

REMINISCENCES

By Brian Walsh, July 2002

...Some memories of Vera Walsh (Matthews) – my mother, and “Nana” Walsh to her 21 grandchildren.

This is not intended to be a biography of Vera Walsh, but rather a collection of memories of her life and times, which way serve to give a picture of the lady, first in her younger days, and then later as we knew her, from the early 1930’s until her death in 1983.

Vera Matthews was born in Ballarat in 1903, the only child of Bertha and George Matthews. Grandpa Matthews came from a Cornish mining family, but was not a miner himself. In his younger days, he drove wagons in his brother’s timber business, and all his life was either a driver or labourer, so was never well off. His wife, “Little Nin”, came from a Cornish family also, but they were not miners – her father and at least 2 of her brothers were painters.

In mum’s early years, the family lived in Mt. Pleasant. We don’t know much detail about mum’s childhood years, but assume they were generally untroubled and, for those times, at least comfortable. Little Nin was a good housekeeper, and Grandpa was apparently always in work at the time. Some of the deep lead mines were still working in the early 1900’s, and mum told of hearing the thumps of the stamper batteries as she lay in bed as a young girl.

Another yarn she told at times, was of Nin and her driving a pony and trap to various places outside Ballarat, taking lunches and hot tea out to Grandpa and his brothers, who were cutting timber for the mines. (They usually camped out when cutting and carting timber).

Mum was a good looking girl, of average height, and Rosemary has a portrait of her in her room, all dressed up in white and looking very smart, when she was about 12 years old (that would be about 1915, in Ballarat). Mum seems to have enjoyed some good times as a ‘teenager’, (a term unknown in her younger days), as she would visit Queenscliff, around 1918 or 1919, when she was about 16, and stay and help at “Beechworth House”, a boarding house run by her Auntie Hett (Grandpa’s sister) and her sisters Ginny and Nell.

We have photos of mum and her cousin Adeline (Auntie Hett’s daughter), while staying at Queenscliff, togged up in fur coats and large hats, posing with young fellows in white trousers and jackets, apparently enjoying the chill winds blowing across the pier! (But we never heard of any boy friends, or names dropped, from those times).

The same time, between the ages of 15 and 20, mum worked at Ince brothers, tailors, and qualified as a tailoress. This was given as her occupation on her marriage certificate. This stood her in good stead in her married life, as she was very good at sewing, and patching trousers when our pants began to go! One thing sticks in my mind – it always intrigued me, when mum was threading a needle, how adept she was at tying a knot at the end of the cotton, using only the fingers of one hand! Although, as I show later on, mum had very few appliances during her early married life, she did have a singer treadle sewing machine, which she used to good effect.

Her family moved to Melbourne in the early 1920’s, but for what reason we don’t know.

Mum was living in Moore Street, Footscray, when she married Maurice Walsh in 1925. She was 21 at the time, and dad was 22, living in South Yarra and working as a proof-reader at The Argus newspaper.

They were married at Wesley Church in Melbourne. Mum's cousin, Adeline Williams, was her bridesmaid, and dad's best man was a friend called Jack Edgar. It wasn't a 'white' wedding, and we have photos of mum and Adeline in their 1920's finery, taken at home beforehand. The wedding, with the ubiquitous paling fence in the background! Alas, there are no photos of the men.

After their marriage, mum and dad first lived in Footscray with Nin and Grandpa, and Nancy was born there in 1926. In 1927-28, they bought a newly-built timber house at No 15 Wales Street West Brunswick. (This later became No. 37, when Bayles Street was renamed Wales Street).

Dad, by this time, had moved from the The Argus to the Herald-Sun office in Flinders Street, where he worked on the 'Sun', (night shift) for a few years, before joining the day shift reading room of the 'Herald'. When they moved into their new home, it was the "bare bones".

It was a 5 room timber house – 2 bedrooms at the front, a bathroom off the hall, a lounge room with an open fireplace and arched brick surround and mantelpiece, and a similar sized room which might be called a 'living' room', but we always called the 'kitchen', where mum cooked and we ate meals. The kitchen had a wood stove and oven, with a gas stove alongside. These were recessed into the wall, with a long mantelpiece above.

The laundry was behind the kitchen. It was also the "bare bones", with 2 concrete troughs, and a cooper built into a concrete and brick surround, with a small fire-grate underneath. Initially, there was a back porch, which opened out from the kitchen and laundry. Opposite the laundry, and also with access from the porch, was a long narrow room which was called the 'sleepout', although it was under the main roof and fully enclosed. Within the first few years, dad, with the occasional help of Grandpa Matthews, extended the back porch to make an enclosed 'back verandah', and also built a skillion – roofed room behind the laundry, with access from the verandah.

He also built a fernery outside the new back door, and this fernery was extended and repaired many times over the years. In the early years, mum did, in fact, have ferns in the fernery, but later on it was mostly covered by creepers. Most of the materials used in these extensions came from "Whelan the Wrecker" timber yard in Melville Road., and we were steady customers of Tom and Jim Whelan for many years.

When mum moved into her new home, she vowed never to move again, and she didn't! She lived there from 1928 until 1983. Her aversion to moving, she said, stemmed from the fact that, from the time she was young, Little Nin was constantly moving house-often on a whim. So Grandpa and mum did most of the work of packing and unpacking. They had lived in various rented homes in Ballarat, Geelong and Melbourne, so no wonder mum was content to put her roots down in one spot!

Now, although mum (and dad) had their own home, following are some of the things not in the home initially and, in some cases, for many years. (This was typical of homes built at that time).

No – carpets Lino was the first floor covering, and we later had some loose mats in some rooms. I think the first wall to wall carpet (in the lounge) appeared in the 1950's.

No – hot water service The only source of hot water for baths was from lighting a fire under the copper and carrying buckets of water to the bathroom. At some stage, dad installed a "chipheater" above the bath, which saved boiling the copper, but it wasn't until the 1950's, when Allen updated parts of the house, that mum enjoyed the luxury of a real hot water service!

No – refrigerator I don't know whether mum started with an ice-chest, but she had a Coolgardie safe hanging in the back verandah for some years. There was an ice-chest when we were young, and if the ice ran out before the ice man was due, we would take a billycart to Parry's Dairy and ice works in Albion Street, (about 400 metres), and trundle home before the ice melted too much! (I think it was about sixpence or a shilling for a block that weighed about 15kg.). It would be well into the late '40s or early '50s before mum had her first refrigerator.

A sideline – she was a resourceful woman. – when I went to stay with Bub Heagney on his chicken farm at Tullamarine in the hot summer of 1939, she not only stocked me up with food, but got hold of a large stone pot plant and saucer and an old clean singlet, and made a "Coolgardie safe" to keep the butter cool! With the water in the sauce, and the singlet draped over, it was very effective, but I can still taste the "stony" flavor of the butter to this day!

No – air conditioning Unheard of in those days! Even fans didn't appear until the late '40s. The accepted method of keeping "cool" was (1) – shut up the house and darken everything to keep the heat out and (2) – when a cool change came, throw open all doors and windows to let the cool breeze through!

No – heating The only sources of heat were from the wood stove in the kitchen (which didn't radiate much heat), and the open fireplace in the lounge, where dad burned a variety of fuels – mallee roots, coke and briquettes – at different times. I can recall, as a little bloke, standing in bare feet on the lino in the kitchen, waiting for mum to light the fire, and shivering in my boots that I didn't have on!

No – vacuum cleaner Without carpets, who needs one? Cleaning the lino floors was done with a broom and shovel and a mop. We had a carpet sweeper fairly early, for the mats, but I can't recall when mum graduated to a vacuum cleaner.

No – Mixmaster, toaster, or other labor-saving gadgets in the kitchen. Mum was middle-aged before she enjoyed some of those luxuries. We made toast by the fire for many years.

No – radio

It must have been about 1933 when dad made a “crystal set”, which operated by a tuning knob, and a wire “cat’s whisker” touching a crystal. Listening was by a pair of earphones, or 2 people could listen with one earphone each. Dad had the crystal set on the mantelpiece in the kitchen, and in 1934, dad and Bub Heagney tried to listen to the broadcast of the cricket tests in England, which were relayed by a Melbourne radio station. Getting the best reception by twiddling the cat’s whisker on the crystal was quite a delicate operation, and I was reminded by dad, many times in later years, of how I would bugger up their reception by bumping something, or jumping on the floor at the wrong time!

Our first “real” radio was a mantel model, bought in 1937, and that gave good service for many years. Allen later made a modern casing for it, and it hung on the wall near the lounge fireplace. Of course, no one had television until 1956, but Allen got in early and bought an ‘Admiral’ (imported from USA), so we had TV for the Melbourne Olympic Games, and mum turned out to be as keen as anyone else about some TV shows.

While there were beds and chairs for all, the house was not fully furnished for a while. Dad was a handy carpenter, and had been given a set of good tools by his father as a wedding present. (I still have his ‘Stanley’ plane, still in good condition). So he got to, and built a good-sized kitchen table, and dresser. And the next year, built a bedroom suite for the ‘spare’ front bedroom. wardrobe, bed and a chest of drawers – all of which lasted for over 50 years, with the occasional paint job!

Then in 1931 (according to Allen), he made a beautiful Blackwood gramophone cabinet, on carved legs and finished with a French polish. (More about the gramophone later).

While mum and dad were making things as comfortable as possible in the home, the outside was still fairly primitive. The road was unmade and turned into a gluepot after rain. The road finished 4 doors down, cut by a creek that ran westward, from beyond Melville Road to the Moonee Ponds Creek, near Moreland Road (this was the north-west extremity of Brunswick, and there was open country from our place to the Essendon aerodrome (3 miles away) and beyond!

‘Our’ creek was filled in during the late ‘30s, with large concrete pipes, and Wales Street was then run through to Bakers Parade. We had our own little drama one night, before the creek was filled in. – Dad’s mother (Big Nin) was living with us at the time (1935) (she had been widowed when little Grandpa died in 1930).

Alf Cron, who lived in Coburg, was “courting” Nin at the time, and would visit us to see Nin, play cribbage with dad, then walk home across the creek. One night, Alf headed off home in the dark, then not long after, turned up at the front door, covered in mud and nursing a broken arm! He had missed his footing crossing the creek and come a cropper! Mum put a splint and sling on him, and sent him off home again! I don’t know whether Alf Cron was accident-prone at work, (he was a coppersmith at Newport railway workshops, and helped build the Spirit of Progress locomotive in the late ‘30s, but mum had to play nurse to him again in 1938. (He had married Big Nin in 1936). When dad was building a 13 foot outboard motor boat in 1938, (built on the front verandah, but some work was done inside), he got Alf Cron to make a watertight tank, to fit under the forward

deck, to make the boat unsinkable. (Fortunately, he never had to prove it!). The tank, of galvanized sheet steel, was about 3 feet long, tapering from 3 feet to 2 feet in width, and about 1 foot deep. Alf assembled and soldered this tank on mum's kitchen table. (No standing on ceremony in our house!). Anyway, I recall that I was there, (but for once didn't get blame for an upset), while Alf was putting the tank together. Geoff was only 3 years old at the time, and was playing on the floor. Alf knocked a hammer off the table, and snatched at it, to stop it 'crowning' Geoff. Unfortunately, as he swung his hand down, he nearly took the top off a finger on the sharp edge of the tank. So mum came to his aid once more, bandaged the finger and sent him off to the doctor for stitches, and cleaned the blood from the table and floor! (I don't recall where we ate for a while after that, as the tank probably stayed on the table until Alf was able to finish it!).

Before I got side-tracked by Alf Cron, I was describing the outdoors. Apart from the road, the footpath was also a quagmire after rain, until the council used some coke ashes from the power furnaces to bind the mud. This was very effective, but tough on bare feet, as we had to keep shoes and runners for school and Sunday school!

But the best laid plans of the council were soon upset by Mr. Griffiths (2 doors down), who had a motorbike and sidecar that couldn't handle the boggy road. So, like any intrepid motorcyclist, he started to use the footpath, until he reached the bitumen in Bayles Street! This, of course, upset the council, (I don't know about mum and the neighbors), so they put in a few white posts, spaced a few inches narrower than his sidecar outfit, and that stymied him! But I can't recall what happened after that.

Apart from our street, and others in that new area at the time, Moreland Road, (the main northern boundary road of Brunswick), was not sealed either, so was full of potholes and ruts. Mum often related the story of her rough ride in a taxi, (probably something like a 1927 Chev. or earlier), on the way to Vaucluse Private Hospital, near Sydney Road, to produce me, in February, 1929. Apparently we made it in time and, apart from the occasional ringing in the ears and dizzy spells, I don't think I suffered any ill effects! (And I wouldn't be surprised if the slight cough I have at times was a legacy of the dust in Moreland Road at the time!)

So mum and dad battled on in the '30s.

While dad spent years turning the backyard from a claypan into some very good garden beds and lawns, (helped by tons of horse manure and straw from Parry's Dairy, which we collected by barrow and billycart), mum kept the house clean and tidy, and kept us well fed and tidily clothed.

Money was probably tight as, although dad was never out of work at the Herald Office during the depression, he was on reduced wages for some time. (This was a policy of the managing director, Sir Keith Murdoch, which enabled him to keep as many staff as possible in work). I doubt that his son, Rupert, whom dad once referred to as a "snotty-nosed copy boy", when his father insisted that he start at the bottom at the Herald, has ever looked after his employees as well as his father was noted for.

Also, as the house builder had gone broke, with many others, mum had to negotiate loans (at times paying only interest), so it was touch and go at times whether they could keep the house. Fortunately, mum saw it through, but it was many years before the house was eventually paid for. It's ironic that, for more than 50 years, mum and dad never had much cash to spare, yet after dad died in 1987, we sold the house, and we 4 children shared the sort of sum that mum and dad had

never seen! The one exception to their not having much to spare was she and dad won 100 pounds in Tatts in 1930. (That's roughly \$20 000 in today's money). So, they palmed off the kids – Nancy and I went to stay in Footscray with Grandpa and Little Nin, and I think Big Nin looked after Allen – and had a 2 weeks blowout in Sydney, which would have been a great break for them at the time.

Some things that I recall about mum and the early 1930's:

Before I started school, mum would take me to town, (Melbourne). I don't recall her doing much shopping, but I do remember going to the pictures at times. One film has always stuck in my mind was "Wings Over Everest". It must have been a type of documentary, because it was a record of the first flight over Everest, which I think was 1930/31. When in town, we would go to lunch at Coles' Cafeteria, or Myers, or sometimes to a small restaurant. To get to the city, we walked about 400 metres to Melville Road, and caught the tram into the city. An alternative would be to walk to the corner of Albion Street and Melville Road, and catch a horse-drawn cab that went along Melville Road; around the corners at Whitby Street and Daly Street to Victoria Street then to Sydney Road we would then catch a train to the city. But we would only do this if mum needed to do anything in Sydney Road, as it took longer and, of course, cost more in fares.

The horse-drawn cabs in Melville Road, were replaced in the late 1930s by small motorbuses, (licensed for 6, but sometimes crammed in up to 10), which went to Victoria Street, then along to Sydney Road. (I still recall my trepidation when they had a full load on, because of the crazy tilt they assumed at times! I was reminded in recent years, when reading a book on Brunswick's history, that the horse-drawn cabs dodged the corner of Melville Road and Victoria Street, because of the steep grade at the corner.

Other outings were to Sydney Road, where mum would shop at Treadways or Love & Pollard, (the main haberdashery & manchester shops in Brunswick). Nancy, Allen and Geoff all worked, full or part-time, at Love & Polard in their younger years. There was a good assortment of shops at the corner of Albion Street and Melville Road, and also on the Melville/Moreland Road corner. These shops were about 400 metres up the hill. In the '30s, the butcher would call for orders, and then deliver them. The milk was delivered early in the morning. (I can still hear Lou Parry rattling the milk cans in the dark, running down our sideway to the end of the verandah, dipping a pint or so of milk into the billy we left out, pickup the threepence, then "geeing up" his horse as he ran next door).

A sideline – for Nancy and Alan, Allen and Geoff – we always knew the milkman as Lou Parry – recently, when we had a retired priest to dinner, we were reminiscing about Brunswick and Coburg, He used to go on the train to school with Hector Orams, from Coburg, when they were boys, over 60 years ago!. When I mentioned Parry's dairy, he said "Ah, yes, that's Luigi Pariavinti", but he changed his name to Lou Parry". How's that for a bit of trivia?

A green grocer called every week, with his cart full of fruit and vegetables and, when I started work as a grocer's boy when I was 10, I would call on regular customers for their orders, then deliver them in a basket on the handlebars of my mike. And most of that service was given with a smile – and no extra charge!

Mum, and sometimes dad, when he wasn't working, would take us to the zoo occasionally, which was easy from our place. A threepenny tram fare (one penny for kids) to Royal Park Station, walk through the gates across the railway lane, then about 200 metres to the zoo. This was the back

entrance. Entry fee was threepence, and threepence bought a good-sized bag of roasted peanuts in the shell, to share with the monkeys. The rest of the outing was free, except for threepence for a ride on Queenie the Elephant!

So, overall mum and dad looked after us pretty well.

While we may have been a bit bare-foot and ragged at times at home, one always seemed to have some good clothes and shoes for going out, or dressing up for Sunday visitors, usually grandparents.

Now to some personal attributes (and oddities) of mum:

Eschewing any attempt at psychology, I'd say that mum was a strictly moral woman, stern when she had to be, (which was fairly often when we were young, and the copper stick or coat hanger got a good workout on our behinds at times!), but she was very forgiving and a real "softie". I never knew her to be nasty about anyone, or to bear a grudge. She had a sharp sense of humor, and a good appreciation of the ridiculous.

An example of that: There was a radio program in the '30s, called "Yes, what?" It was about a class of 3 boys and dill of a teacher. Mostly very funny. One of the pupils was "Greenbottle", who was always late, and always had a ridiculous excuse, usually concerning his topsy-turvy home life. For years after that show finished, if anything at home was topsy-turvy, or lost, or out of the usual, mum would be sure to say "greenbottle's got nothing on us", or "on this place"!

Before radio shows and TV took hold, mum and dad were keen readers – mostly mystery yarns and detective stories. We would regularly get books for them from Falvey's lending library, which Falvey's ran from their newsagency in Albion Street. Mum enjoyed listening to the radio in the early days, and up to the time TV took over in 1956. She liked the comedy shows like "Yes, what" and "Mc Cacky Mansions", with Mo and young Harry, and others I can't recall now. She also enjoyed dramas in shows such as "Lux Radio Theatre", and there was one show we all liked – "Old Nancy", who told ghost stories, with all the creepy sound effects!

And when TV came along, she loved shows like "Amos and Andy", "The Jackie Gleason Show", Bob Dyer, Jack Davey and others. She was keen on Marshal Dillon in "Dodge City", "Paladin", and other good western shows. She also liked the good "detective" shows, and we all used to watch the song and dance "Hit Parade" on Channel 7. I don't think she would be impressed by today's so-called "hit tunes", or the videos that go with them!

Going back to the early '30s, when dad built the gramophone, we had a great collection of records (all 78s), including Melba, Caruso, John McCormack, Harry Lauder, selections of Gilbert & Sullivan and various musical comedies. Mum and dad must have had those from before they were married, or soon after, as I can't recall their buying any records when we were young. We eventually played most of those records to the wornout stage, some were broken and some lost. I have about 5 of those records packed away, which is all that remains of that collection. After dad died, Geoff had a fancy for the Cabinet, and by agreement he now has it.

Speaking (or writing) as a disinterested spectator, I would say that mum's only failing (if that's the word) was that she was keen supporter of Geelong Football Club for all of her married life.

Although she wasn't in the same league of rabid one-eyed barrackers, as dad, Allen and Geoff, she exulted or was depressed, in direct proportion to the fortunes of the Geelong team over the years. I recall going to only 3 games when mum was with us – the 1937, 1951 and 1952 Grand finals, all of which Geelong won. I can still recall the 1937 game, although I was only 8 at the time. The concrete stand had just been built and we (i.e. mum, dad, Allen, Big Nin, Bub Heagney and I), squeezed in with 87,000 other bodies. (a record at the time). It was a hot day, and the surging of the crowd knocked down part of the fence, and crowds of people finished up sitting inside the fence. Women who had fainted were passed over the heads of the crowd until a clear space was found for them. I don't recall anything of the game, but the Geelong mob came away happy, and the Collingwood crowd were down in the dumps. My dislike for being in crowds probably stems from that day! Nancy, I think, stayed home with Geoff. (Sensible girl!)

By comparison, the 1951 and '52 finals were tame affairs, but my main recollection of those was defending the umpires from the combined abuse of mum, dad, Allen and Geoff (and most of the crowd!). Of course, mum wouldn't use strong language at the football, but she certainly joined in with the cheers and boos! While on Football – mum and dad for many years would listen to the Geelong matches on 3GL, the Geelong radio station, and share in the elation or depression each week, depending on the results.

Generally, mum's outlook and attitude to life was no doubt influenced by her Cornish Methodist-Wesleyan background. Although she rarely went to church, she always insisted on good manners and polite behaviour, but she had some odd sayings at times. Apart from the usual "have you washed behind your ears?" she would insist we had clean underclothes on, when going out – not "because it is hygienic", but "in case you have an accident". She seemed to have a phobia that she would be responsible for our having unclean underwear, if we ever finished up in hospital! Fortunately, we never had an accident that required others to see our underclothes, so that was a moot point for 30 years.

She also insisted that we have clean shoes – "you should look as though you belong to someone", was her reasoning. I suppose she had a point there. I think she had something of a streak of pride – to put on a brave face even if, or when, things may not have been too rosy. I recall that I had an ambition to be a "paper boy" when I was about 8 or 9 – selling newspapers, but mum wouldn't allow that, saying that there were other families more deserving, who could do with the few bob a paper boy could earn. Yet, she had no qualms about my starting work as a grocer's boy the next year, earning about 5 shillings a week. I wonder whether she thought there was a small difference in status between a paper boy and a grocer's boy, but she was probably genuine in her reason for her refusal at the time.

While mum was a practical woman, she had a few firm superstitions – all to do with bad luck! Putting new shoes on a table was taboo, and she was serious about it. I don't know the origin of that one. Opening an umbrella, or taking an open umbrella, inside the house was banned. There may be some practical origin for that, such as damaging something, or someone, in a confined space. Breaking a mirror would bring 7 years bad luck. Mum was sure of that, but I don't think we ever proved it one way or another! She had others, which I can't recall so easily.

Mum also had a string of proverbs that she used regularly, to suit the occasion, such as: Procrastination is the thief of time. (One of her favorites). One hour's sleep before midnight is worth two after (true!). The road to ruin is paved with good intentions. Curiosity killed the cat. Satan

finds mischief for idle hands. Cut your coat to suit your cloth. (The tailoress coming out there!) The early bird catches the worm. The devil looks after his own.

Some of mum's sayings that came out regularly:

Like patience on a monument (I discovered only recently that that is from Shakespeare's "Twelfth Night"- no idea where mum came by it.)

Like a cat with 2 tails

You imp of darkness (I got that when young and naughty!)

Whilst thinking of these proverbs and sayings, (which I recall without effort), I wondered why the older generations used so many proverbs. Perhaps it was part of their education, and repeating proverbs reinforced the impression of morality and good behaviour. By contrast to mum's oft-quoted proverbs and sayings; I listed some of dad's. (Again without much thinking required). On reading through them, it's interesting to see that most of mum's have to do with personal behaviour and attitudes, while most of dad's are of an impersonal or philosophic nature. This is possibly a reflection of their particular backgrounds and characters, but I've avoided trying to come to any conclusion!

Dad's proverbs and sayings:

The proof of the pudding is in the eating.

The nearer the bone, the sweeter the meat.

What's worth doing at all, it is worth doing well.

You can take a horse to water, but you can't make him drink.

A nod is as good as a wink to a blind horse.

It's all over bar the shouting.

A cobbler should stick to his last.

Don't try to teach your grandmother to suck eggs.

Discretion is the better part of valor.

Every cloud has a silver lining.

When telling a story – "to put it in a nutshell" and - "to cut a long story short". (He rarely did!),

On finance – "if mansions were two bob a dozen, I couldn't put a deposit on the littlehouse door knob".

On a dimwit or some politicians – "He wouldn't know if the littlehouse fell on him".

And to mum for 50 years – "The moon's on its back, sweetheart – turn your money over".

(I don't know where that one came from, but my wife Jean said it was one of her mother's sayings, so it's probably of Irish or Scottish origin).

Finally, some assorted recollections:

*From 1933 to 1940, we always managed to have an annual summer holiday at the beach, usually for about 2 weeks. I think it was always in January, and always pretty hot. The first of these that I recall was at Black Rock, when we stayed at Miss Moody's house in Beach Road. Even then, we usually wore shirts and hats on the beach, but everyone still managed to get sunburnt! Some early remedies of mum's were oatmeal mixed with water, which caked hard on the skin, or coconut oil (before being exposed), but that just helped our skins to cook better! Later, mum discovered cold black tea, which seemed to be best to sooth any sunburn.

I don't know whether it was hotter then, but it seemed so. I can still smell the hot sand as we struggled up the cliffs or primitive steps away from the beach, and can yet feel the blobs of melted tar on our bare feet as we skipped across Beach Road to our house!

From about 1936, we stayed at Half Moon Bay, one house, I recall, was in Arkaringa Crescent, just off Beach Road. Dad was a handy carpenter, and he built a 6 foot plywood dinghy in 1934, a 9ft. catamaran in 1936, and a 13ft. outboard motor boat in 1938. That boat had a 3 H.P. Johnson outboard. We still have the odd photo of those boats. I don't recall what became of the first two, but the last boat was damaged on the rocks during an overnight storm at Half Moon Bay in, I think, 1940. Dad gave the boat to a local fisherman, and sold him the motor.

Mum was never a swimmer or sailor, but would put on her togs and paddle about, provide refreshments, and gets sunburnt like the rest of us!

From 1938, we would occasionally go out in the motorboat to the 'Cerberus', climb aboard and have a look around. The 'Cerberus' was sunk as a breakwater in 1926, but it already had a thick coating of rust on everything by 1938. So, no wonder it was breaking apart and collapsing in the 1990's, when people suddenly started talking about preserving it for posterity. – too late, by about 50 years! In the '30s, there was a good thickness of mussels on the ship just below the waterline, and we would pull off handfuls of them and fill up Kerosene tins, take them back to our 'boarding house', cook them up, pickle them in vinegar, and have great feeds. I think this was banned about the 50's or 60's, as too many people had cleaned off all the mussels, and someone thought it was dangerous.

A sideline about the 'Cerberus' – at the end of the 1800's, when it was the flagship, (and only warship) of the Victorian navy, our grandmother, (dad's mother) and, I think, one of her sisters, were guests of the commodore, with others, at an afternoon tea party on board (that's one of dad's stories, and probably true!).

During the war, and after dad was posted to Darwin in 1943, (he was a sergeant in the RAAF, but too old for Air Crew), mum decided to contribute more to the war effort and, for the first time since her marriage, went out to work. She obtained a job with "Ensign Lamps", in Latrobe Street Melbourne, a firm which made electric light bulbs. Her job was to insert the filaments and seal the globe with the cap. (At least I think that's what she did most of the time). She seemed to enjoy working, and worked there at least until dad came home from "up north" at the end of 1944.

Before dad went north in 1943, he had planted a large crop of tomatoes. It turned out to be a bumper crop and, for what seemed months, we lived on tomato sandwiches, fried tomatoes and tomato pickles. And, because some things were in short supply, mum sold dozens of jars of pickles to our local grocer!

Also during the war, when Geoff was about 9 or 10, mum would send him up to the end of our street to Mr. Grindal, the "Rabbit-o", to get a pair of rabbits. According to Geoff in recent years, Mr. Grindal must have been the only unfriendly 'tradesman' in Brunswick. He would growl to Geoff – "Do you want 'em skun? They're 2 bob a pair and two and six skun". I presume that Geoff always had him skin them, as I don't recall any rabbit skins lying around home!

When Allen and I bought motorbikes in 1950, mum might have been a bit apprehensive, but soon accepted them without any complaints. This was helped by the fact that we treated the bikes as a

handy conveyance, and didn't annoy anyone with loud revving or racing around. Between us, we never had an accident in 5 or 6 years on the motorbikes, with one exception which we've laughed about since, but could have been serious at the time. I think it was in 1954, after I had gone to England. Allen used to take Geoff on the pillion to Geelong to watch the football. We always said he had only one speed on the open road – "flat out"! (There were no absolute speed limits in those days). Anyway, on one occasion, just after he had new piston rings fitted to the engine, they took off for Geelong. Not appreciating the need for new rings to be "run in", (he was a good architect, but no mechanic), he took off at the usual high rate of knots but, before the halfway mark to Geelong, the engine seized, and Allen and Geoff went over the handlebars, and finished in a heap beside the bike. I can't recall whether they rode on after the engine cooled off, or whether they got a lift, but they went on to the football, (unhurt except grazes and torn clothes), and eventually got home again, tattered and torn. I believe mum's main reaction was 'good grief' – (another saying of hers) – you'd better get in the bath! Not long after, Allen decided 4 wheels were safer than 2, and bought his first car.

Mum had a long-held fear of her house being burnt down, or at least of the chimney catching fire. I don't think she had any previous experience of a house being burnt, but it's quite likely she had seen chimney fires in her younger days. As it turned out, her house never burnt down, but she did on one occasion have her fear of a chimney fire fulfilled! I think it was in the late 1950's. She and dad had been out and, while walking home, they saw smoke and flames belching from a chimney that seemed to be near our house. Then mum realized with horror that it was her chimney! They hurried home, and found that Geoff had decided to light the lounge room fire, but had stoked it up too much, which caused the accumulated soot in the chimney to catch fire. There was no damage done, but it gave mum the fright of her life!

From the time that Geoff, Allen and I had girlfriends who became our wives (Bev, Janet and Jean), mum always made them welcome and there was no "disapproving mother-in-law" about her. (Of course, Alan Sporton had been a 'fixture' in our family for 15 years or so before then). And when more grandchildren arrived in rapid succession through the '60s, to add to Nancy and Alan's five children, both mum and dad welcomed them all, and "Nana Walsh" was an institution in our families for many years.

I will conclude my recollections here, as all of mum's grandchildren will have their own memories of her, from the 1960's on.

In conclusion, we could say that mum had a long, interesting and varied life, living from a few days before the Wright brothers' first flight, to seeing men walk on the moon. It was unfortunate that her final illness was a rather protracted, sad time. She died of cancer in October, 1983, and I'll always remember that her funeral was on the 21st October – Trafalgar Day. I've always thought this apt, as she had the same fighting spirit as Nelson!

Brian Walsh