

LOVE  
LIFE !

MAY BLAIR  
QSM JP





**For My Family,  
With All My Love,  
Christmas 1994.**

I, me, Isabella May Forrest, was born 18.7.1916 at No 1 Battery Road, Napier, in a small four roomed house, which was next door to the horse yard and stables owned by the Napier Harbour Board.

I was the sixth child born to my parents, Alfred and Josephine Forrest. My eldest brother was John then came Robert, Josephine, William, Bruce, then me. My Dad and Mother had both come from Australia. Dad was born at Woodstock, a little town on the New South Wales Victoria border out west. Mother was born at Urana, New South Wales, and they came to New Zealand in 1908. My Dad was a driver of horses for the Napier Harbour Board, and we lived in the house which belonged to the Harbour Board. It was typical of its kind in those early days, almost square with four rooms, a long hallway running through the middle to the kitchen, which was the largest room, lined with tongue and groove wood varnished a mid tan colour. This room was also used for entertaining guests. There was a black coal range with a wire grill below the mantle piece which always seemed to have clothes airing on it. Also the big black iron kettle always on the boil as well as in the winter time the oval boiler with soup. Good meaty vegetable soup, and to one side would be a Mrs Potts iron with detachable wooden handle. In the middle of the room was a large wooden kauri table and Bentwood chairs and a long wooden stool along one side of the table. At night the room was lit by a kerosene lamp which was placed in the middle of the table which was always scrubbed whits. My Mother was most particular about the table being clean. We also used candles, they were put into an enamel candlestick about the size of a saucer and it had a small handle at one side. On the mantle piece was the ornate fretwork wooden framed clock and a green jug, an iron money box and of course a tin tea caddy. Also a jar with paper tapers which Dad would light from the fire and then light his pipe. I loved the smell of that tobacco.

There was a brass fender by the hearth and it was polished every Saturday. Also the brass tap on the coal range and all the brass door knobs. We were fortunate to have a range with a hot water container at one side. You filled it from the top and the tap was about half way down the front.

Mother made her own bread. The china bowl of dough, covered with a cloth, was placed on a chair in front of the range to rise and then turned out onto the table and kneaded and put into tins and left to rise again, and then baked in the oven. What lovely crusty bread it was. We were never allowed to eat it fresh, or were never allowed to eat the bread with butter and jam. It had to be bread and butter or bread and jam. We also loved to have bread and dripping with lovely brown juice from the roast beef, mixed with the dripping pepper and salt sprinkled on the top.

There was a small scullery out from the kitchen, just enough room for the bench and enamel sink with a brass tap, also to be polished on Saturday. On the end of the bench stood a knife cleaning and sharpening machine. There was no such thing as stainless steel.

Mother also at times would cut a potato in half, dip it in knife powder, polish and rub the blade of the knife and a nice shine would result.. There were cupboards under the sink and that was where the pots and pans and bowls were kept. Above the sink on one side were shelves for such things as cocoa, baking powder, sugar etc.

We did not have a bathroom inside. From the scullery you went down three wooden steps across the yard to the wash-house. It was fairly large. The bricked in copper with fire-box was in one corner, also a set of tubs. Along one end wall was the tin bath. The water was heated in the copper and carted to the bath in a galvanised tin bucket.

The washing of clothes was a hard task in those days. The water had to be heated in the copper. Woollens were washed by hand. Cotton clothes, sheets, towels etc were placed in the copper of cold water to which was added finely cut up homemade soap, plus a couple of handfuls of washing soda and a spoonful of borax, the latter to soften the water to help make the soap lather. This was then brought to the boil, all the time being prodded and stirred with a long wooden copper stick.

After twenty minutes of hard boiling, the clothes were lifted out with the copper stick into the tub of cold water and rinsed. Then through the hand wringer into a tub of blued water. The blue was bought in knobs tied up white calico type muslin. You had to be careful not make the water too blue. There was a saying ... out of the blue comes the whitest wash. Then out of the blue through the wringer and then out to the clothes line. Not the revolving ones of today. They were long lines strung between posts and there was the clothes prop to push the line high to catch the breeze. Many the time I remember the prop slipping and the sheets would be dragged in the dirt. My poor mother had to rinse all the clothes again. The hot water left in the copper was cooled down and used to wash the heavier coloured clothes. Wash Day usually started at 6 am and the last of the washing would be on the line about 2 pm. Monday was always wash day. There were no clothes driers in those days. In winter time the heavy washing would hang on the line for days. There was the starched table-cloths and doyleys, the white petticoats, all made of good linen or strong cotton material. These items had to be damped down and left overnight to be ironed next day.

Tuesday was ironing and mending day. There would be two Mrs Potts irons on the coal range. While one was being used, the other was heating. I can see my mum taking a cloth to wipe the sole of the iron, then spit on the hot sole to test for the correct heat. The ironing was done on the end of the kitchen table. The ironing blanket covered with a piece of sheeting. I don't remember this but my brothers never let me forget that I had drowned three kittens in one of the tubs and was about to put one through the wringer. I would have only been two or three years old. Maybe I was washing them.

I could tell lots about that home, how we went to bed at night, the only lighting was from a candle. The beds in the room I shared with my sister were single iron beds, with horse hair buttoned mattress - white honeycomb quilts in winter and floral cretonne in the summer. We also shared a chest of drawers and the wardrobe was a shelf with curtains hanging on the floor. We only had linoleum and rag mats on the floor.

My Mother and Father's room had a big double iron bed with lovely brass knobs top and bottom on the bed ends. Also a big tin trunk stood under the window. Not the push out ones of today. They were the long double hung windows able to be pushed up at the bottom or down from the top. Long lace curtains hung from brass rings on a wooden rod.

The boys bedroom must have been similar but I do not remember it. I do remember that when Jack and Bob were older Dad put a tent in one corner of the horse paddock for them as a bedroom. It had wooden floors and sides. We girls were not allowed in the tent unless asked in.

As children we spent a lot of time in the horse paddocks playing. We would collect pieces of broken china and stones and mark out houses on the ground. Also pick wild flowers and make a garden. There was a herb which grew in the paddock and we would gather it and crush it and put it in water to make perfume using an empty vanilla essence bottle which in those days had a cork, not the screw top of today.

Those years at Battery Road were happy and carefree days.

My playmates were our neighbours. Muriel Johnson and the McBride twins, Edith and Ursula - and Biddy Falvy. We spent a lot of time playing, not only in the horse paddock, but also up on the beach front. It was not a good place for swimming as there were too many rocks, but how we loved to fossick over and under and around them. There were all sorts of sea life, limpets, boo boos, star fish, crabs and sea horses - tiny little fish and a whole wealth of creepy crawly little creatures. We loved it best at low tide. We would turn over the rocks to find sea eggs, very spiny, but beautiful. There was one huge rock standing all of one and a half metres high. It had little caves and hollows in it and we would hurry up after high tide to see what sea life had been left in the caves and hollows. We seemed to go to the beach winter and summer, and gather star fish, periwinkles, boo boos, we called them. We would get an old tin, fill it with sea water, put in the boo boos, boil them up, and when cooked, pick them out of their shell with a hair pin. Many a feed we had.

The Johnson's had a galah called Jerry, and once when Mr Johnson planted onions, Jerry pulled them all out. Mr Johnson also used to cut our hair, just straight around, plus a fringe. Mum and Mrs Johnson were great friends. My mum would do the dressmaking and Mrs J the ironing. They really helped one another.

I remember the grey and red striped crochet petticoats Muriel and I had, also our beanie hats, also red and grey crotched.

There was quite a family of McBrides.... two sets of twins. Mrs McBride always seemed to be working and always wore a big white apron. At times she would stand on a brick to see over the fence to have a talk with Mrs J, and she always put a corner of her long white starched bib apron over her head. On a Saturday it was a ritual for Mrs Mac to call to the twins - Edith and Ursula to come and get their worm tablet. Old Mac, as we 5 called him. Made blackberry wine in the bucket which at other times was used as a slop bucket. My brother Bill's birthday was in November and Mrs Mac always picked a yellow rose for Mum on that day.

The Falveys had a boy and a girl. They lived next door to the McBrides. Next to them was the big two stories house where the Plowmans lived. They also had a boy and a girl. I played a lot at their place. The boyo had some wonderful toys... Oh, the lovely ride-on-elephant he had.

There was the time Glen had his tonsils removed all on the kitchen table. I can see it quite clearly covered in a white sheet and plenty of boiling water on the wood and coal range.

I loved the big house, so roomy. The old grand-dad lived with them. Mrs Plowman's father. There was a big grandfather clock in the upstairs hall, and I still like to think the story true, that the night old grandfather died, the clock stopped. In the big sitting room, as it was called, was a big doll in a glass case, only to be seen on very special occasions. The Plowmans owned the cordial factory on Battery Road, and many the time coming home from school, we would take an empty bottle out of a crate at one door, take it further down the building to another door and get a free drink.

Miss Kenny's shop across the road from the Plowman house, really was one room of her house. How we loved that shop with rows of glass jars filled with the most exciting array of sweets any young child would drool over. There were cough cakes, big round flat aniseed tasting. They lasted so long if you only sucked them. Also aniseed balls, conversation lollies, all shapes and colours with writing on them....Kiss Me....I Love You....Meet Me...etc. How we loved them. Weaner pigs, jelly babies, chew bars, cigarettes with a ruby, diamond, or sapphire coloured stone, all for a penny. Liquorice straps, two a penny, and we could also buy a penny's worth of broken biscuits. We all liked Miss Kenny. Outside her shop was a Pohutukawa tree. Still there today, in my childhood it was just a small sapling with a wooden fence to protect it, this was also the area where the evening papers, The Daily Telegraph, were thrown from the tram car. The papers rolled in a round bundle, later to be sorted and picked up by the runner boys.

Across the road was Mr Skinner's shop. He was a grocer, not patronised so much by my mother. But I remember the time I stole sixpence,... yes, I stole it,...but it took me about six weeks to pluck up the courage. It was on our mantle piece and it was my job on a Saturday Morning to get up on the chair and dust this mantle piece.

One Saturday, there by the clock, was sixpence. I shifted it along further, the next Saturday, a bit further - then partly under the green jug, where it stayed for two Saturdays. Then I stole it, and down to Mr Skinner's I went to buy some broken biscuits, some dates and I think the rest went on sweets. I had a lovely feast, but alas, Mr Skinner saw my mother and mentioned I had been in the shop and spent a whole sixpence. I am sure it was the look on my face when my mother confronted me as to where the money had come from ..... into my bedroom I was sent with a very sore bottom.

At this time, Napier had tramcars running from Faraday Street where there was a tram shelter up Thackery Street, into Dicken Street, then Hastings Street, up Shakespeare Road, down Shakespeare, along Waghorne Street, then Bridge Street, to the depot. There was also a link road at the junction on Dickens and Hastings Street that took you down Hastings Street. We got to know the tram drivers and conductors. You boarded the tram and the conductor would come along call ... All tickets please... and for a penny a child could go all the way to town. A ticket would be clipped with a hand punch. Sometimes the little piece clipped out would be shaped like a club or spade, or diamond.....maybe a heart. We liked to guess what shape it would be. So up the hill the tram would clang and squeal.

The tramshed at Battery Road is still there. We used to play at the shed, chasing around the outside or climbing over the seats. But on one side was the entrance to the Men's Toilet, and woe betide us if we went that side. Someone would tell mother and it would mean a scolding or smacked bottom.

In the winter we played lots of games such as skipping, and bouncing a ball. We did lots of fancy clapping and turning while bouncing the ball. With skipping we had a short rope which we skipped along doing things such as crossing arms - turning the rope backwards, skipping fast, calling that "doing pepper". Then when more than one played we used a long rope. A child at each end and the third person running into the turning rope. Also using two long ropes turning at the same time, and that was quite a trick to run into the ropes and skip one to the other. Hop scotch was also popular. You marked out three squares, an oblong, another square and another oblong. You had what was called your favourite block, usually a flat stone. Throwing it into the first square and hopping on one leg up the remaining squares then turning to come back and pick up the block, all this without losing your balance. If you tripped it was the next one turn .

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Inside games were "I Spy" something with my little eye beginning with a letter of the alphabet, it had to be something in the room you were in. We also played board games, Ludo, Snakes and Ladders, Dominoes, Draughts and of course we played with out dolls. One I remember had a cloth body filled with sawdust and china arms and legs and head.

We also used to build houses and castles with a pack of playing cards. Summer games again with dolls, also marbles. We had names for different ones, Stinkies were little clay ones - aggies were agates, brown and blue, some mottles with white. Then there were Taws, lovely coloured glass. Clear glass were called "bottles" because they came from the soft drink bottles.

We also spent a lot of time going on walks. How we loved the days the water cart came around. There was no much thing as tar sealed roads, so in the summer it was so dusty the water cart came to lay the dust. This cart was horse drawn. It was a long flat tank-like vehicle with rotating flanges at the back which fanned the water out, and we just loved to follow behind with our dresses tucked up in our bloomer legs. We would skip and run and jump into the water spray. It was a Mr Morton who drove the cart.

My dad was a tall man with a moustache and he always wore saddle tweed trousers with braces over his shoulders - a felt hat always on his head - lace up boots which he repaired himself with plenty of protectors, little steel sort of three pronged nails they were. Also toe and heel plates of steel. He also mended all our own boots and shoes. On a Saturday night all our footwear was cleaned and polished ready for Sunday.

Many a time if Dad had not had time to half-sole our shoes, Mum would cut a piece of cardboard and slip inside the shoe to make them wearable until Dad had time to repair them.

Always in February Dad would get up early of a Sunday and with a kerosene tin strapped onto the carrier of his bike, ride out to Tongoio to pick blackberries. This must have been a hard day for him as it would have been a good twenty mile bike ride. The Monday, Mum would make them into jam. Great jars of jam for the winter. There would be peach, apricot, plum, pear-ginger and melon and lemon jam. She also made marrow honey which was delicious on sponge cakes. Mum was a very good cook and her flaky pastry and scones and sponges were well known in the neighbourhood.

Across the road from the McBrides lived old Mrs Morton, in a very little house, just two rooms. On a Sunday night she would go to St Mary's Church and on her coming home our boys who would have stuffed an old sock with grass and attach a long string to it. Then hiding behind McBrides or Skinner's fence. As Mrs Morton came close they would pull the sock across her path. The poor dear would scream, thinking it was a big rat.

She had a son who was a rabbitier up country, and when he came home to visit, how we would ooh and ah as he jumped his horse over the picket fence outside the little cottage. I'm sure he only did it to impress us. There was also old Mrs Grant and her two daughters who lived in the lane below Seapoint Road. I was quite scared of Mrs Grant. Once when we were playing in the oak trees up the lane, she offered me an apple, but I would not take it for I was sure she had cut it and put poison in it, to get rid of us playing outside her place.

**Memories** - memories but to delve into the past one must go further back than one's own memories and try to recall families memories - remember what your parents have told you. I want to recall all those I've heard about the Harbour Board horses of which my father was the driver in those early days of the building and shaping of Napier.

I was born in the front bedroom of a house that belonged to the Napier Harbour Board. It was just a four roomed cottage, with a scullery and an outside wash house. The horse paddocks and stables were next door so for as long as I can remember the horses and stables were part of my life.

As children the neighbours and me played in the horse paddocks, so many wonderful games we played, the fantasy of making believe houses marked out in the dirt decorated with bits of broken china. They weren't just houses they were palaces. The highlight would be the end of day when Dad arrived home with the horse and dray, up we would get on the dray to ride into the yard. Imagine the long red stables with the double stalls at one end with the hay feeding racks at the other end. Outside the stable was the water trough where it was wonderful to watch and hear the horses drinking in great quaffs of water after a long hot days work. The shaking of heads and then down to the stalls to be scrubbed down and brushed, their hooves examined and I can still hear my Dad talking to them "steady old girl or old boy, you've had a hard day". "Oh you did a good job today" or "you stubborn old things, move over you're not as tired as I am". Dad would never leave the stables until the harness was hung on big nails that were on the walls, and the horses bedded down in the stable itself, which had big doors



with a big brass padlock. Inside was the feed, stored in big old wooden piano cases, the hinged lids held up with leather straps. I remember the kerosene tins Dad used to catch mice. He would half fill them with water, sprinkle chaff and oats over the water and have a trick stick across the top of the tin.

This was then buried down in the chaff so far, the mice walked along the stick, fell in the water and the stick reset itself ready for the next mouse. Some nights he would catch up to eight or nine mice.

Now to go back to the early days before my time. The Hawkes Bay Harbour Board had horses as far as I can ascertain in the early 1890 - 1900s. My dad was driver as early as 1906-08. The first reference I can find is a letter written by him asking for Epsom Salts for the horse "Wallace".

(See centre pages for the letter).

Other references were about horses for sale. H N Glazebrook on the 21.12.06 - The Kennels' had a draught horse "West Blue" for sale as did "Brunkburn" Longburn Manawata on the 11.07.08. A good draught horse for sale at J W Harding also had horse for sale.

Back to the horse stables - the smell of oats and chaff and the nugget and neatsfoot oil that Dad used to clear the harness with. I did not like the mice... so many of them. When they became too plentiful Dad would half fill a kerosene tin with water and bed it down in the box where the oats or chaff were kept. He would sprinkle some fodder on top of the water and he had a wooden trick stick across the top of the tin. Along came mousy, in he dropped, and the trip reset ready for the next victim.

I think it was once a year the man came around with a portable clipping machine to crop the horses hair for the summer. What a treat to be allowed to turn the handle of the machine. How smooth the horses were after clipping. Just long hair left on their backs to prevent them getting sunburnt.

The horses I remember were Charlie a dark brown chestnut, and Tommy, a bay with long cream tufts of hair around his hooves. I liked Tommy best, he was gentle. Charlie always had his head down until he heard Barry Bros 12 o'clock siren, and his head went up and he'd head for home. The horses belonged to the Napier Harbour Board and were used to cart soil and rocks and clay for road filling and reclamation at the breakwater, now the Port of Napier. Also the Harbour Board quarry was in Battery Road at the corner of Burns Road and soil was taken from there to fill for the Embankment. Dad was the first to drive a horse and cart over the completed Embankment.

After the 1931 earthquake, the horses were sold and Dad was then a carpenter on the Glasgow wharf. Many a time I took his lunch up to the wharf, where even on the hottest day in summer, he would come up from under the wharf where he had been working on the piles, with an overcoat on. I remember the Canteen on the Wharf, run by a Miss Cass and a Miss Wilkins. Never ever will I forget the day I took Dad's lunch and just got to the canteen when an awful apparition appeared above the breastwork of

the wharf. I dropped the lunch and ran. It was Mr Donovan, the diver, coming up. But what a fright I got.

In the 1920's Dad organised cricket matches. The pitch was in the horse paddock. Dad used to water and roll and keep the pitch in good order. There were the Battery Roadites - Portites - Shakespeare Roadites. They all played on a Sunday. Wonderful matches. Dad also kept the cricket bats in good repair, making new handles for them from Ozier willow, which grew along the banks of the Tutaekuri river, which then flowed along Georges Drive and it was quite a wide, fast-flowing river.

Mr J P Kenny who was at that time the Secretary/Manager of the Harbour Board, a very hard man, made them vacate the paddock and that put an end to the cricket and also to my brother Jack.

The boys thought they would clear an area up by the morgue which was closer to the beach front, and while clearing away the stones, Jack was bitten by a Katipo spider. He was twelve to thirteen at the time. My poor mother spent days at the hospital with him. Dr Thomas Gilray was wonderful, but it was almost two years before Jack was home again with a very deformed arm. The spider had bitten him on the inside of the wrist and after having thirty seven operations and a bone removed from the lower arm, Jack was home. He finished his schooling and started work at Allan & Harris's furnishing shop in Emerson Street, as a ticket writer and window dresser. Alas each year would find him back in hospital with an ulcer which had to be lanced and drained. It was 1932 that he went into hospital for the last time. The poison had never really left his system. He passed away in the May and is buried out at Park Island Cemetery, not far from the Earthquake Memorial Grave. With today's modern drugs he would have survived, I'm sure. While in hospital, Dr Gilray gave Jack a set of books - The Wonder Books - trains ships, etc.

Our boys had paper and milk runs. The milk was delivered in the early mornings from the covered horse drawn cart of the Napier Dairy Company. The boys would take a large billy and a pint dipper and off they would go. It was quite a large run, up the brick lane to Bay View Road. Often I went with Bill and Bruce to deliver the milk. We would cut through to Bay View Road and on the way we would take a freshly laid egg from Mrs Lambie's fowl-house and tell Mum she had given it to us. Then one Christmas we stole two Christmas plum puddings hanging on the line of Mrs Dun's place at the bottom of the brick lane. It was, in those days, the custom to make the puddings at the end of October. Usually they were boiled in the clothes copper for two to three hours. These puddings were always in calico and tied up to form a round pudding. After boiling they would be hung out to dry. Come Christmas Day they would be boiled for another hour or two and then served with custard and cream. Really delicious.

Of course they also had silver charms or threepences, or sixpences in them, how we loved to get one of these goodies. But the milk run, each household would put a billy out and you would know how many pints each customer took. This was measured out from the large billy-can with a pint dipper which had a handle that looped over the edge of the can. When we got back home, this can and dipper had to be thoroughly scalded so as to be ready for the next morning.

The paper run was done between 4pm and 5pm. The bundle of papers came from the Daily Telegraph in Tennyson Street, by tramcar and was thrown off the tram at Miss Kenny's shop, where they were collected by the runner boys. My brother Billy was not a very reliable delivery boy. He would go around the Port where there were seamen and give them a paper. His excuse was the poor seamen had been at sea for so long they wanted to catch up on the news. They often paid him with foreign coins. He eventually had a grand collection. Maybe between 5pm and 5.30pm there would be a knock at Mum's door and it would be someone wanting to know if Bill had left their paper. This happened with regular monotony. Often Bill would get a hiding from Dad for this and my sister Josie would get most upset and said "I'm going to pack my clothes and jump over Bluff Hill".

We also had an old Chinaman that came around with vegetables and he used to sit in the bottom of his cart, head just over the headboard. One day the wheel came off the cart. Oh, the spate of Chinese - he could not make out what had happened. Then there was the soft drink van owned by Long and Bardon, that came around with stone jars holding a gallon of drink. These jars had a tap at the bottom. We loved ginger beer best. How we waited for Mr Long and Bardon to come.

Another job we had was to go to Barry Bros coal yard of a Saturday morning and get two shillings worth of coal. We would take a chaff sack and Barry's loaned a hand trolley to bring the coal home. It always seemed to be my job to take the trolley back. This coal came from the South Island by steamer and was loaded onto railway trucks and taken to Barry Bros at Ahuriri. Often the train driver would jerk the railway trucks so as some of the coal would fall onto the side of the railway line and we children would take a bag and pick it up, thus saving Mum a few hard earned pence.

I had two jobs to do on a Saturday. One I hated was to scrub the front veranda with cold water, scrubbing brush and sand soap. If the soap left any marks I would be made to wash it all over again. The other job I didn't mind. That was to take the paper money after the boys had done the collect to the Daily Telegraph. That meant a ride in the tramcar. Why it was my job - I got the cheapest fare. One Saturday it had been raining and windy, and as I went down Tennyson Street, a ten shilling note blew along. I gave chase. The note landed in a puddle at a man's feet. He stooped and picked it up and handing it to me said "My word, you would have got a hiding if you had lost that". I don't remember going home. I was so excited. What wealth - but it was short-lived, it was taken off me and my sister got a new pair of shoes with the ill gotten ten shillings.

One day the boys were mending a puncture in the tyre of Jack's bicycle, of course, all were helping him. One of them put the little round piece that goes on the valve onto the top step. Josie came out with a full chamber-pot and her foot rolled on the little piece, and Bill collected the contents of the chamber-pot all over him - what an uproar that caused.

Then there was the time Dad had told my brother Jack to get up and clear the washhouse copper chimney. He had not done it by the time Dad came home, this made him very angry, so putting a ladder on to the roof, he was about to hoist himself onto the roof by the help of the chimney, when it collapsed. Back he fell into the strategically placed outside toilet.

There he was among the broken toilet pan, and water from the overhead cistern, and bricks and soot .... we kids took off up to the beach until he cooled down. Many a time later, though, he could laugh about it.

Dad was a great gardener. He kept the family in vegetables nearly all the year around. He also grew wonderful sweet-peas and pansies. The pansies were in a round bed with a big peach tree in the middle of it. Those pansies I well remember as I had a great number of warts on my thumb. Someone told me to be rid of them, get a bit of lean bacon and rub it on the warts, and then bury the bacon but not to tell anyone where. This I did, and yes, the warts disappeared. I hope now I've let the secret out that the warts don't come back.

School Days - I went to Napier Central School up on Napier Terrace. The boys and Josie had been at Port school, but owing to a better education at Central, Mum had transferred them the year before I started. It was a long way up to Central, along Battery Road, up Milton and Burlington Roads. Must have been about one and a half miles. Up past Amners Lime Works where in the winter time we would pick up a lump of lime rock, dip it in a puddle to get it working, that was warming it, and we would jiggle it from hand to hand to keep our hands warm. We would just drop what was left in the gutter. Further up from Amner's lived Johnny Owen who had a pet pig. He would put a lead on it and take it for a walk. He even made little leather boots for it. I would meet up with friends on the way and all would run - hop and skip and talk our way to school.

Eleven fifty-five the school bell would ring and off we would run down the hill to go home for lunch. We would try to get as far as Amner's before the twelve o'clock Barry Bros siren sounded.

The Infant Department was separate from the Standards. I was still in the Primers when the Memorial Gates were opened. The whole school was assembled on the upper playground and we listened to speeches and we sang "Land of Hope and Glory". We had a ditty on that song - "Land of soap and water, Mother wash my feet. Father cut my toe nails and give them to baby to eat". We also sang "Heart of Oak are our ships, jolly tars are our men, we'll fight and we'll conquer again and again". There was also that time at school we could join the Navy Club. By paying sixpence a year you were given a bronze medal to wear, if financial.

They were happy days at Central. I went on to the Standards and was there when the Duke and Duchess of York visited the school. We senior girls assembled on the tennis court at the back of the school and the Duke and Duchess watched while we drilled, forward and backwards and sideways lunging, arms, elbows bent, on hips and arms forward, sideways and upwards, oh how smart we were. That was 1928.

Every year we had a school Ball, held in the Forresters Hall in town. We practiced marching, all sorts of intricate formations, ending in a maze march. One year I was leader, how important I was. Of course we girls always had a new dress for the Ball. Later, it was our best for Sunday School.

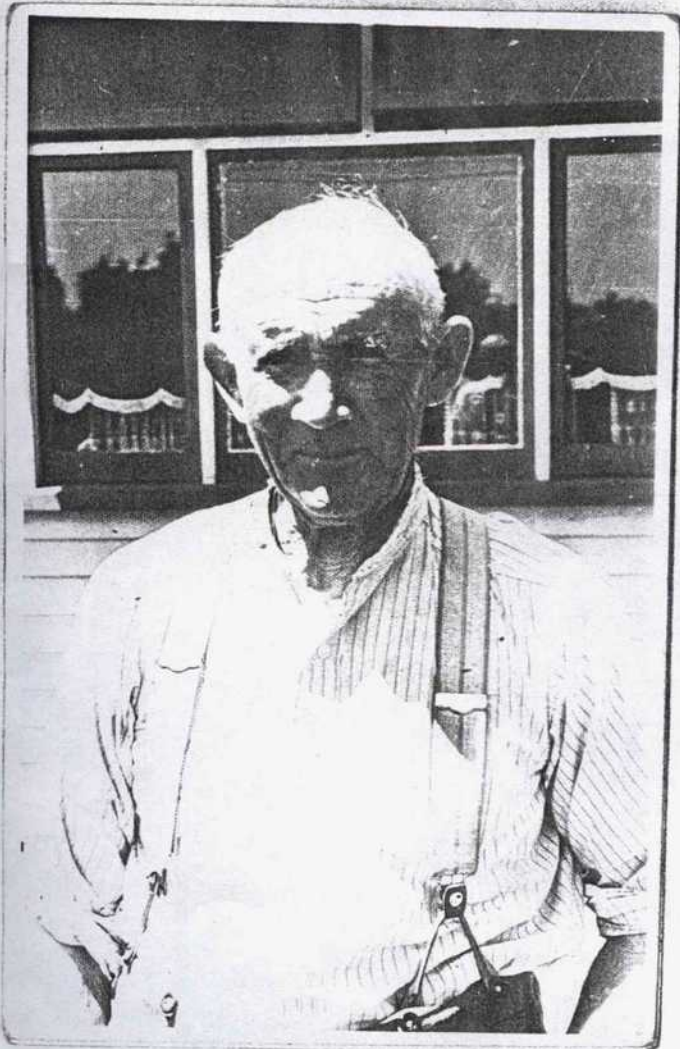
Seapoint W.d.  
November 2<sup>nd</sup> 1910

Mr. Jno. P. Kenny

Dear Sis.

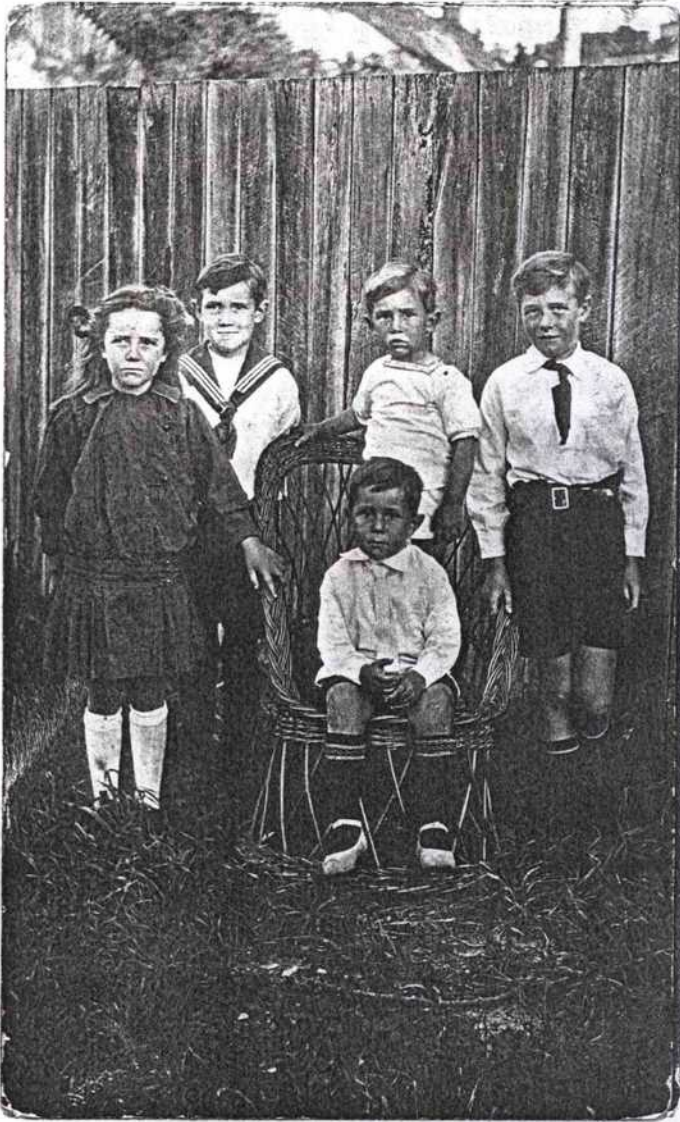
Please send me about two dozen packets of Epsom salts for horses. Wallace was bound up this evening when he came home & I had to give him an injection. He is all right now, a little Epsom salts in their feed keeps their bowels open.

yours faithfully  
Alf. Forrest

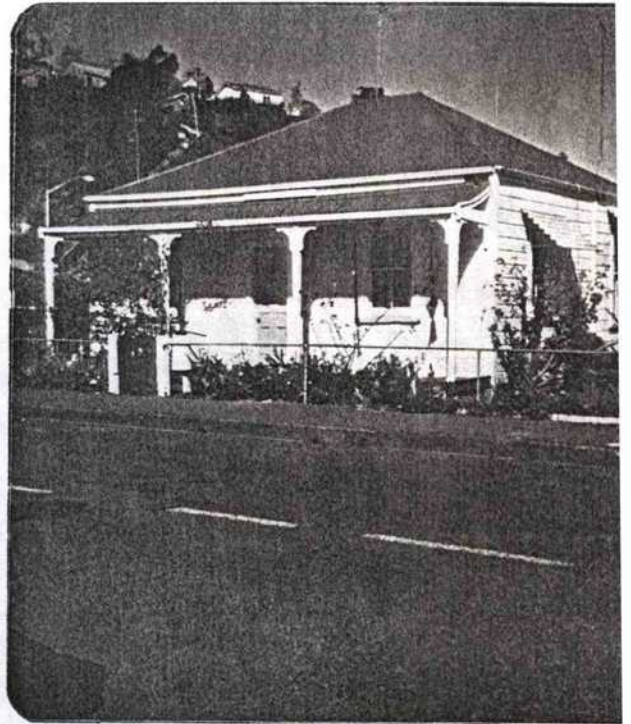


MUM AND DAD

JOSEPHINE & ALFRED FORREST



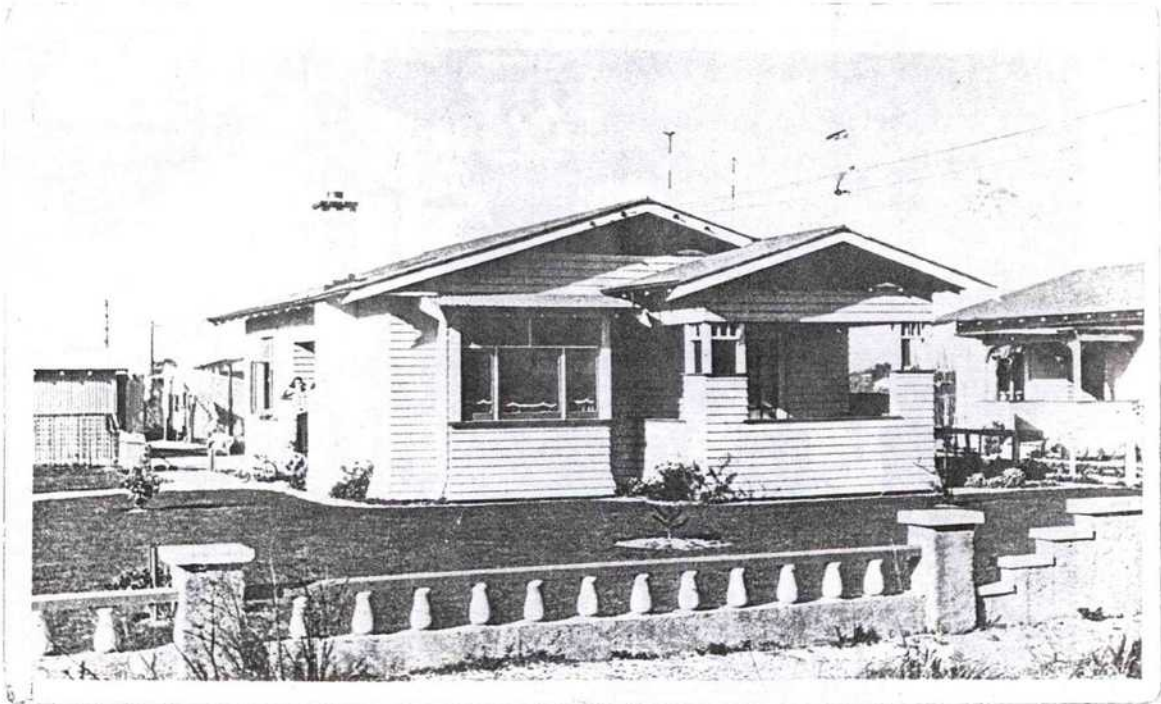
JOSIE, BOB, BRUCE, JACK  
AND BILL FORREST



HOUSE WHERE I WAS BORN  
NO.1 BATTERY ROAD



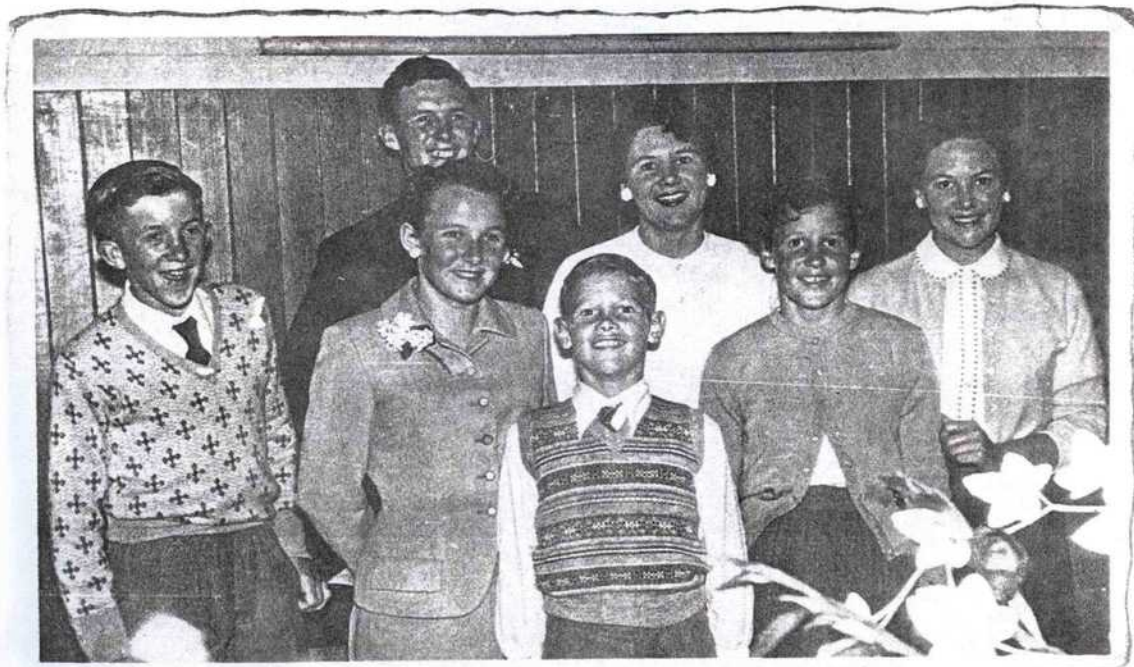
MAY FORREST  
16yrs 7months



BLAIR HOME 1936 7 TARADALE RD.



BLAIR FAMILY 1948 KENNETH, RAYLEE, NEILL, LOIS, JOSEPHINE, BRIAN AND COLLEEN



BLAIR FAMILY 28.4.56 NEILL, BRIAN, LOIS, KENNETH, JOSEPHINE, RAYLEE & COLLEEN



MAY & HUGH BLAIR 1950's



SISTERS: JOCIE AND MAY



PORTITES

IRENE McLENNAN, MURIEL JOHNSON, GRACE McBRIDE, EDITH & URSULA McBRIDE (twins) AND MAY





FLOAT AT CITY CENTENNIAL PARADE 1978



FAMILY AND FRIENDS



WELL MEDALLED 18.7.91

On Sundays we attended Knox Church at Ahuriri. First Sunday School, then into Church for the first half hour. I always sat in the McBride pew, and always had a little cough so Mr McBride would then pass along a blackball - this became a Sunday ritual. After a big roast dinner, usually beef, baked potatoes, baked parsnip, pumpkin and cabbage, followed by either steamed pudding in winter or fruit pie in summer, we children were allowed to keep on our best frock and shoes and we would go for a walk. Mum and Dad would have a well earned rest. Over the hills we would go, being warned if we were not home by 4 o'clock - look out.

The twin McBrides looked forward to tea on Sunday nights, as they shared an egg, a real treat. Mr McBride was a very stern man who had served in the Boer War. How well I remember Mrs McBride standing on a box to be high enough to see over the fence - her big white apron with one end thrown over her head to keep off the sun, talking to her neighbour. She would hear her front gate clip and down she would get saying "I must go, George is home".

On Saturday mornings she would call the twins, "Edie, Urkey, come and get your worm tablet". They must have been the most worm free children in the neighbourhood.

Up the hill above us lived J P Smith. He had a phonograph. On a Sunday he would take it out on to the front veranda and play it out loud so the poor people below could hear it. My mother would say "Old Smith, showing off again".

Just past the horse paddock was the train shed, housing great, big, black, smoke blowing, smelly engines. I liked to sneak over to see them, but there again little girls were not supposed to go there. Maybe that was why it held such a fascination for me. These engines plied between the Port Ahuriri Station and the Glasgow Wharf. Just north of the Glasgow Wharf was our swimming area. What fun we had there. I'd call out to my friends, "come for a dip", we would get into our togs, put a dress over them and away we would go. After swimming, we would lie on the shingle to get dry. Dr Gilray swam every day, winter and summer, up at the Breakwater Beach, as it was then called. That strip of beach has very special memories of my childhood. We would go up past what was called the E-shed where goods were stored after unloading from the coastal ships, taken there by train. Behind these sheds was a very unsafe area of shore line. The waves crashed up on a concrete wall, sending great flumes of water into the air. My Dad once tried to drown a cat there. He put it in a sugar bag, tied the top and threw it in. He was not long home when the cat arrived back, settling in the hearth to dry out. The cat had ringworm, and that was why Dad wanted to get rid of it. We had that cat for a long time. Dad was also very good at wood-carving. Many a firescreen, tray and table tops he carved. How I wish I had one of them now.

Mum did all our sewing, mostly by hand, until she got a treadle machine. How she must have worked, not only sewing but baking, bread making and washing. I remember her ill once, and she was propped up in bed, hand sewing baby clothes. I asked her what she was doing, but was told - little girls should not ask questions - it turned out Mrs Johnson was expecting and of course a seven year old was not told that. Mrs J did not sew, but while Mum sewed for her she would do Mum's ironing. Neighbours really helped one another in those days.

There was a stile over the fence into Johnson's back yard. I loved to go over and play with Muriel. They had a galah called Jerry. It was kept in a big cage just inside the back door. The wooden steps up to the back door were always scrubbed white. I never ever saw them other than snowy white. Mr J also had a horned phonograph with the round cylinder records. We like to hear mostly Scottish songs. During school holidays Muriel and I would go with our mothers to see Mrs J's old aunt who lived up Chaucer Road North. She was a very tall imposing figured woman. Afternoon tea always consisted of the thinnest cut bread and butter, seed cake or sultana cake. We had to be on our best behaviour when we were there. Aunty's husband had been a sea captain, Captain Rentoul. Both are buried in the Napier Cemetery.

It seemed there were quite a few sea captains who lived up around that area of the hill in those days of the 1920s.

My parents had friends, the Herbisons, who lived in Hastings and every school holidays they would visit us just for a Sunday. They came in a horse and gig. There was Mr & Mrs, four girls and one boy, all red headed. The girls' hair was so long they could quite easily sit on it. How we looked forward to their coming, the preparation, the big roast meat...cakes and scones. They always brought fresh cream as Mr H had two house cows. It must have been a very long day for them, as they lived on the south side of the Hastings race course.

Mr H had been married before and had two sons who were station hands up country. Often they would stay overnight with us, as they had been droving sheep. These sheep were loaded on to a coastal boat and taken either to Gisborne or down Cape Turnagain way.

We liked to see them as they always had sweets for us. Their horses would be hobbled and left in the horse paddock and the dogs tied up to the fence. It was always an early start in the morning for them to go back up country.

Lots of flocks of sheep passed out house and we would ask the drover how many in the flock. Oh, maybe 600 or 700 and to us, that was an awful lot.

Some holidays I would go to stay with the Herbisons in Hastings, going by train then bus and then walking 1 1/2 - 2 miles to their small farm. I used to get very homesick and frightened. Mrs H used to have long hair which was unpinned at night, and in her long white nightdress kneeling by the side of her bed, saying her prayers, to me she was a very scary thing, all this in candlelight throwing big shadows on the wall.

There was the time one of the cows got into the lucerne and became blown. Mr H had to puncture its side to let out the gas.... how I cried. They also had pigs, ducks and fowls. Lovely little pink pigs. One thing I did love at their farm was playing in the hay loft. You had to climb up the rickety stairs - but what run rolling in the hay. We would fill out pockets with green biddy bids - a weed - and after a good play we would peel the biddy bids and eat them. We called them bread and butter.

We would go visiting a neighbour with Mrs H. This neighbour would give us a class of Sarsaparilla. I hated it, and used to wait till she went inside and I'd throw it down the back of the door steps. Children were not allowed inside to overhear adults talk, and we were made to sit on the back steps and were told - Little pigs have big ears.

I attended Knox Presbyterian church and Sunday School, getting dressed in my best dress, my patent leather shoes and of course I always wore a hat to church.

We practiced for the Sunday School concerts for weeks. At one concert we had a play and I was the Maid. My only words were "Good morning Sir" and "if it's fine for the crops, it's generally wet for the hay if that's good for turnips, it's usually bad for the hops."

Another time a group of us did a display of swinging the Indian Club's. How blistered our fingers were. But on the night I received a big Girl Guide Annual for not missing a Church or Sunday School for three years. How important I was on that prize giving.

During the summer holidays there was no Sunday School, and we either played in the horse paddock or up at the beach. Sometimes we would take a picnic lunch up to the Harbour Board Quarry on the corner of Battery and Burns Road, where there was a big willow tree. Dad would make us a rope swing and organise games for us. Those days come to an all too soon.

I only faintly remember my Australian grandmother arriving by tramcar one Christmas. I was about four. She was a very little person, barely five feet tall, dressed in black, her belongings in a wicker basket - with a leather strap around it. She brought some metallic Christmas ball decorations. I don't remember her going home, but she also used to send us the "Ginger Megs" and "Tiger Tim" comics out of the Australian newspapers. When I was eight or nine she died and left my mother a small legacy. Two hundred pounds.

The legacy changed my life-style. My parents had a new home built further down Battery Road, No 45, now 43. Oh, what a thrill to have electric light and a radio, an Atwater Kent Console model. This new home had three bedrooms, a big sitting room, a large kitchen and a scullery wash-house, a front porch, but best of all, a large back yard. There was still a back veranda to scrub, and brass taps and door knobs to polish, but we also had a bathroom with a hand basin and a white bath, also built-in wardrobes and linen cupboard.

It did not take long for my father to get the garden in order. He was very fond of Dahlias. I remember the lovely Monkey Musk flowers my mother liked. Out front we had a nice lawn. This home we were all so proud of because my father, being a labourer and owning his own home was almost unheard of, especially having six of a family as well.

#### Happy School Days at Central School

The Central school was on Napier Terrace. The Headmaster was Mr James Hislop, a stern man, but a fair person. There were good large playing areas. The now large flowering gum, reputed to be the largest in the Southern Hemisphere, was only a small tree when I was a pupil.

At the back of the school were large tennis courts where we also had our drill lessons. Forward and backward lunges, hands on hips, arms sideways, hands turning in and out. I remember the joy we got out of all keeping time and then standing to attention or at ease while being lectured on what we could or could not do.

We also had swimming lessons at the Marine Parade Baths. This meant having to go there at 8.30 am. It was being out of bed a half hour early as to run up Shakespeare Road, down Coote Road to the baths, pay your penny to enter, swim for twenty minutes. A bell would go to warn you to get dressed and then we had to run again, this time up Coote Road and Harvey Road steps, along Napier Terrace and be at school by 8.50!

In 1930 I swam fifty lengths of the baths to qualify for a certificate. We also learnt Life Saving. I passed for the Bronze Medal, but alas, because of the 1931 earthquake, I never did receive either the certificate or the medal!

Sir Donald McLean lived next door to the school and we were never allowed to retrieve our balls when they went over the fence. He had a lovely garden and I suppose he did not want children forever trampling over it.

The girls from the children's home attended Central. I made friends with the ones in my class. It seems strange now, on thinking back how different we thought those girls were. Children can be cruel, because sometimes we were not very kind to them. My eldest brother became engaged to one of the Home girls, but he died a few months prior to their set wedding date.

It was while we still at No 1 Battery Road that I saw my first aeroplane. Most of the neighbours joined us up at the beach front where we had gone to get a good view of it. We could have stayed at home and got the same view.

This brings to mind also my brother Bill, who had joined the Navy, serving on the HMS "Philomel", HMS "Diomedes", HMS "Dunedin". One of these ships steamed into Hawkes Bay and anchored in the roadstead. The sailors were all on deck. Up we all went to the beach to have a look. My mother was very proud of her sailor son. She was sure she could see Bill, "Yes, it was that one the ears sticking out!" The roadstead is that stretch of sea lying between Perfume Point and the Breakwater, as the Port of Napier was then called. You can tell a Napierite when they refer to the Port of Napier as "the breakwater".

Across the road from us at No 45 was the Hitchmans Lolly Factory, my sister worked there for some time. The factory was ruined on the day of the earthquake when the cliff came down. Eventually one of the big steel trays used for pouring sweets out on to, ended up as the cover for the septic tank at my home in Taradale Road.

Near our Battery Road home was the North Pond. A very smelly weed infested pond with plenty of big fat eels. Out boys had a wonderful time on that pond, with their homemade boats, of corrugated iron sealed with pitch. They often came home very smelly and wet, having overturned and waded ashore, pulling the boat behind them. My mother was not amused.

Next door lived the Waltons. Mr Walton was the station master at Ahuriri. They had only one daughter, Hazel, who later married my brother Bob. Mr Walton had an open tourer car, a Chevrolet with canvas side curtains and a big carrier on the back. The spare wheel was strapped to the running-board.

On a Sunday afternoon Mr and Mrs Walton Bob and Hazel, would go for an afternoon drive. I was always taken with them, sitting in the back seat between Bob and Hazel. How they must have resented me, for I was only there to pimp in them if they held hands or tried to steal a kiss.

Mrs Walton taught me to knit. I was to do so many row each evening and then show her the next day. If I had made a mistake it was pulled undone. I was told it only took a little while to rectify a mistake, but if left there, it was there for the life of the garment. I've always remembered this and would never think of knitting on if I had make a mistake, even to this day.

Another family friendship was Mr and Mrs James McCosh. He drove for the Big Tree Oil Company. Petrol was in tins and two tins to a wooden box. Those boxes were put to many uses. Three boxes, padded and covered with cretonne material, made a seat for the bedroom. There were two children, Dave and Anne. Mr J had known my parents in Australia. At one time he was engaged to mother's sister, but she would not come to New Zealand. So in time he met and married Rosie MacIntosh who was a very staunch member of St Mary's Catholic Church. He was just as staunch a Presbyterian. On Sunday he would take Rosie and family to their church and continue on to Knox Presbyterian Church on Waghorne Street. Being an Elder he always took the collection plate. Rosie had to walk home as her church got out early and also the Sunday dinner had to be ready for Mr J. We loved to hear Mr McCosh play the pianola, but once again that would be a special treat as rarely the children were allowed into the "best room".

Grandma MacIntosh lived up the Chaucer Road Steps and we often went to see her. She was a dear old lady and always gave us biscuits.

More or less at the back of McCosh's house was the Harbour Board Quarry. In the school holiday time we would have picnics under the big willow tree on the Burns Road side of the quarry. The Edlins lived near by. Mr Edlin worked with Dad in the quarry. This must of been when we were at No 1, as it was in the late 1920's that the Harbour Board sold the horses and Dad then became a carpenter up at the Glasgow Wharf.

While Dad was at the quarry he collected fossils, shark's teeth and lots of bones. We children also liked to fossick. When working on the Quarry face my Dad always wore bow-yangs, which was string tied round the trouser legs below the knee. This, I would think, was a carry over from his days in Australia where they were used to keep snakes and reptiles climbing up the inside of the trouser legs.

Times were changing. We were growing up and Josie had left Hitchman's factory and was working at the Hawkes Bay Steam Laundry, which was in town down by Clive Square, in Dicken's Street. Brother Jack was window dresser and ticket writer for Allen's Furnisher Store in Emerson Street; Bob, a telegram boy with the Post Office; Bill in the navy, and Bruce had a vegetable run.

Josie was sent off to Melbourne to an aunt and when she arrived home she had a dear little baby called Eris, who was looked after by the friendly Herbisons in Hastings. Eventually she married Eris's father, Percy, and they lived in Napier. Percy was a butcher and worked for his father. It was a house to house butcher run and the meat was cut and sold from the back of the van. Not at all hygienic, by today's standards.

Jack's girl friend, Ida Stone, came to live with us. Being a Children's Home girl, they were only kept at the Home until they turned 14. She was put out to house work, and Ida became one of the family, just before Jack's death in 1932. She lived in at her employers home in Elizabeth Road, as it was not deemed proper for her to live in the same house as her fiance.

A little more about No 45. With a large back yard, my Dad had ample space for his vegetable garden. Also he had a large shed at the foot of the yard where he put in long hours with his love of carpentering. It was in that garden, one day I buried a couple of my Dad's smelly but favourite pipes. He never did know what happened to them.

### Earthquake Experiences

I finished my schooling at Central school in 1930 and enrolled at the Napier Technical College. Labourers' daughters did not go to High School.

I was only to have a few hours at Tech in 1931 as that was the day all Napierites remember so well. It was the 3rd of February, 1931...Earthquake Day.

I went off in the tram to my first day, full of wonder and awe at how I would be at the new school. The only article of uniform I did not have was shoes. I wore my best court shoes. When the quake started I was in an upstairs classroom overlooking St Patrick's Church. The building seemed to lean right over the footpath before the bricks began to fall. I didn't know what was happening, then all was blotted out with dust. I had a fountain pen and had dropped the top of it, so had got down on all fours to look for it. I think that must have saved me from injury as I was under the desks most of the time. When the dust started to clear, I jumped across what had been a corridor and jumped down and over the rubble to get out at Station Street. At one stage I nearly jumped on the body of a boy who was pinned under a huge concrete girder. Out at last and over to Cranby's to get the last drop of water in the tap to try to clean out my mouth. A taxi man, I think, came and asked some of us where we lived. I said "Battery Road", but was told "No, I can't take you there, the hill roads are all blocked. So I said Josie lived in Latham Street, so down there I was taken. I was wanting to go to the toilet, but Josie wouldn't let me go inside, so I just did it in the driveway, and when I pulled down my bloomers a shower of glass fell out. It was then I realised I only had one shoe on. I had nasty gashes on my neck and the top of my left arm. I was not at Josie's very long when a man on a bike came yelling "Get into the park, the gas tank is going to explode!"

At the park we were told to get up onto the hill as there would be a tidal wave. It was then Percy came with the meat van and we all got in. Eris and Billie, just tinies. Bill in a pushchair which was left at Dr Thomas's home in Jull Street, and we ended up in Faraday Street where McWilliams Wines are now.

It would have been about 4 pm that my brother Jack found me... How I'll never know. He was to take me home as quick as possible, but boys being boys, we detoured up along Colenso Avenue to stand and watch the town burn.

Chimneys down, houses skew wiff, great fissures in the ground. We got home to Battery Road, No 43, but would not go inside. Our chimneys were down and lots of ornaments broken, furniture shifted. That night we slept under a canvas shelter on the fence line next to the North Pond.

Next day I was going over to Mr Soper's store in Wagborne Street when there was another heavy quake, and the ground opened in front and behind me. When I got to the shop what a mess! Broken bottles and tins, flour, sugar, all in a mess on the floor.

Maybe its was the 5th of February that we waited in Battery Road to see brother Bill go past on the back of a flat deck trailer pulled by a tractor. The navy boys had to come to help look for people buried in the town area, and also make the town safe by demolition the burnt out shells of shops.

I was taken to Woodville, (as all women and children were evacuated), by Mr Walton. He being the Station-master, who in turn took me to Palmerston North Showgrounds to have my neck dressed and the wound cleaned. Later I was billeted with a Mrs Adams at Ormondville, in a hostel that belonged to a dairy company which had closed down. I was there for about four months.

Home again, I was unfortunate enough to have a crop of boils, over 50 of them. They were possibly the result of the trauma of the last five months - it was lovely to be home again. The town was starting to be rebuilt. Shopping was in "Tin Town" built around Clive and Memorial Square. A decision had been made the tram cars were not to be put back into use. Such a pity for they had given a wonderful service.

I started back at secondary school which was held in tents in Nelson Park. Third term, we girls were sent to the Napier Girls High school, but alas we were not accepted by the girls there. One of them said, in later years, when she was giving a talk about the earthquake and mentioned about girls going to High, she said, "We looked at them as though they had come from outer space!" ... and that was just how we felt. So that was the end of my school days.

The Depressions had started and jobs were hard to get. I looked after a little boy and also did a few other household tasks while his mother played croquet. Then I kept watch on the other two children when they came in from school. For this I received ten shillings a week, out of which I had to pay one shilling insurance, four shillings to Mother for my keep and the rest for clothes and entertainment. I did not like the job very much, having to wash awful smelly nappies, make beds and dusting. Not at all to my liking. Times were getting harder, and they could not afford to keep me on, so I then went to another family, doing scrubbing, polishing, bed making and ironing, for which I received nine shillings. I stayed there for quite some time. I was saving very hard to buy an overcoat. I had never had a new one, always my sisters hand-me-downs.



The day came and off to town I went. There was a sale of winter goods and yes, I got a coat - a brown and fawn check, belted, and wide reverses, double breasted, patch pockets. I remember it so well. It cost me two pounds four and sixpence, I would not have called the queen my aunt, when wearing this creation.

It was about this time I met my future husband. Hugh. He had not long been in Napier, and through their work, my father brought him home. He was a handsome Irishman. My father and Mr Johnson and several other men were great card players and Hugh had been asked home for a game of cards. It was not long before the card playing became an excuse for him to call in home.

In May 1932 Hugh went back to Ireland to visit his parents. He promised his mother he would be back to see them within ten years. He was to stay two years there but alas, 8 months was all he managed. The pull back to Napier was strong. He had gone over to Sydney and embarked on the "Strathnaver" ship leaving the day the Sydney Harbour Bridge opened. The day De Groot slashed the ribbon before the official opening causing such an uproar.

At this time, I was very keen on basketball and played for the Amateur Athletics Team. I was chosen for the representative team, and was captain. I also joined the St John's Girl Guides.

Josie was married and lived at Haumoana. I would often go out with Percy in the meat van to look after Eris and Bill, her two young ones, while she had a few days in with Mum, no doubt to do some shopping.

After Hugh came back, in January 1933, we started going to the pictures together. We would walk over Milton Road to what is now the State Theatre, and back again after the film, stopping to buy four bananas at the store at the town end of Milton Road. We would eat these as we strolled home.

Hugh lived with another chap further down Battery Road. A Scotsman named Duncan. They lived in a little bach (house). Many an evening Mum would accompany me down to the bach so I could be with Hugh. Mothers were like that in those days.

On the 29th of October 1933, we became engaged.

At the end of that year Duncan went back to Scotland and Hugh came and boarded at home.

We were married on the 29th of December, 1934 in St Andrew's Church, Ahuriri, being piped into the church by Willie MacDonald, a friend of Hugh's. Our reception was at home. My bridesmaid was my dearest friend, Muriel Johnson, and the flower-girl was my niece, Eris.

I wore a blue crepe-de-chine long gown with leg-of-mutton sleeves and frills on the skirt seams. I had a large blue picture hat. Muriel was in soft lemon, and Eris in pale lemon. We did not have a honeymoon, as Hugh had just started work, and money was not plentiful.

He was working at Jack Northy's slip for sometime - but lack of work meant that he was put off. After some months he started as a carpenter with the Napier Harbour Board,

and worked there until 1943 or 4 when he joined the NZ railways as a carpenter. He stayed with them until he retired in 1968.

We rented a small house at 29 Battery Road and lived there when we were first married until August. I had been very ill with my first pregnancy, and was just becoming well when my mother had a heart attack and Hugh and I left our house and shifted in to look after Mother.

By now we had great plans for building our own home. Harbour Board sections had become available in the new Marewa suburb. We were granted Section 1 of Te Whare o Maraenui Block, this being land gifted to the city by the earthquake. My parents were not too all happy about us going so far out of town. They said it was out in the "wop wops". Never the less, we went ahead with our plans and the house was started in the Augusts and we moved in on the 9th November 1935.

How wonderful it was! The house had two bedrooms, sitting room, kitchen, wash-house and front and back porches.

What joy it was, making curtains, buying second hand furniture.... We could not afford new!

On the 6th December, 1935, our first baby arrived, Colleen Agnes, a tiny dark haired mite, so like a photo of Hugh's grandfather, we called her Colleen Agnes, after Hugh's mother, as it was her first grandchild. I stayed in the McHardy Home for two weeks at the cost of twenty-five pounds. Sister Fields was the Matron.

Times were even harder... The Sugar Bag Years they were called. You would very rarely see a man riding his bicycle without a sugar bag on the carrier. The bag could be used for numerous things a raincoat, an apron, or with one top and one bottom corner tied with rope and slung over the shoulder, it made a very handy bag for that bit of wood, bottle coal, or anything that might be useful.

I really think it was those years of careful living that make me hate to throw anything away, even to this day, because it might come in useful. Old habits die hard.

A baby kept me busy, as I did all my own sewing, also fancy needle work was a popular pastime and I like doing that. There was the garden to create but first to grub out the huge fescue weeds. Hugh had to cart barrow loads of sandy soil from the back of the section to the front. We were the first true residents of the new suburb. There was a family further down the road who were living in their garage till their home was completed. Mrs McLeod and I became really good friends.

I learnt a lot about child rearing from her, because she had six of a family.

Yes, they were hard times, but happy ones. We had quite a struggle to keep our heads above water, as the saying was. For ten months Hugh did not have a full weeks wages as it was a very rainy year. His job was outside, and they would have to stop work when it rained, and that meant no pay. Also there was two weeks compulsory holidays at Christmas, again no pay. If it was known that he had done another job in that two weeks, he would have been told to "Walk down the road..." end of job! Things were not easy. There was so much we wanted to do; fences paths, gates, we were trying to get a vegetable garden established.

At the end of the section was an old tin shack in which lived an old couple. There was no lighting or water. She was a poor deranged old soul, and at times it was very scary. They had a little foxy dog and it had a litter of seven pups. My vegetable garden suffered and a fence was essential.

In the January of 1937, our son, Brian Hugh arrived, once again a good Irish name. We named him after Brian Boru, the Irish Chieftain. He was a tiny fair haired baby, born at the McHardy Home. The Labour Government had brought in the free hospital service (Social Security) and there was no charge, but we received the same treatment.

We were far from the shops, but a Chinaman used to call on a Friday with vegetables. Yee On was very interested in the little ones. I remember him wanting to see Colleen when she was just a few weeks old. He remarked "That she had the look like her father".

Yee called for quite some years, the second Christmas he gave me a lovely ming jar of Chinese ginger in syrup. I still have the jar, I treasure it.

We also had my old grocer from Port Ahuriri, Syd Otton, calling on a Thursday morning about 8.15 am. He would take my order and deliver it around 12.30 pm. Mr Otton also gave his customers a gift at Christmas. I still have a very pretty little jam dish he gave me one year.

The butcher, Gordon Martin, also used to call three days a week. He came from Westshore. So really we had a good service.

Josephine Margaret Urana arrived on the 29th of October, 1938, and what a bonny baby she was, so different from Colleen or Brian. She was born at Nurse Cunningham's Home in Milton Road. Josephine was named after my mother, Urana being where my mother was born. She was the first child to be born in the Urana Hospital. Her mother, my grandmother, was the Matron and my grandfather was the wards man.

In February, 1940, Lois Rosaline was born at Bethany Home, Roslyn Road. We had quite a time deciding on a name for her. We had a very good friend whom the children called Uncle Dick. He was not married but said if he ever had a daughter he would have called her "Lois". So it was Lois, for Uncle Dick. She was a small wiry little soul and spoke very well by the time she was one year old. When at eight months she could say "Mum", "Dad", "Bye-bye", "Col" and "Boo", "Nana", "Ta", "Tickle me". As you can imagine, my days were full, but we still went to visit my sister and mother each week.

Lois was a great talker, and once while walking around to visit my sister Josie, we were singing about the "Dog on the tucker box". Lois said "ten miles from Gundagai". I corrected her and said only five miles from Gundagai. But she quickly said "I sing ten miles because I don't like the dog". Another time her Aunt Josie was teasing her, and tiny Lois said "I'll tread on you, Aunt Josie!" - who turned around and said "I'll knock you into the middle of next week". "Oh, then I'd bang my head on Wednesday!" was the quick reply.

My mother was not at all well, and she died when Lois was one year seven months old. What a gap that left in my life. Dad stayed on in the family home for sometime.

O'Neill was born at Bethany Home, Morris Street, in October 1942. A big broad shouldered boy. Another Irish Chief's name. His name was really Hugh O'Neill, but we have always called him Neill.

It was also at Bethany Home, Morris Street that Raylee May was born in March 1944, and Keneth John born in September 1945 completed our family.

When Neill was five months old, war had been declared and Hugh was called to Pahiatua as guard at the Interment camp. So I was left to bring up five children. It must have been the continual washing, plus strain of family life which caused a nasty nerve rash on my hands. This continued for some years. I had all sorts of treatment, even a trip to Wellington to a specialist, but to no avail. It was real agony, but eventually they healed.

When Hugh was at last home, our first priority was to enlarge the house. We were very proud to be able to do this out of our wages. I was the chief tailor out. Hugh made all the window joinery, all twenty of them. We worked long late hours, but our home was going to be bigger and therefore better. We dug shingle out of the river bank to mix with cement for our concrete paths and yard. What a joy, not having mud walked inside when it rained. Those paths were worth all the hard work.

For me though, it was still one round of cleaning, cooking, washing and sewing. I made all the girls frocks and the boys shirts and pants. Later a lady down the road made the girl's best frocks.

I just could not write down all our doings in those days. Colleen went to the kindergarten held in the Congregational Church, Carlyle Street. Brian was too frail to go. Josephine, when it came her time to go, went the Kindy across Marewa Park, in the Tennis Club pavilion, as did Lois. I don't remember the three young ones going. We probably could not afford it. One by one they attended Nelson Park School. How fortunate they were to have a wonderful Headmaster, Mr Farrell. He ran a good well disciplined school.

Then it was off to Intermediate School, Girls and Boys High. The girls attended St Paul's as did Brian, and they also joined Girls and Boys Brigade. Then there was tennis, basketball, rugby and sailing, dancing, etc. Life was a round of involvement with schools and leisure pursuits. It was not until Ken was 18 months old that Hugh and I had a holiday. One of the neighbours looked after Ken and we had another couple to come in and be with the other children.

We went by train to Wellington, flying across to Blenheim. Standing waiting for the plane was another couple and one asked the other if it would be that little plane or the big one, "Oh dear, the big one of course", but Oh dear no, it was the little one we climbed into!

We stayed one night at the Criterion Hotel in Blenheim, where a Mr Meatyard was the Proprietor. We went to the local picture house that night and I remember coming back to the Hotel to a wonderful supper - a huge cold roast of beef, bread and cheese. We then went by train to Christchurch and on to Dunedin and Queenstown, where we took a trip on the Lake in the "Earnslaw". We came back home via Christchurch and Wellington, staying with a cousin of mine, Norman in Lower Hutt over night.

With Hugh being a Railway employee we had a free rail pass, but the fourteen days of lodging and one small bus trip cost us twenty eight pounds! We were home three weeks and we had a letter from the travel agent, Cox and Co, to say there was a refund of one pound as they had overcharged us.

When Ken was two and a half years old, my dad came to live with us. We had him for three years. He died in the July of 1949. He would sit out on the front step of a morning and count the cars that went past on Taradale Road, or maybe kill the little ants that were so plentiful. It was not until I was cleaning out his room after he died that the mystery of the children's tennis balls was solved, for there in his wardrobe were some fifteen or sixteen balls.

Ken started school in the September. I remember him saying to me that now I had no one home all day, I would have nothing to do! At this time my cake tins seemed forever empty, yet I was always baking, trying new cheap recipes. Having to cut eight lunches each morning was a real problem.

Guy Fawkes nights were celebrated in style. For some weeks previously, the boys having made their "guy" would cart it up and down, calling for a penny for the guy. It was surprising how the pennies mounted up, so there was always plenty of fireworks. The bonfire on the river bank across the road was steadily growing higher. What a job it was to hoist the guy on top. The whole neighbourhood joined in for bon-fire night. We never had any mishaps and some years there would be as many as 30 children and adults.

The build up to Christmas was hectic with new clothes for everyone, toys, sweets and balloons.

On Christmas Eve, the little ones tucked up in bed, Uncle Dick being the baby-sitter, Dad and I would go off to town with the older ones for last minute "Stocking Fillers" and to see the decorations. Uncle Dick always had the peas podded and beans sliced, ready for Christmas dinner by the time we arrive home. The older children then went to bed, and Dad, uncle Dick and I would sort out all the gifts. The children's stockings had all been hung from the mantle piece in the sitting room some days previously. The excitement was great. After gifts were put in place, the door was locked so there was no early peeping to see what Santa had brought.

Bright and early we would be woken up. then there was the line-up at the sitting room door, youngest first, and as each one got to their pile, the "Ooos" and "Ahhs", and the joy was tremendous.

On Christmas morning the City or Salvation Army Band would come around playing carols, and there was always a collections taken up to help the Bands funds.

Over then to Aunty Phyll and Uncle Bill's in Morse Street to show them what they got from Father Christmas. One year it was sewing boxes for the girls, which Dad had made, Dolly Dimples, trikes, scooters, the hammer, made at the railway workshop, which Brian told his Dad that Father Christmas must work at the Railways because he had seen it in Dad's lunch bag! There were balls, rackets, cricket sets, whistles, skipping ropes and marbles. One year, someone gave Neill and Ken a drum each! But childhood went, and then it was young teenagers.

Colleen started work in an accountant's office, and later became a typists at Robert Holt's. Brian had an apprenticeship as a motor body builder with G T Hydes. Of course it was not only starting work, but boy and girl friends started also. We did not have any real worries, everybody was kept too busy.

Hugh had brought an old Chrysler car which Brian and his Dad converted into a utility truck. What wonderful picnics we had from then on. Out to Eskdale under the bridge. Because we usually had church and bible class to attend in the morning, we would have lunch at home and then with our tea packed, off we would go.

Other's joined us, Pop Sigglekow and Brian, Bill and Basil Moorhouse, Gordon Wilson, Murray Franklin, Pat and Jill Tankard and Lorraine Wagg. Pop would always take his button accordion and we would have wonderful sing-songs around the camp-fire, and swims in the river. Wonderful carefree times. home at No 7 and all would come in for a cup of tea and we'd talk and talk until quite late. Yes, happy, happy weekends, all together with so much laughter.

In 1952 I had a longing to visit relatives in Australia. I had never known what it was to call anyone "aunty" or "uncle". An old family friend, Mr McCosh had been over to see some of them and he came to see me to tell me about them. Money again was needed. So I took a job at night in the Palm Grove Milk Bar to earn my fare. Hugh was quite happy for me to do this and once a very good friend, Aunty Mary, came and looked after the children. Hugh only worked till 4 pm so was home when the children were in from school.

I was away five weeks, going by the Union Steam Ship Co, taking three days to get there. I met three aunts and many cousins. One aunt I met on several other occasions when I went to Australia.

My involvement in the community was increasing by now. This had really started when Colleen and Brian were babies, as I became interested in Plunket, then Kindergarten. From Primary School on, i was on the school committee, so it was Jumble Sales, Bring and Buy's Gala Days for Nelson Park School.

I had heard of a school hall just completed in Wairoa, so off we went, four of us, to view and find out all we could, regarding costs etc. Our Jubilee Hall was based on their plans. To raise funds, as I've said, kept us very busy, but we had wonderful support from the parents. The Waipatu Maori folk put on a concert for us in the Intermediate School Hall.

With the Family growing older. their needs became greater, so to help with finances I got a part time job at McKenzies Department Store, helping with the stock-taking. The store was in Hastings Street, then it moved to Emerson Street. I worked there for many years in different departments - sweets, haberdashery, china, doing up Easter and Christmas packs, finally being the "Mother Christmas". It was a service they gave to various firms who would supply lists of their employee's children's names, the amount to be spent on the gift, and it was my job to choose, gift wrap and pack the parcels. One year I was extra busy choosing gifts for 224 firms Christmas parties. Gifts ranged in price from thirty cents to two dollars.

At this time I was very interested in National Council of Women, having joined in 1957 as a delegate from Napier Girls High School PTA. We used to meet in the Congregational Church Hall every fourth Tuesday of the month. Later I joined the Business and Professional Women's Club and was their delegate to NCW. I became president of the NCW Napier Branch, retaining that position for fourteen years. I am now a Life Member of the Napier Branch.

I must say the NCW widened my outlook and I gained much constructive knowledge. I met and heard some very fine dedicated women. At the Executive meetings and Conferences I met many wonderful men and women concerned with the betterment of conditions in our country.

I attended Conferences from one end of the country to the other. I was President when the 1968 Conference was held in Napier. The opening night was held in the War Memorial Hall. The guest speaker was Sir Richard Wild.

A church service was held in the St John's Cathedral. Archbishop Lesser took the service. He was well known for always having a ready answer and a quiet sense of humour. On the opening evening, attended by both the Archbishop and Mrs Lesser, we ladies wore long frocks, but Mrs Lesser was in a short frock. The Archbishop quickly turned to her and said "Never mind, my dear, I'll wear my long robe to Church in the morning".

The Conference was held in the Wool Exchange, which was a very good venue. Having good support from the Women's Organisations made for a smooth running meeting.

While President, I represented the Council many times - Road Safety - Council of Social Services - Health Stamps - Civil Defence - Meals on Wheels, and on two occasions did a survey on the aged in the community to ascertain their needs.

The Collectors Group of the Hawkes Bay Cultural Trust is another of my interests again some wonderful speakers. I have learnt so much regarding the collecting of antiques, my love of collecting Napier souvenir china. There is such a variety of scenes depicting early Napier, also collecting tea pots dollies, these were used in the top of tea-cosies and milk jug covers. Here again a huge variety of types. The Art Deco one being particularly lovely.

Victorian clothing, mainly white is good. The beautiful lace trimmed camisoles and nightdresses, the old split drawers and strap-door bloomers are a delight. The tray cloths and doyley's. What hours must of been spent embroidering them, all mostly done by kerosene lamp or candle power.

On many an occasion I've been asked to display this wear. I remember on one occasion was asked to speak to a group of elderly at one of the rest homes. I took some of the old clothing plus other items which would remind them of their young days. An old candle stick, a Mrs Potts iron, a button hook etc. It was two one pound notes that gave them the greatest pleasure. they felt and peered at them and the comments generated were all the thanks I wanted.

On the home front, times were changing. Colleen married Bruce Logan, Brian married Judith Cliff, Josephine went to Australia, Lois married Graham Wells, and for some years we just had the three young ones at home.

Neill was serving his apprenticeship as a baker-pastry cook at Murdock's bakery in town. Raylee was working in an accountant's office and Ken had started his apprenticeship and Brian was very involved with "The Boys Brigade", where he earned the Queen's Medal, the second boy in Napier to receive this award.

Colleen also got top marks in NZ for Bible Knowledge for Girl's Brigade. Josephine on leaving school worked for the Automobile Association - becoming head of their Insurance Department in Hastings. She was given a glowing reference when she left for Australia in 1957.

Lois had gone to Gisborne for a nursing career.

Our first big upheaval came while I was at McKenzies Department Store. Neill used to help a furniture removal firm and one day he tripped on some steps, hurting his back. It was a nasty accident which landed him in hospital for quite some time. He was paralysed from the waist down. We really thought he would end his days in a wheelchair. But no - with great care from doctors and nurses and a trip to Dunedin to a specialist, he was able to walk.

That seven and a half hour air trip in a little Air Ambulance Cessna plane from Napier to Dunedin, with just half an hour stop at Christchurch to refuel, I will never forget. I stayed a week. Neill was there for three weeks. On the day he returned, my sister's husband passed away and three months later she also passed away. Far too young for them both to die.

Neill is now a strong man with a delightful wife and they have a daughter Kelly and a son Cameron.

Colleen and Bruce had two sons, Blair and Scott and two daughters Vicki and Tara. After Scott was born Bruce was not all well, and he was diagnosed as having Hodgkinson's Disease. With remission over, the next five years, and treatment at Palmerston North, and spells in and out of the Waipukurau Hospital, he passed away in 1969. This was a real tragedy, leaving Colleen with four young children. They were living in Otane, which was an hours journey, but Hugh and I went down as often as we could.

Brian and Judith had started their family. They had built a nice home in Taradale. There was plenty of space for the family they had. Catherine, Deborah, David, Sally, Helen and Richard.

Lois and Graham were in Taupo. Another close large family. Suzanne, Caren, Mark, David, Paul and Grant. Tragedy came to them when Mark was six. He suddenly collapsed and died. Such a shock for both Lois and Graham. It happened on the last day of school in 1966.



Raylee and Ron Pryce were married and went to live in New Plymouth. I felt a big loss when Raylee went as she had been a comfort to me when the other girls left home. Raylee and Ron now two fine boys, Sefton and Gareth, with four years between them.

Ken had gone to Australia in December 1968, and is now married to Tracy. They have just the one boy, Nathan, born in 1982.

Over the years I have had many trips to Australia, travelling long distances. On one trip with Hugh, we did the Snowy Mountain Scheme - then up to Queensland as far as Cooktown. A fantastic trip, taking in all the highlights that tourists do. Another time Josephine and I went to Melbourne and toured that area, and again another time to Canberra and on to Urana to see my mother's birthplace. We went to Echuca where my dad spent his youth and visited graves of my grandparents, both mum and dad's parents. We saw the shop my grandmother had in Urana and met with an old resident who remembered her. It was a nostalgic time.

I was appointed a Justice of the Peace in September 1970 and find a great deal of satisfaction in being able to help my fellow citizens.

I was voted on to the Hawkes Bay Federation Justice and in the 1982 was President, the second woman to hold this position in the Hawkes Bay Federation.

I became fully involved, doing both Ministerial and Judicial work. I have presided in court on numerous occasions, also spending many Friday mornings processing traffic offences.

By 1977 Hugh's health was deteriorating. His asthma was taking its toll. The family were very good, calling in often to see him. He enjoyed Colleens company and would spend time with her Otane, trying to do odd jobs for her.

He spoke often of his brothers and sisters in Ireland. He was the eldest of nine, the others being Tom, Joe, James, John and Archie, the boys, then Elsie, Letty and Jean, the girls. They all lived in or near Larne, in Co Antrim. Hugh had served his apprenticeship as a shipwright with Harland and Wolfe's in Belfast, coming to New Zealand in 1924 with his brother Tom and two other young men. He had a great love of working with timber and made many items of furniture for our home. One very special item is the rocking chair with the turned armrests and back.

Early in 1978 he really did not have much joy in his life, fighting for breath. It was hard for him not to be able to do the lathe work in his beloved shed.

Beginning of June, 1978 he went into hospital and passed away on the 17th. I wrote in my diary that night - "A forty-four year partnership severed."  
I can't say another thing.

In 1977 I was appointed a Civil Marriage Celebrant, marrying young and not so young couples from all walks of life. I have married New Zealanders, Australians, French, Dutch, German, Laotians, Chinese, Phillipinos - I have married them in public parks, home gardens, hall, out in the country, at the waters edge on the sea shore, outside

prison gates, on board an overseas ship, on different maraes. I have gone as far as Auckland and Wellington to perform a ceremony.

My first ceremony was the daughter of a friend, and I nearly married the bridesmaid instead of the bride. On another occasion it was a couple of punk Rockers being married at the water's edge on the beach. The bridesmaid was dressed in a very bright pink and the best man's hair was dyed the same colour pink!

There is always something lovely at all weddings. Way out in the Mohi Bush I married a German couple. It was a beautiful, with lots of flowers and children at the wedding. If there are children involved in the wedding, I always like to include them in the ceremony, so make a point of knowing their names. I just love the ceremonies performed in home gardens. So much work has usually been done to see that the garden is just right.

I had the bride being late, the bridegroom being late, losing his way, the bride's mother late, and on one occasion the best man half an hour late. He mistook the time.

Then there was the bridegroom who fainted. I was just asking the bridegroom to say the vows, when he said, "I can't ... I'm going to faint!" It took half an hour to get him settled. Finally he had to sit in a chair for the ceremony.

I have married my daughter Colleen, grandsons, nieces and nephews, and even my son's mother-in-law. I have also married a mother and then her sons and daughters.

Naturally I do not stay for all the receptions. However one day I conducted an eleven o'clock wedding and stayed for the meal of roast baron beef and all the trimmings, and then at five pm sat down to Puha and pork at another wedding.

Another wedding out at Havelock North is one I will never forget. We were treated to a magnificent puppet show.

Then there was the wedding, late one evening, on an overseas ship berthed in the Port. How guilty I felt - I had always told my daughters that "nice girls" did not go on board ships at night - and here I was at my age, doing just that! On arrival at the Security gate, I was told to follow the guard. Off I went in a van with the guard and two crew members who quickly ran up the gangway. Within a few minutes faces appeared - to see the "priest" who was a lady!

On another occasion a hangi had been prepared for the wedding breakfast. When it was ready, we were told to queue up for our meal. I was suddenly prodded and asked "Aren't you the Priest Lady?" I replied "Yes, I performed the ceremony." With that she ordered those in front of me to make way. "Didn't they know that the Priest lady should eat first?"

When a couple marry in an outside venue, alternative arrangements must be made in case of rain. At one wedding, this had not been done - it was just as well the guests had brought umbrellas!

It was autumn and the couple wished to be married in Frimely Park, Hastings. It started to rain, just misty rain, so they decided, yes, it would still be in the Park. As it happened the spot they had chosen was under a beautiful tree with leaves all turned

gold. As I said to them, where else could they have been married, but on a carpet of gold under a roof of gold!

With the wedding over and photographs being taken, the couple wanted their two children included. So the two year old and a babe in arms were posed, ready and smiling, when a voice from one of the guests came - "Hey, you, I thought the kid came after the wedding!"

There was the time when the daughter of the bride was a flower-girl, but she would not have her photograph taken with the bridal group. Mum turned to her and yelled, "You come and get your photo taken or I'll take that dress of you and Grandma can wear it!"

Funny things can happen at a wedding..... forgetting the ring, dropping the ring, - and why is it that it's usually a struggle for the bridegroom to get the ring over the bride's finger joint - to the best man always professes to have lost it, and search in every pocket.

A mixed marriage involving a Filipino woman and a New Zealand man meant an interesting mixtures of wedding traditions. The couple were entwined with veil and strings of pearls, and I handed the couple money so as to symbolise future prosperity. Wedding are always happy times, even when as happened once, when the bride did not know until half an hour before the ceremony, that she was going to be a bride. The wedding had been put off three times, but this time the bridegroom, with the help of future mother-in-law, got his bride!

Up to November 1990 I have performed five hundred and fifty six marriages, and two baby naming ceremonies. Both these were the daughters of solo mother. I gave a lot of thought to the format of that ceremony. Both turned out to be very happy occasions, with grandparents and friends present.

I do enjoy my role a Marriage celebrant, and over the years I have met so many folk.

In the year of Our Majesty and Prince Phillip's Silver Jubilee, in 1977, I was awarded the Silver Jubilee Medal for my work in the community. I was so proud for my family' sake, although a sister-in-law thought my family would fight over who was to get it when I departed this life.

Being an Honorary Volunteer Social Worker for over twenty years has had its rewards. Once a week, with three other women, we go to what we call "Steptoe House" (really Faraday House) where there is stored good clean used clothing, kitchen equipment such as pots, pans, cutlery, crockery etc. We also have bed linen and blankets, all generously given to us for welfare. Our "client" must come to us from a reputable source, such as Social Welfare Department, Prisoners Aid, Birthright, Public Health Nurses. Our goods are given free to those in need.

I should mention "Steptoe" is an old four roomed cottage owned by the City council and is ideal for our use. Over the years we must have helped hundreds of needy people and we hope to continue this worthwhile cause.

Alas, last year we lost dear Phyllis Strother when she passed away. We miss her so much. That hearty laugh and gentle mature. Just the three of us now, Dot, Eve and myself. Eve is to be away for six months, so we have asked my dear friend Muriel to come in to help us.

Another group to which I belong and have done for many years is the Marewa Townswomen Guild. There is the main Guild also the two Circles, Craft and Gardening. Each year there is a Show and Home Produce are entered, with members working for months to compete for a prize. The Guild also has a Choir and Drama Group. I have enjoyed the friendship with the women of the Guild. A small group who are very interested in craft and meet on a Monday afternoon and I lead this group. It never ceases to amaze me that so many variations of one thing can be made. You take a fancy pin cushion or a knitted toy, and if ten women make a copy you would get ten different versions. This group always has a project each year for some worthy cause. Maybe knee rugs for the elderly or cot covers for children's group. Cushions for an aged persons home. In 1988 and '89 we made toys for the Christmas Cheer Appeal. Over the years we have helped with many worthy projects for someone in need.

This group meets from the month of May to October. I have put on a Breakfast to start the year, and then we all contribute to a party for the final meeting.

In 1989 I said that I would not be doing the Daily Telegraph/Bay City Radio Christmas Appeal for 1990. My decision was reluctantly agreed upon. I felt it was time that a younger person with new ideas and more energy would be better for the success of the appeal. I had enjoyed my years co-ordinating and being involved - but one seems to know when it's time to give someone else the job.

In the February, the Mayor, Alan Dick, hosted me to a morning tea with the other helpers and Telegraph personnel. I was presented with a tray and coasters with the Napier City coat of arms depicted on them. I was so pleased as I have quite a collection of Napier souvenir china.

I also enjoy being a member of the Collectors Group, attached to the Art gallery and Museum. It is a large group with interests in antiques. Each month we have a speaker and a display table with members always willing to show their treasures, and share their interests with others.

The friendship Force I joined when Brian was President of the Greenmeadows Rotary Club, and asked me to host a couple of Americans. The object of the Friendship Force is to promote peace through friendship. I have acted as a host five times, and found it a very rewarding experience. Fundamentally people are the same, no matter what nationality. I have made friends, not only from overseas, but within our own community.

I will never forget the wonderful six week trip that I made in 1989 to the United States of America being hosted in the homes of friends.. I went with John, Joan and Jill Stevens. We went to North and South Carolina, Florida, Chicago, Seattle, British Columbia, Honolulu, Hawaii. I could write a book on the trip alone!

Now my family is scattered.

Colleen in Otane, Brian in Gisborne, Josephine in Newcastle, Australia, Lois in Thames, Neill back home with me, Raylee in New Plymouth, Ken also in Australia.

Grandchildren - well there are twenty of them. Some are in Australia, and others have been overseas, travelling in England and the Continent. I am very fortunate that they all keep in touch with m. 24 Great Grandchildren

At Christmas, 1989, Ken came home bringing his seven year old son, Nathan. What a delightful child. We had many a laugh with him. One conversation I'll forget. He wanted a "quiet talk" with me. This is how it went:

"Grandma, do you like living by yourself?"

"No"

"Grandma, what did it feel like when your husband died?"

I tried to explain that death was a natural part of life.

"Oh well then, are you going to married again?"

"I don't think so," I said,

"Haven't you got any boy friends, Grandma?"

"No", I replied,

"Well, if you get one, and he wants to marry you, ask him does he have a job, and if he has any money, and do make sure he hasn't go Aids."

It was quite a conversation!!!

I'd very much like to be around when he is a grown man.

All to soon Ken and Nathan returned to Newcastle. I wondered how long it would be before I would see them again.

What would 1990-1 hold for me. I had many weddings booked in for the first four months and doubtless many more to follow.

The Friendship Force had many activities planned, such as 'Guess who's coming to dinner'. You either hosted or were a guest, you chose a number for a meal and then also for a social evening to follow. I've become very friendly with a couple who now visit me regularly to play a game called 'Rummy-Kub'. Quite a game, we thoroughly enjoy. Then there are other meeting when the whole Friendship Force get together.

My weddings still keep me busy most weekends and now its become popular to have a baby naming ceremony, of which I have done quite a few.

Faraday House is still being called on for help for those in need of clothing, bedding and kitchen goods, there is always somebody in need. Over the years we must have given out many thousands of dollars worth of goods, all donated to us by the Community. It never ceases to amaze us the quality of goods that are given to us.

The demands for my services as a Justice have increased. Hardly a day goes by that I'm not called on to witness a signature, this is sadly being mostly insurance claims. So many homes and business's being broken into, is this a result of so much unemployment and the down turn of the economy?

In July my 75 birthday, a whole week of rejoicing with family and friends. Colleen organised a wonderful surprise luncheon for me at Kennedy park Restaurant. Over 30 attended. Imagine my surprise when I had thought there would be only 6-8 pf us. I was presented with a "This is Your Life Mum" book, which I now treasure!

The family continue to increase but all well and happy. The grandchildren growing into adulthood and making their own input into life. The great grandchildren, some of them are off at school, and doing very well.

New Year 1991 was memorable not only for me, also the family when I was awarded the Queens Service Medal for community involvement. What a proud moment for me in May 1991 I went with my eldest daughter and my son Brian to Government house Wellington to receive the award from our first woman Governor General, Dame Kath Tizzard. It was quite a decision on who was to accompany me as only two were allowed for each recipient.

No it is 1992. Life will go on. I think its just as well we do not know what's ahead of us, but of one thing. I'm quite sure I have the love and support of my family and my very dear friend Muriel.

Can I just sum it all up by saying:

"My Family have been my greatest romance."

I have not put down half of my thoughts for quite some time, life is just so busy. When I last wrote Nathan was seven and a half, he is now ten and a half. How time goes. I'm still busy with Faraday House, the needy will always be with us. Also the ones that have things to spare for others.

On the 8th of October, what a surprise in the post I received. The 1990 New Zealand Commemoration Medal for my service to the community. My name had been put forward by Honourable Margaret Shields, Minister of Women's Affairs.

New Year 1991 I was given another award. This time the Queens Service Medal, how overcome I felt, so proud for my family who have always been so good to me. More decisions as I could only have two at the presentation at Government House. Being instructed regarding protocol, when it came my turn to receive my medal, I walked up to bow to Dame Kath Tizzard, the Governor General. All I could think was don't limp and hold my stomach in. Dame Kath did say she wished more women had been so honoured.

Now its nearly Christmas 1992.

What will the future hold both for me and my family?

First I would wish health, happiness, employment and leisure. Time to enjoy life to the fullest for my family.

For myself, to keep doing for them and others. To give of one self is so rewarding.

To date I have married 646 couples.

Maybe one day I'll write another chapter.....

Isabella May was born 70 years ago today  
 Such a lot had happened on the way  
 First to crawl, toddle, then walk  
 Then to school and use the chalk  
 Onto paper, pen and ink  
 Then to give the boys a wink  
 Upon the scene appeared Hugh Blair  
 To him you did 7 children ear  
 Colleen the eldest is a Bank Teller  
 Brian in Gisborne is a Steel Manager Fella  
 Josephine in Australia is she  
 Lois now lives in Thames and no longer Mangre  
 Neill mixes concrete and no longer dough  
 Raylee types letters and does wages for the P O  
 The youngest is Kenneth a plumbers mate is he  
 Lives in Newcastle and looks after machinery  
 We mustn't forget Sefton and Gareth too  
 Who've come from New Plymouth to be you  
 4 lovely grand daughters too are here  
 As well as Richard from Gisborne and Cameron Blair  
 Others overseas are sorry to be absent  
 But we'll move on to your history and present  
 Then you decided to take your part  
 School Committee's it was at the start  
 B P W and National Council of Women too  
 These were some of the things you could do  
 Proud of you we were when you were made J P  
 Then you got the medal for the Queen's Jubilee  
 Steptoe house keeps you busy most Tuesdays  
 Weddings take up many hours of the week and Saturdays  
 Your family like to see you but have to book  
 Else they don't get a chance even for a look  
 We are so lucky you keep so fit  
 And share with others your laughter and wit  
 50 years 7 Taradale Road has been your home  
 Expect it's too late now for you to roam  
 Ups and downs you've had over the years  
 But we all wish you joy now and no more tears  
 So on this Friday the 18th July 1986  
 We show you our fondest love and give you a kiss

Written by my eldest Daughter Colleen

IMMORTALITY

You tell me I am getting old!  
I tell you that's not so  
The "House" I live in is wearing out  
And that, of course I know.  
It's been in use a long while  
It's weathered many a gale  
I'm really not surprised you think  
It's getting somewhat frail.  
The colour is Changing on the roof  
The windows are getting dim  
The walls a bit transparent  
And looking rather thin,  
The foundations not so steady,  
As once it used to be.  
My house is getting shaky  
But my house isn't me.  
My long years can't make me old  
I feel I'm in my youth  
Eternity is just ahead  
A life of joys and truth.  
I'm going to live forever there  
Life will go on, its grand!  
You tell me I'm getting old, You just don't understand.  
The dweller in my little "House"  
Is young and bright and gay,  
Just starting on a life to last  
Throughout eternal day.  
You see only the outside,  
Which is all most folks see  
You tell me I'm getting old,  
You've mixed my "house" with me.

Author unknown by me