

(Nancy) Shirley (née Martyn) Stevens, 1928–2018

Early life

Shirley's maternal grandparents, John James Woods and Elizabeth Jane Maxwell, were born in what is now Northern Ireland, in neighbouring villages, and migrated separately to Australia in the 1890s, where they met at her sister Maggie's pub near Central Station in Sydney. They had nine children—six girls followed by three boys. Shirley's mother was their second daughter, Anne Jane Walker Woods, born 4 January 1904.

Shirley's paternal grandfather, John Martyn, was born in Cornwall to Welsh parents, where he became a miner. He migrated to Pennsylvania, USA, to work as a mining engineer. Shirley's maternal grandmother, Dorothy Crawford, was born in Stockton, Pennsylvania, to English immigrants of Scottish ancestry. John and Dorothy met and married in Pennsylvania and had two children there before John moved the family to Australia; their third child was born during the voyage. They moved around NSW and Victoria as John took a series of jobs managing mines and they added three more children. Settling in Tilba Tilba, on the NSW South Coast, close to another mine, they had their seventh and last child, Glanville Crawford Martyn, born 21 November 1893. They later moved to Sydney's eastern suburbs.

Glan was a highly talented pianist, largely self-taught, and was church organist at the McNeill Memorial Presbyterian Church in Waverley, although he worked as a clerk at the Coastal Farmers' Co-operative Society. In 1917 he enlisted in the Australian Army and, following training in Sydney, sailed to the UK to serve as a gunner in France and Belgium in the last year of World War 1. Following the Armistice, there weren't enough ships to bring the troops home quickly, and his battalion stayed for most of 1919. Being a musician, he joined The Courtier's concert party, which kept the waiting troops in France and then England entertained. Returning home, he followed his career as a musician, finding work in the silent movies as an accompanist.

Anne worked as a seamstress, but also helped out at her parents' open-air cinema on The Crescent, Fairfield, which had roles for most of the siblings. This might be how she met Glan. Anne and Glan married on 3 August 1927 but had to move to Dubbo, in central NSW, for Glan to take a job as an accompanist at the Monarch Empire Theatre. Shirley later told her grandson Robert: "They had a theatre and they also had an open air cinema where people sat in deck chairs in the summertime to watch the movie in the open air."

Shirley was born on 29 November 1928 at 31 Nancarrow Street, Dubbo, a simple worker's

33 cottage. Her mother wanted her to be named Nancy. Her father wanted to call her Shirley.
34 Both won. As a baby, Shirley used to sleep beneath the piano while Glan played.
35 With the arrival of the talkies, Glan found himself out of a job, and took up work as a local
36 bus driver for a while, but the arrival of the Great Depression forced the family to move back
37 to Sydney. They moved to Fairfield, where Anne's parents and siblings lived, and they took a
38 gamble in opening a little grocery shop at 24 Frederick Street. "So we came back to Sydney
39 where my mother's mother—my Nana, your great-great grandmother—had bought a little
40 shop and put my parents in there to work."
41 "Now, my dad was out every night playing the piano and my mother used to have to cook on
42 the wood stove at night and give us our dinner and bath us, put us to bed, and then she'd go
43 into the shop, where she used to weigh up bags of sugar. Butter came in boxes and she used to
44 have to cut the butter, wrap it up in paper and then put it in the icebox. There were no
45 refrigerators then either. And she worked very hard and she looked after us very well; she
46 made all our clothes for us. And at that time, during the Depression, there was very little
47 money about. So she used to unpick the bags that the flour came in. And she used to boil them
48 up in the copper and stitched them together and make sheets for our beds, and she made our
49 underwear out of the same bags. She was really very special."
50 Despite having food in the shop, they lived a hand-to-mouth existence, as they could barely
51 afford the food that they stocked. Her friends couldn't understand why the family couldn't
52 just eat their stock, and felt that they were somehow privileged. Shirley's brother Bob wrote:
53 "These were tough times for our little family as most of Mum's and Dad's customers were
54 very hungry but couldn't pay their bills, and there was often a last-minute dash by Dad to the
55 bank to make a deposit to cover a cheque before it bounced." At least Glan had his musical
56 skills and picked up extra income by playing for local dances with his orchestra, which
57 became a popular part of the social scene in south-western Sydney during the 1930s.
58 Shirley's brother John Glanville Martyn was born in 1931. Shirley started school in 1934, at
59 the age of 5. "I went to school at Fairfield Public School right through from kindergarten to
60 [year] six. I was always known as the best reader in the school, and whenever there was any
61 special function on Anzac Day or the Queen's birthday, I would be the one standing up on the
62 stage at the picture show reading something special that the headmaster had chosen." Being
63 taller than the other girls (an irony given that she reached only 5 feet 6 inches tall, or 167 cm),
64 she was often called on to lead marches in the playground.
65 Until her first haircut at the age of 6, she had long blonde curls down to her waist. Being of a
66 similar age to the child star Shirley Temple, with similar hair and the same name, she drew a

67 lot of comparisons. She liked to sing and dance, too, which one day led to disaster as, dancing
68 down the hallway in their house, she fell through the rotten floorboards! “I could sing and I
69 just enjoyed myself. I wasn’t a noisy child. I used to love to read a lot and I still like to read a
70 lot, but then when you when you’re small like that you don’t realise what life is like when it’s
71 hard work for your parents.”

72 Having five aunts and three uncles on her mother’s side and three aunts and two uncles on her
73 father’s side, Shirley was blessed with dozens of cousins: 35 on the Woods side and several
74 more on the Martyn side. “I had lots of cousins and I played every afternoon after school with
75 all my cousins. My mother had five sisters and three brothers and we all lived close to each
76 other. In those days people didn’t move about the country a great deal; they just stayed with
77 their families in the area where they were born.”

78 Shirley’s brother Robert (Bob) Crawford Martyn was born in 1937. Being 8½ years older than
79 Bob and with both parents flat out trying to earn an income, Shirley became a second mother
80 to Bob, who later wrote: “As I became a little older I began to realise I had two Mums
81 because you were there to care for me when Mum was busy in the shop, being 8 years older
82 and with a noticeable maternal instinct. I would have been doing OK except for our brother
83 who made it clear that his preference was for me to move to another planet.”

84 After 10 years of running the shop, around 1940 Glan and Anne sold it and moved to
85 Ashfield. Bob wrote: “Dad’s Fiat car broke a tooth off the crown wheel, and as we were then
86 at war with Italy, parts were unavailable, so I am guessing that this event triggered the
87 decision to move to Ashfield. This meant a new car and a new job for Dad.” Glan joined the
88 Producers’ Distributing Society (a rural produce co-op), where he worked for 8 years. “World
89 War 2 had started and things got pretty grim. Dad dug a trench in the shed that was in the
90 backyard [in case] we were bombed. He chose to dig the trench inside to stop it filling with
91 water when it rained. Being a veteran of WW1 he doubtless had plenty of practice.”

92 In 1941, Shirley started at Liverpool Girls’ High School in what is now called year 7. At
93 school, all the girls learned to touch-type, and their mothers were required to make and supply
94 a bib for each girl to tie behind the neck and over the typewriter so that the girls couldn’t look
95 at their hands as they typed. In year 9, Shirley qualified in Pittman’s shorthand. In the same
96 year she was confirmed in her church fellowship, where she had many friends. One friend,
97 perhaps from later work, invited her home one day for dinner. Her mother served spaghetti
98 bolognese, the first such that Shirley had ever eaten. It made a change from her mother’s rigid
99 meat-and-three-veg meals of chops, mashed potato, un stomachable boiled pumpkin or choko,
100 and a slurry of green vegetables.

101 Shirley left school in what is now year 10, as most kids did then, and with her stenographic
102 skills earned a series of jobs with firms in the city. She said that in those days, one could walk
103 out of a job and straight into another. She worked from 1947 to 1954 for the Mercantile
104 Mutual Insurance Company in Pitt Street as a “shorthand-typiste”. Decades later she still took
105 notes in shorthand and could still belt out correspondence on a typewriter.

106 During her late teens she joined the Fairfield Players, an amateur dramatic group that put on
107 light plays, including “Bus Stop” and “Annie Get Your Gun”, in which she played—and
108 sang—Annie. There she met Jacqueline Oram-Burd, whom she invited home one day for
109 lunch. She recalled her brother John laying eyes on Jacqueline and “his tongue hanging out”.
110 John and Jacqueline later married.

111 At around the same time, the family moved to 83 Berwick Street, Guildford, a few kilometres
112 away. Glan later worked for 10 years at Winns Department Store in Auburn. During another
113 period, he worked as a piano demonstrator and salesman at Palings Music Store on George
114 Street, Wynyard.

115 Shirley was the second grandchild to Nana and Pop Woods. Her cousin Betty (Eva Elizabeth
116 Osborne) was born 2 years earlier, and the two of them remained best friends throughout their
117 lives. The other Woods cousins were younger than Shirley, but the Martyn cousins were all
118 much older on account of the gap of almost 20 years between Glan and his oldest sister. Both
119 of Glan’s parents had died many years before Shirley was born, so she never knew them, but
120 her elderly aunts and uncles and the older cousins were regular features in her life. Glan’s
121 sister Auntie Blanche, who lived in Newport, survived until 1961. Glan’s great-niece Minnie
122 Collett, granddaughter of his sister Minnie Maud, was one cousin Shirley remained in contact
123 with into the 2000s. Minnie bore a striking resemblance to Shirley.

124 Nana and Pop Woods lived for many years next door to the Bowtell family, and the Woods
125 children grew up alongside the Bowtell children. The Woods children were all kept clean and
126 tidy. The Bowtell children were allowed to roam free. When someone once wondered why the
127 Woods children often got sick and the Bowtell children didn’t, Nana Woods suggested that
128 the germs couldn’t get through all the dirt. When Shirley was a child, Nana Bowtell became a
129 second grandmother to her. Nana Bowtell’s daughter, Auntie Vera, took a role in raising John,
130 who would have preferred to be an only child. Nana Bowtell lived to the age of 103, and
131 looked after herself, despite failing eyesight, to the end.

132 As a child, Shirley would go with her family for long drives out into the countryside of what
133 is now West Pennant Hills and Castle Hill to visit the farm and orchard of Auntie Edie Gee,
134 one of Nana Woods’s nieces. Her father’s car was built before pumping technology was

135 invented, so the petrol flowed from the tank to the engine solely under gravity. If he ever had
136 to drive up a steep hill, he had to drive up in reverse or the engine would stop for want of
137 petrol. “My dad always had a car. He needed that because of going out at night to play the
138 piano for dances and balls and people’s weddings, and he also played the organ at church. He
139 was really very talented. And on some days he’d take us all somewhere for the day: to the
140 beach, or we’d go for a drive around Castle Hill. In those days there were very few houses out
141 there—it was all lots of paddocks and cows and orchards out that way—and the beaches were
142 always fairly empty and we’d take sandwiches with us, and we could buy some boiling water
143 somewhere; there’d always be a little shop by the beach. We’d go and buy boiling water for
144 our tea and we’d have soft drinks with some fruit. It was a really happy time. Quite different
145 from the way people live these days.”

146 One annual trek involved packing the car, an Austin, with camping gear and driving the
147 arduous journey into the foreign wilds of Narrabeen, on Sydney’s Northern Beaches, where
148 the family would camp every summer. The tradition started in 1942 and lasted 15 years. Glan
149 would rig up a kerosene tin of water over the fire so the family could have a hot shower every
150 day. He would commute to work each day from the campground. Later, Shirley would catch
151 the bus to Manly and the ferry into the city to work, and then come back to the camp for a
152 swim in Narrabeen Lagoon.

153 One day Glan had a car accident as he was driving home from work. Shirley wrote:

154 “Coming home from the train, the temperature was cool, getting dark, and as I turned the
155 corner I saw my Dad’s car parked askew in the gutter instead of it being in the garage. A
156 tragedy had occurred; the car should have been in the garage.

157 “I went into the house to see Mum crying and Dad in shock—a lad aged 16 ran into the car on
158 his motorbike. As Dad was turning the corner, the bike went under the car, and the lad was
159 thrown onto the footpath. The police came; so did the neighbours. The boy died. Dad had to
160 go to court, but he was not charged.”

161 A neighbour in the next street—83 Bangor Street—heard about the accident and sent his son,
162 visiting on leave from the Navy, around to ask after Glan. The young naval officer was
163 George Stevens. Only a year later, he and Shirley were married!

164 **Marriage**

165 As George was in the Navy and thus away a lot of the time, he and Shirley decided to get
166 married in secret so that she qualified for a wife’s allowance while he was away for several
167 months, giving them both time to plan for a church wedding and to work out where to live. So

168 on 16 October 1953, they were married in the Registrar General's office in Sydney with only
169 her parents and his father and stepmother present. George didn't tell his mother, who could be
170 difficult, and Shirley didn't tell her brothers or anyone else. While George was away at sea,
171 Shirley continued to live with her parents as Miss Martyn and continued to go to work, never
172 letting on that she was married.

173 They then took several months to decide, via frequent postal exchange from Sydney to the
174 HMAS *Sydney*, when and where they would marry, and where they would live. They
175 eventually settled on 26 June 1954 at St Mark's Church of England, Granville. It was a lavish
176 affair, with many guests, including Shirley's parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins.
177 Afterwards, they flew to Lord Howe Island. This involved catching the flying boat from
178 Rushcutters Bay, on Sydney Harbour, at half past midnight to coincide with the tide. At Lord
179 Howe Island, they were met by the only vehicle on the island, a Holden Ute, and so began
180 their honeymoon.

181 During their long-distance correspondence, George revealed that his mother had decided to
182 sell her house in Melbourne and split the proceeds with George and his older brother, Dick,
183 who had both contributed to its renovation. That would then give George and Shirley enough
184 money for a house deposit. But it took a while for a house to eventuate, as first they lived on
185 base at Jervis Bay in Married Quarters, and then later moved off base to rent in a series of
186 grubby two-room shacks while they saved for the rest of the deposit. Finally, in 1957, they
187 scraped together enough money to buy land at 22 Owen Street, Huskisson, not far from the
188 naval base, and George then took leave from the Navy to build the house himself. He bought
189 books on building, with step-by-step diagrams showing how to saw and drill and lay bricks,
190 and bought several hand tools that are still in use 60 years later. Shirley worked as his
191 labourer. She called him Corky (a pet form of George) and he called her Tom, as befits a
192 builder's labourer.

193 He cut all of the timber by hand and hammered in all of the nails by hand. The house was clad
194 in fibro-asbestos sheets, and why he didn't contract mesothelioma will remain a mystery.

195 Being a qualified electrician, he later (not initially) wired up the house. Being a self-taught
196 man, he did all of the plumbing, joinery, roofing and glazing himself too. For heating, they
197 installed a slow-combustion stove, which kept the house warm in winter and provided hot
198 water for the bath and shower. It also cooked all of the meals.

199 Out the back they kept chickens for their eggs. In those days, chicken feed was supplied in
200 cotton fabric bags, typically striped in pastel colours, which Shirley would unpick to make
201 clothes.

202 The house was a 3-minute walk from the shops in Owen Street and a 1-minute walk to the
203 cinema. The cinema was the social hub of the village. Two of their neighbours from their
204 previous rented accommodation were Mr and Mrs Van. When a movie was showing, Mr Van
205 would place a brick in the oven for an hour and then wrap it in “a good-quality *Herald*” so he
206 could rest his feet on it in the cold cinema.

207 One day while George was away serving in Korea, Shirley was at the cinema, and the
208 newsreels were showing while the audience waited for the feature to start. Suddenly George
209 marched across the silver screen in an old newsreel featuring the Australian contingent at the
210 Queen’s Coronation. Shirley cried out, “It’s George! It’s George!” The whole theatre knew.
211 Mr Van was an early form of television remote control. When George was away at sea,
212 Shirley would visit the Vans for meals and company. Mrs Van would issue the instruction,
213 “Nine, please, John,” and the channel would change. The television was an early colour
214 model: the screen was covered with a sheet of blue cellophane, ostensibly to mask the snow in
215 the picture, which came all the way from Sydney, 100 miles to the north. A few years later,
216 Shirley’s mother’s back-fence neighbour, who kept budgerigars in an aviary, acquired a blue
217 budgie that was called Johnnie Van.

218 To keep Shirley company during the frequent periods when George was away at sea, and to
219 provide some protection, George acquired Carl, a German Shepherd. Carl kept Shirley safe at
220 all times, particularly when she tried to go swimming at the beach in Huskisson, when Carl
221 would dutifully dog-paddle out in the waves, gently take Shirley’s wrist in his mouth, and tow
222 her back to shore. Carl proved to be too loyal to the family when he attacked the postman one
223 day, and in 1962 was put to sleep.

224 In July 1957, one of Anne and Glan’s neighbours, Mrs Leslie Tobin, hired a recording
225 engineer (David Cummings of Wonder Records, a one-man operation) based in Pymble, on
226 Sydney’s Upper North Shore, to bring his recording equipment to Guildford to record Glan at
227 the piano. Despite having played as a church organist, in the silent movies, at dances and for
228 friends and family, Glan had never made a recording. The resulting cutting, with only six or
229 seven copies, was the only recording ever made. Many years later it was converted to CD and
230 lodged with the National Film and Sound Archives. The timing was fortuitous: Glan had a
231 stroke in late December 1957 and was admitted to Fairfield Hospital, where he had a second
232 stroke and died on 27 December. This was the third death in the family in quick succession,
233 as Pop and Nana Woods also died during 1957.

234 By late 1957, with no pregnancy in sight, George underwent testing, which showed a 5%
235 motility count, so he was prescribed a course of an unidentifiable drug called Antuitian S. In

236 the meantime, they began an application to adopt. Just as the adoption application approached
237 fruition, Shirley became pregnant in 1959.

238 George was away at sea in April 1960 when Matthew was born, and it was 6 weeks before he
239 got to meet his first born. So when Shirley went into labour, Mr Van drove her to the
240 Shoalhaven Base Hospital in Nowra. He then brought her back home again. George had
241 wanted to call his son Simon. Shirley got in first.

242 Life in their little house was at first tough, as it was a few years before George installed
243 electricity. Despite repeated applications for promotion in the Navy, George ran into the
244 seniority wall, which ensured that officers were promoted on the basis of time served, not
245 merit, and the income was not much. His smoking habit didn't help. From the age of 16, when
246 he joined the merchant navy, George had smoked heavily. He was still smoking when
247 Matthew was born. One day, Shirley was unpicking chicken feed bags to make clothes for
248 Matthew on account of having no money, and George announced that he was off to the shops
249 to buy cigarettes. Shirley threw a fit: "I'm unpicking chook food bags to make clothes for the
250 baby and you're wasting money on cigarettes!" There and then he quit, and he never touched
251 them again.

252 The frugality of making clothes, and the pride in doing so, continued throughout Shirley's
253 life, as she continued to knit jumpers and make shirts, pyjamas, dresses and trousers for all of
254 the family until she was about 80.

255 **A civilian wife**

256 Having missed the birth of his first child and unwilling to wait another 10 years for
257 promotion, George resigned from the Navy in 1961 and the family moved to Sydney, initially
258 to rented accommodation in a two-room flat behind a dentist's rooms in Smart Street,
259 Fairfield. This suited Shirley, as her now-widowed mother was close by. It was far preferable
260 to her regular drives from Huskisson to Sydney and back with the baby in a bassinet
261 unsecured on the front seat of the family's ute. Shirley and George's second child, Jennifer
262 Rosalie, was born on 13 September 1962. By this time George had tried two unsuccessful
263 jobs, first as a radio technician at TCN Channel 9 in Willoughby and then selling shirts in
264 David Jones on George Street, before successfully talking his way into IBM as a customer
265 engineer. This gave George enough income that they were able to sell the house in Huskisson
266 and buy a fibro shack at 14 Shackell Avenue, Guildford, close to Shirley's mother and
267 youngest brother.

268 George worked hard, and rapid promotion in IBM saw him offered a two-year transfer to

269 Melbourne. So in 1964, with IBM's help in moving and financing the sale of the house in
270 Guildford and the purchase of a house in Melbourne, the family drove from Sydney via
271 overnight stops in Gundagai and Wangaratta to Melbourne. At first they stayed with George's
272 father, Fred, and stepmother, Nance, at 2 Kyarra Road, Glen Iris, while they scouted around
273 for a house. They settled on a newly built spec home at 40 Grenfell Road, Mount Waverley
274 (for the total sum of £6000). At first, Shirley knew no one in Melbourne, but quickly made
275 local friends, particularly with the next-door neighbour, Edyth Kirk, and her husband, Brian.
276 The Kirks had a little boy, Gregory, who was just 3 days older than Jenny, and the two
277 children got on very well. The day after Shirley and George moved in, Jenny, at only 15
278 months old, scaled the dividing paling fence and invited herself in to play. The Stevens
279 children and the three Kirk children remained playmates for years after.

280 George had grand plans to make money. One involved turning the house into a restaurant at
281 which Shirley would cook. Shirley's response was that she would walk and take the children
282 with her. Another was to buy a block of land as an investment. They bought a block in then
283 uninhabited Vermont in Shirley's name (for taxation purposes). The purchase price isn't
284 retained, but it sold in 1976 for \$15,000.

285 In the 1960s, door-to-door vacuum cleaner salesmen were a clear and present menace. One
286 day while the children were asleep, Shirley opened the door to one such menace. He used the
287 trick of sticking his shoe in the door and wouldn't take no for an answer. He threw dirt on the
288 carpet and then showed how his cleaner picked it all up (it didn't). In distress and unable to
289 get rid of him, Shirley caved in and bought one. When George got home, he was furious, and
290 the next day phoned the company and forced them to refund the money. The residual dirt
291 eventually came out.

292 In 1966, impressed by George's abilities, IBM transferred him back to Sydney, *during* the 2-
293 year contract in Melbourne. So the family spent the first half of 1966 living in a flat in
294 Grasmere Road, Cremorne, once again bringing Shirley and the children in contact with
295 family. Then they moved back to Melbourne for another 7 years of the 2-year contract. Only
296 shortly after moving back, they travelled again to Sydney for Shirley's brother Bob's wedding
297 to his first wife, Karen Morgan. Bob worked for the PMG (Post Master General's Office) as
298 an electrical technician, and had just come back from 1 year living and working in the Cocos
299 (Keeling) Islands. So their mother, Anne, was very upset when Bob and Karen announced
300 that they were moving to Tasmania for Bob to join the Hydro-Electric Commission. To Anne,
301 Tasmania was self-evidently "overseas", and Bob was abandoning her.

302 In 1967, Jenny started kindergarten at the local church, which she loved. (Matthew had hated

303 the noise.) Shirley picked her up one day and asked who had been there that day. With a lisp
304 (which Shirley had had at the same age), Jenny replied, “Fanthoise wath there but Franthoise
305 wathn’t” (referring to twin French children, François and Françoise). The distinction was
306 never clarified.

307 The years 1967 to 1971 saw the family grow in Melbourne. Perhaps to pay for the investment
308 property in Vermont, Shirley took a job as a dressmaker at a garment factory in an inner
309 Melbourne suburb. Most of the women there were recent migrants. One took a liking to
310 Shirley and regularly gave her a home-made salami to take home. Shirley never really worked
311 out what to do with them. To get to work, Shirley bought an ancient black Hillman Minx with
312 a hole in the floor on the front passenger’s side, through which the road could be watched
313 during travel. During this period, also, Anne used to come and visit about once a year, taking
314 the Southern Aurora overnight sleeper train from Sydney Central to Spencer Street Station. It
315 was always a special time for the children.

316 During this time, Matthew joined the Cubs, and on a trip to Trentham, in western Victoria,
317 with George as one of the cub masters, acquired a kitten. She came to be called Dibbies, and
318 became a much travelled cat.

319 George drove an old Ford Falcon, registration JCA 295. The family called it the “Batmobile”,
320 on account of its top speed of 40 miles per hour (64 km/h). Shirley upgraded to a newer
321 Falcon, JZN 841.

322 Keen to keep getting ahead financially, George persuaded Shirley to sell the house in Grenfell
323 Road and buy another at 16 Glendowan Road, Mount Waverley, the other side of the railway
324 line. They paid \$13,900. Unlike the house in Grenfell Road, this house was old—a little
325 weatherboard L-shaped cottage—and had plenty of scope for improvement. So on 1
326 September 1972, the family moved house. The very next day, the phone was connected and
327 rang almost immediately: it was Shirley’s brother John, in Sydney, with the devastating news
328 that their mother had suffered a stroke and died. So with the new house in a shambles, strewn
329 with unopened moving boxes, the family flew to Sydney a couple of days later for the funeral.
330 Back in Sydney, George set to and arranged a builder to extend the house to his plans, filling
331 in the L to make a square and excavating beneath to make a double garage. The total cost was
332 over \$16,000, more than the purchase price. While the builder worked on extending the
333 house, he gave Shirley a job typing his correspondence. The income must have helped.
334 Then IBM, facing a crisis in the New Zealand office, asked George to go to Wellington and
335 straighten out the mess. So exactly 1 year after Anne’s death, on 2 September 1973, the
336 family uprooted and moved to Wellington. The cat came too. George relished the challenge

337 and dived in. Shirley, always able to make friends, quickly became part of the IBM set and
338 the local set too, making friends with the wife of the then Finance Minister and later Prime
339 Minister, Bill Rowling; neighbours in Kelburn, at the top of the Cable Car; and people in the
340 NZ television industry, including the weather man and the science presenter. The children
341 found it much harder, having had to leave all of their friends behind. The next-door
342 neighbours in Kelburn, the Macdonald family, with four children, proved good friends, and
343 Shirley remained friends with Judy until some years later when a hit-and-run driver killed
344 Judy on a pedestrian crossing. The driver was never found.

345 The house, at 2 North Terrace, was a 1-minute stroll to the top of the Cable Car, and Matthew
346 used to catch it daily, holding onto the leather strap on the open side in all weathers, on his
347 way to school. Shirley would take it regularly into the city, a 5-minute ride downhill, for
348 shopping. George usually walked to work through the Botanic Gardens, which abutted the
349 Macdonalds' house, to the IBM building a couple of streets below. Jenny attended the local
350 primary school in Australian-equivalent years 5 and 6 during 1973 and 1974.

351 IBM agreed to ship Shirley's car over to NZ. One day Shirley was standing at the traffic lights
352 waiting to cross the road in the city when JZN 841 drove past! It had just come off the ship
353 and was on its way to be cleaned and fumigated. She kept it until the family moved back to
354 Sydney and sold it in Wellington.

355 The neighbour at 4 North Terrace was an old accountant who, at the age of 93 and wearing
356 trifocal lenses, was still driving his car. On learning that George worked for IBM, he opined
357 that computers would never catch on because they could never replace double-entry book-
358 keeping. They did, of course.

359 One weekend Shirley and George threw a party for IBMers and friends. A few people were
360 late. So when the doorbell rang, Shirley flung the door open and exclaimed, "You're too late.
361 The food's all gone!" But instead of the late guests, she found two enormous Maori men
362 standing there, filling the doorway. Shirley recoiled in fright. One of the ferocious-looking
363 men then said, hesitantly, "Excuse me. We're lost. Can you tell us how to get to XYZ?"

364 **Back home**

365 Having resolved IBM's problem early and faced with an unhappy family, George ended his
366 posting to New Zealand and shifted the family back home. He was given a choice of postings,
367 and put the vote to the family. Shirley and the children all chose Sydney. So following a bus
368 tour of the South Island in January 1975, the family flew to Sydney, just in time for the start
369 of the new school year. With jetlag, the children sat the entrance exam for selective high

370 schools and were immediately accepted into North Sydney Girls' and Boys' High Schools.
371 While Shirley settled the family into a rented house in Naremburn (no pets allowed, but the
372 cat came anyway), George engaged real estate agents, and they settled on a double-brick
373 California bungalow at 26 Bent Street, Greenwich, near Shirley's cousins Betty and Barbara
374 (Cowell, née Osborne), with views up the Lane Cover River. It cost a breathtaking \$65,500,
375 for which George had to take out the first of three mortgages to cover costs. George then
376 spent the next several years renovating the house, demolishing walls, demolishing and
377 rebuilding rooms, enclosing the three outdoor verandahs to make more space, and building a
378 swimming pool. He had intended to do everything himself, but he developed a mysterious
379 arthritis in the shoulders and had to stop for several months, to his frustration. Shirley soon
380 developed the same problem, so it could have had an infectious cause.

381 While they were recuperating, George, never able to stand still, took up rug making and
382 leatherwork. This led to the establishment of the Cove Craft Cooperative, based in Lane Cove
383 shopping centre, with Shirley and George and cousin Betty as founding members. Shirley
384 sewed a variety of children's clothes for sale in the little shop; George made leather belts and
385 wallets; Betty made pressed flower cards; and other members contributed ceramics, paintings,
386 macramé, turned wooden bowls and a variety of other handcrafts.

387 The renovating resumed, and eventually the house came to cover 28 squares, or 260 m².
388 Shirley made curtains throughout the house and they bought a number of oil paintings from
389 local artists, making the house a beautiful home.

390 Soon after settling in, Shirley organised a Woods family gathering. It was only 3 years since
391 her mother had died, and she wanted to have more contact with her aunts, uncles and cousins.
392 Many of them came, giving the children an opportunity to meet their extended family.

393 Shirley quickly integrated into the local scene, aided by Betty's ties, and joined what became
394 the Greenwich Talking and Tennis Club, with a dozen local ladies who became her friends.
395 She also made friends with various ABC employees, many of whom lived in Greenwich
396 because they worked up the road in Gore Hill, including Caroline Jones and Andrew Olle.
397 She also befriended Jeanette Howard, wife of the then Federal Treasurer and later Prime
398 Minister John Howard, and Jill Dowd, wife of the then State Member John Dowd, who lived
399 a short walk away. The Dowds had three daughters, the youngest of whom, aged perhaps 11,
400 took a shine to Shirley, and would sometimes drop in for a visit. One day Shirley was cooking
401 spaghetti bolognese for dinner when the daughter dropped in. Shirley, always happy to talk,
402 was paying scant attention to the task when she saw the girl's eyes go wide and her jaw drop.
403 Shirley had opened a tin of cat food instead of tomato soup and was about to tip it in.

404 She also helped at both children's schools, contributing to costumes for end-of-year musicals
405 and serving at the tuckshop at North Sydney Girls'. When Jenny was in year 12, Shirley
406 served a young Nicole Kidman, who even then had a coterie of acolytes. The Kidman family
407 lived nearby in Greenwich Road then.

408 By 1983, Dibbies, who was by then very old, died. On learning of the family's distress, a
409 neighbour over the road, Lana Wells, who was a member of the Cat Protection Society, paid
410 to fly two kittens from Melbourne to Sydney from her former husband, Derryn Hinch, a radio
411 and television presenter (and later Federal Senator), whose then-wife, the actress Jackie
412 Weaver, had asked him to give them away. Derryn telephoned after their arrival to check up
413 on them. Jenny took the call. The cats came to be called Nyssa and Alice Mae. (Years later,
414 Shirley's brother Bob met Jackie and asked her about the cats, but she didn't remember.) The
415 two cats made the place their home. Out the back, they would often lie on the pavers
416 surrounding the swimming pool. Lost in the moment, Nyssa occasionally rolled over while
417 grooming and fell into the pool. Her facial expression was comical. Three bluetongue lizards
418 called the pavers home too, and the cats could often be seen stepping over the lizards while
419 the lizards stayed put. The cats also found a route from the back pergola onto the roof and
420 around to the front, where they often walked along the guttering, prompting Shirley to
421 surmise that they were riding little bicycles along.

422 Still keen to make more money, George bought two cabin cruisers from a cruiser hire
423 company on the Hawkesbury River that was upgrading, and restored them to rent out at
424 weekends. He called the business Glendowan Cruisers. The investment required a third
425 mortgage on the house. Yet despite several years of hard work, he only broke even and
426 eventually sold them. So instead of trying to run a business on the side, and as the children
427 had moved out of home to their own homes, he decided to sell 26 Bent Street and buy a doer-
428 upper and so capitalise on the investment through improving the property. So in 1989, George
429 and Shirley sold the house for \$650,000 and bought 4 Kingslangley Road, Greenwich, a short
430 distance away, for \$350,000. They spent a year improving it until George fell out of a tree
431 while lopping a branch and snapped his leg in three places. Surgery, plates and pins, and
432 months of recuperation dented his plans. Only 2 years after moving in, they sold 4
433 Kingslangley for only \$345,000 and bought 135 Greenwich Road for \$445,000. They turned
434 that two-storey house into separate upstairs and downstairs dwellings. They lived upstairs,
435 with views up the Lane Cover River, and rented the downstairs flat out to a tenant they got on
436 very well with. The cats had come too. Unfortunately, Nyssa fell into the pool one day while
437 George and Shirley were out and drowned.

438 During this period, first Jenny married John Hutchinson in 1998, and then Matthew married
439 Linda Davies in 1991. Jenny had William in 1990; Linda had Robert in 1992, followed
440 quickly by Jenny with Nicholas; then Linda had Timothy in 1994. Shirley doted on her
441 grandsons, although the relationship of grandparents to grandsons tended to be hands off,
442 perhaps because all of them were boisterous and three of the four were decidedly eccentric.
443 In 1995, Shirley's brother John died of a heart attack at 64. He had divorced Jacqueline and
444 remarried twice more, but his alcohol dependence and his unwillingness to seek help left him
445 living on a disability pension (he had been severely injured as a child when he was shoved
446 between the platform and a train at Wynyard Station) in a mobile home at The Entrance,
447 largely estranged from family and friends. The funeral brought Shirley together with her last
448 aunt, Auntie Eva, and husband Uncle Blue (Walter Moore), for the last time, but it also
449 allowed the grandsons, then still little, to meet a great-great aunt.

450 **Retirement**

451 By 1998, feeling fed up with the hustle and bustle of city life and perhaps wanting to
452 recapture their youth on Jervis Bay, they sold 135 Greenwich Road for \$790,000 and moved
453 to Huskisson, where they lived in a rented house while their next house, at 12 Minerva
454 Avenue, Vincentia (purchased for \$265,000), was extended by the original builder (and
455 vendor). There followed several years of family Christmas gatherings in the house: George
456 and Shirley upstairs and Matthew's and Jenny's families in purpose-built accommodation
457 downstairs, and frequent trips to the beach for swimming, fishing and bushwalking.
458 Alice Mae had moved with Shirley and George, and every evening she would take her rightful
459 place on Shirley's pink-dressing-gowned lap. Alice Mae had been terrified of the noise of
460 plastic bags since she was a kitten, but with age she eventually went deaf, and calmed down
461 considerably. She developed a thyroid problem, so at the age of 19, she underwent surgery at
462 the vet's and made a full recovery. She eventually reached 21 years, so Shirley and George
463 decided to celebrate this milestone occasion with a 21st birthday party. Various local
464 dignitaries were invited (neighbours, friends and veterinary staff), and Alice Mae attended
465 wearing a pearl necklace and got to help cut the cake, looking quite nonplussed.
466 During the 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s, Shirley and George went on several overseas trips:
467 a cruise around Greece and Turkey on a Russian cruise ship; a tour of England, Wales and
468 Ireland, focusing on the origins of the Woods, Maxwell, Martyn and Stevens families; the
469 World War 1 battlefields in France and Belgium to see where Glan had served; Hawaii on a
470 cruise; and Norfolk Island and Lord Howe Island. In addition, they toured Australia on

471 several occasions, visiting Kakadu, the Kimberley, the Victorian coast, the Murray River on a
472 paddle-steamer, Tasmania several times, and Glen Inness for the Celtic Festival. On the
473 Russian cruise ship in 1996, Shirley told the story of dinner one night, when a Russian
474 waitress dropped a stack of plates, which smashed on the deck. In the immediate silence that
475 followed, an Australian male voice called out, “Off to the gulag!” In France on 6 September
476 2000, Shirley and George, along with three others, were invited to participate in the laying of
477 a wreath on the tomb of France’s Unknown Soldier at the Arc de Triomphe in Paris in front of
478 about 200 people. Shirley proudly wore Glan’s WW1 medals.

479 Then there was the trip to Glen Innes in 2004 to take part in the Celtic Festival. One evening
480 they went for a walk before dinner, but a broken footpath tripped Shirley and she landed
481 heavily on her hands and face and suffered cuts and bruises. Seemingly out of nowhere, four
482 women appeared and offered to help. While they ascertained how badly she was injured,
483 Shirley noticed that they were all wearing name tags, all of which said “Shirley”. It transpired
484 that the women were visiting Glen Innes not for the Celtic Festival but for the Shirley
485 Convention, at which every participant was called Shirley!

486 By the early 2000s, Shirley had experienced a few transient ischaemic attacks (TIAs,
487 precursors to stroke), and George’s physical health had declined remarkably on account of
488 war-service injuries, genetics and his bull-at-a-gate approach to everything, so they
489 reluctantly recognised the need to leave Jervis Bay and return to Sydney to be closer to
490 medical services and their descendants. They sold 12 Minerva in 2003 and bought 78
491 Lonsdale Avenue, Berowra Heights, not far from Jenny and John. This house, built at the end
492 of a long driveway, was another two-storey home, despite George’s difficulty in climbing
493 stairs in the previous two houses. The block abutted the Muogamarra Nature Reserve, and
494 native animals were frequent visitors. Wallabies and kangaroos occasionally came to graze on
495 the back lawn. Turtles wandered out of the garden pond. A pair of pardalotes nested in the
496 garden bed below the verandah. And one day Shirley found a snake studying her through one
497 of the downstairs windows. The house had been built with a double garage on the ground
498 floor, which the previous owners converted into a sunroom. At around this time, Jenny had
499 been building up her personal trainer business and set up a private gym in the sunroom, which
500 Shirley and George dubbed the “ballroom” on account of its size. Jenny’s business grew to
501 the extent that she needed to open a larger gym at the Berowra Heights shops, which ran
502 successfully for several years until she moved with John to Singapore on assignment for IBM,
503 thus continuing a family tradition.

504 George had established the Radio Mechanics’ Association in the late 1980s and organised the

505 first of several reunions, in 1992 in Adelaide. Shirley helped in the preparations, and later
506 joined him for reunions in Sydney, Perth, Hobart and Brisbane. Pursuing his interest in family
507 history in association with contacts made at Jervis Bay, George organised a Cornish Cultural
508 Celebration in Nowra in 2008 with the Southern Sons of Cornwall, a family history group
509 through which Shirley was able to trace her Martyn family history.

510 **The long good-bye**

511 Around about 2002, family members began to notice that Shirley was becoming forgetful,
512 forgetting that she had asked something or retelling something that she had earlier said.
513 George minimised the problem. Over several years, regular assessments by aged care doctors
514 failed to identify a problem. Later, it was revealed that the Mini Mental Score (MMS) test
515 used routinely around the world to test for cognitive decline fails to detect changes due to
516 vascular dementia, which Shirley was suffering. Mild strokes struck periodically, from which
517 Shirley appeared to recover in full, but despite the family's increasing observations of
518 repetition, confusion and forgetting, Shirley continued to pass the MMS. Her naturally social
519 personality gave her the social skills to cover most signs of confusion, and few people were
520 able to spot the evidence. Shirley became convinced that she had had only two mild strokes,
521 but a brain scan revealed evidence of about a dozen.

522 In 2007, George and Shirley sold 78 Lonsdale Avenue and bought 16 Wymah Crescent, only a
523 kilometre away. This time, the house had a single level and had been built on a level block.
524 They engaged an architect to draw up plans to extend the house, and their builder effectively
525 doubled the size, resulting in a house in which the original rectangular structure provided
526 kitchen, lounge-dining room, bedrooms and bathroom; a new block provided a new laundry,
527 a second bathroom, a sewing room, an office and a garage; and an airy atrium joined the two.
528 George had intended to develop the garden but he began suffering breathlessness every time
529 he walked a few steps, and had to stop. The diagnosis was right heart failure, which could
530 have been caused by his smoking during his naval service. Unable to work physically and
531 unwilling to stop, he joined a campaign to create a memorial to Australia's Boer War veterans
532 in Canberra. Then one day in early 2010 gathering signatures at the local shopping centre, he
533 caught pneumonia and had to go to hospital. This was the start of his final decline, during
534 which he repeatedly discharged himself from hospital each time he was admitted with
535 something else (including myelodysplasia, prostate cancer, spleen cancer and anaemia) as the
536 hospital didn't run according to his rules. But Shirley was now unable to look after him at
537 home. Jenny spent weeks organising home help services, to which they were entitled for free

538 through the Department of Veterans' Affairs, but too proud to accept help (or, in Shirley's
539 case, unable to see the need), they sacked all of the services except a cleaner.

540 Things only got worse. Shirley entered the "sundowning" phase of dementia, and every
541 evening (hence the name) would ring either Matthew or Jenny in tears, convinced that George
542 was trying to kill her. Poor George couldn't get out of his chair without help, so he couldn't
543 do anything of the sort, even if he had wanted to. Shirley would barricade herself in her
544 bedroom every night with the telephone, securing the door with a draught excluder, and call
545 in desperation. Every evening, Matthew or Jenny had to talk her down from her anxiety, and
546 the next day Shirley would have no recollection of the previous evening's events.

547 Several times, George fell over during the night on his way to the toilet. Instead of helping
548 him up, Shirley would step over him on her way to the toilet, and would then place a blanket
549 over him. By morning he was cold and in pain. One time he was able to reach the phone after
550 hauling himself over the floor and called Jenny (not the ambulance!) at about 5:00 a.m., and
551 Jenny and John had to race there and help him up. But neither Shirley nor George would
552 admit defeat.

553 Shirley had always kept house for George, and continued cooking his meals, but her failing
554 memory reduced the menu to one item: steamed chicken, steamed broccoli and boiled potato
555 every night. Understandably frustrated at having the same bland food every night (and unable
556 to taste it on account of his medication), George got increasingly cranky, which triggered
557 Shirley's daily paranoia. Shirley simply couldn't understand why George didn't want the food
558 she so lovingly cooked every day.

559 But every morning was a new day for Shirley, and she would drive to the shops (sometimes
560 several times each day) and buy the same groceries. One day she argued with the supermarket
561 cashier that she had paid, when she clearly hadn't, but the manager gracefully let her have the
562 groceries, probably recognising her declining state. Despite finally being diagnosed with
563 "mild cognitive impairment", Shirley continued to drive to the shops or to Jenny's house
564 every day (sometimes making up her own road rules), so Jenny took steps to have her licence
565 revoked. Although she handed over her licence at the RTA and received an official RTA
566 identification card in return, Shirley had by the following day fabricated a story to fill in the
567 blank in her memory, that the geriatrician had snatched her licence out of her hand and cut it
568 up in front of her. She kept driving, despite no longer having a licence. George facilitated this
569 by hiding the car keys so Jenny couldn't take them, as he was dependent on Shirley and was
570 unwilling to relinquish control to the health services. Eventually Jenny took the keys and sold
571 the car locally. The fabrication of stories continued. Shirley had been telling a funny story one

572 Sunday during afternoon tea and fell over while acting it out. She grazed her cheek, but
573 Matthew cleaned and dressed it. The following day, she had become convinced that she had
574 fallen out of the car at the shops, and the pharmacist had dressed the wound.
575 By now, George was reliant on about seven medications to be administered four times a day.
576 The pharmacy supplied them in a 4 × 7 pack clearly marked with day of the week and the
577 time of day. It should have been straightforward, but as George was barely mobile, he kept
578 the medication within easy reach. Unable to remember this, Shirley would put it away in a
579 cupboard to keep the house looking tidy, so George went without. Being a pragmatist, he hit
580 on the clever idea of taking them all at once every day. Not surprisingly, this didn't work.
581 Following a few weeks in an assisted living home in Hornsby for respite care under the
582 supervision of nurses, Shirley and George returned home to the same shambles, and in only 5
583 days, George's health had declined alarmingly. Matthew had him taken by ambulance to the
584 Adventist Hospital in Wahroonga, where the triage nurse declared that there was nothing
585 wrong and he should go home. So Matthew drove him to Hornsby Hospital, where he was
586 diagnosed as having had a heart attack and was kept for a month to stabilise his condition.
587 During that period, Jenny frantically tried to find aged care accommodation, and by chance
588 found places at a newly opened aged care home in Wahroonga. Both Shirley and George were
589 moved in, unwillingly of course. George, being fully in control of his faculties, understood
590 the need but continued to fight for his independence. Shirley went on the understanding that it
591 was her job to "look after" George. They moved in in April 2011. By December, George's
592 health was perilous, and he died on 28 December. Shirley stayed another 7 years.
593 After refusing to discuss the need for months, George eventually agreed to sell the house, and
594 Matthew and Jenny handled the sale. The house sold on 14 December 2011 for \$600,000. The
595 proceeds were invested and proved able, supplemented with a DVA and later war widow's
596 pension, to cover the costs of the nursing home for the next 7 years, even slightly gaining
597 value over time. George's strategy of buying cheap, improving the property and selling at a
598 profit proved successful. He did manage to create enough capital for their retirement.
599 During her stay, Shirley's health declined very slowly, and she remained active and mobile
600 into her last year, even as her memory faded. The geriatrician visited a few times, and was
601 shocked one day a couple of years after George's death when Shirley asked, "Where's
602 George?" This was the first time that the geriatrician had seen what the family had been
603 reporting for several years, as without even meaning to, Shirley masked the obvious signs of
604 dementia. Shirley became a valued resident, loved by many of the staff and residents. On
605 account of not having Alzheimer's disease, her personality never changed. She remained

606 happy and friendly and willing to help. She continued to knit, making squares for assembly
607 into blankets for orphans in Africa; she set the tables in the dining room; she made her own
608 bed. All of these skills slowly faded, along with most of her vocabulary, cognition and self-
609 care skills. Having always been independent, and obsessively maintaining that only her way
610 of doing anything was the right way, Shirley would fight the nurses who tried to help her the
611 “wrong way”. Only one nurse was able to wash her (apparently knowing the right way). Her
612 family continued to visit her weekly. She always recognised them, although she could no
613 longer name anyone, and even 3 months before her death, when viewing photos of herself as a
614 child, recognised herself at the age of about 12 months, saying, “That’s me!”
615 But in early July 2018, her appetite failed and she slowly faded away, slipping into a coma.
616 She died on 10 July at the age of 89 years.