

(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 at church in Pennsylvania (John was a musician and became involved in the Presbyterian church choir) and had three children there before John moved the family to Australia; their fourth 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 eighth 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 Courtiers' 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 moved to Dubbo, in central NSW, where Glan had 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."

33 Shirley was born on 29 November 1928 at 31 Nancarrow Street, Dubbo, a simple worker's
34 cottage. Her mother wanted her to be named Nancy. Her father wanted to call her Shirley.
35 Both won. As a baby, Shirley used to sleep beneath the piano while Glan played.
36 With the arrival of the talkies, Glan found himself out of a job, and took up work as a local
37 bus driver for a while, but the arrival of the Great Depression forced the family to move back
38 to Sydney. They moved to Fairfield, where Anne's parents and siblings lived, and Anne's
39 parents set them up in a little grocery shop at 24 Frederick Street. "So we came back to
40 Sydney where my mother's mother—my Nana, your great-great grandmother—had bought a
41 little shop and put my parents in there to work."
42 "Now, my dad was out every night playing the piano and my mother used to have to cook on
43 the wood stove at night and give us our dinner and bath us, put us to bed, and then she'd go
44 into the shop, where she used to weigh up bags of sugar. Butter came in boxes and she used to
45 have to cut the butter, wrap it up in paper and then put it in the icebox. There were no
46 refrigerators then either. And she worked very hard and she looked after us very well; she
47 made all our clothes for us. And at that time, during the Depression, there was very little
48 money about. So she used to unpick the bags that the flour came in. And she used to boil them
49 up in the copper and stitched them together and make sheets for our beds, and she made our
50 underwear out of the same bags. She was really very special."
51 Despite having food in the shop, they lived a hand-to-mouth existence, as they could barely
52 afford the food that they stocked. Her friends couldn't understand why the family couldn't
53 just eat their stock, and felt that they were somehow privileged. Shirley's brother Bob wrote:
54 "These were tough times for our little family as most of Mum's and Dad's customers were
55 very hungry but couldn't pay their bills, and there was often a last-minute dash by Dad to the
56 bank to make a deposit to cover a cheque before it bounced." At least Glan had his musical
57 skills and picked up extra income by playing for local dances with his orchestra, which
58 became a popular part of the social scene in south-western Sydney during the 1930s.
59 Shirley's brother John Glanville Martyn was born in 1931. Shirley started school in 1934, at
60 the age of 5. "I went to school at Fairfield Public School right through from kindergarten to
61 [year] six. I was always known as the best reader in the school, and whenever there was any
62 special function on Anzac Day or the Queen's [King's?] birthday, I would be the one standing
63 up on the stage at the picture show reading something special that the headmaster had
64 chosen." Being taller than the other girls (an irony given that she reached only 5 feet 6 inches
65 tall, or 167 cm), she was often called on to lead marches in the playground.
66 Until her first haircut at the age of 6, she had long blonde curls down to her waist. Being of a

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

73 Shirley was left-handed (along with George and both of their children). But while most left-
74 handed children were forced, often by physical punishment, to write with their right hand (as
75 George was), Shirley escaped the irrational “correction”: at the start of each school year, her
76 mother would meet the teacher and instruct him or her not to coerce Shirley. In later life,
77 Shirley would look for opportunities to identify with other left-handers she randomly
78 encountered.

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

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

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

99 In 1941, Shirley started at Liverpool Girls’ High School in what is now called year 7. At
100 school, all the girls learned to touch-type, and their mothers were required to make and supply

101 a bib for each girl to tie behind her neck and over the typewriter so that the girls couldn't look
102 at their hands as they typed. In year 9, Shirley qualified in Pittman's shorthand. In the same
103 year she was confirmed in her church fellowship, where she had many friends. One friend,
104 perhaps from later work, invited her home one day for dinner. Her mother served spaghetti
105 bolognese, the first such that Shirley had ever eaten. It made a change from her mother's rigid
106 meat-and-three-veg meals of chops, mashed potato, un stomachable boiled pumpkin or choko,
107 and a slurry of green vegetables.

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

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

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

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

131 Nana and Pop Woods lived for many years next door to the Bowtell family, and the Woods
132 children grew up alongside the Bowtell children. The Woods children were all kept clean and
133 tidy. The Bowtell children were allowed to roam free. When someone once wondered why the
134 Woods children often got sick and the Bowtell children didn't, Nana Woods suggested that

135 the germs couldn't get through all the dirt. When Shirley was a child, Nanna (Emily) Bowtell
136 became a second grandmother to her. Nanna Bowtell's daughter, Auntie Vera Jones, took a
137 role in raising John, who would have preferred to be an only child. Nanna Bowtell lived to the
138 age of 103 (circa 1974), and looked after herself, despite failing eyesight, to the end.

139 As a child, Shirley would go with her family for long drives out into the countryside of what
140 is now West Pennant Hills and Castle Hill to visit the farm and orchard of Auntie Edie Gee,
141 one of Nana Woods's nieces. Her father's original car—a Ford Model T—was built before
142 pumping technology was invented, so the petrol flowed from the tank to the engine solely
143 under gravity. If he ever had to drive up a steep hill, he had to drive up in reverse or the
144 engine would stop for want of petrol. "My dad always had a car. He needed that because of
145 going out at night to play the piano for dances and balls and people's weddings, and he also
146 played the organ at church. He was really very talented. And on some days he'd take us all
147 somewhere for the day: to the beach, or we'd go for a drive around Castle Hill. In those days
148 there were very few houses out there—it was all lots of paddocks and cows and orchards out
149 that way—and the beaches were always fairly empty and we'd take sandwiches with us, and
150 we could buy some boiling water somewhere; there'd always be a little shop by the beach.
151 We'd go and buy boiling water for our tea and we'd have soft drinks with some fruit. It was a
152 really happy time. Quite different from the way people live these days."

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

160 One day Glan had a car accident as he was driving home in Guildford from work. Shirley
161 wrote:

162 "Coming home from the train, the temperature was cool, getting dark, and as I turned the
163 corner I saw my Dad's car parked askew in the gutter instead of it being in the garage. A
164 tragedy had occurred; the car should have been in the garage.

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

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

172 **Marriage**

173 As George was in the Navy and thus away a lot of the time, he and Shirley decided to get
174 married in secret so that she qualified for a wife's allowance while he was away for several
175 months, giving them both time to plan for a church wedding and to work out where to live. So
176 on 16 October 1953, they were married in the Registrar General's office in Sydney with only
177 her parents and his father and stepmother present. George didn't tell his mother, who could be
178 difficult, and Shirley didn't tell her brothers or anyone else. While George was away at sea,
179 Shirley continued to live with her parents as Miss Martyn and continued to go to work, never
180 letting on that she was married.

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

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

201 He cut all of the timber by hand and hammered in all of the nails by hand. The house was clad

202 in fibro-asbestos sheets, and why he didn't contract mesothelioma will remain a mystery.
203 Being a qualified electrician, he later (not initially) wired up the house. Being a self-taught
204 man, he did all of the plumbing, joinery, roofing and glazing himself too. For heating, they
205 installed a slow-combustion stove, which kept the house warm in winter and provided hot
206 water for the bath and shower. It also cooked all of the meals.
207 Out the back they kept chickens for their eggs. In those days, chicken feed was supplied in
208 cotton fabric bags, typically striped in pastel colours, which Shirley would unpick to make
209 clothes, following her mother's example.
210 The house was a 3-minute walk from the shops in Owen Street and a 1-minute walk to the
211 cinema. The cinema was the social hub of the village. Two of their neighbours from their
212 previous rented accommodation were Mr and Mrs Van. When a movie was showing, Mr Van
213 would place a brick in the oven for an hour and then wrap it in "a good-quality *Herald*" so he
214 could rest his feet on it in the cold cinema.
215 One day while George was away serving in Korea, Shirley was at the cinema, and the
216 newsreels were showing while the audience waited for the feature to start. Suddenly George
217 marched across the silver screen in an old newsreel featuring the Australian contingent at the
218 Queen's Coronation. Shirley cried out, "It's George! It's George!" The whole theatre knew.
219 Mr Van was an early form of television remote control. When George was away at sea,
220 Shirley would visit the Vans for meals and company. Mrs Van would issue the instruction,
221 "Nine, please, John," and the channel would change. The television was an early colour
222 model: the screen was covered with a sheet of blue cellophane, ostensibly to mask the snow in
223 the picture, which came all the way from Sydney, 100 miles (160 km) to the north. A few
224 years later, Shirley's mother's back-fence neighbour, who kept budgerigars in an aviary,
225 acquired a blue budgie that was called Johnnie Van. The neighbour also kept Trixie the Corgi,
226 who would come to visit Anne through the gate in the fence.
227 To keep Shirley company during the frequent periods when George was away at sea, and to
228 provide some protection, George acquired Carl, a German Shepherd. Carl kept Shirley safe at
229 all times, particularly when she tried to go swimming at the beach in Huskisson, when Carl
230 would dutifully dog-paddle out in the waves, gently take Shirley's wrist in his mouth, and tow
231 her back to shore. Carl proved to be too loyal to the family when he attacked the postman one
232 day, and in 1962 was put to sleep.
233 In July 1957, one of Anne and Glan's neighbours, Mrs Leslie Tobin, hired a recording
234 engineer (David Cummings of Wonder Records, a one-man operation) based in Pymble, on
235 Sydney's Upper North Shore, to bring his recording equipment to Guildford to record Glan at

the piano. Despite having played as a church organist, in the silent movies, at dances and for friends and family, Glan had never made a recording. The resulting cutting, with only six or seven copies, was the only recording he ever made. Many years later it was converted to CD and lodged with the National Film and Sound Archive. The timing was fortuitous: Glan had a stroke in late December 1957 and was admitted to Fairfield Hospital, where he had a second stroke and died on 27 December. This was the third death in the family in quick succession, as Pop and Nana Woods also died during 1957.

By late 1957, with no pregnancy in sight, George underwent testing, which showed a 5% motility count, so he was prescribed a course of an unidentifiable drug called Antuitian S. In the meantime, they began an application to adopt. Just as the adoption application approached fruition, Shirley became pregnant in 1959.

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

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

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

A civilian wife

Having missed the birth of his first child and unwilling to wait another 10 years for promotion, George resigned from the Navy in 1961 and the family moved to Sydney, initially to rented accommodation in a two-room flat behind a dentist's rooms at 94 Smart Street, Fairfield. This suited Shirley, as her now-widowed mother was close by. It was far preferable

269 to her regular drives from Huskisson to Sydney and back with the baby in a bassinet
270 unsecured on the front seat of the family's ute. Shirley and George's second child, Jennifer
271 Rosalie, was born on 13 September 1962. By this time George had tried two unsuccessful
272 jobs, first as a radio technician at TCN Channel 9 in Willoughby and then selling shirts in
273 David Jones on George Street, before successfully talking his way into IBM as a customer
274 engineer. This gave George enough income that they were able to sell the house in Huskisson
275 and buy a fibro shack at 14 Shackell Avenue, Guildford, close to Shirley's mother and
276 youngest brother.

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

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

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

301 In 1966, impressed by George's abilities, IBM transferred him back to Sydney, *during* the 2-
302 year contract in Melbourne. So the family spent the first half of 1966 living in a flat in

303 Grasmere Road, Cremorne, once again bringing Shirley and the children in contact with
304 family. Then they moved back to Melbourne for another 7 years of the 2-year contract. Only
305 shortly after moving back, they travelled again to Sydney for Shirley's brother Bob's wedding
306 to his first wife, Karen Morgan. Bob worked for the PMG (Post Master General's Office) as
307 an electrical technician, and had just come back from 1 year living and working in the Cocos
308 (Keeling) Islands. So their mother, Anne, was very upset when Bob and Karen announced
309 that they were moving to Tasmania for Bob to join the Hydro-Electric Commission. To Anne,
310 Tasmania was self-evidently "overseas", and Bob was abandoning her.

311 In 1967, Jenny started kindergarten at the local church, St Mark's, which she loved. (Matthew
312 had hated the noise.) Shirley picked her up one day and asked who had been there that day.
313 With a lisp (which Shirley had had at the same age), Jenny replied, "Franthoithe wath there
314 but Franthoithe wathn't" (referring to twin French children, François and Françoise). The
315 distinction was never clarified.

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

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

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

331 Keen to keep getting ahead financially, George persuaded Shirley to sell the house in Grenfell
332 Road and buy another at 16 Glendowan Road, Mount Waverley, the other side of the railway
333 line. They paid \$13,900. Unlike the house in Grenfell Road, this house was old—a little
334 weatherboard L-shaped cottage—and had plenty of scope for improvement. So on 1
335 September 1972, the family moved house. The very next day, the phone was connected and
336 rang almost immediately: it was Shirley's brother John, in Sydney, with the devastating news

337 that their mother had suffered a stroke and died. So with the new house in a shambles, strewn
338 with unopened moving boxes, the family flew to Sydney a couple of days later for the funeral.
339 Back in Sydney, George set to and arranged a builder to extend the house to his plans, filling
340 in the L to make a square and excavating beneath to make a double garage. The total cost was
341 over \$16,000, more than the purchase price. While working on extending the house, the
342 builder gave Shirley a job typing his correspondence. The income must have helped.
343 Then IBM, facing a crisis in the New Zealand office, asked George to go to Wellington and
344 straighten out the mess. So exactly 1 year after Anne's death, on 2 September 1973, the
345 family uprooted and moved to Wellington. The cat came too. George relished the challenge
346 and dived in. Shirley, always able to make friends, quickly became part of the IBM set and
347 the local set too, making friends with the wife of the then Finance Minister and later Prime
348 Minister, Bill Rowling; neighbours in Kelburn, at the top of the Cable Car; and people in the
349 NZ television industry, including the weather man and the science presenter. The children
350 found it much harder, having had to leave all of their friends behind. The next-door
351 neighbours in Kelburn, the Macdonald family, with four children, proved good friends, and
352 Shirley remained friends with Judy until some years later when a hit-and-run driver killed
353 Judy on a pedestrian crossing. The driver was never found.
354 The house, at 2 North Terrace, was a 1-minute stroll to the top of the Cable Car, and Matthew
355 used to catch it daily, holding onto the leather strap on the open side in all weathers, on his
356 way to school. Shirley would take it regularly into the city, a 5-minute ride downhill, for
357 shopping. George usually walked to work through the Botanic Gardens, which abutted the
358 Macdonalds' house, to the IBM building a couple of streets below. Jenny attended the local
359 primary school in Australian-equivalent years 5 and 6 during 1973 and 1974.
360 IBM agreed to ship Shirley's car over to NZ. One day Shirley was standing at the traffic lights
361 waiting to cross the road in the city when JZN 841 drove past! It had just come off the ship
362 and was on its way to be cleaned and fumigated. She kept it until the family moved back to
363 Sydney and sold it in Wellington.
364 The neighbour at 4 North Terrace was an old accountant who, at the age of 93 and wearing
365 trifocal lenses, was still driving his car. On learning that George worked for IBM, he opined
366 that computers would never catch on because they could never replace double-entry book-
367 keeping. They did, of course.
368 One weekend Shirley and George threw a party for IBMers and friends. A few people were
369 late. So when the doorbell rang, Shirley flung the door open and exclaimed, "You're too late.
370 The food's all gone!" But instead of the late guests, she found two enormous Maori men

371 standing there, filling the doorway. Shirley recoiled in fright. One of the ferocious-looking
372 men then said, hesitantly, "Excuse me. We're lost. Can you tell us how to get to XYZ?"

373 **Back home**

374 Having resolved IBM's problem early and faced with an unhappy family, George ended his
375 posting to New Zealand and shifted the family back home. He was given a choice of postings,
376 and put the vote to the family. Shirley and the children all chose Sydney. So following a bus
377 tour of the South Island in January 1975, the family flew to Sydney, just in time for the start
378 of the new school year. With jetlag, the children sat the entrance exam for selective high
379 schools and were immediately accepted into North Sydney Girls' and Boys' High Schools.
380 While Shirley settled the family into a rented house in Naremburn (no pets allowed, but the
381 cat came anyway), George engaged real estate agents, and they settled on a double-brick
382 California bungalow at 26 Bent Street, Greenwich, near Shirley's cousins Betty and Barbara
383 (Cowell, née Osborne), with views up the Lane Cover River. It cost a breathtaking \$65,500,
384 for which George had to take out the first of three mortgages to cover costs. George then
385 spent the next several years renovating the house, demolishing walls, demolishing and
386 rebuilding rooms, enclosing the three outdoor verandahs to make more space, and building a
387 swimming pool. He had intended to do everything himself, but he developed a mysterious
388 arthritis in the shoulders and had to stop for several months, to his frustration. Shirley soon
389 developed the same problem, so it could have had an infectious cause.

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

396 The renovating resumed, and eventually the house came to cover 28 squares, or 260 m².

397 Shirley made curtains throughout the house and they bought a number of oil paintings from
398 local artists, making the house a beautiful home.

399 Soon after settling in, Shirley organised a Woods family gathering. It was only 3 years since
400 her mother had died, and she wanted to have more contact with her aunts, uncles and cousins.

401 Many of them came, giving the children an opportunity to meet their extended family.

402 Shirley quickly integrated into the local scene, aided by Betty's ties, and joined what became
403 the Greenwich Talking and Tennis Club, with a dozen local ladies who became her friends.

404 She also made friends with various ABC employees, many of whom lived in Greenwich
405 because they worked up the road in Gore Hill, including Caroline Jones and Andrew Olle.
406 She also befriended Jeanette Howard, wife of the then Federal Treasurer and later Prime
407 Minister John Howard, and Jill Dowd, wife of the then State Member John Dowd, who lived
408 a short walk away. The Dowds had three daughters, the youngest of whom, aged perhaps 10,
409 took a shine to Shirley, and would sometimes drop in for a visit. One day Shirley was cooking
410 spaghetti bolognese for dinner when the girl dropped in. Shirley, always happy to talk, was
411 paying scant attention to the task when she saw the girl's eyes go wide and her jaw drop.
412 Shirley had opened a tin of cat food instead of tomato soup and was about to tip it in.
413 She also helped at both children's schools, contributing to costumes for end-of-year musicals
414 and serving in the tuckshop at North Sydney Girls'. When Jenny was in year 12, Shirley
415 served a young Nicole Kidman, who even then had a coterie of acolytes. The Kidman family
416 lived nearby in Greenwich Road then.

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

432 Still keen to make more money, George bought two cabin cruisers from a cruiser hire
433 company on the Hawkesbury River that was upgrading, and restored them to rent out at
434 weekends. He called the business Glendowan Cruisers. The investment required a third
435 mortgage on the house. Yet despite several years of hard work, he only broke even and
436 eventually sold them. So instead of trying to run a business on the side, and as the children
437 had moved out of home to their own homes, he decided to sell 26 Bent Street and buy a doer-

upper and so capitalise on the investment through improving the property. So in 1989, George and Shirley sold the house for \$650,000 and bought 4 Kingslangley Road, Greenwich, a short distance away, for \$350,000. They spent a year improving it until George fell out of a tree while lopping a branch and snapped his leg in three places. Surgery, plates and pins, and months of recuperation dented his plans. Only 2 years after moving in, they sold 4 Kingslangley for only \$345,000 and bought 135 Greenwich Road for \$445,000. They turned that two-storey house into separate upstairs and downstairs dwellings. They lived upstairs, with views up the Lane Cover River, and rented the downstairs flat out to a tenant they got on very well with. The cats had come too. Unfortunately, Nyssa fell into the pool one day while George and Shirley were out and drowned.

During this period, first Jenny married John Hutchinson in 1988, and then Matthew married Linda Davies in 1991. Jenny had William in 1990; Linda had Robert in 1992, followed quickly by Jenny with Nicholas; then Linda had Timothy in 1994. Shirley doted on her grandsons, although the relationship of grandparents to grandsons tended to be hands off, perhaps because all of them were boisterous and three of the four were decidedly eccentric. In 1995, Shirley's brother John died of a heart attack at 64. He had divorced Jacqueline and remarried twice more, but his alcohol dependence and his unwillingness to seek help left him living on a disability pension (he had been severely injured as a child when he was shoved between the platform and a train at Wynyard Station) in a mobile home at The Entrance, largely estranged from family and friends. The funeral brought Shirley together with her last aunt, Auntie Eva, and husband Uncle Blue (Walter Moore), for the last time, but it also allowed the grandsons, then still little, to meet a great-great aunt.

Retirement

By 1998, feeling fed up with the hustle and bustle of city life and perhaps wanting to recapture their youth on Jervis Bay, they sold 135 Greenwich Road for \$790,000 and moved to Huskisson, where they lived in a rented house while their next house, at 12 Minerva Avenue, Vincentia (purchased for \$265,000), was extended by the original builder (and vendor). There followed several years of family Christmas gatherings in the house: George and Shirley upstairs and Matthew's and Jenny's families in purpose-built accommodation downstairs, and frequent trips to the beach for swimming, fishing and bushwalking. Alice Mae had moved with Shirley and George, and every evening she would take her rightful place on Shirley's pink-dressing-gowned lap. Alice Mae had been terrified of the noise of plastic bags since she was a kitten, but with age she eventually went deaf, and calmed down

471 considerably. She developed a thyroid problem, so at the age of 19, she underwent surgery at
472 the vet's and made a full recovery. She eventually reached 21 years, so Shirley and George
473 decided to celebrate this milestone occasion with a 21st birthday party. Various local
474 dignitaries were invited (neighbours, friends and veterinary staff), and Alice Mae attended
475 wearing a pearl necklace and got to help cut the cake, looking quite nonplussed.

476 During the 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s, Shirley and George went on several overseas trips:
477 a cruise around Greece and Turkey on a Russian cruise ship; a tour of England, Wales and
478 Ireland, focusing on the origins of the Woods, Maxwell, Martyn and Stevens families; the
479 World War 1 battlefields in France and Belgium to see where Glan had served; Hawaii on a
480 cruise; and Norfolk Island and Lord Howe Island. In addition, they toured Australia on
481 several occasions, visiting Kakadu, the Kimberley, the Victorian coast, the Murray River on a
482 paddle-steamer, Tasmania several times, and Glen Inness for the Celtic Festival. On the
483 Russian cruise ship in 1996, Shirley told the story of dinner one night, when a Russian
484 waitress dropped a stack of plates, which smashed on the deck. In the immediate silence that
485 followed, an Australian male voice called out, "Off to the gulag!" In France on 6 September
486 2000, Shirley and George, along with three others, were invited to participate in the laying of
487 a wreath on the tomb of France's Unknown Soldier at the Arc de Triomphe in Paris in front of
488 about 200 people. Shirley proudly wore Glan's WW1 medals.

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

496 By the early 2000s, Shirley had experienced a few transient ischaemic attacks (TIAs,
497 precursors to stroke), and George's physical health had declined remarkably on account of
498 war-service injuries, genetics and his bull-at-a-gate approach to everything, so they
499 reluctantly recognised the need to leave Jervis Bay and return to Sydney to be closer to
500 medical services and their descendants. They sold 12 Minerva in 2003 and bought 78
501 Lonsdale Avenue, Berowra Heights, not far from Jenny and John. This house, built at the end
502 of a long driveway, was another two-storey home, despite George's difficulty in climbing
503 stairs in the previous two houses. The block abutted the Muogamarra Nature Reserve, and
504 native animals were frequent visitors. Wallabies and kangaroos occasionally came to graze on

505 the back lawn. Turtles wandered out of the garden pond. A pair of pardalotes nested in the
506 garden bed below the verandah. And one day Shirley found a snake studying her through one
507 of the downstairs windows. The house had been built with a double garage on the ground
508 floor, which the previous owners converted into a sunroom. At around this time, Jenny had
509 been building up her personal trainer business and set up a private gym in the sunroom, which
510 Shirley and George dubbed the “ballroom” on account of its size. Jenny’s business grew to
511 the extent that she needed to open a larger gym at the Berowra Heights shops, which ran
512 successfully for several years until she moved with John to Singapore on assignment for IBM,
513 thus continuing a family tradition.

514 George had established the Radio Mechanics’ Association in the late 1980s and organised the
515 first of several reunions, in 1992 in Adelaide. Shirley helped in the preparations, and later
516 joined him for reunions in Sydney, Perth, Hobart and Brisbane. Pursuing his interest in family
517 history in association with contacts made at Jervis Bay, George organised a Cornish Cultural
518 Celebration in Nowra in 2008 with the Southern Sons of Cornwall, a family history group
519 through which Shirley was able to trace her Martyn family history.

520 **The long good-bye**

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

532 In 2007, George and Shirley sold 78 Lonsdale Avenue and bought 16 Wymah Crescent, only a
533 kilometre away. This time, the house had a single level and had been built on a level block.
534 They engaged an architect to draw up plans to extend the house, and their builder effectively
535 doubled the size, resulting in a house in which the original rectangular structure provided
536 kitchen, lounge–dining room, bedrooms and bathroom; a new block provided a new laundry,
537 a second bathroom, a sewing room, an office and a garage; and an airy atrium joined the two.

George had intended to develop the garden but he began suffering breathlessness every time he walked a few steps, and had to stop. The diagnosis was right heart failure, which could have been caused by his smoking during his naval service. Unable to work physically and unwilling to stop, he joined a campaign to create a memorial to Australia's Boer War veterans in Canberra. Then one day in early 2010 gathering signatures at the local shopping centre, he caught pneumonia and had to go to hospital. This was the start of his final decline, during which he repeatedly discharged himself from hospital each time he was admitted with something else (including myelodysplasia, prostate cancer, spleen cancer and anaemia) as the hospital didn't run according to his rules. But Shirley was now unable to look after him at home. Jenny spent weeks organising home help services, to which they were entitled for free through the Department of Veterans' Affairs, but too proud to accept help (or, in Shirley's case, unable to see the need), they sacked all of the services except a cleaner. Things only got worse. Shirley entered the "sundowning" phase of dementia, and every evening (hence the name) would ring either Matthew or Jenny in tears, convinced that George was trying to kill her. Poor George couldn't get out of his chair without help, so he couldn't do anything of the sort, even if he had wanted to. Shirley would barricade herself in her bedroom every night with the telephone, securing the door with a draught excluder, and call in desperation. Every evening, Matthew or Jenny had to talk her down from her anxiety, and the next day Shirley would have no recollection of the previous evening's events. Several times, George fell over during the night on his way to the toilet. Instead of helping him up, Shirley would step over him on her way to the toilet, and would then place a blanket over him. By morning he was cold and in pain. One time he was able to reach the phone after hauling himself over the floor and called Jenny (not the ambulance!) at about 5:00 a.m., and Jenny and John had to race there and help him up. But neither Shirley nor George would admit defeat. Shirley had always kept house for George, and continued cooking his meals, but her failing memory reduced the menu to one item: steamed chicken, steamed broccoli and boiled potato every night. Understandably frustrated at having the same bland food every night (and unable to taste it on account of his medication), George got increasingly cranky, which triggered Shirley's daily paranoia. Shirley simply couldn't understand why George didn't want the food she so lovingly cooked every day. But every morning was a new day for Shirley, and she would drive to the shops (sometimes several times each day) and buy the same groceries. One day she argued with the supermarket cashier that she had paid, when she clearly hadn't, but the manager gracefully let her have the

572 groceries, probably recognising her declining state. Despite finally being diagnosed with
573 “mild cognitive impairment”, Shirley continued to drive to the shops or to Jenny’s house
574 every day (sometimes making up her own road rules), so Jenny took steps to have her licence
575 revoked. Although she handed over her licence at the RTA and received an official RTA
576 identification card in return, Shirley had by the following day fabricated a story to fill in the
577 blank in her memory, that the geriatrician had snatched her licence out of her hand and cut it
578 up in front of her. She kept driving, despite no longer having a licence. George facilitated this
579 by hiding the car keys so Jenny couldn’t take them, as he was dependent on Shirley and was
580 unwilling to relinquish control to the health services. Eventually Jenny took the keys and sold
581 the car locally. The fabrication of stories continued. Shirley had been telling a funny story one
582 Sunday during afternoon tea and fell over while acting it out. She grazed her cheek, and
583 Matthew cleaned and dressed it. The following day, she had become convinced that she had
584 fallen out of the car at the shops, and the pharmacist had dressed the wound.
585 By now, George was reliant on about seven medications to be administered four times a day.
586 The pharmacy supplied them in a 4 × 7 pack clearly marked with day of the week and the
587 time of day. It should have been straightforward, but as George was barely mobile, he kept
588 the medication within easy reach. Unable to remember this, Shirley would put it away in a
589 cupboard to keep the house looking tidy, so George went without. Being a pragmatist, he hit
590 on the clever idea of taking them all at once every day. Not surprisingly, this didn’t work.
591 Following a few weeks in an assisted living home in Hornsby for respite care under the
592 supervision of nurses, Shirley and George returned home to the same shambles, and in only 5
593 days, George’s health had declined alarmingly. Matthew had him taken by ambulance to the
594 Adventist Hospital in Wahroonga, where the triage nurse declared that there was nothing
595 wrong and he should go home. So Matthew drove him to Hornsby Hospital, where he was
596 diagnosed as having had a heart attack and was kept for a month to stabilise his condition.
597 During that period, Jenny frantically tried to find aged care accommodation, and by chance
598 found places at a newly opened aged care home in Wahroonga. Both Shirley and George were
599 moved in, unwillingly of course. George, being fully in control of his faculties, understood
600 the need but continued to fight for his independence. Shirley went on the understanding that it
601 was her job to “look after” George. They moved in in April 2011. By December, George’s
602 health was perilous, and he died on 28 December. Shirley stayed another 7 years.
603 After refusing to discuss the need for months, George eventually agreed to sell the house, and
604 Matthew and Jenny handled the sale. The house sold on 14 December 2011 for \$600,000. The
605 proceeds were invested and proved able, supplemented with a DVA and later war widow’s

606 pension, to cover the costs of the nursing home for the next 7 years, even slightly gaining
607 value over time. George's strategy of buying cheap, improving the property and selling at a
608 profit proved successful. He did manage to create enough capital for their retirement.
609 During her stay, Shirley's health declined very slowly, and she remained active and mobile
610 into her last year, even as her memory faded. The geriatrician visited a few times, and was
611 shocked one day a couple of years after George's death when Shirley asked, "Where's
612 George?" This was the first time that the geriatrician had seen what the family had been
613 reporting for several years, as without even meaning to, Shirley masked the obvious signs of
614 dementia. Shirley became a valued resident, loved by many of the staff and residents. On
615 account of not having Alzheimer's disease, her personality never changed. She remained
616 happy and friendly and willing to help. She continued to knit, making squares for assembly
617 into blankets for orphans in Africa; she set the tables in the dining room; she made her own
618 bed. All of these skills slowly faded, along with most of her vocabulary, cognition and self-
619 care skills. Having always been independent, and obsessively maintaining that only her way
620 of doing anything was the right way, Shirley would fight the nurses who tried to help her the
621 "wrong way". Only one nurse was able to wash her (apparently knowing the right way). Her
622 family continued to visit her weekly. She always recognised them, although she could no
623 longer name anyone, and even 3 months before her death, when viewing photos of herself as a
624 child, recognised herself at the age of about 12 months, saying, "That's me!"
625 But in early July 2018, her appetite failed and she slowly faded away, slipping into a coma.
626 She died on 10 July at the age of 89 years.