

Early Days

It was the year 1946 and Chic and I had planned our wedding for 7 September.

We did not realize how incredibly hard it would be to find a place to rent. If you had key money, you had a chance, but that was out of the question for us. Finally, I was thrilled to be offered a flat, by a Solicitor. This man's office was in the same building as the Architect, for whom I worked as a Secretary. However, just a few days before the wedding, I was horrified to discover that this slimy creature expected very personal favours instead of key money. I couldn't bring myself to upset Chic so close to the wedding, so I told him that this detestable person's parents were coming up from Victoria and he had to let them have the flat for the time being.

Mum and Dad arranged a beautiful wedding for us. We were married in the Presbyterian Church at Ashfield by Robert John Henry McGowan, Minister.

The Reception was held at "Jonroe", a sister to the very popular, and larger, "Amory" in Ashfield.

I had three bridesmaids, Val Johnson, my best friend from school years, Lois Pitman, a neighbour and my young sister Marie, thirteen years old. The first two had glorious, bright auburn hair and Marie was blond. They all looked lovely in long blue dresses, with a fitted bodice and flowing skirts over taffeta slips.

Fred Wright was Chic's Best Man and Colin Smith, his Groomsman and all looked great in their matching dark suits, white shirts, white bowties and white gloves. Chic had trouble getting his suit, but finally one of his Uncles gave him some extra clothing coupons.

My dress was heavy ivory satin with a yoke of net, embroidered with rosettes and seed pearls. The skirt had an extra overlay of satin with a wide frill about knee length and the back a beautiful train. The embroidered veil was also beautiful. I was extremely fortunate to acquire this dress with veil through a friend for the ridiculous price of fifteen pounds. Evidently, the girl who had it made, changed her mind about the marriage and left it with the dressmaker to sell.

I had decided on cream roses, with a few orchids for my bouquet and talisman roses for the bridesmaid's bouquets, but they were not available when the time came. I had white hyacinths with orchids and the bridesmaids had hyacinths in several pastel colours and all with wide trailing ribbons.

The reception went off beautifully, with delicious food and excellent entertainment.

Later, I changed into my “going away outfit” and everyone joined hands to the tune of “Auld Lang Syne” in the time-honoured tradition, as we went round the circle, kissing and hugging our relatives and friends.

We had a wonderful honeymoon at Katoomba in the Blue Mountains, staying at a place called “Homesdale”. Our newly-married state was revealed to all, when a heap of confetti flew out of Chic’s pocket, as he removed his wallet.

A young neighbour of Chic’s was married on the same day as us and their honeymoon destination was a closely guarded secret. You can imagine our surprise, when they arrived, shortly after us at “Homesdale”. It worked out beautifully, as they had a car and often asked us to go with them on sight seeing expeditions. They proved to be a lovely couple and great company.

The weather was cool and beautiful and Chic and I went for long walks, often joined by a group of people. Everyone in the home was so friendly and happy, just a great bunch of people.

By checking the daily papers, we came back to the only accommodation available, a room in an old disreputable hotel in Balmain. I can see it now, just an old uncomfortable bed, old chest of drawers and small wardrobe, with torn lino on the floor. There were no washing facilities available, so I used to rinse things out by hand in the old chipped bath that no one used. Then, I’d hang them on a line above our bed in the room.

We couldn’t afford to eat out, as Chic only earned four pounds, five shillings (\$8.50) and I earned three pounds five shillings (\$6.50). I can even remember setting jelly and custard, etc. on a tray in water, as of course we had no fridge. I cooked on a tiny metho stove, one thing at a time and reheated each saucepan before serving.

Being young and hopeful, we weren’t upset over the arrangements and always optimistic, we expected to find something better soon. Besides, we were away from the place five days working and then visiting family and friends on the weekend. We didn’t own a vehicle, but there was plenty of public transport around Sydney.

In the meantime, I met a friend, whom I used to help in her milkbar, after work, sometimes, before I was married. She owned a house that was being repainted and said we could move in, in a couple of weeks.

So, after six weeks in the Hotel room, we moved to Nicky’s house. We thought it was gorgeous when we saw it, so clean with its fresh coat of paint. There were three bedrooms, living room, kitchen, bathroom and a laundry with a fuel copper. We had to light it for a bath and bucket it into the bathroom. This was luxury indeed. We couldn’t believe our luck, to have a whole house to ourselves, even though it was in Surry Hills in a bad slum area of Sydney. There were constant arguments, physical as well. It was commonplace to see a man dragging his wife along the street, sometimes by the hair, or

chasing her down the street swearing horribly. We kept to ourselves and I learnt not to look out when I heard a commotion, as people like that wouldn't tolerate any interference.

However, our privacy was short-lived. A few weeks later, arriving home, we were surprised to see a family outside, awaiting our return. We were very shocked when the father produced a form from some Government Department, stating that they could legally share our place, as we only needed one bedroom. This proved to be true, but it was the first we'd heard of "squatters", as they were called.

Mum, Dad and three sons settled with us. There proved to be one problem, as the father was a rum addict and ended up drunk each night, although never became nasty. The Mother was a barmaid, who usually worked the late afternoon shift. She used to leave the food for the boys and I used to cook it for them. I must admit they were nice teenage lads, very polite and appreciative, so I didn't mind. However, Chic started to get very annoyed when Mum used to come home later, drop into a chair and let me serve her, too. I begged him not to say anything, as I wanted peace at any price and besides she used to look so tired, I felt sorry for her. Meanwhile Dad would be squaffing his rum and I expect ate something later. He was a very harmless, kind man really. After washing up, we'd retire to our room and read.

The final straw came one day when Chic had to drag Dad away from the copper. Chic had lit the copper for all our baths and Dad was so drunk, he'd fallen with his head practically in the firebox. His hair was singed. He must have attempted to put more wood in the fire.

Then I discovered I was pregnant, so we decided we must move as soon as possible.

A mate of Chic's from work said his sister, Jean, had a nice room for rent. We were impressed when we saw it, as it had a nice closed-in patio outside the room. It was quite a nice brick home in the suburb of Petersham. Of course I would have to share the kitchen and facilities.

We said goodbye to our squatter family and moved in. Jean and husband, Bert had one child, Margaret. She was frightfully spoilt and used to march into our room and expect to do anything she liked. When reprimanded, she'd say "I'll tell my Mummy you hit me".

As time went on, I came to dislike Jean, more than anyone I ever knew, before or since. She used to constantly "put down" her big kindly husband. How he stood it, I'll never know. Also, she constantly told me how agonizing labour was, in excruciating detail. She said there was no way she'd ever have another one. Also, she was the meanest person I'd ever met, especially with food and kept nagging me to be more economical, although it was none of her business. I remember once, she showed me a cheap way to make soup. It was revolting, just a bowl of brown water- yuk! She was horrified when I

made a stew, as she said it used too much gas to cook and of course I'd put too many veges in it. At times I longed to be back with my "squatters".

As Chic was a painter, Jean asked him if he would paint the room we had. He did so and it looked lovely. The ceiling, being plaster was ornamental, with shells, etc, which he picked out in blue. I bought some pretty blue material for curtains for the glass door and bedspread and was happy with the result.

At this point, I only had a week to go for my baby, due 16th June. On 11th June, this mean creature said she needed the room for her Mother. We had to move to Chic's parents' place 12th June and baby Sandra Lee was born 13th June.

Sandra was very tiny, only 5 ½ lbs, but I was allowed home before she regained her birth weight. She was a pretty little thing, very fair skin, very little hair, later very blonde with hazel eyes. Being small, she had a lot of trouble with wind. I had plenty of milk, so had no trouble feeding her myself. She wasn't too bad by day, but nights were bad. We had her in a pram beside our bed and would take turns rocking her to sleep because we didn't want to disturb Chic's Mum and Dad and three sisters. Chic's Mum bought a dummy, which Sandra just rejected and would never take. However, when Sandra was three months old, she changed into a really good baby.

We tried hard to get a place of our own, without success. We felt bad about living with Chic's family, as a baby is not a peaceful addition to a household.

Later on, we moved round to my Mum's place for a while, as a couple of my brothers were working away from home, so there was a bit more room, but we still felt guilty.

Then, when Sandra was nine months old, we decided to take a drastic step. A man Chic had known for years, around the corner from his place, was moving to Greenwell Point with his family. Greenwell Point was a small fishing village, ten miles from Nowra. Bill had a fair sized truck and would be having several trips down and would take us on one of them.

We bought an Army tent from a Disposals Store and packed up the bare necessities and off we went. It turned out to be the best thing we'd ever done. It was wonderful being near the sea. We revelled in the fresh sea breezes and felt free at last.

At first, Chic found some maintenance work at the Hotel, which was opposite the Camping Area. He met a Mr. Cruikshanks, who offered him a house for rent, which we snapped up. Mr. and Mrs. Cruikshanks were wonderful friends and we stayed there, almost eight years and were very happy.

Cruikshanks home was right beside the sea and we were directly behind them. Behind us were three cabins, which ended up with permies as well. Cruikshanks owned them all. In no time we were all good friends.

It was such a healthy life. We had our own chooks, so had fresh eggs. I had a vegetable garden and Mr. Worner came down a couple of times a week with any produce I didn't have, so we always had plenty of fresh vegies. One of the Wilsons came down twice a week with freshly caught fish and I walked up the hill to Mrs. Green's for fresh milk and cream. The milk was so creamy, that left in the 'fridge overnight, you could spoon off a small dish of cream if desired.

Our second daughter, Sheryl Anne, was born 1st November, 1948, weighing 7 lbs 4 oz. Unlike Sandra, she had quite a bit of dark brown hair and later her eyes became a lovely dark brown. She was an exceptionally good baby and I was able to feed her also. Sheryl was born on Melbourne Cup Day and I actually won the hospital sweep with Rainbird and the Xmas cake raffle.

Before we left the hospital, the news came through of the birth of Prince Charles.

A strange and very disturbing incident occurred the second week I was in hospital. As it was feedtime, the Nurse had gone to the Nursery for my baby. In those days, you didn't have your baby in the room beside you, as they wanted you to have plenty of rest. Also you were usually in hospital for a fortnight. Time went on and I wondered what the delay was. I found out later what had happened. Evidently, Sheryl wasn't in her cot and they finally found her with one of the older Sisters in the Nurses' quarters. This Sister was dressed ready to go out, with Sheryl tightly wrapped in a rug. As well she had an empty needle in one hand. It was thought that maybe this Sister intended to inject Sheryl with a mild drug to make her sleep. This poor woman seemed in a daze and couldn't explain her actions. She was taken to the main hospital where she had a complete breakdown. We didn't dare think about what might have happened if Sheryl hadn't been found in time. As it was, Sheryl was thoroughly checked over and no harm had been done.

My fertile imagination conjured up a story that this poor soul had lost a baby many years before and that Sheryl greatly resembled her lost child. Of course, I never found out the real story.

A couple of days after I was home from the hospital, I had a terrible fright. On checking Sheryl in her bassinet, to my utter horror, there was a massive spider on her cheek. It was so big, it covered the whole of her cheek. Fortunately, Chic was there and plucked it off in an instant and evidently it hadn't bitten her. She didn't even wake up.

When Sheryl was nine months old, I was rushed to hospital in Nowra with what seemed to be a clear case of appendicitis. On operating, it was found that a cyst had burst on my right ovary, so they removed same and also the appendix, which they said was chronic. I was in hospital a couple of weeks. What a dreadful place it was, very old, overcrowded, understaffed and quite grubby. My Doctor was wonderful, though and sat with me all night after the operation. Dr. Gillespie wrote me out a list of times I was to have certain injections and/or medication and ask for them myself. After the first two days, I was

removed to the verandah and I can remember my Doctor and visitors, crunching through some sugar that had been spilt, until the day I left. The Doctor told me the place was to be condemned and not long after, it was demolished.

Amazingly, I made a good recovery and no sign of an infection, whereas to-day with our modern pristine hospitals, it is incredible how many people go home with infections. My neighbour has picked up Golden Staph, just having an operation on her toenails (March 2001).

While in hospital a good friend looked after Sandra and Sheryl and I came home to a spotless home, the work of another friend.

Mr. and Mrs. Cruikshanks went away fairly often for weekends and we always looked after their little fox terrier at such times. The first time, I was quite upset, as Sneezy hobbled around on one leg, looking sad. We thought he must have hurt himself or had something in the foot, but couldn't find a thing wrong. However, when he heard his people's car, Sneezy raced in to their place, to our amazement, without a sign of a limp. Mrs. Cruikshanks apologized for not telling us, that he always put on an act of some kind, when they left him, looking for sympathy, the cunning little creature.

Every now and again, Mr. & Mrs. Cruikshanks would take us all to Sydney with them, to visit our parents, which was great. Mum & Ben came down by train a couple of times and loved it there.

At one stage, Chic worked at the Horlicks Milk Factory and there was a lot of night work involved, as the massive vats had to be cleaned at night. Chic would have to be covered from head to foot in snow white protective clothing and get right down inside the vat and scrub it thoroughly. The malted milk used to set hard on the sides. What a revolting job! It didn't put Chic off malted milk, which he loved forever.

I must have been romantic in those days, as I would always write a poem for Chic to read, when he came home in the early hours of the morning.

It wasn't too long after, that Chic was able to go back to his trade. His Boss, Jim Carr and wife, Belle and family were wonderful people and became lifelong friends. We often spent weekends at their lovely home in Nowra and our little girls would be horribly spoilt by their older children. They had two daughters and a son and sadly had lost a seven year old son with tetanus. Accordingly, if one of my girls had a scratch as big as a pin's head, Belle would rush them in and bathe it with antiseptic.

When Sheryl was a baby, Chic bought a motor bike and sidecar, as we couldn't afford a car. The sidecar was great, with two seats. Little Sandra sat opposite me on one and I nursed Sheryl on the other. We went everywhere in it and caused a stir, by even arriving at the Church, for Joyce Carr's wedding, in the contraption.

Of course, as the family grew, we traded it in on an old Dodge car, which we thought was marvellous. It was a big, black, square thing, with heaps of room for four kids to sit in the back comfortably.

Life went on happily, with heaps of friends and I even played tennis, which was a lot of fun, because it wasn't serious and we could take our kids with us.

Then, February 4, 1952, Karen Joy was born, so now we had three daughters. Karen was very fair and as her hair grew, it was platinum and with blue eyes, she looked very Danish. She was another good baby and I was able to feed her also.

Our three-bedroomed house was ideal for children, with its wide enclosed verandah on two sides. They could play out there with all their toys, especially in rainy weather and I knew they were safe. I just had to look out one of the bedroom windows to check on them. In any case, the ample yard was fully fenced, another plus. There was a Cossi-stove in the Lounge and a large fuel copper in the laundry.

Mr. & Mrs. Cruikshanks suffered a tragic loss when their lovely son was killed, when the "Herald" plane went down. He left behind a young wife, who was eight months pregnant and their four year old daughter, Dutsie, who used to play with our kids, when she visited her grandma. A baby girl was born a couple of weeks later, with a rye neck. An operation fixed the problem, whereas years ago, nothing could be done. Aside from knitting a seven piece Royal layette, there was no way I could help,. We were all terribly sad.

We used to walk along the water's edge most days, about fifteen minutes walk, up to the Post Office and little shop. On the way back, we usually stopped for a chat with our dear old friends, the Worners and more often than not have a cuppa. They were a wonderful old couple, Nell and Ned and Ned's brother Jack, lived with them also. I always remember, after I came home from the hospital with Karen, Nell and Ned arrived with a special gift. It was a brand new Wringer, to put between the tubs. The dear souls thought I needed it for the nappies. After wringing by hand, I thought it was the ultimate treasure. How could you ever forget friends like that?

Once a week, we went to Nowra in the 'bus and that was our big day out. The kids thought it was wonderful having lunch in a café. Nell would often come with me and was a big help. She just loved children and it was sad that she'd never had any of her own.

One weekend, we had a visit from the Carr family. As the day went on, Chic wasn't feeling the best and then his face started to swell, so of course, we all thought he had the mumps. After our friends left, Chic realized his whole body was swollen. One of our neighbours, Mr. Odell, took him straight in to the Doctor. Chic was quite shocked, when the Doctor rubbed his hands together and said "Oh great-an allergy, I love allergies". The Doctor said, if he'd left it any longer, his throat would have swollen and he could

have died. They traced the allergy to insulwool. In the new home he was painting, there was some insulwool lying around, so Chic moved it out of the way and evidently some minute strands of it had found their way under his skin. He made sure never to touch the stuff again on any job.

At one time, a delightful Dutch family, John and Hetty and three young sons, came to live in the cabin behind us. Every Sunday morning, anyone in the cabins was invited for coffee and cake and more important, great conversation. Those three lovely boys learnt to speak English incredibly fast. John worked very hard, milkman, early mornings and plumber all day. In no time they'd saved enough for a block of land up near the shop, where later, they built a nice home.

After they left the cabin, Edna and Ron Cater, with two children, Ross and Sue, moved in. Sue and Ross became good friends with Sandra and Sheryl, as they were much the same ages. Edna and I kept in touch many years, until she passed away in 1996.

I met a lovely young couple, Jennie and Ray Wheeler, who lived in the main street of Greenwell Point. They had a little boy, with blue eyes and golden curls, just adorable. We became firm friends and kept in constant touch over the years and incredibly both now live in Bundaberg, not far apart. I can walk to her place in fifteen minutes.

Sandra started school there and loved it. When Sheryl was four years old, the Headmaster said she could stay one day and see how she went, as she was longing to go. She loved it also.

It was a delightful little school with lovely kind teachers, very different from some of Chic's and mine. Chic and I were very involved with the Parents' and Citizens' Association and I often helped with fund raising. I must have made a million pikelets over the years there. The men did clean-up jobs and repairs and of course Chic did various repaints. Funds were always scarce. When you come to think about it, things haven't changed much have they?

My fourth daughter, Janice Gay was born 7th November, 1953. Jan's hair was fair for a while and became dark later. She had lovely golden-brown eyes.

When Sandra was seven, I had the four girls and looking back they were very good and didn't seem to be much trouble and very rarely needed to take any of them to a Doctor. Little did we know then, that nine years after Jan was born incredibly we would have a son, Brett Murray, to everyone's joy.

The school used to have quite a few concerts and fancy dress turnouts and I particularly remember Sandra being a little fairy and another time Little Bo-Peep and Sheryl was a little painter, with overalls made out of a pair of Chick's old overalls, complete with paint. Another time, she was a little tramp, with a little hat complete with corks. All the children looked forward to these occasions, as we managed to get some good local talent

for the concerts. Our most memorable performer was Jimmy Little, who was only a young lad at the time. We took him home to stay the night and the next morning he played and sang on our front verandah. Our close neighbours gathered round to listen. We all thought he was wonderful and none of us were to know he would become famous later on. Chic met him years later and he wrote a message to our four girls.

Then the year of 1955 was a bad one for us, with shortage of work in Nowra and surrounding districts. Then in August, the most dreadful event of all, the tragic death of my beloved Mother, yet young, only fifty-five, who was loved and respected by all.

The last week of the year was the only bright spot in it, an idyllic camping holiday to Tabourie Lakes. That week, Chic and I were determined to toss our worries aside and give our girls a good time.

We spent most of our time on the beach, as the weather was glorious. It was so peaceful, with that delightful free feeling one gets when wandering barefoot along golden sand, with perhaps now and again, a cheeky little wave, lapping around one's ankles. Meanwhile, the kids, in and out of the water, like playful little puppies, with the water glistening on their little brown bodies.

We found many beautiful shells there and other material from which Chic later made unusual, pretty ornaments, set on driftwood.

In between, we lazed and read and went for a trip to Milton, Ulladulla, Bateman's Bay and Pebbly Beach. The kids were fascinated because we had to cross the Bay in a punt, although we had to wait an hour for our turn.

The week passed all too swiftly and back we were to the Point and the usual worries.

After spending the next week looking for work, we decided on impulse to buy the South Coast Times. The first job in it sounded just the job for Chic. However, this job was at Bulli, so we decided there and then to go down there that very day and apply for the job. If Chic was accepted, we would look around the Camping Area and see how things were.

Chic got the job. Mr. Fred Smith, his new employer, proved to be a very pleasant man and later proved a wonderful help on several occasions. He also paid very good wages, which gave us the chance we needed to get back on our feet, financially.

We were agreeably surprised by the Camping Area at Bulli, even a laundry there, so we decided to come back with the old tent of Spackmans' and give it a trial for a couple of weeks. If we found everything was alright, we would give up the house at the Point, sell what we could and buy a nice new tent with it. Gordon Quilty lent us his trailer.

We loved the place and the carefree life so much, that after the first week, we decided to give all up and live this way permanently.

Then started the tedious job of moving, trying to sell goods and decide which to keep in the tent and which to store away at various relatives.

As time went on, I realized I must give up far more and live with just the barest sticks of furniture and essentials and certainly give up any fripperies dear to a woman's heart.

We were obliged to buy our new tent sooner than we wished, as the old one started to tear, which worried us, as it was only on loan. Mr. Smith kindly paid Chic his wages a couple of days early and gave him the day off to go to Sydney to purchase the tent.

It was a frightful day with heavy rain and our old car leaked like a sieve. We arrived back to find a lot of our goods wet, as the roof of the old tent also leaked.

As the rain had greatly eased, we decided to put the new tent up straight away and move into it that evening. We thought it was marvellous.

Dad came up by train, one Thursday, for a visit and was quite pleased with the place and our set-up.

Then came rain, rain and more rain. We didn't get a drop of water in the tent, but it was very messy around it.

Meanwhile, the girls had started school at Waiora Public School, about ten minutes walk. It was a nice new school, even had free milk and the girls were very happy.

After a lovely week, the rain came again, but this time it was in earnest and one Friday night in particular, we had a southerly gale with the rain. How the tent rocked and the rain poured in the south side. We sat up most of the night, but the kids slept through the lot.

The next morning, the place was in a disgusting state, with mud and more mud, the floor coverings were ruined and each time you walked you went squelch, squelch. We decided it would be impossible to stay in it. We moved camp the next day to a dry spot, which was situated on a ledge, overlooking the other side of the beach.

As usual, we had to do everything the hard way, as our old car had broken down at Albion Park. We were on our way to the Point, for our last load of goods and to say our final goodbyes. Also, we were expected at Worner's place for tea. Instead, we had to go back to Bulli on the train. We were all very disappointed.

Actually, we were fortunate enough to have a few trailer loads brought down to our new spot, by our friends Shirley and Joe, who lived in a caravan there.

I loved this new spot even more. We had a glorious view, even from inside the tent. You could see right out to sea, looking across the pine-fringed beach, with the mountains on one side, their greenness, broken only by a curl of smoke, denoting a camper, hidden in a niche.

At night, you could see the cars, travelling down Bulli Pass, looking like twinkling stars in an ever-moving line and also the Kiosk, right up on the Mountain lookout.

We had quite a bit of rain after we moved, but none came in and no clothes were ruined with mildew. Although we had further to walk to the amenities, it was so lovely and so private, we thought it was worth it. I loved hearing the sea roar, day and night.

As at February 18, 1956, we still had goods in the trailer, packed ready to take to my brother's place. Lin and Norma had kindly offered to look after a good load of stuff, also to buy the polisher and other furniture from us. Nell Worner was looking after my glory chest, containing all my cut glass, silver, ornaments, etc., mostly wedding presents.

At this point, we'd been at Bulli for six weeks and despite the various hardships involved living this way in a twelve by twelve tent with four children, we were still glad we'd made the decision. It was a wonderfully healthy life for the kids, who spent every spare moment on the beach. After constant usage, we had our own pathway from the ledge down to the beach.

I met a lady, Joan Ferman, who often walked on the beach with her two young sons, Paul and Christopher, with similar ages to Sandra and Sheryl. We became firm friends and we still correspond to this day, about forty-four years later. Sometimes, Joan came up to my van for a cuppa and I often had one with her, as I had to pass her place to walk to the shops. She was an ex-nursing sister from England, who also had worked at the Waterfall Sanatorium, in the Blue Mountains, for tuberculosis cases, until it closed down, happily for lack of patients. Bill Ferman was a very nice chap, very athletic, running and swimming daily on the beach, but died of cancer, many years ago.

One day we had a very frightening experience, involving Sandra and Sheryl. At the time, I was building sandcastles with the two little ones, Chic was relaxing nearby and Sandra and Sheryl were playing in the water on a large tube, which they often did. Then Chic, checking on the girls, realized to his horror that they were way out on the tube and moving fast. I've never seen him move so fast. He managed to bring them back safely, but was on the point of collapse by the time he reached the sand. It was terrible, watching and there wasn't another soul on the beach who could have helped.

We received a letter from Chic's sister, May, saying that his Mum and Dad had sold their home and moving to Queensland and might even be gone before our visit, planned for February 19. May was intending to stay with sister, Nellie, but Vida was already in Queensland with sister, Thelma.

A more terrible day than 19th would be hard to imagine. There was torrential rain, made worse by a southerly gale. It always seems miraculous that a pitifully weak structure, like a tent can withstand such rain.

The sea was like a mighty bubbling cauldron. The giant waves roared in and smashed against the rocks, sending up a snowy spray many feet into the air. Living here, I had learnt to love the sea in all her moods, but I'd never seen her so savage as that day. Now and again, a peculiar radiance touched the foam lashed waves, giving them a glowing iridescent quality. The mountains in the background were completely invisible. The entire vista was just slanting sheets of rain and miles of turbulent water, as far as the eye could see. We had to keep moving things, as the force of the wind was forcing the rain through the walls of the tent.

The rain eased finally at 4pm and people began appearing here and there, the children eagerly bounding ahead. A typical beachcomber wended his way, slowly, head down, eyes intent, while here and there, a practical character collected stray wood and coal, washed in by the mighty waves.

We decided to leave our retreat and take a walk in the lovely rain-freshened air. We discovered the other part of the Camping Area in a deplorable state, so realized we were in the best spot. We just got back in time for the rain to renew its onslaught.

The next day dawned as grey as ever, but the rain vanished about 11am and the sun actually appeared, giving us a chance to dry everything off.

The humidity in the afternoon was frightful, so the girls went in for a swim as soon as they came home from school and I joined them for a paddle amongst the waves, ever so gentle now after their violence of the day before. When Chic came home, he took them all round to the Baths for a swim.

The evening was lovely, but as soon as we were ready for bed, down came the rain once more.

The floods around Windsor were dreadful and also in many northern towns. At the time the floods around Sydney were reputed to be the worst on record.

A few weeks later, it was still raining, with only a couple of fine days in between. At least the intensity of the wind gradually eased, so that things could be kept reasonably dry.

Chic did a wonderful job on our poor mildewed tent, by scrubbing it with Marvel-Linn. It looked great, but we had to use so much of the product, it cost us over a pound. Sadly, the mildew returned, so Chic was thinking of trying out some waterproof paint, but would try the straps first.

We had now been living in the tent for ten weeks and about this time we watched a dramatic surf-boat rescue. The Surf Club's brand new boat was swamped and the crew were vainly trying to keep it afloat. Then another surf-boat came around and by the aid of ropes, etc., gradually managed to bring her safely ashore, very luckily undamaged.

Finally, we managed our trip to Sydney and took a trailer load of unnecessary goods to leave at Norma and Lin's place. What a day it was! We left home quite early, but soon after had trouble with the fan belt slipping. When we got as far as Bald Hill, the steepest slope of the journey, the old bomb slipped a gear, with the heavily loaded trailer on, so back we slid and the trailer jackknifed and cracked the main wooden connection to the trailer. Luckily it didn't break right off. Chic tied rope around it very tightly and we hoped for the best. We placed many rocks under the wheels and off we crawled painfully, just holding our breath until we gained the top. Had we slipped again it would have been disastrous. We were very fortunate indeed as there was no other traffic at the time. Of course, the rest of the journey was nerve racking, as we didn't know whether the ropes would hold for too long.

When we reached Cabramatta, we couldn't find the place. It seemed that nobody had ever heard of Laurel Street, as it was a new street. After an age, we finally found the place. Norma and Lin had given us up for lost and had begun their dinner but we still had a lovely meal.

On unloading the goods later, we found only two pictures broken, which wasn't bad under the circumstances.

A couple of hours later, we went on to Dad's place and stayed for tea and he gave us a good kitchen table and a marble top one, which proved very useful. Also Dad gave us two large poles, which were great for our front awning.

We went round the corner to see Chic's family and found the place completely deserted and open. They had gone to Queensland just a week before. We had a letter later to say they'd bought a nice little house at Gympie and were staying at Thelma's until the deal was settled. Also they'd left some goods for us, over at Watson's place. What a pity we hadn't known that day, while we had the trailer.

Surprisingly, we had a wonderful run home, no trouble at all, arriving home about 10pm.

Everyone was well, but Karen and Jan had horrible sores all over their legs from paspalum, which was very plentiful at the time. Evidently it is the ergot in the plant which causes the problem. I cleared them up with ointment from the Chemist, but they leave dreadful red marks, which are quite disfiguring.

Nell O'Donnel lived in a tent, near the kiosk, with five children and another expected shortly, was provided with a home, after articles were written about her in several papers.

Next, we were faced with Menzies' Horror Budget, which put us back in our savings, quite a bit.

Our old rattletrap was in trouble again, new fan belt needed and the battery very poor, wouldn't hold a charge for long.

On Saturday afternoon, we went for a long walk, right around to the disused coal wharf. The next day, despite the doubtful weather, we decided to do a tour of the beaches. We visited Corrimal Beach and checked out the Camping Area, which was real "Happy Valley" I never saw such a disreputable lot of hovels in my life and wouldn't like to camp there.

Woonona Beach was very nice and clean, with extremely long baths.

Next, on to Thirroul, which we found a lovely place. It had a delightful Olympic Pool, which the kids thought marvelous and a very long beach. We decided to go back there for a picnic the first fine Sunday.

It was now the middle of April and Chic was cutting down his smoking, as tobacco had gone up once more. We were saving up in earnest for our big truck, fifty pounds already.

We finally managed the trip to Greenwell Point and everything went wonderfully well. We found that Mrs. Gibson had sold most of our things.

We visited Carrs in Nowra and picked up our wireless, which had only cost three pounds five shillings to fix. All was well with the family, except that Rosemary had broken her engagement. On calling at Baker's place, we found that poor Nell was still in hospital with cancer.

Next, we visited Spackmans, then Morleys, who were out, Gibsons, Wildchuts and finally Worners for tea, where we had an enjoyable meal. Then to Edna's, Blackers and Skinners. Everyone was well and it was great to see all our wonderful friends again.

We met Gordon Quilty on our way to the Point and arranged for him to pick up his trailer. Beryl came with him the following Friday and we had a good afternoon together.

It was 11pm when we arrived back at Bulli, thoroughly exhausted, but happy with the day.

Our first real visitors came the next weekend, on Easter Sunday, Joan and Jack Baker, Mr. and Mrs. Payne and little Peter. We had an enjoyable day and we all picnicked outside, as they had brought all their food, in spite of me telling them not to bring anything. We arranged to visit them April 29 for the day at Earlwood, Joan's new home.

I had a letter from Nell Worner to say that Jack was very ill, rushed to hospital with breathing difficulties, poor soul. Nell was visiting him every second day.

The weather had been beautiful for weeks, nicer than it had been all Summer. We all went for a swim on Sunday and I got very burnt. It was so lovely though, jumping in the breakers with Chic.

We had a bit of excitement one day, with professional fisherman, Massey and employees, hauling in three large nets full of mullet. It was interesting to watch the technique, as they hauled in the great, squirming, jumping mass of fish. Since then Massey watched for three days, with no luck. He sat on the hill behind us, with special glasses until he sights the porpoise and the school of fish, then blows a whistle and the men race madly, get the boat out, fix the net and then haul it in.

One day, we decided to go for a bush walk in the mountains, it was quite rough going in parts, but we found a nice spot for a picnic and enjoyed our day. Later, when I was getting weary little Jan ready for bed, after taking off her jumper and shirt, I recoiled in horror to see her blood soaked singlet. A leech had found its way to her little back and was greatly engorged with blood, ghastly creature!

Everything was going well and Chic had covered the floor with lino, which was a big improvement. It was time to prepare for Winter, with more blankets, at least.

We were all feeling wonderfully healthy. The rough life was agreeing with us all and we all loved being so close to the beach.

We renewed our friendship with Eileen and Bob Massingham, whom we once knew in Terara, as friends of the Watsons. We were welcome visitors to their nice home, not far from us.

So, life was drifting along very peacefully, until the westerly winds arrived. We had had many strong winds and I was quite used to the tent flopping madly and it never worried me. On this particular morning, I was sitting quietly, reading and enjoying an early breakfast while the kids were in bed. Then there was a mighty crash, a side pole snapped in two, the top half flew across the tent and the cupboard containing all our crockery, pots and pans, etc. with a fruit bowl on top, fell right over. To add to the noise, a jar filled with coins, also smashed to the floor. You can imagine the terror of the little ones and the mess and panic and noise of the moment. I raced up the hill for help and was lucky to catch Joe Kelly, who was just off to work. He replaced the side pole and my brave big girls held up the pole, while I raced up the shop to ring Chic, who most fortunately was not far away at Woonona. We hung on until he came and in no time Chic had everything in order once more. Luckily, the wind died down quite early that day, not like following winds, which kept on for days at a time. Actually, we were lucky that the whole tent didn't collapse, as the middle pole was already out when Joe came down.

I'm ashamed to say, that after that, for quite a while, everytime the wind was strong, I tasted fear and my eyes used to become riveted on the side pole that went before. However, as the weeks went on, gale after gale and nothing happened, my fears lessened. If anyone had told me that wind would be my only worry in this life,, I would have laughed and said that anyone who had lived in Greenwell Point would be used to strong winds.

Getting back to my story, right back in March, we realized that we must have better shelter for the winter and after the first taste of the strong winds, we knew a tent would definitely be inadequate, especially for the kids. Accordingly, one dreadful night, we went up to the Kiosk and saw Noel Collins about a very old caravan he had up there. We were willing to rent it, but he refused to accept any money at all, as he said it was old and dilapidated.

A couple of days later, Joe Kelly brought it down, bumpity bump, it sounded frightful, as though the wheels were going to come off. To us though, it was a beautiful sight and as far as solid shelter, a real castle. It was fun cleaning it out and moving in crockery, clothes, etc. There was a real wardrobe and a big comfortable bed. We thought we were made, after sleeping on a mattress on the tent floor for so long. We settled in well and still had the tent for awhile, for odds and ends.

One day, John and Hetty paid us a visit, a real surprise, and stayed for tea. We had a lovely evening, as it happened to be my birthday. We were able to make them quite cozy in the tent for the night and they left in the morning after breakfast. Actually, their visit was the finale of a wonderful holiday by car to Queensland.

As the days went on, the winds grew more fierce until we realized we'd just have to live entirely in the caravan. Although cozy in the caravan, on windy nights, we couldn't sleep for looking out the window, checking on the tent. One night we packed the tent up and were very lucky, as the next day, the wind blew the most violent gale and we greatly doubted whether it could have stood such a test, as the few tents left in the area were in a bad way all day.

The Stewart family were obliged to tie their tent down flat on the ground and get underneath it for shelter. We found out later that the poor things had slept under it all night. What a nightmare it must have been, especially with three young children.

As a result of living in the old caravan, a new plan was born. We resolved to buy a nice caravan and pay it off, so we'd never have to rely on the tent, wherever we went. Ben said he'd look around and report on the matter. A couple of weeks later, Ben informed us that he'd seen the very thing at a place in Bankstown, so Chic took a day off work to inspect same. It was 350 pounds, but terms had to be arranged and there was a doubt whether they'd let us have it on 100 pounds deposit, which was all we had saved.

After a week of suspense, Aud and Ben paid us a surprise visit, with wonderful news. Dad was going to finance the whole business. Also, they'd put the price down to 325 pounds for cash. This meant, with the dreadful interest, we would have had to pay, Dad saved us over 100 pounds. What a wonderful turn he did us.

Our lovely van arrived a week later. Ah, the excitement and thrill when we saw it. I adored it on sight, so long, so spacious, so beautifully appointed. There was pink and blue laminex everywhere, wardrobe, icechest, lovely big table, stainless steel sink, rubber flooring, dunlopillo mattresses and joy of joys, a wonderful gas stove, two burners and a grill, run off a gas cylinder. There were seven nice windows, with screens and pretty curtains, patterned in roses and even three battery lights for emergencies.

Then, we had another stroke of luck, Noel Collins said we could keep the old caravan down here to store the tent and other rubbish. Of course, we made better use of it than that. Sandra and Sheryl took it over as their bedroom and were quite content to be on their own, with lots of room for all their toys and clothes. I found it a great help for storing many things.

So the months flew by in perfect happiness, except for those dreadful westerly winds, when you had to be very careful opening the door in case it smashed back out of your hands. I remember one day, as I was walking back from the Kiosk, on nearing our ledge, I was just in time to see the whole back panel fall off the old van. Little Sheryl was just getting dressed and the look of horror on that child's face was something to see. She wasn't worried about the back falling off, just the fact that someone may have seen her, partly undressed, modest little soul.

To his disappointment, Chic's overtime cut out for a while, but in October, it was on again.

I made many friends, but Joan Ferman and I became close friends. At the end of October, I had a badly infected foot, which Joan treated. In those days, they believed in the hot treatment, wringing out a cloth in almost boiling water. I remember young Christopher popping in when I was "ouching" with the pain and saying "What fun, what fun". My infection was caused by a fragment of shell embedded in the foot, while walking on rocks.

At the time, Chic had a new hobby, making shell ornaments. Besides driftwood arrangements, he turned out some delightful plaster ornaments, including "sets of four", from small to large, tortoises. His imagination was endless. Noel bought a lot of things from him for the Kiosk. Chic's rockpools, rowing boat ornaments, tiny parks with swings, etc., little ladies, were all so cute. I sold quite a few to friends and glowed with pride every time anyone admired them. Chic had many more ideas but not enough time to carry them out.

We had news from my sister, Marie, at last. She had a baby son, May 9, three pound only, born two months early. She had a lot of trouble with him, but he started to thrive and then got a virus'flu and was back in hospital for another month. However, he was doing well again and weighed 13 ½ pounds at five months. They called him Geoffrey Ian Thomson. There was a possibility of them coming over for Xmas. We were looking forward to seeing them. Marie and Graham were still living in Woomera Rocket Range. They had a nice home there, but were thinking of transferring to Cooma. Graham was a refrigeration mechanic in the Airforce.

I had a letter from Jennie Wheeler, who had moved up to Bundaberg, Queensland and Ray was fishing once more.

One day, we saw a huge whale and often saw a school of porpoises, very close and now and again, sharks. It was wonderful being near the sea.

All good things must come to an end and inevitably work ran out and so ended a very happy time of our lives.

We ended up in Norma and Lin's backyard, in our van for a while. Lin was a painter, also and managed to get Chic a job with his Boss.