

Hello to all, you asked for more info re my early days so here goes,
Written August 2005.

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People most involved in my life during these early years were,
Mother, Mabel Rose Hodgkinson [Crook]
Father, Eric Vivian Hodgkinson
Brother, Ronald Eric Crook
Sister, Audrey Colleen Viney
Gran & Grandfather, Alice Mary & James Edward Cottle
Aunty Ivy & Percy Krebs
Aunty Alma & Ernie Cottle
Stanley Eric Crook

I was born on Xmas day 1932, we were living at 16 Jessie St Petone at the time although I have no recollection of this. Audrey says that we were placed in a boys Catholic home, St Thomas's Boys School, Naenae, I was about 5 years and Ron about 6 1/2 years.

My father was a Catholic and Mother was not but as my Father had left her she had no option but to send us to the boys home for the meantime, although this was to last about 7 years in all.

We also attended during this time other primary schools although many were short lived, these included Taita, Thorndon Mt Cook, Johnsonville, Marist Brothers at Newtown & Thorndon and others, we also stayed at Mrs Robottoms place at Johnsonville [about 3 weeks] and Mr & Mrs Tynan' at 231 Thorndon Quay [18 months].

It was at Mrs Tynans old house that Ron used to catch big black spiders and put them down the inside of my shirt sending me right off, one night I was sent to pick up a scrubbing brush that had been left outside, as I picked it up the bristles brushed my fingers, thinking it was a spider I threw it away, unfortunately the brush went through the kitchen window smashing it, I can still recall old Mr Tynan saying "I know you didn't mean to do lad it but you must be punished" SMAC! We always went home during school holidays although Mother was working fulltime, this gave us latitude to do as we liked and we weren't always on good behaviour.

One time Mother was renting the top story of an old weatherboard house, Ron and I had heard that you could set fire to wood if you magnified the suns rays and we wanted to prove it, well it worked, Ron managed to get the rotten weatherboard to smoulder so he sent me upstairs to get some water to put out the smoking wood, that's when the comed started, I went upstairs and asked for a glass of water, when I went to walk downstairs with it Mother insisted I drink it there, when pressed as to why I wanted to take it away I blurted out that Ron had set fire to the house, Mother panicked and we all went downstairs including me with the water but there was no fire as Ron had managed to blow it out.

Lesson learnt "don't tell anyone what you are doing"

It was at this house that I was given a large wooden train engine for Xmas, I got sick of pushing it so decided to light a fire in the cab of the engine to make it go, I was disappointed when it smoked but still would'nt move by itself.

Later we moved to 32 Arthur Street and Mother and Audrey stayed there for a number of years with us only coming home on school holidays, Audrey went to a Catholic school just down the road in Buckle Street, unfortunately she went on to embrace her religion almost to the exclusion of everything else, more on this later.

She was a good sister to me and when I lost the top of my little finger that had been jammed in a school desk drawer she came from Wellington out to the boys home & took me to the Wellington hospital, she would also visit us at Naenae.

Life at the boys home.

The day began in summer at 6 am & in winter at 6-30am, the home/school catered for up to 65 boys up to standard 6, about 12-13 years old and I have no illusions about my education, after getting dressed we walked down the hundred or so steps to the main building.

There we washed and went to the chapel for prayers and mass, about 7-30 we went to the refectory [dining room] for breakfast which always was porridge and bread and dripping, in winter the bread and dripping was warmed, those boys that were lucky had jams and honey in their locker, after breakfast we were on a roster to do the washing up, there were sinks to use and the soap was in a wire shaker, others swept the dining room and tidied up, on Fridays there was confession and mass as there was on any sacred day, sometimes at Easter we went to mass 3 times a day, the home was run by the "Sisters of Mercy" with Priests there for mass.

I can tell you that after 7 years of this carry on I have no time for religion.

As written earlier both Ron and myself ran away 5 times from this home at Naenae, stealing milk money to get the train & bus fare home to Wellington to be with our Mother, of course we were always returned and we knew what to expect, a bloody good whacking.

I will write page 2 later as I still find reference to Naenae upsetting. dad g/dad.

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MORE HISTORY.

THERE WERE SOME GOOD TIMES AT NAENAE, I REALLY ENJOYED CUBS AND LATER ON SCOUTS. ONE OF OUR SCOUTMASTERS WAS KEITH MOODY WHO WALKED INTO THE MOWER SHOP IN HASTINGS ABOUT 1990, WHEN HE GAVE HIS NAME I SAID THAT I HAD KNOWN A SCOUTMASTER OF THAT NAME IN NAENAE IN THE 1940S, IMAGINE MY SURPRISE WHEN HE SAID "THAT WAS HE" HE WAS NOW LIVING IN HASTINGS WITH WIFE & FAMILY AND IS A PRACTISING CATHOLIC.

WE HAD A GOOD NATTER AND SOME TIME LATER HE BOUGHT IN JOHN SCOTT WHO ALSO HAD BEEN IN THE HOME, JOHN WAS A PUPIL AND HIS MOTHER STAYED THERE IN A SMALL COTTAGE AND WORKED THERE AS A HELP. JOHN IS VERY MUCH A CATHOLIC AND HIS EX WIFE LIZ SAID HE DROVE HER MAD WITH HIS WANTING HER TO GO TO CHURCH ETC, THEY SPLIT 2 YEARS AGO. IT WAS JOHN SCOTT THAT ORGANISED A SCHOOL REUNION SOME 2 YEARS AGO WHEN I HELPED WITH MAILING LABELS ETC. HE DOES NOT KEEP IN GOOD HEALTH..

DURING THE WAR YEARS SOME AMERICAN SOLDIERS CAME TO TRY TO TEACH US HOW TO PLAY SOFTBALL, THEY WERE GREAT GUYS AND BOUGHT US SMALL GIFTS, WE NEVER MADE UP A TEAM OR DID GREAT THINGS, THERE WERE THOUSANDS OF AMERICAN SOLDIERS IN WELLINGTON, THOUSANDS SLAUGHTERED FIGHTING THE JAPANESE IN THE PACIFIC, WE WERE UNDER NO ILLUSIONS THAT THE JAPS WERE COMING, THEY HAD BOMBED DARWIN AND SOME JAP SUBMARINES WERE BLOWN UP NEAR SYDNEY, THE NUNS USED TO SAY TO US "GOD HELP YOU ALL" I THINK SOFTBALL IS NOW CALLED BASEBALL.

WE PLAYED SOCCER IN WINTER ON THE FARM PADDOCKS, THE CONVENT GROUNDS ALSO INCLUDED A FARM WITH PIGS AND 65 COWS, A FULL TIME FARM MANAGER LIVED IN A COTTAGE HALFWAY DOWN THE LONG SYCAMORE TREE LINED DRIVE INTO THE CONVENT.

ONE DAY I WAS PLAYING IN A ROUGH PART OF THE PADDOCK, I WENT TO KICK THE SOCCER BALL AND MISSED AND FINISHED UP IN A HEAP ON THE GROUND, I ENDED UP IN THE HUTT HOSPITAL FOR ABOUT 10 DAYS WITH A CHIPPED BONE IN MY LEFT LEG, THE CHIP HAD TRAVELLED DOWN MY LEG SO THE NURSES PUT ME ON MY BACK WITH THE LEG ELAVATED, IT WORKED BUT I WAS TOLD NOT PLAY A KICKING SPORT AGAIN, THIS GAVE ME A GOOD REASON NOT TO PLAY SPORT AT THE HASTINGS BOYS HIGH IN 1947 DURING MY ONE YEAR THERE.

THERE WAS A CREEK RUNNING THROUGH THE GROUNDS AND EELING TRIPS WERE GOOD FUN AT NIGHT WHEN WE WERE ALLOWED, SOMETIMES THE ODD OPPOSSUM WAS CAUGHT AND DISPATCHED, NOT HUMANELY THOUGH.

I REALLY HAD NO INTEREST IN SCHOOLING AND WAS A POOR PUPIL, I REALLY GREW TO HATE THE PLACE, IT'S LACK OF FEELING AND LOVE AND IT'S STRICT CATHOLIC DISCIPLINE WHICH LED ME AND TO OTHERS RUNNING AWAY, I GOT AWAY 5 TIMES FROM THE SCHOOL WHICH MEANT A BUS AND TRAIN TRIP INTO WELLINGTON FROM NAENAE A TRIP OF ABOUT 25 kms, USUALLY ARRIVING AT MOTHERS AT 32 ARTHUR STREET ABOUT 8-30 TO 9-30 AT NIGHT, I WAS ABOUT 10 OR 12 YEARS OLD AT THIS TIME.

ONE TIME THE SCHOOL'S SEPTIC TANKS BLOCKED AND THE PLUMBER SAID THERE WAS TOO MUCH TOILET PAPER IN THE SYSTEM, THE NUNS DECIDED THAT WE WOULD HAVE TO GO TO THE KITCHEN, KNOCK ON THE DOOR AND ASK FOR TOILET PAPER, [SOMETIMES THE NUNS WERE ALL AWAY AT PRAYER AND NO ONE WAS THERE] THIS WAS FINE IN THEORY BUT DISASTER IN PRACTICE AS THE TOILET BLOCK WAS ABOUT 100 YARDS AWAY FROM THE KITCHEN, WHEN DYSENTERY SWEEPED THROUGH THE SCHOOL WHICH OCCURRED ABOUT 3 TIMES A YEAR THE RULE WAS CHANGED BACK AFTER A FEW UNPLEASANT EXPERIENCES.

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Members of my family reading this today will not realise the hardships faced by our parents & Grandparents of those early years.

Few family members had cars & if they did have the good fortune to own one it was usually a run down Austin 7 or perhaps an old Chev 4, during the war years tyres & tubes were rationed and generally no new tyres were available to the public, this resulted in most tyres having patches in them which caused more punctures, also rationed was sugar, tea, butter, petrol & meat, if you lost your coupons it was difficult to get them replaced.

Gran lived at Naenae during the war years, she had no hot water unless she boiled it on the wood stove, I well remember walking up to the cemetery at Taita and further on around to buy duck eggs from a small farm, the walk would take a few hours there & back but it was nothing unusual, I can't remember her having a phone at this time even though she was a mid-wife and sometimes on call.

For most of the war years we lived at 32 Arthur Street in Wellington, now a rundown area as the street is now required for motorway extension but it was a good part of town to be in during those years, Ron & myself were of course at the boys home in Naenae and only came home in school holidays, mother was working at the Wellington Brace Co and Audrey lived with mother and went to Buckle street Catholic school.

It was an exciting time for us boys, the American soldiers were in town either on leave or training at various camps around Wellington, we often went to the Brooklyn Army camp which had earlier been one of our playing parks, the Yanks treated us well, gave us chewing gum etc & most of them were good guys, Audrey, under her mother's supervision had an American boy friend, he was a nice guy, captured by the Japanese, he drowned along with hundreds of other American prisoners when the Japanese prison ship was torpedoed at sea and the Japs wouldn't release them. I still have his lapel badge Audrey gave me, Audrey & his mother kept in touch for some time after the war.

On school holidays we would go to Selfridges or Woolworths and pinch shoe polish & brushes and set up a shoe-shine box in upper Cuba street, it was good money as the Yanks were going overseas and the NZ money was no good to them they would give you a good tip plus the 1 shilling we charged, later after we had some money we would buy nugget and brushes.....good while it lasted

The Wellington harbour was full of war ships, hospital ships and fighting ships, we would walk around the wharves looking at them all and actually going aboard some of them, also the sailing ship "PAMIR" which was in harbour when war broke out, it was a German training ship and was seized and held in Wellington for the duration of the war, it was later sold to Argentina and was lost at sea with all hands during a storm.

Another ship we went on was an American aircraft carrier, it had a damaged superstructure, gouge marks all over it and about 15 or 20 Japanese flags painted there, these indicated the number of Jap planes shot down, we also went down below the flight deck by the big square lift in the middle of the flight deck but were chased out by an American sailor when he said "boys, get out, if there's a fire here you will never escape" we got out quickly but not before we saw mechanics working there on aircraft with wings folded & everyone busy. When you are 10 or 12 years old this was heady stuff.

The floating dock which was where the Picton ferry terminal is now, had a torpedo net placed around it in case Jap midget subs got into Wellington harbour, there was a blackout in force and everyone had to have their windows covered in paper or painted, one night in Arthur st there was a knock at the door, a warden had spotted a chink of light and mother had to turn off the light or cover the window better. there was a general fear that the Japanese would invade NZ sometime soon.

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My Mother, Mabel Rose Cottle was born in Marlmsbury, Wiltshire, England on 11th February 1907 and shortly after she was born sailed to New Zealand with her parents James Edward & Alice Mary Cottle [Jims Grandparents]

They arrived in Wellington circa 1908 and as far as known lived at Naenae, James was a gardener and found work in the district.

My mother had 2 brothers, Freddie who died in 1918 aged 5 years, and Ernest, she had a sister Ivy.

Ernie married Alma and they had 4 or 5 daughters and lived at 39 Merton Road, Trentham.

Ivy married Perce Krebs and lived at 13 Goring Street Wgtn for a number of years, they had 3 sons, Barry, Cyril and Ron and 2 daughters Fay and Ann.

My mother married Eric Vivian Hodgkinson, my Father was a mechanic and later a Service manager for a garage until his health gave in, I had heard that he had stomach ulcers, he was ordered to take it easy and later became a Rawleighs salesman.

Children of the marriage are Audrey Colleen, Ronald Eric and James Vivian and we lived at 16 Jessie Street Petone. Later, after they divorced, mother then went on to live at various addresses but settled at 32 Arthur Street Wgtn. She had to work to survive and got a job at "The Wellington Brace Co" which was just around the corner from home in Cuba Street, she had previously worked at the "Q-Tol" factory in Thorndon Quay.

I guess we were a handful as kids, home on school holidays and mother working, but it was a home that I enjoyed although it was right next door to a factory, the neighbours were kind to us children especially a Mr & Mrs Judd, I remember trying to build a chair and asked them if they any spare nails, "What do you want them for ??" Mrs Judd asked "I want to build a chair for my mother" I said which was partly right.

They thought that was very nice and gave me some, next time I tried it ...no luck I had pushed my luck once too often.

I'm afraid we almost drove Mother to desperation, we would play a game of Ronnie hiding round the corner and me rushing in saying "Ronnie has been run over by a tram" poor mother, she would send Audrey to check as she got ready to go to the hospital, eventually she got wise and one day after a stone fight with some boys and I came running saying that I had killed a boy, she took no notice, in fact we did have a stone fight and as the other boys were walking away I threw a stone in their direction, being the youngest I was a lousy shot but it came down on the top of a boys head and it bled something terrible, so bad was it bleeding that a taxi driver stopped and took him to hospital, when I saw him about an hour later he was alright and just had a small mark on his head, I really did think I had killed him.

We used to play knocking on someones front door and running away, we were always faster than the mostly older people that chased us, one day we approached a house, be careful one of my mates said, this chap hides and waits for us so said, "why don't we have a stone each and throw it at the door one after the other so it sounds like someone knocking" My idea was put into practice...unfortunatly some good ideas just don't work, I had overlooked that there were glass panels each side of his front door, someone miss-aimed and a stone went through his side window, we took off as soon as we heard the glass break and he took off behind us, I managed to get home, tell mother I was unwell and was in bed before he knocked on the door, all was to no avail, mother made me get up and tell the story, we apologised and looked sorrowful and all was well again.

Poor mother, we really were a pain during school holidays, she had to work to earn money to keep Audrey at the Catholic school and us at the boys home plus the rent etc.

Mother met a nice chap Charlie Pike, he was good to us bringing mother out to Naenae to visit on a Sunday afternoon and we would picnic by the stream that ran through the home, mothers bad luck continued when Uncle Charlie as we knew him died of cancer, he was a good man and in his Will he left us 25 pounds to be invested till we were 21 years old, I was working at this time and used the money to buy a set of bagpipes, Ron was in the pipe band and I had ideas of joining too.

It was later in the war years that mother met Stan Crook and all our lives changed forever, Stan was a signwriter and during the war was stationed in Wellington in the Army in the camouflage unit painting cars, trucks and whatever needed camouflaging.

He was engaged to a Napier girl at the time and he met mother at an Army, Navy and Airforce Service club and they fell in love, for the first time I had a father figure in my life and he was a great man, his father was a signwriter also in Hastings and in 1945 he married mother and they shifted back to Hastings with Audrey leaving Ron & myself to finish primary school at the Naenae boys home.

In 1945 Ron finished primary school and also shifted to Hastings and I stayed on leaving in 1946, mother & Stan Crook purchased a house at 812 Albert Street in Hastings and over the next few years Stan painted and upgraded it.

Stan had a good business and built a new workshop at Albert Street but mothers bad luck continued with Stan dying of cancer 7 years after they were married, I was devastated, it seemed that the Crook family badf luck was still running, Stan's brother Ken had been out rabbit shooting when the man behind him accidentally shot him in the head and he was damaged for life and unable to work, Stan's elder brother Phillip died at 55 years and Phillip's son also called Phillip died while out cycling at a young age, the bad luck continued throught he Crook line with Peter Crook and Ann losing there fir baby and then Mark , they were advised not to have any more children so they adopted Paula.

It was tough going for mother, Audrey met Ron Viney, Ron had been married before and had lived in Christchurch and had 2 boys Robert & Keith both with Cerebal Palsy and were not expected to live past 14 years, at this time Audrey was devout catholic and was to remain so throughout her life, the problem was that Ron was not, she wrote to the Vatican asking permission to marry a non catholic and was told that she could marry him but not in a catholic church, they were married on the front lawn at 812 Albert street and she bacame Mrs A Viney, the trouble began when the Priests called and told Audrey the although she was married in the eyes of the law she was not married as far as the church was concerned, so she left Ron.

Ron eventually agreed to become a catholic for the sake of the marriage and they were remarried, both Robert & Keith died, Audrey and Ron shifted around the country to Kumeu, Gisborne and Opitiki, Ron died at Opitiki and Audrey shifted back to Napier, later to Upper Hutt, Paraparaumu and finally Waikanae, whilst there she suffered a massive stroke and died November 2004 in the Wellington Hospital, present were myself, Louise and nuns.

Mother died at Audreys place at Bill Hercock Street Napier on the 8th December 1990. more later.