

THE FIRST 40 YEARS

9TH DECEMBER 2001

IT IS DIFFICULT TO KNOW JUST WHERE TO START BUT BY INDEXING PEOPLE AND PLACES THIS MAY MAKE IT EASIER TO FOLLOW....THIS ARTICLE IS WRITTEN FROM MEMORY AND IS FOR MY FAMILY RECORD.

SOMETIME IN THE 1937, MY STORY IS TYPICAL OF DOZENS OF BOYS AT NAENAE BOYS SCHOOL

MY MOTHER {MABEL ROSE HODGKINSON} AND MY FATHER [ERIC RONALD HODGKINSON] HAD PARTED, WHAT TO DO WITH THE PRODUCT OF THAT MARRIAGE FORMS THE BASIS OF THIS STORY.

THERE WERE 3 CHILDREN, AUDREY COLLEEN, RONALD ERIC AND JAMES VIVIAN. THIS IS MY STORY...JAMES VIVIAN...NAME CHANGED BY DEED POLL TO JAMES VIVIAN CROOK WHEN MY MOTHER MARRIED STANLEY ERIC CROOK.

1930'S

MY EARLIEST RECOLLECTION OF SCHOOLING IS OF MY GRANDMOTHER [ALICE COTTLE] WALKING ME DOWN PARK ROAD IN NAENAE TO GO TO TAITA SCHOOL. I WOULD HAVE BEEN IN THE PRIMERS AT THAT STAGE, PROBABLY EARLY IN 1937, I HAVE NO OTHER RECOLLECTIONS OF THAT SCHOOL

ON THE FIRST OF FEBRUARY 1938, AGED 5 YEARS I WAS PLACED IN ST THOMAS'S BOYS SCHOOL AND ENROLLED AS JAMES HODGKINSON, NUMBER 563 ON THE SCHOOL REGISTER,....MY BROTHER RON HAD BEEN ENROLLED EARLIER ON THE 9TH AUGUST 1937 AGED 6 YEARS.

I CAN RECALL MEMORIES OF SISTER MARY JOSEPH, AN OLDER NUN BERATING US FOR EVERY WRONGDOING AS I SAT IN THE FRONT ROW IN CLASS IN THE PRIMERS, SUCKING ON MY SLATE STICK....I CAN STILL RECALL THE TASTE OF THAT HORRIBLE THING,...SHE WAS A HARD TASKMASTER WITH SELDOM A SMILE, .. ONE OF HER FAVORITE SAYINGS WAS "WOE BETIDE YOU IF I CATCH YOU DOING" WHATEVER IT WAS THAT YOUNG BOYS DID AND SHE HAD AND USED A BIG STICK WHENEVER SHE FELT THE OCCASION JUSTIFIED IT.

SHE ALSO TOOK US FOR SINGING AND I HAVE DISTINCT MEMORIES OF HER SITTING AT THE PIANO AS SHE WENT OVER AND OVER THE SONGS WE HAD TO SING ,...MOST OF THOSE SONGS ARE STILL WITH ME TODAY 60 YEARS ON.

BLACKBERRYING WAS ALSO ONE OF HER TASKS AND WE SPENT MANY AN HOUR PICKING BLACKBERRYS WITH ALL THE SCHOOL PUPILS ,...WHAT HAPPENED TO ALL THOSE BERRIES IS STILL A MYSTERY ALTHOUGH SOMETIMES A PIE WAS "BAKED FOR THE BOYS".

IT WAS A TERRIBLE LONELY LIFE..WHILST WE WERE NO DOUBT WELL FED AND MOST OF OUR NEEDS CATERED FOR THERE WAS NO LOVE GIVEN...NO SENSE OF FAMILY LIFE...IT WOULD SCAR ME FOR LIFE. *EVER*

THE LEARN TO SWIM CLASSES

ONE OF THE HORROR STORIES THAT WORRIED MOST OF THE BOYS AT THE SCHOOL WAS THE "LEARN TO SWIM" CLASSES...THIS WAS SISTER MARY JOSEPH AT HER MOST CRUELEST..WE WERE SHEPERED TO A POND IN ONE OF THE PADDOCKS , THE WATER WAS ABOUT 3 OR 4 FOOT DEEP AND FULL OF EELS AND RUSTY CORRAGATED IRON AND OLD HOMEMADE CANOES , THE OLDER BOYS WHO COULD SWIM GRABBED THE YOUNGER LADS BY THE SHOULDERS AND LEGS AND SWUNG

THEM SCREAMING INTO THE POND..MUCH TO THE MERRIMENT OF SISTER JOSEPH...THERE WERE CRIES FROM THOSE WHO COULDN'T SWIM AND I REMEMBER BEING THROWN INTO THE DEEP END AND BEING HELPED OUT BY ANOTHER 2 BOYS STRATEGICALLY PLACED TO BRING UP THOSE THAT DIDN'T SURFACE..THIS THEN WAS THE SYSTEM USED TO MAKE US LEARN TO SWIM ...NO WONDER WE WET THE BEDS AT NIGHT..

IT WAS SOME YEARS LATER THAT A SWIMMING POOL WAS BUILT AFTER FUNDS WERE RAISED AND THE HARD TIMES AT THE POND DISAPPEARED.

THERE WERE SOME HAPPY TIMES..THE GARDEN PARTIES WHERE FUNDS WERE RAISED AND TOFFEE APPLES WERE THE TOP OF MY LIST..I THINK WE WERE GIVEN SOME MONEY TO SPEND ON THOSE OCCASIONS..AND WHO COULD FORGET THE OPENING OF "THE SHOP" WHICH WAS OPENED ON A THURSDAY AFTERNOON FOR AN HOUR..THIS WAS RUN BY SISTER MARY GONZALES..A POLISH NUN WHO WAS ALSO A TASKMASTER..ALWAYS TRYING TO HURRY US ALONG WHEN WE TRIED TO WORK OUT JUST WHAT TO BUY...SOME OF THE BOYS HAD PLENTY OF SPENDING MONEY..OTHERS LIKE MY BROTHER AND I DID NOT.

ONE OTHER CLEAR MEMORY WAS IN THE REFECTORY [DINING ROOM] OF THE CUPBOARD JUST BY THE ENTRANCE DOOR WHERE BOYS COULD KEEP THEIR JAMS OR MARMITES THAT HAD THEIR NAME ON THEM, THESE WERE BOUGHT BY THEIR PARENTS..THESE WERE GIVEN OUT AT TEATIME OR DINNER TIME WHEN NEEDED...MOST OF THE BOYS HAD NO SUCH LUXURIES AND THOSE THAT DID WERE MOST POPULAR FOR A TIME.

ON ONE OR TWO OCCASIONS SOMEONE FROM HAWKE'S BAY SENT DOWN A 4 GALLON TIN OF HONEY FOR ALL THE BOYS TO USE...I AM FOREVER GRATEFUL TO THAT UNKNOWN PERSON AND I WISH TO THIS DAY TO REPAY THAT DEBT.

THIS IS THE COW WITH THE CRUMPLED HORN...

THERE WERE TWO DORMITORYS USED..THE LARGE OLD TWO STORY HOUSE AND THE WHAT I NOW KNOW TO BE THE BALLROOM. WHERE THE YOUNGER BOYS SLEPT...THERE WOULD BE ABOUT 25-30 BEDS IN THIS ROOM AND A VERY SMELLY TOILET IN ONE ROOM IN THE CORNER..THE LAYOUT OF THIS ROOM IS ETCHED IN MY MIND..AROUND THE WALL WAS A FRIEZE DEPICTING A FAMILAR FARM SCENE OF "THIS IS THE HOUSE THAT JACK BUILT" AND WITH ALL THE DRAWINGS AND SAYINGS THAT APPLIED TO IT..I USED TO LOOK AT THESE AND READ THESE TO MYSELF WHEN I WAS LONELY AND UNHAPPY AND I STILL THINK OF THESE TIMES AS BAD.

LATER WHEN I WAS OLDER AND MOVED INTO THE LARGER DORMITORY THINGS IMPROVED...BUT ONLY JUST.

I WAS A POOR SCHOLAR AND MY MIND COULDN'T BE MORE FURTHER FROM MY SCHOOLWORK,...THIS CARRIED OVER TO MY 1 YEAR AT HIGHSCHOOL IN HASTINGS WHERE I WAS 27TH IN A CLASS OF 28....THIS ALL CHANGED WHEN I WENT TO NIGHT SCHOOL AND COULDN'T GET ENOUGH OF THE EVENING CLASSES IN MECHANICS WHERE I WAS USUALLY IN THE TOP 5.

SISTER MARY GONZALES WAS THE POLISH COOK..IT WAS HER JOB TO PREPARE THE BREAKFAST EACH NIGHT BEFORE BED...THIS ALWAYS CONSISTED OF BREAD AND DRIPPING..SUMMER AND WINTER..ALTHOUGH IN WINTER IT WAS SOMETIMES HEATED...AND OF COURSE PORRIDGE...THERE WERE ABOUT 65 BOYS AT ST THOMAS'S AND THE WASHING UP WAS DONE IN 2 SINKS ON A ROTATION BASIS...SOAP WAS IN A WIRE MESH HOLDER AND WAS SHAKEN VIGOROUSLY TO MAKE A LATHER..THE PLATES AND KNIVES AND FORKS ALWAS HAD A SMELL WITH THEM,BUT WE SURVIVED.



WE ALL HAD TO LINE UP ABOUT EVERY 2 MONTHS FOR A DOSE OF EPSOM SALTS. "THIS IS TO CLEAN YOU OUT" THE NUNS SAID, AND IT DID.

BOILS AND DYSENTRY AND OF COURSE THE FLU ALL HAD AN EFFECT ON US DURING THIS TIME, WE ALL BATHED IN A CONCRETE BATH IN THE WASHROOM AND NO DOUBT THAT WAS A GOOD SPOT FOR ANY GERMS TO MULTIPLY. LATER ON I WAS ABLE TO TAKE A BATH IN ONE OF TWO SEPERATE BATHROOMS ADJOINING THE COAT ROOM.

I WELL REMEMBER THE HEAD SISTER, SISTER MARY GONZAGA TELLING US NOT TO TAKE TOO MUCH NOTICE OF SISTER MARY GONZALES CRYING AS THE GERMANS HAD JUST INVADED HER HOME COUNTRY OF POLAND AND SHE VERY UPSET...THIS WAS IN SEPTEMBER 1939 AND THIS LED US INTO WORLD WAR 2.

THE COLD WINTERS

THE COLD WINTERS, MANY A TIME I WOULD PUT MY HEAD UNDER THE BLANKETS TO TRY AND GET SOME WARM AIR INTO ME. BEFORE GOING TO SLEEP..THERE WERE SOME QUITE SEVERE FROSTS DURING THOSE WINTERS AND KEEPING WARM WAS A PROBLEM, ALTHOUGH CRUNCHING THE FROZEN PUDDLES WAS ALWAYS FUN. LATER WHEN I SHIFTED TO HAWKE'S BAY DURING XMAS 1946 I FOUND THE HEAT OVERPOWING, SO MUCH SO THAT WHEN MY SCIENCE TEACHER CAME INTO THE GARAGE WHERE I WORKED AND SAW ME SWEATING PROFUSLEY HE SAID "WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH YOU BOY? YOU SHOULDN'T BE LIKE THAT" I SPENT 7 YEARS AT ST THOMAS'S SCHOOL BUT BETWEEN 1937 AND 1946 RON AND I WENT TO OTHER FOSTER HOMES AND SCHOOLS.

1940'S

231 THORNDON QUAY.

WE MUST HAVE BEEN THERE FOR ABOUT 12 OR 18 MONTHS, MR AND MRS TYNAN WERE OUR FOSTER PARENTS....MILLY AND MICK KILLKOLLY LIVED UPSTAIRS AS WELL AS RON AND I.

MR TYNAN WORKED AS A TRUCK DRIVER..THEY WERE ELDERLY AND VERY OLD FASHIONED...SUNDAYS WAS SUPPOSED TO BE SPENT READING FROM A BIBLE OR PRAYER BOOK...I WENT TO THORNDON SCHOOL WHERE I WAS IN THE PRIMERS. I HAVE A SCHOOL PHOTO SHOWING "GREEN HOUSE 1940" WITH ME IN IT. MR AND MRS PARRY LIVED NEXT DOOR ON THE TOWN SIDE.

The Water

MRS TYNAN USED TO BOIL THE COPPER AND WE WOULD BATHE IN THE WASHHOUSE TUB....ONE COLD DAY RON BENT DOWN TO WARM HIS BOTTOM BY THE COPPER DOOR..HE GOT TOO CLOSE AND BURT HIS BACKSIDE.

ON ANOTHER OCCASION THE POLICE WERE CALLED WHEN RON ALMOST CUT OFF A GIRLS THUMB...THEY WERE BOTH CLEARING THE TABLE..RON HAD THE CARVING KNIFE IN HIS HAND AND USED IT TO STOP THE GIRL HELPING HERSELF TO THE MEAT..HE ACCIDENTALLY CAUGHT HER HAND..AND THE DAMAGE WAS DONE.

IT WAS HERE AT THIS ADDRESS THAT MY WORST FEAR OF SPIDERS GREW,...WE HAD BEEN TO THE PICTURES AND SEEN TARZAN CAUGHT IN A GIANT SPIDERS WEB...VERY REAL WHEN YOU'RE ABOUT 8 YEARS OLD, RON USED TO CATCH THE BIG BLACK SPIDERS THAT WERE OUTSIDE THE OLD HOUSE AND PUT THEM DOWN MY SINGLET...THE EFFECT WAS JUST WHAT HE WANTED...THIS WAS TO HAVE REPERCUSSIONS LATER ONE NIGHT WHEN I WAS ASKED TO BRING IN A SCRUBBING BRUSH THAT HAD BEEN LEFT OUTSIDE...AS I PICKED IT UP I FELT THE BRISTLE TOUCH MY FINGERS...THINKING IT WAS A SPIDER I THREW IT...STRAIGHT THROUGH THE KITCHEN WINDOW...OF COURSE IT RESULTED IN A HIDING...IT WAS NO USE EXPLAINING.

THREE GREENS GOING UP.

BEING IN THORNDON IT WAS NOT FAR TO 32 ARTHUR STREET WHERE MOTHER AND AUDREY LIVED...WE USED TO CATCH A TRAM..THE TRAMS HAD THEIR DESTINATION DISPLAYED AS WELL AS COLOUR LIGHTING AND 3 GREEN LIGHTS WAS THE TRAM WE CAUGHT.

IT WENT AS FAR AS THE NEWTOWN ZOO AND ON THE WAY BACK TO THORNDON ALSO DISPLAYED 3 GREEN LIGHTS....AFTER A WEEKEND AT ARTHUR STREET WE

WOULD WALK DOWN CUBA STREET TO THE JAMES SMITH CORNER AND CATCH THE THREE GREENS TRAM BACK TO MRS TYNANS. I HAD TO ATTEND THE SUNDAY SCHOOL AT THORNDON AND STILL HAVE MY PRAYER BOOK...NOW VERY MUCH UNUSED...

OTHER SCHOOLS WE BOTH ATTENDED WERE MARIST BROTHERS AT NEWTOWN, MARIST AT TE ARO. MT COOK SCHOOL IN BUCKLE ST, SOMEWHERE IN PETONE, JOHNSONVILLE SCHOOL WHERE WE STAYED WITH A MRS ROBOTOM, WE ONLY LASTED ABOUT 3 WEEKS THERE AS SHE SAID WE WERE TOO MUCH OF A HANDFUL...NOT HELPED BY MY STEALING MILK BOTTLE MONEY ON MY WAY TO SCHOOL SO I COULD CATCH A TRAIN HOME TO BE WITH MY MOTHER, I WAS SPOTTED BY A GIRL WHO PROMPTLY REPORTED ME AND IN SPITE OF MY BEST EFFORTS TO TRY AND HIDE THE MONEY IN A TOILET I WAS CAUGHT REDHANDED.

SOMETIME AFTER THE JOHNSONVILLE SAGA WE WERE RETURNED TO NAENAE WHERE I STAYED UNTIL 1946...THE YEARNING TO BE HOME AT ARTHUR ST NEVER LEFT ME AND DURING THE YEARS RAN AWAY 5 TIMES....THE WELCOMING I GOT ON RETURN NEVER VARIED...A GOOD HIDING IS WHAT YOU NEED AND THATS WHAT YOU'LL GET..."I DON'T WANT TO DO THIS "SAID SISTER GONZAGA...STRAP IN HAND..BUT SHE DID,.....ROUND AND ROUND WE WENT...I KNEW IF I HOLLERED LOUD ENOUGH SHE WOULD BE IMPRESSED AND PERHAPS STOP SOONER,... BUT SOMEHOW I WAS NEVER QUITE LOUD ENOUGH... SHE STRAPPED ME FOR QUITE A WHILE..."YOU CAUSE ME ENOUGH TROUBLE" SHE SAID AND WENT ON "I HAVE REDUCED THE 30 SHILLINGS A WEEK BECAUSE YOUR MOTHER CAN'T AFFORD THE FULL RATES" SHE WOULD SAY AS SHE STRAPPED "I DON'T KNOW JUST WHAT TO DO WITH YOU"

I WASN'T THE ONLY RUNAWAY,...RON HAD ALSO DISSAPEARED ON OCCASIONS BUT HE NEVER MENTIONED THE STRAPPINGS...HE DID MAKE THE HEADLINES WHEN THE POLICE BROADCASTON THE RADIO THAT SOME BOYS HAD RUN AWAY FROM ST THOMAS'S..HE AND CHARLIE ROBERTSON AND OTHERS WERE INVOLVED...PERHAPS RON MIGHT ONE DAY TELL HIS TALES.

THE 1940'S

NOT ALL THE NUNS WERE HARD ON US..SOME WE EVEN GREW TO LIKE..BUT IT WAS NEVER LIKE BEING AT HOME...TIMES WERE HARD..THE WAR WAS ON AND A JAPANESE INVASION WAS EXPECTED...SEARCHLIGHTS WERE SWITCHED ON IN WELLINGTON AT NIGHT...SOLDIERS WERE EVERYWHERE AND AIR RAID SHELTERS WERE BUILT...THE JAPANESE HAD BOMBED DARWIN AND HAD MINI SUBMARINES IN SYDNEY HARBOUR.

ALL HOUSES WERE BLACKED OUT AND WARDENS PATROLLED THE CITY ,...KNOCKING ON DOORS IF THEY SAW A CHINK OF LIGHT...ARTHUR STREET HAD A KNOCK ON THE DOOR AT NIGHT FROM A WARDEN COMPLAINING ABOUT THE LIGHT SHINING THROUGH A WINDOW...EARTHQUAKES WERE ALSO A CONCERN..IN 1942 A BIG JOLT SHOOK THE CITY..HOUSES LOST THEIR CHIMNEYS IN OUR STREET AND POWER AND TELEPHONE LINES WERE BROUGHT DOWN...MOTHER WAS PETRIFIED OF EARTHQUAKES AND IN LATER YEARS WOULD'NT DRIVE DOWN CUBA OR WILLIS STREET WITH THEIR OLD BUILDINGS "JUST IN CASE"