

Dear Shirley,

It seems you have gone to be with Mum, Dad and George. Peta might be there as well. I suppose George has everything organised and has assigned projects all around, I hope Peta has managed to explain the reason why it is not ok to consume a month's supply of prescription drugs at one go.

Matthew and Jenny have asked me to write about memories I have about earlier times before their arrival and after mine. I thought if I wrote you a letter they and their offspring might get a picture of those times.

To fill in before my arrival and as related to me by our Mum, she and Dad were married in August 1927 and moved to Dubbo western NSW. You arrived November 1928. Dad had a job playing piano to accompany silent movies. It was a job which Dad loved and the little family was very happy, but, alas technology raised its ugly head with the arrival of movies with built in sound so Dad was suddenly redundant.

The three of you returned to Fairfield Sydney where they took on a Grocery shop in Frederick Street. This was just in time for the depression to start. Our brother John arrived in 1931.

These were tough times for our little family as most of Mum's and Dad's customers were very hungry but couldn't pay their bills there was often a last minute dash by Dad to the Bank to make a deposit to cover a cheque before it bounced.

The next significant event was my arrival in 1937. This is still too early for me to remember.

I suppose my earliest recollection was my cot being moved from Mum's and Dad's bedroom and I was to share with John. I was terrified at this turn of events as there were large holes in the flyscreens in that room and I was convinced that the cows in the next door paddock would get through and tickle me.

Luckily you agreed to have me move into your room where the flyscreens were intact.

As I became a little older I began to realise I had two Mums because you were there to care for me when Mum was busy in the shop. Being 8 years older and with a noticeable maternal instinct I would have been doing ok except for our brother who made it clear that his preference was for me to move to another planet.

Ww11 had started and things got pretty grim. Dad dug a trench in the shed that was in the backyard so if we were bombed. He chose to dig it inside the trench to stop it filling with water when it rained. Being a veteran of Ww1 he doubtless had plenty of practice.

You probably remember better than I do but Dad's Fiat car broke a tooth off the crown wheel and as we were then at war with Italy, parts were unavailable so I am guessing that this event triggered the decision to move to move to Ashfield. This meant a new car and a new job for Dad.

I am guessing but I think it might have been 1942 as that is the year I started school. I believe you were enrolled at Burwood Girls High where you did shorthand and typing.

School was devastating for me because neither of my mothers were there to protect me. I had a severe case of separation anxiety.

I seem to remember that you and John joined the church fellowship at the Ashbury church . this gave you a social life so you especially for you. I remember a boy called Allan Davis and some girls and it was fun when they came to the house. None of their names remain in my memory box.

The other salient fact about the Ashfield era is our discovery of the Narrabeen camping experience. It must have been about 1942 when Dad borrowed a tent, loaded up the little Austin car and off we went. It started a tradition that went on for 20 years and with Dad's ingenuity at rigging the hot shower, first he then you and eventually even I was able to commute to work and be back to Narrabeen for a swim. Bliss.

It was there as well that one day a handsome Naval Petty Officer called, with his Father and Stepmother to pay us a visit.

I have jumped ahead of course. Somewhere during this time you left school with shorthand and skills and got a job. We also moved to Guildford . The stage beckoned and you joined the Fairfield Players. Dad's Taxi service came to the fore in getting you to rehearsals and back. I seem to remember one production was Annie Get Your Gun with you playing (and singing) Annie. That is where we met Jacqueline Burd.

To pick up the Narrabeen thread (earlier) with the arrival of the Stevens clan at our campsite, Fred and Nance had settled into a property in the street next to ours at Guildford. George came to visit his Dad and it remains a mystery what it was that prompted the Stevenses to visit the Martyns at Narrabeen but the result is Shirley and George Stevens et al.

I cannot finish this without thanking you for still being there for me when my own adult life took turns which caused me to suffer deep distress. The worst of these was the loss of Peta. You and George travelled to Tasmania and took Penny and George back to Sydney for the school holidays then returned them to their Dad safe and sound. You and your George then visited Tas again to help me celebrate a milestone birthday which we proceeded to celebrate next to my George's hospital bed while he recovered from appendix surgery. Thanks again for being my Sister.

All my love, Bob,

Monday. Jul 16 2018.