

## ESTELLE'S FAMILY LIFE

[These notes are retyped from Estelle's writings from about 1991.]

Born 1930 at Edendale, Southland, on September 26<sup>th</sup> the ninth child. The family lived on the edge of the bush country in a huge house with marble floors. At the age of three months I was sent to Aunt Olive with a bad dose of whooping cough, she nursed me back to life. The family were dairy farming and my older brothers and sisters rode horses to travel to school. During the depression, it was decided to come to the North Island. We travelled up to Christchurch and crossed over on the ferry. I can remember the bunks and the maid bringing cups of tea and biscuits in the early morning – sorry – none were for me. At first, we lived with my grandparents who had an orchard in Kaiapo Road, Hastings. Grandfather Ward told me when I couldn't find one of my socks – a mouse had taken it down its hole – I believed him! A house and land next door became our home. And a new orchard was planted, my parents working with granddad. We kept cows – three or four – which Ian, Cliff or my mother milked. Our job was to separate the milk and wash the separator. Each day we took a billy of milk over to granddad – nervously knocked on the door, hoping that grandma (Eliza McLennan) wouldn't answer. She never asked us inside – I can only remember being in the kitchen – and seeing the serving window into the dining room and thinking how wonderful that was. I often met granddad at the steps of the house – perhaps he was waiting to save me from grandma – he called me his "milk maid". He was a quiet man with a warm nature, a good gardener. He was renowned for his long driveway, centred with oxalis, never let it spread, and a great sight when flowering. We often used to pull a stem when going to school and chew the end. His garden shed was another delight – everything was cleaned and oiled and put onto its own hook. We were definitely not allowed in to borrow. One day I went over and heard granddad say "Get out of here you little rascalion or I will chop off your head". I ran for my life and thought my small brother must have got into his shed. It turned out it was only one of his own chooks. His strawberry bed was another delight – he brought over great bowls – I remember seeing him pick them in the early morning as we went past the garden to school. Funnily, we never pinched any! This is more than you can say about the cherry orchard at Clarks – up the road. On the way to school we could see these delicious fruits hanging on a big tree and would rush in to pick some. At times we were caught – told to come to the house and ask – but never did. Our parents were always told about our misdemeanours – so we always pinched cherries. We were called "worldly" by the Clarks who taught Sunday school and were very religious. We were sent to Sunday school and had to walk miles – next to the cemetery. A missionary woman came one day to speak to us. She told us how special her "calling" was and that she would sit next to God – it was her place. I thought how mean she was not to give up her place – after all she was a religious person. After a time we wouldn't go to Sunday school and put our pennies on the tin plate while singing "falling, falling" and "All things Bright and Beautiful". But we must have caught a bug because Marjorie and I made Joyce and Rod attend our home Sunday school on Sunday afternoons. On the way home from Clark's Sunday school we would look through the cemetery – reading the headstones and wondering what each person had died from, especially the young ones. The cypress trees there were so tall – I always thought that they helped people to get to heaven! All this religious stuff came I think, from Granddad and Nana Macdonald – grace was always said when they came to stay – and I can remember, they always knelt by their bed to say

their prayers. Granddad presented us all with a bible and he would read his bible aloud. Several of my mother's cousins were Presbyterian ministers. My mother's parents were kind people – I think that my mother was best known and loved for her warmth and kindness. Nearly everyone, as they came to know her, called her "Mum" in the nicest way. Even though she had such a brood of kids, she was very hard working – the cows, orchard, food and washing. Each Saturday, she boiled up the copper and poured it into the washing machine. Great linefulls of washing would stretch out over a vast area. As each line full dried, the older girls folded it and ironed. Saturday was also "bread" day. My father would go to town to the "old lady" (our name for her) to get a box of bread, and always at the bottom was a large bag of lollies. Those lollies caused a great deal of strife amongst us. We would always try to get one extra! And wails would go up. We never had sweets otherwise, unless we chose to spend rare "lunch money" on them. Because we were such a big family, everything was bought in quantity – boxes of butter – sacks of flour and sugar. The pantry was filled with great tins of honey, billys of milk, veges from our extensive garden, preserves and jam. The jam was covered with flour-paste covered newspaper. We kept fowls, pigs for eating – we always ran away when a pig was slaughtered. Sometimes rabbits. Poor man's oranges were stored under the tank stand – bitter taste! We had a swing on an elm tree and a sack over a branch of an oak tree to simulate horse rides. One year there was a great storm – hid under the blankets as trees came crashing down. Often there were fires during the summer – one year Odlin's mill (on northern boundary of our orchard) was burnt down. I remember working for 1/- (one shilling) and hour weeding carrots, one penny a jar for picking black currants – gooseberries. One shilling a (4gallon) tin for green peas before being taken to the beach. Holiday at Westshore – gale winds and sand so had to come home. Our neighbour, the Esams across the road, used to annoy us girls by calling us back when we left just to ask "How far we would have got if he hadn't called us back?" Joined the library when 9years old – loved to read. Other people's birthday parties – couldn't eat as I was too nervous and excited. Running and hiding when Alan had diphtheria and we needed swabs taken. Jobs included shelling corn for chooks, bringing in the cows and chopping wood. Our meals were pretty basic – porridge and toast – lunch a cooked dish like macaroni with bread and jam – loads of milk to drink and fruit – as much as we wanted. We ate roast dinner every Sunday with plum pudding (made especially for Cliff – Mum's favourite). We shelled great tins of peas and sweet corn to fill a large pot. Also, casseroles of meat and stews were usual. And great trays of apple turnover. Because we employed workers as well as family, they eat with the family. Morning and afternoon teas were provided. We baked several times a day for these. Fruit buns, scones and treacle biscuits. A large basket of cups, several billys of tea, and plates of goodies were carried to the workers in the orchard. Also, tea was provided at lunch time. During the packing season, supper was also provided. At first all this baking was done on a wood-burning stove – and wonderful food it was. My mother baked then the older girls and finally, me. My trouble was that I liked to make the food look attractive in special (mostly best) bowls and was always checked by my brothers. I liked flowers and would always fill the vases. Both Marjorie and I loved everything to be very clean – so we would wash and polish everything. Then the boys would come in with their boots on. The dining area in the large kitchen was swept and cleaned after every meal. Water for baths was heated in the copper in the washhouse and carried into the house. We bathed once a week only, two in the bath at a time. We loved to make the water bubbly with lots of soap and stay in the water until we couldn't put up with the protests. The rest of the week we

had to wash our feet etc. before going to bed. Of course we didn't wear shoes very often, so this was very necessary. One time I climbed up on top of the wardrobe to see the special things stored up on top – CRASH! I was scared of the dark and wouldn't go to bed without co-ercing someone to come to see me safely into the bedroom. From the doorway, I would run and leap so I wouldn't get caught by some imagined person hiding under the bed. At first four of us girls slept in one bedroom, Marjorie, Joyce and I in a big double bed and Wilma in her own bed. This was when we were small. Later a big 'dormitory bedroom' was built for us and we had our own beds. The girls loved me to make up stories for them. I had a great imagination about fairies etc. So each night, before sleep, I had to think up a new episode to add to the on-going sagas of adventure. Even Wilma listened. The older girls always laughed – I said I heard Father Christmas's bells and fairies at Christmas time. Christmas was special – we each put up our sock in our place on the dining table. Very early, we would sneak down to the kitchen to see "if he had come", rush back – "He's come!" We were not allowed up before 6am then into see what there was. One present each – perhaps a tennis racket – one year a doll. Always a few sweets, a banana and an orange. We always had a guest at Christmas, someone living on their own. Usually the man who lived in a small cottage by the main road. We ate pineapple fruit salad (only at Christmas), plum pudding, and trifle (on Mum's special dish from Nanas) with loads of cream (cream every day). A roast with veges and fresh green peas. At tea time we ate what was left from Christmas dinner if we had any space left to fill.

I always enjoyed school – we walked to school each day, taking our lunch of jam sandwiches wrapped in brown paper or even newspaper. I always looked at the lucky kids who had lunch-wrap – and had socks as well as shoes and a school gym dress. And those who had cocoa at lunch time (one shilling). Milk was always provided at morning break. I used to fill my school case with apples for my friends. Quite a load to tote to school. I had no trouble with lesions and was good at sport so school was OK. Also being a 'good' child, was treated well by the teachers, was popular with the other kids. In Standard 4 I was given a prize book inscribed "For smiling and being helpful and for careful neat work." I scratched out the 'smiling' bit as I felt embarrassed about such an odd remark! In Standard 6 I was Head Prefect and first girl – 4<sup>th</sup> in the class. High school was more of a challenge! The teachers prevailed on my parents to let me take a General class with French. I was top of this class – so the teachers prevailed again and I moved into the Classical course – 5<sup>th</sup> this time! Now my parents prevailed and I entered the Commercial course where they had wanted me to be. However, I left school in the third term, when my parent's marriage ended, and I had to come home to help my mother cook while she worked on the orchard. (The orchard was settlement.) I was 15 years of age. When I was seventeen, I applied for work as an X-Ray technician at the public hospital. I worked there for awhile then the Radiologist, Dr. Costello, asked me to work for him at his private practice. I was an extremely shy, timid person. I found him to be brusque and, though pleasant, had a very bad temper. Twice a week he would go down to Waipukurau to read the X-Ray films. He asked me if I would go down to relieve a young man whose father had died and who wished to return to Hastings. This is when I met Bruce, for it was him. The Sanatorium, where he worked, had ancient equipment where the sparks leapt. The patients used to watch me surreptitiously

[I have only made minor corrections to this script. The handwritten notes in the margins I have fitted in where they seemed to be most appropriate. Bruce. 8/10/2009.]