunity to reminisce of her girlhood days back in Ireland. And once or twice I felt that if I was brazen enough to gaze at her face, I'd see a teardrop fall, and a faraway look in her eyes. Sure her mind was dwelling on the *"Green green grass of home, "* though of course that song would be sung by Tom Jones who was yet unborn. That song-has a memory for me, each time I hear it.

I was earning money and paying board and had a few interests now in life. The very recently arrived parish priest Fr de Bree came for dinner one evening, and we chummed up from the start. His English was not too good and he'd arrived before I did. He was from the Dutch Order of the Mill Hill Fathers in Holland, that specialised in missions to the Maoris and Polynesians of the Pacific. Fr. de Bree's command of the English Language left a lot to be desired. But Ohura was the ideal place to start and we spent many happy times together, helping his language difficulties such as the difference between "won't" and "want". His Maori was better and my Dutch vocabulary increased to a dozen or so words which I have forgotten all except the word for "eighty-eight".

The theatre in Ohura showed pictures irregularly. It was only called a theatre when it showed pictures, otherwise it was the dance hall. It was part of a block of buildings attached to a garage and petrol station; the only one of its kind in such a small town. The reason I mention this is the whole lot was owned by a family called

Koorey, who also were Lebanese. Although no deep ties were formed between me and them, it was obvious my name was Coory and spelt differently. My parents were full blooded Lebanese. Those deep down reservations I had in my mind about my parents nationality since leaving the South Island now began to disappear completely. As a child the word Lebanese was not in my vocabulary, the word was unknown. But occasionally in Hampden, Mick and I were called Syrians or "skypoos". The bridge between my pre 14 and my post 14 years was being gradually demolished. I'd be middle aged before I was reconciled with the two periods of my life.

The Kooreys were naturally friendly because of the name I suppose. The Peter family wanted me to visit the Koorey family and to meet Adele, whom everybody loved and adored, *"you simply must meet her".* So we went. I had met death calmly in my early years but I was not prepared for the sight that met my eyes on first seeing Adele. She was in a wheelchair, and her head had no support, lolling over like a flower with a broken stem on her chest. The face was purplish, the lips loose and red, and mouth drooling slightly. She was ageless. Anything from twenty to forty, painfully thin. If only I'd been prepared I would not have minded, but everybody kissed her and fondled her and indeed did love her. Later in life I did visit a Home of Compassion for incurables, the flotsam and jetsam that nobody wanted or loved. The humanity in us is put to the test with such as these. The periods in life when we come face to face with real compassion, are too few for us to face life calmly at all times.

The job with the Ohura County Council "petered out" as the miners say (Ohura was a mining town) three months later. I elected to go back to Wellington, and promptly landed my second stint with the Radio Corporation. This was a step up the ladder from being on the production chain. This time I had the job of fitting the completed chassis into wooden cabinets. This was the penultimate stage of each radio as it emerged from the production line, before it went to the testing room. Here the camaraderie of the staff was much happier than on the chain. The supervisor of the department Norman had the same adjective for anything and everything. A day never passed but he used it many times. The word was SALUBRIOUS. It applied to the weather, to eating, to clothes, human behaviour, even to aspects of the job. Each time I hear the word, I think of him in spite of the years since.

The blank cabinets came in different styles with no provision to accommodate the chassis, except for the speaker grill. The tuning and control knobs, and the base security holes had to be made. The cabinets all had a veneer finish, and care was necessary to protect them. To get on the permanent staff was the desire of most of us but the Corporation somehow were geared to a skeleton staff and a seasonal work style. The demand for radios at the time was phenomenal. The Corporation never handled retail sales depending entirely on wholesalers for distribution. The days of the middlemen between factory and retail was firmly established, and was to last at least fifty years before it began to crumble. A few wholesalers in the food area, began to have the best of both worlds, the wholesale and the retail. Competition brings prices down eventually but this had years to go before becoming a reality.

One drawback with factory jobs like the Radio Corporation apart from the seasonal aspect, was the lack of skills to do most of the operations. You get highly skilled in one operation at the expense of versatility over a number of operations. I felt a need to get a downright trade where one could command a wage should I ever want to travel or marry, and have a home of my own. This time with the Radio Corporation was for a little longer period than the first, but it ended as usual. Back on the scrap heap of the jobless. The circle of friends among the Lebanese was widening to include the Romanos, Bouzaids, Wakems, Zembas and Anthonys. The

Bouzaids, Zembas and Wakems had soft goods factories in the atmosphere that was livening up in the growing economy.

One day I was doing the rounds of the auction rooms looking for a piano with a hazy idea of really taking up piano lessons. I found one for five pounds delivered free. Walking along the street afterwards, ran into one of the Wakem girls. The Wakem family had a soft goods factory supplying Woolworths and McKenzie stores, specialising in soft goods such as underwear, pyjamas and shirts. She asked did I have job yet.

"Why don't you get a job as a cutter?"

"What's a cutter?"

"You know; cutting clothes. There's a good future for cutters, and you'd get a job anywhere. Lots of jobs going right now".

I went to the employment agency and asked were there any jobs going for cutters. Learning my age, he said being inexperienced I would need an apprenticeship and this takes five years. I was too old for that. However, you could try for an adult apprenticeship of three years which the Government has introduced to catch up with the lack of training during the depression. He gave me a letter of introduction to the manager of A. Levy Ltd., a men's clothing factory.

"Go and see Mr. Ben Levy, and have a talk to him, telling him all you told me. You never know your luck. Try him for an adult apprenticeship".

I asked if Mr. Levy was approachable, and was assured he was. Mr. Ben Levy looked very similar to Mr. O'Sullivan of my first job in Dunedin for build and ruddy complexion. His manner was much more affable and less intimidating. He read the note I'd brought and agreed to take me on, subject to Mr. Bob Hill his head cutter's approval. He took me upstairs introducing me to the elderly head cutter Bob Hill. They accepted the adult apprenticeship idea for three years starting at two pounds a week. I remember this was just after the time I turned twenty-two. It was about six weeks to Christmas 1937.

Life was becoming fuller these few weeks before Christmas. The two pounds weekly was becoming a hardship, and although I had not as yet signed any apprenticeship papers, due to a provision of three months trial, increases were to be made only at six monthly intervals. So I came to the conclusion a week before the Christmas holidays to call it quits. I'd only had three weeks pay when it dawned I could not possibly exist on such meagre pay for six months. I bowled into Mr. Ben's office and told my tale of not being able to live on two pounds a week, and begged leave to end any idea of an apprenticeship.

"What could you live on?" he asked. "How much do you want?" I took a breath and bravely said at least three pounds a week. After a while he asked me whether I liked the work, and where I lived. He stood up and said,

"Look. I'll go and see Mr. Hill first and talk to him. Just stay there, I won't be long". He was just going out the door of his office when he turned back, opened a drawer in his desk, took out a packet of cigarettes. "Have a cigarette while you're waiting". He tossed the packet across his desk and went off. When he came back, he sat down. "We'll give you three pounds, as long as you come back after the holidays commencing next year. There was only one week to go, so I accepted, a little dazed by the ease of the increase in wages.

CHAPTER ELEVEN.

Mr. Ben Levy was the next full-blooded Jew I'd met after Lou Morris my brother-in-law, and his parents Harry and Ada. I was to meet many more working at Levy's, I had never shared the opprobrium for Jews the Lebanese had, and found

them just ordinary folk as far as I could see. Ben Levy was a commanding figure of a man, rather swarthy of countenance and very genial in manner. He had a reputation of being tight economically in the running of the factory inherited from his father Abraham Levy, who founded the firm of A Levy Ltd. When I started working, there were about a hundred and twenty of a staff, mostly women machinists. The firm owned the eight story building block, serviced by two passenger service lifts with woman attendants, and one goods lift. Lift attendants in those days prior to automatic lifts, talked about the weather all day. A Levy Ltd. occupied the two top floors; the factory on the eighth, the warehouse, offices, and other departments on the seventh. The other floors had tenants of various occupations mostly accountants, legal offices, importers, and advertising agents, with shops on the Manners Street side. The building occupied the corner of Taranaki Street and Manners Street and known as the A Levy Building. A useful landmark, because of its imposing corner site. A Levy Ltd. was one of the big clothing factories in the country, supplying a wide range of uniforms to the Railways, the Post Office and other Government State owned enterprises. They also supplied Men's Outfitting shops throughout the country under two main brands of Berwick and Clarion. The building is no longer there, being pulled down as an earthquake risk, when replaced as The Inland Revenue Department. I was to spend twelve years with the firm at broken intervals. It was the first time any job lasted more than two years.

The contact with a close knit large workforce with the concomitant socialising such brings, was another learning curve I most needed at this stage of life. By no means were the staff just one conglomerate whole but a series of overlapping sections. The products of the factory fell into two main classes, which for the purposes of this story is best described as civilian and contractual The main cutting room I was attached to was contractual and cut clothes for services such as the Post Office (postmen) Railways,(stationmasters, porters). Wellington Tramways (drivers and conductors) and a host of other uniformed personnel. About eight cutters were employed with five of us apprentices, to three journeyman cutters. Another cutting

room was at the other end of the factory cutting mostly for the civilian trade. They had two cutters and one trimmer. A trimmers job was to cut the linings, canvasses, waddings and pocketings. All cutters started off as trimmers. Uniforms for Tramway and Railway porters had leather cuffs on the sleeves and leather reinforcements for side pockets. Piles of hides to cut these pieces of leather were always dodged because they were hard on the hands unless one had a good pair of shears.

When after two years Ben Levy brought his son Austin to me, he asked me to start him off and keep him occupied. As I was the senior apprentice at the time, I gave him the job of cutting out these leather cuffs. The shears were not little toys and the pair Austin had been given were a clumsy blunt pair, probably with the firm since its inception. Joe Robinson the head cutter in our room came to see how the young fellow was doing, noticed his knuckles were starting to bleed. He got Ben up and protested, with the result he was given a brand new pair of shears, the envy of us all. After all he was the bosses son. I was accused by fellow workers of the crime of CCCA. (Cruelty to Clothing Cutter Apprentices).

In those days the government civil service supplied all the postmen and railway workers with uniforms and Levy's had this contract for many years. In addition the male inmates of the asylums, now termed psychiatric hospitals, were compelled to wear clothes financed by the government. I never wondered about the women inmates. There seemed to be no end to the organisations that used uniforms for their staff. The police, army officers, naval officers, traffic officers, station masters,

tramway workers, were all cut to measure. These were nearly always fitted, in a room downstairs, in a room presided over by a dour Scotchman Mr Macleod, or Bob Hill.

Mr Macleod was an expert on military decorations and medals, as well as military service uniforms. The walls of his room were covered with a bewildering array of such, and the second world war had not even started. Mac, as he was familiarly referred to was a large elderly white-haired gentleman with large jowls that shook when talking which fascinated me. He had the gloomiest countenance I ever saw, and in the years I worked there, never managed to get a smile from him. I read a joke in a humour magazine that advised never to tell a joke to a Scotchman on a Saturday, as he would most likely burst out laughing in church on Sunday. A swipe at their dourness I suppose, or slowness in seeing the point of a joke. His cutting was limited to specialist uniforms with box and inverted pleated pockets which I had to trim for him and presumably able to read his mind. Every time I wanted information or enlightenment of his cutting, he regarded me much as an entomologist would regard a new species of insect. Lower down in Courtenay Place was a subsidiary factory run by Arthur Tracey who specialised in bespoke tailoring for the shops in other towns. After my brief military stint in the army, in 1943, I worked there for some years widening my experience of the clothing trade considerably.

Among the male staff of pressers, supervisors, and general dogs bodies, were, as one would expect, a few other Jews. One in the other cutting room. Alby Heiman, was many years older man me and we took more than a passing interest in one another. A lot of his cutting came across my table for trimming before passing onto the machinists. In our cutting room were all the apprentices and journeymen of various ages between sixteen and fifty five, and when the younger ones were approaching voting age for the 1938 elections, some stirring discussions used to take place. This was the age of the rise of Hitler to power and Mussolini's invasion of Abyssinia. The stories coming through of Hitler's persecution of the Jews began to horrify most people. And to polarise others.

We were a vociferous lot, in our cutting room and argued our way through the pros and cons of not only politics, but religion and sports. I was never backward in pushing my view about the evils of communism, nor the orthodoxy of the Catholic church. I was called the professor or "Prof for short, which became my nickname for many years. The main tools of out trade were chalks, cutting shears, yardsticks, measuring tapes, and electric cutting machines; of which we all had sooner or later to become proficient in their use. The yardsticks were used for sword fights, chalks as ammunition, so these articles of trade were both short-lived. Factory life was never dull

Alby Heiman, a stock cutter at the other end of the factory was a poor Jew with a big family, but had no aspirations for any top job, loved to come quietly and have discussions about his religion and mine, and about books, and bargains. We became very friendly in spite of the age difference. Hitler's persecution of the Jews was always a ripe topic of conversation, though the full horrors of this were not fully known at the time. Alby had evidently long ceased to be a regular attendant at the Synagogue, and his discussions mainly became apologetic for the Jews responsibility for the crucifixion of Christ. His plea, was that it was the Roman soldiers, not his race who did the deed. Alby had an obsession about nuns and priests. I remember a book The Citadel, written by A. J. Cronin a well-known Catholic author where a section in the story had a mild adulterous passage.

"What would nuns think reading that?" he asked. Despite my twenty-odd years and his age at least about sixty, with large family, he must know that women don't cease to have periods or baths or cease to have bodily functions because they are

nuns The naivety of the man amused me. But my knowledge of the facts of life in hindsight, was appallingly scanty, and to consider poor Alby as naive was the height of artless presumption to say the least on my part.

Here I was thinking, at last on the road to learning a useful occupation to carry me through the rest of my life. That chance encounter, with Miss Wakem (wish I could remember her first name) was a turning point in my life, and I looked forward to settling down in Wellington with Mary and Lou and family. The house in Cambridge Terrace was proving inadequate, and we moved to a two-storey house in Rugby Street midway between the Governor-General's Residence and the Caledonian Hotel. This gave Mary scope to take in boarders and/or roomers, to augment the income and higher rent. This suited me down to the ground, as there was a small room downstairs handy to the entrance for my piano practice. Walking to catch a tram in Courtenay Place after my last week at Radio Corp when I saw a brass plate, Miss Dorothy Spinks Piano Teacher. I made up my mind then and there to pursue piano lessons soon as possible.

So in addition to learning a trade, about 1938 I started taking piano lessons. A flattering idea this new hobby. I was soon to learn my inadequacy at the keyboard by Dorothy Spinks, when she agreed to accept me, and I agreed to accept her. I was twenty three, conscious of my large fingers trying to locate the spaces between the black keys. Miss Spinks was very professional looking, her rimless glasses giving her a school mistress appearance. Her age I was always curious about, she could have been anything from twenty-two to thirty five. She was always very professional and brooked no familiarity or lack of practice. Every minute of her tuition was just that, wasting no time. She combined theory with practice and I appreciated her greatly. All I'd previously learnt, she discarded and started me off from scratch with a book of scales of all kinds and exercises right at the beginning. Her patience, faith, and encouragement were reassuring. I had no grand illusions about my ability. The war years were to put paid to the fulfillment of being an adequate pianist much to my sorrow in the later years of my life. -

. Weekly lessons for the first three months, was all practical, after that I started on the theory, which proved easy for me as it was written work. At the end of each year, she gave a recital of all her pupils, mostly young, I being her eldest pupil. At the first recital, held in the Blue Triangle Hall,- she trained me and two girls to play a six hands piece on one piano, an arrangement of *Funiadi Funicula.* It was a stirring bright opening number, me playing the treble part. The stage in this hall sloped towards the audience and we all shared a long stool. My end was the lowest and after bowing to take up our position, I sat last of all and slid down on the floor of the stage. This undignified debut to my musical career did not detract from the performance, and as the leading item for the night, put the show off to a good start.

While these two interests, my apprenticeship and musical studies were going along nicely enough, another interesting phase entered my life. The Mary Peters who set me on learning the piano in the King Country, was still a close friend. One Sunday evening outside St Josephs church in Buckle Street, we were talking after Rosary and Benediction as usual, she asked me would I like to come along with her to the Catholic Seamen’s Institute in Vivian Street. Ada Mottram was with her, a lovely looking girl with the most beautiful eyes. When I heard Ada was going too, I agreed. It has always been my belief that some events take over our lives, more than we take over them. The Catholic Seamen’s Institute was to have a profound influence on my life.

Since arriving in Wellington, and hating the first years, I gradually became swamped by activity one way and another. People who had some influence turning my life around, was first the converted Catholic from Judaism Harry Morris who introduced me to the Holy Family Confraternity at St Gerard's in Hawker St, Mary

Peters introducing me to the piano, and The Catholic Seamen's Institute, and Miss Wakem for pointing me in the right direction to learn a useful trade, the clothing industry. All these gave me a host of friends one way and another. Sadly all those mentioned here have passed on, but contrary to Anthony's oration over the dead Caesar *"The good they do are oft interred with their bones".* I'd like to believe it were their virtues lived on instead. Of the Catholic Seamen's Club, John Clancy, Tom McCabe, Jimmy McCarthy, Eileen Duggan, Father Gascoigne, Julia Spurway, Mrs. Compton. plus many others all formed a circle of friends to make a meaningful life. The Catholic Seamen's Institute was part of the world-wide, Apostleship of the Sea, and as it forms a great part of my life, I will refer to it as the "CLUB".

The year 1939 was to prove an eventful and unsettling one. The clothing trade was gearing up for increased production, because war in Europe looked certain to come. The year 1938 saw Neville Chamberlain on the steps of Downing Street with hi brolly in one hand and waving a piece of paper in the other declaring, *"Peace In Our Time".* Less than a month later, rolls of khaki and Air Force blue woollen goods were tilling up the warehouse on the floor below, as well as other clothing factories Throughout the country. In spite of all these assurances of the British Prime Minister, all the woollen factories were primed up making cloth for the Armed Forces anticipating war as inevitable. The map of Europe in the daily papers were showing parts shaded in black swallowed up by German occupation. The territorial forces in New Zealand were moving into top gear and commissions were being doled out or eagerly sought, to all experienced personnel. The woollen goods were soon followed by bales of drill to line the khaki and our cutting machines were readied up to cut multi-layers of soldier's uniforms. The old type of uniform for lower ranks was soon to disappear in favour of a new design; the battledress. Pattern makers were in their element, working from a submitted one to graded sizes.

I was almost emerging from my apprenticeship, with war clouds on the horizon, when I entered hospital for a minor operation on my nose. This was to straighten the septum; one nostril was blocked making breathing difficult when I had a cold.. I was off work for a few weeks and when the time came to celebrate coming out of my apprenticeship, I was told that I had to work the weeks taken off to make up the full time. I thought this was a mean trick but had to do so, the only difference in wages was a paltry few pounds or so. My admiration for Jewry lost a few points over this niggardly decision.

I bought a brand new piano from Beggs in Manners Street, using the old one as a deposit, the rest on time payment. Mary had two children by now with another on the way and some boarders, I had a room for the piano and a bedroom as well, but I felt cramped in with all the people on top of regular piano practice. The Rugby Street house was getting overcrowded, I decided to leave for a place of my own, where in my busy life I could practice at any time of the day or night. This would give Mary and Lou an extra two rooms to let. I found a large room with bed and breakfast in Hawker Street not far from St Gerard's on the hill. It was the season of lent. I tried to attend daily Mass these days and the vicinity to St Gerard's was a blessing. The room was large and spacious, adequate for my needs .

Mrs Pemberton, the landlady, was a Catholic, and this pleased her. It turned out to be a mutual pleasure. The conditions were bed and breakfast, no meals. Breakfast was tea and toast, and as the room was in the front of the house close to the front door, late hours were no problem. I told her about my Lenten resolutions of forgoing tea for its duration, would she mind if I had coffee instead? She did not mind at all. There was no Mr. Pemberton, she was a widow with a young daughter Barbara about sixteen. Shades of Moa Flat I thought. When I did see the daughter, she was the image of the other Barbara, with red hair as well; but slimmer. The first morning Mrs. Pemberton brought in the breakfast tray, it was coffee and a generous

amount of toast equally generous with marmalade. Ye Gods! I had always hated marmalade, and when my tray came in each morning, there were copious amounts of the dreaded marmalade on my toast. Well, I thought it's Lent anyway, and rather than offend Mrs. Pemberton's delightful nature, I ate it all in the spirit of self-sacrifice for my sins. In no time, I loved marmalade and couldn't get enough of it. What perverse natures we humans have sometimes. Parsnips were the same. I hated them once. Now one of my favourites.

When Mary Peters took me along to the Catholic Seamen's Institute, she introduced me to the president Charles Mallia, who I will discuss later. He persuaded me to join up and come on the committee, and knowing Ada, the lovely lady with the beautiful eyes would be there too, agreed. She would not be on the committee worse luck. Not long after I joined, Ada sadly fell ill and in three months left this world for good. Angels no doubt have her to themselves. Now on the committee of the Catholic Seamen's Institute, with meetings every Wednesday night, meetings of the Holy Family Confraternity every Tuesday evening, and Sunday morning visiting the ships in port inviting the crews up to the Sunday evening dances at the club rooms. My knowledge of film showing was later to come in useful a few years later when we extended our activities to picture evenings as well.

These pursuits together with my music considerably widened to cram them into a style of living that left little room for other leisure pursuits. These social contacts were sufficient to dispense me from any deep socialising with the workers at A. Levy Ltd. Covering these aspects of my life as I write, I find that some people find their social needs with their fellow workers adequate, others keep them apart from their private lives. I definitely did the latter. Meeting after work for a few beers with fellow workers had to contend with the 6 o'clock swill of those days, never appealed to me, except for somebody's birthday, or other worthwhile celebration.

CHAPTER TWELVE

The Apostleship of the Sea was a unique organisation, owing its genesis to a great need to cater for men of the merchant navy visiting ports in other lands. Nearly all the major ports had rooms or clubs where seamen could visit and spend time away from their ships, instead of the more shady places proverbially on offer. In Wellington there were three such refuges: the British Sailors Society, the Flying Angel and the Catholic Seamen's Institute. No real rivalry existed between any of the three, but without doubt ours, though furthest from the waterfront, was by far the most popular, due mainly to a consistent ship visitation by the committee members. I had over two years activity of this kind before the outbreak of war in 1939, but for a short break during the war continued for another ten years. In its heyday we produced an Annual Report and Balance Sheet with a glossy printed booklet, attended by some notable civic leaders such as Prime Minister Peter Fraser, who became an ardent patron for many years, Frank Kitts the mayor and others. Peter Fraser donated some pictures of famous historical vessels to hang on the walls. Quite a few other dignitaries besides. But I am anticipating events considerably.

In my first few years after joining we grew apace improving the amenities of the "Club" as we liked to call it. This was to be a boon during the war years, when our activities extended to three functions a week. Our main function was the Sunday night dances only, apart from fund-raising evenings. The three story building we were in was tenanted on the ground floor by Taylors the Undertakers, and our dances were up the stairs on the first floor. We successfully managed to also take the top floor, to supply a lounge for reading, a chapel by permission of Bishop O'Shea, and a boxing and wrestling ring fully equipped, to satisfy the WA (Wrestling

Association.). Cliff Teague from the WA joined our committee proving excellent in organising contests. Downstairs on the same floor as the dancing, a projection room was installed. Sunday entertainment began with a film about 6.30 followed by the dancing and supper.

On the principle, every girl loves a sailor, we never lacked girls to dance with the sailors. They formed an auxiliary- Guild of 60 ladies, Mrs. Julia Spurway represented them on the committee, she demanded fairly high standards of behaviour, and tried, not always successfully, to prohibit any of the girls leaving with the sailors afterwards or accepting offers to escort them home. The Guild was divided into six groups, each with its own leader and after a tussle of opinion each guild were in modern parlance perhaps, colour coded. The committee felt that some girls dressed as they liked and 'others not so tidily. A dress uniform was designed and accepted and each group had their own colour. The colours came to vie with one another for loyalty, enterprise and achievement, all friendly rivalry. Each group had a turn in playing hostesses on Sunday evenings. It worked very well when the teething problems were sorted out, but each girl, as the price of her membership, paid for their uniform. Between the single men on the committee and the girls guild, a few romances blossomed over the years into lasting attachments. I met my future wife there which became life's greatest blessing..

The building of the Chapel, lounge, reading room, wrestling ring, and the projection room facilities, were all done by the members and cemented great friendships. The Chapel particularly, was dear to the heart of Charles Mallia, for permission to have the Blessed Sacrament reserved when completed. The Club President Charles Mallia was Maltese, a victim of gas poisoning and a prisoner of war during WW1. He was a tutor in charge of the Joinery Rehabilitation Centre for trainees of returned soldiers, and managed the making of the tabernacle, altar rails, seating, and confessional. Rev Dr Gascoigne our chaplain, was influential in purchasing a Harry Clarke circular stained glass window of the Apostleship of the Sea insignia, looking very impressive when installed.

Julia Spurway was charged with making the tabernacle lining and door curtains, for the chapel. During one of the many working bees, she asked each of us to put in a few stitches in the tabernacle lining, and had our names sewn in as well. This is an old tradition; when the Blessed Sacrament is present, our handiwork and names are continually there with our Blessed Lord. This was a great consolation over the following years, whenever one adverted to it. As I write, the chapel no longer exists, nor the club either, its demise along with the better working conditions aboard merchant ships has made their existence less urgent, but some still survive in other parts of the world.

The Chapel formed an important role in all the Club activities. Our president Charles Mallia decided that now the chapel was a fact, in future all committee meetings on Wednesdays would begin with the rosary. The first important consideration was mainly the welfare of Catholic seamen and getting them to the practice of mass and confession. The second consideration was to provide all seamen with good clean entertainment. Once the chapel was complete, we were able to add short religious services to our Sunday night evenings. After the film showing, the hall was made ready for supper and dancing. The Catholics were invited to go upstairs for Benediction and a brief homily, telling those present confession was available immediately when this was over; or any time during the rest of the evening. During the war many did avail themselves, and it was a simple step to return to the dancing downstairs. Father Noel Gascoigne was fond of referring to the Chapel as the *"UPPER ROOM"* in remembrance of the Gospel story of the Last Supper and the Descent of the Holy spirit taking place in the same room on Pentecost Sunday.

The ship visiting was done by the committee men. who were rostered according to the number of ships in port. In peace time the movement of ships was known well in advance, their ports of call were published in the daily papers. Usually four visitors at a time was a good number, to cover three or four ships. The coal burning cargo ships of the CITY LINES was depressing . They had mostly Lascar crews, with European Officers and Goanese workers in the galley (kitchen). The Lascars were Mohammedan and had peculiar rules about meat, hence, the Goanese who were Christians would prepare meals acceptable for the officers. The Lascars had their own cooks, It was a delight to meet the Goanese, a gentle race, and on all the ships we visited, they were the only ones to have a little altar dedicated to their patron, St Francis Xavier, both in the galley and in their quarters, The first Sunday of the month we had mass in the chapel, and the ship visitors strove early and earnestly to get as many Catholic seamen up for this as possible, as well as for the club members if they could attend.

The war made ship visiting difficult. In the interests of security, all publication of ship movements was suppressed, the waterfront and wharves were closed to the public. Weather reports were banned also. Police officers were on wharf duty permanently, as well as having a police depot there. Sometimes military personnel would be on guard too. Our president Charles Mallia wouldn't take refusal for ship visitors to the wharves. Charles and the secretary Stan Best (incidentally Charles son-in-law) did manage to get passes but not enough to go round the whole committee. This put an extra burden on about six of us. After the first few months of the war, with the uncertainty of ships coming in, myself and two others took turns to visit the wharf each evening. The Chaplain was always ready to meet any Catholics in need of special help. Entertainment evenings were extended to Tuesdays and Thursdays, as well as Sundays. The weekday visits to the wharf were always in the evenings, and some dramatic occasions resulted in enabling a merchant seamen going to the sacraments. The loss of ships in the early part of the war was harrowing and many a sailor regarded each trip as probably his last. Some sad news did filter through weeks afterwards.

The ordinary individual soon knew a war was on. The tentacles of the war machine penetrated every facet of human activity. The Man-Power Act required every working person to be registered, and be directed to work in industries essential to the country war effort. Rationing was introduced to ensure the armed forces did not suffer from shortages like meat, butter, tea, sugar and clothing. Other items were petrol, tyres, and travel beyond 100 miles, though exemptions for the latter were granted for applications under urgency. Holidays came under that heading. Crossing Cook Strait held me up for a week when returning from a holiday in Dunedin. The inter-island ferry in those days ran from Wellington to Lyttleton. On returning from my holiday, the Lyttleton ferry was suddenly commandeered by the Army for troop movements. Coastal shipping was also subjected to their movements. Secrecy surrounded all shipping information as to when or where or what was taking place. The shipping office in Christchurch advised me to try my luck in Picton for a ferry. I took the train from Christchurch to Hundalee which was as far as the railway line went in those days. A bus carried on to Picton where the same sorry tale was repeated, with the exception that if any vessel was going to Wellington I would be advised. I booked into a hotel and waited for news. My hotel room had a view of the waterfront, so I could see some activity at sea. I was getting worried about being late returning to work. I had exemption from military training because my work was declared essential to the war effort. I was called up in the three monthly ballots, and been declared fit, but each time my employer appealed successfully.

The days passed slowly in Picton. I chummed up with an Australian in the same predicament as me, and we used to pass the time going for walks. Picton had not arrived to its present day tourist eminence as the Inter-island Rail Link. We made some visits to the cemetery, where the tombstones of many infants and young people indicated a high mortality in the early days of the district. It was inevitable religion would be touched on there, cemeteries have that eschatological tendency somehow. I asked him if he was a Catholic. Something about an earlier response made me suggest he'd left it because of the practice of confession, which he admitted. The point was not pressed home. After nearly a week, it occurred to me to send a telegram to Levy's about my delay. No sooner had I sent it off than I was told the Tamahine would be sailing the next day. The Picton trip was a daylight one compared with the nightly Lyttleton run. Checking out of the hotel, in one of the dresser draws I saw a bible. Not familiar with the Gideon Bible Society policy in placing a bible in every hotel room on earth, I took it down to the office when checking out saying the last visitor must have left it behind!

Returning to work I was mildly reproved in not seeking their help getting back on time. I sourly reflected the war effort was now extended unnecessarily by my dereliction in. not doing so.

As the Catholic-Seamen's Institute boomed during-the war, pressure gradually began to extend our services from the Merchant Navy, to the Armed Forces. Why not a Catholic Services Club? Our committee felt we had. Our hands full as it was, which seemed a sane enough view. The Merchant Navy had always been our special mission, and we wanted it kept that way, A Catholic Services Club for the uniformed services would fill a special need. During the second year of the war I scouted around to see if a services club could be founded. Bishop O'Shea had no objection, some of the priests had no objection. I set about interesting some leading lights in the church, and the manager of the Terminus Hotel gave me a few names and together we managed to get a committee of sorts to discuss the feasibility, if it could only get off the ground. I was feeling I had overstepped my ability, and wished someone would take over the reins. At last a chairman was elected, rooms obtained, and I gradually faded away. In a few months a grand opening was announced and I was asked to attend the official launch.

The City Mayor, Government Minister John A Lee, and other dignitaries opened the rooms in Cuba Street with a flourish, and "IT" was hard to believe; The *CATHOLIC SERVICEMEN'S CLUB* was a reality. I do take credit for initiating the machinery to get it going. Some months later I was cut down to size in trying to gain entry to see the place in full swing. I was turned away because I was not in uniform. Trying to see some of the personnel running the place I could not recognise any that I knew. It was confirmed however, a uniform was necessary to enter. My tail between my legs I descended to Cuba Street to wallow in a bout of self-pity. By a trick of irony, my brother Michael was to be a frequent visitor there, but by then I was too busy to know or care of their fortunes.

Michael had a high regard for the place. He worked for one of the units run by the Patriot Funds Board with the rank and pay of captain, during the last few years of the war. In my few months in my few months in uniform, we met up together and a street photographer took our photo. The comparison in uniform was well marked, me in battledress and Michael the posh looking officer in his captains uniform. Michael had more inches than I was blessed with. My exemption from military service every three months came to an end in 1942 after many objections on my part. A few remarks made by others who suffered casualties in their families could be heard as I passed them, and an envelope with a white feather in-it was not comforting. Following the initial appeal by my firm for exemption, an inspector from the Man-Power Ministry, Mr. Banks, a slight figure of a man with one arm, was

deputed to watch me and others at work to test the validity of the exemptions. He watched all morning and his report satisfied the authorities.

My severance from work to enter the army was fraught with drama. Some of the staff got together to give me something as a farewell gift. This took the form of a made to measure battledress uniform. The best khaki cloth of the woollen mills in the country, found its way across our cutting boards. Definitely the cloth from the Wanganui Woollen mills was definitely the best. Each machinist who played a part in its manufacture autographed the pocket, and a lot of skill had to be employed in slipping past the various foremen and forewomen, who had to approve the different stages of its making. Shan Rough our packer downstairs in charge of dispatches had a nodding acquaintance with the Quartermaster in the Army Stores and arranged to give it to me on the sly: The stodgy head cutter Bob Hill, unaware of all this, happened to be in the dispatch department when Shan Rough was temporarily absent. Bob's eagle eye spied the garment with all the autographs, and queried Shan, "What's all this?" Shan in fact was the chief organiser of the whole nefarious project and my bosom companion in the horse-racing scene. (He had a nephew a horse trainer at Awapuni). Shan couldn't help but spill the beans, surmising that Bob would see reason, and truth is always the best short cut to a happy conclusion. Bob brought the offending garment to me and said it wasn't quite the thing to do, but as it had gone so far, any trouble accruing from the Quartermasters Store would be entirely mine. This all happened in the weeks before Christmas and entry to camp was the first week in January. Some of the girls wrote to me in camp, so l was not forgotten.

My military call up coincided with the call-up of the 41/43 age group with a sprinkling of those emerging after the age of 20, like myself at 27. January 1943 was a hot summer in Linton Military Camp. The Camp had 7 areas catering for different types of training including a Royal Air Force unit. With the army every one started off in the infantry, the main stress on drill, marching and discipline, for one month. After this, was the allocation of each soldier to various units, sometimes if lucky, to one of their choice. Heaven help the shy ones entering the army in wartime. One of the distasteful aspects for me was showering en masse with no privacy. After a few days, all the men would wake up in the morning with an absolute loss of libido, and those more knowing in these things speculated on what was put into the food or drink to interfere with nature to this extent. Many years would pass before the subject of this loss of libido was explained. A retired restaurateur informed a caller on a radio talkback session about this phenomenon, declared the army cooks put caustic soda in the green vegetables while boiling, not only to retain their colour. Needless to say some fantastic ideas were voiced. During one of the pep-talks in the orientation classes, about behaviour with women and girls, getting sunburnt, or any illness that interfered with a soldier failing to turn up on parade, would result in loss of pay. A dire prospect considering the few paltry shillings a day.

Parades were an oddity. Everything was a parade. Kit inspection parade, gun inspection parade, dress parade, hut inspection parade, mail parade. When a mail parade was declared we all assembled without standing to order, while an officer called out the names alphabetically. In the particular draught I was called up in, although my surname began with C, I was well down past halfway in a group of about eighty. The suspense was agony. Alphabetical lists are sacrosanct in military life. Mail parades were the exception to standing in drill formation.

Nearly all evenings were free, and Saturday night was socially bright, with an influx of girls from Palmerston North to help with dancing, supper, and giving items of entertainment. When 1 arrived there were four recreation huts side by side. The Y.M.C.A., the Church of England, the Catholic, and the Salvation Army, They all

had their clientele and specialties, a friendly rivalry existed among them all. The Catholic Hut appealed to me, among the four huts, their coffee was the most popular. On Sunday they had mass in the morning and benediction at night. The Chaplain, Father Barney Keegan was the brother of Peter, a Redemptorist priest at St Gerard's Monastery in Wellington whom I knew reasonably well. I made myself at home and did useful duties to help out the chaplain and Len, who was in charge of the Catholic Hut. A11 Officers in charge of the recreation huts had the rank of Captain, and dined at the Officers Mess. Their assistants dined at the Sergeants mess.

At the end of the months training we were all again assessed for grading regarding physical fitness. I do not recall at the time whether I was dismayed or not, being relegated from grade 1 to grade 3 because of flat feet. Discussing this down grading with Fr Keegan he asked me would I be prepared to work in the Catholic Hut. After I demurred at first, he asked permission to put my name forward. He had been looking for someone to help, so that Len could have a holiday. Without expecting to get the job, I said he could try if he wanted to, and left it at that. Following on the regrading, we were all sorted out and allocated to other units. I was designated to the Japanese prisoner of war camp at Featherston. At 5.30am on a Saturday we were all assembled to go to our various destinations in army transport trucks, very much like a lot of livestock. A voice on the PA system called our attention to the following notice. "Would Private E.A. Coory and Private A. Williams stay behind, and not proceed further". This was a surprise and we're mystified. I learned that the reason in the case of Williams, was he had a venereal disease. The area would soon be deserted and empty, getting ready for the next intake of draughtees to be called up. Private Williams disappeared. I was in limbo, unable to leave the camp without a discharge. Nobody knew the reason why, nor could I find out.

For a whole month, I quite enjoyed myself. Nobody knew what I had to do, so I just fraternised with all the other recreation huts staff, and the two chaps of the medical unit. In the unit was P.K. Daly, nicknamed Juicy Fruit, and Arthur Whitlock, son of the famous pickle factory family in Wanganui. His nickname was Tasty. But good things never last long enough, and my honeymoon came to an end with my appointment by the Patriotic Funds Board to the Catholic Hut as assistant. Father Keegan who had made and approved the appointment returned for the next batch of hopefuls for king and country.

Barely a week into my new job, with an increase of pay to the same rate as sergeant, Len was sent for a well earned holiday by the chaplain. I was pitchforked into my duties immediately. Len gave me the secrets of making the coffee to maintain the chief attraction of the hut. Father Barney Keegan was no slug when it came to the finer points of coffee making; it was his recipe, in the first place. In the army there is the famous practice of *"fatigues"* and *"running orders for the day"*. I had not been familiar with these duties but I soon learned fast. A few fatigues were allocated each day to assist with light duties in each hut in making sandwiches, washing up, waiting on and clearing tables. Once a week, a larger lot were fatigued to wash out the floors and clean the windows. Some of these weekly fellows were bookmakers, business men, and executives, doing menial jobs like scrubbing floors, even cleaning toilets. One who was pointed out to me owned a chain of hairdressing salons throughout the country. He had been the owner of a string of racehorses until he was disqualified for life for rigging a race. The horse involved was on the verge of being acclaimed a champion, so he was heavily penalised and all his horses as well.

Dining at the sergeants mess amounted to a Masonic initiation. In the anteroom was a bar where we all had a few drinks first. You must never enter with

your headgear on, this was a fine of sixpence each time. In the dining room, cross table talk was also forbidden, penalty sixpence, as too was the mention of any ladies name, another sixpence. Once a week for sergeants was a formal mess. Entering the mess silently you took your place and remained standing till the mess officer toasted the king. Permission was then given to be seated. The officers had a formal mess each day.

The sergeants were more easy going in this respect, and by general consent much more fun. My first-week was the worst, fined many sixpences.

It is one thing to be in charge of a Recreation Hut, but it is a job after all. To get any recreation for ones-self was like trying to open an oyster with a pencil. The job was just starting to be enjoyable when Len returned. I am sure he didn't enjoy his holiday, it was work he enjoyed more. If I wanted to have a night off, to take one of the hospitality girls to the pictures or spend an hour or so in her company, was depressingly difficult; I did manage one evening in Palmerston North, with a Miss Dorrie Jones. I called for her at her home, and while waiting in a room with a piano, sat and played Chopin's E flat Nocturne, hoping this would impress her. It didn't sweep her off her feet but the evening went off fine. We went to the pictures and I caught the bus back to camp. Another rare occasion was when a group of Holy Name men were invited by the parish priest Monsignor McManus to supper in the presbytery. Father Hughes was assistant priest there. I got to know him well in the early days in Buckle Street Church when I first arrived in Wellington. He told me there was a Mrs Coory in

the parish and gave me her address. I did call on her after a month but she was frail, living on her own, all her family were in Auckland. On a second call months later she had gone to Auckland too. This saddened me as she seemed pathetically lonely on my first visit. She had invited me to a meal on that early visit.

Len and I worked well enough together, but I found he was a workaholic right enough, and resented any time away from the hut except for meals in the officers mess. He was meticulous in his dress and peak cap, and I'm sure he was never guilty of being fined sixpence or transgressing mess rules. He was of spare stature, of medium height, devoted to Father Barney, (to Len it was always Father Keegan) a faithful steward in his duties. In a way I envied him his integrity, but I did wish he had a sense of fun and would smile a little. Not that I was the Kolynos smiling type; my humour was more of the dry type but I loved hearing and telling jokes. When in 1966 we came to live in Palmerston North 23 years later, I met Len after mass outside St Patrick's church. He was very frail and a few weeks later died, to my disappointment. I'd worked with him for a year and never got close to him because of our incompatibility. Of course he was older than me but I did recognise and envied his unique qualities.

The year dragged on and finally I asked to be released. Soldiers around me all the time would fray my nerves if I stayed much longer. They say a certain camaraderie exists among miners, soldiers and sailors confined in male groups, and I believe it's true. Before the war I prided myself on being a pacifist, until Hitler and the Nazi savagery altered these beliefs with their unbelievable horrors. I finished in 1944 and tried to resume where I left off 14 months before. My sister Mary had shifted from Rugby Street to Rintoul Street and taken all my mufti belongings there. Glad to be back in civvy life.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Hopefully now the army and military were out of my life forever. 1 looked back on the few years before, and viewed with dismay the bleak prospects ahead. My

music interests were in tatters, and no future lay there as I no longer had the piano. In the early years of the war and after the Man-Power Act had been passed into law. I was getting unsettled with the added duties to the Seamen's Institute, the extra demands with the extended facilities of showing pictures twice a week, ship visiting, working overtime at A Levy's cutting uniforms, and doing my best every Tuesday night going to St Gerard's for the Holy Family Confraternity, which I so valued, that I cut short my overtime on Tuesday nights by half an hour not to miss these devotions. There were extreme occasions when because of my exemption from military service I had to work Saturdays and Sundays.

Returning to my musical aspirations, the ending of these is worth noting, as it was all happening with the early part of the war. Dorothy Spinks had been pushing my piano lessons into more difficult pieces by getting me into Beethoven Sonatas, performing duets with her at patriotic concerts to raise funds for knitting circles to supply "comforts for the lads overseas". Getting time to practice was not recognised by the war effort. I was learning Liszt's Liebestraum, while getting the notes right, she was keen to get more feeling into its expression. Musicians call this *rubato,* and is really the difference between technique and just playing the notes. The ability to rattle off lots of notes fortissimo, at the same pitch, without varying the notes is not the mark of putting soul into your playing. One of the sonatas began with a chord to be played *fortissimo.* Nine times out of ten I was asked to soften sections *pianissimo,* and the accumulations of these finer points began to make me despair of attaining proficiency to the Dorothy Spinks standards. She was a much sought after accompanist for visiting vocalists. She had a *sympathetic* touch reputation, and passing this on was a gift.

In one of these moods Mary Peters again came to my rescue and suggested the choir master of St Joseph's church Max Fernie would teach me, and why not give him a trial? Max was well known in the musical circles for organ and the National Carillon playing, and had a choir called The Aeolians in addition to leading St Joseph's church choir. At Mary's request. Max agreed to see me. He had a house in Webb Street, where only he and his mother lived. I well remember the diffidence with which the interview took place. I took my music along and was candid about my waning confidence. He then asked me to play something, and he chose the sonata with the opening chord marked *Fortissimo.* .1 reached the end of the line, when he said, "stop".

"That chord says loud". Reaching over he gave the chord what I thought was an almighty thump. I gave the chord my best shot, and felt all my frustrations melting like snow in summer. After a few weeks, things happened to increase the tenor of my career and provide exciting expectations of what to come. We agreed on terms and I was content. If I felt during practice emphasising my feelings *pianissimo, fortissimo, or grandiose, or dolce,* the sky was the limit. I felt horizons were widening, I went one night to a concert at which Max's Aeolians were giving a recital. After the performance I was flattered to be asked what I thought of it. Knowing Dorothy Spinks prowess in accompanying visiting singers. I proffered a criticism of the pianist for the choir who lagged I thought a little behind the singers instead of anticipating. Max raised his hands in appreciation and said if I did well I could have the accompanists part. The prospect pleased.

Alas, just when events were going along well enough, the war by now some six months later, the War Cabinet added the Conscription Act to call up men for service with two ballots; one for military service at home and one for overseas. These names were published in the daily newspapers. In the very first overseas ballot, Max's name appeared. With no grounds for appeal, we decided to quit the lessons which were half way into the first month. Max refusing acceptance of any fee, we agreed there and then to resume at the end of hostilities when Hitler was dead and buried.

As one door closes another opens. Music was abandoned for the war, and to replace it, a romantic interest took over for a while, which threatened to put it into permanent recess. I became engaged, but more of this later. Max and I were fated practically to only meet very briefly twice more. He went overseas and returned for a short at time during my months military training in Linton. That brief meeting was at a function given by Palmerston North parish priest Monsignor McManus to Catholic trainees during the intake I was at Linton military camp. Max returned overseas, but after the war took up duties with European Liturgical Music Societies, as well as organist at Westminster Cathedral in London. Max eventually returned to New Zealand to take on similar pursuits for the Church here, on his retirement in the 1980's when I was retired too. One day we both ascended the steps to St Mary's in Wellington from opposite sides to the main entrance. There we looked at one another uncertainly. At the door he turned round;

"Do I know you? I seem to remember you".

"Are you Max Fernie?" It seemed a gratuitous question. "Alex Coory, an old pupil of yours". "Yes yes", he remembered well. We spent some time working out how long ago it was, and it came to over forty years, since the Beethoven Sonata days.

"Tell me, did you keep it up?" When I told him in the negative he shook his head saying :"Pity, pity". He was not convinced by my long list of reasons, still shaking his head. Yes, he was back in Webb St. Me in Palmerston North. Like two ships that pass in the night, Me with eight children and twenty four Grandchildren. Max never married. *For all sad words of tongue or pen, The saddest are these: "It might have been'"*

These flash backs in my life for the sake of cohesion are necessary, but I must return to the resumption of my civilian life. I was keen to take up the with the Club in Vivian St once more to see how the projectionists I'd trained were faring. I had taught two before the country asked for my services. The first Projectionist had left to train for the priesthood; only to find the second one was also about to follow for the priesthood. A third was keen to take it on to spare me. In 1944 the war was still showing no sign of abating. The work of the Seamen's Institute had not abated either. I was glad to join my friends in the Club again. In my absence, two new members had joined up, John Clancy from Christchurch and Tom McCabe from Taranaki and these two and I formed a triumvirate. Where one was, one or two of the others were sure to be found. John boarded with the Milligans at the family home in Guilford Terrace, across the road to the Catholic Presbytery and Sacred Heart Basilica in Hill Street. These were the only dwellings in the terrace. A lane separated them but provided access to St Mary's Convent and St Mary's Girls College through to Hawkestone Street.

The Milligan home was a large two story- residence capable of accommodating two families as well as a few boarders. This was just as well as the large family of Milligans came from Greymouth on the West Coast mining area where Nick Milligan had been foreman of the Denniston coalmine. Nick had large family mainly daughters who had married and had families of their own. Nick retired to Wellington and some of the families came with him. The early history of when this took place was well before I met them. When I first visited the place Mick Kelly, husband of one of the Milligan girls and his family seemed to run the place. Old Mr Milligan was near his last days, and some of the other members had come to stay, including Mary Jefferies a grand-daughter Two of the boarders, were John Clancy, and Jack Lewin. John was a barman at the Duke of Edinburgh hotel, in spite of the fact he was a teetotaller. Jack had a position in the Civil Service, finally becoming Chief Statistician in the government.

It was like one big happy family as every vestige of the Milligan family was intensely Catholic except Lewin a professed communist. The Milligan residents were inseparable from the occupants of the clergy and domestic staff of the presbytery over the way, flattered by the name of Guildford Terrace. Nick Milligan himself came from Durham-on-Tyne in England as a young man. He married an Irish lady that gave the impression it was an Irish family. Mick Kelly from Limerick, John Clancy from Galway. My other friend Tom McCabe came from County Cavan in Northern Ireland. I seemed to float among Irishmen at this time of my life. I had many happy times there, the hospitality was overpowering, with cups of tea, going on all the time. Verily the kettle was ever on the boil. Musical evenings round the piano with lots of singing, a feature unknown to me previously. Three generations singing round the piano. I envied their voices and though I could play the piano, my voice was flatter than my feet.

Old Mr Milligan died and the family rallied round his bedside where he lay in state. Constant prayers were going on. One of the daughters Kitty Graham was stroking his face, saying to me in a most peaceful tone:

"Death is the most precious gift of God, don't you think Alex?" Saints of mercy, this staggered me. In spite of my religious upbringing, death seemed always the ultimate disaster to befall us poor mortals at any time. Not so with this family. Nick Milligan had a tough reputation for fairness and justice. The way Catholic tradition filtered down from parents to children as a way of life, transferred from every fibre of their being. I felt at home there.

Mary Jefferies who came to Wellington to find work was nearly my age, and we found each other mutually attracted to the extent we were eventually engaged. The family must have thought it was a good match and every man and his dog were happy. One of our special dates was thwarted when she caught a bad cold. On a visit to commiserate with her she was in bed but her happy nature was not given to moaning over misfortune. She jocularly suggested to hop in with her when she showed me her hands. Horrors! She'd painted her nails a bright red, which made temptation fly out the door. Red fingernails! Whatever Manichean traits I harboured in my psyche, came to the fore, and I spent the evening taking the paint off despite her protests.

I don't know how long after our engagement, maybe six weeks later, taking Mary home from the pictures, we stopped at the gate, She gave me the ring back saying she did not love me. I was quite shattered. Wartime does funny things. The glamour of the American Marines who captured the Kiwi girls with their manners and endless cash, cigarettes, and flowers, to anything in skirts; or so it looked to us kiwi blokes. I suppose we appeared as second rate Romeo's to the Yanks. I walked home after the break off of the engagement, the whole length of Lambton Quay to my rooms in Hawker Street. I had returned the piano to Beggs to pay for the ring as life was too crowded to keep up the piano tuition. Besides, if I did get married my bank balance was only a lot of love and hope plus a hundred pounds in war bonds. For Mary's Birthday 1 had bought a very popular record by a Japanese singer which she liked. 0n my birthday just following the broken engagement, the present she had bought for me and the record I had bought for her came back.

Reflecting on events, as I looked at the present and the record before me, 1 realised there were pluses and minuses; the pluses a diamond ring, a new book and a record. The minuses were no piano, no lady-love to face the future, and shortly I had to get to new lodgings. The record was in Japanese but a translation in English (in tiny print) had escaped my notice earlier; it read *"The Flower That Never Blooms"*, ***h***ow fitting. Harking back to the day after the engagement was called off, I felt as if a load had been lifted off my shoulders, which I was not prepared to dissect too much. Mary was a happy go lucky type, and said once, God loves those He makes to suffer.

Her only complaint was God must not love her much as she had no crosses in her life. The theological conclusions escaped me at the time, I think she did have a cross very soon, as her family gave her a hard time for abandoning me, We both had a mutual friend called Kitty Flynn who lived on the hillsides of Mt Victoria. It was a most atrocious approach to get there. You climbed up to the top of the hill and practically had to abseil down to Kitty's home. Brendan Lockhart, an old school friend and I were invited for a meal there, and Mary unknown to me was there too. We had a few minutes alone together and she suggested to make up and take her back. As gently as I could I just shook my head, unable to say the brutal word "no". Not much later she went back to Greymouth where she married and settled down, unable to stand the recriminations of her relatives in the Milligan home.

My friends were either Irish or West Coasters. In Rugby Street where I lived with my sister Mary, a large boarding house run by Mrs. Phillips, next to the imposing iron gates of the Governor General's residence, specialised apparently with West Coaster boarders. Four of them became members of the Seamen's Institute Committee. George McGirr, Kevin Buckley, Pat Coyne, and Dick Kiely I recall well. They were all civil service employees, man powered to the cities and drifted on eventually. It seemed to me all the Catholics from the West Coast emanated from Irish settlers. The generation I write of were not attracted to follow their fathers working in the coalmines. Yet a great camaraderie existed among miners, and this perception was assessed by the general public that the West Coast was the most hospitable and friendliest place in Gods own. I found later in life, the proverbial friendliness of West Coasters was mostly propaganda initiated by West Coasters themselves. Later in life when I was chief buyer in an electrical business, I found that commercial travellers from the large cities like Auckland were much more accommodating than their counterparts in the rest of the country.

So many facets of these Wellington early years did much for me to overcome the initial prejudices to the city. The political atmosphere had much to do in creating new found hope emerging from the depression years from 1928, to the end of the first three years of the Labour Government in 1938. One of the main reasons Alma went to Australia was because Dad had some correspondence with his sister in Adelaide who had lost her husband. Her children were all adults and instrumental in contacting their New Zealand kin. Incidentally, we knew Dad had five sisters, this one in Australia, the Betro's, was a turn-up, the fate of the other four as far as we learned or guessed, ended up in Cuba.

Alma with her friend Ada Brookie went to Adelaide staying with the Betro family. One of the sons, Les Betro therefore was a first cousin, fell madly in love with Alma at first sight and followed this up with a persistence that thrived on opposition. Alma tells me she yielded to his many proposals of marriage and gave in out of weariness in resisting. At first, permission was refused. Officially, I know the ecclesiastical authorities did refuse permission to marry at the outset. Some hesitation
and debating over the situation occurred; the conclusion reached was that the forbidden consanguinity in this case could be stretched because her parent and his parent were brother and sister, whereas the progeny of two brothers and/or sisters were definitely forbidden to marry. Whether this Betro union precipitated the second world war or not, war did break out when the first child of the union arrived. This was succeeded by a second pregnancy when the decision was made to return to New Zealand, for the birth of the second child.

My inveterate letter writing I have already commented upon. Letters to my sister and brother Michael were fairly regular to Australia, but the ones to Alma aroused the interest of Helen Lapp, a frequent visitor to the Betro's whose family owned a clothing factory in Adelaide. Helen read my letters to Alma, which aroused

her curiosity as well as another friend Cyril Sims. Helen wrote to me praising my style of writing. Reading some of my own effusions of the past, they seem pretentious, and I can't imagine them giving the readers the opinions of glowing prose. However, in these Wellington years from 1937/41 Helen and I developed a strong pen pal relationship that developed into a paper love affair with periods of heart to heart confidences of sublime heights and depths. Her letters ran to at least a dozen pages a time, and judging by her replies, mine must have been the same length. I think she was nineteen when our correspondence began, and was already an inveterate letter writer herself. In one letter she gave a list of letters she had received from all over the world. A list she gave dated Feb. 23rd 1937, included The Queen of Holland, Hitler, Sir MacPherson Robertson, (a Prize Air Race winner), letters from Japan, Germany, (was this from Hitler I wonder) plus lots of others. I was New Zealand's sole representative. Then she raved about the thrill of getting my letters, and then takes a page to explain her laziness in answering them. My sister Mary told me when any of her letters arrived, my facial expressions were a wonder to behold as I read them!

There was a mild longing to meet one another, but when I learnt from the Brookie girl, who returned on her own, that Helen was tall. I had visions of her towering over me and lost some of my longing because of my five foot five inches. She asked for a photograph and sent one of herself, obviously cut from a group. It reminded me of what Annie Laurie would look like from the words of the song;

Her brow is like the snowdrift, her throat is like the swan.
Her face it is the fairest, that e'er the sun shone on.

She was miles more educated than I, so her admiration for my letters was like balm to my ego. The waning of the ardent correspondence began when she left home to go to Farina, and later to Alice Springs in the Australian outback. In one or two letters she tried to get me to start up the Legion of Mary in New Zealand. This movement began in Ireland and took root in Australia. Due to my time being fully occupied, I consulted Monsignor Cullen a priest who warned me of the implications of over zealous devotion to the saints at the expense of Our Blessed Lord. However, it did get established without any help from me.

The Legion was dear to the heart of Helen and was one reason she went to the peace and quiet of the Australian Outback. A newcomer entered the scene when she met someone she referred to as Roberty Bob. She returned to Adelaide where she published a sheet of music, a popular waltz in the style of *A sleepy Lagoon,* with lots of triplets. Unfortunately this disappeared along with a lot of other possessions of rare musical pieces, and other personal effects I had stored, when Mary shifted again while I was staying elsewhere. Helen and Roberty Bob married, and other interests supplanted this paper romance, with a tinge of sadness. Helen never replied to my last letter. Episode closed.

Cyril Sims main interest in being a pen friend lay in learning I was writing a novel. His style was boyishly enthusiastic, and anything in the written word with his name attached, his sole ambition. Cyril craved for facts if I had ever submitted or written any poetry or had anything accepted for publication. I had a mental image of Cyril that was not flattering; I think this was due to his excessive praise of my writing. I thought he was one of those pimply youths fawning at the feet of his peers. The letters did not last long, perhaps a year. Letters in those days cost twopence, between Australia and New Zealand. Today it's a dollar and twenty cents. I still have an envelope to prove it, dated 5th Jan 1937, 63 years ago. Is that Inflation plus?

A friend Noel Murphy from the club became engaged to one of the guild girls and wanted to know if I still had the ring from my recent engagement. When I went to get it from a suitcase under one of the beds at Mary's place for safekeeping, it

wasn't there. I remembered it being on the very top of clothing and things in an empty penny matchbox. When I opened the case, the indentation of the box was clearly visible where the lid pressed on the clothing. Mute evidence it was stolen. Mary had no idea who could have stolen it but it made the final chapter in the saga of the *"Flower that Never Blooms".* Another episode closed. I was now getting settled taking up civvy life again. That small depression an inch square summed up the loss of romance and ring, piano and music, promises of what may have been if war had not come. What home I ever had, burnt down, plus a fractured family losing its mother. How many others had the same fate? In so many events in my life, women called Mary came to the rescue. No wonder Mary was also the name of the Mother of Perpetual Succour.

The war was still making havoc of people's lives. I was back in the clothing trade, where the gaps made by war casualties being filled with refugees from Europe, mainly Jews. Some found work with their own people, like A Levy Ltd. Two of these a childless married couple from Poland, Maurice and Dora Kuperschimdt had started while I was away for my Army stint. They had changed their name to Cooper. Maurice the husband had ingratiated himself with management in a manner that upset the rest of the male staff. Maurice was a short stocky built fellow who managed to take over one of the retired supervisor's job who suffered from chronic dyspepsia. Dora, Maurice's wife also worked in the trade, had a kittenish manner, meek, timid and childless, both were middle aged. When the Polish Jew, Maurice, bought the boss a bottle of whisky for a Christmas present for the manager, the indignation of the male staff was aroused. This was not the way staff ingratiated themselves with management in New Zealand. Management was oblivious to this seething unrest, and Maurice rose inevitably to be chief foreman on the floor, displacing others who left in disgust. Maurice carried any staff peccadilloes, however minor, to the manager, creating a siege mentality. Most of these later developments transpired after I was temporarily transferred. Later when I returned, he was responsible for my leaving the very firm where I had become a first class journeyman in an otherwise very enjoyable job. Especially when I replaced the functions of the late retired Mr. Macleod.

My leaving A Levy Ltd. for good was for the most petty of reasons. It was all over the time clock. Morris insisted after some wrangling, that I not only clock in for start and finish of the day, but in addition for the lunch breaks as well. The nature of my work involved special customers who were not subject to the time of day. Halfway during a fitting, I could not tell the customer, "Sorry, my lunch break, you'll have to come back later". I stuck to my guns, and he pestered me, even going to the extreme of deducting minutes from my pay packet, for being late. Young Austin Levy was now in Ben Levy's position and never once did he come then or later to ask me the reason for leaving. We had been good friends earlier, going to cabarets and dinners with a group of friends, mostly his.

My activities at the Seamen's institute were resumed much to the committee's delight and my own. The presence of the American Marines and their takeover of all the most desirable girls were still very much evident. In England, it came to my attention the same sort of prejudices existed over there. So much so, the English comedian Tommy Trinder quipped about the Americans, *They're overpaid, overfed, oversexed, and over here.* That just about summed up us Kiwis too.

It got to the stage if any girl took my fancy, it was qualified by knowing whether she had ever been out with a Marine. If so that was that, and she was not in the market for me. But a fellow worker Mary Sands, (still another Mary) a lady for whom I had a lot of esteem, took me to task for this attitude. She was older than me, and a lady who was always capable of intelligent viewpoints. She worked with two others ladies at a table doing hand stitching and finishing touches to garments. This

Mary, was besotted with Labour politics. For instance the price of sugar at threepence a pound rose to sixpence, almost double due to some trouble in Fiji. Everybody was aghast at this iniquitous price hike, but not Mary Sands. She said she'd pay half a crown a pound if it improved the workers wages of the Fijians, where most of our sugar came from. But to get back to the Marines and the girls:

"Tell me Alex", Mary suggested, "Do you not think the soldiers we sent overseas, are the best of our menfolk?"

"Yes I'd agree to that"..

"Would you not think then, you'd have to agree the American Marines are regarded equally by the Americans?" Her logic was disarming.

Nevertheless with all my contemporaries, their familiarity (YANKS as we called them with a tinge of jealousy) had a way with the girls, and women too for that matter. They showed us a thing or too about courtesy, the way they took the arm of the ladies each time they crossed the street or the footpath intersections. Mind you at this time I was resuming city life. The Marines had been around for at least three years or so, but in my absence at Linton for fourteen months, they seemed to be everywhere even at the Seamen's Institute. Now I soon found that my opinions had been too sweeping. Back again at the Club, I was to meet some Marines of a shy retiring nature, and some who had gone through hell in the Pacific Islands like Iwo Jima, Midway Island, and Gaudal Canal. Some wanted nothing better than to share a home for some friendliness like their families at home. I learnt of the horrors they endured against the Japanese navy and air bombers. Some were so shattered, they were sent home to recuperate, but some had to return to the horrors after recovery. Our chaplain brought some of the Catholic American chaplains to the club, and they enhanced our activities taking part willingly.

One pleasant experience occurred when at one time a year or so after Pearl Harbour, a large convoy of the USA Navy was moored out in Wellington Harbour for a whole month. None were tied up at the wharves but anchored out in the stream. By a coincidence the Club was due to have our Annual General Meeting. The City dignitaries were invited as usual along with the United States Ambassador plus some of his officers. As with Annual Meetings speeches are inevitable. The Ambassador rose to give a stirring speech, pledging the military might of all the American Forces to protect us, and all freedom loving people. It was very comforting for us to hear, (but not for the Japanese.)

Came a day, when Fr Gascoigne was invited by the senior American Chaplain to celebrate Sunday mass on the Flagship out in the stream. As I was the chief altar boy for the Club Chapel, Fr asked me to assist him at this mass. We met at the wharf, where a pilot boat was waiting to take us out to the ship. This was my first experience of this kind of ferrying. Fr was like a schoolboy. When I attempted to sit down:

"No no Alex", he protested. "You stand up and ride the waves. We're sailors now". It was further out than appeared from the wharf. We climbed up the gangway and were allocated the shell room to say mass. The shells and torpedos were arranged in tiers, but space was made for a table to hold candles and the vessels for the celebration. While Father and I were vesting, he asked, one of the men,

"Are these shells practice ones?"

"No Father. They're the real thing". Father ceased pushing an arm though his alb, to reach over to shift the candle a few inches away from one of the highly polished brass shells. After mass, we were invited to breakfast, conspicuous for the absence of butter for toast but plenty of cheese. It was nothing sumptuous. Plenty of "Ca'fee" of course. We rode the waves once more, arriving safely back under the full protection of the U.S. Navy, instead of His Majesty's Royal Navy.

This has little to do with my story, but I must say the military situation was appallingly ill informed, nor understood by us in New Zealand at the time the American Navy came here. All New Zealand's military forces were totally committed to the Middle East. To withdraw them with Japan's entry into the war would have imperiled the war there, and made us sitting ducks if we were attacked. The war was being fought on several fronts, so a compromise was made for us to stay with the war in the Middle East, and free up the Americans to protect the Pacific, which was getting precarious. If America had just concentrated on her own shores, instead of joining the Allies, the New Zealand flag would be the Rising Sun today. In a way the nuclear free policy adopted by the Labour Government, and later endorsed by the National Government as well, has an odour of political cant about it.

However, every cloud has a silver lining. One Sunday night after the club, I was walking in the company of some of the Guild girls to catch a tram at Courtenay Place. Gwenda King whom I had known for some years and been keen on with little success, was with me at the rear of the group. She asked me had I met any nice girls while in Linton. I countered with had she met any nice Americans while I was away. My jealousy surfaced for a brief airing. She had, and sensibly replied life did not start and end with Americans. This American business went back a couple of years when we first met. Gwenda was a loyal member of the girls Guild, and when her younger sister Norma joined up too, a friendly debate arose over a book I was reading called *THE AMERICAN HERESY* by Christopher Hollis. They both took exception to my reading the book. One Sunday when I declined going for a walk with them round Oriental Bay in favour of my Sunday rest and to read my book, they kept ringing me up to prevent further reading. It was fun of course but more like Norma's flirtatious ways She did not have Gwenda's loyalty to the Guild and soon drifted. So walking home this Sunday after a club function, to catch a tram home,

"I'd like to meet a girl". I said to Gwenda walking beside me, "who'd never gone out with an American".

'Then you'll have to have Bonnie".

"Who's Bonnie?"

'You've never met Bonnie? There she is in front of us. Come, I'll introduce you, which she did. But it was dark and we were approaching the corner to the tram shelter, not enough time to exchange pleasantries on a first introduction, just sufficient to learn she had joined the guild while I was away and only been there a few months. She had the most beautiful golden red hair. So ended my first few months in civvy life. But it was the beginning of two years of an off and on dating. A Chinese saying. *"The longest journey begins with a single step".*

The path of true love seldom runs smoothly, says Shakespeare. Of all the sayings and proverbs about love, there is enough false information to fill and satisfy any mind on earth. The assumptions of what it is, is as common as daylight. Misconceptions too are equally common. While for some "I love you", can be equal to "I love pizza"; to others is a violation of a revered emotion. To go through life worried about the meaning of words, shows up the level of mental competence of an education system that costs millions of dollars, to produce a variety of nincompoops that is its own judge. James Thurber, the American humorist commenting on the struggle of obtaining money for education, came out with the comparison to the vast amount available for fertilisers, proclaimed *"Millions for manure, nix for education".*

It was only natural that I took more than a passing interest in Bonnie in the next few weeks each time she attended the Club as the Seamen's Institute was referred to. Everything about her grew on me, without realising this at first. Popular with the others and specially with Linda Abraham, a Lebanese girl who worked with her at Zemba's Clothing Factory in Adelaide Road who had brought her along to the

Club in the first place. Linda introduced herself to me and reintroduced Bonnie to me. Linda was not long out in New Zealand and made tentative gestures I interpreted as looking for a husband for her self. Frankly, I was not a bit attracted to Linda; she was short, squat, and dark. I was two of those things as well without the squat bit. Linda's friendliness and accent had qualities that redeemed her, but nowhere as much as her companion Bonnie Phillips. They had a strong friendship for each other. To have one without the other was not a problem at this stage.

I suppose events overtook us as you will see. One quiet evening at the club, a group was sitting on a long stool against the wall. Very few seamen were present and a lot of talking was going on. Bonnie was sitting at one end talking to a couple of friends, I had my foot on the other end talking to somebody. Gradually all those in between us moved away and removing my foot Bonnie landed precipitately on the floor with a thump at the other end. Most undignified but I couldn't help laughing. This ruffled her feathers that I should think it funny. But like Scene 2 in Act 1 of Richard the Third, my apologies were successful enough during supper, she agreed to allow me to walk her home. It was early closing this night, we took the tram to Constable Street and walked the rest of the way to her home in Kilbirnie. On the way at the top of the hill in Wellington Road was a park seat under a street lamp, we rested for a while before finishing the walk. In the days to come this was to be a frequent resting-place.

The conversation on this first walk impressed me in a way as no other girl ever had. A kind of naivety-cum-caring concern for others and their interests. I learnt she was not averse to going to daily mass either. We had a theological discussion on the value of going to mass on Sunday, not being as efficacious as a weekday one, this requiring more effort. I tried to convince her this was slightly heretical, but she was not that naive to believe me. However, learning that I served a weekday mass at the Club Chapel she agreed to come one day. This weekday mass turned into a highlight for a favoured few indeed. Another newcomer to the girls Guild, Allie Anderson, and Bonnie became fast friends. Allie was a twin and worked as housekeeper to Doctor Kronfeld. Between these two girls they took charge of the week day Mass. As a rule this meant going without breakfast. Allie thought this was not good enough and started cooking breakfast for Fr Gascoigne. Armed with a spotless tablecloth, bacon and eggs, and coffee, nothing was too good for a priest. Bonnie, Allie and I did with something less like toast or porridge.

When Father was away he arranged another priest to say the mass, which was obligatory because of the reservation of the Blessed Sacrament. If perchance he wasn't able to get a replacement priest, it was left for me to arrange one, either from St Gerard's or St Patrick's College in Buckle St. But the breakfasts became an institution. Fr Gascoigne never tired of referring to the UPPER ROOM, from a passage in the Acts of the Apostles when the disciples waited for the coming of the promised Holy Spirit. Allie's twin sister Clarrie joined up later but she did not have the same enthusiasm for the Club, but remained a good friend just the same. The Anderson twins were some years older than we were.

The first walk with Bonnie Phillips did not lead to making a date forthwith. The Club ran a popular Euchre evening every Friday night, to raise funds. It was up to the girls to roster enough to help by clipping tickets and supplying refreshments from the canteen. The Euchre evenings was an institution of some years, and supervised by the secretary on behalf of the committee, and seemed to function automatically. The various committee members had their particular responsibilities and the organisation ran like a well-oiled machine. The only time I ever adverted to its existence was at the weekly committee meetings when the takings were filed under anything financial. Stan Best our secretary was most efficient and his work seemed to do itself which it didn't of course. He was the most tireless worker and

probably worked more hours than anyone else, and exempted from ship visiting on that score.

When Bonnie was rostered for euchre one night, I popped into the club that Friday. They were short of a hand to clip tickets and I found myself grabbed for the job. The whole thing fascinated me. There were four rows of tables, one clipper to each row. When each game ended you clipped the winning tickets only. No quarter was given by the contestants, they were a seasoned lot and one had to be on ones toes all the time. If someone wanted to go to the toilet a clipper would take her/his place till their return. The bell rang for the end of each game, any hand in progress was allowed to finish.

This night, a wide-awake girl was about to clip a ticket, when she spotted a clip she didn't recognise. The lady involved had her own clipper. No two clippers were alike and the offending clip did not match up with any that night. Protests of innocence were unavailing, but the police were not called and the incident resolved peacefully. Another night when I volunteered elsewhere to assist at a special housie evening for a church organisation, I was dumbfounded at the scramble for certain cards. The diehards and enthusiasts knew the cards they wanted and the cards were strewn over the table in frantic search for the right combinations. Some players even queued early to be first when the doors opened. Bingo, Housie and Euchre evenings can be addictive. The law of the jungle rules in their case, and generally confined to the gentler gender.

The more I saw of Bonnie and chatted with her the more I decided I would like to take her out for an evening. She belonged to the Children of Mary and while I was mulling over the best approach, she approached me, saying she had two unsold tickets for a Leap Year Dance the Children of Mary were running in the Brougham St Hall, would I like to come? It wouldn’t cost me anything. It was a quiet night and as we were leaving the Club early I agreed. We were hardly there for an hour when she wanted to go home. I lived in Newtown and she in Kilbirnie. We caught the same tram and I offered to go all the way with her, but she refused in a sort of huff. At the Constable Street corner, my stop for getting off, which I reluctantly did. Not an auspicious start, but you don't force yourself on any young lady, when she is unwilling.

The next time we met, it was as if nothing untoward had happened. It was 1944,1 was 28, and mindful of some advice I was given when disappointed by rebuffs in the past, "Remember son, there's more than one pebble on the beach". This was early March, the years were catching up and my best friends were men at the Club; bachelorhood was getting heavier, my friends were marrying and getting happier while I was getting envious. The children of my friends appealed to me as a great asset. There was one aspect of my life I was trying to come to terms with. My friends at the Club were all racing fiends and felt as if I was selling my soul to the bookmakers. I was spending all my spare money on credit betting with two or three bookmakers. Saturday afternoons when Wellington races or any metropolitan meeting for that matter, were spent at one of the members homes listening and betting the afternoon away. My hopeful father-in-law was no help either, joining me in little flutters on the horses.

Many weeks later and friends telling Bonnie I was passably acceptable, she agreed to start going out together, with the implied emphasis on the word "start". It was on the second occasion we were walking home I mentioned my addiction to betting and she was horrified I could put almost a weeks wages on a single bet. In these pre TAB days all bookmakers gave credit betting and limited odds as compared to what the totalisator offered. Big metropolitan meetings the bookies would pay no more than 20 pounds for a win and 5 pounds for a place, no matter what the tote paid. Smaller meetings were 5 pound to win 2 pound for a place. I

must admit when the army life began I was away from the Club, my betting was nil. I was tempted only once when a sergeant said he had a certainty;. "I could put my shirt on it". The certainty did not perform. So when I came back to the club and met Bonnie I was slowly succumbing to the blandishments of my friends and the bookies, and slipping back to old habits; but not as reckless.

Sunday evenings Bonnie discovered I went without a decent meal because of the early start of having to show films at the Club. When we went out together I always insisted on calling for her at home. I never liked this date meeting in town. If a lady was worth taking out, it was the decent thing to call for her. When I met her parents, it took two or three calls to get beyond the "Hello" and "Goodbye" stage. When Bonnie's father who everyone in the house referred to as Pop, discovered my interest in horses, I was a hit from the start. Pop liked nothing better than a chat about racing and persuaded me to place a few bets for him on a cash basis. Eventually it was the popular belief that Pop encouraged me to satisfy his five bob each way and doubles prospects. Bonnie claimed Pop saw more of me on my visits than she did herself. She had three sisters already married, two brothers at the front, one in the navy, one in the Air Force, and *a* brother and sister still in college. Eight in the family, and from the start I felt they welcomed me.

I gathered slowly from the family that Bonnie was very choosey about her men friends, and almost the despair of her sisters as regards them. At twenty five, her choosiness as the third child in the family, the unasked question was audible enough. Three sisters Kitty and Winnie and Mary (another Mary in my life) were already married, all with young families. The two eldest Kitty and Winnie had been in partnership in a dairy corner store for a while, but sold out and shared premises out in-Miramar. Kitty's husband Norm Nielsen (Danish spelling) had a job in the Inland Revenue Department, and Winnie's husband Phil Hinds was in the Fire Unit of the Air Force. These two, curious to meet the fellow attached to their choosy sister-in-law, arranged for us both to go out there one evening so they could suss him out. Winnie had just had her second child, a son Brian. To see the new baby was the bait to get us out there. I was a lamb to the slaughter, innocently unaware of these machinations going on. I never found out what the impression was if any, apart from just blatant though friendly curiosity.

There were three son-in-laws already in the family. Norm Nielsen, set up a hierarchy of them, himself as the senior family's son-in-law. Winnie and her husband Phil Hinds, were later to prove real friends in the years to come. The other sister Mary had married the son of Welsh parents Eddie Jenkins but without the flourish of Kitty's or Winnie's weddings. Mary's husband Eddie Jenkins was a true son of his Welsh parentage, who were not to be browbeaten into yielding to the blandishments of the Catholic conditions of marriage, that all children of the marriage were to be brought up Catholics. Indeed the promises went further to compel a written promise to do so. This was not to Eddies liking to sign such an undertaking. The result, a registry office wedding with the only family members present were Mary's sisters Kitty and Bonnie. The families hands were tied to a certain extent by the fact Pop's brother was an esteemed parish priest, and quite naturally at any family weddings the rites would be performed by Father Frank Phillips. When I met up with Father Frank, one would have to go a long way to find a priest who was so basic and free of humbug and pious nonsense. Live and let live his belief.

Though Kitty and Winnie had contracted mixed marriages, theirs had been blest in the Catholic Church. Father Frank had some firm views in the field of education. He went through the war unscathed and when demobbed in his late twenties felt he had a vocation to the priesthood. He took his place at Holy Cross College with boys in their teens to qualify. Frank was a man of the world you might

say when launched into the priesthood, not a starry-eyed young curate, and very soon was elevated to be a parish priest.

The Phillips family seemed to envelop me in their circle. Pop Phillips at the first Christmas holiday season of our acquaintance, invited me to spend a week with him at Father Frank's presbytery in Marton. Every Christmas Pop used to do this to trim the hedges and do sundry odd jobs around the presbytery, church and grounds. The prospect of a Catholic son-in-law at long last for one of his daughters must have influenced the invitation, for none of the three marriages of Kitty, Winnie or Mary were Catholics. Pop's older spinster sisters Anne and Maud were also in the habit of spending Christmas with their esteemed brother of the "cloth". Here in one fell swoop I came into contact with the elders of the clan. The love of the horses was something we all had in common. The Liverpool accent of the four of them equated with the Lebanese talk that confused me when I first went home. Perhaps because I was so much older, when television came, and Coronation Street hit the small screen, I heard their accents all over again. I slid into this family much more than I did when fourteen than to my own family

The history of the Phillips family is worth recording for some interesting aspects. The New Zealand family originated with William Henry Phillips born-1850, a publican of the Wellington Hotel, Islington, Liverpool. He married Mary Ann Pagan and had two children by her. She died, and William remarried in 1890, Catherine McDonough by whom he had six children plus two that died in, infancy, one 18 months. The records I have show that after the sixth child was born, William left the family in 1901 to suss out the situation in New-Zealand, bringing with him the two children of his first marriage. While here he set up in business as a builder in Wellington. Twenty years later in 1921 he sent for the rest of his family when resident in Seatoun Heights Road. Anne the eldest was only ten when she last saw her father, was now thirty, the others Elizabeth, Maud, Leo (who died at Passchendale France 1918) and Francis who embraced the priesthood. Joseph and Elizabeth were the only ones to marry.

Pop and Frank's two maiden sisters, Anne and Maud whom romance had never smiled upon lived in Kilbirnie, and Pop each Sunday after mass, was in the habit of visiting his two maiden sisters. Their house was within an easy and pleasant walking distance from his own Hamilton Road home, only separated by Kilbirnie Park. The sister's home was an unpretentious dwelling squeezed in among a row of similar houses with narrow lanes giving access to the rear of the properties. A redeeming feature was the shoreline that skirted the road including Kilbirnie Park beyond making the front view free to Evans Bay on the other side of the road. I don't remember Maud's special gifts or talents, apart from housekeeping but she was stout, short, and dumpy, round faced and assented to every opinion expressed by Anne, who was tall, spare, and opinionated. Anne was a fully qualified nurse and seamstress, before leaving Liverpool, living on the proceeds of her sewing, and at the beck and call of all the priests of the parish and the diocese for her expertise in altering or making clothes. She also supplied a shop in the T & G Building on Lambton Quay taking any fancy goods she made. Far as I know, she never practised as a nurse in N Z.

Maud on the other hand never had a chance to initiate conversation or enter any worthwhile contribution in the presence of her sister whenever we visited them. Yet on the rare occasions of Anne's absence, she could be very bubbly and enjoy talking. Maud especially loved a bet on the horses. During those holidays I shared with them at Fr Frank's presbytery at Takapau, Fr Frank would drive us all down to the TAB in Waipukarau to back our fancies. In this undertaking, Maud was very secretive marking her selections under cover of her hand. Nor would she reveal

them either, being partial to horses with religious names. The rest of us were open about our choices.

I mentioned earlier about the path of true love not always running smoothly. So Veronica Josephine Phillips, otherwise Bonnie to me and all her friends, but Von or Vonnie to her immediate family, the Club put us together in a common bond not only because of our shared interest. Romance will always blossom with heaps of mutual friends. Initial steps towards courtship were inevitable. Having my foot inside the door as it were, plus the mutual interest we had in common, we naturally became closer. Even on the occasions when she worked overtime, I'd meet her and go home to her place for supper.

So much was happening all around me affecting my life that clashes were sure to occur. The war was still full on, Lou's father was up at Waiouru as a tailor to the Armed forces, and Ada his wife took ill and put into hospital. It was left to me to visit her, as Mary had her hands full with a young family. At the outbreak of war, Lou who had service in the merchant navy as a young lad in the first war, was an active a member of the Legion of Frontiersmen. To my disgust Lou actually volunteered for service hoping to get a commission, in the first months of the war, despite having three young children, and one from his first marriage.. He was familiar with the parts around Egypt, and keen to get posted there. He got his wish within 6 months. He did write often and sent gifts now and then and his pay was shared to support his family. Lou's mother Ada now hospitalised had to depend on us to help out, while her husband and two sons were fighting the war on every front but the domestic one. Wars reveal family tragedies long after they have ceased.

The worst did happen, Ada's illness worsened while in hospital and she died. I remember walking the long corridors of Wellington Hospital, at nights during these weeks before her death, trying to locate Waiouru military camp on the phone all hours in the morning. Incredible as it may seem it was impossible to make direct contact, and I had to co-opt the local police in Waiouru to get a message through to the camp tailor. Rae who had been looked after by Ada had now been transferred to Mary's family of three, Kevin her eldest was now seven. Late in 1944 Mary's husband Lou was invalided out from Egypt, and a fourth child was soon on the way, born the following year.

At this stage I toyed with the idea of leaving Wellington and going to Auckland to live, to get away from the pressures around me. Even to go on a farm. The more I looked at Bonnie I thought what have I got to support a wife? But then if I had one I'd just have to turn my life into some order. Betting on horses was frittering away at any nest egg because of the company surrounding me, though they were my friends. Working long hours in the clothing trade, three nights a week at the Club, ship visiting on Sunday mornings, courting a lady I knew was true blue to the core, my male friends pushed to one side to accommodate courting. Despite this fact we were all friends together. I resolved to propose marriage and hang the consequences. Proposing for the second time is fraught with apprehensions but I did it, combining it with a private resolution to leave Wellington if accepted.

At the garden gate when saying goodnight I did propose. The war was not yet over, I did not mention the alternative of leaving. But I did the next time and she was a little apprehensive, saying she'd let me know what she thought about such a step. Bonnie accepted the proposition after a week and we agreed not to get engaged until three months before setting the date of the wedding. Pop was among the cabbages when I nervously asked for permission to ask for the hand of his daughter. Bonnie's mother said on the three previous occasions when the others had asked for their daughters hands in marriage, he was in the garden among the cabbages for them all. I'd preferred Pop was among the petunias, but he was calm, and assured me if Vonnie was agreeable he was too. Sedate speeches have no room

on these occasions. Then ensued the season of "off 'n' on" hinted at earlier in my story". A lot of water was to flow under the bridge, during the rest of the year of 1945.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

VE Day came suddenly on a May working day, putting Wellington in a frenzy. Everybody walked off their jobs to mill around the streets, marching in any direction where a crowd of people were seen. Public transport ceased; tram drivers and conductors left their trams unattended to join in the celebration of the end of the war in Europe. City dignitaries tried to find focal points to make official announcements but only the photographers were interested. This was the same all over the country, the euphoria of nearly six years of war and their restrictions coming to an end. We hopefully thought in our happy ignorance, ignoring the fact Japan was still at war, only Germany had surrendered.

I don't know how Bonnie and I found each other during this melee but we did, and walked the whole length of Lambton Quay to try to pick up a film ordered to show at the Club next Sunday. Luckily we were in time before this place too was closed and lucky to find a taxi to bring us back to the Club. The next day brought reality back with a thump; rationing, that wartime bugbear was still a reality, now in some ways more of an irritation than ever. Would you believe it was June 1950 before the last of the rations were finally lifted.

Life went on. The homecoming of the soldiers from overseas was looked forward to, but demobbing was not the simple operation we visualised. The conquered lands had to have peacekeeping forces in place until the Armistice was signed. This was more complicated than anticipated by us simple folk. The Japanese were very tenacious, and it took nearly three months and two atomic bombs to close that war. The Japanese generals were eager to continue the war in spite of those two dreadful atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but the unilateral intervention of the Emperor mercifully overrode their decision. The month of August saw the end of the Japanese war proper, the celebrations were less sudden and more controlled, but just as enthusiastic. For the Americans, their comprehensive military depots were put into reverse, and to our way of thinking, a callous destruction of a lot of useful machinery. Their military equipment were either buried, or destroyed. The powerful American war machine had no sentiment whatever, and when the usefulness of a project was accomplished, that was the end, finis. Cast off clothing has some value to someone somewhere; but this was not USA style..

One of my Club friends George McGirr a robust gentle giant to my modest proportions anyway, became another of a coterie within the club, joining John Clancy, Tommy McCabe and Jimmy McCarthy among others. George and I because we lived in adjacent streets went home together, spent some time saying goodnight on the street corner debating, life, theology, or philosophy, well beyond our amateur ability. Wherever any of us were George would never be far away. He could always be depended on in an situation if anything needed doing. Then suddenly he seemed to desert us for a lady friend he had recently met. She had just returned from a pilgrimage to Lourdes, and George became fascinated with her. Dulcie was dark, tall and slender with long hair, pleasant but not beautiful; but with an aura of mystique about her; what my description would term *femme fatale.* I'd come across this phrase in eternal triangles or whodunit novels. One day George dropped a bombshell saying he was marrying Dulcie. He asked permission to marry in the Club Chapel. George did not look radiantly happy and fended off inquires as to details on this sudden romance. Bridegrooms in my book are expected to be over

the moon at the approach of their wedding day, but who was invited among his friends? But I was in for a shock two days before the nuptials were planned to take place. I passed George on the stairs of the Club.

"Alex. You will be coming to my wedding won't you?" Before I could express any response, he added, "I want you to be my best man?"

There weren't too many of us present on the day but it turned out better than expected. But surprises were in store. George gave up the club to enter fully into married life. Like the parable in the Gospel story where a man could not attend a feast because he had married a wife and so could not come. It was not a case of George deserting us, but his friends remaining loyal to a colleague who had been a pleasure to know. After some months when we intruded more or less into his bed-sitting room where they lived, to see how they were getting on, it was obvious Dulcie and George were going to be blessed with a child. In due course Dulcie was rushed into hospital, and George was frantic of such a premature birth. Tom, one of my closest friends dragged me to see the baby as soon as was decent. Tom, a County Cavan man from Northern Ireland got annoyed with the emphasis George put on the *-word premature* for the baby, to our eyes it was a bonny healthy child.

"One trusts ones friend", Tom said to me, "but I don't like to have the wool pulled over my eyes". Funny how a word can estrange friendship if one allows it to do so. But George and Dulcie moved away when he managed to get a transfer in the civil service. But we were never advised to where they went, nor did they say goodbye. Before I quit this part of my story, I must touch on Alice Carnarvon, a Northern Irish girl from Strabahn, who managed the Club Canteen. She and George had been keen on one another until Dulcie came and claimed his affections. Alice was an easygoing type making friends easily. I myself went for walks with her and found her quite a pleasure to walk with. We went to the Botanical gardens several times and her ability to distinguish a rose by looking at it, whether it was scented intrigued me. Her knowledge of flora was one I envied, and though I was more taken with Bonnie, she took this in good part. Alice became friendly with an Irish seaman called Paddy Gresty. The Chaplain, Fr Gascoigne, confided in me that she and Paddy proposed to get married. I was unaware of any courtship prior to this so I was surprised. Father had some misgivings at first, but finally gave the go-ahead for the wedding. I was sure Father was going to add something, but didn't.

The wedding was private, Alice asked me would I be best man. Now this was the first time for two things. First I'd never been asked by the bride to be best man, and secondly the first time I had ever seen the bridegroom. More of Gresty's friends attended than Club members. Surely one of them could have filled the shoes of best man. There was no honeymoon. Mrs Gresty remained as canteen manager, Mr Gresty sailed away the next day! As time went on Alice did say the marriage was never consummated, but the details of this marriage remained her secret and beyond this confidence I was no wiser. I felt as if my career was destined to be a father confessor. I am sure heaven sent me Bonnie to bring sanity into my life. So many questions of human behaviour I consigned to remain as unsolved mysteries.

The immediate postwar period was a time of annoying shortages of the little luxuries of life. To buy things for wedding presents was an exasperating exercise. Everything in the shops was of strictly utilitarian nature. Engaged couples had each other, but a time comes when even that can appear too much of a good thing. Even in ones wildest dreams, washing machines, refrigerators, hot water systems, were the ultimate. Electric blankets were not even a gleam in the eyes of the marketeers. There were the talking pictures, and the dance halls and the races at Trentham, drawing the crowds like festivals do today. Taxis were severely limited in the distances to take fares, because of the shortages of gas and tyres. To go to the races in a taxi, they would only go if a return fare were guaranteed. The trains were so

crowded, motor cars were scarcest, it was the heyday of the public transport everywhere. The Wellington summer races had eight extra trains both ways to carry the punters to penury or riches. Queues were the norm for wanted commodities of every description, from ladies hosiery to cotton goods.

Love will always find a way, and in this period Bonnie's two brothers Leo and Joe returned from overseas. The Phillips family came to be a refuge for the few hours of recreation my busy life allowed. It sometimes happened I had to remind myself I was engaged to be married but there was no ring to prove it, nor any date set. The word commitment was never raised nor did it have the connotations it now has. In a sense I was committed to the Club and its activities of showing films on Thursday and Sunday evenings. The Tuesday evenings were cancelled when war ended. Ship visiting on Sundays was still necessary when it was my turn. The wartime period was now over and the urgency had passed. Attending The Holy Family meeting every Tuesday, the Club Committee meeting on Wednesdays, working overtime at the whim of my employer, was tempered somewhat by the need for extra money. To work overtime was not compulsory.

Bonnie felt at times she was taking a back seat in my life, that I was just squeezing her into the bits of time on my hands. Now that I know more of the feminine psyche, I can understand how she felt though this quality was not very high on my list of priorities. The episode of George who abandoned his friends and the Club for the love of a lady, sort of rankled with my nature. I talked to myself often of this impasse as I saw it. Especially as I had slipped back into a betting spree and wasting my money instead of saving it. When at Bonnie's home, she felt Pop monopolised my presence to discuss form for the Saturday races, and giving money to put on his choices with the bookies. Saying goodnight to Bonnie, she would say not to bother calling again, forfeiting the goodnight kiss.

I was lucky to have the services of her mother who must have tweaked to these subtle undercurrents, by reminding her choosy daughter of ways and means to bring me round. Truth to tell I knew I had a real treasure in Bonnie, that if I was to marry anyone she was the one I knew I'd make sacrifices for. To say I was head over heels in love according to the romantic notions of Hollywood film or a Mills & Boone novelette. I would have to say no. My philosophy in life was if you couldn’t be faithful in little things you are already committed to, you damn well won't be faithful to the big things when the crunch comes. I was not going to desert my priorities as I saw them, nor turn my life upside down. Some adjustment would be necessary. When the time for change was ripe, I'd do it. There is a hierarchy of priorities. I was convinced I had the right person to share my life with, and felt also I was the right person to share it with here. She had every quality I was looking for, Catholic, family oriented, wonderful parents, a great help in the home.

Her mother came eventually to insist Bonnie take me into the lounge so we could be by ourselves. Maybe a two edged sword; first to curb Pop's monopoly of my attention and secondly to curb the racing post mortems of losses with the bookies. These little sessions of privacy did much to smooth away the sense of just being used as a convenience. The goodnights at the garden gate started to come right with fewer "You needn't bother to come back". There were times when Bonnie would remark about that garden gate, as her three married sisters had in the past preceded her at spending long farewells there. It was more like a garden bower with leafy trees forming an archway for privacy. She wondered if those trees could talk, what sentiments they could reveal! It's always a loss when romantic thoughts die because of personal doubts. Newly planted trees too take a while to get their roots into the ground.

Bonnie had a senior position where she worked at Zembas Softgoods Factory in Adelaide Road. The Zembas were Lebanese and already well established when I first

came to Wellington. Mick Zemba, a son of the proprietor was about my age, and another Lebanese, Norman Romanes, sat down one night and deplored the absence of a Lebanese Club, like the one in Dunedin. After a few ideas had been tossed around, others became interested and one was formed eventually. I discovered the Wellington Lebanese community was like the proverbial curates egg, good in parts. The enthusiasm of Norm and Mick Zemba, plus a late comer in Ned Anthony, did get a club established, and it prospered without much contribution on my part. I did attend the meetings and functions that were organised, and thoroughly enjoyed them, meeting new faces and making friends. During the time of going out with Bonnie, the Lebanese Club was doing fine. *A* ball was organised to which various well-known people were invited from Dunedin and Christchurch. I'd never considered myself a thoroughbred Lebanese but of course I was. But out of loyalty to the Club and its efforts to get it up and going I took Bonnie along with me. I enjoyed showing her off to my Southern friends. It was that uneasy time after the closing stages of the war. My sister Mary always had a very open home to anyone with a whiff of Lebanese blood in their veins. I was surprised at the numbers of them living in Wellington. Mary's hospitality was very effective in getting them to emerge from the woodwork. The Lebanese were like other people, some brash, some modest, some social climbers. Certainly the Wellington members were more into the commercial life of the city than their counterparts in Dunedin. In the post-war era this went into reverse with the younger generation showing more aptitude to enter into commercial life, setting up their own business.

After the war ended. Zernbas opened other branches, first in Wanganui and later in Inglewood. Two others in the factory, Margaret O'Connor and Kath Groves also shared senior positions at the Adelaide Street factory, taking turns in going to these branches to coach the staff and establishing them. When Bonnie and Kath were asked to go to Wanganui and help to get it going, Kath stayed on as manager. Whatever goes on among unmarried women, it is wiser that men should not be too concerned. Margaret O'Connor was the chief forewoman, Kath and Bonnie her assistants.

Bonnie and I now got engaged officially and bought a ring to prove it. We had the blessing of our friends and Bonnie's forthcoming wedding was of immense interest to her companions at work. I got the impression and feeling I was stealing one of their prize possessions. Then I was surprised to discover an element of her looking forward to leaving work despite all this. Kath Groves even went so far when setting up home in Wanganui, to offer the use of her home for our honeymoon. After begging us to see her place, we viewed it and behold it was a bedroom with two single beds. Kath had never married so we thanked her and said we would bear it in mind and let her know, after the style of professional agents, *"Don't call us, we'll call you"*. I'd set my heart on a honeymoon in New Plymouth. I had seen Pukekura Park on a previous visit when I was there to organise and run a street day appeal for the combined three Seamen's Clubs in Wellington and had made a mental note of it as an ideal venue for my honeymoon.

The Wellington City Council let us have a street day appeal every two years, and this was a combined effort by all the supporters of The Catholic Seamen's Institute, the Flying Angel and the British Sailors Society. It gave us the opportunity to fraternise after the end of the day in the Flying Angel, the headquarters of the street day appeal. Their rooms were ideal to do the counting of the booty under the supervision of bank officers.

The setting of the day for the wedding is always the brides choice I am told. Bonnie decided on January 26th in 1946. We little knew the rumpus this caused nor the (in hindsight anyway) trivial reason for it. Every friend I had, had been looking forward to the wedding day to give us a rousing send off. January the 26th

was *Wellington Cup Day* at Trentham Races. My friends could not be in two places at once. We were both assailed from all quarters to change it to the next Saturday, which we agreed. Wedding arrangements involved a lot of people who mattered. Our friends were many and try as we might we had to whittle the list down to suit our limited resources.

An elderly workmate of A Levy's Ltd, Alf McDonagh whose hobby was job printing, did the invitation cards for the wedding, and making an error in the date. *He* was very obliging about it and corrected them all. Then my father took exception to not inviting a family of cousins who had shifted up from Dunedin. None of them had been invited, Dad saying if Lizzie and family did not come nor a few others, neither would he, Alf was obliging again with more invitations. The Club insisted on running the reception in the clubrooms, so the committee were all welcome, invited or not.

Bonnie's sister Winnie and husband Phil Hinds had bought a house in Brooklyn. He was enlarging a flat underneath, but we could have the house above. We spent some happy hours furnishing it with our meagre furniture and using it as our departure point for the honeymoon. The tradition of keeping a honeymoon venue a secret is a battle of wits. So many false clues are given out that I hit on the idea if I told the truth nobody would believe it. I said we were catching the train at a certain time at the railway station. These were happy days, despite the wartime shortages lingering on. Very few people had cars and it would be ten years before I could drive and twenty-two years before we had a car of our own. Public transport was efficient and second nature for everybody to depend on to get to their destination

Saturday February the 2nd was our weeding day. Recalling this time it is incredible the changes that have taken place in ordinary living apart from essentials. In 1946, nuptial masses were celebrated in the Catholic Church 9 o'clock in the morning. Not only that but also both bride and groom fasted from food and water from midnight. Today, one hours fast is sufficient and mass can be at any hour-before 2.pm. It was Candlemas Day in the church's year, Father Frank Phillips, Bonnie's uncle was to celebrate the Nuptial Mass. We did ask Father Gascoigne to say this mass being such a close friend, but he persuaded us a priest in the family was the one for such an honour. He did agree to say a few words on the occasion. It was at his request we had Eileen Duggan also present among our guests. One wedding is like another, and I deplore the lack of photos of this one of ours, but we did have studio photos taken. The reception later was punctuated by John Clancy urging me at frequent intervals to say often in my speech, *"On behalf of my wife and I. ……* " John was put down to toast absent friends. He arose to say, *"I have been asked to toast absent friends, I wish this moment I was with them ".* My brother Jack was best man, and Bonnie's sister Eileen was bridesmaid. Of the family weddings of my two brothers and two sisters, mine was the only one we were all present. By a quirk of fate I was least at home of us all.

After the reception we went to our new home just to change and catch the train for Palmerston North for the first night. Our booking for the hotel in New Plymouth was not available till the Sunday. Being Saturday the races at Trentham were still on. In 1946 most race meetings were on Saturdays. We rang for a taxi to take us to the station and none were available, they were all out at the races waiting for the return fares. Panic set in and the only way to get to the station was by tram. We actually rushed to get ready carrying our baggage to the tram, fortunately not too far away, praying to get there on time to catch the train. Disaster!

We missed it by a few minutes. The men who turned up waiting to see us off, were still there cursing their luck at missing us. John Clancy, Tom McCabe, Jimmy McCarthy, and Stan Best were huddled together watching Jimmy warming his

hands on a dilapidated cigar burning fitfully on the platform. Seeing us they couldn't believe we'd missed the train. Stan had his car and suggested that we bundle into his car and speed off to catch the train at Paekakariki, which stopped there for refreshments. With our hearts in our mouths, Lo and behold our prayers were answered, the train was there and we had five minutes to spare. What a wonderful lot to have real friends and Guardian Angels. I remembered the reserved seat numbers only to find a couple already there. Going through my pockets the ticket reservations couldn't be found.

They too like us were young and contested our right to them. When the guard came along I told my story and he asked the squatters for their evidence to prove it was reserved, which they couldn't, so we won that round. When the guard returned I still could not find the tickets; he took my name and address, but shortly before reaching Palmerston North a boy came through selling newspapers. Putting my fingers in my fob pocket, there were the tickets, put there for easy access. Next day arriving in New Plymouth, the hotel booking was for the Monday, not Sunday. I began to think all the blessings of my married life ceased at the church door. The manager found us alternative rooms at a neighbouring hotel at no expense, when discovering it was their mistake. Safety ensconced next day in our right hotel, we came down the stairs but who should join us going into dinner, but cousin Henry and a friend there on business. The last thing we wanted was company at this stage, but Henry was diplomatic and we didn't see him again.

We were there for twelve days. I had two good friends from the Club I-wanted to call on before leaving again. I was disappointed with the first, Mary Powell. She had married a doctor and shifted out to a practice in the country. Mary and I used to play two of my favourite piano duets at the club when I was taking tuition at Dorothy Spinks studio. They were *China Doll Parade,* and *Out Vive.* The other was a priest who was one of the curates at the Buckle Street Church, Fr Dick Gilhooly. He had a fine tenor voice not only in choir, but also at the Brougham Street dances on a Saturday night, which were occasionally broadcast over 2 YA. He would sing the words to the dance music under the name of Danny Boy. Fr Gilhooly had a sadly short life as a priest incurring tuberculosis, and had to retire a few years after ordination. He returned to his home at New Plymouth. I rang him and we were invited for an evening. It was a delightful evening and Father seemed boyish and well. His parents and two sisters made us welcome, and were evidently a very musical family. The sisters played some duets for us in a semi classic vein and one of them insisted on playing *Black and White Rag* as a finale. If I remember correctly, Fr Gilhooly died within a couple of years.

Honeymoons come to and end inevitably. But all is not lost, there is the making of a home, returning to work for me, but not for my wife. Bonnie had been looking forward to leaving work and setting up home. Lots had to be done with Winnie, her sister downstairs and her husband Phil who couldn't between them do enough for us at this stage. They were ideal landlords.

There are moments in the early stages of married life that defy description. We enter this stage either with your feet on the ground, or with expectations life will be one of heavenly bliss. I was thirty, set in my ways, never with the chance of being subservient to a family experience, except in short bursts. I said before that I never knew what a family was until my own came some years later. My son in law Peter O'Dowd, who is an only child, told me his idea of a family was just him, mum, and dad. His first Christmas with us was a revelation to him, with our eight children, six married with children and in-laws as well. The following year when his parents from England were due for a visit at about the same time, Peter mooted the possibility of a repeat version. Their visit did not happen. Our big Christmas get-togethers are only every few years. Bonnie had the benefit of a full family upbringing, was twenty

-seven, and some adjustments had to be made on both sides. For sixteen years since I was fourteen, I'd sought independence in one way or another.

I started this story by stating *No man is an island.* For those sixteen years I had lived as if I was an island, and now someone else has come on the island to jolly well share it with me. The adjustments to be made required both of us to come to terms with; one to understand, the other to make the effort. Upsets did occur chiefly in my surrendering some cherished beliefs I could look after myself as I always did. Doing things for other people and letting them do it for you, was what I had to learn and found difficult. It was to take a long time. I was like a car that wanted to do all its own steering.

On one of those lovely honeymoon days in New Plymouth, we were sitting near a seat near where a street sign read David Street. Bonnie said, "/ *always dreamed of having a child called David".* Within the year David was a reality, one week before Christmas Day. While Bonnie was still in hospital Joyce Rogers was organising a tableau at the Club enacting the Christmas scene, asking me to be St Joseph. It was tenderly done on several nights, with a cave, subdued lighting, shepherds and wise men. Joyce with a voice over, recited Eileen Duggan's poem, *"A New Zealand Christmas"* For Bonnie and I, we had our own baby, David, so it was quite fitting for the time.

Many couples in these modern times start off their married life with next to nothing except themselves, and a weekly wage. Ours was no exception. The scarcity of goods in the shops was reflected in the wedding gifts. Every second gift we received was a pyrex dish. When I see some modern weddings, some begin where we oldies finish, after all the children have grown up. We were born fifty years too soon. But we had ourselves and if we had nothing else we were happy, if not contented.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN.

An extraordinary incident took place connected with my getting leave of two weeks to get married. Shortly after getting engaged, my friend Jimmy McCarthy suggested I come and work for J. J. McCaskey Ltd who were in dire need of cutters. It was worth a pound a week more, so in the interests of self and penury, I did so. While the work was not as pleasant as the one I left, at least it paid more. The manager Mr J. Fleming was genial enough, but about the same time I started working there, he engaged a Mr Bob Wilson as production manager who would be my immediate boss.

I thought a months notice of getting married was reasonable enough to seek leave, so I went to his office. Wilson was sitting behind his desk, which seemed to be part of him. He had horn-rimmed glasses the type executives favoured, listened quietly to me asking for two weeks off to get married, his eyes not leaving the pad in front of him. I waited for his reply. He went over the dates on a calendar beside him. Wrote a few words still not making any effort at eye contact, nor offering congratulations or his hand in fellowship. Then he made the following statement:

"Well, so far as I can see, there seems no objection, but should it not be possible, 1 would expect you to make other arrangements".

Then he looked at the door indicating that would be all. I was to have two further encounters with Bob Wilson, after I was married. Wilson was not popular with some of the staff. All the men, about a dozen of us were asked one day to meet the manager Mr Fleming in the lunch room after work to have a few drinks, and hear of some matters he wanted to discuss. We all trooped in full of curiosity, perhaps our wages were going to be doubled - or even trebled.

Bob Wilson was standing beside him looking into his glass of beer. He looked so meek and mild, and no wonder.

Fleming stated he had heard there was whispering compaign against Bob Wilson, which he wanted stopped. This man was appointed to step up production and smooth the way for the production plant to grow. After all we were men, and if there was any grouching about his methods, then to front up like men and settle the problem. I nudged Morton a fellow cutter saying I was going to ask Wilson to speak up in his own defence and not hide behind his manager. Morton said better not. Wilson was standing there miserably staring at his half empty glass, not looking a bit defiant; in fact looking sheepish. He never said a word. Fleming told us he stood behind Wilson and expected us to do so too. The firm of J.J. McCaskey specialised in waterproof clothing and tent making. He wanted the firm to be the best in the country with our help.

One day Wilson called Morton and I into his office to say he wanted to design a new waterproof overcoat with raglan style sleeves. Each of us to submit a sample and whichever was the better would be chosen for production. But it was to be our own effort and no one elses, it would bear the J.J. McCaskey label. We had a couple of weeks to do this in addition to our regular work. Morton had his done in three days. He also did overtime with Matheson Minster Suits, where he had worked previously. I was struggling away with pattern designs and was hardly off the ground. One of the junior cutters told me Morton took a copy of a Matheson Minister pattern. This made me angry. Without saying anything I withdrew from the contest. When Wilson requested my submission I said I wasn't giving one. We argued for a while but felt telling the truth seemed petty. Finally he said to me I must have a reason. When I did tell him that Morton had pinched the pattern from Matherson Minster and claiming it as his own, Wilson then had the effrontery to commend Morton for enterprise and ingenuity. I told him it was deceitful. He said, "not at all". Next Friday payday, I was given a weeks wages in lieu of notice and dismissed. My first dismissal as a newly married man, and not a good start.

When I arrived home, I was about to tell my new wife who was getting dinner ready, about losing my job, when I saw Bill Cassidy and Austin Levy walking down the path. They said they'd heard about me losing my job and came to ask would I like to start on Monday back at A Levy's Ltd. We were

flabbergasted at the sudden reversal of bad news to good news. Bill Cassidy had always been one of my closest mates in the cutting room. I had roomed with a brother of his in Brooklyn for a brief period of the early years of my piano tuition, previous to shifting to Mrs. Pemberton. The staff at Levy's welcomed me back, but for my sins I was taken back at ten shillings less in wages from what McCaskeys had given me.

Fifteen months later in 1948 a daughter was born, Teresa, and two years later Kathleen another daughter. Kathleen was unexpected and caused a little stress when it was known for certain. Bonnie was a bit upset but as it turned out Kathleen was the catalyst to stop me from drifting along in a steady low paid job. My commitment to the club activities, as well as working overtime to augment a slim wage, and the Holy Family Confraternity meant I was not home in the evening as much as a mother of three children deserved. During the dying years of 1949, and the early part of 1950, the job market was alive and thriving. There were jobs galore and a lot of poaching went on among firms trying to get staff.

I was tempted with and accepted another job at two pounds a week more, as it cut out the necessity to work overtime. Bob Kidd had a small factory of no more than a dozen employees, but he had a lucrative connection with the Rugby Union, making blazers for the All Blacks over many years, as well as the All Black leisure clothing for social engagements while on tour. I was quite happy there for a year or

so when another tempting offer came to work for my ex bookie Aussie Richards. I used to cut for Aussie on a temporary basis in a little factory in Kilbirnie. Aussie had a contract for children's ware with a local warehouse and he decided to shift his factory to Levin where the labour market was not so tight. I was offered a more agreeable home in Levin to rent that was coming available within a few weeks and of course another increase in wages. This suited us both, as we both liked Levin. So I agreed to go and board, while Bonnie went to live with her mother with the three little ones until the house in Levin became vacant. It suited us for a further reason that Winnie and Phil had finished updating the flat downstairs and wanted to sell the property. We had no desire to hold the sale up. Meantime I was to return home at weekends.

Aussie had given away the bookmaking but his wife took it on, and she was not willing to shift. They had a comfortable home opposite Kilbirnie Park. He would bring me back on a Friday, and collect me on the Monday. The only reason we endured these arrangements, was the promise of a home and work in a smaller town. I boarded with an Italian lady who limped as a result of polio in her younger days. She had another boarder who worked with an oil company who introduced us to the marvels of detergent, which was coming onto the market. The introduction of detergent to the market in the early stages was restricted to petrol stations. The surname of my landlady escapes me, all I remember is it rhymed with Liguoiy, but we called her Esther by request. She gave me breakfast and dinner at night Monday to Friday. The other boarder was good company for her reserved nature.

One weekend Aussie went home, his wife told him she had been robbed of a fair amount of money and had the police in. On the way back on Monday, Aussie confided he suspected she'd lost the money on a bet and feigned the robbery as a cover-up.

In 1949 the general election resulted in the defeat of the Labour Government, which was to have far reaching effects on our life. The National party had been in the wilderness for 14 years, and they were keen to put a few things right as soon as possible. One of the burning issues on the hustings was the housing policy, which was very protective of wage earners and their rental conditions. Landlords who owned rental houses, could not evict tenants to gain higher rent without securing alternative accommodation that was moreover, to be suitable to the tenant The weeks were going by and no sign of the house we were promised. One of the early bills passed by the new Government was called the Land Sales Act. This virtually gave the upper hand to landlords to evict tenants should they wish to sell their houses. The house we were promised was put on the market, with no hope of ever getting it to rent.

Houses were available to buy, rental homes were very scarce. I called on the parish priest who had a friend with a house at Waitarere Beach, who was willing to rent it out. It was a nice house but at the end of a road right close to the beach. A bit isolated but at least we were all together. At the end of the first week after moving in, Bonnie felt the loneliness and isolation depressing. It was some distance to the shops and the gravel road not much soothing to push a pram with a baby. Necessity is the mother of inspiration they say, so Bonnie on the trip to the shops one-day made inquiries about alternative places to rent, near the shops and nearer to people. The isolation was getting her down with me leaving early in the morning and getting home in the dark. She found one place that had been made a flat that had previously been a garage. But we had neighbours now, and a small enclosed yard David and Tess could play in safely. We made friends immediately, or rather the children attracted them.

The new landlady Mary Cameron, and Mr Wood a friend of hers couldn't do enough for the family now come to live in their flat. Waitarere Beach was famous for

its toheroas, and we lived lavishly on toheroa fritters cooked by another Mary in my life (Mary Cameron), and garden fresh vegetables grown by Mr Wood.

It was late summer when we arrived and the months were edging into the winter season. Work was agreeable and when I had some spare time I had a machine at the factory making our children's clothes like bib overalls and winter coats. I even managed to make a dinner suit for Bonnie's brother Joe before he sailed to England to play rugby league for Bradford Northern. Everything was fine but the shortcomings of the flat were beginning to show. The ceiling was unlined and one very frosty night, the condensation on the ceiling began dripping on us in bed. Despite the friendliness of people taking care of the children, and little gifts of food, better accommodation for the sake of the children was fast becoming a problem. Kathleen would be about nine months old when one night after all had gone to bed, I was up late reading the Evening Post newspaper, when I espied an advertisement in the situations vacant columns, for a cutter paying *thirteen pounds a week* in Greymouth. For the past ten years I had mixed with dozens of West Coasters, I felt I'd met half the population of Greymouth at least.

As I got into bed later I said to Bonnie,

"Guess what! I've written after a job in Greymouth." She thought this was a better time for sleeping than these funny notions. "Go to sleep" was her advice. Next morning I took the letter and posted it in the Levin Post Office. I thought of a verse, as I heard the letter drop down.

The moving finger writes; and having writ,
Moves on: nor all thy piety or wit,
shall lure it back to cancel half a line,
Nor all thy tears wash out a word of it.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Any expectation of a reply of my letter to Mr Dalefield in Greymouth was not high. True, the labour market made it easy to apply for jobs, especially for anyone with a trade at his fingertips. I had learned to draft patterns for menswear and had the tools necessary. The tools were basic, consisting of a calibrated square, a trouser stick, a pair of shears a tape measure, and some chalk. Not many trades could boast of so few tools. To improve my skills, the addition of subscribing to an English monthly magazine *The Tailor & Cutter,* became my second Bible. Not only providing drafts of patterns for the latest trends in men's fashion, but also occasionally, women's outerwear as well.

The clothing trade has two classes of cutters, stock and chart cutters. I was a fully fledged chart cutter by now after eleven years in the trade. Stock cutters cut from patterns supplied, while a chart cutter cuts from measures taken of a customer. However, many times adjustments were made from stock patterns. I could, fit, and make adjustments to the clients figures, whether they were erect, stooping, round, square or sloping shoulders, flat or prominent seats. In the days of which I write, made to measure suits were in high demand. Nowadays, suits are much more off the hook, great improvements made in the making and supplying suits designed for various figures, short or tall, stout or slim, as well as in between.

The work I was doing for Aussie Richards was only a stopgap. Boys and children's outer wear for a few warehouses specialising in these were plainly bread and butter, the only chance to get some jam on it would be rare. I had lots of spare time, and used it to gain experience with sewing machines, doing alterations off the street for the odd customer, making patterns to replace the tatty ones that Aussie had obtained from lord knows where. Better housing, small town economy, and

promises of better economic conditions in the future was all I was killing time for. Now that the bottom of the promised house had fallen through, my sights just had to be raised.

About four days after posting the letter for the Greymouth job, a gentleman came into my place of work, said his name was Basil Dalefield, and where could we go and have a talk. He suggested the pub over the road, so excusing myself to Aussie, we went to the hotel lounge. From the very outset of our talk he gave me the impression I wouldn't be turning the job down. Dalefield was stout, medium height, and of a mien unmistakably Jewish. Briefly, he explained that he had owned three shops in Nelson, Westport, and Greymouth. The Westport shop had closed, sold to Bert Chamberlain who converted the rear premises to a clothing factory, but retaining the shop. They had an agreement Westport was too small for two shops. but to make the suits for the Dalefield shops in Nelson and in Greymouth.

Between Dalefield and Chamberlain, they farmed the whole of the West Coast among themselves, stocking readymade wear, and also canvassed the area for the made to measure suits. Between the two of them, they had agreed to get the services of a chart cutter and share the cost of his wages, and if necessary pay for his shift down to Greymouth where the facilities were better. But as it turned out later, Dalefield's secret plan was to get rid of the incumbent Greymouth manager there, and the cutter could do both jobs. I would also do the expert cutting for Chamberlain that was beyond his expertise. Following on Westport being too small to support two shops they agreed to farm out the West Coast area between them. Bert wanted a district around the town including a defined area including Reefton for himself, and Basil could have the rest of the West Coast from Nelson down as far as Whataroa and beyond. I was willing to try and give it a go, agreeing on a weekly wage of thirteen pounds.

I would travel down on my own and stay initially in Nelson and be briefed by the manager there as to the details of the job. Then Mr Dalefield would meet me at Westport airport, stay overnight with him and drive down to Greymouth, where a brand new unit flat was being finished to rent, subject to accepting the position. Mentioning the fact of my wife and three children and shifting them down later, I held off any decision pending acceptance of the job. I elected to pay my own way down as far as Westport so to be under no obligation. The wages were to be thirteen pounds a week. Agreeing on that, we shook hands.

My first experience of the West Coast in 1950 was everybody travelled by air where possible. The fares were very competitive with the normal rate. First Bonnie and I had to discuss the feasibility of acceptance or rejection. I suppose the overriding factor to consider was our present housing problem which was unsatisfactory for three children, the youngest Kathleen at five months, still at the nursing stage. We were only in the fifth year of our marriage, still living on the weekly wage, with no bank account. After much consideration, we decided to give it a go. Bonnie and the children were to go to her mother in Wellington and await developments, while I went down to size up the prospects. Also see the premises promised for renting.

Arriving in "Sunny Nelson" for the first time, having for years been brain washed with its "*sunny*" appellation, I was disappointed to find it raining, and gloomily overcast. The sun was not to shine that first day. But I found the premises of *BASIL DALEFIELD, Men's Outfitters,* and introduced myself to the manager. The premises were very nice and I was impressed with the layout. The manager, who seemed slightly nervous, but was quite forthcoming to all my questions. He was about my age and had been headhunted for his present job from the main opposition in the city. The shop did not carry mercery lines to any degree. I was mainly interested in what patterns he used, and whether I was to be the only chart

cutter employed. I saw the patterns and was not too impressed. He was a very basic cutter, but suspected Bert Chamberlain also struggled with this problem. A set of these patterns were in Greymouth too, he said. I was looking forward with some trepidation to them. Basil Dalefield had worked for Schneideman's in Wellington, and I was familiar with their reputation. They specialised in navy blue and sombre tones judging by their shop windows in the Capital city. Basil was a bit more progressive, giving the customer his preference in the post war period of gayer colours and cloths.

Dalefield's wife Alma, made me welcome to Westport, and had a nice home. We didn't talk shop that first evening. I mused on the fact of being embroiled with Jewish folk so much since coming to the North Island. I mused on the fact I was here still fraternising with Jewish people in my working life, though I don't know whether Alma was Jewish too. Dad who was still alive since my sister Mary's marriage to a Jew turned Christian, by the grace of God, managed to get reconciled to the idea, after returning from Australia. He must have stayed in Australia for at least four years. After my marriage in 1946, Dad made trips to Wellington visiting and staying with each of us. He and Lou, his Jewish son in law started to get on fairly well. Mary had the knack of being able to twist Dad "round her little finger" as the saying goes.

I was taken to meet Bert Chamberlain at his shop and factory, which was pretty modest to what I had been used to at A Levy Ltd. Bert never stopped entirely working, during the brief visit, though he seemed affable enough otherwise. There were a few machinists, about four, and the same number of table hands. A lot of handwork went into his tailored suits, and I must say I admired their skills in handmade buttonholes, and basting techniques. Bert was cutter, trimmer, and presser, and general dogsbody as well as attending to his customers assisted by his only son. I think everybody knew everybody in Westport. They even had their own newspaper. I met the papers sole journalist, a huge specimen of a man. I didn't envy cutting a suit for him.

Friday was the day we were to go to Greymouth. We were soon to find out that Greymouth was in the grip of rugby fever. Nay! The whole of the West Coast was gripped. The Saturday following was the final of the Seddon Shield to be played in Greymouth. Our intention was to stay in a hotel overnight. Of course every hotel in the place for miles around was booked out. The 100 kilometre Coast Road we had just driven over, was not one to do twice in one day to get a nights sleep . After much frantic search telephoning, we discovered a hotel with a vacant shared bedroom in Ngahere 34k distant. A case of any port in a storm we mused. My expenses were met on this occasion by Basil Dalefield. Everyone we met with was in the grip of the big football match and even I was interested in the rugby clash. I was to find that Basil Dalefield never had the slightest inkling of the passion, sporting events had in the district or anywhere else.

The big moment arrived when I first saw the shop premises where my future, perhaps would lie. It was beyond expectations, situated in the heart of the business area, an impressive recessed entrance between display windows, thirteen of them. The interior was large with display racks and modest shelving. A screened recess against one wall was to be my working area. The manager was another Basil; Basil Mettrick. I imagined myself a real gentleman's tailor in such surroundings, hobnobbing with the owners and managers of all the shops in the central business area. I decided all this could be mine, toying with the expectation.

The next big consideration was the accommodation problem. Before my arrival Dalefield had done some scouting around, and had interviewed a builder who was nearly completing a building of three semi-detached three bedroom units distant about two miles. This gave rise to the question of transport between home and

work. No buses, but Dalefield had a bicycle he would give me, which proved to be ideal in the end. It was a Raleigh with gears, a speedo and a carrier. A good strong edition, much better than any I'd ever had before. We went out to view the place which at that time was already occupied by two families. The grounds were not groomed as yet. On the adjoining section a large building was in the course of erection. I decided the job was mine, sealing our fate. The cost of bringing our meagre furniture from Wellington was confirmed between Chamberlain and Dalefield, subject to my staying a reasonable amount of time before going off somewhere else.

Phone calls and letters of instruction to friends to assist Bonnie with the onerous duties of shifting while I coped with my new job was beyond belief. As soon as the meagre furniture arrived Bonnie was to follow on the Lyttleton ferry. Our good friend Jimmy McCarthy, who worked as a steward on the interisland ferry, volunteered to handle the part of assisting Bonnie aboard with the three children, David, Tess, and infant Kathleen. I was to meet the other Basil that day, Basil Mettrick who managed the Greymouth shop. His only qualification was as salesman and manager, but no skills in tailoring as such. He was a pleasant well groomed fair haired young fellow about 23 years. He had been a salesman since leaving school in the footwear trade of Hannahs, and was to remain a life long friend to the present day.

I was pleasantly surprised at the size of the shop, and the range of ready made suits on display. Situated right in the heart of the shopping centre, flanked on one side by an electrical firm, and a stairway entrance to offices upstairs on the other. Over the street was the leading department store Trumans. It was a huge place for such limited lines as menswear without mercery lines. The other main tailoring business in the town was Wally Messenger's, only a tenth of the size. Another well publicised menswear shop, Alf Harrison's, would be one of the smallest shop of its kind I've ever seen. Alf carried everything for menswear. He was well known for his ability to appease his customers when any goods ordered, but had not arrived on time. The goods were "*on the way," "just waiting to be unpacked," "be here tomorrow*". His list of excuses were notorious.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Life in a new town is similar to growing up, places and people need adjusting. to. Basil Mettrick, whom I'll allude to as *young Basil* in future, was a tower of strength in the following weeks. Underlying his friendliness, was a strong prejudice against his employer, feeling that after a while he would be dismissed, as I got to grips with the job. He was a Cobden lad, his family still there, and in a period of a few days, I had met his family, three brothers and two sisters . I remember it was the whitebait season. Young Basil took me out in a dinghy to his spot to catch some. Taking the oars was hopeless for me but second nature to him. Summer was nearly upon us which was rather fortuitous, as one of those extraordinary climatic changes took place. All that summer Greymouth and the West Coast had a drought with endless sunshine, while Canterbury were having floods. Some residents were reduced to even buying water for necessities, almost unheard of.

Our furniture duly arrived, it was time to journey to Lyttleton to meet Bonnie and the three children on the ferry. Our good friend Jimmy McCarthy met me and led me to their cabin where two year old Tess proudly showed me the hand basin she had been sick into, during the night. Then the short journey to Christchurch to have breakfast and catch the train to Greymouth. The children didn't eat anything despite the waitresses using their wiles to do so. Afterwards as we were making our

way to the carriage further along the station, the two waitresses caught up with us with some money to return to us, because I'd paid for the children's breakfast. They said they'd never eaten anything, so why pay? This was a good introduction to South Island ways of fair play. Having three young children seemed to draw folks attention to render friendly assistance to this family, making their way around.

The year of 1950 was a glorious summer, and some of the many contacts I had made in the preceding years of West Coast people, Greymouth in particular, I was keen to renew. The camaraderie I had anticipated being continued did not eventuate. True enough, I did meet up with two, but we all had our lives mapped out, and I found out that new neighbours are easily made, and young married couples like us with little children, new job, new home etc, was enough to fill the day without chasing will-'o'- the-wisps of past acquaintances. None of the children were of school age yet, that drama was yet to happen. Everybody was friendly, and children of the other people in the street soon had new playmates. Casual references by everybody to the *barber* were intriguing, and the word was bandied about in conversation. I was told I'd meet him soon enough. The winter was the time he was at his best, as I soon found out riding my Raleigh bike to work. The *barber* was a cold wind that came down the Grey river in the mornings just before sunrise, was so keen it went through, rather than round you. It was so cold. It must have come directly from the Arctic and Antarctic combined. It was not unusual for rime to form on ones clothing riding the bike.

I had no trouble coping with the work that came my way. The cutting of the suits that Basil Dalefield collected on his travels down the West Coast well exceeded the ones that came into the shop off the street. As months went by Basil Mettrick's fears of losing his job to me were worsening, and not helped by the feelings his employer was devious. This antagonism in fact, I had full sympathy with. In fact, realising there was some foundation to young Basil's feelings seemed to deepen our friendship. The diplomat in me in playing ducks and drakes with the two Basils, was made much easier by Dalefield living in Westport and not in Greymouth, as he never stayed overnight. The time came when I was put in charge and given the authority to take over the management of the shop as well.

Young Basil was offered a job more in keeping with his abilities and personality, as a commercial traveller for Godfrey Phillips, a tobacco firm. He was provided with a car covering the whole of the West Coast. He landed on his feet as it were, and being a smoker myself at the time, was an occasional recipient of his wares.

As winter approached cycling to work, I was favoured with the "***barber***". *A*pproaching near the river, enduring the intensity of the wind that cut though you rather than around you I arrived those mornings for work frozen. The remedy to get warm was cleaning the windows, as nearly the thirteen of them as time could allow. After opening up, the managers of the adjacent shops sweeping the paths outside their doorways, would linger long enough to exchange a few observations with each other, and chat about the burning topics of the day. The advent of TV was still ten years away, but the local topics concerned the weather, sporting events, and politics. Life this side of the Southern Alps and Cook Strait, was a different world. It would take a few more years to be called a West Coaster. The friendliness though was enough to feel at home.

As our first West Coast Christmas drew near, the children were getting excited and expectant as well. Getting acclimatised was exciting for their parents as well. We'd go for walks on the long balmy evenings and weekends. When the forty hour week became a reality, the weekends left families with young children, to find time to spend with them as well as the many chores of settling down in a new home. Going for walks was nearly always fruitful; we seldom returned home as empty as

when we left. We'd chat to gardeners about their garden, and given cuttings or plants to take home. David had turned four, Tess would be three in three months, and Kathleen was still in a pram. On occasions we'd arrive home to find a large jar of whitebait on the back doorstep. Don and Polly who lived next door had two children, while in the rear unit were the Harris's. Mr Harris managed the local branch of a Christchurch drapers. Don was a miner in one of the coalmines. Miners were allowed a ton of coal each month, so Don would now and then give us his alternate months supply. A few houses along the street Trevor Jones who worked for a local mill, and his supply of free firewood often landed on our lawn as well. The wood often was the home of wetas and huhu bugs. The latter were harmless unless you stood on one, then the stink was overpowering.

Being a shop manager for the first time, gave me duties in addition to cutting out suits. Handling the money and banking with a trading bank was all new to me. The Post Office Savings Bank was my only connection with the financial world. Wages were paid by cheque. In handling the money customers paid, I found my experience with this side of commercial life had been sadly lacking. It was quite exhilarating to receive money instead of parting with it. Then the commercial travellers became another experience, selling not only woollen fabrics, but advertising, bargains in the liquor trade, books from wholesalers, insurances, plus a host of others. One learnt to fob most of these off onto the shop owner. Dalefield at the start would pay a weekly visit from the early days, and certainly left me free to manage affairs as they arose. In the early months we were once invited as a family to stay a weekend at my employers in their Westport home. We had the impression they would have liked to have had children, and once confidentially Basil asked me for the recipe!

When young Basil left, the nature of the business changed with my expertise for the job. Adjustments to made to measure suits and alterations, had been done in Westport by Bert Chamberlain, these delays had their drawbacks. Dalefield heard about an immigrant Irish tailor in Australia looking for a job in New Zealand. He thought it would be a good idea to engage him and he would make suits and do repairs and alterations. There was plenty of space in the rest of the rooms to the rear of the showroom. Dalefield wrote and got an acceptance so we prepared an advertising campaign to generate some public interest in Basil Dalefield Tailors. This took the form of scatter ads in the local paper, The Grey River Argus like *Who is Jimmy Lanigan? Why is he coming to Greymouth.* I was quite chuckled with this as my first foray into the advertising business. This was followed by *Jimmy Lanigan is coming soon. What will he be doing?* This went on for a month, and young Jimmy Lanigan duly arrived with his young wife, and took up residence. He was shortish and slim in a wiry sort of way, a typical tailor who sat cross legged in the traditional style of the bespoke tailor, stitching by hand. He was equally adept at women's tailoring, his wife testifying to his expertise. Clearly he was a natural, and we complemented each other. He was hopeless as a cutter, as I was hopeless as a stitcher. Lanigan said another hand would ease his work so a female hand was engaged to not only help him but make the tea and run messages.

The highlights of Greymouth of the three years we spent there were not many, but as an experience of life I was glad of it. The birth of a fourth sibling was one; Noel arrived amid a lot of support from our neighbours in the way of baby sitting, the use of their phones. Within an hour of Noel's arrival, I had him in my arms and he sneezed to my amazement. Maternity procedures in the '50's had mothers stay in hospital generally about two weeks. Not like these times for just one or two days. Another experience new to me was an escape from being convicted of being on licensed premises. One night, Don from next door suggested he and I go to the pictures. Being so used to the pictures starting at 8 PM I was surprised when he

called just before 7 PM. I thought this was a bit early, but he explained this was the usual thing as we drove off in his car. In town I was taken into Revington's hotel for a few beers, on the local understanding going to the pictures this was a West Coast custom. Perhaps a few beers before going to the pictures was a sure way of enhancing the film in case it was a dud.

It was pleasant enough but after a few drinks bells started ringing. Then the lights went out. My hand was grabbed, "follow me" was shouted in my ear, we ran along some passages till we were out in the daylight again. This was my first taste of after hours drinking on the Coast, notorious for this flouting of the law. Those were the days of six o'clock closing all over the country Many hotels flouted this law, in peril of having to close down. When the bells rang, this told us the police were making a raid, but the truth was the police knew about the after hours, and only raided either on a prearranged warning plan, or by a protest from the anti-liquor brigade, or some wife wowser whose dinner was getting cold.

David our eldest child started school there, much to his objection, that for some reason we, his loving parents could not understand. At only five, he with a few others in the immediate neighbourhood, were taken daily in Minty Curtis's grocery van. While the other children piled in, David screaming had to be physically thrown in with his vocal protests fading away as the van took off. This harrowing experience went on for a week or so and was exhausting for us. He knew Minty well enough and would go to the shop with his sister Tess.

When the long reign of 14 years of a Labour government, came to an end in 1949, the newly formed National Party took over. In 1951 the Waterfront Strike progressed in intensity, involving the support of other unions. The waterfront strike was to last 151 days, with the new prime minister Sid Holland, and the union as protagonists, ended up with the calling of a snap election. After being in Greymouth for this period of unrest, the country's economy began to struggle, with the worm of industrial unrest creeping through. The snap election firmed the government's position. But businesses began to get nervous and Dalefield's was no exception. Bert Chamberlain had made overtures to get me to work for him, with no loss of wages. Dalefield's excursions to Westland were getting less results, the shop lease was due for renewal, and I was sounded out what would I do if it didn't. Several months were still to run, I suggested I do a quick trip to Wellington, size up the prospects and make up my mind on my return.

Meantime before all this, Noel our fourth child had entered the world on 2nd January 1953. The quick trip to Wellington was disappointing with nothing to fire me up. Back in Greymouth, the die was cast to close up Dalefield's in Greymouth, and either take up the Chamberlain offer and shift to Westport - a prospect that didn't immediately appeal - or try for another local job. On the week before the closure, one of the tenants upstairs, an insurance salesman for The Provident Life said he heard I was leaving, would I like to sell insurance. Thinking this would save having to shift, I said I'd try it out anyway. These were the days of what was called Industrial Insurance when a choice of maturity or life policy was taken for moderate sums from 100 pounds or a 1,000 pounds for as little as 2 shillings or half a crown payable fortnightly, weekly even. Looking back the lapsed policies for some companies, must have added up to more than petty cash. The company also had a sickness and accident policy which when I started was my first sale. This was to the fellow cutting my hair.

The collection of the weekly and fortnightly premiums started out at Blackball. Transport to the villages was still of the pioneering style. Horse, bike, or by car if you had one. I forget how I got there or returned. Door knocking is not my forte, but the collection of dues and entering the cards as paid, seemed so futile. Streets were not marked. Everybody knew each other. There was something appealing about

rural life, but these were miners not farmers, to which I could respond to on familiar terms. No men about, only women and children. One miner told me as I was fitting him for a suit once that he'd taken part in forty strikes, they'd never won any except one on a safety issue. There were better ways than striking, he commented - as an after thought - of the recent strike.

Insurance was not for me. Bert Chamberlain was pleased to get me, he insisted I board with him and wife Rose till I got some place to stay. From the beginning Bert went out of his way to make things easy at the start. I was introduced to most of his customers, though he did most of the fittings. It is difficult to call the tune when someone pays your wages, and I'd preferred to do the measuring taking notes of the figure. The patterns were dreadful, I was given a free hand to make new ones. There never was enough work to keep me going, so any alterations were left to me, though the Dalefield orders kept rolling in. A sewing machine was at my disposal, invisible mending of a sort tried as well. On one of Bert's monthly visits to Reefton on a Saturday I was asked to come along. Arriving, the place seemed deserted. First call was to the pub, Maisie the owner said the local golf tournament was on. Golf was the local obsession winter and summer and all days in between. Enough folks were around who were untouched by golf to pass the time away, but barren for business. Reefton is proud, that at a nearby location called Blackwater, was New Zealand first hydro electrical generator. Goes to show not all pioneering achievements are confined to heavily populated areas.

My thoughts during these early Westport days would frequently revert to Bonnie and young Noel, and how soon we could be together again. Bert allowed me plenty of latitude to do some house hunting. The local auctioneer dabbled in this type of business, and became well disposed to my wants. One particular house with a half acre section with two street entrances, owned by an elderly lady Mrs Tennant, was keen to sell, and only wanted a 100 pounds deposit. She may as well asked for the moon, but when I told Bert this, he reached into his hip pocket and said, "Here's a hundred quid. Take it." Flabbergasted would put it mildly. Thought all my Christmas's had come at once.

I went through the motions of buying a house for the first time in my life, put down the deposit, took out a bank mortgage, the friendly bank manager Mr Yeoman advising to take out a mortgage insurance policy as well. I then sat down and wrote the news to Bonnie. She tells me she was over the moon with the news and read the letter 100 times, pinching herself it was real. A house of our own!

In these early days on Sundays I made myself known to the parish priest Fr Phelan, Irish to the bone, a Maynooth seminary export, with all the traditions of that institution. His curate, Father Cuminsky a similar Maynooth export but much later, was as meek as his pastor was seemingly autocratic. Yet great harmony existed between them. Fr Phelan bowed to the special qualities of his curate in moral judgements, which I was later to bear witness of a thorny question (for me) of right and wrong.

Settling in to our own home was the thrill of a lifetime. From a semi detached unit of 3 bedrooms, a kitchen-cum-dining room-lounge, washhouse, toilet, bathroom all squeezed together, to a 4 bedroom larger house with all separate areas, our meagre belongings floated in space. Everybody wanted to help us, not only neighbours, but the commercial area as well. Noel was the baby and the centre of interest. Westport was to be the place where my life was to do a turn around in a few minor but lasting ways. The Holy Name Society was strong at St Canice's Church, being the name of the convent school. The Mercy nuns had a novitiate here and the Catholics were strongly represented. Being a Holy Name man already, it was just a matter of taking my place with them. In a few months I was elected to their Council, which was held monthly in the presbytery, and always ended up

socially with a cup of tea. One of the members Laurie Cocker one night when we were walking home together asked me, if I'd ever thought of joining the Hibernian Society. To me, these were the fellows who wore sashes at various functions of the church like carrying the canopy during processions of the Blessed Sacrament, or attending to liturgical ceremonial functions. Laurie pointed out the benefits to the family for their medical needs, like free doctor visits, prescription charges etc. I was persuaded to join up before I reached a certain age, while the charges of joining were most beneficial.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Joining up with the Hibernians was one of the best things in my life. In addition to being on the Holy Name Council, monthly lodge meetings of the Hibernian Society, put me in contact with the Catholic Community at large. Fr Phelan took his parish seriously visiting everybody once a year. Mostly seeking funds, but in our case, when things were pretty tight, we were on the receiving end when he gave us thirty pounds instead. Our Irish friends in Wellington hadn't forgotten us and visits from Tom McCabe with young Phillip my five year old Godson, John Clancy, Margaret O'Connell were special occasions. One of the committee members at the Club, Gerry Molyneux had arranged with Tom McCabe to visit the Denniston Coalmine while in Westport. Gerry had an uncle who was a long time foreman at the Denniston mine This proved to be an unforgettable experience. The size of the mine beggars belief.

To get to the mine you enter a cage at the foot of a steep hill, on a rail line that carries you to the top of the hill. There's a double rail line you may pass trucks of coal coming down. At the entrance you get fitted with those miners caps bearing a carbide lamp, and join one of the many railway coal carriages drawn by horses into the depths. The horses stay underground the whole year living in total darkness, except during the Christmas holidays, when they are brought out to feed themselves. The foreman Gerry's uncle, who was leading us, kept up his patter with historical details explaining the parts of the mine that had been exhausted. Others closed off that were on fire, but contained to burn themselves out. One of them the Sullivan mine has been burning for seven years. Most of the coal is blasted from the seam face, and we were treated to a demonstration. Holes bored strategically at varying points, plugged up with explosive, then all take shelter while set off. Young Phillip McCabe who was with us was asked would he like to set the blast off. "Too Right" he said. The transformer was put in front of him, the plunger drawn at the ready and down it went followed by the blast. The feeble lighting from our lamps only emphasised the drama for us. Trucks, horses and men would emerge ghostlike from the murky darkness and likewise fade away.

Tom with his Irish frankness commented later being deeply impressed with the camaraderie among the miners, and would not have minded joining them. About a year or so in the life of St Canices in Westport, and taking an interest in parish affairs, I began to detect an underground group of parishioners who would seize any newcomer to start a move for improvement in the parish. The monthly meetings in the presbytery gave access to the feelings of the parish priest on their activities. My naivety nearly caught me unawares when some strong feelings expressed for the need of a Catholic Secondary school, of which there was none in Westport. Little by little the progressive underground group came out in the open, and I agreed to lead a delegation to the Parish Priest to plead their cause. Being new and brash, I joined in and supported the cause. Of course Fr Phelan raised the spectre of finance and not only getting a school off the ground but the continuance of the project once

established. None knew better than him, the strength of the parish financially. From a *cause celebre* it became a lost one.

Meanwhile, the work for Bert Chamberlain at the end of two years became thinner and I had difficulty in being fully occupied. With all the range of his suit patterns made, alterations done by me, the times came when there was nothing to do. I began to get the idea after discovering that his popularity in the town was such that some people didn't come to his shop. The main Men's Outfitters owned by the two Dellaca brothers sowed a seed that was to grow, which appealed to me.

"Look Bert," I said one day, "what say you pay half my wages, I'll take off on my own and start up a repairs only, still do all your cutting, and you concentrate on the suits. I'll even do any alterations you send to help out." Contrary to expectations he agreed. I set up in a building shared by a local lawyer, and an optician who came over once a month regularly for a few days. The lawyer A.A. Craig was incidentally the secretary for the Hibernian Society, and was also the lawyer who handled the transaction when we bought the house from Mrs Tennant. I ran a daily scatter advert in the local newspaper daily for a few weeks, then a weekly one. I canvassed the shops and did quite well initially. The only major items required were a sewing machine and a tailors iron. Sometimes the work was enough to hire a casual hand.

Gradually I was pressed to make suits by those acquaintances and others who patronised battlers in the work force. Those range of patterns hanging in Chamberlains workroom I thought were not necessary and could very well hang in mine, as after all I was still doing his cutting for him. Trying to do this, met with Bert's strong opposition, declaring they were not mine. They'd replaced the ones he had and they were lawfully his. I was to "*damn well leave them there."* This miffed me and I left them. On second thoughts, the time he lent me the money to buy the house, and the kindness shown me in the initial stages of my employment came back to haunt me. The ownership of the patterns I felt were done to improve the efficiency of his business done in the time there was no work for me otherwise. I still felt cheated in some way, and my conscience prickled me uncertainly.

Taking my problem to Fr Phelan, he listened carefully and said his curate Fr Cumiskey was very knowledgeable on these moral decisions; he'll get him to adjudicate on the matter. After some discussion, Fr Cumiskey came down in favour of Bert. "Clearly, " he said, "anything done while in his employment, whether initiated by him or me, was the property of the employer, not the employee." This moral judgement I had to accept, and as time passed was reconciled to it. The natural course to take was make the best of the situation. I didn't lack work and we had to part company, and took on all the work I could get. Jimmy Lanigan now living in Christchurch, working for himself, sent me his suits for cutting out which I continued to do for many years afterwards even when I left Westport. I secured the services of a firm in Christchurch meanwhile make the suits I had orders for.

On the home front, another child was on the way to add to the family. This was due three years after Noel was born, and would make five of a family. Living in the same town as Basil Dalefield, we became quite friendly. He and his wife Alma were off on a holiday and wanted to know if we would mind his goat while away. For our four young children, we thought this would be a bit of fun for them. This pure white goat Basil had found as a kid on one of his travels, and took it home to graze his lawn instead of having to mow it when his electric lawnmower broke down. Our own lawn covered the best part of an acre and anything to mitigate this chore would be welcome. At this stage two of our neighbours joined in a proposition of buying a motormower between the three of us which by this time was a going concern.

Mr Havill the local grocer just across the road, was outside his shop one day enjoying the sun, and witnessed one of the most hilarious episodes of his life. Our house was well back from the road with a very large expanse of lawn in front. The

recently acquired goat had broken loose of its tether and Bonnie, quite pregnant was trying to catch it. Each time it was within reach it would escape. It was debatable whether the antics of the goat or the frustrations of the rescuer was the most intense. Finally the little children joined in the sport and it was all over. Mr Havill dined out on the event to all his customers for months. The day after the goat arrived, David our eldest son showed care for the goat when with a sudden downpour of rain he rushed out with his coat to cover it, while leaving himself exposed to the fury of the storm. With no care for his own self, he had to be forcibly removed.

Westport featured many folks I never found in other provincial towns, who were noted for being out of the ordinary run of the mill . Dr Wilson our very popular doctor lived in our street. It was always a question whether his customers came first or his magnificent garden. . Roses were Dr Wilson's forte and it was a pleasure to pass his house to stop and admire their display. And if you were a patient, you had a visual access to his back garden from the windows of his surgery. The manager of Millers Ltd, the local branch of a South Island chain of drapery stores Mr Zuber, loved to drop in and have a chat about his woes on the domestic front. The first time I met him, it was because of his present wife's objection to him visiting his two previous wife's local graves. His present wife was his eighth. He claimed to have buried seven wives, only two in this town and he was grudged respect for them. Another one who earned my *awe* (no other word for it), was the chap who sold tickets in a well known illegal lottery in Tasmania. Though illegal by the Postal Authorities, they turned a blind eye to the practice, like the 6 o'clock closing of hotel bars. Regularly once every two weeks, he called into Bert's factory either to bring tickets or results of the lotteries. In those days of capital punishment, hanging was the mandatory sentence for murder, and this gentleman was the official hangman for the country. Of course his true identity was not well known which is understandable. There are few rarer occupations, although I met a man who was long unemployed because he was an expert coronation flag seller.

Then there was Percy who loved to come in and sit on my table to regale me of the virtues of communism, the paradise that was Russia, the iniquities of capitalism, and the secrets of the *diplomatic bag.* The latter was something new to me, and any learning to widen my knowledge, of these affairs as I plied my needle or shears, passed the time. Percy was in full flight, once when Paul Dellaca, from the leading men's store, and incidentally a neighbour of mine, arrived in with a bundle of alterations for my attention. Paul as the owner of the leading men's clothing shop, wanted to know if I could lower my prices a little as he felt sure they could supply me with more work. On most work, I charged the shops the same as the man off the street. When Paul had gone, Percy made a statement worthy of any one in the industrial field. "*Alex. You are better off doing nothing, than working for nothing*". This principle raised my poor estimation of communists a few points above zero. What raised it a notch or two more was many years later when Muldoon declared in Parliament he preferred an honest communist to a dishonest unionist any day.

Our popular curate Fr Cumiskey, was due for sabbatical leave. He called in to ask if I could make him some light clothing as he intended to visit the Holy Land and spend some time in Rome. I was flattered to do so. In the end, I headed a group to give him a send off, plus a gift of money. I must confess I hated to take the money for the clothes I made, so compromised by asking him to say a mass for me and my family at the shrine of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour in the Redemptorist Monastery in Rome. The Committee set up for the official farewell insisted I make the presentation and address, which was the biggest crowd I ever had to front up to.

Sad news came one day. Bonnie's father Pop, who had been ailing for nearly a year, was sent to hospital while in Wanganui for an operation. This was put off after

the early stages because the fault was other than had been diagnosed, in fact very seriously. The most optimistic opinion was Pop had only a few months to live. Kitty who did not know our address rang the Westport telephone exchange to locate me. Fortunately, a parishioner who had a position in the Post Office heard my name mentioned, and was able to tell them my workshop was across the road. We never had the phone at the time, but someone came over to give me a Wanganui number to ring urgently . The news was so sudden, Kitty suggested how and when to advise Bonnie, and to arrange for her to see Pop before long. This was the most difficult phase of my married life up to now. I had always associated her father with jokes, betting on horses, recalling happy times in that Lancashire accent he never lost. It was to be fondly brought back many years later with listening to *Coronation Street*.

Bonnie needed no urging to visit Wellington as soon as Pop was home from Wanganui. Noel our youngest child was too little to leave with me, so she had to take him with her. The plane journey up had Fr Phelan also as a passenger, who told me later Noel was air sick, giving everything up bar his religion. The hostess took him back to clean him up. He returned spick and span relieving the tension of the rest of the travellers, vying with one another to care for him. A week after seeing Pop, the return journey had its own drama, the plane unable to land because of fog. The pilot journeyed down further giving the passengers a sunset view of the Southern Alps. When someone asked the pilot how long they would circle around, replied as long as the fuel would last. Ask a silly question, you get a silly answer. In the event it took an hour.

Pop lived for three months so another visit to Wellington for Bonnie, but we were all resigned by this time for the inevitable. Bonnie's return from the funeral was notable for the absence of any sadness. Indeed, the week before his death, he said to tell Alex, Pop struck a small double on the races. These were the early days of the introduction of the TAB to the public, spelling an early end for the bookmakers and their limited dividend odds.

Still in Westport the next big event in our lives was the addition of another daughter. In our early married life, in fact during our honeymoon we were sitting in one of the seats outside one of the New Plymouth parks in full view of a David Street sign, when Bonnie expressed she'd love a son with the name of David. We made a resolution that she would choose all the boys names, as long as I could choose the girls. It had been even with two each up to now with two girls and two boys. A third girl's name proved more difficult. Paul Dellaca our neighbour had a little girl called Lynne who was the same age as our Kathleen. Lynne was forever being at our place –a case of the Binn's Twins - that her father was thinking of changing her name. Sometimes he would collect her and she would immediately sneak back. She was a delightful child otherwise, pretty and engaging, I thought Lynne would be a nice name for our new daughter. Then the variance in the social scale of the Coorys' and the Dellacas of the town gave us misgivings.

Time was running out for the Christening, trying to choose a name, despite the custom of the times in the maternity homes in keeping mother and child for two weeks before going home. This new daughter was such a placid baby, her eyes were always open, asleep or awake. I tossed all the names about but nothing seemed to fit. I remembered hearing among my Irish friends that every catholic family should have a Mary and a Joseph. My whole life had been surrounded by Mary's. In the end we settled for Mary. The births of Kathleen, and Noel, were followed by big shifts of home and town and jobs.

Mary was to be no exception. My working for myself was not proving to be of any economic improvement either. I had managed to pay back the 100 pounds to Bert, but a snag developed when we decided to sell the house and perhaps move back to Wellington. The bank manager rang me to say could I make some payment

on the arrears of the money for the house. This puzzled me as the payments had been made to the lawyer whose premises were in the same building as mine. The bank manager when I saw him showed me the extent of the deficiency, and I showed him my receipts from the lawyer. The news developed our worthy Hibernian Secretary and his legal business wouldn't bear close scrutiny. He was charged and tried some months later with embezzlement and sent to prison in Christchurch.

We decided to say the rosary every day, and I vowed to give up smoking till we could get back to the North Island. At the end of a week, a letter arrived that was to be an answer to our prayers. My brother in law Phil Hinds, who all through our married life seemed to be our guardian angel, wrote to ask would we be interested in a farm job in Lower Hutt with a free house, to milk a few cows and look after a garden to supply vegetables to the Sacred Heart Convent and High School. What! Another cowman gardener job again! But I would need a drivers license as a truck went with the job. Could he know as the present farm manager was leaving, but would stay on till I came.

We made up our minds to take the job. The question uppermost in my mind was how could I manage a driving license when I didn't have one. Don Herring a neighbour who had a model T Ford offered to teach me. Learning all about chokes to start the motor, advancing and retarding sparks was a whole new experience. But not enough to get a license. Don was confident I'd have no trouble when the time came. We put all our furniture up for auction with my friend the town auctioneer together with all the preserves and jams, the fruit and proud produce of our garden. The terms were to be 12%. In the event, when we got the account after moving, he charged us 15% and his cheque for the balance of the proceeds. This taught us to get terms in writing before an auction in the future.

The arrival of babies seemed to indicate it was time to move on. Mary was a good sleeper and contented baby posing no problems for a well organised shift. With the arrivals of these last three children we moved. With Kathleen we moved from Wellington to Levin and Greymouth. Noel from Greymouth to Westport. And now from Westport to Lower Hutt. Every person we bade goodbye to, and all who knew us one way or another, regretted our leaving. A close neighbour, Mrs Tennant's daughter was particularly moved when saying in biblical fashion, I was shaking the dust off my feet. I assured her it was not the people of Westport. One part of Westport would earn my undying gratitude to its people, by teaching the secrets of good gardening, how to compost, grow tomatoes, potatoes, anything a resourceful husband needs to know in the vegetable line. There is no doubt in my mind, flowers and shrubs are a great deal easier to nurture than vegetables. The latter demand and need mollycoddling: pretty flowers or exotic shrubs don't. Our Westport presence was one I never regretted, and I look back with a lot of fond memories.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

The transition to the North Island went smoothly enough, and even exciting in a way, though a great unknown lay to be revealed. Bonnie and the children were farmed out among her family. Phil Hinds my priceless brother in law took me out to the farm, introduced me to Barney the manager, who in turn gave me a run down on my duties. The absence of a driving license posed a wee problem, and when I saw the Chevrolet truck my heart sank a few centimeters. Compared to the little Ford of my first lessons it seemed enormous. Barney undertook to clear this hurdle by giving me lessons in it, staying on till I qualified. The first test for my license failed because of the six oral questions, I only got one right. The officer said it was useless taking me for the practical test until I got the oral one right. Disappointed, another

appointment was made. I took the manual by the throat as it were, and instead of trying to memorise the rules, wrote them down. At the next test, the officer who had taken and rejected me, the first time asked the one who just tried me for the oral, “How was he?” Replied, “Alright. Actually, very good,” was his answer. I flew in with the test, with the reservation I was a bit shaky.

Barney waiting outside breathed a sigh of relief when he heard. His new job was driving a meat truck. He drove back to the farm at my insistence and we parted company. Barney jubilant, Alex nervous. I yearned to be alone when next I drove the Chev. The very first drive on my own was to go over that winding tortuous metal road to Wainui-o-mata to visit Phil and Winnie. Years later the road had a major upgrade, widening, tarsealing, corners rounded off, and a two lane on the upward section. Phil and Winnie who had been of such a help in the early days of our marriage, were practically our neighbours once again. They had a farm the other side of the Wanui-o-mata Hill. A heavy gorse covered the hills but a track up from the farm was negotiable to the hardy, finishing up in their farm as well. The winding road over the Wainui Road between the two farms was only about sixteen kilometres.

The house had three bedrooms, and before we could be altogether again, we had to buy all the furniture necessary. Where possible we bought them new on generous time payment terms. A Mr Costello, manager of the Te Aro Furniture Coy, was very liberal with any discount for cash purchases. The kitchen when Bonnie came to use it had a range with only one top element functioning out of the three. Reverend Mother Mechtilde who was head of the Convent and the boarding part of the high school, was the one I had to deal with about farm matters and conditions of employment. Protesting about the stove she asked me to see an electrician to repair it. He condemned it saying we had all these children, they deserved something better. A new one was provided. As well as a free house plus the amenities like power, milk, vegetables from the big garden, about the only things we had to buy were groceries, meat, and clothes. The parish priest of Our Lady of the Rosary where we now found ourselves was none other than Fr Keegan from the army days. Most of my married life, we seemed to follow Fr Keegan who was a great friend of Bonnie’s uncle, Fr Frank Phillips.

It is time to meet the farm as I now found it. Dobbin, an old Clydesdale horse, seven cows plus two heifers, one called Scrubby. “Why Scrubby?” I asked. “She just came out of the scrub from nowhere one day,” said Barny. Only one of the cows had a name, a friesian called Maggie, she was a prolific milker. Others were a mixed lot, two were Jersey’s, another an Ayrshire who had a habit of sucking herself, the rest were friesian. The farm comprised 100 acres, a third in scrub mostly manuka and gorse. The land being within the city limits, was the playground at times of enterprising youths, mostly boys living nearby, To call it a farm was flattering. Bordering the farm on the eastern side was a stream – named Waiwhetu – and the street aptly named Riverside Drive. The boundary on the northern side was the State Advances Garden Nursery providing all the necessities for state houses in the Hutt valley; the southern side ended on the Te Whiti Park. The western side was somewhere buried in the scrubby parts on the Wainui Hill, separating this farm and my brother in law’s Phil and Winnie’s farm The fencing was practically non existent except on the north and south sides.

Adapting my self to farming life again had its novel moments. City life to which I had become accustomed to for some years, and now back to cowman and gardener was a rude shock to realise the progress I thought I’d made, instead of going forward, I was going backwards; or was it the reverse? Bonnie had the problem of the house, the children, and their schooling. My duties were milk the cows, take it to the convent in Margaret St to separate the surplus milk in the dairy there, if

there was more than required for the staff and boarders. Light the furnace to supply all their hot water needs. My daily contact was with the kitchen staff headed by Sr Kosta. Then there was the adjacent laundry in the charge of Sr Liguori, who also was a keen naturalist as well as a teacher, had a section in a nearby garden harbouring strange plants and insects. This was of great amusement to Sr Kosta, who now and then would surreptitiously take me there to show me some development. There may have been some sly differences between these nuns, as Kosta referred to it as Sister's Buggery. But Kosta did things dramatically. Once when I took her a large bunch of flowering clematis she burst into tears. It reminded her of younger days in Taranaki. She also had a novel way of cracking open iron bark pumpkins by standing on the steps at the kitchen door and throwing them down on the courtyard, paved with concrete.

When about six months had passed, I asked the superior Rev Mother Mechtilde, for an interview. The costs of running the farm and even considering doing anything to improve the place would be futile, as there did not appear to have any future as a farm. The fencing, the cost of running the truck and needing repairs which was not new, the garden needs etc, and a host of other necessities like the house needed painting. She was quite sympathetic and listened to my advice. She explained that she would have to seek advice from their Mother House in England (of all places to have a head house I thought) and she would advise me. The advice when it eventually came, tied in with my advice. A Mr David Daly who was their property adviser, strongly recommended to market the land for housing development. Would I stay on till this happened? My promise was to stay, thinking it would maybe a year or two. It took nearly six years.

Development was held up to allow a new bridge over the Waiwhetu stream. The old wooden bridge was the only access to our place and the State Advances Nursery. This old wooden structure had served its purpose and replaced with a modern concrete one. What did Bonnie think of the new life style? In way I was home most of the day, not leaving to go to work in the morning and come home when it was over. She was city born and bred. To say she took to farm life, I have to admit what she lacked in a taste of country life, the children made up for in enthusiasm. I introduced hens to the farm, building a henhouse. I also made a second run and chook house for rearing unwanted cockerels from the poultry farm of Frank O'Leary. I would get them as day old chicks, and grow them up for Sr Kosta who revelled in free chooks for their larder. In return she gave me all the kitchen scraps to help feed them. I rarely had to resort to pay for the cockerels feed. The garden scraps were enough and cooked if needed. Now and then a bakers delivery van would unload unsold stale bread from grocers.

In due course, the Sisters of the Mission, embarked on building a new Sacred Heart College in Laings Road, to replace the crowded boarding school attached to the convent. When completed, I had extra trips to ferry two nuns to work in the morning, and take their hot dinners every lunch time. Each year was expected to be my last. Each year I would plan the years activities. Like an acre of potatoes, vegetables, a hundred tomato plants, thousands of onions, and yes, two hundred gladioli corms ready for Christmas. I was told they take a hundred days from planting to flowering. The biggest curse of this garden were the weeds. Some districts are cursed with one distinct weed. I never found its true name, but saw a description in a magazine from England where it was well called Devil Weed. Selective weedkillers helped. The Shell Coy had one called "*weedkiller w"* that was effective on carrots and parsnips. Another, was sulphuric acid of one part to twenty parts of water for onions,(also for gladioli I discovered.)

All this was a far cry from a tailoring job. That a change of occupation is as good as a rest, is a trite saying that loses meaning by repetition. But open air

activity was in my blood from my early years, so think that my adaptability to situations enabled me to accept what was expedient at any time. Factory work and land work can be easy to some natures . When it is aligned to married life, where now we had five children, this continuity had a stabilising effect. We were all into this together. Bonnie adapted well to the new life and her city bred nature was not too assaulted, because city amenities were only five minutes away now we had our own transport. The city of Lower Hutt was much bigger than Levin, Greymouth, and Westport.

A lot of the running of the farm before my tenure was pretty haphazard, and the practice of disposing of the new born calves and serving of the cows each year, had to be negotiated anew. I was never told how this was done before Barny left. Except that one of Barney's friends would take the calves, give ten bob each, this to supplement my wages. Phil was able to suggest ideas. Through friendly catholic institutions I became friendly with a farmer over in Normandale who would come and transport any cows when in heat over to his bull and return them at no charge. One year a farmer who I had not met before suggested he could let me have his bull free of charge to run with the cows. I was pleased about this but they were all in calf at the time so had no worries. The worries came sooner rather than later. This fellow was a fine specimen and a Friesian too, to whom I gave the name of Horace. Most of the internal gates separating the paddocks were the Taranaki type, which Horace thought was useful. If he was separated from his harem he would use his horns and simply lift them off. I countered that one, but one day I couldn't believe my eyes. despite his size he jumped over the fence clean as a whistle. No wonder he had been given away.

Dobbin the horse was a placid old fellow, and gave endless joy to the elder children especially David. I made a sledge, supplied all the necessary gear to use this for transporting heavy things. I could take the truck up to the cowshed in summer but not in winter or wet conditions. This was a serious drawback as the cowshed was near 400 metres from the house and the milk had to carried by hand in kerosene tins, then poured into milk cans. Under normal conditions the dairy is the place that should be near the cow bails, and house the separator as well. In this case it was at least two miles away, at the convent. Milk has to be warm for separating, but if there were any delays, Sr Kosta would have boiling water to warm the milk. Many an occasion would be in winter, when there was none to separate. That meant no cream, but little hardship, for the delight of the nuns and boarders, nor for my growing list of friendly neighbours, especially the men of the State Advances nursery next door.

In the weeks after we first arrived, Bonnie complained that when she went outside to hang the washing, or attend to the garden, these wolf whistles from the nursery would annoy her. A mature row of lawsoniana trees formed the boundary between the nursery and the house so it was difficult to see the culprit. With the passing of time neighbours usually get to know each other, and I got to be so with the staff of two in the propagating section. Spurred probably by the size of the garden I had to look after, they gave me many vegetable plants and bulbs introducing new species of cabbage, (succession) tomatoes, (grosse lisse) which I still grow after many years. The head man Wally had a pet magpie, the first time I entered their sanctum the magpie flew at me pecking at my arm drawing blood. This magpie had been taught to wolf whistle, giving Wally lots of sly entertainment. This alleviated a lot of the annoyance she had at first, and in fact may have amused her instead.

The terrain between house and cowshed was up and down dale, while a little creek trickled down from the hills halfway along. This harboured a lot of creatures called crawlies, similar to prawns, a rare delicacy for our children and their hordes

of cousins when visiting, spending many happy hours catching them and cooking them in jam tins to eat. Us parents were horrified when proffered some. One lad called Michael protested to his mum Lorna, between missing front teeth protested, " Mum, they're delisshous!" Lorna was a lady of impeccable charm, a sister in law, and a frequent visitor. Her children and ours were much of a muchness in ages. Bonnie had her married sisters, Winnie in Wainuiomata, Lorna in Naenae, and Mary in Johnsonville, all with comparable families. Their visits were always welcome, and even to their extended families. Then my brother in laws, my sister Mary in Wellington, Michael my brother also on a farm in the Wairarapa, brother John in Featherston, we never lacked social occasions.

Any farm land as close to a city as this one was, never lacks trespassers or young boys living near the area. The Waiwhetu Stream forming the boundary on the street side was easily negotiable, even jumped over by the more athletic when running. An Archery Club on some weekends thought this was an answer to prayer for a clear space. I did allow them in the summer on Saturdays when their presence livened up the place. They never exceeded or abused their privileges but after a couple of seasons, had to be terminated, it did not help while they were there. The comings and goings about the house and grounds was the only access for them, the whole length of the farm from the bridge to Te Whitu Park.

The farm was one half of my life, I had a family as well that needed the other half of my attention. Our last three children were born while we were there. Raymond was the first of these, and I must say that the staff of the convent took lots of interest in each of their arrivals. We made friends and the children made friends among the parishioners of Our Lady of The Rosary Church and School. This was different to the social life of a factory where the workers toiled in proximity to one another, and found a social life at work in addition to where they lived. By way of contrast, Raymond's arrival was not stress free in comparison with the previous five children. He'd been taken away from his mother the first day because of a slight skin rash before she could bond with him and that was upsetting. Then at three months he developed whooping cough that took up to four months to recover. The unstinting care of the doctor plus his mothers loss of sleep helped him to pull through eventually. It was unusual for babies to get whooping cough so early.

Our next child a daughter Christine followed 17 months later. She was due after Christmas. Under the circumstances every thing had been arranged to have Christmas dinner over in Wainui with Winnie and Phil. As usual Christmas Day arrived on due date. I arose, milked the cows and before going to the Convent with the milk, called in to check with Bonnie all was ready for going over the hill for Christmas dinner with the children. Christmas was ready alright, but our plans had to be rearranged and fairly smartly. She said the baby was on the way and she'd have to go into the maternity home that day. We did a quick reshuffle of plans. I'd deliver the milk, rush home and take the other children over to Wainui, return and take Bonnie to the nursing home. All this was accomplished by midday. Bonnie said she'd go to maternity in about an hour. We sat and waited. Of course the food situation was on a par with our appetites, next to nil. At least the children were provided for. Our Christmas dinner was the simple fare of God's poor on the day, consisting of bread and butter and a cup of tea. The best our larder could provide. After all this hustle and bustle, Bonnie entered the nursing home after our meagre lunch. It was time for settling down and await results.

Nothing happened in the birthing line up to time to go back home to milk the cows and visit the nursing home later. Still nothing to report when calling in to see Bonnie, and there was no chance the nursing home would allow her to go home, because the water had broken and that was that! We had to wait for three more days and each morning the sisters at the convent would keep asking me for any

news, adding their prayers were for the welfare of mother and child. Nothing is more frustrating for mother and father to be kept on tenterhooks for baby's arrival. The Christmas season is the same as any day for nurses and doctors and would be farmers and mothers. Christine's arrival was on the feast of the Holy Innocents, December 28th. Sr Kosta said to me on the morning after, she'll have to christened Innocenta Veronica. She had decided the name, unaware I had beaten her to that privilege many years before. Chrissie's (as she got called eventually) babyhood main feature was to be in rejecting mother's milk occasionally.

CHAPTER TWENTY

Our last child Barbara, before she was ever born, twice became a duel between her and her doctor. When Bonnie first went to him and said she was pregnant, he said, "very unlikely because of your age." It was getting on for four years since the last, so to humour her insisting on a test at a second visit, the doctor gave in. He ruefully admitted she was right. Then further into the pregnancy, all unknown to me, another test was made. Then on day after returning from her doctor's visit to my asking how things were, I was greeted with a flood of tears and flung herself into my arms. The story unfolded that once on a recent check up, the *doctor thought* he detected two heads, suggesting maybe twins? This alarmed her no end as she always believed with twins, there was a possibility of one being weaker than the other. This test confirmed no twins. The relief was such I got the reaction not knowing the drama before. Thinking on this later, the idea of twins would not have been traumatic to the degree Bonnie feared. What she had gone through mentally was a sobering thought that too often a doctor by throwing out a chance remark, never gives a thought to what the patient under his care may make of it.

Earlier in the foregoing I spoke of the ephemeral nature of this farm job, knowing it was under the developers hammer, and a new job for me was imminent. I had given a promise to stay till this happened. Occasionally we had visits from various people interested in the land. David Daley a builder was engaged by the convent who was doing the spadework of its disposal would pay a visit accompanied by prospective buyers including Henry May a Government Cabinet Minister, and drip feed on the progress being made. May, the Minister of Lands asked a few questions and surveyed the land visually. One day the police came during a suspected murder inquiry to comb the land for recent burial signs but found none. In one place they found freshly turned soil but this turned out to be Horace sharpening up his horns when I viewed it. There was always something going on. But finally the day came when a decision was made, and David Daly was the one who told me. He was going up to Raumati to view some sections connected with his business, and to give me some ideas of what may interest me in other jobs, inviting me to go with him. There was a country store in Ohau we passed. He knew the owner wanted a man, but that didn't quite appeal. I viewed some sections David said he could arrange finance for. Of course months would elapse in the meantime.

But a more serious development took place nearer to home. Mother Mechtilde, shortly after the date had been settled, was replaced as Mother Superior. The difference the new one made by her attitude and treatment of me, could not have been more pronounced. Gone was the interest in the children and myself, I was lucky to see the new one on any visits, which would terminate my tenure any day now. Though the farm as such ceased to exist, the house was still occupied by us and preparatory to the development, a new bridge was being erected to facilitate the development of the land for housing; a lovely concrete one right in front of our house. There came a time when we had made so many friends locally, we were loath

to leave, and the house though a bit small for our needs, would do till we could get a bit of finance together to buy one. Getting only eleven pounds a week , for a family of eight by now sounds a bit meagre and was. I had a part time job with Pilchers the nursery people who had a shop in town as well, and with the calves from the cows, managed to rear them for sale either to the meat works, or in the case of heifers, to sell to farmers, all this with the cognisance of Mother Mechtilde. The separated skim milk was used for this purpose instead of going down the drain.

The housing problem weighed a little heavy with me. No date was set but it hung over my head. For a solution to my problem I consulted Father Keegan. and sought his advice. Mulling over to Fr about keeping the farm going and my promise to stay till they were ready to sell, he could see no objection in the short term anyway of offering to buy the house and even suggested a price allowing for all the circumstances. In a mood of facing the music, I made an appointment to see the new Reverend Mother, and was shown to one of the reception rooms in the bowels of the huge building. I remember it was cold. She never said a word as I said my piece. I reminded her I'd given my word I would stay till the place was sold, and now it was five years later. When no questions were asked as I said my piece, was a little daunting; her face quite impassive. I will say she listened, hearing me right out, and then gave her verdict: no other word for it. She said:

"It is my duty to do what is best for our Order. We consider that in our best interests, we must get the most for the property it is possible to get. How soon do you think you can get out?"

I was flabbergasted. All those minutes preparing my speech to no avail. When I told our parish priest Fr Keegan, he too was flabbergasted.

For the month or so before this interview with no stock of any kind on the farm, I had managed to get a job Bonnie had spied in the paper, working in Catholic Supplies in Dixon Street. I was familiar with the place having lots of negotiations with them while a member of the Seaman's Institute, (the Club). I seemed fated to work for religious organisations, and I hoped this one would have happier results. The shop manager, Geoffrey de Latour was a pleasure to work with and gave every possible encouragement. The firm had a large van which every two months Geoff would tour the province selling merchandise. After a while with a bit of experience, this would be my job travelling, as he hated being away from home. I was known by some of the staff before starting, and the ones I didn't know were just as friendly. Stan Hoskins was the General Manager upstairs, shared by Peter his son running the business below, the shop, and mail order side. Geoff and I ran the shop.

It was pleasant work. Attached to the shop, was a store where all the packing and unpacking of imported goods, and mail order goods were despatched. One of the assistants there was a young Hungarian, Imrie not quite twenty yet, and by a strange coincidence, upstairs was another Hungarian of aristocratic genealogy, Count de Esterhazy. His work and responsibilities I never found out, but what made me now recall his presence was something the Count ridiculed. Morning tea was shared by most of the staff upstairs and downstairs. The year was 1962, I think, and the world was agog with the news Russia had propelled Yuri Gagarin into space to circle the earth. *"Just a hunk of metal,"* said the worthy Count dismissively.

Only two months later a surprise appointment to me by Geoff. To take the van and tour the province, with an itinerary visiting convents, schools, colleges and presbyteries. This was just a short trip of three days, to test my aptitude I supposed or success. The goods were a varied lot. Candles of different types and styles I had been unaware of until now, oil and wicks for sanctuary lamps, rosary beads, pictures large and small, books galore, medals and lots of things undreamt of, but not altar wine. Before leaving, Peter who had designed the van coached me in the finer details and the idiosyncrasies of driving this van. It was the largest road

vehicle for me to drive, but still did not qualify for a heavy drivers licence. They all had confidence in me, so off I went. I enjoyed the experience, and probably would be doing it to this day, if the wages had been equal to the task of supporting a wife and children. I stuck it out for six months. I reflected I was sitting on a trade where I could at least earn more than 16 pounds a week that I was earning.

In the situations vacant column was a job going at Cathie and Sons for a cutter and duly applied, at 24 pounds a week. When giving my notice to Stan Hoskins he asked me would an increase in wages change my mind. Asking what wages for the new job was, he said he couldn't possibly match it, but was sorry to see me go. Cathie and Sons Ltd was a similar type of factory to A Levy Ltd, only they catered for the civilian trade. During the war they enhanced their reputation for a high grade of army battledress, and proudly displayed the pattern they used for General Montgomery's battle dress while on a brief visit here. It goes without saying the General was very pleased with the fit and quality of his uniform. Learning of my previous experience I was slotted in to the same position as the one who had just left, who measured, cut, and fitted their special clients. My cutting board was in the factory alongside the other staff, conditions which I liked. I really fell into this work as if it was made for me. I never had to resort to pattern making anymore, they had patterns for most occasions.

It was a pleasure to get away from uniforms to which I had served a lot of my experience. In fact the Government was gradually moving away from uniforms for their State Owned Enterprises like postmen and railway officers, though local bodies like Wellington City Council persevered for tramway, traffic, and police officers. I was to meet many well known personalities in public life, especially politicians. Cathie's brand name of "Sincerity" was well known throughout the country. The highlight of my career there was looking after the tailoring needs of the Prime Minister, Keith Holyoake. He was so pleased with two suits I had fitted for him, that when his son was getting married in England, he required a morning coat and striped trousers and overcoat, to mingle with the aristocracy. Cathie's rose to the occasion. We in New Zealand have no class distinction to bother us sartorially to this extent. He was a pleasure to fit and deal with, sending his chauffeur in the Daimler to fetch me and return me from the fittings in his parliamentary office. The Prime Minister's department was not the plush place one would expect. I thought it was high time it had a whole lot of decor. The carpet was threadbare, extension cords ran here and there beneath furniture. The fitting over, the famous "Kiwi Keith" as he styled himself, would take me to the lift, press the button and see me safely off. Kiwi Keith was the only Prime Minister never to get beyond a primary education. As a debater he had few peers to oust him. He reigned twelve years, and finished up in due course as Governor General. A posh education was not necessary to lead the country of New Zealand.

Like most factories with a large staff, a person usually from the office would attend to anyone suffering from an indisposition. In the early months of working, I had frequent headaches, often taking aspirins, when a fellow worker suggested it must be my eyes. "You need glasses" he stated. I did take his advice in the end to find out he was right. Cutting along miles of chalk line on materials became much easier.

There were a lot of young bloods among the young mail staff there and I got teased about my large family. I came back from a fitting once, to find a large drawing, of male genitalia across my board, with a phrase I wont repeat here. I thought I knew the culprit. On a later occasion a spirited discussion took place about buying a car, and all were voicing their preferences for this make or that. The artistic one who I thought was guilty of the genital drawings on my table came over to me during the discussion said: "A car Alex wouldn't be much use to you; you'd

have to buy a bus." I mulled over this for a few days, and heard an idea I thought would be good to put into practice. The fellow who suggested the bus, I invited to come out home and have dinner one night. I had lots of why's he should come. Then he could then tell me which of our children we shouldn't have had. This put paid to a lot of nonsense from that particular quarter.

Winnie and Phil Hinds who had been such a support to us, decided to leave the farm at Wainuiomata, and chance his prospects on a better farm in Levin that had taken his eye. He took us out to view it, and we thought it would suit Winnie better who had been suffering with a form of rheumatism. Anyway the house was a big improvement for her. After they had shifted, Phil had an idea he would gift some land to me to grow cauliflowers. I could do this at weekends until it turned out to be viable, then extend the operation to grow other things and eventually, to move up there as one big happy family. I did manage to start on the venture, but an acre of cauliflower plants turned out to be a disaster mainly because of weather and lack of water when I should have been there. Before the truth of this development occurred I had promised to move and handed in my notice to Cathie's to finish at Christmas.

CHAPTER TWENTY ONE

The main concern became the children's schooling at Levin. During the holidays I spent some time in Levin seeing what transport was available for schooling and found there was none whatever. This was bad news and decided to get my job back at Cathie's, to find they'd promised it to someone else. Out of a job again, I then decided to try an employment agency and was sent to Rembrandt Suits who were in the strict Cut and Trim style of tailoring. They had an unusual set up I had not met with before. They did not stock material for customers to choose. The Cut and Trim contract was for other shops or individuals to supply their own material. The Rembrandt brand was a well known label and exclusive to some shops throughout the country, not only made to measure, but for stock sizes as well. For instance in Wellington, Vance Vivian's were their main supplier and featured the brand name as exclusively theirs. Gradually after some years, other small provincial towns were allowed to feature the Rembrandt name, but not in Wellington. Working for Rembrandt I was limited to cutting only, and came across some of the latest expensive cloths from all over the world, which had never lain before on my board. Other factories used mostly English or Scottish or New Zealand made, even continental ones brought in by tourists on holiday. A lot of Jewish industrialists who travelled abroad fell into this category

Rembrandt were easy to work for but they had their own ideas of cutting to figure types, such as square or sloping shoulders, erect or stooping postures, that were equally effective as the old style I'd inherited from Bob Hill at' Levy's, yet had stood the test of time. Fitting the customers was jealously guarded by the two owners of the business. These partners had travelled overseas always looking for the latest in styles.

I'm not sure how long I worked there, but I did realise as a recent employee, I instinctively felt they had such a loyal and contented staff, any promotion for me was a gamble. I was attracted to a job offering at Hallensteins, a Lambton Quay menswear shop as manager of their men's clothing section. Their sections were boys wear, shoes, mercery, and clothing, these presided over by mini-managers, and all presided over by the general manager Eric Coleman. Eric was pragmatic and conceited, bossy and condescending, pigheaded and changeable all at once. With the other mini managers specially the mercery one Don Turnbull, I learned to be happy with his peculiarities, at the same time patient with his dithering. Apart from

his shop concerns, when he had to make up his mind in domestic affairs, he dithered for ages till we were all exhausted. Subjects like a new battery for his car might take weeks to decide, and we were each solicited for our opinions not only alone but at tea breaks. Another time he needed a new vacuum cleaner. Every brand name came in for discussion. Otherwise working conditions were very good, and the staff were a very harmonious lot, more united because of the eccentricities of Manager Coleman. Whatever would he dither about next?

As section managers we were not given an entirely free hand in replacing stock. The lists each made had to receive the Eric Coleman *imprimatur*. The head office was in Dunedin and each month a circular would come round offering stock replacements. My department was more strictly controlled in comparison with the others, whether it was my inexperience or not, but it relieved me of responsibility of getting overstocked. When it came to my special forte of made to measure suits, a free hand was given. This was the first time of dealing with university academic gowns to order. Sometimes these were hired for capping ceremonies, but a few liked their own gowns, if they were after professorships. One had to be familiar with the necessary professional colours of the linings that distinguished them. Very little fitting of these, mostly the bulk and height of the wearer. Dr Kronfeld the doctor who attended to the first of our three children came in one day and wanted a Burberry raincoat, very fashionable in England. My favourite reading of "whodunnits" told me of this; used in evidence of what a character was wearing at the time of some misdeed. Whether the good doctor got his burberry I don't know as I passed it on to head office in Dunedin. A young browser looked over our selection of a thousand ties, asked did we have any not on display.

The prime position of this shop with its wide open doors attracted a lot of foot traffic and gave me my best experience of handling the browsing type. Friday evenings I had an assistant Chas Billcliff to help me. During the day he was a warehouseman. His knowledge of who was a prominent figure in the town was invaluable. Chas was always full of jokes and tricks but fitted in well in the department. On holidays, we seemed to have a regular supply of casual workers. Some were more of a nuisance than assistance. My first day with Hallensteins, I was taught by the mercery manager Maurice Turnbull, their way of serving the customer. The way of doing this I've passed on to many others. It was particularly useful when a selection of different articles littered the counter. (1)The article chosen for purchase was placed on the wrapping. (2)Engage the customer in conversation while you clear away the unwanted articles. (3)Write out the docket, (this applied to every sale) place same on top of the article, (4) take the customers money give him the change if any. (5)Wrap the parcel up and now you have a clear desk to engage the next customer.

Those weeks and months working again in Lambton Quay, coincided with Tess our eldest daughter also starting work. Her work place was at Whitcombe & Tombs also on Lambton Quay, not many shops further along from mine. We would both leave home and get back home together, even on late Friday evenings. Tess's first application for a job was fraught with one of the most despicable outcomes that outraged her mother and me. She applied for a job at the DIC as a ticket writer, and had taken some samples along with her. Tess was thrilled to be accepted, and as she was leaving, was asked to make a small sample ticket. The one who had engaged her let out a gasp, saying she was left handed and would never do. When Tess came home and told us it seemed outrageous. However her next application was successful, working at Whitcombe & Tombs in their book purchasing office. No matter where Tess worked, she was always highly favoured. She had an instant appeal to others involved in the workplace.

While all the forgoing was happening, we had to leave the house on the farm. Eddie Jenkins one of the brother in laws, fortunately was a carrier by trade, came to the rescue to move us from Lower Hutt to Tawa, where we managed to get a state house just finished being built. The second time we moved in to a house as its first occupants. This time we had oodles of room. The house was built on a sloping section and while not paradise, afforded a panoramic view of the valley, and the children could watch the suburban trains go by from the city of Wellington to the all stations north or south. Bonnie had to practically climb the steep path to the clothes line. The State Housing Department in building these houses left the grounds free and tidy of rubbish, leaving it to the occupants to put in lawns. They provided a limited number of shrubs and hedging plants. While on the farm living next door to one of the State Housing Nurseries, I was familiar with this provision.

We missed the garden and the hens, which we considered were indispensable, but a garden was out of the question. This particular section had no soil at all at the back, being all clay. Instead, with all the garden tools I had brought with me, set about excavating a portion the hillside at the rear, using the spoil to enlarge a level area sufficient to build a henhouse out of packing cases from the motor industry. The position of the henhouse to the clothesline took a little juggling, but with reason and negotiation a satisfactory compromise was reached by the woman of the house. This time instead of buying day old chicks, we bought pullets instead. There was no facility for rearing chicks, so fascinating as they are for children.

The floors were bare, the windows needed curtains and blinds, and bedding for the extra bedrooms, it was quite exciting. One could imagine a pioneer family coping with these conditions. This was a young housing area, no more than a few years in existence, so most of the people living here were apt to be more than of nodding acquaintance. David was working as well as Tess, and their mother insisted on them paying board, but they were willing enough in this regard. Tess with her first weeks wages bought us a cutlery set, and each week bought the siblings comics and such, putting them under the younger ones pillows on a Friday night. David was all for having a car, saving every penny. He'd had a taste of cars even before leaving the farm, I had bought a baby Austin, for a song, but it kept breaking down. We never managed to get it going and sold it for another song to some young fellows. We seemed to be pushing it somewhere or other, even though it did have an engine.

Those were the days when every young blood of a boy was rapt in Zephyr cars, and David was one of them. He did succeed and became popular with the youth around. I taught all our children to drive, but David was more enamoured of accelerating and braking, probably I think to impress his peers more, than of self gratification. Perhaps a bit of both. He was always ready to lend me his car.

From our house to the Tawa railway station would be easily a mile, a few short cuts were made by the presence of future sections waiting to be built on. One had to be agile though as some were pretty steep. Commuting to Wellington daily is routine for thousands of workers, but to us tyros, quite a novelty. As our train emerged from the long tunnel at Kairanga, one is greeted with a magnificent view of the harbour. Few of the passengers with heads in the morning paper would fail to lift their eyes to take in the scene. Each morning for me, the sea had a different hue. The commuters would make a good study in types, especially for columnists. I had two experiences commuting both different. The one from Lower Hutt to the city, and the other from Tawa to the city. The latter were a snooty lot compared with the former. The Huttites had been doing their commuting for ages, and probably had their own estimation. The difference would make an interesting study

Kathleen, our third child was a commuter also from the Tawa side, as a pupil of St Mary's College in Wellington. Once, she and another pupil espied an orchard at the penultimate station to Tawa, and planned to raid it when seeing apples on

some of the trees. Arriving home she was so proud of this escapade she wanted to share them with us. When mother enquired where they came from, she unashamedly confessed to where. “That’s stealing,” said mother. When the rest of us were offered an apple, we refused. From being so certain she had done a generous thing, the episode had *“put the children’s teeth on edge”* right enough, as mentioned in one of the psalms. We never heard how her companion got on with her booty.

Noel the next in line after Kathleen, attended Tawa high School, considered one of the largest in the country, but in our short experience one of the best, in that parents were instantly aware of any misfortune to the pupils, and the follow up of any care. Noel had a severe knee injury at the school and quick attention saved it. The Catholic convent school was full to the teeth and couldn’t accept two of our younger ones at the time. The parish priest, Fr Connors did move heaven and earth to get the two of our younger ones accepted in the end. Tawa had grown so quickly, some amenities lagged behind. The church was a local hall, set up each Saturday night, then returned to normal on a Sunday. A situation like this tends to bring a sense of community effort to the place and the church was no exception. We did not stay long enough to see the church built, yet did partake of efforts to get one.

The curate to Fr Connors was Fr Kevin O’ Donoghue, and he was instrumental in setting up a system teaching catechism to those children denied entry to Catholic schools. A branch of the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine was set up in Tawa and I volunteered to help teach a class in the evenings, as no provision was possible to do this in the State School hours. During winter, Fr Connors lent me his brand new Triumph car to attend classes which I thought was brave of him. The first night it was pouring with rain, I couldn’t find the switch for the window wipers. Yet bravely drove on. Another facet of Fr Connors generosity was shown when my holidays fell due in Lent, I sought release from the lenten fast. He said the Church’s teaching was, not only did the soul need refreshment but the body also, and holidays were just as necessary for the health of the person. Then he offered me a whisky as usual, only this time only one glass poured out. “Not having one too Father?” He sighed, “it’s Lent.”

The children were growing up with all the adjustments necessary to it. And during the school holidays, the others in line looking for temporary work. Noel got a job after school with the butcher Mr Jones, who incidentally lived next door, and during holidays longer hours. Kathleen had one with a local factory making toiletries, and regaled us with the mysteries of bulk production of creams and lotions in large rusty drums, then finishing up in beautiful containers and dispensers belying their mundane beginnings. Noel on the other hand told us how when Mr Jones would lock him out (and young Jones too who also worked there) when he had to make the sausages. They were denied to see what went into them. They suspected sheep’s eyes, pigs ears, and other unmentionable parts.

The year was the later part of 1965 . Bonnie’s mother came to stay for a few days, and the question of a TV arose to keep the children and nana amused. Bonnie approached the local Lamphouse branch, to hire a TV. The manager Bernie Hayward -Ryan, said they don’t hire TV’s. Disappointed, she was just going out the door when he suggested she could have one on trial or as a demonstration model. In fact he could bring it up that day. Everybody but me whooped for joy to think at last a TV in the house! My experiences with the advent of television in the homes of my friends and relations did nothing to fill me with enthusiasm. Rather the opposite. The “shushing” and “keep quiet” while on, and flickering picture effect out of the corner of the eye, did not impress. Any way, Bernie brought it up. We had it. After three weeks, when nana’s stay came to an end, Bernie came up to get the set as

agreed. When he entered the room and saw the children all watching and agog, said he didn't have the heart to take it, and said he'd leave it for a while.

As one door closes another door opens, has been the theme of most of my life. My sister Mary, some months previously had to the consternation of the rest of the family shifted to Palmerston North to be near Dawn her daughter. Mary had been the bulwark to our fractured family, and taking the centre away from Wellington, robbed us all, including friends and the Lebanese coterie, she'd gathered around her. Where Mary lived was the anchor we all knew to haul, if anything went wrong or needed help. But one of the gaps was about to close for us. The roles were about to be reversed for a change. Mary dropped in one evening and said she wanted to have a talk.

She had agreed to buy a property in Palmerston North, with a view of keeping boarders or roomers, but Lou her husband wouldn't live in it. He wanted a home without sharing it, as he had had a "gutsfull of people in his home for many years". True enough, as Mary had always catered for roomers and boarders where she lived. She loved money as much as her husband, and when she ever had to borrow from me seldom was I ever got it back in kind but in some other way. Mary was sinfully generous with a helping hand in everything except cash. Meanwhile she was now in another house she already bought, and knew we had shares in a building society. Would we be interested in buying this other property, or at least come up and stay and look at it. I was working at Rembrandt Suits, and the future there to judge by my fellow cutters, was not very bright. Those ahead of me were well established and contented as well they may be, as the atmosphere and conditions were very happy ones. Moreover they paid good wages.

Palmerston North certainly appealed as a well established city, and I remember well, when working a few years ago fitting Mr Millar of Millar and Georgi, who had a figure needing skill to fit properly. He was very erect and had an enormous pot. He tried to persuade me to come to Palmerston North. Getting work there would be no problem. He managed the business there, while Mr Giorgi managed the Napier business. They both started off as partners, and never had serious problems usually associated with enthusiastic beginners. If there was a problem, such as starting up in Napier, they never bothered with lawyers. Two pairs of boxing gloves always hung in the back room, and they settled everything with them on. They had very successful men's outfitters in both cities, and I had cut many suits for them over the years, when working for Arthur Tracey, a subsidiary of A levy's Ltd. The type of work I really wanted was one like Hallensteins, could I get one there. He didn't know, but could get one at Barraud and Abraham's, seedsmen and wholesale merchants in the grocery lines.

According to Mary, the place she wanted us to buy had two units. She and Lou having two shares, one in each name. All she needed was for me to buy Lou's share, Mary retaining the other. It was estimated £900 would clinch the deal according to her lawyer. We had little to lose by having a look, see, and then decide. I went on my own the first time, and saw the house, but not inside. It was in Main St. Two years previously, the railway line ran through Main St, which had not quite recovered from the lifting of the rails. The house looked OK to me but nobody was home. Both sides were already rented, had two street numbers, 666 and 664. A concrete division ran right through the centre of the building. This was the first look. The second look was organised a few weeks later when Eileen and Milton, Bonnie's sister and brother in law took us both up. They were purchasing a new car from Paraparaumu, and decided to try it out on a run up to Palmerston North and back.

Milton who dabbled in architecture for a living, and in the process of building his own home, we thought his opinion would certainly be invaluable. We approached the house, and knocked on the door in a recessed porch. Explaining

ourselves, we were sternly knocked back, and refused entry. I don't know if we could have done this differently. The curtains on the window close to the porch were torn and hung bedraggled, the blind askew as well. This disappointment instead of putting us off, had possibilities, and according to Milton the place looked reasonably well from without. An advantage was nearness to shops,(a plus) to the church (another plus) and even schools (another plus). Back to Mary, we said we'd buy the place if she could set the wheels in motion. This made her day.

We had enough time to look at the shops, and learning from Mary, Lou and Dawn, the names of the leading ones. Collinson & Cunningham was by far the leading store, I went in and asked for the personnel manager to see what the employment prospects were. A Mr Cummins came down to the menswear showroom, a tall well groomed gentleman; I told him I was going to live here and was buying a house coming on the market. I was not sure exactly when, but gave him my qualifications, and experience to date. I asked him what were the chances, he said he was interested alright and if I wrote to him a few weeks before coming, he would have a position ready. This cheered me up no end to work in this high class establishment.

The family conference got into gear when we returned home, assessing the pros and cons of another shift of home, town, and employment. Bonnie was not over the moon of our neighbours except a family of McLaughlins, who had a family whose children loved to look after the chooks and collect the eggs, when we were on holiday. Two years of climbing up to the clothes line, twenty three steps down to the washhouse, distance to the shopping area with a pram uphill and downhill, (at least a mile or more) distance to church and schools, was a recipe for change from renting to owning a house. Also the promise of favourable employment and nearness to all these amenities. The building shares just managed the minimum deposit, and Mary's lawyer advised me when we were in Palmerston North and needed a lawyer, recommended Kevin O"Sullivan. If I had taken his advice it would have saved us a lot when we came to sell later. We did get Kevin when a deal went wrong, and had many happy associations both socially and legally. Kevin turns up later in this story.

It was time for the TV to be returned to Lamphouse. Calling in to settle up if there was any cost, Bernie Hayward Ryan the manager told me he had been transferred to the Palmerston North branch as manager there. I said we were thinking of shifting there too, and we got talking about the TV. Seeing it was a used demonstration model, he would let it go a bit cheaper than a new one, and he would transfer it to Palmerston and collect it when we moved there. We fell in with this deal pronto.

The move from Tawa to Palmerston North was another happy family affair. Eddie Jenkins who had moved us from the farm in Lower Hutt, again would not take no for an answer saying, when they were on their bones once and desperate, we'd helped them out, this was just a bit of payback. All the bigger children of his came along to help, not only load up, but right to the end of the journey. As it happened, young Eddie Jenkins, the eldest son had just got his license to drive and bought a car, was determined to come too. His mother, insisted I go with him, and when we had cleared part of the journey I let him take over the driving.

Our arrival in Palmerston North was Good Friday 1966. The number of the house 666 Main Street, two unforgettable details. The semi attached house was 664 Main St which we would soon have to buy as well, but this came sooner rather than later. My sister Mary was waiting for us with her friend Mrs Johnston (incidentally the mother of her lawyer). Eddie's big truck was packed to the eyeballs with all our worldly goods. And with all the senior siblings of the Coory and the Jenkins's clan, the worldly goods and shifters got inextricably mixed up, Mrs Johnstone kept

nudging Bonnie, who is the least assertive person imaginable, to “assert yourself.” All the things were merely taken from the truck and deposited inside the house, irrespective of which room they should be in. With Mrs Johnstone’s urging the furniture was placed in some order, enough to leave till later.

CHAPTER TWENTY TWO

The longest day does end, and any confusions thereof do end as well. Moving into a house you had never a chance to inspect inside beforehand, has both big and small surprises. The plaster ceilings were the most ornate, with centre recesses. Seven children plus Mum and Dad, is best left to the imagination. Like the man after he had taken a sea voyage, was asked how he enjoyed the trip, replied,” I’d rather not bring it all up again”. We faced the future as a welcome novelty. Children do put a face on things, we adults could never imitate.

We had three days of the Easter holidays to get settled in and could hardly wait for Tuesday when the shops opened, to see about the job at Collinson & Cunningham. I had written to Mr Cumming as requested two weeks before coming. With no transport, I started to walk into town. Before the first intersection a car pulled up asking if I was going into town. Glad of the ride I got in, he introduced himself as Alan Archer, working for the free weekly paper called the Tribune. I made some remarks about being new to the place and was off to town arrange a few things. He dropped me near Collinson’s, and off I went to see Mr Cummins. To my dismay he claimed getting no letter from me, and to be brief said there was no vacancy, and seemed to infer that the whole episode was barely remembered. Here was no job, so what to do next? Inquiring where the Lamphouse was, I passed the Post Office so decided to apply for a phone. They told me it probably would be about two weeks. Then to the Lamphouse and was pleased to see Bernie Ryan.

I told him my sad story, no job for me as expected. All my castles in the air had come tumbling down. “Not to worry,” he said. “My man Joe Baker is leaving and you can start work here, while you look for one.” He offered further to help me with the names of any likely places I could try in the meantime. I was to start work the next day. As I was walking home, it was hard to decide whether to be elated or sad. Arriving home I found instead of waiting two weeks for the phone, it was already connected. The phone was already in the place merely needing a connection. Putting on a philosophical face, at least I had something to put on my bread, in the way of earning a living. In the meantime Palmerston North was full of surprises. When I left Wellington, my wages were 24 pounds weekly. Bernies best offer was 16 pound a week. 33% less.

David the eldest had already left home to try out his wings in the big wide world before we left Tawa, so did not travel with us and had accommodation elsewhere. The next two eldest, Tess and Kathleen were after jobs which they were not slow in the job hunting, both landing work to their liking, Tess in Insurance, Kathleen in a supermarket. Four of the children to school, Noel to the Marist Brothers, Mary, Raymond, and Christine to Convent schools. The usual trial of mothers in respect of uniforms fell to the lot of Bonnie. The hundred and one things to attend to in shifting into another house did not disappear one by one; indeed seem to add to themselves as soon as one was attended to. Looking back on this period of one shift after another with each new birth, starting with Kathleen, from Wellington to Greymouth, Noel to Westport and Mary to Lower Hutt; where Raymond, Chrissie and Barbara were all born during the next seven years while I was another cowman gardener for the last and final time.

I started working for the Lamphouse next day. Joe baker had already left to sell used cars which was more to his liking. The Lamphouse was a well established Wellington electrical business. The local branch occupied the Mercury Theatre when it closed its doors in the Square. The shop sold TV's, stereos and all kinds of sound appliances, home appliances, and gear for hobbyists in the electrical trade. Record players and sound records added up to quite a kind of merchandise that made me feel at home, since I'd had a taste for sound and musical equipment left over from my days with cinema projectors. The shop was not particularly large, but the area at the back was very spacious, where most of the large stock of various brands of TV'S and radios were stored.

Bernie Hayward-Ryan was an easy going person, very affable and forthcoming to staff and customers. The entire staff was him and me, and he soon learned to trust me while he liked to associate with the business people of the city. The van went with the job, and when he knew I could drive it was mine to go home and come to work the next day, provided I collected him, and took him home each day. In fact we were co-bosses of the place, bowing to each others choice of procedures when anything thorny arose. Bernie explained his hyphenated name and the reason for it. He fell in love with the only daughter of the well established Manawatu family of Haywards. There was a danger of the name of Haywards dying out due to a sad lack of male heirs. When they married, a compromise was agreed to join the name of Ryan to the Hayward, in the hope that sons would follow to keep the name alive. True enough two manly sons entered the world in due course, both grown to manhood at the time of my working there, their lives giving no indication of any serious romance in the offing. Bernie confided to me in a rash moment of confidence, that he tweaked one of them of getting a move on and make one lady very happy, replied with the observation, "Why buy a book when you can join a library."

On the question of hyphenated names, I recall once working in McLeod's old job at A Levy measuring and fitting special customers. I was taking down details of a customer who insisted on spelling his surname. The next customer who was waiting to be attended to, remarked he worked in the museum history department, and said if the owners of hyphenated surnames knew the history of their inception, they wouldn't be so proud about them. Not in every case since, but they originally were given by royalty to children born on the wrong side of the blanket. I never checked this up, but I instilled in all my children my favourite maxim in life; *Never believe everything you hear and only half of what you read.* What is heard in the market place is mostly what someone has heard, and seldom questioned.

Apart from the Hallensteins job, I had never had shop work before where I was practically my own boss. I enjoyed the work immensely. The pay was miserable, but great allowances were made thereby. A Kenwood foodmixer with a chip we bought for half price. Likewise a radio-cum- record player for Tess. At the rear of the shop were lots of Japanese knick knacks the Lamphouse was noted for as well as novelties like flashing Christmas lights, novelty children's bedlamps, even battery toys and heaps of Japanese knick knacks the country of Japan was noted for in these early post war days. The selling of TV's I usually left to Bernie. One day a Mr O"Leary came in to buy one saying he lived in Shamrock Street. When Bernie came in and read the note, suggested with an Irish smile on his face, "Do you think we should sell him a Murphy Brand!"

TV's only came to New Zealand in 1960 so the market was quite alive with factories already thriving. We'd only had ours for a few weeks so I was not quite up with the play but learning. One late afternoon we had a call from a recent customer saying they were getting no picture, Bernie was away for the last half hour and left me to lock up. He said take a rental model down and collect the other one on my

way home. The address in Awapuni was on the main road, so I called in about 5.35. To my surprise the elderly couple had the blinds drawn and both sitting in front of the set with sound but no picture, dressed in their pyjamas and nightie. I tried the first knob labelled brightness, and behold, it was right as rain. It has this effect if turned to extremity. I went home feeling I'd made two old folks happy for the night, and I was feeling happy too because of it.

After some months Bernie was wanting a holiday and felt confident he could leave the shop for a few weeks. A man called Dexter was sent from Wellington whose main job was relieving manager for Lamphouse shops. His first day was a Monday, and in the cubby hole that passed for the office, Dexter settled in, and midway in the morning he popped his head out asking me where the "under and overs tin was". I hadn't a clue what he was talking about. What the blazes was an under and overs tin? Explaining that in adding up the days takings, it is well nigh impossible to be exact every morning when seeking a balance. If you are over , this is put in tin, when you are short you make up the deficiency from it. But you keep track of these ups and downs. Each Friday we had a university student as assistant whose main job was looking after the sales and restocking of the long playing records and 45 inch discs, and recording tapes. He had changed his name by deed poll to Kingsford Smith (he tells me) and at this time the Beatles were all the rage with his generation. The sounds of all the latest hits were played over the system outside the shop. I'm sure he played the Beatles latest release *WE ALL LIVE IN A YELLOW SUBMARINE,* a million times in three Fridays, almost driving me mad. I am not a pop music fan! I regard all pop music as mostly noise.

Dexter did not have a very high opinion of Bernie. At the end of the first week, he said the wrong name was on the office door; my name should be there. Some records are a shamble, some missing he reflected. Dexter was an old fusspot, according to Bernie. Funny when you're piggy in the middle, when both hold you in high regard. Though the wages were poor, having transport was a bonus with the Austin van. I had some occasions when trips to the country to deliver goods, give service, or reclaim articles not paid for. On one occasion a trip to Ohingaiti was involved, with permission I did this on a Saturday and took the two youngest children and made a picnic of it. With the use of the van, petrol was not an issue even with private use.

Some jobs I did apply for but had to turn them down, reconciling myself that Wellington wages were not to be expected with what I considered were my skills. Again anything electrical appealed, and thought that perhaps I might not limit my options, to the clothing trade only. Perhaps a shop job like what I was even doing now. True enough a bit of luck came when the electrical business of E P Wix Ltd advertised a vacancy. I can't remember the nature of the wording but they wanted somebody reliable. What the heck I thought! Why not apply, the worst was they could only say no, and that was nothing to be afraid of. When I did I was told I was the second applicant, and they'd let me know, aye or nay. It was late November. I well remember it was a Wednesday morning when I was interviewed. On Thursday, I got a ring from the Lamphouse to say thanks for applying, but they were sorry the first applicant had been chosen because he had the necessary experience they were looking for. The following morning, another phone call came to ask was I still interested in the job, because the other applicant had failed to turn up, and I could have it. Bernie was quite pleased and was ready to let me go immediately. Kingsford Smith's university days ceased temporarily due to end of year term, was prepared to take my place. Within a month, Lamphouse closed down. Bernie Hayward Ryan's tenure in Palmerston North was brief. He shifted to Tauranga working as a clerk in the courthouse; on a visit there I called to renew our brief association. In the years

to come I was to trade with the Lamphouse many times, their merchandise found a ready market for a lot of customers of E P Wix Ltd

Round to the E P Wix to present myself, it was explained to me they were a well established business, and my age would fit in well with elderly customers. The business was a three tiered one. Principally they were electricians and contractors, appliance dealers, service contractors for many brand names. The business still went under the name it originally had of Mr Ebenesa Porta Wix, who had retired eight years previously, and sold the business to his first apprentice Sid Albert. Sid had purchased the business on Wix's retirement, and on a coincidence after four years also retired and sold out to two of his first apprentices Bob Alger and Bruce Wallace, who became my bosses. Bob looked after the electricians and contracting mainly, while Bruce handled things of a highly technical nature, and of the clerical side.

Geographically, the shop I was to manage, had a unique position in Broadway, was long and narrow, with display windows facing foot traffic coming from The Square. This window was much sought after for notices of events like recitals of visiting artists, or specials in the entertainment business. Free tickets went with permission to display them and Bonnie and I had access over the years to a lot of free shows; even including films. The Salvation Army next door was set back on the footpath leaving a clearing where their band used it every Friday evening and made a few speeches of an evangelical nature. A customer one Friday evening said, " How do you put up with all that noise ?" Told her I liked it. The workshop at the back widened out spaciously, continued right out to a store in King Street where a Caltex petrol pump for E P Wix's use only, stood guard in the adjacent parking places. There were four service vehicles as well as the staff cars. Staff (and mates in a few cases only) had petrol at a reduced rate as part of the perks of the job. Above the shop approached by a narrow stairway, was another room where appliances and lighting, as well as the packaging for the displayed items in the showroom were stored. Looking back at this time, the outfit was a higgledy piggledy collection that had a homely feel to it.

I was soon surprised at the amount of activity such a small business engendered. The repairs of every kind of appliances small and large that didn't come through the front door, came through the back entrances. It seemed to me there was no appliance from shavers to big electric motors that stumped the service or repair men behind the shop or Bruce Wallace. The larger appliances like ranges, fridges, freezers, or lights, or whatever were done in the home by Pat O'Connell, our roving fix-it man ; his knowledge and expertise was infinite.

The world of household appliances especially the smaller ones was an eye-opener for me as regards their variety. In this year, of 1966, Palmerston North had not only a host of electric retail shops but also a host of electrical wholesalers, with their travellers and/or agents calling on the shops to supply their wares. From the early months getting to grips with handling these representatives to replace stock or buy their products, Bruce Wallace had coaching job on his hands. I had handled reps before in the clothing trade in buying woollen goods and cotton trimmings, but the range of stock in a shop like this, I was not only learning fast but enjoying it. It took a few years finally to get on top, once you made enough mistakes to do so. Anyone who never makes mistakes, never achieves much either. Very soon, little by little I became expert at my buying acumen and replacement of stock and parts progressed, assuming responsibility for many lines.

A big change was gradually taking place when some of the wholesalers were losing their grip on their exclusivity, by new large outlets getting the best of both retail and wholesale. Manufacturers were privy to the change, when brands like Sunbeam, Zip, Ralta, could be accessed by shops direct, bypassing the wholesalers

if retailers could singly or more, buy in quantity. Large whiteware goods like ranges, fridges and freezers, washing machines and driers, some manufacturers were very choosy with their retail outlets, like Fisher and Paykel. Towards the end of my tenure with Wix's, I had an arrangement of bypassing this arrangement, by cultivating friendly relations with other retailers. When I started, I couldn't believe the animosity that existed between four appliance outlets nearby. I take full credit for breaking this down over the years, and we all helped each other with shortages particularly in the whiteware range. For instance, if we were doing the wiring for new houses, and the owner wanted an F & P washer, we could satisfy the wish. Some of these places no longer exist, Lane and Hill, Begg's, Garners, Ward & Elwood, among them

One of the strengths we had in the repair and servicing of lines like Ultimate, Phillips, Claude Neon Signs, Remington, Gallagher electric fences and others, opened up other repair shops to getting their spare parts or supplies from Wix's, especially items under warranty. I was able now and again, of winning service contracts when dissatisfaction with other firms occurred. In addition we were the depot for Electrolux vacuum cleaners agents for the district, five of them, and did all repairs as well. About twelve years later they opened up their own agency. When Malcom Swenson left, Sid Albert who had retired when selling to the present owners came out of retirement to replace Malcom. He was an ideal fellow to work with and his company made an old boys club mood of the place. I was able to have a constant source of reference in technical matters.

CHAPTER TWENTY THREE

Staff at Wix's were a fairly contented lot. One of the electricians, Terry West went out of his way to wise me up to occasions of protocol as they arose. Like shouting morning tea on ones birthday, and/or something in the alcoholic line when necessity arose, like Christmas, or one of the apprentices getting his trade certificate. The office had two female workers, one Jocelyn was already there when I started, and was still there when I retired many years later. She had many assistants over the time I worked there and had the keys of the safe. Eight months later, in 1967 on July 7, the whole country was geared up to change to decimal currency after much preparation and debate. Jocelyn had the job of handling the money and changeover. It was a time for both customer and server. The ten cent piece replaced the shilling, and when it was tendered, the old habit of giving two cents change, was slow to eradicate. Handling change all day gave plenty of practice to cope, and in fact was much simpler in calculating change.

Under the old imperial system of pounds shillings and pence, 20 shillings made a pound, 12 pence made a shilling. Under decimal currency, 100 cents made a dollar. So you didn't have to subtract a penny from twelve, and a shilling from twenty any more. A lot of the old people I tried to convince it was easier, would not be convinced. And the same with measurement when yards, feet, and inches, were abolished from the vocabulary. This was 12 inches to a foot, 3 feet to a yard, and 22 yards to a furlong, eight furlongs to a mile. Athletic sports took on a complete nomenclature for events involving yards, furlongs and miles. The unit was a metre; 100th of a metre was called a millimetre, and ten millimetres called a centimetre. Building a house, the architect's plans were a confusion of these new measurements to bewilder the owner of the house when it came off the blocks.

The introduction of the decimal system some said was an excuse for businesses to raise prices, and I remember a great discussion in the papers and the media, using the price of chewing gum as an example. Prime Minister Muldoon was

blamed for everything including this, though rather unfairly. During his reign as minister of finance, we did have galloping inflation following the decimal currency introduction. I had been working for eight months fortunately, and was well prepared but even so I was now and again still guilty of giving two cents change for a ten cent piece if my mind was not attentive. One cents and two cents as well as the one and two dollar notes have been abolished over time since.

A few years in the job, I finally met Mr Ebenezer Porta Wix, the founder of E P Wix Ltd. Eb, as he was familiarly known, was living in Rothesby Bay near Auckland paid the first of his occasional visits to Palmerston North. He was a chubby sort of fellow and we got along famously right from the very start. He shifted up there to be near his only child – a daughter – on his retirement. She had married and provided him with some grandchildren which gave him an excuse when they married and/or took notable steps in the course of life of buying them presents. I gave him suitable discounts over the years till he and his wife passed on. Eb liked keeping in touch and having the benefits of discount and chatting of the continued progress of the firm he had so solidly established. His chats were quite illuminating talking about the old days, when most of the transport of goods were done on bicycles. Sid told me of transporting so many lengths of conduit and rolls of copper wire this way. Eb was proud of winning the contract for all the early electrical work at Massey University. I well remember one conversation we had that revealed his penchant for calling a spade a spade. The news of the day was when Prime Minister Keith Holyoake was laid low and entered hospital for a prostrate problem. We never so much knew in those days what a prostrate is or was.

"It's like this me boy," (He called me "boy" at times, I was 55 he was 88) "If you or I went to the doctor with this complaint, he'd say what you want is a water works job. But if you were a society snob, it would be a plumbing job. But with the Prime Minister, it's a prostrate problem." In a list of christian names, I see the meaning of the name Ebenezer is given as "in Hebrew, rock of salvation". Mr Wix was pleased to meet Sid Albert who was his first apprentice back working, re-calling old days; and with Sid's apprentices, Bruce Wallace and Bob Alger now the owners, making a real success of the business he had established. I was still working there when Mr Wix and Mrs Wix died. I attended their funerals and discovered that they with Bruce Wallace, Bob Alger and Sid Albert were all Freemasons. This scotched a long held belief I had that Catholics and Freemasons were antipathetic. I got along jolly well with them as well as Jews.

I've not mentioned Bob Alger much so far. Bob was a go-getter, and became the President of the Electrical Contractors Association. How Bob coped with his colour blindness as a electrician with their colour coding puzzled me, but none of the others remarked about it. His mother lived a few doors from us and doing a job for mother in her garage once left the place in a dangerous state, nearly electrocuting her. At times with any shop stock, I'd miss an article and found out Bob had taken it home on trial. I'd rather he told me first rather than later. When it came to trade-ins, this was his forte, and this suited me fine but this applied to ranges.

There is no holding time back, it marches inexorably onwards, and fate intervenes without always knocking on doors. An added responsibility was soon to fall on my shoulders. Jocelyn as usual, when getting the banking ready one morning, was searching the safe and office looking for the previous days takings.. All she had was the loose change and nothing else. Only her and Bruce had keys to the safe. When Bruce finally had time to spare, came to find out what Jocelyn was so upset about, the paper money was missing and no trace of it anywhere. Suspecting a robbery the police were called and were sure one of the windows of the repair shop showed signs of a forced entry. Questions were asked all round where the keys were kept, it came to light that every night Jocelyn when locking the safe

threw them in one of the office drawers, none of which had locks. She was well into tears by now, and Bruce blamed her for the loss of the notes.

In a spot decision, he took the keys off her, and gave them to me. I was shocked and flattered at the same time to be trusted with the safe keys. Jocelyn was the mother of two boys, whose father had absconded after the second child was born. The marriage was a bitter affair strongly opposed by her mother, refusing to grant her permission to marry at sixteen. But she succeeded to coax an aunt to do so. The aunt told me when discussing Jocelyn on one occasion, it was the worst days work she ever did in her life. I gradually got to know her boys during their school years, they were very good and polite. Jocelyn always made their school lunches, and tried to vary the sandwiches, but every day they insisted, one had marmite, the other jam. No variation over the years she says

Jocelyn stayed on and the hurt of loss of the takings faded as bad news does, and the friendship between Bruce and Jocelyn blossomed enough, till about a year later they married. It was a happy ending and the staff fully approved. Another son was added to the union who was given the name of Scott, and I believe it was the easy compatibility with the other two sons of Jocelyn's previous marriage with Bruce, who provided them with a much needed father. In fact they were all like brothers. Goes to show out of adversity, sometimes comes much needed luck.

My own status gradually progressed from not only retail manager, to chief retail buyer, and advertising manager, as well as keeper of the safe keys for its daily opening and closing of business. Mention has been made of the servicing of appliances, which was in the care of Malcom whose versatility seemed to know no bounds. The great range of household appliances that daily came across the counter, and the nature of the customer proved a great study in human nature. Before the days of electric jugs that automatically switched off when boiled, created a lot of customer anguish. Many times a jug element replacement would be returned in a few days as faulty, when obviously the jug had boiled dry again. The element would show irrefutable tell-tale signs this was so, by comparison with a brand new one. Some would deny this but the evidence was there. Once a pop-up toaster revealed a very dead electrocuted mouse when opened up.

Automatic electric ranges were a boon to working folks when their popularity made selling them easy. A golfing lady when this was pointed out of the benefits having dinner cooking (or cooked) when she returned home after a game had one installed immediately. Twice she rang up to say it didn't work, and twice our man Pat O'Connell could not fault it. For the third time she rang to say it still didn't work, patient Pat returned to see if she was doing something wrong. He arranged to go through the whole process the next time she set the time clock. I'd drummed into her the system to use. 1. Set the start time. 2. Set the finish time. 3. Set the temperature. 4. Put the food in the oven. Pat witnessed all this done correctly and they both proceeded out the front door. But before closing the door she reached up and switched off the mains on the switchboard, just by the door. How she expected the range to operate without power, would without doubt, haunt her for the rest of her life. Incidentally there are cases where some owners of automatic ranges forget to put the food in the oven!

As I settled into the electrical trade, the tailoring business was left well behind, though I never concealed the fact of my tailoring skills. Close friends sometimes took advantage of this by giving me minor repairs or adjustments to do. My ready acceptance by all the electricians as one of them, I felt was rather flattering. One of them Terry West went out of his way to make me better acquainted with the staff, giving me backgrounds of their peculiarities whatever they were. I've remarked elsewhere that in workshops and factories, some workers chum up with fellow workers in their private lives. Some like me have never been inclined to do so,

naturally keeping ones private social life separate to their working life. This minor aloofness, stood me in good stead. The shop part was easily managed by me and one other, or a part timer, and I was free to engage extra staff when holding special sales.

One of my chores I was asked to perform was providing copy for advertising in the daily press. And there were many occasions when members of various clubs and kindred organisations who printed news letters and magazines and were customers, pleaded for advertising copy. My limited experience of display advertising, was this seldom yielded returns in sales compared to the cost of them. Still the management were keen to have the name of the firm portrayed, but I got very selective with more experience. When working for Dalefield on the West Coast, he was always keen to have scatter ads in the local daily newspapers and these proved profitable. I resorted to these again and found them quite effective. One of the quirks in advertising was the nature of the logo involved. During my tenure of office, Wix's designed a logo with a big W incorporated in it, and the response to this was a letter from a building supplier (Winstones) who objected to our use of it. They for some time featured their trade name with a big W. Litigation was threatened but never materialised to our relief. Seemed a petty objection.

One would naturally think that as the father of eight children, and a job giving reasonable satisfaction, the interests of a large family, should add up to a full life. Added interests with school children creep up slyly, and with our children attending three different schools, their mother and I took an interest in the schools beyond what uniform and rules applied. Before long I was finding myself on the committee for one, a secretary on another, and teaching religion to catholic children as a member of the CCD (Confraternity of Christian Doctrine) as I had been doing in Tawa. These were those children who didn't go to catholic schools, because of staff shortages, over crowding or because of fees or any other cause. This was not onerous, taking a couple hours a week at the most, but there were occasional meetings of staff. The president of the CCD association was the headmaster of Palmerston North Boys High School, and the vice president was the headmaster of Terrace End Primary School. This was a very satisfying experience. Also to meet many of the parents of the standard 4 children I was teaching. In Tawa, my class were all secondary school ages; in that case they taught me a few things as well. The younger children varied so much in background, parentally. One year we were in the exalted position of having five children in four different schools. Three of our children were good academically, Mary, Raymond, and Barbara. But Chrissie and Noel were pretty run of the mill but quite satisfactory, yet after leaving school were champions as far as progress in the work place were concerned; in fact like prisoners just out of jail!.

Family matters can either run smoothly and leave a lot of time to pursue other interests. Two that spring to mind were firstly, politics in the form of joining the Social Credit Party. Secondly through the back door of politics the burning issue of the Abortion Debate a hot topic looming as a future election issue. Social Credit aroused my interest many years before becoming a financial member. Their policy including a strong objection to the growing and vociferous pro abortion faction and their propaganda was enough for me to join up. Looking back I was never thrilled with the numbers attending monthly meetings. Despite persevering for some years gave it away. Politically we managed two members into parliament but it took two elections to get one each. It lapsed into oblivion over subsequent years.

The middle and late 1970's, saw the birth of a movement labelled SPUC; The Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child, and has persisted to the present day. In Palmerston North, this started with household meetings, with invitations to political candidates, in particular, Dr Gerry Ward of Porirua, to organise for the

coming election some campaigns, particularly telephone ones. Palmerston North formed its own branch and we formed a committee of ardent supporters and I was elected to the committee. We decided to organise a big public meeting, to be held in the Opera House (now defunct) as the largest city hall, and for speakers. All the five gynaecologists in the city agreed to briefly address the gathering, as well as another one Dr Mason from Wellington as the main speaker. Without exception these all proved to be sympathetic to the cause.

On the night the hall was absolutely packed to the limit. Not a voice was raised in objection. At our next meeting such a good start to the campaign was encouraging. The local daily newspaper did its best editorially to support the pro abortion lobby, our present member of parliament Joe Walding supported us. Joe being a catholic came in for the usual comment, "*What else would he do?"* while an up and coming pro abortion candidate John Lithgow was moving heaven and earth to win the coming election for the National Party. Another catholic, Peter Edmonds a political candidate for Social Credit was canvassing like hell to win the seat as well. So with heaven and earth and hell contesting, this three sided contest was to have a Gilbertian result in the end, if only MMP elections were in vogue then! Peter Edmonds entry, split the vote and John Lithgow won the seat for National and Alranz. Shortly after the elections our publicity officer was transferred and she nominated me to take that responsibility. Timidly I welcomed it and had a few ideas.

My first move was to meet the Manawatu Standard editor face to face with the policy aims and objectives of the SPUC Society and already had them written out. He agreed to print it and the following day was as good as his word with a blazing prominent headline half across the page.

SPUC SPELLS OUT ITS SIX AIMS AND OBJECTIVES. The opposing faction ALRANZ (Abortion Law Reform Association of New Zealand) replied four days later over seven signatories, with what I thought a limp reply, that every child should be loved and wanted; that birth contraceptives and sterilisation should be freely available. If the unborn child is being loved and wanted, it didn't make sense to be destroyed. Alranz's headline ALRANZ REPLIES TO SPUC QUERIES was not as impressive, as the one over my lone signature. This way I thought I had made a good start, and meant to carry out a mild campaign though on the grounds of reason rather than on polemics. We had the city gynaecologists in our camp after all. Two of the ALRANZ signatories were political hopeful John Lithgow and his wife. In a later enquiry I conducted, I found she was the Social Welfare agent in approving adoption of unwanted babies. While not in any way being provocative at least she hinted, maybe, at a balance in her philosophy.

The Palmerston North Public Library had a large display board as you entered showing and advertising local events of sporting, social and cultural ones. I booked in a season for three weeks for Spuc which was readily approved. We had a good supply of photographic and literary pamphlets based today's children being the future, including the hope that every thing we now treasure and value is not lost. That was the main message. The practice inherent in abortion on demand, plus upsetting the balance of the natural population increase, put all this in danger. Some lurid photos of aborted foetuses in colour were rather graphic, but the whole was counter balanced; I thought and others too, it would prove effective. To my dismay early in the third week I had a ring from the chief librarian while at work.

"Would you like to tone down some of the photos especially of the aborted foetuses in the display." I protested saying everything was factual, and pictures don't lie, nor were fictitious in any way. "No, but some have protested because it was terrifying little children. Some mothers have asked him to have them removed. Could you just tone it down a little?" Grudgingly I agreed, and removed the offending photo with one less lurid to a less prominent position. The chief librarian

would have to reply to a protest, it was no use to antagonise any one in a similar position. Abortion was one of the most effective way of polarising this issue.

The committee received tentative approaches to debate the issue of abortion. Our lady president at the time always declined on the principle which I thought were just. If something is inherently wrong, why give the protagonists and supporters a platform to air their erroneous views. For instance if stealing is wrong, why debate it? John Crowley, a specialist gynaecologist called in by the maternity ward of our general hospital in urgent cases wrote a booklet called, *PHYSICIAN or SOCIAL TECHNICIAN.* In this publication, he outlined the growth of the abortion matter over the 2,500 years as a medical issue. I quote:

The medical profession has come to a decision - (cross roads) -more important than any other we have made, in all the 2,500 years of our history. The abortion issue can lead us along a road, so radically different from all that we have done, that our work, and life, as Doctors, will never be the same again. it behoves us therefore to make this decision consciously, not just let it happen.

THE CHOICE?

What are the two alternatives we have? Firstly, the pregnant woman is our patient and we must not, for doctrinaire reason,. deny the abortion to which she is entitled – furthermore forcing an unwanted child on her may lead her to Australia or back-street for an abortion, or produce a child which will be gravely and socially, disadvantaged. Secondly – the alternative point of view would have it that the unborn is a human being who has rights which must be protected. Necessarily we must now discuss these points of view to make a correct decision, but there is a more fundamental question.

IS ABORTION RADICALLY DIFFERENT?

The argument is clearly stated above, but what has it got to do with us Doctors, we are not philosophers or ethicists, but simply practitioners of the healing art. However, two very awkward questions arise:-

1. Does abortion, as a cure for social problems lie in the realm of medicine at all?

2. If abortion as used by Doctors, has it anything different about it from normal therapy?

These questions are objective. The answers pro and con, then do enter the realm of subjective assessment, and usually few of us have the expertise or the necessary knowledge to remain objectively honest. In a debate about honesty which we all admit is intrinsically right, abortion as stated has overtones because of social implications. The world in which we live has opened up a sexual revolution in which permissiveness has outrun its responsibilities to give it an equal chance, of coping with a responsible attitude. It is easy to say, no effect without a cause. Alranz has not an effective policy of responsibility for avoiding pregnancy. Half a truth is sheer fatuity, educating the use of birth control and wanting every child wanted, and loved, even suggesting sterilisation or contraceptives. I do not want to labour the point, but there is the fact that every child that is aborted, like in the words of a song, Too many parties and too many pals, occurs a line, "…….*Remember there's a man to blame, that man may be your son.…"* Fatherhood should be more of pride than shame, and too many of my fellow men have shirked their manhood in the best sense of the word. Those that do stand up and be counted, have the courage to warrant the name of father.

As publicity officer, we issued a monthly newsletter for local distribution, and I took pride in formatting the news. The free weekly paper The Tribune was very sympathetic to Spec, and did not hesitate to publish full page ads on our behalf. Christine my daughter typed the copy from my hand written notes, and St Peter's College donated the use of their Xeric copier to print as many as needed. Among the

religious communities the Catholic Church had only one wholehearted public supporter in the Mormons (Church of Latter Day Saints).

Before leaving the topic, I must tell of the General Election when Dr Gerry Wall from Porirua came up to show us how to effectively conduct a telephone campaign. This was my job, and lord knows I didn't know how to get started. Calling at the post office, I outlined what I wanted, and out of somewhere, a telephone man emerged from the depths of the offices. He was a great help and spared no effort to make the day an outstanding success organising several lines for a dozen telephone operators to the venue decided on. Whether it was my helplessness or an answer to prayer, everything went as planned. We rang up numbers from the telephone book and names in the Palmerston North Electoral Roll for 1976. Looking back through my scrapbook I am amazed at the fury of the campaign for that year. The cost of our telephone assault on the poor voters, and the weary phone operators, was amply repaid when no charges were made, by the post office. At least we never received an account. The elected Labour Government went on to have a Royal Commission on Contraception, Sterilisation, and Abortion.

After some years, listening to politicians, and finding attitudes only hardening on both sides of the abortion debate, some of our leading members decided single issues have a limited effect. Depending on the human nature of the population, only frustration on both sides kept the issues alive. Alranz and Spuc have left to the field their most hardened supporters. Given time, intensity lessens or increases among the hardened few: my view is let them have it. I resigned not my beliefs, but my subscriptions to the Spuc publications. Everything to say had been said. There are those who will harp forever on any theme till they die. Prayer to the author of life is necessary, and in time goodwill prevails. It is not the medals that win the day, but the efforts that precedes them. I think that last sentence is very quotable on lots of occasions.

CHAPTER TWENTY FOUR

I realise that family life, among the many facets of living, occupies a unique position in the time allowed for it. I recall the remark, if you want anything done, ask a busy person. With all our children, they at one time or another make the remark "I'm bored.". You could surmise from all the activities I embroiled myself in, did the family get left behind somewhere? Blest with what I firmly believe a wonderful wife and mother to our children, no problem was too large, or too tragic, that we were unable to cope with. And they came truly enough. Not of epic proportions, but one does not sit down as each problem arises and measure these things. Mothers and fathers are blest with different natures, and thank God this is so in the majority of cases. The emphasis by others is sometimes so wide of the mark, that reconciliation seems nigh impossible. In most cases, time is the best of all cures. I would say for me, time is the best, while the mother at first would treat a problem as the end of the world. These two attitudes can cancel out difficulties like magic. If mothers and fathers both shed tears at the drop of a hat, the children would have to depend on their own therapy. I sincerely hope the magic of childhood will never cease, as mum and dad in old age can swap incidents in their families, and sons and daughters can carry on where they leave off .

So far, none of the children have been in jail, nor to my knowledge, been arrested. At time of writing David our eldest is 57, our youngest is Barbara is 40. The six children in between are reasonably spaced. Bonnie and I are now into our eighties. Some of the grandchildren are even enjoying parenthood, so we are getting to know that we still have a little more to learn. Both of us as practising Catholics,

naturally we assumed that was all we had to do, to have them all follow like lambs in the fold. How wrong we have been proved. They have the same choice as we had all those years ago, and we are warned that as parents, we are not the final judges even of our own flesh and blood. My gray hairs were well established before I realised that the final judgements are the ones to be feared most. This was pointed out in a Psalms commentary I came across in a book by that wise Anglican writer C S Lewis, that some of the harshest judgements will be reserved for those things we omitted to do. Rigid attitudes, can warp judgements, just like lies can. Our main blessings we are a happy family, always eager to help each other, no strife at all. Like most things there are some "Buts".

The "but" on top of my list is when the babyhood gradually starts to disappear as they progress through the education process. Then they begin to think for themselves and you find a loss of ones own final authority. When Bonnie and I were young adults – or teenagers as they are now referred to - there was not the passion to leave home and go flatting. One stayed home till married and relieved your parents of further responsibility. Parents as they saw their loved ones off on their first honeymoon, (fathers especially) would visibly wipe their hands and say to the tearful mother, "They're on their own now. We've done our bit." Then during the first few years they are back with problems, and seeking advice on them. When the first baby arrives, the new mother realises she has the same things to learn as the rest of the world. Then the grandchildren begin to arrive. One of the best things Bonnie and I learnt early, was when we ever took charge to help out by looking after grand children, or other folks children, was when they were back in their parents care again. The propensity for children to get into trouble, is a universal trend.

One of the truisms we were told in the early sessions for those contemplating marriage at all, in reference to the raising of children, was if you make a success of the first child, those following on were likely to be less trouble. My brother John who was never ready to accept others advice wryly remarked once, " ……the best brought up children are those of spinsters and bachelors." In any gathering of parents, the hot topic of raising children can ensure great discussion. There is no doubt that the best place to bring up children is in a family. China is a country where the limit is one child in each marriage. A country that legislates on nature and natural progression has lost touch with reality.

Rearing a successful family is one of the joys of married life. The joys of a large family has assured us of a contented old age and never have any fear of being alone and neglected. The role of mother is as important as the role of father. I was going to say more important, yet the back up a fathers makes puts an emphasis on any joint decisions. Some hard decisions had to be made at times, housing among them The sacrifice of staying on the farm in Lower Hutt for nearly seven years in the hope of buying our own home was a bitter blow. I'd made a promise to stay till the land was sold, and then be told we would not lose by it, was one of the most bitter disappointments of my married life. But prayer and getting on with life instead of crying about it, worked out in the end, though it took longer than expected.

We have a lot to be proud of and a lot to be thankful to our family as they joined the workforce getting their own jobs. To be on the receiving end of a lot of amenities, they contributed to, particularly with cars, video recorder, holidays and others has been an enriching experience. All without exception have their own homes except one who is temporarily paying rent. Never have we been outdone in generosity, nor has our life not been abreast with theirs. This sharing of life's pleasures started off with Bonnie, willing to share anything with others. Compared to her I'm sure I'm a skinflint, tending not to let my right hand know what the left is up to. Very often I'm shamed into action at times, prompted as she is so naturally

giving. Perhaps there's a balance lurking somewhere in all this, maybe by the glow of self satisfaction that follows on giving.

My life since coming to Palmerston North established a lot of unusual statistics. We came here in 1966, when aged 51 to buy a house to help my sister Mary. She had bought two houses, one which her husband wouldn't live in, and was financially embarrassed. She knew I had building society shares for years, which fortuitously benefited us both in the end, as I was able to raise such a small deposit to secure a home at last. I now realise that up to that age of my life, I had never in all my years spent more than seven years in one place or in one job. True I had once bought a house in Westport, but due to circumstances I have already written about was a disaster. This first house in Palmerston North was also of short duration, but it was a stepping stone to stability in both job and home. We sold this first home for $17.000 to buy another in Terrace End a Cinderella suburb, for $12.000 and stayed there for twenty years. During those years that suburb had lost that status, and was sold at double that price. This was thanks to finance minister Muldoon's inflationary financial management.

Now for the first time in my I stayed in a job exceeding seven years duration. This time it actually lasted sixteen years. And actually for twenty years lived in the same house. Stability had at last come. One factor over which I had no control about was getting older, about time to consider the time of retirement. Kathleen had gone to join Tess in Wellington, being attracted by the higher wages she had heard about. It was "*the thing"* to do and despite parental advice of free choice for young and old in these matters, they have to try their wings like fledglings from the nest. Let them fly I demurred. Well well. She had paved the way to some approval by writing to a family we were very friendly with, when we lived in Lower Hutt, to see if she could board with them. The answer was yes. Before a year had passed, she was proposed to and accepted. By a twist of fate, Peter Knapp and Kathleen when they were born, lived opposite us in Mortimer Terrace in Brooklyn. Mortimer terrace is a very steep street, cut out from hills in part. One side is very high the other very low, and despite being opposite, very little chance to even have a nodding acquaintance as neighbours. Peters father at the time of the engagement, was Wellington Commissioner of police. The families together discussed the coming wedding and us two fathers became friendly and discovered we were the same age, born same month within a day or so, and due to retire at sixty the same time at the same age, in a couple of years. One or the other suggested we plan a holiday to celebrate together. This was something worth looking forward to. Fate was to play tricks over this

Kathleen's wedding was the second in the family, David the eldest who left home was the first, Marie his bride did not get any family support nor came to her wedding, so it came to be a quiet celebration. Bonnie and I were a little miffed at her parents ignoring the event, so rather than make a fuss fell in with the plans of the betrothed. Our parish priest Father Keegan blessed the marriage which was a good one. Marie turned out a wonderful daughter in law and was a priceless help to David in the many enterprises of his married life. Lots of mutual love overcame all obstacles, and they were many. They were rewarded with six children, four boys and two girls, and finished up with a lucrative business in writing and publishing, and a mail order business. Kathleen's wedding was just the opposite, being a full blown affair, with the full support of both families. Peter Knapp, was an auto electrician and had a flying start to their career in contrast; starting up in his own business, marked by lots of free services to his father in law's motoring woes from time to time. They finished up with five comely daughters. When the fifth girl arrived, I sent Peter a telegram congratulating the arrival of a son at last but missing its tassel!

Mary and Christine eventually took the plunge to go overseas, after their boy friends had gone to England, they decided to follow. If it was to be a lengthy stay, and obtain work, passports were essential before they arrived. The fact their mother was born there, paved the way. A birth certificate had to be obtained which duly arrived in the post. Mary's friend David Ollivier was the first to go. Chrissie's friend Peter Edmonds, was the next to go. He was a thorn in her parents estimation, and Bonnie did her best to thwart this friendship, but the two boys were totally unknown to each other and had gone under separate motives. Chrissie with the help of a little borrowing raised the fare to accompany Mary and the day came when they were off. Shortly prior to their departure, on holiday in Dunedin I passed the Government bookshop when I spied maps of London and England, so bought them to take away with them. Mary when she arrived teamed up again with David who had landed a seasonal job in Rome called the Seven Hills Camp, catering for young tourists and supplying refuge needs if wanted.

Their going had our blessing and best wishes, and I undertook after their first letters came, to reply with a joint monthly one as long as they stayed. As it happened Mary stayed a little over four years but Chrissie hung over for more than double the time including three trips home, once for her mothers seventieth birthday, twice for holidays .They never stayed in each others pockets all the time but exhibited the prerogative of individual initiative as the fancy took them but always stayed in touch with each other. To relate both had a life of untroubled smooth going all the time, would not be true as upsets to both did occur. In the case of Chrissie extreme internal pains suddenly came within, and fortunately a friend was in touch by phone and came to the rescue. Mary was in Italy at the time. Carted off to hospital it turned out to be acute appendicitis. It was all over before we knew anything about it. One of her jobs was with computers that at the time in the late seventies and early eighties, was progressing into communications like e-mail. She was sent to New York to be initiated into the techniques and returned to run the office in London. When the staff there was augmented in London she met Peter O'Dowd, who sailed into a career that was to overtake her, woo her, and finally marry her in the finish. They were married in London, but the money for us going to London for the wedding was saved to help them move back to New Zealand as soon as possible. Peters expertise in computers convinced both of them of better scope for his abilities rested here, when we forwarded to them all the literature we could lay our hands on. In the girls letters home I was introduced to a lot of unfamiliar jargon to add to my repertoire, for which a reputation was imputed to me. Words like *sussing* and *temping* cropped up. In the context they were used it was not plain; but one meant *to get to know all about it*, and the other was *temporary jobs relieving permanent staff only*. One never ceases to learn.

One of Mary's early experiences was a term with a kibbutz in Israel. She went with a friend whose name was also Mary. We heard in a letter this was over a period when during Christmas Day, it was not a day of rest for them in the kibbutz, but work as usual shovelling gravel. Gender had no privileges for kibbutzers; work neither. However one joined up for a period and you left or stayed on as desired. , Mary was persuaded to join David in Rome to assist him during two seasons at Seven Hills Camping for the catering part on the refreshment side. The currency inflation in Italy she told me later was phenomenal. Returning to England during the off season was a let down; for the million lira she earned, amounted to peanuts in sterling. It's a wonder she returned for a second helping, but David was very persuasive.

Her brother David with Marie his wife were very genealogy minded, and the thought of persuading his sister Mary to visit Lebanon to unearth some data for the

family history, wrote to Mary and she agreed to go for a very brief visit with a set of questions he gave her.

As it appeared only a hop skip and a jump to go from Israel to Lebanon, the two Marys' parted agreeing to meet up later in London. Not widely known in the world at large there was a lot of unsettled activity in Lebanon due the military skirmishing between Palestine and Israel. Mary arrived in Becharre and made almost instant contact with the family, but instead of only a day as planned she was marooned for a couple of months. Her arrival was coincident with a deterioration between the Phalangists and the Syrian armies and transport in and out of Lebanon for Mary was impossible. Fortunately she kept taking notes of her stay and all the experiences she had. When her letter arrived here, it became an historical document among friends - and even foes alike. The original was fortunately copied and lies somewhere in strange hands. Many attempts have been made to retrieve it but failed.

Mary's visit to Lebanon was unknown to us her parents. When nothing was heard from her since the two Marys' after for a week or so, alarm bells began to ring. When the weeks came to a month of utter silence, all the other siblings made a pact not to let mum or dad know to save us from sheer worry. David who started this Lebanon enterprise did not panic. Out of the blue a telephone call from Greece, a frail voice said she is ringing and has only a short few minutes to catch a plane, but she wanted us to know she is alright. It was Mary, and to say we were mystified, we were baffled as well. Then our whole family who knew what we didn't know, spilled the beans, and the number of toll calls put through, put Telecom back in the black as everyone was ringing everyone. Mary is safe, back from the dead.

. I think the family, were on the verge of contacting Interpol when the phone call was made to us. Repercussions of the incident took weeks to die down. Her recuperation from an illness, while in Lebanon plus the delay getting out and back in London to a very happy reunion. When the two Marys' decided to return to new Zealand without any fanfare, it was a complete surprise. No intimation was given to us. We were watching TV just before midnight, mulling over the sudden death of Norman Kirk, the Prime Minister, when hearing the back door being opened and there was Mary's face peering at us from very tired eyes. Landing at Auckland they had driven down through Taranaki to drop off one Mary while ours came on to Palmerston North.

CHAPTER TWENTY FIVE

Some family weddings are more memorable than others because of the circumstances surrounding them. I would say that Tess's one had features about it worth recording. We knew she was going steady with someone called Jim for some time, before they decided to get married. We did not know his surname at the news, but his family were very enthusiastic and made moves to make themselves known to us. We learned the parents names were Marge and Harry Maskell, good old English names. They had emigrated out to new Zealand and in fact Jim was born in Palmerston North. Jim had two sisters already married, and his parents made the effort to actually come up to meet us and make arrangements together. So we were off to a good start anyway. Tess was keen to be married in the Catholic church, so we made arrangements to meet our parish priest Father Bernard (Barny) Keegan. This was one time Father let us down by saying as she was not a practising Catholic they could not have the facilities of a Catholic ceremony. The conditions he laid down were not favoured by Jim or Tess, in regard to any children, so until they could do so it was declined. She was in tears over this harsh decision and was a

sore point with everybody involved. Father used the corollary of membership of a golf club in regard to abiding by the rules, and not only when it suits you.

Bonnie who arranged this meeting, took this much harder than I did, in spite the friendship we had over the years with Fr Keegan, she felt a more persuasive attitude could have had better results than a cold refusal. Bonnie's uncle Fr Frank Phillips and Fr Keegan went through the seminary for the priesthood together, so there was a bond on her side of the family to perhaps stretch a point. The repercussions did not stifle the future entirely. As in the cases like this the way to deal with it is to dust yourself down, and carry on. David our eldest had been in a similar situation of being a non practising Catholic marrying a non church going lady, but, received a blessing when Fr Keegan married them. David carried on with the faith for a while but a few years later, succumbed to the blandishments of the Church of Latter Day Saints, and joined up with an enthusiasm he lacked for the status quo. He rose through the ranks or degrees of his new religion to be a Bishop, and had a licence perform to marriage license, though not born with it, achieved through his merits. So David would do the ceremony for his sister, a real family affair.

On the morning of the day of the wedding Jim and Tess came around to see me, while I was burning rubbish and tidying up the grounds. Jim told me he and his two brother in laws were buying a few bottles of beer to watch the football test in colour back at the hotel. New Zealand were playing Australia. He was unaware we had a colour TV, had booked the hotel conference room from 2-4 and a barman from 3-4. The caterers were told to have peas and potatoes ready for the breakfast reception being held in our home at 4pm. There was also a children's tea party as well. I did not bother to argue over this as my confidence in Tess's common sense to make him see that despite his enthusiasm for international rugby, wedding arrangements take precedence. Moreover the older children were using tape recorders to record proceedings we could send overseas later to the girls Chrissie and Mary. I had insisted on having two recorders in case of missing out on any highlights.

We had a large house that would accommodate the small crowd for the wedding breakfast. Preceding this there had been a bit of sprucing up of the house as Bonnie didn't want the smell of paint hanging about for the wedding breakfast. I drew up a possible program to go like this:

2. PM Guests arrive
2.30 The wedding
The singers and speakers
Signing the register
3.pm Bar open, socialising
4.pm Wedding breakfast.

<u>What actually happened:</u>

1.30 David arrived without Marie. (result of a tiff)
2.30 Marie arrived
2.40 Tess ready.
3.00 No best man. Had gone for walk. Tess, Teresa the bridesmaid, and I (giving away the bride), waited in the guest room.
3. 40 Still waiting, several excursions up and down stairs. Everyone getting restless. Trying to find best man.
3.45 All clear given. Wedding ceremony
4.15 Bar opened
4.30 All told to clear out. Bar closed.
4.55 Reception started

There was the Maskell and the Coory families mostly and the Albert Motel for the wedding and guests. David the celebrant had to come from Tauranga, but when he arrived he was alone. Hitch number one. Where was Marie? She is coming later. Mystery. So we waited. The best man was Jim's brother in law. Bonnie and I had never seen David in this role before, and making allowances for liturgical differences his performance was well done. The aftermath function of the football had a good result too, we beat Australia a bit close for comfort 12 – 9. If any enterprise has a wobbly course, very soon its forgotten when it ends happily. Tess and Jim finished up as Mr and Mrs Maskell.

Noel was the only one of our children who stayed at home till he married. The others seemed to try their wings outside the nest, but when he left school and even before he left school, always managed to find work.. In Tawa he had a job with a butcher, and in Palmerston North with a fish and chip shop. With David having his own business as a car spray painter in Wainuiomata and Tauranga, Noel and a friend decided painting cars was no big deal, thought they would practice on the bombs they had. On one occasion they travelled to some northern town to collect a wrecked item with the intention of repairing and making a huge profit. This enterprise resulted beyond even our wildest dreams, and theirs also. Nothing like success to spur ambition. Noel's friend departed for pastures new mainly in the fire prevention business, and Noel worked to improve his car repair and painting skills. In no time to us oldies his progress in owning his own business on the spray painting side was predictable. He had the kind of nature like David to inspire confidence with customers whether with touch-ups or full body work.. I know David and Noel found pleasure in the customers faces as they came to collect their cars.

Noel and Mary were the West Coast born of the family, Noel in Greymouth, Mary in Westport. Their marriages were held in the Mercy Chapel which exists no more. The Mercy order of nuns have closed their hospitals due chiefly to the lack of vocations and the cost of supporting them. The building has been sold and is now called the Aorangi Private Hospital. These two weddings were straightforward, but the venue was ideally suited to families because of its intimacy and atmosphere. A big church like St Patrick's Cathedral our parish church, guests seem remote from the ceremony. It's the closeness that makes the difference.

The wedding of Mary and David Ollivier followed naturally after their overseas jaunts. David's parents lived in Taupo; his father had an artificial leg, and David was concerned all the wedding venues had to be approachable. Mary on the other hand was attending Auckland University studying law, and David who also lived and worked in Auckland, opted to come to her Palmerston North home to be married. Six weddings so far, but two of the eight children we had, Raymond and Barbara, have played either hard to get or not found what it takes, . While there's life there's hope. They may find a motive to write their own life story some day. At least all contributed to the enjoyment of my fairly long life. Raymond's interests in life are many and varied and has come to the rescue many times to his other siblings in matters of knowledge such as electronics, gardens, museums (where he works), and literature, regarding books.

Barbara on the other hand, never deviated from her earliest years and during schooling of being a nurse. A nurse in the family can answer many problems and recommend measures to solve most. I think we all but me mostly, found her presence during illnesses a great comfort, especially during visits to specialists. And times when it was not advisable for me to drive my car to appointments, she did so for me. The training for nurses when Barbara entered the course, signified the demise of the tried and true method of nurse training in hospitals, but since then in favour of Technical Institutes. This method had been mooted for some years before it was approved and actually put into practice. Barbara did her full training in the

local hospital. The end of her training with the issuing of their class certificates while all were assembled, they were advised that no firm assurances were given of filling jobs right away. This had an unsettling effect on some of them, and it must have been seen as a waste of time if they were not automatically placed immediately. Barbara was not affected. Her twenty years of nursing saw her working in Sydney and Kalgoorlie in Australia, and a season in London with her sisters. While there she managed a stint with a practice in Harley Street. Her years away were not many and she came home again before the others.

CHAPTER TWENTY SIX

The question of retirement became a possibility during the election campaign of the Muldoon era. To capture the treasury benches Muldoon proposed to change the qualifying age of the Labour Superannuation Bill, to 60 and to make the rate a percentage of the minimum wage. This was a bold step at the time and appealed to me as you could keep on working , as long as you were the retiring age of sixty, you could qualify for the pension. Two events took place that was to alter the age of my retirement, I had planned. Kathleen's father in law Bert Knapp was the same age as me and we were retiring together. Two weeks prior to Bert's 60th birthday, he left the Police Commissioners Department, to catch the train home to Upper Hutt, when he collapsed on the railway station, with a heart attack. Before the ambulance got to the hospital, Bert had passed away. The suddenness of this was electrifying.

The police gave Bert a huge funeral, and I would say there were thousands of uniformed police present. Guards of them lined all the routes of the courtege to the Taita cemetery. The impressiveness enhanced the tragedy for me as in the short years of his son Peter marrying my daughter Kathleen he had shown a lot of interest for their welfare, not only in a material sense but in affection, albeit if a little rigid. He had a reputation in the police force of being uncompromising.

The weeks before and after my sixtieth birthday, in all my monthly letters to Mary and Chrissie much had been discussed about retirement, and in turning sixty had enrolled in the Muldoon pension scheme, and was delighted to learn I received additional to my wages. This I put in a special trust fund pending the day I did retire. Consequent on this I worked for another five years. What precipitated my retirement was the selling of the business to Rob le Heron, a recent employee. Rob had been one of the highest apprentices in the country. I was treated well by him after he took over but I missed the camaraderie one of my bosses Bruce Wallace, while the other owner Bob Alger who probably was the cause of the sale though I may be wrong . Bruce went to work for the Manawatu Evening Standard. They had invested in some high technology, and wanted him on a permanent basis. Bob Alger on the other hand became an itinerant handyman, but the name of E P Wix had plenty of goodwill. Rob begged me literally to consider deferring my retirement. I postponed the actual date of retiring by six months. Truth to tell I was more than ready to give up work. Rob gradually changed the nature of the business by dispensing with the large amount of appliance repairs, and some of the service contracts for brand names. The ordering of spare parts was taken off me, Rob adopting more of a hands on approach. His main interest was on new work, specialising on the lighting side.

I was offered a part time morning job with a wholesaler when retiring and this I promised taking a tip from the English daughters of *temping* for a change. It seemed final, handing over the keys to the safe, and other responsibilities. The new manager who took my place, found there was a lot to do and look after all at once . Within two months , he was dismissed for an unprofessional misdemeanour, which

surprised me. But not for me to be worried and quietly ignored it. I was free and intended to stay that way.

As Robbie Burns put it when one plans the future, "*things maun gang aft agley"* and that certainly happened within a few months. When Bernie Hogben, the manager of Electrical Traders offered me a morning job only, thought I'd try it out. This turned out to be an easy assignment as all I had to do was look after the place while he did the mail orders, and attend to customers. the first thing I learnt on entering retirement was one doesn't get meaningful holidays, or sick leave. Days take on a sameness, no matter what day of the week it is. First one has not to go to work. Then, you ask the question; what are you going to do today? All those chores around the house and garden, you had mentally put off to do when you retired, all come back with a vengeance. If a list had been made it would be fairly lengthy, which is the benefit of not making a list in the first place. Otherwise one would be held to ransom by it. Postponed holidays take on a debatable urgency over those postponed chores. The home in Palmerston North was becoming a halfway stopping venue between Tauranga and Wellington with the married children living in those cities.

When Bernie Hogben offered me a mornings only job, this suited me down to the ground. We were old friends and he had recently been made manager of New Zealand Electrical Traders. This was the life for me, home for lunch, then a snooze upstairs afterwards. Then as the fancy took me did anything fancy dictated in house or garden. The months flew by from Easter when I retired to late in the following September the 24th to be exact. Alone one morning when Bernie had an appointment, a consignment of batteries arrived. They were deposited in a stack inside the entrance, and with no one to help me proceeded to stack them on the shelves. They were heavy as batteries are, but struggled manfully till it was finished, the hardest days work I'd done for a long time. It was time to knock off when he returned, so went home as usual for lunch and my garden. This day the snooze was declined, I was pricking out cabbage plants when a queer feeling came over me. Entering the house, remarking to Bonnie about the queer feeling, just managed to collapse into a chair, and passed out.

The next thing I knew was the sound of a siren, and a brief glimpse out the side window passing the local shopping area on the way to hospital. Followed a series of a hazy consciousness, and a bearded face trying to wake me up saying, "You've had a massive heart attack……. we are putting in a pacemaker". They could have said we're flying you to the moon for all I cared. The next few weeks was an education knowing what goes on in the cardiac ward. To say I was amazed at the care is putting it mildly including the presence of two male nurses surprised me as I thought male nurses were a thing of the past. All the attachments to my body and the drip feed and constant monitoring of my condition for the first two weeks was an experience. The suddenness of heart attack without any warning signs is alarming in any circumstances, and the rallying of the family around was part of the cure. When Noel came for his first visit and saw the tangle of wires and cords under which I lay, fainted immediately. The nurse who rescued him made the room look like a first aid post for some minutes.

The first time to take a shower alone I asked "you OK?" I said yes and promptly collapsed. Another time during a quiet read a nurse rushed in and said are you alright? The pacemaker was removed after two weeks, and one of the nurses asked to have it, to send to the Islands. The day of my birthday, 13th October, I was having a shower when a toll call came from Chrissie in London. The nurses asked tolls to hold the call till after showering without telling me. By the phone was a parcel from her for my birthday. This was a complete surprise, my birthday call, and the

present was a lovely paisley silk dressing gown. It was the best medicine for me at the time. I put it on and swanned around the wards showing it off.

Two days later after my sixty seventh birthday, was home again, weak, glad, and happy. A tree I had earlier felled, was still there in its entirety lying on the lawn. Thinking that must be chopped up and got rid of soon. The physical weakness took some recovery like carrying a chair, and getting the mail from the letter box were enterprises in need of planning to accomplish with any aplomb at all. Physical weakness had never been a problem before.

After some years of improvement to the grounds and the house including a new roof, and receiving some tentative offers for the property we flirted with the idea of buying a more modern house. We put our house on the market while we looked at others. I personally was disillusioned with the ones we looked at, in fact they only enhanced what we already had. One particular family was very impressed and I suppose being members of our church, over a couple of years that followed made it known they were still interested, if we ever changed our minds. I had known his father when we lived in Lower Hutt, they had three young children, and we promised to let them have first refusal However I got to the stage where no matter where my eyes fell on either house or garden, some aspect still needed attention. They say you cannot make a silk purse out of a sows ear, and facing reality the house was old and would not lend itself to extensive upgrading.

The house at the end of our section became vacant with the decease of its occupants, and was bought by a developer who pulled the house down and built another more modern dwelling. The developer didn't like the boundary fence, which was tatty and asked me to go half with a new fence. I thought if he wanted a fence he could pay for it too, but the fence could be improved with a few posts and straightening up, and offered to pay half of that. He disagreed. He pestered Bonnie if she was within cooee and me as well, with all the advantages a new fence would provide to the point of virtual harassment. There followed a month of correspondence debating the pros and cons of a new or repaired fence.

Neither gave way till one day the builder brought in a bobcat machine, demolished the fence putting all the debris on my side and began erecting his new fence, reversing the original style by having the cross beams on our side. Then we received an account for a little over a thousand dollars. Eventually we were sued when refusing to pay, in the small claims court by the builder, which he did not attend and the case was dismissed. He said he did not get any notice of the hearing. When notices are sent out, only the defendant's is delivered but not the plaintiff's, so it would be difficult to prove he was telling the truth or otherwise. The rehearing did take place, but he did not win; the referee saying he had been too cavalier in his attitude. The winning of the small claims case was satisfying. We still were toying with looking for a house when I saw one for sale in an adjoining street. Most of the houses we had inspected were nearly all in outlying areas, and Bonnie's heart was set in staying in the area we'd lived in for the last twenty years, even praying for this. A lot of prayers get "no you can't have it" and some get "yes you can". Both are legitimate answers to prayers. This time the people selling the house in the adjoining street were praying they'd get nice people to buy theirs. We all had a happy ending and shifted while the ones who bought ours were very happy too. They'd been patient for a few years and we're all living happily ever after.

Now later, in my eighty eighth year, recalling all these events up to the time of my retirement and after, never regretting all the blessings my life has brought me through a large and wonderful family, the down sides fade into forgotten insignificance. On the wall as I write is a reminder in a few words, about happiness.

Happiness isn't always getting what you want; it's wanting what you have.

Robert Browning has put it well in Rabbi Ben Ezra:
Grow old along with me!
The best is yet to be.
The last of life, for which the first was made:
Our times are in His hand
Who saith, “A whole I planned,
Youth shows but half; trust God: see all, nor be afraid!”
