

A Short Story of My Life by Beryl (Hubbard) Finedon

(Originally written in 1995. Revised in 2011. This is the first part of my Auntie Beryl Finedon's (nee Hubbard) life story. My parents were Marj and Don Hubbard. At places Mum is referred to as Marjorie Ruth, just to distinguish her from her sister-in-law Marj. Ruth Midavaine)

This is a very small story of my life or part of it.

I am now 96 years of age and living at Weeronga Nursing Home at Wee Waa. I reluctantly moved here in 2008 from my home at 35 Meelee Street, Narrabri.

I was born at Echuca Hospital in Victoria on the 9th August 1914, my parents being Arthur Lawrence and Caroline Maude May Hubbard. Dad was in charge of a small school at Womboota on the NSW side of the Murray River from Echuca.

My older sister, Dorothy Mavis, developed a kidney complaint while Mum was in hospital waiting for me to arrive. Little Dorothy died two weeks before I was born. This must have been very traumatic for my parents as I was told she was a very bright little girl of two years four months. When I was six months old the doctor in Echuca suggested that they take me away from the severe climate where we were living at Womboota or they would lose me also. Mum and Dad took me to Sydney where my grandmother, Grandma Stephenson, looked after me for the next six months.

Arthur was born at Echuca also, two years and one month after me. This was during a severe drought and mice plague. Mum and Dad had to have Arthur and me cradled in their arms while they slept or the mice would bite the ears and fingers off – Dad set kerosene tins of water with a wooden roller covered with fat so when the mice or rats got to the roller they would slip over into the water and drown.

My brother Don was born February, 1918 at Grandma's house in Ashfield, Sydney. Grandma was a District Nurse and helped Mum many times.

After Womboota Dad was transferred to Tynedale, a small town on the Clarence River near Grafton. When Mum was well enough she and Don traveled by ship to get there. I was four then and started school in 1st class. Many years later at a school reunion at Tynedale I met the Town Clerk of Maclean (5 miles away) and he said to me "I sat next to you in 1st class!" I also have vivid memories of going to a neighbour's place with a large enamel billycan each morning to collect milk for the day. There was only the road between the School Residence and the Clarence River, which made it quite dangerous for children.

My sister Marjorie (now Walker-Smith) was born at Maclean Hospital when I was five. I remember Dad harnessing up "Silver" our cream horse and putting Arthur, Don and me in the sulky and driving to Maclean to see our new sister. Silver was a lovely horse but Dad sold him when he was transferred to Coopers Shoot, a few miles from Byron Bay. I rode my first horse there being doubled to Sunday school a few miles away I was six then. It was while we were there that the SS Pulgumbah ran aground during a violent storm. Dad took us down to see the ship fast on the sand and we children tried to push it off. From Coopers Shoot Dad received a transfer to Woolgoolga. I was seven then and in 3rd class. At that stage the railway line didn't go past Coff's Harbour and everything to Woolgoolga was transported by boat, our furniture was

late arriving so we had to stay at the local hotel for 10 days. We had a long jetty at Woolgoolga and soon after we arrived Grandma Stephenson came up to help Mum and took me back with her. We had to be placed in a big cage and swung by a crane over to the ship but as the ship was rolling badly the cage missed the ship and we were plummeted into the sea and got very wet, I can remember this quite vividly. While staying with Grandma I attended Canterbury School, was in 3rd class and had to walk to and from Grandma's place as she was living in Ashfield at the time. I stayed till the end of that year then returned to Woolgoolga.

I loved living at Woolgoolga it was a happy time for all of us. Dad made surfboards for us and we would go down and have a surf in the morning, come home and have breakfast then off to school. Dad was keen on all children being able to swim and one time the whole school, at least all the children, walked down to the lake. One squad at a time went into the lake to learn to swim under the supervision of another teacher who was a qualified swimming teacher and while one squad was in the water the rest of us were having lessons on the bank of the lake. I still have the certificate I received for swimming 800 yards; we also had life saving instructions on the banks of the lake.

We didn't have any running water at Woolgoolga or electricity. Mum had a fuel stove, fuel copper and we had good lamps but no candles. We had concerts and picnics on a Sunday usually with the family of Bill and May Richards. We would often go in Mr. Richards' truck to Red Rock, the Lake or to Hearn's Lake. In the early days when Bill Richards was starting out Mum and Dad would go and help when they were stocktaking. Our families grew up together, Arthur and Doug, Eunie and I etc. Arthur and Doug were lifetime friends but both are now deceased. Eunie lost her husband, Ken Prince, and I lost Eric also. Eun and I still write and see each other when I'm able to visit Woolgoolga.

It was the Depression time when I was at Woolgoolga and my mother always gave food to the needy who came asking if they could chop wood for some bread, sugar etc, she would still give them food even if they didn't chop any wood. It was the same if some children didn't have any food to eat at lunchtime. If Dad noticed this he would send a note over to Mum and she would make some sandwiches, many of the children had to go to school with just dry bread but no one complained in those days, no one had much, we all mended and patched and accepted it but never complained. We children didn't have proper wardrobes; we had a curtain wardrobe with kerosene boxes stacked one on top of the other and our clothes were placed there. No one had a lounge suite just a dining table and six chairs.

When I was about nine we all got the chicken pox together so Mum sent an SOS to Grandma who immediately came up to help. How awful it must have been for Mum to look after the four of us, I know I was delirious at the time and apparently very ill.

My mother was very artistic and taught me to do pen and brush painting. We did the pen painting on pretty blue satin lined with blue silk and padded with cotton wool and this made a beautiful handkerchief sachet, it was then folded over and tied with blue cord.

The nearest doctor was 16 miles away at Coff's Harbour and the road was a broken bullock track, which took a long time to traverse. The Woolgoolga folk had not seen a car till the Butter Factory Manager brought one to town. My Dad brought the second one, a Studebaker, about two weeks later so he had to be First Aid Officer, Ambulance Officer and on occasions Undertaker.

Whilst still at school approximately 1925, a small plane was heard overhead making towards the beach. This was a very rare occurrence, so Dad let all the school children out and we ran to the beach – Captain Lester Brain had just landed his Tiger Moth and was willing to take one passenger at a time on a short joy ride over the town. Dad asked Captain Brain if he would take me up together with my little sister, Marj. As there was only one passenger seat Marj sat on my knee, he took the plane over the school residence at a lower altitude and I could see Mum and Grandma in our yard quite distinctly. They had tied sheets to brooms and were waving to us, it was so very exciting – Marj was not impressed, I had tied a handkerchief on her little bangle and tried to get her to look out and wave to Mum but she was too scared, this cost Dad five shillings. This was one of the highlights of my young life I shall never forget it as the sound of a plane was very rare.

Also about this time the P & C were organizing a “Mock Wedding” to be held in the school one night. The bride was to be the Headmaster’s daughter and the groom was to be the Policeman’s son – when it came time for me to go over to the school I was terrified thinking it could be for real and I hid, it took a long time to coax me out. Everything was mock, I had a long white dress on, my mother’s wedding veil and a large bouquet made of bottlebrush and tied with rope. There were the usual speeches etc how different it would have been had it been performed in these days.

There were no refrigerators or ice chests in those days but Mum had a tin drip safe with sides to be kept wet to stop the butter going to oil. Everything seemed to be delivered in bulk then, the grocer boy would drive his horse and cart to deliver the orders. Salt was in bulk, sugar in hessian bags, tea in tins about 15” square, biscuits also came in large tins and broken biscuits could be bought for 3 pence a bag. There was only one variety of bread made I think they were called “tank” loaves, two loaves joined together. Dad also made some good home-style ginger beer we all enjoyed that. Flour also came in large white bags and when eventually the bag was empty women used the bags for clothing etc.

At Christmas time our mother would give us each a pillowslip to hang on the bottom of the bed (the pillowslips in those days were white and had four tapes on so we could tie them to the bed) and about first light we would be up to see what Santa had left. Also there was always a large plum pudding and Mum would have lots of silver coins to put in the pudding, the coins were all boiled first and many times we would really be full but if a little piece of silver was sticking out we would ask for a second piece. Oh happy days, how wonderful to have such memories of days long ago.

When I was 12 my uncle and aunt, Eric and Millie Lewis plus three cousins spent the Christmas holidays with us then took me back to Bowral with them for three months. Uncle Eric was the Headmaster of Bowral High School – I was placed in 1st year High to learn French, Algebra etc, then back to Woolgoolga to remain in 7th class till I was considered old enough at the age of 13 to be away from home. I was enrolled at Burwood Home Science School in 1927 and immediately made friends with Elsie Jenkins, now Cunningham and Ena Foster later Campbell – the three of us remained the best of friends all through school but going to separate Business Colleges – our lives were always close. The Sydney Harbour Bridge was opened 19/3/1932 Ena, Elsie and I met at Central Station and went down to the Domain, as we couldn’t see very well we climbed a huge Moreton Bay Fig Tree and watched the official opening including De Groot cutting the ribbon on his horse. Elsie came home to Woolgoolga with me for two Christmas holidays and we all enjoyed her happy disposition. Later when I started work I had several holidays with Ena and her family at Bathurst where I first saw snow, then Ena and I spent most of our holidays together, one of the nicest being to “Stella Maris” at Coolangatta, Qld. We met

two nice young chaps as soon as we arrived and they insisted on driving us half way home, we said goodbye then. Ena and I also had several holidays at The Entrance where we spent most of the time on the beach. It was a sad day when we heard that Ena had died suddenly sitting in her chair prior to eating her tea she died at the age of 78. Elsie has passed away too at a Retirement Home at Bateau Bay we were such good friends ever since childhood. I still have my wonderful daughter Alison to check on me every day – my three grandchildren Scott, Matthew and Sarah are a delight and joy to have. I am now a great grandmother also. Lincoln has just turned one, I am sure he knows me whenever Scott and Jess bring him to visit, I do enjoy having time with him.

Arthur, Don and I missed our mother very much when we had to go away to school, the boys to Grafton to board and me to Sydney to board with Grandma for five years and in all that time Mum never missed a Tuesday to write to me. I would get her letter on the Thursday when I came home from school and would answer the letter every weekend, I lived for that Thursday to get Mum’s letter which always made me so homesick. I stayed with Grandma Stephenson at Strathfield till I passed my Intermediate Certificate then won a half scholarship to Stott’s Business College in Sydney I did well in all the Shorthand and Typing exams but was always very nervous. I returned for the second year, as jobs were hard to come by, during the first couple of months whilst repeating the course my mother wrote and asked if I would come to Morisset where Dad had been transferred and help her as she was pregnant, I helped out by playing the piano for Dad at the singing classes and also helped Mum where I could. There was no resident doctor, the nearest being at Dora Creek so Mum didn’t receive medical attention for her pregnancy, her baby girl was born on 24th September 1932 (Arthur’s 16th Birthday) but was born dead a big disappointment to all of us. Dad made a tiny coffin and lined it, it looked lovely and she was buried in the Morisset Cemetery. After that the Manager of the Morisset Psychiatric Hospital came to see Dad and asked him if he would allow me to work in the office at the hospital, they had just received permission for a female to be employed. I was terrified, just didn’t know what to expect, I had an office to myself, the Clerk, Manager, Medical Superintendent and other doctors and Laboratory/Dispensary were in the building, also the Hall Attendant and switchboard.

My work in those days was to do all the shorthand and typing for the Medical Superintendent, all the work for the Manager including ordering for the artisans, help the Clerk count the money on pay day and look after the switchboard, later a patient was appointed to take care of the switchboard. Whilst operating the large switchboard there was a frightful electrical storm and I was partly struck as I was transferring a call. I was thrown over a large table onto my back with pins and needles in my arms, I was told not to touch the switchboard during a storm again.

After a couple of years approval came through for a second female to be appointed and she took over the Manager and Clerk’s work (she didn’t do shorthand). Soon after that another building was erected and I worked solely with the Medical Superintendent, I really enjoyed all this, every day was a happy day – if any of the staff were called to the Medical Superintendent’s office for a reason I had to be there to take down what was said. I didn’t like this as I was friends with all the staff and at times it was a bit embarrassing.

I haven’t touched on the war years, 1939 to 1945 – our family was on holidays at Canberra when war seemed imminent, we went on to Kangaroo Valley the next day and it was whilst there we heard on the radio that the Germans had marched into Poland. Dad and the other men staying at the hotel poured over maps late into the night and just after we arrived at Grandma’s at Strathfield we heard the fatal words that England had declared war on Germany. Our first

thoughts were of Arthur and later we were to be informed that he took a squadron of Wellington bombers on a night bombing raid over Norway the first night of the war.

Don and Marjorie-Ruth had only been married a few months but Don enlisted in the Army immediately and sailed with the 2/1st Battalion AIF for the Middle East. Later he was sent to Greece then Crete and it was there his 6th Division had to fight a rear guard action to let the rest of the troops escape to the ships knowing full well that they possibly would be sacrificed but they did what they knew was right. He was shot in the back knocking him out for some time and eventually he was taken prisoner and taken to Stalag 13c in Germany. I understand he tried to escape on two occasions was caught and after he returned home there were many times at night when he had nightmares and his screams were bloodcurdling. Don was the first casualty in the area to be listed as "Missing" and it was six months before Marj got word through the Red Cross that he was a POW in Germany.

We were at Morisset at the time War was declared and the hospital was in a direct line to Rathmines Air Base and would have been a good target. Our hospital had to organize everything in case of emergency to evacuate all the patients from the hospital, this was a big job – the seaplanes used to land on the lake just in front of the hospital, a lovely sight to see. Dad arranged for many trenches to be dug in the school grounds and I have a photo of myself standing in one of the trenches, they were about up to my shoulders in depth. We also attended First Aid classes in readiness and also had to have a small suit- case packed with necessary articles in readiness for a quick get away. My mother was President of the Red Cross and also for POW meetings we all helped pack parcels to send to our boys often with a little letter enclosed. My wonderful sister in law Marjorie-Ruth lived with us during the War and was a great help to Mum and a good friend to me, she was with us till Don returned some months after the War ended, they had three lovely children, Ronald, Ruth and Nancy.

Ted Walker-Smith was teaching at the time but joined the AIF and he and my sister Marj were married 22nd March 1944 whilst he was on leave from the Middle East. I was bridesmaid for Marj we went down to the city and bought two pretty frocks, Marj's was blue and mine pink we had two little hats made to match the frocks. There was no possibility of a traditional wedding dress in those days as we were strictly on ration coupons for clothing and for food – they were married in the Methodist Church next door then a nice family luncheon at our house later. Tea, sugar and meat were the main items rationed but we were ever so careful. Paper was also scarce and I had to use old forms for the carbon copies of letters I typed for the Superintendent. Blackouts were also something I shall remember, windows had to be covered with no light showing outside, cars had hooded shades on headlights which only shone directly on the road, also names of Railway Stations were covered to confuse the enemy. The Women's Day and Women's Weekly magazines cost 3 pence.

Arthur returned in 1944 but Mum was already ill in hospital and couldn't attend his wedding to Margaret Holland of Adelaide. Mother died in Waratah Hospital 23rd January 1945 from cancer. We all went to Sydney to meet Don when he was discharged, he expected to see Mum and the first thing he said was "where's Mum" – even though letters had been sent to him via the Red Cross giving him the sad news, he had not received any the letters had followed him from Germany to England. He was so upset.

After my mother died Dad was transferred to Brooklyn on the Hawkesbury River, so I went to live in the Nurses' Home. I enjoyed that and was friendly with the nursing staff. I traveled to Brooklyn each weekend to see Dad. After Dad retired from there he took a long holiday to

friends in Tasmania and it was while he was over there I developed pneumonia in both lungs and Dad was sent for, as soon as I got over that I broke off my engagement to a member of the staff I then transferred to Stockton Hospital in a similar capacity. During the year I was there my previous Superintendent who was now Superintendent at Kenmore, Goulburn, 'phoned me and asked me to come down to Kenmore. This was arranged and I traveled down by train, I at first lived in a vacant Sister's flat then rented a room in Goulburn before boarding with friends at Bradfordville – I enjoyed my three years at Goulburn, went to a few balls, played tennis at the Hospital and had lots of weekends with Ena at her flat at Bondi. It was during this time I traveled by train to Newcastle to spend my holiday with my family who were then living at Wattle Hill, Wootton – to get there from Newcastle I had to catch a bus to Topi and my brother Don would meet me there in his truck. Bush life was so different and I enjoyed it, Don even tried to teach me to shoot and I brought down a huge goanna from a tree. Sometimes I stayed with Marj and Don, sometimes with Marj and Ted 3 miles away on another farm, my father had also built a shack close by. It was while staying with Marj and Don that a little dance was held in the local school and it was there I first met Eric. He was playing for the dance – he asked someone else to play for a dance and he came and sat next to me and talked, I didn't see him again for another 12 months. This time, Don had organized a lift for me back to Newcastle with mutual friends and as Lynne was being taken to Newcastle also I was in good company, she asked me to get off with her at Mayfield and stay the night and go on to Goulburn the next day. I didn't know who would be at the house but Lynne assured me there was a spare bed in her room and that is what I did, in the morning Eric found he had a house guest and offered to drive me to town to catch the train – following that we decided to write, sometimes we met in Sydney at Ena's flat at Bondi and then he asked me to marry him and this we did at the little Congregational Church at Mayfield on 10th September 1955. I was on Long Service Leave from Kenmore so was able to get a transfer to the Department of Labour and Industry in Newcastle and started there the week after I was married. After a while I was able to transfer to the Health Department and that was better. We had Dale, Lynne and Rex living with us and later Eric brought a young chap he knew to live with us as an apprentice, this made extra work and caused a few arguments especially as at that time Eric was playing in an orchestra sometimes twice a week. Dale was married about six months after us and she and Neville came up Narrabri way to live, Lynne married about a year later, I missed her as we had got on extremely well and still do.

In July 1957 our daughter Alison was born and she was a beautiful baby with big eyes and hair that soon turned curly, she was a good baby and gave me a lot of pleasure.