It was the last thing I expected when I returned to Sydney to live after twelve years away. But the first person I ran into was my twenty-five-year old self running away.

It seemed everywhere I went she was there and stories about her life and experiences emerged and drifted around my consciousness. Much later I found myself writing some of these stories down. They involved somebody who was like me, but also very different from me. I found myself thinking of her as somebody else, a girl called Pam, say, a very common name for girls of that time. It could have been other names, Beverley or Sandra. But Pam this girl remained. As I wrote, I found that some of the stories took on a life of their own, diverged from my own experience. But they reflected it, they echoed my life in Sydney during the 1940s and 1950s. She had lived here since 1941, but by the middle of the 1960s had reached a point when she had to leave.

Knowing why she did that seems to me to tell us a great deal about living in Australia in the years during and after the second world war. In this book I tell some of the stories about Pam that came to me. About being a girl during those years.

Overseas, I worked in Italy as a teacher of English, in London as a waitress and in publishing, in Kenya as an ethnography curator. I married an Australian lawyer there, I had my two sons there. After my sons were born, I went to the local university in the provincial town where my academic husband worked, and I retrained as a sociologist through a postgraduate degree. I became involved in the Women's Liberation movement, marched, picketed, joined political organisations. As a couple we formed close friends with whom we lived, ate, played, shared childcare and holidays. And yet as we approached our forties we had to face some questions. Had we really decided to leave Australia for ever? Could we imagine living the rest of our lives as provincial academics, with a holiday in a rented house in France or Italy each summer? The answer was, we had to find out, by returning to Australia to live.

This book is what French philosopher Gaston Bachelard describes as a reverie, somewhere between memory and story-telling. Bachelard specifically calls upon reverie in relation to childhood.

> "When, all alone and dreaming on rather at length, we go far from the present to relive the times of the first life, several child faces come to meet us."

He says reverie represents and recaptures not just the actual, but the possible, the wished, the other.

> "A potential childhood is within us. When we go looking for it in our reveries, we relive it even more in its possibilities than in its realities."

English historian Carolyn Steedman, in a book *Landscape for a Good Woman*, which I have long admired, describes her own recurrent memories as crucial in developing an understanding of her life.

> "We all return to memories and dreams like this, again and again; the story we tell of our own life is reshaped around them. But the point doesn't lie there, back in the past, back in the lost time at which they happened; the only point lies in interpretation."

Within my reverie I found a number of other voices. People who were there with me, other books, newspaper articles, academic texts. Most important were autobiographies and fictional stories by women in my age range. I did not want to make my own individual story THE representative story of the time and place. Other stories assisted me in identifying the major organising narratives which worked through the lives of young women in the 1940s and 1950s.

Like many other women who became involved in the women's liberation movement of the 1970s, I have always had a conviction that the movement had its origins in the ways in which we grew up as young women in the 1940s through to the 1960s. As a young woman in Australia I faced many confusions and contradictions in negotiating my place in society. I received different and at times conflicting messages from parents, relatives, teachers and fellow students about what was respectable, about the aspirations reflected in activities like studying elocution, about American culture and about what comprised the appropriate activities of an intellectual.

Writers these days are always telling us that some of what they write is true and some is stories. When I was growing up I read stories and believed they were true. Many friends have said of me that I never let the truth stand in the way of a good story. The difference doesn't matter to me. It seems to me that these stories are what happened. I hope that readers of this book, both of the Pam stories and my questioning and reflecting on them, will also insert themselves into them as participants and questioners.

It was late on a January afternoon when our plane from England touched down at Sydney Airport. After twelve years away, my husband and I, who had married in England and had our two young sons there, were coming home. We pushed the overloaded trolley through the doors to the arrival lounge, our boys following, carrying toys and tattered books. The heat swelled up and struck us. Immediately the families surrounded us, my smiling mother kissing me, holding back tears of pleasure, my younger brother beaming, pushing his wife forward, my husband's father and brothers gathering around, his mother holding his hands. We were back at last. His nieces picked up my small sons, laughing, petting them. They'd met them only once, four years ago, when my youngest had been a baby. I looked over their heads. My father was nowhere in sight.

"Oh no, he's around somewhere," my mother said. "Too many crowds for him."

I was tense at the thought of seeing him again, of re-entering a relationship which had always been difficult. As we pushed out to the carpark, there he was, behind a pillar, smoke drifting from his cigarette. His brown striped suit was rather shiny with wear, his tie tightly knotted, a brown hat tilted forward on his head. He always wore a hat. He ground his cigarette into the ground as he moved forward, raising his hat, formally shaking my husband's hand. His smile was crooked. "Good journey, I hope, Mike? Good, good." My mother hovered nervously behind him, wanting the greetings to go smoothly. A slight bitter smell rose from him as my lips brushed his cheek. My boys were crowding around my legs, staring at this relative stranger, this stranger relative. I'd been their age when he returned from the war.

Nita gently shook her four-year-old daughter awake.

"Come on Pammie. Wake up, darling. Today's the day. Your daddy's coming home. All the men are returning. You remember, we're going to go down to the ships to see if we can meet him there."

The sun was just rising when they left the small house in suburban Belmore North, where they lived with Nita's parents. Nita pulled her sleepy-eyed daughter by the hand up the steep hill to the railway station, where they got on the train to the city. Pam's excitement battled against her tiredness. She held her mother's arm and whispered plans about what she would tell her father, whom she had not seen since she was two months old. She planned to tell him about the new doll that she had just been given for her fourth birthday. She would show him how she could read and make him a biscuit.

At the docks in Woolloomooloo, a haze of early heat hung above people pushing and craning to get a glimpse. Even though Nita and Pam had left home so early, they were at the back of the crowd, much larger than Nita had expected. There was a high level of excitement, distant bands playing, flags waving, women crying, kids screaming. Well, it had

been a long six years since 1939. Pam clutched her mother's leg, crying because she was at the level of knees and hems. Eventually Nita lifted Pam onto her shoulder but all the child could see was a crop of heads, a waving of flags, a blur of ships.

"Come on, love," Nita put Pam back on the ground, wiping her tears with the edge of a handkerchief. "We might as well get ourselves back home and wait for him. We're never going to see him here. I've never seen such a crush."

"Not a hope of getting him from there," Nita told her mother, Dora, when they reached home. "You've never seen such a mob. Just shows how news gets round even if we're not supposed to know. The world and his wife were crowding round those ships. They'd come in earlier than I thought. Poor Pammie didn't even see them sailing or hear the bands."

The two women busied themselves cooking. Nita rolled out pastry for an apple pie, piled sweetened stewed apples high in the plate, and covered them with a long strip of dough, gently coiling it off the rolling pin onto the pie. Pam sprinkled cinnamon and sugar carefully on the top, concentrating so as not to get any on the pile of beans her grandmother was topping and tailing.

A ring at the doorbell.

Pam rushed forward. She could not reach the doorknob. She fell back behind her mother. A large shape filled the light, dressed in khaki. There was a musty smell. Pam watched a big canvas bag and boots, round-toed, shiny, black.

"Oh, Frank," Nita's voice was low. "I can't believe it after this time."

She moved towards the man. Pam grabbed her legs.

"Here she is," said her mother, pushing the girl forward. "Here's Pam. Kiss your father, now."

Pam's stomach turned sideways. Her father. She stood on tiptoes as he knelt down and she awkwardly brushed her lips across his cheeks. His cheeks were hard and bristled, not like her great soft grandfather's. His fingers ground into her shoulders. His hand was shaking.

Henry, her grandfather, rose slowly from his seat next to the radio in the dark living room. He moved forward to shake hands with the stocky man in khaki and clapped him on the shoulder. At the door of the kitchen, Dora suddenly appeared, moving restlessly from foot to foot and wiping her twisted hands on a faded apron.

"Cup of tea, Frank?" she said, abruptly, "or dinner's ready if you're hungry. We've only got to put on the beans."

"Dinner'd be good." His voice was roughened.

"Well if you're going to eat with us, you'd better get out of those army clothes." Her grandmother's mouth was tight. "God only knows what germs they'll have in them, the places you've been. Go down to the laundry and take them all off down there. Keep them out of here. Nita'll bring you down some of your old clothes."

Nita flushed as she looked awkwardly up at Frank. He seemed to be silenced. "That's a terrible welcome home, Mum."

She pulled the kit-bag forward for Frank to take downstairs. "Don't know what you've got in this, it feels like it weighs a ton. Hope it's not all washing!" She pushed him gently, her hand barely resting on his shoulder, as if she too believed her mother's warnings.

As she turned into the bedroom where she slept with Pam, she looked back. "Anyway, Frank, you'll be more comfortable out of uniform." She dragged out a towel, clean underwear and ironed shirt and trousers from the deep bottom drawer of the wardrobe. She pressed them tightly to her breasts, breathing in their fresh sweetness as she followed him downstairs to the chilly laundry. Pam followed quietly, her thumb in her mouth as she gazed around the laundry door.

In a few moments Nita dashed up the stairs into the kitchen, Pam still at her heels. She shook a starched cloth over the kitchen table. Dora put a large joint of meat, crisp skinned, onto the kitchen bench, ready for carving, and Henry moved heavily into the room, taking up a curved knife and razor strop. Dora shook flour into the baking dish and, stirring fiercely, poured steaming water which hissed as it struck the pan. Pam ran in excitement from one adult to the next.

"I'll just finish a smoke before we start," Frank's voice broke though the mesh of the flyscreen door as he stood on the concrete steps above the garden.

Pam got milk for the tea out of the icebox, where a steady drip marked the melting of the ice down the brown-stained back, and poured it into a jug. She put knives and forks around the table and then squeezed in beside her grandfather, while the two women served plates with strips of meat and mounds of vegetables.

At last they were settled. Pam couldn't eat. She wiggled around on her seat, craning her head up, trying to see the stranger's face, trying to grab her mother's dress, catch her attention, pull her back. Her voice piped high, chattering. "We were going to David Jones for my birthday, but they wouldn't open up because the war was finished so we had to go again ..."

Suddenly, he reached over the table.

"Nita! Control this child! Sit down and eat your dinner!"

And a smack, short, sharp, painful, flashed across Pam's face.

She was out, away. She fled from the table, pushing past her grandfather, out through the kitchen door. Tears spurted as she ran down the concrete steps onto a patch of lawn still dappled by sun. She pushed through a bush of pink azaleas, clung to the fence next door, trying to squeeze her body through the gaps between the posts.

Next door their big capable neighbour was pulling crisp white sheets down from the high clothesline. It was only for Pam's family that this was a special day.

"Shaw, Shaw," Pam called, "can I come in to you, he's trying to kill me!"

That moment marked our relationship from the beginning. At the time I did not know that killing was what soldiers were trained to do. But I realised that the small and protected world which had surrounded me for my first four years had been pushed aside. My father's return had altered a balance that had been established during the war. As a family we would struggle to regain stability.

My mother, May Harrison, and my father, Joe Olliffe, married in 1940 and I was born in 1941. I was only two months old when he joined the army. He left a small and squalling baby and returned to find a talkative four-year-old, who had been the centre of attention for mother and grandparents for the duration of the war. And on his return he and my mother scarcely knew each other better than he knew me.

In a book written just after World War II, a Melbourne psychiatrist expressed his concern about the impact of the soldier's absence on newly married couples.

"Success in living together requires mutual tolerance; and getting acquainted with each other is the chief business of early married life. This process of mutual acquaintance has to be embarked on afresh when the husband returns from war ... and they may find tolerance more difficult under these circumstances than it was in the first flush of mutual affection ... The wife may find the husband a far different person from the man she imagined was hers. He may be morose and irritable; he may look for the same obedience in her as he had from the men under his command ... the chief obstacle is the inability to bridge the gulf caused by having grown apart."

Nita noticed the young man with the stiff red hair around the corridors of the No. 2 Branch of the Government Printing Office in Liverpool Street, by Darling Harbour, where she worked as secretary to the deputy manager. Apparently he'd joined about the same time as she had, in the mid 1920s, at the age of fifteen, but had worked mainly in the Reading Room in the Head Office, on the corner of Bent and Phillip Streets.

It was a good place to work, the Printo. The large workforce had fun, even during the Depression. Two of her cousins, Muriel and Dottie, worked there and her Dutch grandfather had been the doorman, dignified in a uniform. Nita enjoyed work picnics, dances and balls. Alf Ryan, a big quiet fellow from the office, sometimes took her to masonic dances. She'd even won a fashion parade - which girl looked most feminine in trousers - in a green check shirt with her dark bottle-green slacks. She organised theatre parties; they took a big crowd to see Shirley Temple in *Baby Take a Bow.* Sometimes at lunch hour, in the big room under the photographic studios, Nita and other girls would try and tap-dance, like movie stars.

Frank started waiting around for her to finish work. He was a bit quieter than some of the other chaps. At Head Office he had worked on the top floor in a large room which had a wonderful view into the Metropole Hotel. The boys in the printing office liked overlooking the bedrooms. You never knew when you would get an eyeful, someone undressing, down to her slip - even more. They would call out, crowd over by the window, nudging each other, holding their breath. Not Frank, though. He told Nita he was shocked by this behaviour. He thought women deserved respect. That was one of the things she liked about him.

Nita didn't worry that much about sweethearts. Time enough for that, she thought. She liked her work, she liked playing hockey each weekend with the girls from the YWCA, where she'd been going ever since she was fourteen. Frank started coming to watch her play on Saturdays in the winter, and then in the summer, asked her to come and watch him play cricket each weekend with the Cumberland Club. He introduced Nita to golf. They got on well. They sometimes went out with her cousin Shirley and her husband George.

Nita accepted his offer of marriage, hoping there wouldn't be any problems caused by him being Catholic, and her nothing much. Her mother hated Catholics. Funny that, she'd been worried about introducing Alf Ryan to her parents, in case they thought he was Catholic because of his name. And he was a committed Mason.

Frank had been keen to be a soldier. When Italy first joined the War, before they married, he wanted to enlist. He rushed down to the registration office in Waterloo, full of enthusiasm.

"Nita, I want to be part of it. Italy's coming in. It's not clear what the Fascists will do to the Pope."

He was excited by the possibilities.

"It's the best thing to do, you know. Get in on the ground floor. I don't want to go just into the Army. I like the idea of the Air Force. I've done a bit of photography in the Printing Office. They use photographers in the back of the aeroplane. You take photos of the targets, plot the trajectory of the missiles. That'd be just down my street."

But the recruitment office was cautious, bureaucratic, slow. They wanted him to get some papers, come back another day. That was enough for Frank.

"I'm not worrying with them," he said. "If they don't want me, they're not going to get me."

Nita was secretly relieved. Much better to wait and see how things pan out. No point rushing in. It might all be over by Christmas.

Nita and Frank started married life in a house at West Ryde, bought from a nursery man. They were paying off a large mortgage and furniture from Grace Bros. Nita loved the house, even though it was an area where she had no friends, on a railway line which she did not know. She had meals ready for him when he came home from work, setting them out on the new china on a tablecloth she had embroidered herself.

The baby was two months premature, tiny, fragile. Nita stayed in hospital while the child gained strength. Would she pull through? It was a worrying time, so many men going off to distant Europe. Frank seemed to have more and more to do at the Printing Office. The way the baby cried, you'd think she knew something was up.

Then one morning they heard the news on the radio as they lay in bed. Japan had come in, Pearl Harbour had been bombed.

"This is it, you know, Nita," he said, "Sydney is right in line. I'm going in this morning, signing on, doing my bit."

It was early morning still. Pam had woken them crying. Frank rushed down to the Recruitment Office and signed up. By eleven o'clock he was back at West Ryde.

"Well, I'm in," he said, "Intelligence in the 2/1st Pioneers."

He unrolled his kit bag, dragged out the tightly pressed uniform.

"Come on," he said, "get the child dressed. We'll go and show the boys."

He changed into his uniform, then off they went, down to the Government Printing Office to show off. He was proud and excited, his tiny girl, still wrapped in shawls, in his arms. It was a shiny Sydney day. There was a sense of excitement in the streets. Frank's heart was light. It was a time for young people. He had no experience of war. He had been only three when the first world war started and his own father had been too old to sign up for that. Here was his chance to contribute.

In Market Street, a passerby shouted out to him, "Eh mate you've got the wrong hat on. That's the forage cap. You only wear that for the special occasions."

They laughed, Frank's face gleaming, his chin up. Two days later, this time with the peaked hat on, he pecked Nita on the cheek, Pam on the forehead and swung up the street to West Ryde station, bulky kit bag on his back, a cigarette slowly burning in his fingers.

Before he left, Frank said, "You can't stay on here. We can't afford to keep up the payments. Not on my army wage. It's only 7 shillings a week. We'll pack everything up, put the big stuff into storage at Grace Bros. You go back and live with your mother".

Nita agreed. It would be odd to be alone in the house at West Ryde, with a small baby, fretful and crying, the house dark and chilly with the heavy blackout curtains for the windows at night. She would have trouble managing on his pay as well, with so many things still to

buy for the house. His mother took over the mortgage, selling her large house at Rydalmere and moving down to the smaller house at West Ryde with his younger brother Vince, and a family cousin called Stella who was simple.

Nita moved back to her parents' home in Belmore North where she had lived for all of her thirty years, apart from her one year of married life. She returned to the familiar, to comfort, to a street that she knew. At the age of thirty, she again became a daughter, bringing her own daughter to be brought up by her mother.

He was kept in touch with photographs. My mother May and I would often visit her Aunt Florrie at Bondi Junction, and visit my mother's grandmother's grave in Waverley Cemetery. When young, May and her cousin Ethel went to the cemetery every Saturday morning, to put flowers on the grave. During the war, Florrie's husband, crinkly-haired Harold, would bring out his box Brownie to take a photo of me as a baby and small child to post to my father. My father Joe protested in the end. Every photograph of his daughter had been taken in a cemetery.

When I look through the old photographs that my mother still has, one has a particular resonance. It's small and shadowy, faded to a greyish brown. I had always thought of sepia photographs as belonging to last century; it comes as a shock when photographs of your own life look aged. In this, my father is standing under a capacious fig tree. He is wearing a shirt and shorts, with insignia on the shoulders, long socks and big heavy boots. He looks straight at the camera, head slightly tilted up, cheeks drawn in, nose pointing, shoulders alert, a man off to do his duty. In his left arm, awkwardly held, is a ball of fluff, a small baby swamped in long frilly garments, cap, shawls. This image was the only one I had of myself and my father during the years he was away in New Guinea and Borneo.

My father at the front and my mother in her parents' home had completely different experiences during the war. Like other women she kept her faith in the value of a clean house and a good meal on the table as a solution to most situations She was anxious about her husband, but unable to talk about it with her parents. She wonders now if they were really aware there was a war on. They scarcely knew their new son-in-law, had little concern for him. They felt they had nobody directly involved, as their own son, a boilermaker, worked in a protected occupation, manufacturing armaments.

My mother did not work during the war. Not for money, that is, as we feminists say. She says to me now, when I ask her why she didn't go out to work and leave me with her mother:

"It would have been impossible. Your father would have died. He used to say 'no wife of mine will ever work'. He had his pride to think of. And my mother wouldn't have minded you. She wouldn't have approved of my going out to work. Mind you, I was a fool, I could have got a job. There was a lady up the road in Belmore who went off to one of the

munitions factories. She was a very nice type too, refined. She used to look really smart in her little uniform, all dolled up, and she seemed really happy. I should have thought of it. But you were a sickly baby. And I had a lot to do."

Nita's war was quiet and protected. She had come back to her family, helping her mother with the washing and cleaning and looking after her baby.

She did most of the shopping, not just for her immediate family, but for neighbours like Mrs Goddard opposite.

She got up very early in the morning to do the shopping. Particularly for meat - there were great shortages of that. She tried to be in the queue at the butchers by six o'clock in the morning, so she would be near the front when they opened. Both her mother and Mrs Goddard were fussy, so Nita had to be particular about the quality of the meat she was buying.

"I'll have just six little chops from the best end of neck, no fat. And I'd like a couple of bits of the best steak you've got."

One day the butcher let fly. "She's a selfish woman, that Mrs Goddard, doesn't she know there's a war on? We all have to muck in and put up with things. We have to share around. We can't always be getting the best bit of everything."

Nita felt ashamed. Of course she knew what people were putting up with. Hadn't her own Frank been away in New Guinea? They were luckier than most, though. At least he was still alive. She'd heard that the regiment was in Queensland for training. She had no direct information, mind you. There was censorship on.

As the years went on, she couldn't help but worry. It seemed time had gone into distortion. There was so much excitement about the end of the war in Europe, dancing in the streets. But still nothing happened here. She heard they were going somewhere in the South Pacific, New Guinea again, or Borneo. A funny name, Balik Papan.

And the worries continued, even after the Japanese surrender. Nita couldn't avoid reading about prisoners-of-war in the *Herald*. The paper wanted the army to release the names of prisoners. Day after day there were pages of lists of names, hints that there had been atrocities against prisoners of war in the camps. Changi, Sandakan. Poor devils. Thank God Frank wasn't one of them.

My father was in a battalion which stayed on the periphery of the war. When I read recently The Pioneers, *the Battalion's official history, I was struck by the meaningless nature of much activity carried on under war conditions. The Pioneers were what is called a corps troops, attached to infantry divisions "for military works, requiring for their construction training less expert than engineers, but more skilled than infantry". This role as a back up and preparatory force seems to me an uneasy job definition, not in direct combat. I am not suggesting that this battalion did not suffer hardships; the book details danger and physical discomfort, for example, struggling with a gun emplacement seven days up the Kokoda Trail, on a steep unmade track in mud and rain. But although constant rain and mud and lack of dry clothes had disturbing physical and mental effects, these could not be compared with those facing front-line troops.*

"When the Pioneers thought they were suffering, it took only a glance at other troops on the track - the track being only 4ft. in width in many places - to see how others coming back from forward positions were faring. Some were badly wounded and heavily bandaged, men who had been in the thick of heavy fighting with an enemy they could not see, and not knowing if they would make it back to Owers' Corner."

After New Guinea, the battalion returned to Australia, spending the time between November 1943 and May 1945 on the Atherton Tableland, for what was described as "training and schools". Many men were given four months leave at this time. My father, not being a veteran of the difficult 1941 Middle East campaign, where it had fought before he joined, did not qualify. I find it extraordinary that in the middle of a war, a regiment is given eighteen months to do nothing but train, in what must have been relatively relaxed conditions, in their own home territory. Indeed even the new Commanding Officer decided that "it was obvious that the 2/1st Pioneer Battalion had lost direction and needed a new goal. (It) ... all too often had mundane roles allotted to it." His rigorous training regime to deal with this loss of purpose meant that "sport occupied a lot of time and application by the troops". Yet curiously my father, who before the war was captain of Cumberland District B Cricket Team, is not mentioned in the numerous reports of cricket matches in the History*. My mother thinks he had been struck by lightning during a tropical storm on the Tablelands, but its effects must have been severe to cause a young man who would practise day in and day out to withdraw from his favourite activity.*

Frank was in New Guinea. Conditions were difficult there. The 2/1st Pioneers had to scale the 'Golden Staircase', up to the start of the Kokoda Trail, in mud that clung to the boots and dragged them down to their knees.

He developed tropical ear, dermatitis, a duodenal ulcer, small irritations but building up to niggling ill-health. Frank was a dogged man, obedient and systematic. He kept on with what he was doing, gave himself to it heart and soul.

Occasionally, at one camp or other, he'd run into old friends. Once it was Shirley's husband George. George was a cheerful soldier, a good-time boy with a smile and a taste for a beer. He was a larrikin, skiving out of activities if they didn't suit him, but always with a joke or story, so that others would laugh and forgive.

"Bloody place up here, eh Frank? God, where we've been! Mud to your armpits, I tell you. I've got that much wrong with me. My feet are playing up something terrible. Well, somebody might as well have a ride in the trucks, eh? That's what they're there for. At least if they're going away from the front. Grab it while you can!"

Frank chuckled with the others. But he kept on. It was all right for George, but it was important to Frank to give what he could.

He was called in one day to the superior's tent. On a folding desk in front of the officer was a white sheet of paper, covered with his distinctive handwriting, large letters neatly formed. It was a letter to his brother, written three weeks before.

"What's your explanation for this, Watson?"

He had written to his younger brother Vince. Vince was at university, up to now protected from military service, but there was talk that they would be called up. Frank told Vince not to wait, in case he was put in the infantry as a 'footslogger'. Get into the Navy or Air Force, before too late, while he had some choice.

"It's been sent back by the censors, Sergeant. This will stay on your record."

My father was a clever man who never rose to officer level in the Army. He suffered after authorities found a letter he wrote which was critical of the army. He continued working away. He was not a successful soldier in terms of promotion. He was also not a successful rebel; he did not have the network of support and of mates which can be developed by the larrikins, those who explicitly buck against the system. I think of him carrying on, stubbornly and silently.

And his younger brother? He joined the Royal Navy as an officer and throughout his period of active duty, says he "never saw a shot fired in anger". Photos of him in elegant well-pressed white shorts arrived regularly throughout the war.

I do not know what my father did in the war. He was not injured or arrested or in camps. People could say he had a good war. And yet his silence and his bitterness indicated that he was a man who had been deeply scarred by his experiences.

"Psychiatric casualties of war are due to the interaction of a particular personality with the military setting. The very nature of army life tends to destroy the sense of individuality and the independence of the serviceman; this loss of independence leads to a regression to a more immature attitude...If the soldier comes to feel, at any stage, that the group has failed him in any way...he then develops a feeling of helplessness with which are associated anxiety and hostility."

From Atherton the 2/1st Pioneers went to Borneo, to Balik Papan. After eighteen months in Australia, it must have been a shocking dislocation to be back to warfare, to see the stumbling, wasted survivors of the Sandakan prison camps. Paula Hamilton suggests prisoners of war suffer and are silent about their war experiences because they see themselves as "unmanned ... not real soldiers". Liberators who had not been recently in the centre of conflict must have felt this even more intensely. I wonder if a sense of having got off lightly affected my father, made him silent. The Australian psychiatrist already quoted says:

"A man may go through a whole campaign without suffering a scratch but he cannot come through without some change having taken place in his mind....He cannot come home and just forget the agonising terror he has suffered nor the heart-rending things he has seen."

My father said again and again that he did not want to know any more about the war. He had brought back some Japanese swords, but took them straight away to my cousin Ken. "I never want to see them again." I was given a small green stone heart, engraved

Colleen

Bougainville

1945

I had no idea what it meant and never felt brave enough to ask. I put it in a small cardboard box belonging to my mother and have never worn it.

Under the trees. Shh. Quiet, the fairies are here. Peg's Magic Fairies, like in my favourite book. Blue wings. Look you can see through them. Here's the stream, they're swimming. Oh no fairy, come here, dry your wings. Long hair, long wet hair, trailing like the water.

You help me, fairies. My daddy's coming to tea. My grandad's helped me. He's a dwarf. He's king of the dwarfs. He's got gold. He's there in the garden, digging for gold. He's built this house for me. Here's the kitchen. See, here's a shelf, on the apple tree.

My daddy's a prince, he's been in the battles. He's tall, my daddy. He's got a crown. No nasty witches got him, no witches in Balik-Papan. We'll give him a party. We'll put his table here. Now give me that plate. This is my favourite crockery. Grandma says it's broken, throw it away, dirty old thing. I don't want to. It's pretty, see. It's blue and white. Here's a princess on it. She's Chinese. She's running away, with her prince. There's a boat but not here on this.

I'm a princess, Uncle Vince said I was. I've got long hair and this is my most beautiful plate and cup. Now we want doilies. Where can we get them? Where's the prettiest flowers? This is my favourite. It's purple. It's not blue. My mummy loves azaleas. She says they are her nicest flowers. I love them. Azalea fairy, don't cry. I'll not pick you. Mummy says the fairies cry if I pick them. I mustn't. But here's one on the ground, it's on a stream, it's floating towards me. This is the loveliest colour. All the fairies want to eat from this doily and plate. But you can't. It's for my daddy. Here's some cake. I'll put it on the plate. Ooh it's hard to pull it off the ground. Just there.

"Look, Daddy, it's a fairy tea party. Do you want a cup of tea? Or this little cream cake?"

Frank's jaw tightened. He drew hard on his cigarette and shook the ash away. Some landed on the azalea doily. He stared down at the broken crockery, stems of grass on its surface. His pale blue eyes gazed beyond the fruit trees. "Just give us a break, Pam, will you? Just a minute's peace."

Silence is often the first reaction of the returned soldier. He has been in another world, a world where rules are different. He has no language with which to interpret this to people who have not been there. Feminist Susan Griffin has written a book on men's (and society's) silence about war, its "unspeakable whispered horrors". She tells of a friend's father, who routinely abused his daughters. He had been in Hiroshima five months after the bomb. He was profoundly affected, he "stood mute" before the scenes he had witnessed. His wife said, "Nothing before or since had so destroyed him. He returned shattered."

In 1945, a few authorities, including the military psychiatrists quoted, were aware that care would need to be taken with the anxieties of the returning soldier. A Sydney Morning Herald *correspondent reported by "beam wireless" that Mrs Roosevelt, wife of the American president, had warned that American women would need great patience and imagination in handling the problem of the returning soldier. Mrs Lydia Lynde, a parent education specialist, pointed out that the returned soldier might experience disappointment in home life, find civilian life boring, be reckless with money or dictatorial with wife and children. In*

turn, the wife might be reluctant to give up her war work and fearful of his example to children in table manners, conventions and language. Mrs Lynde listed twelve suggestions to assist the adjustment; these include the mother explaining the father's experience to the children and discussing with them books on "areas he has visited", a sort of war zone tourist guide and geography lesson.

Most Australians believed that life would quickly get back to normal. In August 1945, the Daily Telegraph *told how Mrs Kathleen Randall, the wife of a POW, heard her husband was coming home. She ran from her job in a butcher's shop to tell her eleven-year-old daughter, scattering meat coupons all over the place. "In the afternoon when the excitement died down a bit we decided to spring clean the house immediately and get it in good shape for Les's return. My sisters-in-law have promised to help me with the job." As soon as her husband arrived home, she would give up her position in the butcher's shop. "I will cook him all his favourite dishes and do everything possible to help him forget his internment."*

Dora was worried by what she saw. She was aware of Frank's hands shaking, the pressure welling up inside him, his tension flaring.

"Look at his hands," she said, "shaking away. Case of nerves. Poor Nita, what she's going to have to put up with!"

She knew about nerves and war. The first world war had left many casualties around Sydney, victims of gas attacks.

Frank had nightmares, which woke him screaming and sweating in the middle of the night. Pam felt scared sometimes when he was home, standing on the back step, smoking. She had to be careful of what she said. She stayed quiet.

And then there were times he was kind. He patted her hair. He showed her a pen he had brought back from Borneo, a fountain pen with gold markings down the side. Frank said it had been used to sign the peace treaty. Pam wanted to know more about it. She asked him questions about whose pen it was, why he had it, whether she could take it to her new school, where she had just started kindergarten, to show the teachers.

"Why doesn't this child just keep quiet? She doesn't have to know everything. You've absolutely ruined her, Nita, you and your mother, kowtowing to her every whim." His voice was high. He was quick to anger, a rapid smack stinging the face and the knee.

Nita hugged Pam to her. "Leave it be, Pam. Don't keep hounding your father. As far as he is concerned, he's come back and that's it. It's in the past. He doesn't want to talk about it."

In the years that followed my father's return, I learnt to fear his uncertain temper, his quickness to violence. Years later my mother still conveyed a sense of disappointment, of being cheated. "Your father came back a different man."

Women writers whose fathers were fighting out of Australia express anxiety, blame themselves for their father's absence, take on responsibility for his safe return. Germaine Greer reflects bitterly:

"Just when he should have been dandling me on his knee while I searched through his pocket for surprises he went away. He wasn't there to see me turn from being a baby into Daddy's little girl. It was the war he left me for - I knew that much ... I knew it was there, just out of sight, round a comer, behind the house fronts, ready to burst deafeningly out."

Penelope Nelson, whose journalist father fought in the Middle East, remembers:

"Clap hands, clap hands till Daddy comes home! Reciting that verse, sometimes prompted by a photo of a man with a beret over one eye, and having to be quiet while the grownups listened, endlessly it seemed, to a crackling bakelite wireless - to the extent that I remember the Second World War, that's what I remember. I had the impression that if I interrupted the radio news, world history would go wrong."

Josie Arnold's father dies in World War II, just after her birth. In the powerful first scene we are with the young girl experiencing her mother's sadness.

"she lay on her back and held out her arms and called my father's name in a heart-broken voice. I knew then that I was cold comfort, and this added a deep unworthiness to my already felt distress at not having been good enough to keep my father alive."

Many women do not remake a relationship with their fathers after the war. Germaine Greer describes her father as suffering from anxiety neurosis and notes how many Australian men become psychological casualties after wars. Jennifer Dabbs' heroine, Mary Kathleen Mitchell, is taken by her mother back to her own puritanical mother's home in Melbourne while her father is overseas fighting. She says:

"(Father) never mentioned what he'd done in those years away from us. It was something too terrible to talk about I suppose. It was only on Anzac day that he acknowledged having been a soldier. He marched with the other men and spent the rest of the day drinking. I didn't recognise him at all on Anzac day."

Those of us who have grown used to seeing war on television and to reading about the experience of returning Vietnam veterans are more attuned to the experience than people after earlier combats. It is common knowledge now that the returned soldier is a man traumatised by the experiences that he has suffered and unable to release the emotion to express them. In writing about the effects of the Vietnam War on women, Siobhan McHugh expresses shock that men were expected to shed the "bitter carapace of war" and "reveal a still-perfect chrysalis containing the stalwart affectionate family man".

But as a child I did not know this. I thought it had to do with my family. Many other children must have had similar experiences. No-one spoke of them at school, even when a child came in with a black eye. These things were private, they related to the War and that was something most people didn't speak about.

As I grew into adolescence I wanted to know more. I wanted to have some clear reason for my father's erratic temper. I wanted him to be a hero. Or if not that I wanted him to have been a victim. During the 1950s I heard about Changi, I saw the film Bridge over the River Kwai*, I knew about British nurses being marched through Malaysia. They suffered but were brave. I heard nothing from my father.*

My mother sometimes refers now obliquely to the horrors of the camps. She says, "What he'd seen in those camps! They were more dead than alive. Many of them weren't Australian, you know, they were English, American. But the way the Japanese had treated them!"

I remember him being dependent on drink. "Don't write that down," my mother says, "it'd upset other members of the family."

In the years immediately after the war, Frank did not go to the Anzac Day ceremonies and march. Instead, all too frequently he went to the Printing Office and did overtime. But gradually Frank's evening and weekend journeys began to include the local RSL. Shirley's husband George called by at the weekend. "Come on, Frank, let's check out the races. Come on up to the pub."

Occasionally, he brought a stranger home.

"Here's a chap I've just met at the club, Nita. An old digger. Now make him welcome, grill him a steak. Now what else will you have, mate?"

Dora would come out to the kitchen, clicking her tongue against her teeth. "We're not having this in my place, Frank. Keep your friends to the club."

Sometimes, peering around the door, Pam saw her father wearing a check open-necked shirt, quite different to his formal tie-wearing self. With other men he became happy. He was energised in a rough mating, confirmed in his experience. Their bodies changed, they moved solidly around each other, chests swelling forward, clapping other men on their shoulders. Their chins were raised, the saliva on their lips glistened, they shouted, "I'll tell you one, there was this time ..." Their voices roughened. Her father's vocabulary changed, "Mate, the bastards, the top brass ..." Frank looked different, happy, one of the crowd.

Dora muttered under her breath as she pushed mounds of wet sheets through a creaking mangle. Nita occasionally remonstrated, "Come on Frank, calm down." She put him to bed with a cool washer over his aching head.

The years of the 1950s were powerful in creating Australian military pride. Australians made the best soldiers, Gallipoli was an heroic occasion, the Anzac spirit informed the national character, the old slouch hat was worn with pride, "the bold and cheerful diggers scorned military rank and etiquette but were the best fighters of the war". That's what they said.

Alister Thompson points out:

"By emphasising the qualities of Australians in general rather than the nature and effects of war, it also helped them to keep painful personal memories at bay, and to compose a military past that they could live with in relative comfort."

Pam's generation of Australian war babies was not directly exposed to war. By the time Pam reached university at the end of the 1950s, even military service had been phased out, although young men a year or so older used to entertain them all at the pub with stories of how they had escaped it, feigning flat feet or homosexuality.

"Have you heard what Lytton Strachey said during the first world war when the judge asked him what he would do if a German soldier was raping his sister? He said, 'I would interpose my body between them'. He was homosexual, you see. That was the joke!" Piers, a tall thin boy from an academic family, was spluttering with laughter. They all joined in.

Pam's friends were firmly anti-war and opposed military ideology. They were suspicious of the motives behind the Korean War which had coloured their childhood, they listened in shock as Kennedy provoked the Cuban missile crisis, aware that he was showing himself as 'just another politician'. They had not heard of Vietnam.

They read Wilfred Owen and W. H. Auden. They poked fun at the sentimentality of Hemingway's attraction to the "realness" of men in battle. Wordy, argumentative, chain-smoking, they crowded into Sydney's first coffee bars and fancied themselves pacifists and existentialists.

Pam's father hated her friends. On the few times any came to pick her up at home, his face got red. His voice rose menacingly. His eyes blazed through them.

"And what would you do if there was a war, eh?" Spittle sprayed. "You useless types, you've no idea how lucky you are. And what you've got to thank us for. If it weren't for me, you'd be pulling rickshaws down Pitt Street."

Far from the man who had rejected the war and his part in it, my father moved through celebration of comradeship to belief in his own centrality in the great adventure and defence. His gradual embrace of the mythology of war seems to me to correspond with a growing sense of failure at his own life, his work, his family relationships.

And the Australian concern with the sacrifice of the returned soldier had taken care of him. He enjoyed the numerous RSL clubs around the suburbs of Sydney. The Government took care of his health. When his alcoholism reached a point where he could no longer hold down an active job he was accepted as Totally and Permanently Incapacitated. He received a pension.

Years later, long after my return to Australia, I met a woman who worked as a commissioner in Veteran's Affairs. She had been a lawyer who had fought and argued for years for the rights of welfare recipients to receive adequate support from government. She found her new role challenging. Veteran's Affairs tried to find ways of giving people things, not taking them away, she told me. Departmental policy was not to restrict veterans' access to any benefits, so central had the respect for returned soldiers become, so much had the Returned Soldiers' League dominated life in Australia after World War II.

My mother turned seventy-five in 1986.

"What would you like us to do? We could go out to a restaurant. Or take a ferry to Manly and find somewhere nice there."

"No point fussing about it, love." She disliked being fussed over, happier when taking care of others. "By the time you get to my age, you really want to forget what's coming each year! Let's just go out to tea. The boys really liked that little Italian place in Darlinghurst."

We left it at that. But I began to think it was a bit ungenerous. Seventy-five years, it was something to be celebrated. And she'd had a dreadful few years, with Dad so closed off after his stroke.

"I might give her a party," I said to my husband. "Just put on a lunch for her relatives." I had not seen much of them since our return, and for twelve years before that when we were living overseas. But at one time of my life that huge Irish family was a constant presence.

Nita was always anxious about Pam. She was a thin, sickly baby, puking, mewling, not keeping her milk down, crying a lot. Nita tried to keep her quiet, soothe her. When she moved back home to Belmore, she sought her mother's advice. She also turned to her sister-in-law Merle and her cousin Shirley, who both had daughters about the same age. There really wasn't any skiting among them. They were all in it together, husbands not around, or like Merle's husband, Nita's brother Reg, busy in a war industry. It did them good to get together, Nita thought, visit each other.

Mind you, what a contrast Pam was to her cousin Sandra, Shirley's daughter, with her round face, and dimples, plump and contented, so like her great-grandmother, so like a real Hare. Shirley and Nita had grown up together. Shirley, her brother Jacko and their father Tom had arrived at the small house in Belmore North one day, when Nita was only three. Their mother had left them that morning, just locked the two children outside their house in Woolloomooloo. She was running away with her lover, the rag and bone man. Shirley and Nita had slept in the same bed for the next fifteen years, fighting so much at times that they put a wire coat hanger down the centre to separate them.

Shirley was pretty and loved going out with boys and dancing. Nita was quieter and loved reading. Shirley used to take her to dances, but Nita always had a book. "You'll never get a sweetheart that way," Shirley said. Funny to think of it now. Nita grew up to love getting dressed up and going to balls. All of that was behind them now, with the war on.

Just about every couple of weeks, on Friday, they went to old Auntie Mary's at Erskineville. It kept the old ones happy, gave the young ones a chance to gossip. Mary was the widow of Nita's oldest uncle, Jack, the eldest in the family of her mother Dora and her nine brothers and sisters. When they were all there it was a big group. Mary had three daughters of her own, Muriel, the eldest of those, also had three. Madge the tomboy, the card, was fifteen years younger than Nita. She'd just changed jobs. There were always a few good laughs.

"Hen, your lunch is on the kitchen table," Dora shouted to her deaf husband, his radio blaring. She'd sliced a corn-beef sandwich and put it under a fine gauze net to protect it from flies. She rushed around, giving a final scrub to the gas Early Kooka oven. Nita had always been a bit careless. Now, had Nita got the baby all ready? She really was a bit of a handful.

The train to the city dropped them at Erskineville and with their baskets of cakes, contributions to the afternoon tea, and Pam's shawls and nappy bag, they had a lot to deal with. And wouldn't you know it, no sooner were they off the train than Pam started grizzling and sniffling.

She was still at it when they arrived. Both Dora and Nita went into the formal front bedroom, with a high double bed, its pink coverlet stiff. There was gossip and chat in front of the dressing table mirror as women took off their hats, shook their curls free, and freshened up lipstick.

"That a new perm, Violet? Looks lovely."

"Dear little Peter Pan collar, Audrey, it looks beautiful on that red sweater."

Shirley placed beaming two-year-old Sandra in a corner, with her soft doll. As the brown velvet bonnet was removed, the other women cooed, tickling the girl under the chin, encouraging her to show her new teeth. Nita sat on a hard chair, trying to get grizzling six-months-old Pam to suck from the bottle.

"What's wrong with this little one, then?" Mary was bending over, thick white hair glinting in a shaft of sunlight.

"I'm sorry, Auntie Mary," Nita flashed her sweet smile, "she's such a fretful baby, always crying. I hope she doesn't keep it up all afternoon, we'll never get any peace."

"Looks to me like you need a bit of break, my dear, a chance to have a chat with all the girls."

The old woman walked out to her kitchen where there was a bustle of women buttering Sao biscuits, placing slices of tomato and cheese on them. Audrey had already placed a great tin kettle on the stove and Dora was scalding tea pots. Mary brought down a bottle of hospital brandy, gathered a teaspoon from a drawer.

"You're starting early on your poison today," laughed her sister-in-law Lily, as Mary walked back through the lounge room.

"This will keep her quiet, my dear." Mary poured a couple of drops onto the teaspoon and into the baby's mouth. "Just trust me on this, I've seen enough of them." She settled Pam down in a nest of pillows on the shining satin bed.

Nita swirled out into the group of cousins. From a glass-fronted sideboard, she and Shirley brought out plates painted with wreaths of flowers and gentle bushland scenes, one on a high column, others with shining silver handles rising from the centre.

"This is a lovely one, Mary," Shirley held out one painted with a flower garden in intense colours.

"Isn't it just. It's from my sister's things."

Nita ran her hand over the smooth plate. Hers were all packed away now, at Grace Bros. When would she see them again? She had been buying things for years, each fortnight when she got paid, putting them into her highly polished glory box. She had bought tea towels and tablecloths, when they were on sale, lengths of silk, swami, cotton pelisse. She still had her long nightdresses cut on the cross, so that the skirt fitted tightly over the hips and swirled out around the ankles. She had stitched the seams on an old Singer machine and embroidered flowers or birds with fine shining cottons. She wore plain cotton now, with only Pam to see her. She'd got some beautiful bits of china, too, special cake plates. Before she left the Government Printing Office, when she got engaged, she had typed out recipe after recipe, soups, meat dishes, breads and fancy cakes. One day she'd use them.

In the kitchen, Muriel was putting out cakes brought by the visitors, a fruit cake from Renee, its top gleaming with crunchy walnuts and deep red cherries and Dora's soft yellow butter cake, its white icing dappled with thin shreds of coconut. Lily produced a selection of butterfly cakes in pleated paper cases, soft cream rising to the wings. A stiffly starched circlet of lace or cotton, a doily, was placed on each plate and the cake rested on top.

"That cake's turned out well, Renee."

"Ooh, we're in for a feast today."

Mary poured sugar into a small silver dish, then covered it with a woven shell, brightly coloured beads pulling its edges down over the bowl. Steam was rising from the kettle. In a flurry over the sink, Dora poured hot water onto the tea leaves.

In the dining area, Madge and Audrey, Muriel's daughters, the youngest members of the group, pulled out heavily starched white cloths, embroidered with flowers in shining colours, overstitched in white thread. "That's a lovely one, Muriel, when did you finish that?" Highly decorated tea sets were placed around. "Blessed teaspoons, where do they go?"

Older relatives were called. "It's out, Ivy. Tea'll get cold."

Through afternoon tea they chattered, and through the washing up and putting away that involved the whole party afterwards. No-one left until the last tea-towel was agitated, the last crumbs shaken from the stiff cloth onto the back path, the last precious plate or cup put back into its place behind the closed glass doors.

Then Shirley gasped, "Oh gosh, look at the time, I'd better be heading off."

"And not a peep out of Pam." Nita was flushed and laughing. She had had such a good gossip with Shirley, found out all about Madge's new office job and the news from Audrey's fiance in camp up in Darwin. "That brandy did the trick, Auntie Mary."

Dora tightened her mouth. She didn't approve of alcohol in any shape or form. But it had certainly kept the baby quiet and peaceful. Now they'd have her up all night. She was a sweet little thing, her first grandchild, but a handful, so scrawny. She'd never recovered from her premature birth.

They found their hats on the bed in the main bedroom, where Pam still lay, keeping their voices quiet till the end. Nita touched up her bright red lipstick. Pam was wrapped up in shawls and bonnet. There were kisses all around, promises to bring recipes and dress patterns next time.

During the years of the war and after, my world was the family of my mother and grandmother. Those were the visits that we paid, up and down the long railway lines, from Lakemba to St. Peters on the Bankstown line, out the East Hills line to Kogarah, Kingsgrove and Carlton, into Irene and Henry at Woolloomooloo, out to Bondi Junction to Florrie's. My world spread out through the lists of aunts and cousins, strange inter-connections, ages mixed up and down the family, as the children of my grandmother's oldest brother Jack met and mingled with the widow and daughters of the youngest boy Les, who had been born twenty-five years after his brother, with eight others in between. It was a pattern as fascinating to me as the elaborate doilies crocheted by my grandmother and her relations and set out stiffly starched on the dark gleaming wood of dining and dressing tables.

They were the world I knew, these aunts and cousins. There were differences in age and personality, some young and merry, laughing up and down hallways, others faded and grey, sitting quietly in the corner of the lounge-room, nodding as others put out the teacups and saucers, put their cakes onto plates. To my mother and grandmother they were a network of close attachments and familiarity; to me a blur of nodding heads and tinkling voices over the bell of teaspoons, and above all lists of names....this was Rosie's daughter, oh she was a terror, this was Clarrie's sister, this was Marge, this was Jessie, not really family, but almost, since the Hughes had lived next door.

They called themselves the Bourks.

Pam just couldn't understand it. There were so many aunties. Aunties and cousins and all of them girls. There were three cousins around her age, Sandra, Yvonne and Leonie. And her mother had cousins as well. Somehow they became Pam's aunties. There was Shirley and Merle and Madge and Violet and Betty and Elma. After that she got mixed up. And then her Grandma had sisters and cousins. Both Pam's mother and grandmother had brothers but Pam rarely saw them. All the men were at the war. Like her father.

The only man Pam saw was her grandfather, because they lived with him and Pam's grandmother in the house at Belmore North. He was a great soft mass of a man, bald head covered by a tweed cap, even indoors. When he removed it, his head was a perfectly smooth shiny ball, a few strands of grey hair wisping across it. Pam felt a catch in her heart whenever she touched it, as if it might shatter beneath her small fingers. He had broad strong hands, pulpy flesh. Each day, he sat in a corner of the darkened living room, in the middle of the house, thick curtains always drawn, poring over the racing form in a battered copy of the daily newspaper.

He was deaf. Her mother said his hearing was wrecked by years working as a boilermaker, working with noisy machines. Bang, clatter. Now the living room shook with the radio, blaring out raucous men's voices calling the names of horses. Pam had to shout so that he could hear her. He rarely answered. But he gave Pam a hug around the waist when she leant against him.

Her grandmother was fast and sharp, all jutting angles in her faded cotton dress and apron. She was busy around the house, cleaning, scrubbing and cooking. She washed every floor in the house each day, throwing out the rugs for airing. The front step was white as talcum powder.

Monday was the worst day. Then her grandmother and mother did the week's washing. Grandmother said, "Now get out from under our feet. Keep well away."

Pam crept down the concrete stairs at the back of the house. Beside them was a moist area called the fernery, always chilly even on the hottest days, dark tendrils of plants brushing Pam's face. It frightened her to go into the darkness there, to feel the plants with smooth sticky leaves. Better to take a doll or book to where the rest of the garden opened to the sunlight. On one side of the central path was lawn and an edging border of azaleas along the fence. On the other side were garden beds, carefully-dug black soil where Pam's grandfather grew potatoes and carrots, and alternated rows of beans and peas, first one planted and picked, then the other. At the back was a patch of fruit trees, lemon, peach, apple, pear, one of each, and a passionfruit vine coiling over the back fence. In summer when it bore its hard black fruits, with sweet juice spilling out, Pam's mother rushed to the back fence early each morning to pick the highest fruit before the neighbours. On the left, a tumbledown shack held at various times chickens, Uncle Jacko's greyhounds, old paintings and broken furniture, grandfather's workbench. Pam turned away from that and gazed back up the garden to the laundry, where the activity was.

The two women carried cane baskets of household washing down the stairs to the laundry and lit the fire under the copper, a big metal container taller than Pam, which stood in the corner. It began to bubble and steam.

"Keep away," they said, "it's hot, the water's boiling. You'd really get hurt." Nita grabbed a towel from the pile of washing, lifted the lid and threw it clattering into the stone sink. Into the steaming copper went a bar of Sunlight Soap, the water was stirred roughly with a bleached pole to set up suds, a long wooden stick agitated the heavy bundles of sheets. Later the sheets and towels, table-cloths, underclothes were dragged out from the copper on the long wooden stick and thrown into the great tub, steam rising from the piled whiteness. Nita and Dora's faces gleamed wet.

The clothes were then pushed through a large iron and wooden mangle that sat between the two tubs, spurts of water spraying from the heavy fabric. "Careful of your fingers, now. Stay away," the women cried out. Water gushed from the sheets back into the tub. They then threw the sheets into a scrubbed basket and carried them outside, where they were pegged onto rope lines that stretched across the garden, dripping moistly onto the rows of peas and beans, the mulched and rounded rows of potatoes. The sheets flapped in the breeze, the

lines held up by the long wooden clothes props, curving dangerously if the wind blew fiercely, threatening to cascade all the blowing whiteness into the dark soil. Men came by in horse-drawn carts, their cry "Cloooothes Prop" echoing in the dewy stillness of early morning.

When the sheets crackled between the fingers, they were unpegged, Nita reaching up on tiptoes. One woman stood at each end of a sheet, holding a corner in her mouth while she stretched the edges of the fabric as tight as possible between her two hands. Then with the fabric taut, she walked slowly up to the other woman. The sheet was halved, then quartered, then held close to her body while she folded it over. Pam liked to help then. She was able to fold pillowslips, tea towels, grandfather's shirts and doilies, but not the heavy sheets and tablecloths which felt as if they dragged her arms out from the shoulders.

"Just smell the goodness, lovely fresh sheets." Nita plunged her face into a pile of clothes as she carried the basket upstairs.

On Tuesday when the clothes were ironed, things were quieter. While Dora mended seams or turned collars, Pam was able to snuggle up to her knee and ask her for some stories. They were always about her family.

"My mother was Irish as Irish could be: Mary O'Reilly from County Cork." It was always said like that. Pam had seen an old photograph at Muriel's house. It showed a short stocky woman, with jet black hair scraped back into a bun and coal dark eyes blazing at the camera. "She cleaned her teeth, night and morning, with a bit of coal. Oh, she had beautiful teeth, my mother, so white and she kept them all till the day she died. Ninety she was, and every tooth still in her head." Pam could only take it on trust; in the photo the great-grandmother's mouth was clenched shut, a determined chin jutting out and her neck tightly bound in a high black collar.

"Tell me about the ship, Grandma."

"Well, Mary O'Reilly was one of a family of girls. One by one, they all left Cork and came out to Australia to marry. They were poor, you see. Dirt poor it was in Ireland in those years. No potatoes, they were starving. Well, Mary, on the boat to Australia, met a young Dutchman. Jan van Heeren." The grandmother rolled his name over her tongue. "Jahn vahn Heeereen. He was tall and blond with bright blue eyes. Oh, he was a lovely man, my father. But he was Dutch. Dutch and a Protestant. They married in Sydney. Mary didn't want the name van Heeren. She changed it to Hare. Without an O."

Mary and Jan had children. Ten of them. Pam's grandmother taught her the names. Jack, Sissy, Tom, Dora (that was her), Annie, Wal, Rosie, Reg, Lily and Les. It was Pam's first

nursery rhyme, first catechism. Ten names. Five girls, five boys, the grandmother said, five with black hair, five with blond, five with brown eyes, five with blue. Her family had formed her life. She and Annie were the only two girls without a boy between them. Pam nodded as she listened at her knee.

They lived in the Rocks near the wharves. Jan Hare got work as a labourer on the docks. Dora told Pam about their house in a small street, a dead-end up high on the cliff. All the other houses belonged to the families of Irish policemen. "All of them," she said. "All policemen, all Irish, all Catholic." Seven families, with great numbers of children. Next door were the Quigleys, and there lived Dora's friend Patricia Philomena, a name Pam rolled on her tongue. "She was a tiger," Dora laughed. "We used to have fun."

Pam listened, loved the thought of crowds of children playing in the street. She played alone in the garden, with her silent grandfather, her busy grandmother and mother for company. And went to visit her mother's relations.

My grandma's maiden name was Ellen Honora Bourk. She always pronounced it Ellen O'Nora, as if it was a second Irish surname. Like all her relations, she was proud of her Irish mother, although she was even fonder and prouder of her Dutch father. But the totally created name of Bourk, without an e, was their defining emblem with its suggestions of a mysterious Irish heritage. Just as her father, Jan van Borg, was a silent man, a shadowy figure in the stories, so the men of the family disappeared. Ours was a world of women.

And to these women I turned to celebrate my mother's birthday. I rang one of the cousins from my generation and gradually found names and phone numbers. They were mainly women, the surviving cousins. By the end of the week, I had asked twelve of the cousins from my mothers' generation and two of her aunts, who were still alive at over ninety. The only man was her younger brother, who suffered from Alzheimer's disease. My own younger brother was now working overseas. There were two female cousins from my generation, besides myself.

To all of them I emphasised that this should be a surprise. I was feeling quite pleased. I could show off my beautiful terrace house, the pieces of antique furniture we had picked up cheaply at auction in England or inherited from my husband's family. With the numbers coming it would be a squeeze, even around our big dining table, but some of us could sit in the kitchen.

My mother and her family imposed high standards of tidiness. None of the women in the family had gone out to work after they were married until my generation. Instead they devoted themselves to the maintenance of their houses and care of their families. I was the only member of my mother's family who had gone to university, and the only one who had worked full-time after marriage and children. Of the cousins in my generation who were

coming, both had left school when they turned fifteen, had married and had children young. Now that their children were older, one, married to a publican, completed the pub's books on an occasional basis. Another worked for two days a week as a doctor's receptionist. At the time of the party I was Director of the New South Wales Council of Social Service, a very demanding full-time job. My two sons, aged eleven and twelve, were at school.

I had arranged not to work on the day of the party, but I had done no preparation. I found myself resisting my mother's model of entertaining, which had her preparing food for any luncheon party at least two days beforehand. I knew I was a good cook and could rustle up lunches for crowds with ease. Instead of cooking I obsessively dusted and cleaned, even though I had someone cleaning the house one morning a week. It was as if I did not want anyone to see that I had let my housekeeping standards slip because of my paid work. I even wiped the shelves behind rows of books where the relatives would never look but which I had convinced myself had to be tidy. My husband laughed at this unusual fussiness. He was glad he could go off to lecture at university and keep well away from the festivities.

I also became obsessed by the fact that I had no tea-cups and saucers. Just mugs. I couldn't serve tea in mugs, not to my mother's family. They always had matching cups and saucers. On the morning of the party, I rushed out to a nearby antique shop and splurged on half a dozen exquisite French porcelain cups and saucers. I knew six wasn't enough. But perhaps some would have coffee, which would be no problem. We had inherited from my husband's family an enormous number of small after dinner coffee sets, which must have been fashionable during the 1950s on the heights of Bellevue Hill.

But what to cook, now that was a problem.

Dora and Nita cooked on Sunday. They were up early, mixing the week's cakes to go into the oven with the roast meat. It was hard belting the unyielding sugar and butter together, too hard for Pam's small and bony arms. Nita sent the fork whirring through the mixture until it was white. Pam snatched a scraping of the sweet mixture on the edge of her nail. Dora peeled potatoes and carrots.

When they made a pie, Pam made biscuits. Leftover pastry was rolled out and slowly she pressed a thimble into the soft surface. She had to be careful; too hard and the thimble carried away the shape, leaving a hole, with raw pastry jammed in the thimble, so hard to get clean. If she was lucky, she drew the thimble away leaving a deep impression in the dough, a small round jewel which she carefully picked up and placed on a tray ready to be cooked.

Even though she seemed to love cooking and helping in the kitchen, she rarely wanted to eat. The two women shook their heads. She would never thrive. They would have to build her up somehow. Get some cod-liver oil.

They worried that she was not interested in food. At age three she was still underweight. She fidgeted with her utensils, wriggled in her chair, demanded attention.

Nita decided to work on Pam's love of stories. The plate became an elaborate drawing, a fantasy map.

"Now, Pam, do you see this pile of meat? Look, do you see, it's a beautiful castle, look at the tower and turrets here? See this bit of potato, all mashed. It's the smoke from the castle chimney. This patch of carrots and beans. What beautiful flowers they are. And see this is a crazy path of gravy winding through, see that brown stone shining wet from the rain."

"Who do you think lives in the castle?" Pam shook her head, her eyes wide. "Well, I think it's a wicked old witch. She's gone out to catch some children to use for her spells. Probably she is looking for a little girl just three years old." Pam clutched her skirt under the table.

"Quick, the old witch is away, now's your chance, eat up her magic garden, that will break her power. Good girl, you're finishing her off. Just one more mouthful of these flowers, now. Ooh, she's coming, she's coming back. Now the castle. Open up. Eat it up quickly so she's got nowhere to live."

Pam's eyes were enormous. Where was the witch? In the shadows behind the kitchen range? She opened her mouth. Then, lips crammed together, she held the flowers and bricks and pieces of straw and smoke in her mouth. She struggled to swallow, terrified of the witch's approach, terrified of what was going to happen to her stomach when all the castle got inside.

At eleven o'clock, an hour before guests would begin arriving, I was arranging large vases of lilies and hydrangeas from our house in the blue mountains. Suddenly, the bell rang. It was my mother's youngest cousin, Fay. Fay lived in a town house in Campbelltown with her youngest son, now twenty.

She roared, beamed, embraced me. "You never know out our way when the bloody trains are going to come. That East Hills line. Anyway, one came as soon as I got to the station and just shot straight through. So I thought I'd come early and give you a hand."

I stared in shock. Time had really got away from me. I was already roasting a couple of large chickens and was planning to make a tomato and basil soup and a fruit salad. In one hour by myself I could have prepared them and a salad. But with a relative I scarcely knew,

whom I had not seen since I was young! I could not show her my chaotic cooking methods. I cursed my casualness, which I was sure was a denial of my anxiety. I would have to change the menu and buy some food.

"Fay," I said, "make yourself a cup of tea. Just use this mug. I have to get a few things."

I rushed to the group of shops on the corner of our street, thanking my lucky stars that I lived in Paddington, well provided with expensive take-aways. I bought fruit tarts and baguettes from the French patisserie. I selected patés and cheeses from the delicatessen. In the store cupboard I had rice for an accompaniment and in the fridge lettuces and herbs for the salad. Done.

I took the flesh off the chickens, mixed it with paprika and sour cream and put it in the oven. I boiled the rice, washed the salad, put the patés out on a pretty plate. Fay cut the bread, sliced the tarts, took water biscuits out of a packet. At every turn she said "Have you got a doily?" She wanted doilies for under the vases, on the baskets to hold the bread, on the plate to hold fruit tarts, on the tray to hold the tea and coffee cups. She wanted them in the middle of the dining table. She wanted to put them on top of the place mats.

I had no doilies. I dived my hand into a drawer and pulled out black cotton and green linen napkins. Fay took them, but you could tell she did not approve.

Pam loved to get out Nita's collection of doilies, which Nita and her friends had embroidered and crocheted. They were kept in a flattener, two round pieces of thin board fastened together with ribbons. The doilies, after being bleached, washed, starched and ironed, were put one on top of another on the bottom board, and the top board tied down to keep them in place. There was a kookaburra on the top board, outlined in coal black and painted red. The child stared at the bird's one sharp critical eye. All these doilies had better lie flat and not get creased, he seemed to say, beak snapping shut.

Nita had brought the collection of doilies back to Dora's during the war, since they couldn't fit much else. She had loved doing up her own house. It was like a doll's house. Sometimes she nursed Pam on her knee at night, just before putting her down to sleep. "Oh it'll be lovely when we get back to our own place. I had it so nice. Everything in its place, little touches everywhere".

Pam loved making her own little touches. On Tuesdays, when the ironing was finished, she helped Nita and Dora put back the freshly washed doilies. One set of five crocheted doilies she placed on Dora's dressing table, with its triple mirror, and on them the cut glass dressing table set. "I'll do that, Pam," Dora said. "They're too heavy for you and we don't want my

good set broken." More doilies were placed on the dining room table, on side tables and dresser, with cut-glass vases and bowls on them.

My brother, born after the war and five years younger than I, once said, "There's no doubt about mum. She has everything looking just so. She puts a little bit of care into everything". I stared at him. At this stage I was twenty. I was still living at home but was not attached to any aspects of my parents' stultifying suburban existence, exemplified by doilies. Like my contemporaries, in particular those studying architecture, I was drawn to the new Swedish design. New for Australia that is. Finlandia in Woollahra had strongly patterned fabrics. A shop at Edgecliff displayed cool unadorned furniture. At most there might be a throw on the table or some square place mats. Table-cloths were definitely out. Everything was in bold colours, making what my architect friends called strong statements: orange, pink, blue and green checks.

In comparison to this admirable simplicity, my mother's house in the early 1960s seemed very fussy, doilies on all the surfaces, ribbons tied around pot-plants, antimacassars on the couches, plumped up cushions, small dolls in crocheted crinolines hiding the toilet paper rolls. It seemed odious to me.

But that was then. Now the terrace house in Paddington that we had purchased on our return to Australia was cluttered to a degree my mother could not accept. Comfortable old furniture, mixes of styles, clashing fabrics. Antique Staffordshire ornaments, bright plates from Spain and Italy. Gathering dust, my mother said. And walls of bookshelves. My mother knew that books were the worst thing for dust and silverfish. When I was growing up the books that I had been given were stacked on the top shelf of the linen cupboard. I had to balance unsteadily on a chair to reach them. They came down smelling of mothballs. Now I had books everywhere. And not a doily in sight.

The party guests all arrived on time. The old ones had great difficulty getting down the narrow staircase of the terrace house and my mother's brother almost turned his ankle on the bottom step. "Trying to kill me, are you, Coll?" he said. He didn't mean it in a hostile way. Just frank. "Turned into one of those women's libbers, eh?" was how he greeted me on my return from England. I suppose my short cropped hair was a little confronting.

Some of the aunts, like smiling Florrie now coming down the stairs, had once been special favourites of mine.

They were visiting Dora's youngest sister Lily. Lily was the beauty of them all when she was young, long blond curls flying, huge blue eyes. Lily and her husband Henry loved young people. They used to join Shirley and Nita when they were courting young men in the years before the war. Lily said it made her feel young again, to be out like that with her nieces. They went, all six of them, on a ferry or for a picnic. Henry, tight brown waves clustered

along his head, had a box Brownie. He took the few photos dotted through family collections, the women in floating dresses, the men in cream trousers with wide cuffs and white open-neck shirts.

"My dear," she said to Nita, "I do want to ask a favour. *Bambi* is on in town at the Saint James. Please let me meet you in town next week. I'll take Pam to see it. She's old enough now. I know she'll love all those animals, sweet little things. And you can have some time to yourself, go and see what's new in the shops, get some fabric to make yourself a new frock."

Nita smiled as she heard Lily's voice, curling and trilling to her. She knew the outing would delight Lily, who loved children. She had no children of her own. Voices were lowered when the other aunts talked about it. "Poor Lily", they said. "She loves them so." Nita and Shirley didn't know what was the matter. People did not go into detail, it wasn't polite. Just that she had never grown or developed. That was all.

"Pammie," Nita called down the corridor of the small Bondi Junction semi. "Come on in, Lily wants to ask you out."

Pam was crouched with a fairy book in one corner of the cramped yard, near where Henry was hammering a shoe in his workshop. She took a deep breath so that she could run through the passage to the house. She would have to be quick to avoid the notice of Cocky Tindall, a big sulphur-crested cockatoo. It dominated the small backyard, striding around its cage, tearing bits of green and white vegetable with a vicious curved beak. "Pretty cocky," it croaked. Lily and Henry were devoted to it, but Pam was terrified. If she was unlucky it might throw out seed, which would catch in her hair. She closed her eyes and ran, holding the book over her head, fearful that he might get out of the cage and clasp that tight beak into her neck.

Next week, they met Lily at the David Jones cafeteria. After a shared devonshire tea, Lily took Pam next door into a theatre covered in red velvet, soft and accommodating. Pam was filled with awe. And then the curtains swirled open, and on the screen was a huge picture, fully coloured. Music swept through the theatre, picture followed picture as the deer, looking just like the illustrations in some of her story books, moved slowly through the woods, grazing by the stream. But then came the shock of the fire in the forest, Bambi looking for his mother, huge eyes searching. Pam started to weep, to sob loudly, tears gushing forth, great intakes of breath, grabbing Lily's hand, wailing. Lily was sobbing too, tightly squeezing Pam's hand. "Oh the poor little things", she moaned. When the usher flashed her torch along the row, trying to find the source of the noise, it was Lily, tears still flowing, who cried, "Don't make her leave. Please don't. She just loves animals."

There were cries of delight among the family members and my mother's eyes glistened with excitement. The whole family crowded around the large dining table. They descended on

the food like locusts and drank glasses of champagne. My cousins and I sat in the kitchen and drank more champagne. There actually wasn't enough pate or tarts for us younger ones to eat, which made them both giggle a lot, because I'm supposed to be a wonderful cook with a bookcase full of recipe books from all around the world. They use the Women's Weekly Cook Book*. I think it made them feel quite good that I could make a mistake about quantities.*

In general the day was a success. They all liked the food, particularly the champagne. Just the right number of people had tea and the coffee drinkers loved the little gold-rimmed cups. Everyone said my house was lovely and so unusual. They had all stopped living in terraces fifty years ago, when the houses still had outside dunnies and night soil men walked down the narrow lanes between houses to empty the pots twice a week. Now they all had decent suburban houses with gardens. Still, it was wonderful to see what could be done with terraces nowadays, they said, and Colleen had such lovely things. So many books too. Well, she always was a clever girl.

My mother enjoyed her presents: scarves, handkerchiefs and a book or two. She noticed that the house was much less dusty, although she commented about dirty patches on the kitchen floor and cat's fur on one of the couches. All in all I was pleased I had given her this special party.

She rang me early next day to thank me. I said "Fay was really disappointed in me as a housewife. I don't have any doilies."

"You always need some," she said. "To keep things off your furniture and to make things look nice. I'll get you some."

She gave me half a dozen doilies and three tray cloths. They were beautifully clean, gleaming white and starched when they arrived, but soon lost their stiffness and became greyish. I keep them in a special drawer. I place one on the dining table under a vase of flowers. But mostly I use them when my mother comes to tea. Particularly on the trays underneath the French porcelain cups and saucers.

I haven't got a kookaburra doily-flattener. It is still at my mother's filled to bursting point with her doilies. I only have to ask.

*

Initially I thought this story was about the rather fragile nature of my feminist rejection of my mother's values. I think now that it is actually more about doilies. About their importance in

a world where what you control is the area immediately around you. About women's desire to create something of beauty. About how easy it is to crochet or embroider something relatively small, which you can carry with you on the train to work and bring out at lunch time. About the importance of the ritual of washing, cleaning and starching when you live in tight and crowded streets where dust from the road comes in and men return from their jobs on the wharves and at the railway yard with black dirt in their work clothes. About how doilies show that you care, that you aren't getting cast down. It is also about the pleasures of being part of a close-knit community formed by women working on shared household tasks.

Our childhood memories often concentrate around our mothers doing quiet and regular work, when there were few household appliances, like washing machines or dish-washers. We forget the harshness, the physical exertion. Australian writer Barbara Hanrahan in many books lovingly recreates her all-female family, consisting of her widowed mother, her grandmother and her Mongoloid aunt. Hanrahan rejoices in recreating female experience, washing, powdering, taking part in the preparation of Sunday roast dinners, caring for her grandmother's garden. It is presented almost as a dreamy, magical place, "the quiet calm world I came from", intensely experienced in its sensuous aspects by a small girl. Marion Halligan is another writer who captures the engrossing rituals of cooking and preparing food in the years after the second world war, the subtle changes in food fashions.

*

Not long after my return to Australia in 1979, I bought myself a skirt at Paddington Markets, from a fey girl wearing a long flowered shawl. She made dresses out of old embroideries and net curtains. The skirt I bought was made up of twenty doilies, carefully patchworked together. I wore it to a party. My friend Robin, an art historian, said, "You'd better not let any of the feminist art theorists see you in that. They're reclaiming women's art." Her voice rose stridently. She was involved in the new theoretical movements. Bodies of knowledge. Knowledge of bodies. "Those doilies should be in a museum. They're like Leonardos. That skirt is a total desecration."

The skirt still hangs in my wardrobe. I can't fit into it any longer; besides, I no longer wear hippy clothes. I have seen displays of doilies in the Powerhouse Museum. I suppose my skirt could end up there too. In the future, might it be seen not as a desecration, but as a faithful homage to the doily?

The phone rang harshly one Sunday morning not long after our return. We'd been to a welcome back party with old friends the night before and my head was heavy with trails of thick Australian Shiraz. We didn't drink like this in England.

"Col, you've got to come!" My mother's voice was high-pitched and urgent. My heart jumped. My kids had been staying overnight with my parents, their first night away since we had been back in Sydney.

"It's your father. He's had another turn. I've called an ambulance."

We dressed, jumped into the car, drove fast across the city. Mum answered the bell, two small boys urgently pushing past her.

"Grandpa fell down," the younger piped.

"He's out in the back garden. He's not hurt, just asleep", the older one added, five years old, full of information.

My mother seemed calm, a tightness around her mouth. She had left him where he had fallen, on the edge of a concrete path, his head in the kikuyu grass. His breathing was stertorous.

I gazed down at him, my emotions a mix of love and fear. I might never be able to talk to him about the problems between us. He was unconscious, he was absent. That was familiar to me.

Pam hung over the gate at her grandparents' house and looked up the street. Surely he'd come soon. Why was he never home? He'd been away for the first four years of her life and now he was scarcely ever in her grandparents' house. He was always out, out or working back.

When she was little, during the war, her mother used to tell her that they would have their own house when her father got back. Yet now he was back and they still lived with her grandparents, in their small house with only two bedrooms. Her father slept with her mother in the big bed. She had a little bed placed on the closed-in back verandah.

It was crowded. Racing broadcasts reverberated through the thin walls. Pam's grandmother ran the household, a whirl of constant movement. She tightened her lips, imposed standards of cleanliness and proper behaviour. She made sure everything was spotless.

Pam wanted so much to see her father more. She wanted him to come home and take her out playing, perhaps to a park, where he could push her on the swings. Like the fathers in stories, he would arrive home from the office, take off his shoes and settle into an armchair with his newspaper. He would ask her to bring his slippers and his pipe. That would be nice. She would run off and find them, and then settle on a little cushion at his feet. He would pat her head. It would be lovely and comfortable. He would see she was a good girl and would love her.

Sometimes he enjoyed playing with her, telling her stories, reciting poems. Once they went to get the milk in a small bucket. Coming back from the shop, he swung the bucket around and around, no drops falling out. It was magic. But mostly, his work seemed more important to him. He always seemed to have important things to do at the Office. It wasn't fair. She wanted him to play with her.

When Pam looked at her face in the lid of a biscuit tin, she saw both herself, and someone who was not her, a face that was larger and softer around the edges, whose eyes were blurred and whose mouth made a funny grimace. The arrival of her father in her grandparents' house was like that. The activities of the house remained the same, the rooms and the garden were the same, but there was a new presence which altered those places and relationships.

When she and her mother were with her grandparents during the war, everything seemed happy. They washed and cleaned and shopped and ate. But now, there was something a little different. A raising of voices, her grandmother hissing through her clenched teeth, her mother running around more and trying to keep Pam quiet.

There was anger about the house now. It bristled in corners.

My father Joe worked at the Government Printing Office. At the age of fourteen he had been given an apprenticeship. It was the middle of the Depression and his bookmaker father was having difficulties making ends meet, with his wife and the family of four boys. Joe and his older brother Ken were put out to work. The Christian Brothers from Parramatta where he was at school didn't want him to go. They wanted him to complete his education. His Latin teacher walked all the way from Parramatta to their home at Rydalmere to ask his father to let Joe stay. But the money was needed. And though Joe was young, he had to pull his weight. Arch was little more than a baby and poor Frank was simple. He'd have to be put away soon. It was too much. No, Ken and Joe could start bringing something in.

When war started, Joe had been working for fifteen years. He had become a proof reader. It suited him. You needed a sharp eye and an accurate mind to be a proof reader. He had both: steely blue eyes, staring down a sharp and angular nose, a precision for detail, a keenness to get everything correct, an absolute certainty in his own rightness.

My mother said that they thought highly of Joe at the Printo, that they were grooming him for promotion, perhaps even training him eventually to become Government Printer. But when he came back from the war, he found that a younger man had been placed in a supervisory position. "You lot went away to the war," said the bosses. "Victor didn't go. He was loyal to the Office. He deserves everything he's got."

Joe continued to work at the Printing Office. It was all he knew. He stayed in the proof-reading section and devoted himself to checking the Hansards which arrived every Parliamentary sitting day, the Departmental reports, the School Magazine. He worked back late at least three days a week and often during weekends during the 1950s, particularly when Parliament was sitting. He became Father of the Chapel.

Pam was five. She stood next to her grandparents' window. She pulled the lace curtain slowly aside, just a tiny way, so that the neighbours on the other side of the street could not see in.

On the street her mother climbed into the back door of an ambulance. She was very fat and moved slowly. Dora clicked her tongue against her teeth. "Look at all those nosy-parkers peering out. Your father's made a proper show of us, calling the ambulance. She's nowhere near ready. They could have got the train down, like anybody else."

Pam was worried. Perhaps her mother was sick. That was what ambulances were for. Nita, however, seemed happy. She turned round, smiled and waved back at Pam.

"Wave to your mother now," her grandmother said. "Blow her a kiss. She'll be bringing you back a new baby".

Pam's brother was round and soft. Her aunts crooned, "Look at those rolls of fat on his legs. Isn't he gorgeous! He's a real Hare." He made loud slurping noises on his bottle. Pam pinched his plump legs.

The baby's cot was in her parents' room. One night, the women were still in the kitchen, clattering the dishes as they washed up, next to the alcove where she slept. "Why not go and start resting on our bed, Pammie," Nita called.

Pam went quietly into her parents' room. She could see her face, narrow and shadowy in the dressing table mirror. It frowned back at her intensely.

She got into her nightdress. She lay down on her parents' bed, next to the cot. She thought, "I am trying to go off to sleep." She felt tears in her eyes and the beginning of a headache in the space behind them. She rolled from side to side. She thought, "I feel things pressing down on me. I am having a terrible nightmare. I am going to scream." She cried out loud, she rolled over into the baby's cot. She could feel him squashing beneath her.

Nita rushed in, picked up the baby. "Oh darling. Big boy. Don't be frightened now. What was she trying to do to you?"

And turning to Pam, a flush of anger brushed her face, the first anger Pam had felt from her. "You're a naughty little girl. This is not like you at all. You're deliberately trying to hurt little Brian."

Pam lay still in the cot, eyes clamped shut. Nita shook her. "Come on, Pam. Don't expect me to believe that you're asleep. Get up, Madam, what are you playing at?"

Pam crinkled her eyes. "Wha ... Wha ... What?" She tossed her head to and fro on the crushed pillow, banging her head on the bars of the cot. She dragged her knuckles to her eyes, rubbing, rubbing, pretending first that grainy sleep was there, then suddenly finding hot tears spurting in response to the sharpness of anger in her mother's voice. She sobbed, "Why are you cross with me? I haven't done anything. I had a nightmare."

Nita patted the baby's back, soothing him. She reached out a hand to her daughter, face flushed, hair scuffled and stroked her cheek.

"Oh, little Pammie. Come on, now, you deliberately woke him up. But don't cry. I still love you. You're my girl. Don't get upset by the changes. Be happy now you've got a little brother to love. And your daddy's back. We're a proper family. And soon we'll be getting our own house. That'll be something to look forward to, won't it. You'll have a little bedroom, with a wardrobe and a dressing table."

Feminist psychoanalytic theorists such as Nancy Chodorow and Alice Miller are particularly useful in looking at the relations between mothers and daughters and on the difficulties of daughters gaining the necessary separation from the mother. Chodorow suggests this is particularly hard when there is cross-generational mothering, when a daughter is turned towards her mother, who is in turn turned towards her mother; women, finding it difficult to express anger to their mothers, become narcissistically absorbed with their daughters.

Furthermore, the eldest child is often described as being threatened and displaced by the arrival of a younger sibling. My own memory is confused on this point. I do remember the arrival of my younger brother; I remember as well the fierce and possessive love that I felt for him, a big doll of my own. I have blocked out what must have been the violent feelings. I had, after all, been my mother's major focus for four years during the war, drawn into her world, mirrored in every one of her glances. Within the space of a year a father had arrived, whom I adored and feared, who had taken my place in her attentions and her bed. Now this was compounded. A new brother had arrived, the first boy within my mother's immediate family circle, a healthy, laughing, strapping baby, while I was skinny with a poor appetite. In photos of this time, my brow is always furrowed. I stare at the camera with anxiety.

Nita and Frank searched desperately for a house. "A place of our own, Nita." His mother had decided to stay on at West Ryde, the house they had originally bought. They would find somewhere else.

But in those years after the war, there weren't any houses. If there were, they were in areas that were out of bounds. They saw a house in Annandale.

"My God, Nita, what are you trying to do to me," Frank said. "This filthy area, it's working class. You're trying to drag me down to your level."

Nita liked the thought of Balmain, where she'd lived when her father worked on the Clayton Street wharves. She loved Balmain. It was near the water, and streets of wooden houses curved down steeply to the bays. She'd had a friend whose father was in charge of Cockatoo Island. They had such good times as young girls. They sat in rowboats, or played around the island, their legs bare. Frank said Balmain had rats. "Nita, put that place out of your mind. I sometimes wonder what you think I am. The only people in Balmain are Bog Irish. My family are better than that."

Each weekend during the war, Pam and Nita had visited the house at West Ryde, where Frank's mother lived. It was a magic house to Pam, a mysterious place, in a rambling and untidy garden. It settled into dark leaves and moist soil on a corner opposite a park.

Pam's grandmother Margaret drifted round the house and the silent, whispering garden, her faded red hair softly spilling down from hairpins, her blouse drawn high round her neck with a heavy brooch. She lived there with Stella, a small sparrow of a woman. Stella scared Pam. Unformed sounds came out of her mouth, she laughed with a high-pitched squeal, her arms and legs flapped out of her faded print dress.

After Frank's return, they went to visit on weekends when he wasn't working. Vince had also come back from the war and was living with his mother. After his return from the war, he had to finish one year of law at University. There was always bustle when they arrived at West Ryde. Vince would stop reading and studying and rush out. He liked to throw Pam upside down. He hugged her more than her own father. Pam loved to run her fingers though his crinkly black hair.

Nita carefully drew a cake out of the basket, asked if she could put Brian down for a rest. Frank joined Vince in the garden for a smoke. Margaret and Nita laid out cups and plates in the shadowy dining room on a lace tablecloth. Frank came in quietly, a cigarette glowing in the dark. Pam had a cool lemon drink and slice of cake, sitting to one side, while the two men stood with their cups. She wanted to be grown up and drink tea out of a beautiful cup with violets twining around. She loved visiting her grandmother and Uncle Vince. Why did her grandmother have strange, cawing Stella staying? It would be so much nicer for Pam to live here, in the quiet damp garden, and to read all of Vince's books. Grandmother poured out tea, the cups rested on a lace cloth.

Vince said to Frank, "You should seize the opportunity. Take a returned soldiers' scholarship. Better yourself, make use of your brains."

Frank's voice was raised. "You should mind your own business."

When they came home after this argument, Frank often said he was going up the hill. Pam knew he didn't mean to the church. He shouted at Nita. "I want to get out of this oppressive house, get some fresh air, find some people to talk to." Her mother said, "Don't, Frank." But he did.

Money was put aside out of Frank's regular pay packet. Grace Bros was paid for the storage of furniture, the back verandah was converted to a bedroom for Pam, then split in two to fit Brian. Nita and Dora washed and cleaned, Henry listened to the races, Frank stayed at work or went out. The tensions simmered. Pam thought, "It will all be different when we get our own house."

In 1945, the Sydney Morning Herald *was already warning of a post-war housing shortage. A two-page expose highlighted a December 1943 finding that there was already an anticipated*

278,000 shortfall of houses. The next day commentators asked why surplus plants weren't retooled after VE day to make housing requisites instead of munitions? A headline urged Australia to Build Homes Now for Sake of Family Life.

Jill Ker Conway reminds us that few houses had been built during the Depression, none during the war. On her family's arrival from the country, they found Sydney bursting at the seams, following a 15% rise in population, with a thriving black market in housing. Barbara Brooks in rural Queensland remembers that:

> *"... houses like my grandmother's burst at the seams after the soldiers came home at the end of the war and got married and had children. The verandahs were closed in with fibro painted cream, and there were louvres with rippled glass so the neighbours couldn't see in. ... All around us were families crammed into small houses, with the same closed-in verandahs, rooms tacked on the back, caravans in the backyard."*

Neither of my parents thought that they would still be living with her parents twelve years later. I was growing up. In 1946, my brother was born. Three generations crammed together.

When I ask my mother why they stayed so long, she blames the housing shortage. Yet it transpires that my grandmother, my father's mother, whose husband had died before the war, owned some houses in nearby Campsie. She went there every week to collect the rent, often not taking it when the tenants said they were out of money. She said to my mother, "You wouldn't want to live in them, they're very small." Neither my father nor mother seemed to have thought of questioning that, or of looking for houses or flats to rent. It seems to me extraordinarily passive of my parents to have gone on living with my grandparents.

Uncle Jacko, Nita's cousin, had come to stay. He was just back from working up the country. Down in her grandfather's shed, he kept a couple of greyhounds.

Pam hated the dogs. They had lean bones, grey skin pulled tightly, sharp noses sniffing the ground, constantly moving legs. There was a sense of sharp card-playing that hung around them as they snaffled around, restless behind the barbed wire.

"Don't put your fingers near those things," Dora called. "They'll have them off in a tick!"

More than the greyhounds, Pam hated Uncle Jacko. He was small, red-faced, hair sticking out, always shouting.

One day, she was sitting on the toilet, door open to the garden, swinging her legs, singing a song to the light.

Suddenly Jacko erupted from the shed, running up the garden.

"Shut the door, you dirty little thing. Get that door shut!"

The toilet was dark, its concrete grey and unyielding. Pam felt sick with the door closed firmly. And Jacko had called her dirty, when really he was, always down the back with his dogs and the spiders and other things. She sniffled a little as she pulled her tingling fingers away from her crotch, grabbed a piece of rough toilet paper and wiped herself. She wished she could tell her mother she hated Uncle Jacko.

On some weekends, Frank went to the races with George. Pam knew races were what her grandfather listened to on the radio, a speedy gabble of noise. When Frank came home from the races, he often had a sweet smell on his breath. He laughed and hit Nita on the bottom. Nita said, "Not too much now, Frank." Pam laughed up at him as he twirled her upside down, like Uncle Vince did. He could be cheerful, her father. Dora sniffed loudly.

Frank stayed away more often. He tightened his mouth and said, "I'll be back later Nita. There's work at the office. It's important. I have to do it."

He got an extra job, teaching English and mathematics to young men training to be printers at the technical college, a heavy brick building near Central. He went straight from work, eating a sandwich that Nita had made and packed tightly in greaseproof paper. "All the more to put aside for a deposit," he said. "We might have a chance to look around this weekend, if I don't have to work at the office."

On many nights Nita made dinner early, making sure that they got the kids fed and settled early, just in case there was another blackout. Here they were four years after the war was finished and there was still all of this unrest. Communists in the unions, the papers said. Coal was in short supply. Bunnerong Power House wasn't able to deal with all the demands.

Pam hated blackouts. She hated the way the lights flickered to and fro and suddenly darkness plunged around them. "Oh God, not again!" Dora clicked her teeth. "Get out the blessed candles. I don't know when they're going to settle this." Pam sighed heavily as she went to bed. She couldn't read by candlelight. She lay there, eyes open, hoping that there wouldn't be raised voices.

Sometimes, Frank came home from work after nine, his face quite red. He said "I'm not going to put up with it much longer, Nita. Your family are pulling me down. I spent the best years of my life protecting people like you, and now look at it. No houses available. Was it for this that I went away?"

One Saturday, late in the afternoon, Pam stood outside the house. Frank came down the street. He moved strangely, staggering from side to side. Feathers fell softly around him, as if he were a pillow. He laughed loudly and brought out a chicken. Its head stuck out of a brown paper bag. "I've won a raffle," he said. "Our luck's changing." Pam heard Nita behind her, saying "Oh God, will you look at this", as he slid to the ground. Pam suddenly found it hard to see him. His edges blurred, as feathers drifted around his sharp nose, his piercing blue eyes.

English writer Carolyn Steedman asks how the myth of patriarchy works when the father is rendered vulnerable by social relations. From my own story I would be interested to consider this in relation to a father who was alcoholic, weak, absent. How does the child experience the contradictions of flawed power in the adults closest to him/her? A number of the Australian women writers writing about this period describe weak and damaged fathers, while the mothers are aggressive, punishing to their daughters. The families are battlegrounds.

I was always scared when my father came home late from work. My throat would tighten. Drunk again. What time was it? Eight-thirty. So he'd worked back for a couple of hours until seven o'clock and then gone to an RSL club.

He raised a hand, tried to shout. But his spirit subsided. His mouth wobbled. He swayed to and fro.

My grandmother fell silent. She thought this was fitting. He fancied he was so much better than them. Well look at this.

And I thought it was all my fault. I wasn't doing the right thing. If only I could be a better girl things would be better. But until then I'd try to make them all happy, so they wouldn't get cross.

One morning Pam settled herself at the edge of the playground on a seat with her book open. The Famous Five were having a special meeting. Then voices broke into her concentration. Two girls, Margie and Jill, were waving at her. "Come and play," they called, "come and play." The game was tunnelball, one she had often seen before. Girls formed a long chain, each grasping onto the back of the one in front, their legs wide open. The girl in

front rolled a large ball through the tunnel as straight as possible and it was picked up by a girl at the end who then ran quickly to the front of the team and rolled the ball through again.

Pam hesitated. She did not like rough games because her clothes might get dirty. She felt awkward running, couldn't catch balls, tripped all the time in skipping games. But it could be exciting to be part of a team. She ran forward to the others.

Pam joined one team. Jammed in by girls front and back, she awkwardly squirmed backwards with each throw until her turn as the catcher arrived. The ball came shooting towards her, her fingers reached out, scrabbling. "I've got it now." It was clenched to her heart, bumpety-bump. She ran as fast as she could up the side of the team, all yelling, "Quick, Pam, quick!" She reached the front, the girl behind roughly grabbed her around the waist. She jumped her legs apart and threw the ball. And threw it crooked, crooked. It caught on someone's leg. Oh no, no.

She broke away from the tunnel, clutching her forehead. She could feel a terrible sense of sickness. Tears pricked behind her eyes. She pushed out of the throng of girls and made her way to the side of the playground. "Cry-baby," someone said.

"What's the matter with her?" A teacher stood above.

"She made a mess of the tunnelball throw, Miss."

"It's not that!" Pam cried. "I'm feeling sick, I'm feeling really sick." Tears exploded forth. "My brother, my little brother, he's had to go the hospital. He fell off his tricycle."

She could almost see him, down the bottom of the stairs at the back of the house. He had been racing, peddling up from the end of the garden, stopped the bike suddenly and flew over the handlebars. There was a cut above his eye, blood welling out.

Pam was sobbing now, great breaths shuddering down into her stomach. "I'm so worried."

"Come on now, dear. Come to the Headmistress's office. You can lie down there. We'll get you a drink of water and later someone can walk you home."

Pam clung close to the teacher's embrace. She tried to ignore the faces of the other girls. Some looked scared, a couple twisted their lips and wrapped their arms around each other's waist. Silly thing.

The late 1940s and early 1950s were anxious times. Meaghan Morris has referred to it as a decade of fear. People watched each other, monitored behaviour. Lace curtains flickered along the streets.

Men lived public lives. They went to work, they went to the races. They controlled the pubs. I can still remember my fear at passing pubs towards the six o'clock closing time. Men spilt out into the streets, shouted and whistled. The smell was sickly. The Royal Easter Show was also frightening as it neared six o'clock. Men staggered in front of you, collapsed on the ground, wet stains on their trousers.

Women and children were constrained. Women maintained the family standards, within the house. They found it hard to assert power, jammed into the car in front of the hotel. "Come on, let's just get home."

Pam, ten years old, was excited. They were going to Dangar Island, in the Hawkesbury River north of Sydney, for their first family holiday. Uncle Jacko had given up boiler-making and was just going fishing. He lived there and could put them all up.

Pam hated Uncle Jacko, but they were going with her favourite cousin, Sandra, and her parents. Uncle George had a car that belonged to his work and they could all fit in.

It was a hard journey. They kept having to stop. Every few miles, Pam's Aunt Shirley said, "Oh stop, stop. Oh God, I'm going to be sick." Then she put her hand onto her throat and moaned. Pam curled up closer to Nita. It was such a crush and she didn't want any of Shirley's sick on her.

When they reached the Hawkesbury, George parked the car outside a big hotel at Brooklyn. "Okay, girls, now we're just going in for a quick one." He rubbed his hands. "Come on, Frank, we'll just wet the whistle, before we get on the ferry. And we'll get a bottle of oysters for you girls."

The two women exchanged glances. "Hurry up, then, if you must go. We'll wait here in the car, with the kids. Don't you be too long. Everyone's tired after the long journey." The sighed at each other. Decent women didn't go to pubs.

The minutes passed. The three children complained of heat. They rolled the windows down. The car seat stuck to Pam's legs. She was reading obsessively. The book formed a barrier against the slow drifting river, the flies whirling, the women's passivity.

Brian whined, "I'm hungry. Can I go and get some chips?"

Nita clapped her hand down on a fly. "Don't whinge, Brian. It won't get you anywhere. We can't buy everything you set your mind on. We'll get over to the house soon and have some sandwiches there."

The men appeared, faces red, laughing voices a little loud. They juggled a box of clinking bottles. They had forgotten to bring any lemonade for the children. George shouted that he'd go back. "Don't bother," sighed Shirley. "Just get into the car and let's get the blessed ferry. I've got a terrible head."

"What about the oysters?" Frank laughed.

"Come on, Frank," snapped Nita. "We'll never get there. There'll be no dinner on the table if you don't hurry up."

Brian grizzled. Pam kicked him. Nobody sensible would want lemonade anyway, nasty sweet stuff.

People worried about illnesses, particularly those that were associated with memories of poverty and overcrowding. My grandparents, brought up in the Rocks, remembered the pneumonic flu epidemic of 1919-21. There always seemed to be reasons for anxiety: there was a whooping cough epidemic during the war, there was the poliomyelitis epidemic in the 1950s. In Jennifer Dabbs' novel, a classmate dies of polio; Josie Arnold remembers the scares that polio caused.

Treatments were also a cause of anxiety. My father had severe boils and ulcers, but proved allergic to both sulfur drugs and penicillin. We trailed by public transport across country to visit him at the Veteran's Hospital at Concord, huge sepulchres of brown-leaved azaleas in its grounds. He cried out in pain, red-faced, swollen.

When Pam started travelling by train each morning to Erskineville Opportunity School, she noticed that a man on the train kept looking at her. He doffed his hat to her. She smiled at him, politely, as she had been taught.

One day, he gave Pam a note to take home to her parents. In it he asked Pam to come to his surgery in the city or to his home at Bankstown.

Nita frowned over the letter.

"What is it, Mum?" Pam clung to her arm.

"He thinks you might have something wrong with your blood. Anaemia, he calls it," Nita stroked her hair. "It could explain why you've been getting so tired."

"Oh, Lord, the poor kid," Dora muttered as she clattered pans in the kitchen, "I knew she'd never thrive." Dora had fretted about her grand-daughter during the war. She particularly remembered the Railways Picnic at Neilsen Park, when the child, aged three, had held her breath until she had turned blue. Dora was convinced they'd lost her, but they got her breathing again, calmed her down.

"Good God, Nita!" Frank was shaking with fury. "Do you not have a grain of sense? What do you think this is all about? Asking a girl of that age to his home. I'll telephone him from work tomorrow, give him a piece of my mind. He can't expect us all to be stupid."

Eventually, Nita took Pam into the city, to the doctor's dark offices in Macquarie Street. There the man from the train, hatless now but smiling pleasantly as he did each morning, stroked her hair and took some blood from her arm with a sharp needle.

"It's a fairly mild case, but it is as I thought," he said to Nita over Pam's head. "I couldn't help noticing her curled up in the corner, reading away. There's just no colour in her irises. But if we keep an eye on her and give her two of these iron tablets each day, we should keep it in check. It's important to act now, before she gets older."

Nita watched Pam carefully after that, became more insistent about her eating all her food, called her outside to read in the sun. "Don't keep yourself indoors all the time. Get some colour in your cheeks." Dora chopped raw lamb's fry up with lettuce and spooned it into the girl's unwilling mouth. "This'll be better than any old tablets."

Later that year, all the children were asked to line up early for lunchtime. Some doctors were coming to test them. The girls chattered excitedly, as it was unusual to have such variations to the school day.

The needles were large, metallic. Pam winced as they pricked her upper arm, but did not faint as some of the other girls did. She was getting rather used to it. The next week, the doctors returned, the children's arms were examined and an itchy scab which had formed on Pam's arm was seriously discussed. Again there was a letter for her parents. The doctors explained that she would have to go and have an x-ray. They nodded at the teacher, Miss Border. "No other precautions necessary at this stage. She's not coughing or anything, is she?" "Who do you live with at home, dear?" a lean-faced man in a white coat said to Pam. "Well, the grandparents, you see, that could be it." The doctors scribbled on a form, again nodding at each other and the teacher. "TB is not the problem it once was. They could be the carriers."

Pam hated it when people talked like this about her. She hated feeling different. They couldn't help living with her grandparents. There weren't any houses. Her father wanted to get one.

That afternoon, waiting for the train on the Bankstown platform, she held the letter tight. On the East Hills platform opposite, a large crowd of girls were laughing. Somebody pointed at her and they all stared. Pam felt tears starting behind her eyes. What was it? Why were they all looking? It wasn't her fault.

I did not have TB, just an old scar on my lung. I had to have a precautionary chest X-ray each year. And eventually, when I was twelve, my parents at last bought a house in Kingsford, past Randwick Racecourse. On the first day I was taken to see it, from the bus I saw girls taking horses over wooden jumps on vacant sandy land, where later the University of New South Wales would be built. My heart rose: it was just like the books by the Pullein-Thompson sisters, although these girls had bare legs and did not wear the tweedy jacket and neat caps of the English book illustrations.

Here we would be happy, I was sure. The planting in the street was exotic. There were stiff palm trees down the centre island and along the two pavements. Harsh grass, hard on my feet. In the early mornings I sometimes heard the clip-clop of horses' hooves in the street outside my bedroom. This was it, the house where we would start a new life. We would all live together, a proper family. As much as I loved my grandparents it would be good to get away.

Pam was bent over the stone sink in the laundry. On a ridged metal board, she was scrubbing one of the old cloths she used for her periods. The water was cold on her chafed fingers.

From inside the house she could hear Frank's voice raised. "Just get out of the way, Nita, I've got a right to go out. You can't stop me. You and the family."

Pam scrubbed harder, the tears starting against her eyes. She breathed tightly, clenched her teeth.

Her brother crept into the laundry. She moved her body around so he couldn't see what she was washing, the red gurgling down the plug hole in the grey sink.

"What can we do?" Brian said, ten years old. His brow was furrowed. "He's hitting her." The sharp sound of flesh smarting pierced the wall from the house.

"Nothing now," she said, "but next time I'm not going to wait, I tell you. Next time I'm going to have scissors and I'll stick them in, just above his ear. I promise." She twisted and pulled the rag in her hand, wringing the water out of it. She went out to the clothesline, stood on tiptoe as she hung it over her head.

In the house a door banged. Frank had left. Their mother, face freshly washed, a brighter redness on her cheeks, called out into the dark.

"Come on kids, hurry up. Come in and get to bed while it's quiet."

He was an alcoholic, not that we used that word then. Not that we even talked about it. My mother always presented a positive face, made no reference to him standing there wobbling to and fro. It was best not to talk about it. It was not pleasant. He was never like it before the war. Ignore it and it might go away. Joe's problem. A silence in the family.

How could people outside know how Joe, so formal, pressed and tight, turned when the desire for drink grabbed him, and he was driven, his eyes shining, to hiding places? The cistern above the toilet. Under the house where the garbage bins pressed up against the fibro. Down to the RSL where, in a gang gathered round the bar, they sank their lips into the frothing beer foam, shouting the successes or failures of the days' betting. "Looked like a sure thing just four metres from the post. Where did he come from, eh?"

Joe, feet unsteady, his nose a mottled burgundy, swinging out his arms as he marched back up the street. In control, in charge. "May," his voice pitched high, "where's the food? What's this muck? A man needs some food!" His eyes would start, the veins stand out on his forehead, shouting, shouting, clenched fist bashing the table. Quietly my brother would

creep into my bed, both of us lying tensed against the sheets. Trouble with the boyfriend, my mother called it.

Nita spoke urgently into the phone.

"Is that you, Vince? I'm sorry to ring, but I need a bit of help. We're having some trouble with the boyfriend. He's going through one of his bad periods. He's got into strife at the office. He's been drinking on the job or some silly thing.

"He was working back. He'd gone out to the hotel for dinner break. Anyway, he got into a fight with a bloke. He was going to kill him. Drew back and punched him and all hell let loose.

"I couldn't believe it when he arrived home. Blood all over the place. His eyes swollen. Huge cut on his nose.

"But now there's trouble. It's not been the first time. He's been up before the bosses before. But Henry Court has been able to cover for him. Lucky he's pretty high up down there at the Printo. He could talk about Frank, how long he'd been there, how he'd been in the War, how it had got to his nerves, all that.

"But this time Henry wasn't around. And it's really bad. Drinking on duty, you know, in the public service. And he's in a responsible position, Deputy Chief Reader.

"He's got a letter. He's had to go and see the Public Service doctor. I don't know what to do. How would we manage without him working, the mortgage and everything?"

Vince's voice was authoritative, the suburban solicitor used to dealing with small problems. "Nita, don't you worry about it. I'll take care of it all. What a fool, what a stupid fool he is. You don't deserve this, not after everything else. What date did you say the meeting with the Service doctor was?"

"May 12." Nita checked the official letter in her hand, her heart thumping.

"Look I can't make that. I've got a case in court. I can't put it off. But I'll tell you what, I'll get Mona to drive down, pick you up and take you into town. She'll be there for support."

When Vince's wife Mona arrived, Pam and Brian were both at school. Nita hadn't mentioned it to them. Best they didn't know. She didn't think it was fair. Mona helped Nita, making a cup of tea, waking Frank, whose head was pounding after another late night, shaking headache powders for him into a spoon, holding the glass of water for him to gulp.

Then the three got into the car to drive to the Public Service Board to meet with the doctors. Every time they stopped at a traffic light, he wanted to get out, get to a pub. "Come on, Mona," he'd say. "Just a quickie." But Mona smiled around from her place at the wheel. "Oh no, Frank, we're in a rush. Can't stop." "Just drop me off here, Mona, got to see a fellow in this pub." She drove onwards, taking no notice.

My father's drinking seemed so distant now, as I gazed at his inert figure. The ambulance crew had arrived, putting him on a stretcher. They moved quickly, efficiently. He would be taken to the Veteran's Hospital, an awkward distance away.

Now that he was ill, my mother and I talked as I drove her the long distances to visit him, first to the Veteran's Hospital at Concord, then to the Rehabilitation Centre far away on the North Shore.

> *"Your father came back a different man. He'd been very quiet, a nice polite man before the war. He'd never touch alcohol, even when they were celebrating after a cricket win. He came back totally changed, his health was wrecked, his nerves were bad."*

My mother must have been greatly stressed to ring his younger brother Arch, the ex-priest, the solicitor, the family success. But understandable. All of us relied on Joe's income. He had to hold onto his job.

> *"We got him home somehow after the doctors, but we had him wound up like that for weeks after, always wanting to get out. But there was no more talk of getting rid of him. I think Arch dropped a word with someone down there, you know, a returned soldier, give him a break; and this high-up friend of his got back, probably kept a bit of an eye on him. He was highly thought of, you know, could have gone anywhere, when he wasn't drinking; he could have reached the top of the Service."*

"I don't know how you bore it," I say.

She was loyal to him. "At least he never looked at another woman."

Pam lay in bed, suddenly awake. It was still dark outside, too dark to get up. She wished they could afford to get her a watch. Perhaps this year, when she finished her Leaving. Uncle Vince might give her one if she did well.

She realised why she had woken. The shower in the bathroom next door was running. Her father, presumably, getting ready to go to work. He was always off early, first into his desk, even if, as last night, he had not come in until after she had gone to bed. Working back, and then calling into an RSL afterwards, she supposed. Or had he brought a bottle back here, and stood out in the laundry over the stone sinks, smoking silently, cradling the liquid in his mouth? She tensed as she listened to the water dribbling. Was that an extra dribble detaching itself from the sound of the shower. She felt herself go taut. He was disgusting. He was doing a wee in the shower? He had no control. He'd been drunk again.

Nita was moving around the kitchen in her dressing gown when Pam came out in her school uniform, hair still tousled. "Porridge?" she offered as Pam opened the refrigerator to pull out the milk bottle. Pam nodded silently as her mother began buttering sandwiches for lunches. There seemed to be awkward silences often now, so many things couldn't be spoken of.

"I'll just go out to the toilet," said Pam. She stood on the wooden toilet seat, reaching steeply above her head to the cistern. The water felt clammy, as she moved her hand around, until suddenly she felt the smooth hardness of a bottle. She balanced precariously on her toes as she pulled it out. "Got him," she hissed to herself, "you rotten beast, I'll show you." She stared down at the VOP Rum and its inappropriately jaunty label of a sailing ship and old sailor with a pipe while she carefully wiped her hands on toilet paper.

She looked anxiously out of the door, ensuring nobody was in sight, before hiding the bottle, label down, in a patch of hydrangeas by the side fence. He would never find it there, she thought triumphantly, brushing the sand off her hands on her tunic. If only her mother could be stronger. If only she could beg her mother, let's move, let's leave him. But how could they? Her mother had not worked for sixteen years. And besides, Nita really didn't want to talk about it.

The Rehabilitation Centre was a pointless exercise. This final stroke had destroyed my father's speech. He glared mulishly at the world. He had nothing to say and turned his head to the wall. The physiotherapists expressed their frustration between clenched teeth. Physically there was no reason that he could not begin trying to walk. One leg still had movement. But even if they pulled him onto the bars in the exercise room my father would not move forward. Limp, he hung there, shaking his head to and fro. His blue eyes looked balefully out. When the Rehabilitation Centre had decided that he was not going to be able to progress in any significant way, the Department of Veteran's Affairs arranged to pay for a nursing home, not far from my mother's home. This would certainly make things easier. I was already taking far too much time away from work ferrying her around. My family had never owned a car. But with the nursing home so close she could walk or bus there. And she did. Every day, she would call on him, to limited response for eight years until

eventually, quietly, still in his own world, he died. She had been loyal. For better or for worse, that's what she said.

The executive positions I held during my first ten years back in Australia, at the NSW Women's Coordination Unit and the New South Wales Council of Social Service, involved public speaking and interviews on the media. People would often say they'd heard me and comment on my distinctive voice.

When I was growing up in Sydney, people often said, "What a lovely voice; doesn't she speak beautifully?" I would smile and preen myself inside. To my ears I sounded like an announcer on the Argonauts or like a British film actress. Those were my ideals.

Both my mother and my father were great believers in the value of speaking beautifully. In Australia in the 1940s this meant speaking with a refined English accent. Anything that sounded different, such as dropped consonants, mispronounced words, 'h' inserted before a vowel, these were worrying habits. They marked you as vulgar, badly brought up. They were solecisms, as bad as not having a handkerchief. As bad as having a handkerchief but blowing your nose in public. People would stare.

In my first year living back in Sydney I went to a Women's Liberation Conference. It seemed a similar crowd to those who went to conferences in England, though there were fewer dungarees here. In my flowered skirt, I looked like many of the others. Sydney is too hot for perfect ideology; few women get into complete workman's attire.

It felt odd, not having a group of friends to go to workshop sessions with, not knowing what were the areas of debate. I was pleased to find an old school friend, Cathy Bloch, and we raced to talk about the things we'd done since we had last seen each other in the early years of university. She said in surprise that my accent had not changed at all during the period I lived in England.

"You always spoke in a plummy voice," she said. Cathy has always been a socialist, trade unionist. "I could never work out where your accent came from. You didn't act stuck-up."

"Elocution," I said, "years of it. I had to learn to speak proper."

Nita couldn't help worrying about the way Pam talked. She was almost four, and speaking very well but so fast.

"Stop gabbling, Pammie," she said, "your words tumble out too quickly. You're such a chatterbox, always talking, talking, talking. Just let up."

And there was another area of concern. Pam lisped.

"Try to keep your tongue behind your teeth, Pam. Don't hiss on the s. And do try to speak more slowly."

One day, they were having afternoon tea at Nita's sister-in law Merle's place.

"Why not get Pam taught elocution?" Merle said. "A lot of people are doing it. You know my cousin Betty? She's getting her two girls taught by a young woman. A radio actress, she is, a bit short of work, so she's teaching from her home down in Earlwood. I'll bring Leonie along." Merle's daughter Leonie was just six months younger than Pam. They agreed it could be good fun. They would take along their two daughters and Shirley could bring Sandra.

The lessons were not successful. Round-faced Sandra just giggled when she was asked to recite and Leonie was more interested in somersaults. Although Pam had really enjoyed doing the exercises, Nita stopped going.

She raised the matter with Frank after the war was over, as Pam's lisp hadn't improved. Frank agreed it was important to have a good speaking voice, as long as lessons were a reasonable price. There was no point in throwing money away. Nita heard of a Mrs Carberry who taught elocution three suburbs away on the train line.

One Wednesday afternoon, Nita picked Pam up from her new school. She had brought a hairbrush and twisted Pam's curls around her finger. At a playground bubbler, she wet her handkerchief and wiped Pam's mouth and hands.

The address they had been given was a large house on a corner block. Mrs Carberry was the wife of a carrier. Next to the house was an open asphalted space with a shed in one corner, where Mr Carberry parked his trucks.

Pam clutched her mother's hand a little more tightly. She did not like the look of the dirty and noisy trucks louring over the suburban street. She did not like the look of the drivers, in their dark shorts and navy-blue singlets, their legs and arms brown. They seemed rough and common to Pam. It was peculiar to walk around outside in underwear, even if it was dark-coloured. Pam's father and his family wouldn't do that. Men wore white shirts, well starched. With ties. Pam didn't know how to speak to the truck drivers. She was scared that they might be rude or brush against her. She walked closer to her mother

Although the house was next to the yard, and was built on the profits from the trucking business, it turned its back on it. Pam soon became aware that when Mr. Carberry made an infrequent appearance in the house, he had to take off his shoes and walk quietly.

It was an open-plan house, the first Pam had seen, totally unlike her grandma's house, with its small dark corridors. The front door opened into an entry, which led directly into a large living area. All through there was a pale grey carpet woven in curved tendrils. The chairs were low. There were light wood shelves open to the wall, with small ornaments on them. On one side was the kitchen, completely white, with nothing on the benches.

Mrs Carberry smiled at them. She offered Pam's mother a cup of tea. Nita said, "Thank you. Very weak, please, no milk, no sugar".

Mrs Carberry went into the kitchen, shook tea from a Kinkara packet into a pot, and poured in boiling water. She quickly poured out a cup for Nita and added a dash of water from the kettle. She offered a plate of mixed biscuits from a big Arnotts tin. She waited to pour hers until it was strong and added milk. Then she opened two small paper packets, Bex powders, and shook the white powder into the tea. She drank it down very quickly, grimacing at the first taste. She passed her fingers softly across her forehead and said to Nita, "I've got a terrible head today." Nita expressed sympathy, tsking her tongue against her teeth, softly, so that the noise would not make the headache worse. Pam was offered some lemonade. She shook her head shyly. She didn't like sweet drinks. And no thank you, she didn't like to drink milk, which also had a sweet and cloying taste.

Then they started the half-hour lesson. Pam was taken into the lounge room, and stood on one side facing Mrs Carberry. Nita sat on a smaller chair out in the vestibule and read the *Women's Weekly* which Mrs Carberry kept on a low table in neat piles.

"Now, Pam," said Mrs Carberry, "I'm going to get you to do some exercises for me, to make sure you are pronouncing all your sounds correctly. Concentrate first on the letter O."

"O, O," Pam said, copying Mrs Carberry as she pulled her mouth into a perfect circle.

"Now read me this little verse." The verse contained a number of words with the letter O. Pam read it out, repeated it after Mrs Carberry, then was asked to memorise it for next week. She nodded, impressed by the importance of the word "memorise".

"Some vowels," Mrs Carberry explained, "are diphthongs."

Pam loved the strangeness of the word. And diphthongs were strange, two vowels which slid together; OW, for example.

"To make that sound correctly, you must say ah...ooo," Mrs Carberry demonstrated. "That is right. Don't cut it off too quickly. That would be wrong; that would not be giving it the rounded quality that it needs."

Pam tensed. She must be careful. She must not make an ugly sound like the ones she might hear out in the truck-yard. So practise, practise. "How now brown cow."

"Now we'll try some consonants." Another new word. "Consonants must be firm crisp sounds, Mrs Carberry frowned. "Repeat after me: p...p...p. It is produced on the front of the lips. Now read out this verse."

> "Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers.
>
> Did Peter Piper pick a peck of pickled peppers?
>
> If Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers,
>
> Where is the peck of pickled peppers Peter Piper picked?"

Mrs Carberry laughed as Pam stumbled through the verse. She gave Pam the sheet of paper. "Learn it for next week, trying at all times to say p firmly and evenly." Pam frowned as she looked down at the paper. What on earth did it mean? But she didn't ask.

Mrs Carberry asked her if she had enjoyed the lesson. Pam nodded. Of course she had. Particularly as it had now finished and Mrs Carberry was telling Nita that Pam was a very nice little girl and had done very well. Pam looked up at her mother, who smiled back. Pam was excited. So many words. So much to learn.

Exercises, exercises. From the age of four I went to Elocution classes weekly. Each one started with exercises. Putting my tongue behind my top teeth and hissing out behind it in order to say 's', or learning to stick my tongue forward to say 'th'. The practice drills all followed a similar format, just a change of tense each line. Did they strike me as silly, meaningless? At one level yes. But at another level there was a satisfactory incantatory structure to them which quickly soothed the spirits and slowed the speaking voice. Everything was slightly different, everything could be studied and used to show off at school. I learnt esoteric words like peck, which nobody else in my whole primary school knew. And diphthong.

Hardest of all were exercises which focused on s's, the reason for my learning elocution. My tongue came forward between my teeth, and I slurred the s, lisped. It wasn't a long tongue. Some of the boys at school had much longer tongues, which they could push out and use to touch the tip of their nose. They pulled terrible faces, crossing their eyes. No, my tongue was not like that. It was just that when I spoke there was a funny hissing sound.

> *"She sells sea shells by the sea shore*
>
> *And the shells she sells are sea shore shells I'm sure."*

My father must have learnt elocution. Perhaps he had learnt it at school from the Christian Brothers. Middle-class Catholics were most concerned not to pronounce haitch as the working class Irish did. He knew all the little cant rhymes and verses and rolled them over his tongue at me. He teased me when I got one of the words wrong. I rolled my eyes backwards and blushed and my stomach would knot. I so wanted to get it right.

Elocution teaching was an occupation that many women could follow, teaching in their own homes. My teacher, Mrs Goldstone, came from a medical family. She had learnt elocution and realised that this was a way to have an independent income.

Other women writing about the time talk of the importance of elocution. Jill Ker Conway is acute on her awareness of social class at a public school in Sydney.

> *"I was a snob, and I knew the accents of the teachers and most of the students were wrong by the exacting standards we'd had drummed into us at home. ... everyone spoke broad Australian, a kind of speech my parents' discipline had ruthlessly eliminated."*

Maureen Craig, heroine of Elizabeth Riley's All that False Instruction*, learns elocution to try to fit in to her snobbish private school. At Catholic schools, as shown by Dabbs, Greer and Arnold, girls were taught standard pronunciation to ensure that they did not remain in the working class and could become upwardly mobile.*

Nita loved the way Pam had taken to elocution. She always had been a bit of a performer. During the war one of Frank's colleagues from the office had called by to say hello, tall, brown and thin in his khakis. Nita had come into the lounge-room with a tray with tea and cakes for him and there was Pam, singing.

> "Salome, Oh! Salome

You should see Salome,

Standing there with her feet all bare,

Every little wiggle makes the boys all stare!"

Pam stood on the couch in the dark living room, watching herself in a high round mirror. She sang tunelessly with deep concentration and gyrated her body to the rhythm of the song. Nita felt embarrassed. No-one knew where she had seen such movements or heard the song.

During the war for a bit of fun, Nita had started taking Pam into 2SM, the Catholic radio station, to Uncle Tom's Gang Show, where mothers brought their children, brightly dressed, hair brushed tightly into ringlets, to perform on radio. As Pam continued with Mrs Carberry, she began to recite poems on the show. She also started to sing. Each year the Gang Show had a public concert, when the children (always called "talented children") who appeared on the show every week would perform. Nita and Pam went into Alberts in town and bought sheets of music with the words of popular songs: "Painting the Clouds with Sunshine", "My Blue Heaven", "My Sweet Little Alice Blue Gown".

"In my sweet little Alice Blue Gown

As I daintily walked through the Town..."

Pam loved it. She was just like the song. She was sweet, she walked daintily, she was seven years old. Nita made the dress for the first public concert out of blue net, with a frill around the skirt, and under it a long, stiff taffeta petticoat.

When she sang, Pam learnt the words, just like a poem, and Nita sang her memory of the tune. Neither of them could read the notes on the music they bought and they did not have a piano. At the radio station, Pam stood in front of the microphone, frowning in concentration as the pianist started to play, waiting to hear some note that corresponded to the vague sounds circling through her head. Then she sang away, just slightly flat, voice wandering as she stretched towards the higher notes. Sometimes she tap-danced to the tune so that people sitting at home around their radios heard the ghostly sound of tapping feet as she cruised around the studio, dodging the microphones and the cords leading to them She felt a fixed smile, a smile so tight she could burst. In the small audience at the studio, Nita smiled, proud of her talented little girl.

In our house the radio was on all the time, blaring loudly so that my grandfather could hear, his constant companion as it reeled out lists of horse races. Did we sit down and listen to the news? That I can't remember. Certainly late in the afternoon there were children's programs like The Argonauts *and serials and we listened to those.*

Each weekend on Macquarie Radio Theatre *a full drama was performed. I have a vivid memory of one of these which I must have heard when I was about ten years old. It was the story of a watch-maker who is crazed by the sound of ticking, becomes a murderer, is jailed and in the end is made even more mad by the sound of a cleaner washing outside his cell. "Tick, tock ... splish, splosh." I must have heard this play curled up in my bed, my ears pressed against the lounge room wall. I was terrified by it; the sound of clocks and watches ticking, magnified thousands of times, lived through my dreams that night.*

Sometimes we went to radio stations to watch the plays being recorded. The actors and actresses were glorious figures, in long evening dresses or black suits with bow ties, hair shining, eyes gleaming. They stood in front of the microphones, holding their scripts at an angle so that the audience could see their faces, as the emotions flickered across them, the sharp frowns, the brazen stares. After seeing this I must have realised that the plays and serials I heard were created, and the sight of those distant glamorous actors would dance behind my eyes as I listened.

"I think Pam is ready to go into an Eisteddfod", Mrs Carberry said two years later. "Her lisp is improving. And she is saying her poems quite nicely."

All around Sydney there were annual eisteddfods, the Railways Institute, St. George and, largest of all, the City of Sydney. A section of each eisteddfod was devoted to verse-speaking competition. Pam's elocution lessons now involved learning such poems. She loved the pattern they made on the page.

"You must first learn to say this correctly, words separated, not run into each other." Mrs Carberry marked the copy, drawing lines between words like cut/to, to ensure that Pam did not run consonants together. "Now these pencil markings indicate that the voice should go up at the end of each line until the sense is completed. This mark here shows where you should breathe." Mrs Carberry demonstrated. "Draw your breath up through the nostrils and then deeply down into the diaphragm. Breathe only when you reach a break in the poem."

"Next, Pam, you must learn to say it with feeling. Here, where I've underlined 'fierce', I want you to say it more loudly. Where I've written 'softly here' make your voice quieter, think of the little fairies dancing."

Pam liked expressing her emotion over the sense of the poem. "She's a real little actress," Mrs Carberry said. Nita smiled. She had always loved going to the theatre. Before she was married she went with her girlfriends, to sit in the 'gods' at the Tivoli or the Maj or the Theatre Royal, seeing all the stars, the good plays and the musical comedies, high at the back of the theatre, the stage glowing far below.

Nita and Pam went to the eisteddfod office across a run-down park from Central Railway and purchased copies of the set poems, typed on very thin paper which felt like dying leaves between Pam's fingers. Nita paid a fee for each section Pam was entering: under eight verse, under seven comic verse. At the next lesson Pam gave the poems to Mrs Carberry, who marked them. Then Pam read it through, aloud, and then at home again and again, until she knew it off by heart. Each night Nita said, "Can I hear your pieces?" and Pam stood up straight, chest expanded, eyes facing ahead, arms rigid by her sides, no fiddling please. She said her poem, while Nita and Dora prepared dinner or bathed Brian or put food aside in the oven for Frank who was working back.

The eisteddfod took place in a bare hall, with wooden floors, a small stage and a table for the adjudicator, a tall thin man, with a pair of glasses on a chain around his neck and a stained moustache. Through long afternoons, he listened to one young speaker after another, reciting by memory the same poem and carefully entered marks on the long list of girls and a few boys. In her best summer dress, rickrack braid trimming the frilled neckline, Pam watched the other performers. Other girls waiting sat beside them, whispering to each other, swinging their legs under their stiff skirts. Brian wriggled on the hard wooden bench. They really were silly, they should have left him at home, Nita thought, but at two he was becoming a handful for Dora. Pam was squirming with anxiety. Everyone seemed so good. Suddenly, she grabbed Nita's arm urgently and hissed, "I want to go to the toilet." Would there be time? What number were they up to? Only 45, that's all right, another 20 to go. Quick, out of the bright lights of the main room, hoping nobody had noticed, then along the damp shabby corridors, downstairs to small rooms painted in a sad brown. Don't crush the dress, don't disturb the frills.

Eventually Pam's turn came. She quavered a little on the first words, then launched into the poem, staring down into the eyes of the adjudicator, focusing her attention on him, eyes shining, vowels rounded and consonants firm. And at the end of the session, she heard her name. She had won. Oh it was wonderful, wonderful, she swept on stage smiling, to receive a small silver cup, a shiny plaque on the bakelite base. Down in the audience Nita's face was beaming.

Initially my goals as a student of elocution were simple: to go each week to a lesson, to learn all the 'pieces' that I had been given, to recite them accurately with emphases in the right places, to speak beautifully and please my mother.

In eisteddfods I could compete against other girls and boys. I must have enjoyed the opportunity this provided for showing off and the chance to polish abstruse skills. Consider, for example the categories in the City of Sydney Eisteddfod, in the Speech Training section. Candidates were judged on:

Voice Production and Quality, Breath Control, Modulation.

Vocal Expression, Inflection, Emphasis, Tempo, Phrasing, Rhythm

Enunciation, Articulation, Pronunciation.

Deportment, Facial and Bodily Expression

Conception, Interpretation, General Artistry.

My mother loved the way my voice was becoming more melodious. She admired English actors and waited for films which starred her favourites. She said, "Deborah Kerr has such a beautiful voice." I was very puzzled that her name was pronounced car.

I was thrilled when I won prizes. Usually I was a runner-up. My tension often led to tight sounds and to strangled vowels. I had become friendly with other girls learning elocution and we would sit in rows, whispering, sometimes giggling. My mother liked their mothers and would talk to them, share a cup of tea out of a thermos flask. My younger brother also began to learn elocution.

One year, I was even more thrilled. My photo was taken for the newspaper. I was wearing a white dress with small red dots forming flower patterns on it. My hair was gleaming. The photographer took me out of the hall and stood me by a large urn of flowers. He asked me to start saying the poem, and then bring my hand up beside my mouth as if I were shouting across fields. The photo appeared in The Sun *next afternoon, captioned* Blackberries, blue blackberries*. I recall saying that poem with enormous feeling, although I had never seen blackberries nor tasted their rich perfume. There was a gap between my front teeth which embarrassed me. But the photo gave me a sense of life beyond the world of Belmore North. I was in the newspapers. It was like being a princess.*

When she was seven, Pam started speech exams through the Trinity College of Music, London. In one of her favourite books, Noel Streatfield's *Ballet Shoes*, the three sisters did auditions, and in her mind the exams were a sort of audition. Like Pauline and Petrova, she might get into a Shakespeare play. "Here Peaseblossom!"

But the examiners' comments were dismissive.

> The utterance was not always distinct. The Phrasing was satisfactory, with nice use of Pause. The sight reading was fair.

"Don't worry, darling," said Nita. "It was your first go. You'll do better next time."

"Practise, practise, practise," said Mrs Carberry. "You see, you must form your vowels more distinctly."

The next year, Pam attempted Preparatory Division. The examiner was the same man, but this time he smiled at her. She received Honours for a performance.

> Well varied Inflection and intelligent Phrasing. The Diction was satisfactory. A deserving Candidate. The Pace was suitable on the whole.

"Oh, Pam, that's lovely," said her mother. "You've really done well."

When Pam was nine, Mrs Carberry suggested she learn a Rose Fyleman poem, *Fairies*, although Pam, who had read Rose Fyleman when she was five, thought it might be babyish. The examiner underlined that this was Good Work, but suggested that there was "just a tendency to impose a false emotion on the poems making them sound slightly coy and artificial". Pam clenched her hands, she had to do better. How would she ever win an audition? Some of these examiners came from England, so they must know what they were talking about.

By the time she was twelve, the exams had become more elaborate. In addition to reciting poems, Pam had to answer questions about an extract she had chosen from a book. She enjoyed these, as she had begun to read quite adult books, like Dickens, and Mrs Carberry said she was her most advanced pupil. By the time she went to high school, there were also written exams, which irritated Pam, making her learn information about how the body worked, just like science at school. She always felt anxious about how she had performed.

Year after year she went for these examinations, reading extracts from books such as *The Vicar of Wakefield*, *Oliver Twist*, *Pickwick Papers* and *Jane Eyre,* her favourite, and poems like Kipling's *Fear,* Arnold's *Sohrab and Rustum* and Longfellow's *Hiawatha.* She was usually praised for her part in the free discussion, "delightful! most intelligently interested in the subject" and for "good dramatic sense". But quite often, there was criticism of her actual speech. "The mouth does not open sufficiently and the vowels are squeezed and sound affected." "Your vocal equipment is so uncontrolled."

"You want to keep going on with it, polish off the last one," said Nita. "Even if you're going to university, you could earn a bit of money teaching elocution."

"Oh yes, yes," said Pam. She didn't want to sit in a room like Mrs Carberry. It was the last thing she wanted. But her mother needn't know that. Nita thought it was silly to think of being an actress, but Pam knew where she felt best. So she practised again and again. Yet

when she completed her final examination, just after her Leaving Certificate, she despaired at the mixed report. Was she ever going to get anywhere? They said she was sincere in reading *Bleak House*, but spoke too swiftly. She was stooping, spoiling her breathing, which must be deeper and more controlled. The examiner was particularly disappointed in her performance of C. Day Lewis's *The Ecstatic*, urging her, "Don't wax coy over this. Let emotion flow - but control it."

These instructions sum up perfectly the advice given to girls of sixteen at that time. Emote, express feelings, be sincere but above all, control it, do it in approved pronunciation and inflection. They could also describe the role of the Trinity College, initially an examiner of music students, which extended to speech, as an arbiter of standards in the colonies.

My mother kept in a shoebox my Trinity College exam results written on dusty beige cards, with mauve printing. The name of the College and all major headings are in Old English script, reminding us of tradition and responsibility.

Why did I do it so long, learning elocution long after my lisp had improved? Was it all done to please my mother? Did I respond to the role of Trinity College in awarding credentials? Elocution encouraged gentility in a period that valued gentility. From an early age I learnt that what I said was less important than how I said it. I became watchful of my words and of my phrasing. I listened to other people for the mistakes they made, the mistakes that could raise questions about them, about where they came from, and what they knew. I learnt to value what came from England, like Deborah Kerr or Osbert Sitwell. I remember learning one of his poems about a cleaning lady, struggling with the representation of her speech. "Wednesdays, Halfred 'as 'is dinner early." I worried over it with such intensity that forty years later I can still remember the passion with which I approached that line and the puzzlement with which it struck me, the fear that I should be mocked as this woman was.

Did I respond to the name, Trinity College, so redolent of England? I learnt poems were about England, fields, autumn and spring blossom, "When men were all asleep the snow came falling." It did not seem odd to me that I did not learn poems about Australia and that when I did they were comic pieces, extracts from The Sentimental Bloke*, which my younger brother performed with grins and winks and an exaggerated accent which demonstrated that we were superior to the characters in the poem. We were not vulgar Australians, we knew how one should speak.*

Did I respond to the arrogant assessments of my work by the examiners by feeling that their critical comments reflected my real self, my inability to improve? Did it relate to my fantasy of myself as an actress, encouraging me that I could become a performer, like the women I heard on radio? My fantasy of becoming an actress remained just that. Yet if I had seriously wanted to become an actress I cannot imagine a worse apprenticeship than the rules and regulations of the Trinity College with which I struggled for so many years.

Pam paused, catching her breath, in front of the large building near Newtown Station. The Elizabethan Theatre. She was so nervous. She had come here a couple of times with school groups to see Shakespeare plays. But now she was coming to audition. She said the word again. Audition. She was going to audition for the National Institute of Dramatic Art.

It was as if it had been planned. The advertisements had been in the papers. The Institute was starting next to the new University of NSW, near her home. She had sent off for the application forms and asked Lenny the postman to keep any unusual envelopes for her. She really did not want her mother to know about the audition. Nita was keen on her getting a teachers' college scholarship and going to university.

Frank sniffed at that idea. He suggested that if she did go to university she should work and go in the evenings. "Get a good solid job in the Public Service," he said. Pam's heart dropped at that idea. He had arranged an interview for her with a librarian in the Mitchell Library opposite the Botanical Gardens, a sad-faced man in a brown suit. There was thick dandruff on his shoulders. "I suppose you like Shakespeare, do you?" he had asked Pam, who had nodded enthusiastically. "Well you won't get much of that round here." He waved his arm aimlessly, his eyes fixed on a distant dust mote. He ashed his cigarette on the leather table.

Pam desperately wanted to break away. It would be wonderful to learn acting properly, but this audition was nerve-wracking. Her Leaving Certificate exams, finished two months ago, had been quite a lot of work, with Honours in English and History, but worse, memorising Chemistry equations and Latin and French verbs. She had no idea how she had gone in the exams. Day after day she sat in the back yard, in early summer heat, trying to concentrate on scrawled notes. Girls had appeared for exams, sunburn flaming their skins. Jacarandas quivered in intense blue agony.

The Trinity College exams had taken time too, just two weeks after her Leaving. The report card flashed in front of her eyes: DON'T STOOP, in large capitals. She puffed out breath. She would have to remember.

She had chosen her audition pieces herself and practised them in her bedroom. She could not tell Mrs Carberry, could not rehearse with Nita. She was performing Anne's speech from Richard III, so wonderful when Clare Bloom did it in the film, and a speech from St Joan, "If ifs and ands were pots and pans there'd be no need of tinkers." Jean Seberg was St Joan in the film. If only she could look like her, slim and boyish. Pam pushed back her hair, running her fingers through tight permed curls.

In the dressing room was a tall girl, a year or so older than Pam. Christie's long hair drifted down beside a gaunt face. She really did look theatrical, Pam thought. When she left to go on the stage, Pam tried again to make sure that she had all her speeches in her head. And then she was walking on to the stage, shielding her eyes from the glare of one spotlight, peering out to the darkened auditorium where a small group of people sat in the stalls. She performed her two pieces, chin jutting forward, nervousness edging her voice. She felt rough, not at ease.

A clear English voice asked her to come down to the stalls. A distinguished-looking man, grey-haired, gestured to her to sit down beside him. The others wandered off, lit cigarettes.

"Keen to be an actress, then?" he smiled at her.

"Oh yes," Pam breathed.

"You're how old? Oh yes, just seventeen," he glanced at her application form, held languidly between two fingers. "And you've just completed exams? What subjects did you do?"

Pam blurted out her list. His brows narrowed at the mention of honours subjects.

"You're obviously a clever girl. A good chance of going to university by the sound of it. I must say that would be my advice to you. Go to university, get your degree. Do your acting there, through the drama society. That's what I did at Oxford."

And so I did, never knowing whether I could have been accepted by NIDA. At Sydney University I tried out for the Dramatic Society (SUDS), in the company of Marilyn Taylor, my best friend from primary school at Erskineville. Perhaps aptly we were cast as twin girls in a production of Anouilh's Waltz of the Toreadors*. The director, Pam Trethowan, was the wife of the Psychology Professor and had acted in English Rep. Small, blond, sparkling, she was an inspiration. After-show parties were held in their beautiful stone house in the grounds of Callan Park Mental Hospital. At one, she fixed me with her eye. "You have a wonderful quality on stage, very reminiscent of the young Tutin." I had no idea what she was talking about. A hasty study of* Plays and Players *in Fisher Library next week left me equally baffled. Dorothy Tutin was pictured playing Millamant, a delicious tip of nose arching up. By comparison I felt lumbering, conscious of the perm growing out of my hair.*

The year afterwards, Leo Schofield cast me in his first University Revue, Nymphs and Shepherds*. Bubbling, full of ideas, an imaginative designer and director, he bustled me into singing a solo, as an elderly spinster harassed by a phantom lover sending her flowers. I had not sung in public since I was a child and practised earnestly with the pianist Will*

Scarlet. I could not read music. I did not realise that I could be trained to sing. It was like performing as a child on the 2SM Gang Show*, throwing my voice to an approximation of the notes.*

My mother and brother came to the first night. "It was so embarrassing I didn't know where to look," my brother said. "No-one in the family has ever been able to carry a tune," my mother said. The reviews, in University and downtown papers, were enthusiastic. In honi soit*, my voice was praised, I was called a 'delight'. "As it is you want to put her in a clear plastic box, take her home, put her on your mantelpiece and command her to give you stage-smiles, trips and eye movements when the world is very gloomy for you. You will not only be happy, you will think the world is worth living in after all." I never met Neil Jackson, who wrote these words, even though I worked on* honi soit. *Perhaps it was a pseudonym, or someone from far outside the close circle of revue and newspaper. I always experienced the words as displaced, not really about me. I felt I couldn't sing, wasn't really a good actress, not compared to the others in casts of the plays and revues I continued to star in. I had mislaid my capacity to own my talents.*

Throughout the war I was protected and cosseted, playing in my patch of garden, in a world of my own. And then, as children do, I became aware of the world outside my family. How is it that children understand the powerful forces that operate, how do they respond when they realise that their parents and immediate family are not able to control everything? Who owns the lenses they use to focus, who provides the explanations they use to understand?

Another Sunday, another argument. Everyone was home, the small house at Belmore North was crowded.

Frank wanted Pam and Nita to go to church with him. Pam liked the thought. It would be something they could do, just the three of them together, leaving Brian with her grandmother.

"Nita", Frank stared out the window through the starched lace curtains, puffing on his cigarette, "let's stop this nonsense. She's a baptised Catholic. You gave your undertaking." Pam could tell he was angry.

"Some undertaking," Nita leant over their bed, smoothing out the creases on the bottom sheet. "That smelly old priest. Couldn't even be bothered to stay sober." There was a sob behind her voice.

Pam had not heard Nita talk about her wedding. There were no framed photographs in the lounge room, as Pam had seen at some of her relatives' houses. There were just a few black and white snaps, shoved into the back of a drawer in the bedroom. Nita was not a bride in a long gown and veil. She had been married in a short white dress, with a hat like a flat plate, turned up at the side. She looked smart and neat, smiling directly at the camera. Nonetheless, Pam was disappointed not to see a floating dress, a cloudy veil.

Once as they were walking across Hyde Park towards David Jones, Nita pointed out St. Mary's Cathedral, dominating one corner. "That's where we got married." Pam thought it must have been splendid to walk out to the top of the stairs, looking over the stiff palm trees.

Nita tugged her hand, a rough edge to her voice. "Dreadful place. It wasn't a proper service." Pam stared up at her. "Shouldn't go on at you about it, love. Nothing to do with you. But when I think of them, doing it under the altar. It was so dirty back there and all these old boxes stuck away. You could tell they couldn't care less. They wanted to make me feel bad because I wouldn't turn. And as for that old priest, fat old thing, and smelly. Making as though he was doing me a favour."

Now Nita's voice had the same bitterness. "You go up by yourself, Frank," Nita said. "It's all right for you. I've got things to do, Sunday or no Sunday. Mum and I'll get on with the cooking."

Pam crept quietly out to the kitchen. Dora was clattering pans under the sink. She sniffed heavily, muttering under her breath, "He shouldn't be pushing it down the poor child's throat."

Straightening up, she saw Pam gazing seriously at her. "Do what you have to do, Pam. But don't let them get you into their clutches. They made my mother's life a misery."

Frank paused at the door of the kitchen. "Will you come up the hill with me, Pam?" Pam nodded and ran into the bedroom to get Nita to change her into a pretty dress, though Nita did not fuss over her, as she did when they were went into town.

Pam, feeling important and serious, held her father's hand as they went up the hill. Frank did not speak, but walked straight ahead, wearing his office suit and dark hat. He blew cigarette smoke out.

The Catholic church was on top of the hill. It was dark and smelt intensely of smoke and a strange perfume which caught Pam's throat. She thought how different smells were. Nita smelt fresh and warm, like apples. The smell of Dora was soap and scrubbing, strong lemon, a trace of sweat. They both smelt of cakes, crumbled, sweet. Her grandfather smelt smoky and like old tweed clothes. Her father in the church smelt bitter like the smoke from his cigarettes.

Pam's legs felt damp on the wooden bench. She looked around at the people and knew no one. She puzzled about what her mother meant by 'turn'. How did Catholics make you turn and where did you turn? Certainly there was a lot of standing up, sitting down and kneeling on hard cushions. She copied what Frank did. She worried about what they might push down her throat, whether it was food or drink. She looked for their clutches, which she imagined were like the long fingers of witches. She wondered what they would do to her under the altar, where it looked shadowy and moist. She shuddered a little.

Her school, Belmore North Primary, was also on the hill just opposite the Catholic church and the crowded school where Catholic students went. Once a week, all the children gathered together and sat on the floor, wooden, scratchy, careful of splinters. A teacher stuck felt pictures on a board, of a baby in a crib, sheep and cows, with straw sticking to them. Another woman in a dark blue uniform taught them songs.

"Jesus loves me, this I know

For the Bible tells me so."

Pam liked that song. She liked sitting in the hall, with the large chalk drawings from Peter Rabbit. The Jesus from school seemed to be pleasant and smiling although he was also sad, since he suffered little children.

On Sundays in the Catholic church, Pam felt more frightened. The Jesus there wasn't white and gentle like that and didn't fit with drawings from children's stories. He was tall, skinny and long-haired, hanging from a cross, his hands above his head. His face was sad. Pam didn't feel he loved her. She tried to hold Frank's hand.

Once she asked Frank why there was a painting of a lady in a scarf with her chest open and a bright pink heart, like a chocolate box. "Be quiet and all will be revealed. Our Lady is always there for you," he muttered. Pam hated the picture. She tried not to look at the corner of the church where it was displayed.

She felt great sobs starting in her chest. It was so sad. Her mother was not there, her parents were always speaking angrily to each other. There was so much darkness under the altar, Jesus was hanging from a wooden tree and the strange woman had a big pink heart, a pool of blood spilling.

Frank pulled her outside. "You're a silly little girl. What are you doing, making a fool of me?" He shook her hard. He didn't ask Pam to come up the hill after that and only went occasionally himself. He came home later and later, often smelling sweet and sticky, and did not eat the lunch that Nita and Dora had made.

My mother and her family had ambivalent attitudes to the Catholic Church. For my grandmother, the Catholic Church was a hostile force. It had tormented her own mother, caused her great distress, because she had married a Protestant, the Dutchman Jan van Borg. Years later my mother told me how my great grandmother had been visited by priests sent by her sisters, who were practising Catholics. The priests told her her ten children were illegitimate. My mother remembers my great grandmother hating priests. She would pull away from them as they went down the street, grab her grand-daughter's hand, so that she would not touch their heavy black skirts. I sometimes think of Mary O'Grady chasing after priests, twirling a black umbrella above her head, then black umbrella on black robes. Thwack! My mother also remembers that when she was a little girl, her grandmother would sometimes drag her into the door of the Catholic church in Broadway, St. Bartholomew's, and sit there crossing herself. She asked my mother to keep the visits a secret.

Many of my grandmother's family shared her prejudices about the Catholic Church. Family discussions about religion often concluded on a tight-mouthed sigh and expressions of mistrust.

But others of her family did not seem to carry such rage. She had sisters and brothers who married Catholics and who brought their children up within the church.

In stories of the 1940s and 1950s in Australia, the problems of different religions and the dangers of intermarriage feature strongly. In particular, Irish Catholics felt threatened by any incursions into their community. Jennifer Dabbs' heroine, Mary Kathleen, like myself, grew up in a house of divided religions. In Dabbs' novel, the father does not adhere to the rigid Catholicism of her mother's family. Kathleen is "not at all like a Clancy", the Irish Catholic family of her mother. The Clancys maintain a strict distance from Protestants. One of her aunts, now dead, had married a Protestant: "mixed marriages never work, Grandma said." Kathleen stays away from common children in the street: "we never play with Protestants." Her mother says eating meat on Fridays would choke her to death.

On Friday nights, Frank always ate fish, which Nita cooked. A nice bit of haddock, she said. Pam did not like the smell. "You won't catch me eating that, just for the church," Dora muttered. "What right have they got? Who'd ever know?" She grilled a chop or meat rissole and said to Pam and Brian, "Quick come on, eat it down, before your father gets home. And don't let him know. This is our secret."

Opposite the school a fish and chip shop opened. On Fridays, children ran over and bought chips wrapped in newspaper. Pam begged for some money to do the same.

Nita shook her head. "You mustn't eat things from shops. You don't know what germs you'll pick up."

Instead, the next Friday, Pam ran home and collected some chips that her mother had cooked. Nita wrapped them in newspaper, with greaseproof paper inside so that the black newsprint didn't come off. Pam got a stitch running back up the hill. When she reached school she stood in the playground and tried to look like the other children eating chips. The chips were cold and slightly clammy, not as delicious as she had hoped.

My mother tells me that when I was about six, I was playing with a girl my age called Lorraine. Lorraine's aunt Mick had been one of my mother's best friends at work. Sometimes we went out with Mick, her sister Tess and Lorraine.

Tess had been brought up as a member of the Church of England. Her husband however was a Catholic. As Mick put it, he made Tess give up her religion, he made her change. She became a Catholic and Lorraine was baptised a Catholic and went to Catholic schools.

Lorraine must have felt her mother's anger about this. Enough at least to talk to me about it. Two little girls discussing their parents and their religion.

Mick heard me say "I'm never going to change my religion for my husband. He can change to mine. I'm never going to turn Catholic."

My mother now sees this as evidence that I was an early convert to feminism, back then in 1947. I think it indicates more: a profound disturbance about the splits between Catholic and Protestant in the suburbs, a little girl who unquestioningly identified with her mother's (implied) position.

Frank's brother, Vince, had come back from the war full of energy. He had been studying for the priesthood during the 1930s, but had dropped out and begun studying law. On some weekends, when all three brothers were at their mother's house, Pam heard arguments flaring between them. Vince didn't like the church. He talked about it as a curse. He shouted at Frank that it had got its tentacles into him. "What's it ever done for you!"

Sometimes during the week, Frank came home late from work, with a red face and slurred speech. He stabbed cigarettes into ashtrays or ground them under his heels, shouting.

"I'm not going to put up with it much longer. Nita, the office is full of cheats and ingrates. It's run by the Masons. They are nitpickers, they lean over your shoulders, they look for any slip."

Nita quietened him, "That's enough now, Frank. You shouldn't go to the club after work. It gets you too excited."

Dora struck her tongue against her teeth, mouth clenched.

Frank often said how he hated the Masons. Pam understood they were enemies. Nita sometimes pointed them out, when she and Pam came home from town. They stood in groups on the railway platform in the early evening, men in black evening suits, women in long organdie dresses, like tap dancing clothes but without frills, looking out of place in the fading sunlight. The women carried beaded evening purses, the men small, hard cases.

Pam stared at these elderly people, the men with their red faces, the women with their hair tightly waved, and tried to see what was bad about them. They looked kind, but you could never tell. She noticed them laughing together.

For Catholics like my father, the world must not have seemed easy. He knew that many people were hostile to people of his religion. My grandmother's hostility was just one particularly close to home. Edmond Campion, growing up in Sydney ten years before me, says "Our world ... was a world of Irish Catholics, mostly relatives, whose horizons were defined by the church. In Australian history, Catholics were the first ethnics. They exhibited the defensiveness of any ethnic community."

The defensiveness affected children at school. Dabbs' Kathleen had to win a scholarship. She was told school-children had a "moral and religious duty to win as many government scholarships as possible. Catholics were most unfairly treated by the Australian Government, who refused to grant any financial assistance to our schools." Josie Arnold was also urged to excel by the nuns in her working-class Catholic school.

Yet not all Catholics clung to feelings of victimisation. My father's brother, who had begun training as a priest, rejected religion. He believed in rationalism, that man could make his own destiny, that people could succeed. He disliked constant references to the church and said religion was the curse of the family.

Catholic separatism was based in material reality, as Catholics were discriminated against and needed to stick together in order to succeed. Campion acknowledges that Catholics created for themselves a sort of ghetto, yet notes that for many, the ghetto was the only way to succeed. Between the wars, Catholics were barred from employment in many firms and from membership of many clubs.

When Catholics found a sympathetic employer, that place often became a home for other Catholics. Dabbs' characters, for example, know that "one of the few places a Catholic could get on was in the Public Service". It was commonplace for government departments to be known as the territory of Catholics or Masons. Whether there was truth or not in these perceptions, and the facts are not likely to appear in any institutional histories, people believed that departments were 'owned' by religious groups and that preferment was denied to people not of the right religious persuasion. Indeed Campion indicates that the Knights of the Southern Cross were set up by middle class Catholic businessmen to counteract Masonic influence in the community. To me this shows how deep divisions were, intensifying in the period leading up to the split in the Labour Party.

Up and down the street in Belmore North where I was brought up, people were aware of each family's religion and social class, even though these things were never discussed. My

grandmother and mother always said it wasn't polite. You didn't talk about money, you didn't talk about politics, you didn't talk about religion. It just wasn't proper.

Each morning Pam walked quietly to school by herself, her packed lunch - a sandwich, a red apple - at the bottom of her case. She liked to take her time getting ready in the morning, reading a little more of one of her library books, getting dressed in the neat clothes Nita had prepared: a cotton singlet, even in summer, because it was important to keep kidneys and back protected against chills, a freshly ironed gingham dress, a cardigan if needed, clean white socks. As she trailed up the long hill to the school, her mind danced through the stories she was reading at the time or the games she had played the previous evening with her brother.

There were other girls in her street but she did not play with them. Jacqueline, whose parents were in the country, lived with her grandmother in a large house, with a garden and swing. Jacqueline went to Presbyterian Ladies' College, wearing a hard straw hat. Pam wanted to go and play with her, to swing high and backwards and forwards, but Nita said, "It's not polite to push yourself in. Let her ask you first." Jacqueline never did ask and Pam told herself that she didn't care. The Hansford girls, Denise and Beverley, both older than Pam, went to a Catholic convent, Santa Sabina, behind high walls and trees on the bus route to West Ryde. Frank said, "It would be a great privilege for you to go to that school, Pam. I'll get you there one day, when my ship comes in." He squeezed her fingers tightly, until they ached. Pam managed to glance over the walls, but even the word "convent", so formal and closed, made her anxious.

One morning at recess, Pam stood in the hot playground. There was a slightly sour milk smell, after fights when boys sprayed drops onto each other's woollen shorts. She brushed a fly away from her tightly plaited hair, while other children pushed and jostled. Next to her Veronica Beattie sniffed noisily and wiped the back of her hand under her nose. It was disgusting. Pam fingered her own neatly ironed handkerchief, pinned carefully to the bodice of her gingham dress. She hated Veronica, whose nose was always running and who had been sent home because she had nits.

"Be careful to stay away from her," Pam's mother had said. "Dirty thing."

Today Pam couldn't move because, for the weekly assembly, the children had been marshalled together in rows, boys on one side of the playground, girls on the other. Probably they had put Veronica next to her so that as class captain she could make sure Veronica didn't do anything wrong, like getting more nits. Pam turned her attention away from her scrabbling classmates and stood on tiptoes to see if any teachers were around. She frowned back at her classmates. "Shh!"

After the assembly, the teachers asked Pam to take care of a new girl, Enid, who had just arrived in Sydney with her parents, Salvation Army ministers. She had a head full of natural curls and shook it around when she laughed. The two girls talked all lunch time and Enid walked home with Pam, although she lived on the other side of Canterbury Road.

"Let's climb down this stormwater channel," Enid laughed, throwing her case aside. "Beat you to the bottom!"

Pam knew this was the way you explored, had adventures. But she had never climbed such a smooth wall. Stumbling after Enid, she fell, gashed her leg. "I've got to get home, I'll be in such trouble."

Nita was furious, "Where have you been? You're so late!" She dabbed at Pam's knee with Dettol and cotton wool. "Oh God, what germs you could have picked up down there. I've told you never to go down into that place. She must be a wild girl. Don't ever go down there again, or cross Canterbury Road by yourself."

Enid didn't stay long at the school. Pam sometimes imagined her throwing her curls around, uncontrolled, as she rattled the tambourine.

Pam withdrew from the children at her primary school. They didn't behave as if they were nine years old. She preferred to play with Brian, even if he had no ideas himself and she had to play all the parts. She pretended to be the strict German mistress and rapped him sharply on the knuckles, because he had forgotten his declensions. She said to Brian, "Now we're going to boarding school." She got her school case out from behind the bed and drew out books and pencils. "Say goodbye to your mother and father, then," she called to Brian, "we have to get on the train that's taking all the children off to school." To herself she hissed, "I must pack the case with all my clothes for school. I'll need a hat for going out to the village and to church each Sunday and a smart navy wool coat. I am allowed to have one dress in velvet for the special end-of-term dinner and for the school musical evening. Mine will be glowing red."

Even now, when the history of the common people has become an accepted area of historical research, divisions within the working class and lower middle-class are not satisfactorily explored. My family was from the working class but certainly not defined by it. The fact that my grandfather had been involved in the Railway Strike of 1921 was seen by my grandmother as the reason behind her continuing struggle to make ends meet. My father, whose father was a bookmaker, saw himself as being drawn from a different social stratum to my mother's family and railed against the economic circumstances that forced him to live with my maternal grandparents; he planned stratagems to get me enrolled in a private Catholic girls' school. From my mother and grandmother I learnt at a young age the importance of maintaining distance from some neighbours, who were seen as common and

vulgar. We were respectable, our front step was always scrubbed and our clothes were clean and not patched.

I attended Belmore North Public School from 1946 until the end of 1950, when I was sent to Erskineville Opportunity School. During the period I have no memory of having any friends. My life was almost completely centred on my family and on the dreams I had of books. There is only one photo of me at the school. I am in the front row of a class group, my face wrinkled up in distaste. I am wearing a checked dress made by my mother. The other children in the photograph wear clothes that could have come from the 1930s, thick coarse woollen trousers, home-knitted jumpers.

When Nita and Pam went to the railway station, to go to town, the library, elocution or tap-dancing lessons, they passed a stall selling papers. Around the side, there was a glass window and behind it were stuck pages of drawings, under the title *Beano* in bright red type.

Nita said "Don't bother looking at them. They're comics, vulgar things. They won't help your reading."

But while Nita was queuing to buy tickets, Pam liked to stand on tiptoes by the window display of comics, carefully so that Nita did not realise. They were difficult to read as the window had dirty blotches and grease stains and the pages had been stuck there so long that the illustrations had faded and the paper had become discoloured, stained brown. Pam could not understand why they were funny. There was an ugly fat boy always eating and balloons with writing coming out of mouths.

Once they visited her grandmother's house at West Ryde at the same time as Pam's Uncle Patrick, older brother of Frank and Vince, and his three sons. Her cousins were reading comics. "What's this rubbish you're filling your head with, Ken?" his uncles said. Vince pulled it out of his hands and crushed the bright pages.

Pam could not understand why her mother, Uncle Vince and her father disliked these comics. But because of their disapproval, Pam felt a knot of audacity and anxiety whenever she tried to read them.

Other writers of the time remember how comics were seen as a signifier of working-class tastes. Suzanne Falkiner, a writer somewhat younger than most in my sample, has a heroine, the daughter of a wealthy, emotionally distant pastoral family, who has an acute consciousness of class difference, especially regarding the workers' children. She reads comics with the cook's son, Kevin, illicitly.

"My sister and brother and I are not allowed to have comics. I sense there is something about the secret carton that is not part of the world to which I am supposed to belong. It belongs to the world of Kevin Cooper, the cook's son, and the other older boys - of chewing gum and swearing, of saying 'okay' instead of 'yes', and dropping the 'g' on the ends of certain words."

Pam never did go to the Dominicans at Santa Sabina. Instead, at age nine, with all the other children in her class, she did an examination. They had to sit very quietly and write answers as neatly as they could. Pam puzzled over two questions. One asked what a 'cheque book' was. Pam had never heard this word or seen it written. No-one she knew had such a thing. The second asked what was the tallest: a building, a tree or a giant. With her life among books, Pam answered "giant". When her classmates milled around afterwards, asking who had answered what, one of the boys laughed at Pam. "Giants don't even exist, stupid." Pam blushed. Her answer had sounded babyish.

Some weeks later, Pam brought Nita to the headmistress's office where they were told that Pam could go to Erskineville Opportunity School. Miss Mackintosh inclined her head slowly. "Pam has been given a great opportunity. She could go far and even stay on to the Leaving Certificate. But she must balance her work. She is exceptionally good at reading and writing. But her mathematics does leave something to be desired." She was right. Pam could add and subtract numbers quite well and multiply up to ten. But she could not understand where the zero came from when she did this. It hadn't been there and suddenly it was. It was very strange.

As she went out into the playground afterwards, however, she felt fiercely proud. She was going to go to a school for clever children. She looked for Steven who had poked such fun at her. Let them all laugh. She knew she was better than them.

Erskineville was a train journey away. Nita took Pam the first morning, and then said that Pam could get the train by herself. And at the school Janice and Pam met with great excitement. They were the same height, they both learnt elocution but most important they were both obsessed with reading. And reading the same books. They read with a passion stories of school girls, adventures of gangs of young people, stories of exploration and adventure.

Initially, however, Pam felt sensitive about the teacher Miss Border, after she had laughed at Pam's drawing of a swimming pool. Pam had not used paints at Belmore North. Frowning at the white page, she drew a long strip of yellow for sand, a strip of blue for sea, and in the middle a large square of red, filled with blue dotted with different specks of colour for bathing caps. Embarrassment at her ineptitude came when she saw other paintings, with figures diving and splashing in the water, arms curved above or cleaving the water.

But this was forgotten as pleasures mounted, writing and reading, forming clubs with Janice, hearing orchestras at the sepulchral Town Hall and dreaming about the ballet *Sleeping Beauty*, with wonderful dancers in richly jewelled costumes.

I have little memory of the test which was my own road out of Belmore North. At that time, all pupils in the state completed a Stanford-Binet test at the age of nine or ten, to determine what school in the state system they should attend. I cannot remember it being discussed, except as an 'intelligence test', a name it held on to for many years, despite many arguments within psychology literature as to the actual nature of intelligence or what these tests measured. Special classes for talented children were established early in the 1930s, and testing was used to determine entrance to these schools. Departmental figures are not available for the years 1953-4 when I attended Erskineville, but in 1958 over 1000 children were in what were called Opportunity C classes.

For many women writing about this period in Australia, moving into a talented child stream at school provided stimulus and excitement, gave them a sense of a way out. Leone Sperling went to a school for clever children, Josie Arnold was encouraged to go to a scholarship school, Jennifer Dabbs and Elizabeth Riley have scholarship girls as heroines. However when Dabbs' Kathleen succeeds in her intelligence test, there was family concern about what to do.

But academic life often promised more than it delivered, and girls who had been encouraged to foster their cleverness could be left with considerable anger and disappointment. Susan Varga found that Artarmon Opportunity School, although remaining "the little ghetto, the segregated despised class of 'bright' kids, encouraged to do all sorts of things, like write novels", offered great opportunities. Nonetheless, she found only "transcendental boredom" when she got to Hornsby Girls' High.

Glenda Adams recalls "vulnerable" years at primary school, cruel and damaging forms of punishment for the cleverer children, being told "since you're so smart". She went to Fort Street Opportunity School, "a controversial experiment", elitist and therefore un-Australian; here a sewing teacher told them they were "filthy little parasites". Fort Street drew from affluent areas as well as working class, children of professors, clerks and labourers. Erskineville Opportunity School, which I attended, was on the other hand in an inner-city working class area. It drew from lower middle class families along two long train lines. When I enrolled, the headmistress Miss Woodcock said to my mother that she had checked the lists of girls and the occupations of their parents. "They're almost all white-collar," she said. I was puzzled by this term and what it meant and why Miss Woodcock kept shaking her head.

One day, Miss Border read a poem lugubriously and Pam was breathless with mirth as Janice crossed her eyes and poked out her tongue.

"Be good sweet maid and let who will be clever

Do noble deeds not dream them all day long ....."

Pam was sent outside, asked to restrain herself. Yet each time she was called back in to read the lines out loud, all she could hear was Miss Border's lowing tones and she would collapse in giggles.

After three attempts, Miss Border had had enough. She drew herself up and sent Pam to see the headmistress, Miss Garville. Miss Garville was badly paralysed in one leg and had to be assisted from the taxi which she got to school each morning. The privilege of opening the taxi door, collecting her briefcase and helping her to her room was undertaken by Opportunity A 'slow-learners' who had a room separate from the main school building. Pam, Janice and their friends regarded this with outrage. "Why doesn't she get us to help her?" Pam said. Miss Garville occasionally stumped around the playground, peered closely at children with her black piercing eyes and asked them searching questions. Once Pam had a long talk about books. "Yes," agreed Janice, "not those funny looking other kids, the stupid ones."

Now, Pam was to be sent to her for discipline. She knocked softly at the open door. Miss Garville raised her head just above the desk.

"Ah, Pam, come in. What's the matter?"

Pam tried to explain, biting her lips. She said she could not stop giggling.

"Why do you think that is?" Miss Garville was frowning at her. "It doesn't seem like you at all. You love poetry, don't you?"

Stumbling, Pam tried to explain. Other people were giggling, she said. Miss Garville frowned. Eventually Pam blurted out that she thought it was a silly poem.

"Ah, well now you are expressing a matter of taste. A much better reason," said Miss Garville. "But if you are going to take that position, you must be prepared to back it up. And do so seriously and with respect to your teacher. No silly girlish embarrassment. Apologise to Miss Border and undertake to do any task she sets you. Now, tell me, I saw you and Janice reading to some other girls on the steps yesterday. What was that?"

"Janice was given the new Enid Blyton school story for her birthday and we were acting it out." Pam put her head on one side.

"I don't like you girls spending so much time on those stories." Miss Garville shook her head. "They're unhealthy, class ridden. They don't reflect this country. Read some decent literature. Have you tried any Australian writers, Miles Franklin, Ethel Turner? Or if you want to read English writers, explore the world of Dickens. See what a rich variety of characters he creates."

Pam nodded, her voice drying in her throat. Her Uncle Vince said that about Dickens. She would really have to grow up.

The next time Pam met Miss Garville alone was the following year, when students showed her all work they had completed. Pam had enjoyed sixth class and admired their lean, blond teacher, Miss Harries, who she knew was in the vanguard of taste. Once going to an orchestral concert, Miss Harries wore a close-fitted grey flannel suit, straight skirt, coat with a little waist. Her shoes and handbag were red but her gloves, her little hat with its discreet veil and her long tightly-furled umbrella were pink. Now Pam knew from Nita that pink and red should not be worn together, just as "blue and green should never be seen". And then, later that month, Pam noticed a David Jones advertising campaign for the new season's daring colour combination: pink and red. Miss Harries had known, even ahead of David Jones. Pam and Janice were thrilled.

Pam had books and drawings to show Miss Garville, a novel she had written and an apron, hemmed with running backstitch. Pam's stitches were crooked and the fabric soiled. Nita, tsking behind her teeth, unpicked all the dirty stitches and used her sewing machine. Pam was terrified Miss Garville would find her out, that those sharp black eyes of hers would see the machine stitches. She did not even look at it, talking about what Pam was reading, about the Italian school system and the importance of history. Pam was thrilled. It confirmed all her ideas. History mattered, sewing didn't.

Miss Garville leant forward. "And tell me Pam, what are your ambitions?"

Pam frowned and shook her head shyly. "I don't know, Miss Garville."

"You should join the diplomatic corps," the older woman nodded slightly. "I've been watching the way you negotiate between different groups. You've got a habit of listening, of bringing people together. Tell your parents I said so."

Pam had no idea what she meant. In any case, Pam said, she would like to be a writer, just like her best friend Janice.

"You can always do that later in life," said Miss Garville.

"Get a career first. Gain some life experience."

Pam rolled the word over her tongue on the train journey home. "Diplomat": it certainly sounded grand. Nita wasn't sure what it meant either.

Opportunity schools provided an opening into a world of education and privilege for many children from relatively deprived backgrounds, introducing them to music, art, writing and books, which their homes did not provide. Their parents had been through a depression and then a war. All money was being directed to purchasing houses.

The experience of the Depression also meant that many things of beauty did not survive in their houses. My grandmother believed that everything should be new, not old things like she had always had to put up with. She had been given as a wedding present by her sempstress colleagues at David Jones a willow pattern dinner service. As a child I loved looking at the few pieces that were left. One Sunday night, she noticed the two large serving plates were chipped around the edge. Straight into the garbage bin they went, while I looked on in silent unhappiness. I could have placed them on the shelves under the pear tree, with azalea blossoms displayed on them. "Dreadful old things," she said, "you don't want cracked things hanging around, harbouring germs."

Other women from lower middle class families writing about the period express a sense of their relative deprivation as compared to other children. Germaine Greer expresses this vividly:

> *The house I grew up in had no music, no instrument, no record player, no paintings, no books, no flowers, no good cooking, no pretty furniture, no pudding, no cheese, no wine, no parties, none of the things I now deem essential to the good life."*

For some, such as Barbara Hanrahan, Jennifer Dabbs and Susan Mitchell, there were class divisions between maternal and paternal families and emotional energies were directed to maintenance of a tenuous class distinction. Jennifer Dabbs' Kathleen was made aware of class differences when she was taken to Melbourne as a child; the first class passengers had silver service meals. Later she visited her friend Betty, a bookie's daughter, who had a dining room, wall to wall carpet, and "dad's

cocktail cabinet". Mary Kathleen was impressed most by the dining room: "Didn't they eat in the kitchen like everyone else?" Hanrahan noted that her mother bought everything new, had had enough of second hand in the Depression.

Erskineville was in a working class area. During the Depression, Miss Woodcock had provided food for families around the school, which my mother knew about. This occasioned me some anxiety. I knew that it was important to maintain my distance from the local children, almost as if poverty and working class mores could transmit themselves. We Opportunity kids stayed by ourselves.

Miss Woodcock must have been aware of these little self importances. She made sure that she always gave favour to the local children and children from the classes for the intellectually handicapped which were also at the school. Some of the reasons for her actions seeped into our heads.

We did not wear uniforms. She told us that she hated us wearing uniforms, that she had been in Germany in Hitler's time and seen young children clapped into uniform. We nodded, scarcely understanding the significance of this, and rejoiced in wearing cotton frocks with frills around the skirts.

She valued us as young girls. She encouraged us to think of working in unusual careers. She listened to our reasons for doing things, encouraged us to be honest and to accept intellectual responsibility for things. She wanted us to stretch our intelligence. Unfortunately for some of us that meant we were threatened by anything that downgraded cleverness.

At the time we did not understand the socialist and feminist politics which motivated Miss Woodcock. We did not know that she was a noted fighter in the Teachers' Federation for the rights of women or that she worked with Jessie Street in the United Associations of Women on many campaigns, including the rights of married women teachers to continue working. But the messages she gave us were clear and had deep if ill-understood effects on us.

Sydney Girls' High School made me aware of the fact that many girls were much wealthier than my family. But it was not till I got to university that I really became aware of privilege.

Pam and Janice leant over the basin and outlined their lips in the spotty mirror. It really was remarkable. They had been best friends at primary school, then out of touch for five years and now they were cast as twin girls in a drama society production in their first year. Not a glamorous start to their University acting careers, playing noisy Victorian schoolgirls, but better to be in a play than out.

"Are you girls coming to the party, then?" John the stage manager was, like most of those involved, much older. In fact two of the lead actors had already left university and were working at the ABC.

"Oh yes," Pam flashed a nervous smile. She had had a wretched opening night the previous week. Nita and young Brian had come along to see the play and Nita had insisted that Pam accompany them home, as the next day was another university day. Pam had trailed along Science Road from the Wallace Theatre, feeling as if her life had been blighted. Tears started as they waited for the bus opposite the gates.

"Just stop making a fool of yourself in public, Pam," Nita had said. "There'll be other parties. And how you thought you would get home from Chatswood in the middle of the night I don't know. And still be up in time for lectures tomorrow morning."

Pam felt such a child. She breathed in her sobs. What if a car of people from the play came by! She slunk back against the stone retaining wall, turning half on to the road, so that she would not look attached to her family.

Janice said the party was great; she had drunk some flagon wine and got a bit tiddly. They had danced to Dave Brubeck and told amusing stories about past SUDS shows. Janice had flirted with one of the lighting boys from the Film Society, but said it was nothing serious. "Just a party thing," she giggled, blotting her lipstick on a handkerchief. Pam felt a little envious of Janice's insouciance about boys.

This Saturday night, the last of the show, Nita had given her permission for Pam to stay at Janice's, with instructions about taking care if there was a party: no smoking, no drinking, get to bed early and make sure she rang in the morning to say she was all right.

"So where is it?" Janice asked.

"Martin Grant's parents are away," called John, "so it's out at Vaucluse at his place. I'm lining up lifts for people now."

The two girls pulled on black velvet trousers. Pam had knitted a long grey jumper out of mohair, which flopped loosely over her waist. She brushed her hair out over her shoulders.

Outside the hall, a group of older male students had gathered, friends of the director, a law student. Cast and crew members milled around, some shouting out numbers they could fit in their cars, while others headed for taxis on Parramatta Road.

"Pam and Janice, you're both pretty small. Squeeze into the front seat of Roger's MG, and Pat can slide along behind the seats."

Roger, whom no-one knew, waved from a low-slung silver sports car. He seemed handsome there in the shadows as the girls scrambled in. As they curved down the front road of the University, he explained that he lived near both Rex the director and Martin the party host and had been to school with them. He was studying medicine.

As they raced down a high road to the Harbour, a gust of wind hit Pam, sitting high in the front seat above the gear stick. She had been this way a couple of times, for family picnics at Nielson Park and once to visit her school friend Joan. She had never before seen the velvety beauty of the view at night, the gleam of the distant city on the harbour, the dark

shadow of the Harbour Bridge. It was going to be a long way back to Janice's at Bexley North.

The Grant house was down a side road, a large brick building with scented wisteria spilling from stone troughs over a curved entrance. Pam fell silent as the heavy wooden door opened and they found themselves in a wide entrance hall with thick Persian rugs and dark portraits in heavy gold frames.

"Throw your bags upstairs, girls," Martin Grant called out from the end of the hall. "The booze is down this way in the kitchen." He turned up the blues record on the gramophone and another surge of people pushed through the door: a group of college boys, including Piers and Robert from their year and girls who had sewn costumes.

Kevin, the costume designer, his rubicund face gleaming, swirled out of the kitchen. "It's the little twinnies. How wonderful that you innocents are here. Now I'm setting up a select group on the terrace, before Martin's uncouth private school friends arrive in search of some fun. I've found a stunning Georgian silver tea-pot and I'm hiding my gin in it. Nobody will think of pinching grog from a teapot! Why don't you grab some glasses and come and join us!"

The evening soon blurred for Pam. Sipping gin and water, she giggled as Kevin told them gossip from his work in the advertising department at Farmers' and from professional shows he had worked on. He was keen to do the University revue next year. She stumbled a little at one point going back into the house but livened up when grabbed by Fred, the juvenile lead. They began to rock and roll energetically, pushing linen couches back and kicking rugs out of the way. She leant over the edge of a parapet gazing out over the garden while Fred, who was in the year ahead in Arts, told her how he hated the thought of going into his family's law firm.

Janice had disappeared by the time Pam came back to Kevin's circle. He was still pouring gin and roaring with laughter at his own jokes. Pam found herself happily drawn into his great bear hug, laughing as Bruce, the *honi soit* poet, described a revue audience choking on excessive dry ice. She found a bathroom upstairs, vomited a little into the toilet bowl. She would have to be more careful, she had not realised she had swallowed quite so much gin from the bottomless tea pot. She washed her mouth out at the sink, trying to remove the cloying thickness of gin from it. As she sat on the toilet, oblivious to the knocking outside, she became aware of lights dancing on the water, the great sweep of Harbour drifting away from her eyes.

Later, lying behind a couch, she pushed Fred's head off her breast on to her shoulder. "No, you've got to understand. I'm not jealous," she muttered. "It's not just that this house is so

beautiful. It's the fact that my bedroom would fit twice into his bathroom and only looks at the neighbour's fence. I don't know what it would be like to grow up with so much."

Mouth open, a cigarette butt drifting from her fingers to the parquet floor, her head dropped back onto a corner of a rug and she and the young man dozed.

Bernie Martin, then a young lecturer with the Sydney University English Department, gave two lectures in my first year on Richard Hoggart's great book The Uses of Literacy. *The points made by Hoggart about the devaluing of his working-class heritage did not strike a chord with us as students. His world, long lines of back-to-back houses, were as unfamiliar to us as the halls of high culture. We knew that Australia was a classless society; we were not riven by those British divisions. Our very presence in the Gothic halls of Sydney University demonstrated that in Sydney and Australia all paths were open. None of us, girls or boys, identified with Hoggart's consciousness of exclusion. None of us saw ourselves as part of a trend, a large grouping of the previously disadvantaged moving into education. None of us realised the power of the barriers that might restrict us in the future.*

In referring to his period at Oxford University in England in the 1950s, Jeremy Seabrook refers to people using their working class origins as a kind of accomplishment, a badge of pride. This is not something I recall at Sydney University in the early sixties. Working class origins were something concealed, not boasted about. In Australian history, we studied the journeys of explorers and the expansion of the estates of pastoralists, not the struggles of our mostly Irish ancestors on the wharves, in the mines and on the railways.

At university my friends and I claimed to ignore issues of class. But it was apparent that girls from the upper North Shore dressed differently (twinsets, peter-pan collars, good tartan skirts), married within their social circles (boys in check Hunts shirts, corduroy trousers or moleskins, check Harris tweed jackets, even a woven check tie). We sneered at the conservatism of wealthy friends' families and poked fun at those we called alfs from the distant western suburbs. We showed, however, more cynical disrespect to organised religion and its adherents.

The papers were full of it. Billy Graham, the American evangelist was coming to town. His sharp profile glared down from hoardings all over Sydney.

Pam and her friends sat around tables in the beer garden of the Forest Lodge Hotel, opposite the University down a street where narrow brick terraces clung to the side of the street, boys with grubby faces sitting outside. Pam knew that Glebe was what Nita called working class and she made sure she didn't look too hard at anybody in case they yelled rudely after her. The bar at the Forest Lodge was dark and dingy with a noisy radio playing horse races, dogs or trots, while a crowd of poorly shaved men in dark clothes stood around the bar, swilling beer.

But the beer garden was not so frightening. They came for lunch almost every day, more fun than lunch in the canteen at Manning.

Few people came there and they could make it their own. It was not really a garden, just an open concrete space with a metal-roofed shelter on one side and scratched tin chairs.

George, the medical student who edited *honi soit,* had said to Pam and Helen one afternoon when they were typing articles, "Why don't you girls stop and come over to the Lodge?" They sat around talking. Other students called by, more chairs were pulled up to the table, conversation became loud and lively. It was exciting to be part of it. Although their male friends wandered in alone,

Pam always went there with other girls, fearful of the thought of turning up alone and finding nobody there. There was a regular crowd most afternoons, from the Revue crowd, SUDS, the student newspaper and the film society. Sometimes philosophers would call in or lecturers from the Psychology department. These men usually drank downtown at the Royal George, with a group called the Push, who were libertarians and believed in free love. There were not many women around the Royal George. Pam liked a couple of the Push men, singers with guitars who played folk songs and blues. If they sang too loudly, the owner of the Forest Lodge shouted to them to quieten down.

Pam didn't drink to start with, just lemonade, but this afternoon she had asked someone to get her one with a little gin in it, so it was not so sweet. That was good, the gin didn't taste like alcohol at all. And they were all laughing so hard.

"He's got this big photo of himself up on the board at the Showground," spluttered Peter, "and the faithful are pouring in!

They go down the front and make a decision for Christ and then the huge choir sings away!"

The group of young people were all atheists, though agnostic was also a good word. They knew those who went to Billy Graham were dupes, not only of religion, but of American razzamatazz, which might have been even worse. What fools people were!

"It's so vulgar, isn't it?" cooed Genevieve. "I can't believe people would go to somewhere as crass as the Showground, instead of somewhere like Christ Church St. Laurence, where you have wonderful singing and some decent incense."

People rolled eyes at each other. Genevieve's great-grandfather had been a Bishop and she affected an artistic interest in the High Church. She treasured words like vestments. Religion should at least be beautiful.

"Listen, people are even leaving St. Marks' Darling Point." Robert, with relations in a long-established and wealthy family in the Eastern suburbs, would know. "My mother is really worried about one of her cousins. She's completely mad, most of the Cutworths are, but this is the first time she's got taken by religion. She's gone eighteen times and made a decision each time."

"Well, I practically had to force them off," Pam cleared her throat. This was taking a bit of a risk.

"You went!"

"Well, you know what my mother is like. She loves going to all the shows in town and this seemed a show like any other. Let me tell you she was right. As well, a friend from school, in the debating team with me, has got caught up in the Student Christian Movement and was insistent I come. I thought I should see if I could catch sight of her new boyfriend. He wants to be a missionary!"

It was wonderful, everyone laughed. They all agreed so much, laughed at the same things. Robert suggested Pam give her friend a mosquito spray for a wedding present.

It hadn't felt quite so funny at Billy Graham.

When the time for decision came, twelve-year-old Brian grabbed Pam's hand. "Come down with me," he said. "I really want to go."

"Oh don't go rushing down there," said Nita. "They'll get your address and just keep hounding you." She looked worried.

"Mum, I really like what he said," Brian was urging forward. "Please let me go."

"I'll take care of him, Mum, we'll just get what they're giving out and come back."

But as Pam and Brian got to the front, they were divided into segregated groups. Pam found

herself staring at a young woman about her own age, with pale skin. Pam thought that it was not enough for some Christians not to wear makeup. This girl's skin looked stretched over her bones with Carbolic cleanliness.

"Look, I'm not interested," Pam said fiercely. "I just came down to be with my little brother and you won't let me stay with him. He's over there with the men."

"You must want to know something. Don't deny your feelings. God has called you."

Pam felt a stab of anxiety. Perhaps he had. Perhaps she was weak and had been drawn into it. She had found Billy Graham a powerful speaker, promising love and forgiveness, threatening terrible punishments. He was also better looking than his photos. But she knew she wasn't interested. She was an intellectual. She didn't come to vulgar places like this. She didn't believe in religion. What on earth would her sophisticated friends at university say if they knew she was here? She fastened her eyes on a round brooch pinned to the girl's

flowered blouse. It said "God is Love" in a circlet. That just showed you how tasteless religious people were.

Pam continued denying interest. Around her people were sobbing or laughing, hugging and kissing. She must get away before she found

herself wanting to be part of it. Nita would be upset, she thought religion was silly.

But when Pam got back to her seat she found Brian looking happier than she had ever seen him. He had made a friend. He wanted to go to church, to go to Fellowship, to join, to

belong. But he was worried, too. What would they say to their father? Nita smiled up at him.

"Don't worry," she said. "We will find a way, if it means that much to you."

For my younger brother, a visit to Billy Graham provided a focus and an anchor as he moved through school and to a decision to become an Anglican minister. At University within my circle of friends there was no impact from the Billy Graham crusade. More important was the impact of young people from Catholic schools who began to emerge from the Newman Society to join university clubs and societies. Roger Pryke, the Catholic chaplain at Sydney University at that time,

encouraged students to discuss Catholicism in a critical and questioning way, besides ensuring that the Catholic hall was used for theatrical productions. So there was a sense of debate about issues, as Catholic friends became aware of the importance of questioning the views of the church on sexuality and intellectual freedom. These ferments did not touch me. I remained closed to organised religion, and in the years before widespread political questioning, I was unable to find a way in which to ask questions about religion and class.

My husband found the old photograph when he was preparing an invitation for a birthday party. He was amused by my rigid stance, arms held tensely out from my trunk, hands facing forward. The pose was in fact reproduced almost exactly in a photograph taken at another friend's party only a couple of months before, with me holding a groaning plate of food and two glasses of wine.

I was both fascinated and disturbed, finding it hard to identify the young girl as myself. Photographs can do that, moving between memory, desire and a sense of your present difference. Annette Kuhn points out that memories evoked by photographs are not related just to the image, but to both past and present, the cultural contexts of then and now; "the image figures largely as a trace, a clue; necessary, but not sufficient, to the activity of meaning-making; always signalling, somewhere else."

Gradually, I began to piece together the resonances that this photograph held for me. The setting is one of the side rooms at the Sydney Town Hall. In the background is a heavy cedar table. The carpet is deeply patterned, Persian motifs on a pale background. There is a dustbin under the table, suggesting that the room is normally used for meetings, where paper is scrunched up and thrown away. Amidst this municipal stolidity, I look like a grotesque butterfly.

The photograph commemorates an important moment for me. With other members of my dancing school I had just performed at a special concert for victims of the Maitland floods in 1952. For the first time I performed a solo in one of these concerts, instead of just being one of a line of dancers. It marked my greatest success in an occupation that dominated my life for six years. It also marked the moment when I walked away from it.

Pam was six years old when she first saw tap-dancing. She had recited a poem at a concert. Next on stage was a flock of beautiful girls in pastel dresses with frills that bounced around their legs. How she wanted to be one of them! She desperately wanted to stay on the stage and dance away with them rather than walking off on flat feet. Reciting poetry suddenly seemed boring and tedious to her. There on the stage was colour and glamour. That was where she wanted to be. She yearned to learn dancing.

At first there was much opposition to tap-dancing classes. Dora tightened her mouth and frowned at Nita.

"A lot of silly nonsense if you ask me. As if you haven't got enough to do, without traipsing around the countryside with that young lady. And who's going to look after the baby? No point in taking him out gallivanting with you."

Frank, who thought you had to learn to speak beautifully, also objected to dancing lessons.

"But dancing! God, come on, what are you thinking of!" he berated Nita, stabbing a cigarette towards her to emphasise his point. "How are we to afford it? And what kind of people will she meet there? Scottish dancing, now, that's a skill, that's an art. Or even Irish dancing. But this tapping nonsense, American claptrap".

Such attitudes to tap-dancing were to be expected in the restricted society of Sydney in the 1940s. Tap-dancing has always carried with it a connotation of vulgarity and commonness.

Girls from middle-class homes in the 1940s learnt ballet. Ballet was stylish. In the 1930s the Ballets Russes de Monte Carlo had made three tours of Australia, playing to enormous audiences. Some of their members, most notably Eduard Borovansky, stayed behind and began professional ballet companies in Sydney and Melbourne. Ballet had the approval of influential critics, like Arnold Haskell, whose books I found on the shelves of public libraries. The murder mysteries of Brahms and Simons, such as A Bullet in the Ballet, *which I enjoyed reading, were based on shared understandings of the superior world of Russian-influenced classical ballet. Reproductions of the Degas paintings of ballerinas emphasised their grace and sentimentality.*

Tap-dancing was associated with the shows which were on at venues like the Tivoli in Sydney. Theatre managements, in fact, became concerned to ensure that the young women dancing in these shows were not seen as vulgar, with loose morals. A training school for J.C. Williamson's dancers was set up in Melbourne by Jennie Brenan, whose father, the mayor of Ballarat, was a friend of Williamson. She emphasised the pastoral care that was taken over her chorus-line and their respectability. This was not sufficient for a character in Jennifer Dabbs' novel Beyond Redemption*. Hannah is cut off by her relatives when she goes to dance at the "Tiv".*

My father certainly thought dancing vulgar. For him, education was important, the central thing. Through education I would learn to read Shakespeare and other classics and thereby gain respectability. Not once did my father come to see me tap-dance. He indicated his continuing disapproval by withdrawing from any discussion of it.

Now, feelings are different. People to whom my husband sent the invitation for my party were indulgently delighted, particularly my women friends. Many told me how envious they were. They had wanted to learn tap-dancing as girls. Usually their parents wouldn't let them, they disapproved of dancing, they thought it was common, like getting ears pierced.

Pam had seen the glamour of shimmering organdie and heard the clatter of taps. Scottish and Irish dancing did not have beautiful frilly clothes to float around the top of the legs nor ringlets to bounce on the shoulders.

Nita found out that the tap-dancers at the concert had been trained by Miss Elaine Glazebrook, who taught a class on Saturday mornings in the theatrette at radio station 2SM. Frank was influenced by this. 2SM was the Catholic radio station, she would have to be a good Catholic teacher. Perhaps tap-dancing was not such an unsuitable activity after all. So the next Saturday morning Pam and Nita got the train into the city. It was quiet around Wynyard station and their feet echoed in the draughty streets.

The 2SM theatrette was crowded with students. Along one side on narrow chairs sat a line of mothers, huge women, in shapeless dark dresses, hair drawn back at the nape of their necks. Some carried paper bags into which they shelled peas, others had soft black carry-alls from which they drew knitting needles with long grey jumpers hanging uncompleted, still others stitched bright sequins or lace around the hem of beautifully decorated costumes. Their lips pressed tightly together as they closely watched their daughters.

There were mainly girls in the class. The very few boys were scattered through the age groups and jumped around outside the hall until they were called in to perform. The girls had long legs, with white ankle-length socks. They moved their legs easily backwards and forwards. Some held onto a metal railing around the wall and kicked their legs high over their heads, showing frilly white pants. There was a busy hum and clatter through the room as they rushed around on their noisy tap shoes.

Dancing has always been a girls' activity. Boys are encouraged to play sport, to use their bodies aggressively, to stretch themselves physically. In the 1940s girls did not take part in much physical activity. Schools did not routinely have sports competitions and there were no regular periods of supervised exercise in primary schools. An emphasis on ladylike behaviour and dress meant that girls were discouraged from running and leaping around playgrounds. Girls grouped around skipping ropes, jumped from one foot to another. They played hop-scotch, balancing awkwardly on their toes down the narrow squares of the game.

"What do we have here, then? A new pupil, is she?" A tall woman was smiling down on Pam. She wore a full skirt of stiff net, slightly tattered around the bottom, and a pair of shabby black shoes with taps underneath them. "Ever learnt dancing before, dear?"

Nita felt Pam clinging to her hand tightly. "She hasn't before. And she's not actually very strong. But she's very keen to learn."

"Nothing like starting. We're doing a fairly new routine in a few moments. Get yourself ready, Pam, and I'll put you in the back row so you can follow the more experienced girls."

With Nita's help Pam put on her new white shoes. In the shed at the bottom of the garden her grandfather had hammered shiny metal taps onto the soles and heels. It felt peculiar walking on them, as if she were balancing on top of two upturned globes. They shoved her bottom up and made her legs feel free.

She stood at the back of the class. Miss Elaine was out the front.

"Now girls, we're going to practise the steps we learnt last week. I'll call them out. And we have a new girl joining us. Jennifer, if you could put her next to you and make sure she's doing the right steps."

Jennifer was tall, with long brown legs. Her black hair waved down to her shoulders. She flashed Pam a smile and then flexed her legs.

In Sydney in the 1950s there were a number of dance schools. Most were concentrated in the suburbs with a high proportion of working class and lower middle class families.

For girls from this background a career as a dancer, at a theatre like the Tivoli or a night club such as Chequers, was a means to a secure income and a job that offered more potential for glamour and an upwardly mobile marriage than work in service industries or in a local factory. One of the girls from my dancing class, Janice Breen, is now a highly successful dance teacher. She has two schools, trains dancers for large Spectaculars and has expanded overseas, providing dancers for television and club shows in Asia. Her two children are both successful entertainers.

I remember feeling different from the other students. Now I would call it a class difference, an awareness that they came from poorer suburbs, went to parochial Catholic schools. My mother disagrees when I ask her this. She remembers my playing happily with other girls. She does not agree with my memory of them being 'common'; in fact she says they were polite, not cheeky. "That was what was good about elocution and dancing, they taught children discipline. You had to concentrate to get ahead and present yourself well." She does remember other mothers "pushing their daughters forward, ooh, that one, she had to be at the front, otherwise there was hell to pay".

It was seen as important to provide some form of legitimation to dance-training. Jennie Brenan was among those who lobbied to bring ballet examinations to Australia. In 1935, the first examinations were held under the auspices of the Royal Academy of Dance, a British institution. Tap-dancing, the less respectable art-form, was slower to develop an examination system; I was never to take an exam, if indeed any were offered.

The steps seemed elaborate. Shuffle shuffle: the feet brushed to and fro across the floor. Tap: the toe of Pam's shoe bounced vigorously on the floor behind her other foot. Change: she jumped up in the air and transferred her weight onto the other foot. And so it went on. Initially she was all awkwardness and clumsy movements. Careful, don't fall over. Don't overbalance onto Jennifer. Step on the right foot, hop, step on the left foot, move the right foot forward and back. The movements were hard, but in her head she was dancing away like the girls at the concert, a mass of frills exploding, her hair bouncing up and down.

Gradually a feeling of freedom came. Her feet were doing what they wanted to do. And the noise was deafening.

Each Saturday they went to classes either in the city or in a church hall in Rozelle, when they were preparing for big concerts or performances. They were long journeys from Belmore and Pam cuddled up next to her mother on the trains and buses, reading the book she had borrowed that week from the Lakemba Public Library. Some were books about aspiring ballet students.

Pam did not, however, learn ballet. More experienced students, like Jennifer, would clamber up onto their pointes, circle around slowly, raise their legs in an arching curve. Despite Miss Elaine's encouragement Pam did not enjoy getting up on the shoes with the tight wad of wood in the toes. She felt shaky, her toes felt crumpled and hurt inside the shoes. It wasn't supposed to be like this.

"We'll leave it a little longer, I think, Mrs Watson," Miss Glazebrook said. "Until she's got a little more confidence and her legs are a bit stronger."

Tap-dancing remained Pam’s real passion. But much of the time she was anxious, a clammy feeling in her stomach. She tired easily. While other girls in the class would be tapping away furiously, her legs would begin aching.

"Come on, Pam," Miss Glazebrook called out, "give us a good one-two, one-two-three. Get that rhythm. And where is your big beautiful smile?"

The attraction of dancing has a lot to do with sex. Tap-dancing in particular has strong and distinctive sexual connotations. Like ballet it is feminised, but there is also strength and power behind it, the noise of the taps on the stage. Certainly I felt this, loved the sense of movement and force in my legs, the looseness of my skirts around my thighs.

I liked the sense of control that came from tap-dancing. Ballet presented a set of rigid rules, your feet had to be placed just so, the jeté, the plié all followed each other in a regular

pattern. Tap-dancing presented more opportunity to impose your own style on the relatively simple steps. Tap-dancing encouraged aggression in the way that routines were developed, it demanded that girls impose their character on the stage. Is this why feminists took to tap-dancing? In Sydney in the 1980s I attended some classes with a group called The Freeda Stares*. Living out fantasies, showing that we could master the beat.*

Even in films of the time the two dance forms represented different things. In the American dance films that I so adored, tap-dancers took over the street. Stars like Ann Miller controlled public spaces with authoritative pounding, swirled their skirts, showed their pants, and got away with it. The films were bright - blue and gold. I remember feeling excitement and a sense of freedom from this.

Ballet did not have this sense of freedom. It was constrained behind the proscenium. Ballerinas looked like dolls, you could take them out and play with them, admire them, but they belonged in their chocolate box settings, locked within the proscenium. What lessons did I draw from classic ballet films like The Red Shoes*? That when ballet dancers went into the public realm they were shockingly killed, like beautiful Moira Shearer on the railway line. She ran from the theatre into the outside world, she transgressed, she jumped, and death, blood-red like her shoes, was her punishment.*

Sometimes, Pam dropped out of the line of tappers and went back to her mother. "I'm feeling hot," she said, "my legs are tired. I'm feeling sick."

The other girls rolled their eyes at each other. What a baby! On they danced, pounding the floor with regular taps. And when the routine was finished, they did not stop. They jumped up and down and continued showing their skills to each other.

They did cartwheels! They ran into the room, flung themselves down on their hands, twisted over and over, legs reaching high to the sky for a moment, then down, then over again. Pam watched, amazed. How did they do it? Why didn't their wrists break? How could they hold their arms so straight? And didn't they get giddy?

They did of course. They stood up after their cartwheels, and wobbled on their feet, puffed their cheeks out, flung their arms around each other's shoulders, and giggled, rolling their eyes and tossing back their long hair. Then off they went again.

"Come on, Pam," Jennifer cried, "try it. You won't break anything!"

It made Pam feel scared. She was frightened by the thought of abandoning control, of losing herself in a swirl of skirts and legs and arms and curls, then righting herself. She began to

run, her arms held out straight in front, her chin clenched tightly. But she couldn't start it. She would fall on her head. She was sure of it.

"Not today," she said, "I'm feeling a little sick." She shook her head, and sat next to her mother, opening her book. Back to the world of Posy and Sally.

As a child of eleven, I liked the photograph because my legs looked thin. I had always been an unhealthy and underweight child; I was described as "tiny", short for my age. When I took up tap-dancing, my self-consciousness increased. The other girls in the class were all taller. The strenuous tapping, the only exercise I took, began to develop my leg muscles. I would stare down at them with some astonishment. I took no joy in them. I would have preferred my body to wither away. This photograph minimised my muscles, made my legs look almost as long as those of other girls who could kick their legs up above their heads.

I was in fact scared of the implicit freedom and sexuality of much dancing. Cartwheels and tumbling frightened me, because I felt I would expose myself, take risks. In the company of other girls I felt constrained. I thought it was not lady-like to do tumbling and acrobatics.

My mother made sure that my tap-dancing was 'feminine'. The clothes she prepared for the tap-dancing competitions were slightly old-fashioned, frilled, tightly waisted, be-gloved, aproned. They reminded me of the images of women which were drawn onto the napkins we embroidered, which covered the boxes of chocolates we ate and which were framed in small wooden boxes hung on our walls. They reflected women, costumes, mores of another century. Sexed, but asexual. Repressed, limited.

She also ensured that the songs selected for my performances were not too adult. She says, "I liked the more childish songs, the little girl ones. Nursery rhymes and so on. Some of the other girls used popular songs, a bit too grown-up for them." So I sang Alice Blue Gown*,* Easter Parade*, and other sweet and innocent songs.*

Pam liked best the solo character numbers. Each girl was taught a song and dance to perform in the individual sections at an eisteddfod. She and Nita pored over the songs available, songs about flowers, sweet children, spring. One was chosen, the words learnt, the dance prepared. She was by herself on the stage. No other girls to make her feel out of step. She could dance away happily, her fantasy living itself.

When she was eleven, Pam actually won a solo character number at the eisteddfod.

"That's very good, Pam," Elaine Glazebrook smiled. Funny, she had never really thought Pam would come to anything. But it was an appealing little song and she had tapped very

nicely. "Now, we've been asked to provide a few numbers for a benefit concert for the flood victims. You can do one of the solos, Jennifer can do her Firebird number and Beverley the Spanish tarantella. And the whole school can do the *Wedding of the Painted Doll*, with the boys as the toy soldiers and the bears."

The Lady Mayoress's Concert was for the Victims of the Maitland Floods. Maitland, north of Sydney, had been Inundated by the Waters of the Hunter River. That was what the voices on the newsreel had said. We crowded into the small cinema next to Wynyard station to watch extraordinary scenes: water swirling around the roofs of houses and shops, people standing on the tops of buildings clutching onto the chimneys, a dog drifting down the river on a sheet of corrugated iron, boys running around in shorts and rough woollen jumpers with long mud stains on their legs. The water moved slowly and thickly, like a great lake of cocoa, sucking in bits of wood and suitcases, concealing the shape of the land, enveloping people and buildings.

A big concert or performance always took more rehearsal, often both days of the weekend at the hall in Rozelle.

"I've got to take Pam off to a practice," Nita said to Dora. "Brian's playing down the back. Do you mind keeping an ear out for him?"

When they returned, the grandmother's mouth was tight. "I've fed Brian," she said to Nita, as the small boy flung himself at his mother's legs. "I don't know what you think you're up to with the other one, out to all hours, coming back when the lights are on."

Pam hated fights. She quickly ate her chop and vegetables and got to bed, curling over to read yet another chapter.

Pam and Nita earnestly debated what she should wear. They always bought lengths of fabrics in David Jones' sales, choosing a range of pastel colours: pink, almost always pink, sometimes primrose yellow or pale, pale blue. For solo dances, Pam wore a heavily starched organdie dress over stiff organdie petticoats. The dress was tightly fitted to the waist, a full skirt made of three widths of fabric, trimmed with two layers of frills to froth out below. Accompanying it were small gloves with frills around the wrist, a straw hat with veil and flowers, little matching socks above the tap shoes. They were clothes of great delicacy, elaborately decorated, not like ordinary street clothes. Organdie, the favourite choice, was hard edged and shiny, and felt sharp against bare legs and arms. It starched up beautifully, Nita said. Starching increased its sheen, made it stand out stiffly from the body.

Dora watched carefully as Nita stitched the seams. "That hem, it's one inch out of true." Dora had been chief bodice-hand at David Jones before her marriage, monitoring the sewing

of a number of assistants. She knew what she was talking about, her eyes were sharp, and she missed nothing. Sometimes Nita came back to her sewing to find a seam or a collar unpicked. It was a fraction wrong, it must be redone.

At dress rehearsal, Pam looked round at the other girls, jumping and chattering. Suddenly everyone was transformed, glittering colours, sequins, as if at a ball.

"Will you just look at that young madam," Nita nudged Pam. Beverley was one of the best cartwheelers. She had on a tight red satin dress, a swirl of frills over organdie petticoats. An elaborate design in gold, blue and purple sequins coiled across the bodice and down onto the skirt, glittering in the light. Pam's heart dropped. It was so beautiful.

"All very well for some," said Nita kneeling by Pam on the floor, her mouth clenching a few pins which she used to even the hem. "They can throw money away on getting them made. Pounds, that outfit would have cost. But we'll manage, won't we, Pammie?"

"Mine's lovely, Mum," Pam looked down at the little white frill around the bottom of her skirt.

"And it'll do you for June's wedding next month," her mother said, tightening the soft crepe ribbon around the girl's chin. "We'll do!"

It is making the dress that my mother remembers when she looks at the photo.

She sees a dress she was proud of making. "That was one of my best, I really wasn't too bad." She remembers being embarrassed by the fact that my clothes were more modest than others. Other dancing families spent more on clothes, had them made professionally, cut them out of satin, decorated them with sequins. We always had good materials, mother says, we bought them at the sales. She economised by making me clothes that could be worn without the starched petticoats for ordinary wear. The thought of ordinary wear being a shimmering organdie fantasy strikes me as bizarre.

I remember that the making of the costumes themselves was a powerful female ritual. Buying the patterns, cutting out, standing on the kitchen table to try on the tacked costumes. My grandmother and mother knelt beside it, mouths full of pins, measuring the length against a mark on the bleached stick used for stirring the copper, moving my legs carefully so that the sharp pins would not jab into my skin, washing, starching, the shock of the iron on those light-as-light fabrics. I felt very close to my mother when we did these tasks. I thought she was wonderful and clever, making these glorious clothes. She remembers the tension involved in getting her sempstress mother's approval, the mistakes that her mother would point out.

In remembering these clothes, something else about the post war period strikes me. Our clothes were almost always made out of hard fabrics. The fashionable fabrics for women's wear were hard and unyielding. Even a softer fabric like organdie was always starched, so that it felt rigid to the touch. I found that Brett Harvey, in a book on America in the 1950s, also noticed this.

> *... all the fabrics we wore ... were stiff ... faille, shantung, felt, taffeta, pique. Nothing clung or fell, or draped - everything was crisp. ... Fifties clothes were like armour.*

The night before the performance Nita prepared Pam's hair. With the short hair around the girl's face she made kiss curls, pinning them in place. "Careful, don't move your head or the pins will stick into you." For the longer hair at the back, she got an old stocking, made of lisle, a washed-out fawn colour, with a peculiar dank texture, like a cold handshake. She fixed this close to the girl's scalp. Then she wound a hank of hair around the stocking, twisting it so tightly that the girl's eyes filled with tears. When she reached the end of the lock of hair, she opened what was left of the stocking and used it to twine back up around the ringlet with a final triumphant tie to the original toe of the stocking. Rat's tails, the grandmother called them. A dozen or so of these stuck out around the girl's head. A terrible night's sleep it was, tossing her head from side to side, trying to avoid the rolls of hair and stocking. In the morning the swaddling was unrolled and the hair emerged twisted into tight coils. Nita grabbed a brush and, spitting on her fingers, beat the hair around her first finger so that the ringlets shone and fell evenly. The agony of the bandages was forgotten as Pam threw her head from side to side, the soft hair bouncing on her shoulders.

My mother loved curly hair. She would draw my attention to girls on the street. "Look at her beautiful hair." She would say to her friends about their sons, "What a waste, that beautiful naturally curly hair on a boy." My mother did not plait my hair. Why? She herself wore plaits as a child. I think it was because she had hated her straight hair, as did her own mother. My grandmother loved her niece Ethel's hair, it was long and curling. Ethel had big brown eyes and long lashes. My grandmother would make dresses for her niece. She would say to her own daughter, my mother, "It's not much use making them for you, they look nothing on you, so short and fat, and that dreadful straight hair. Now on Ethel clothes look good."

During the 1950s curls were important for women. Advertisements emphasised the attractiveness of women with waves in their hair: Which Twin has the Toni?. *Women placed themselves under large metal boxes at hairdressers, a singed smell hanging around, to emerge with glossy, permanently crinkled helmets. Home perming kits, like* Toni*, enabled women to make their own miracles at a lower cost.*

Binding and curling hair into ringlets fetishises a natural attribute. Ringlets, soft and bouncing, exaggerate the femininity of the wearer. They are not suitable for active pursuits.

However, they are not like naturally curly hair, able to give a sense of abandonment and freedom as curlicues of hair escape. Instead, they are organised under tight constraints. They carry the memory of fairy stories, like Rapunzel, locked in a tower, with her long curly hair reaching down to provide a ladder for her lover. A group of German feminist theorists say:

> *"It is important for girls to have curls in their hair. If they don't have them naturally, they have to manufacture them. But the reasons for doing so and the question of who finds such things important are left unspoken. As is the question of whom such curly locks entangle."*

Pam stared at the Town Hall where the concert was to take place. It was enormous. Line after line of wooden seats seemed to stretch back. Her heart jumped.

Round the back to the dressing room. Lots of faces she recognised. Tall graceful Jennifer was fluffing out the skirt of her deep blue ballet dress, gleaming with elaborate embroidery. She tossed her dark hair back as she pinned a feathered hat on her head. Next to her, Beverley the cart-wheeler chattered and giggled as she outlined her lips with scarlet.

Pam smiled slightly at them. They seemed so confident. She sat down in a corner while her mother arranged for Brian to play in a corner with another young boy. She opened a recently-borrowed book, *Jane Eyre*, difficult to read, but a thrilling story about an orphan girl becoming a governess.

Then Nita was with her, smiling and happy, shaking the dress out of the brown paper bag it had travelled in. Pam loved this dress, with its flurry of frills, a little apron making another layer to bounce and drift, gleaming white and pale pink, soft and baby-rabbitish. Pink is for girls. They had bought white gloves in the city and Nita frilled them with pink. The same store provided a bonnet shape which was also trimmed with pink organdie frills They bought a length of softer gauzy material for a long bow to tie under her chin, and bright pink ribbon for a huge bow around her waist.

Nita put the dress gently over Pam’s head, hoping there was no creasing, fluffing it out around her. Next came the careful brushing out of the hair, twisting ringlets around fingers, then the hat tied on. Then came what Pam thought the best moment, the application of makeup from a small collection bought by her mother. It was special, thicker and heavier than normal make-up. Cream was smeared over Pam's face, bright blue on her eyes, shocking carmine on cheeks and lips. In the floor length mirror, she saw a stranger. Her eyes were large and sparkled behind their black outlines. Her legs were loose and long on top of the jangly shoes. She treasured this sense of otherness, of sophistication, of contact with another world.

And just as suddenly, her turn. Behind her a great wall of curved organ pipes loomed. They had hung thick red curtains around the stage and finding her way through them proved difficult. Standing in the wings in the thick mustiness of the curtains, with their strong dusty smell tickling and making rough the back of her throat, she was scarcely able to breathe because of the warm softness of the velvet. Her arms embraced the curves of the curtain, holding its soothing calm close, imagining herself lost, lost forever, quiet, smothered in velvet. Then as they called her name she pushed through the thick folds, a moment of panic as if she would never find her way, until suddenly there she was, on the wooden length of the stage, lights glaring down, a huge glow at the centre shading out at the sides. Her eyes were stinging, her tap shoes clattering, as she tripped towards the edge of the stage, her hand screening her squinting eyes from the harsh lights.

And then the song. It was not a difficult song, and her voice only squeaked a little on the top notes. The tap routine was fairly slow and regular, with lots of spinning around, so that the skirt twisted enticingly. She knew she was performing well, that her gloved hand was picking up the skirt in a charming way, that the petticoats beneath were starched and glistening above her legs. And all the time, her feet were going tap tap tap. Her eyes, sparkling brightly, were fixed on the audience. She heard Miss Elaine's instructions, "Keep your head turned to the audience. And where are your big beautiful smiles?" She smiled and smiled. Her cheeks were stiff.

Finished at last. Final taps done. A deep curtsy. The clapping grew slowly. Her mother and brother came rushing backstage. They hugged her, no longer concerned to preserve the dress's stiffness. Her face was gleaming slightly through the powder.

"Good on you, darling," Nita rushed around, pulling Pam’s ordinary clothes over her head. "Now you'll have to really practise for the next eisteddfod won't you? See if you can get another cup for it."

"I don't think I'll do any more dancing," Pam said. "I'm tired of it. I really need to spend a bit more time on school work. I'm just about to go to high school, remember?"

She helped her mother flatten the dress for packing, put her clattering shoes in the bottom of the bag, then sat in the corner, engrossed in *Jane Eyre*, until Nita had everything ready to go.

Now when I look at the photo I cannot recreate the admiration I once felt for it as a photo nor the passion with which I approached tap-dancing. Now I see the strain in the face, a forced enjoyment very different from the delight that marks earlier pictures of me dancing. This

photograph reminds me that I had not been as good a dancer as I wished to be, even if I did not talk about this to my mother or even acknowledge it to myself.

This photograph marks the moment when I began to withdraw from my dream of being a dancer. I justified my anticipated departure from tap-dancing by the development of other fantasies. When this photo was taken I was going to Erskineville Opportunity School. I was beginning to define myself as an intellectual, a reader, a student, a writer. Was I aware even then that tap-dancing was not something I could boast about to other girls in my class? The books I got out of libraries were about ballet students. In the Opportunity Class, and later in high school, other girls studied ballet. I would mention that I had studied some ballet, I would say that I hadn't done the exams. I did not tell them of the years of tap-dancing practice on the hard concrete steps next to my grandmother's fernery.

I established a dual silence. I withdrew from girls at dancing class by telling myself that I was cleverer than they were, that I read books, was a student, not a dancer. To girls at school I kept silent about a form of dancing I already perceived as more than a little common. Yet my pleasure in the pounding powerful rhythms of tap stayed with me.

Pam lay on the floor in the lounge room, in front of the sputtering paraffin heater. She was desultorily looking over a list of French vocabulary for an exam the next day. She had the radio tuned to the Hit Parade on 2GB. Usually she didn't listen to this music. It was not the sort of program which a girl of fifteen with refined tastes and high intelligence should listen to, she thought. It was vulgar, it played noisy American music, and had a blustering compere, whose voice had an American twang. Anyway, if she did have it on, her mother called out from the kitchen. "Turn that rubbish down."

It was a matter of pride to Nita that Pam still looked so neat, in a pink and white striped shirtmaker frock, with clean white socks. The other day they had run into one of her old friends in the street, who looked at Pam and said "You're lucky. She's not turning into one of those teenagers." Nita smiled at her daughter, then, "Oh no, she's too sensible for that." And she had felt pleased when the woman went on, "Doing well at school then, is she?" Pam had smiled as well. Now as she lay by the heater she knew she felt uneasy, a twinge of envy in her soul, a spark of rebellion. If she hung out with others of her age, put on tight black skirts, teased her hair like one of the widgies who hung around Stones' milk bar in Coogee, would she be having more fun?

No, she said to herself, those girls just looked stupid. You could go too far. Some girls really went overboard about pop stars. That could make you look really foolish. Particularly if they were keen on ugly, greasy creatures like Elvis Presley. Not a man of taste and refinement. So Pam listened to the Hit Parade, playing it very quietly, but she made sure that when she talked about her enthusiasms at school she reflected careful distinctions. She might say she liked one of the British singers. Someone a little different. Johnny Mathis, the black

high-jumper, for example. He was quite an interesting choice. Or she might choose songs which themselves had some distinction.

That day she heard an advertisement. 2GB wanted 'teenagers' to apply for the first panel of Australia's inaugural Jukebox Jury. Just ring in. Lucky young people would have the chance to select forthcoming hits, appear on radio.

Pam did. She telephoned. And here was the prize for Nita's steadfast determination to have Pam sound like Deborah Kerr. Pam's tightly-elocuted vowels won her a place on 2GB's Jukebox Jury.

There was a time back then, when not everybody listened to popular music. The radio programs were limited. Times were changing, however, and there were strong reasons for listening to the Top 40*. Even at Sydney Girls' High there were few conversations that did not involve some discussion of the songs and sounds of the stars. And in 1956, when we had a long bus journey to an excursion, there had been a wonderful anarchic moment, when the whole bus broke into* Rock around the Clock*. Few had actually seen the film* Blackboard Jungle*, but all had heard the music, pounding out of radios at least once each day. Incessant beat. Rock... clock. We bounced up and down on the hard bus seats, beat our hands on the seat-backs: rock-clock, rock, gonna rock er-round the clock terniiiiiiight. The whole bus seemed to gyrate with the rhythm. No-one could stop us.*

They recorded the first session of Jukebox Jury on a Saturday. Pam met her fellow contestants. They were not typical pop music listeners. And certainly not bodgies and widgies. All were fifteen or sixteen. Two boys, two girls. Kerry was a plain-talking confident girl originally from the country, but now boarding at Abbotsleigh, a distinguished girls' private school on the North Shore, which Pam had not heard of. Clive was also from the North Shore, handsome with a row of flashing teeth and the style of a British matinee idol. Pam had debated against his school, Knox College. Kevin was from a Catholic school, pragmatic and down to earth.

The leader of the panel was Ross Higgins, an occasional disc jockey on radio. They had to call him the Interlocutor. Emphasis on the "loc". Strange word, but obviously an integral part of the whole set-up. The young people sat around a table, with earphones on; a record would be played, and each would express an opinion. It was indicated that if they could disagree, have a fight, shout out opinions, it would be all to the good. In fact they often had a practice session first, so that they could set out what points they would disagree on.

At the end of the session, they received payment. Ten shillings each, fares to and from the studio, a bottle of Coca Cola. And the record of their choice. They were all 45's. Now that was fine, though of little use to Pam, if to the others. Pam did not like Coca Cola but of course she could give the bottle to her brother. And she could certainly choose a record,

although she had no equipment on which to play it. At least it was the start of a record collection. And she could show off, lending them to girls at school.

So there they were each Saturday. The 2GB studios were in a building in Phillip Street. Pam was allowed to come in on the bus by herself with many strictures about coming home punctually after the recording was finished. But tension simmered in her head. She was concerned about what messages would be going out about her on the Saturday afternoon radio. She did not want to be seen as someone who followed the fashion and raved about Elvis Presley, so she would not choose his records. She listened seriously to Tennessee Ernie Ford's *Sixteen Tons* but decided that there was a danger of vulgarity about working class songs like that. To like them suggested identification with the hardships of coal miners and packers, yet surely all of them would be like her and rushing off to public libraries and elocution classes, trying their darnedest to get out? She thought it safest to admire sentimental ballads. Nat King Cole and Johnnie Mathis seemed somehow less swept-up in American consumerism and exploitation of the teenage market than Elvis.

Each week she would precisely analyse the rock songs and say that she did not like the big pounding drum, found the rhythms uninteresting, the words corny. She would say that the ballad she had chosen that week had a good story, did things a little differently. Her message to the folks back home was just that. I'm not like the others, I'm not falling for all this over-advertised pap. And there was another message, to do with the deeply disturbing area of sex. Pam felt it was degrading, particularly for girls, to show themselves swept away by sexual desire. Particularly not desire for a pop star. Pam did not want it thought that any of this music or any of the singers aroused her. She chose sweetness and thought of Mr. Darcy.

Except once. One record drew her, not sung by Elvis or any of the well-known sex symbols, but by Bobby Freeman. The pounding rhythms of *Do You Want to Dance* worked their way through her hips, set her feet bouncing on the floor, just as when she had tap-danced, and had her affirming, to the radio audience of 1957, "Yes I like the rhythm, I love the beat." Inside her head it was pounding "Do ya, do ya, do ya, do ya want to dance?" and her head echoed "Yes, yes, baby I do, I do, I want to dance."

I still have a number of the records I won as a panellist on Jukebox Jury. I did not in fact lend them to school friends, whom I never told about my time in the studios. Since the records were never played they are in rather good condition. It is odd listening to them now. Much music of that era had a dying fall, never reached a resolution or climax. There is a yearning to songs like Unchained Melody*, a sense of sadness.*

By the time I acquired a record player in my second year at university, I was not at all interested in the world of the Top 40*. Instead I played records bought second-hand from Ashwoods, records which had the seal of approval from my university friends. We danced. We practised jiving to Vivaldi's* Four Seasons *and Bach's* Brandenburg Concertos*. We saw*

West Side Story *at the Tivoli and some of us went to classes with the dancers who remained behind, up dusty stairs near City Road. I had lost most of my technique.*

Instead I listened. We bought Purcell, whose operas were being staged by the University Musical Society. We were fascinated by Deller's counter-tenor. We found records of old Victorian music hall songs and copied them for performances of the Drama Society. We heard Pete Seeger songs from the Push guitarists at the Royal George Hotel and listened to other American protest songs, like Alan Lomax's collection Murderers' Home*. The boys got very enthusiastic about early blues. One boyfriend sat me in a corner of his parents' living room for four hours while he played New Orleans songs. I didn't realise I could ask him to stop and play with me instead.*

Driving from Paddington to my mother's house at Kingsford, I often passed Sydney Girls' High, the school that I had attended in my adolescence. My boys both went to the next-door school, Sydney Boys' High, during the 1980s. It sits on a corner of Moore Park, with well-established gardens and large palm trees just as they had been then. The school is bigger now; a number of new buildings in light brick have been added to the original dark brown solidity.

Driving past, dropping off my sons, I saw that girls milled around outside the school. They still wore the familiar brown uniforms, but compared to my schooldays, they were more casually arranged: tunics blousing over belts, skirts hitched high, no sign of hats and gloves. I resented them, often felt disapproving of their rebellion. I was aware that my body tensed, as if I could still feel the tight controls of the 1950s.

"When we move to Kingsford, you'll be able to go to a very good convent." Frank creased his eyes as he gazed over his daughter's head. "The Brigidines are at Randwick. They're a wonderful lot of women. You'd get a good, solid basis there."

Pam's felt a slight unease. She was wary of nuns, in their long black dresses, heavy rosaries swinging. But it could be interesting to go to a boarding school, with lively girls having midnight feasts, editing magazines, writing poetry. Religion, however, was a problem. How would she manage? She had not been to church on a regular basis. Even thinking about making a mistake crossing herself in the damp-smelling church made her feel nervous.

"I'm just letting your father go on about it," Nita said as Pam helped her scrub and peel potatoes for dinner. Her voice was low so that Dora would not hear. "I don't know where he thinks the money for a convent's going to come from. But you don't have to worry. If you get to Sydney Girls' you couldn't get a better education than that and it's free. Besides, the school uniform will look much better on you. Nigger brown is your colour. And gold."

None of Pam's primary school friends would be with her at either school. They were all going to the two selective girls' high schools, St George and Fort Street, which drew pupils from the long train lines to the west and south of Sydney. But Pam's family were moving to Kingsford, to the east. She was offered Sydney Girls' High. Her father did not mention the convent again.

Pam was very proud to put on the school uniform, as she had never worn one before. The whole process of getting the uniform was also important. Nita did not make it. It was the first piece of clothing she had bought. Pam had to try the uniform on at David Jones, where it was displayed along with uniforms from expensive girls' private schools. Among them was the soft grey and green check blazer of the Brigidine Convent.

Pam looked yearningly at the grey as she tried on her own uniform, so solid and brown. A white shirt with soft collar. A brown tie, which tied in a knot like a man's. A heavy brown serge uniform, with wide pleats. A belt to bring it in around the waist. For first years only, fawn ankle length socks, but for winter and for older girls, thick brown lisle stockings. They had to buy a cotton suspender belt to hold them up. Brown shoes. A Panama hat circled by a brown school band with embroidered gold badge. A brown velour hat with a similar band for winter. A brown serge blazer. Brown wrist length gloves. The weight of tradition made itself felt through the serge. It looked terrible on her.

The Sydney Girls' High School uniform had the great advantage (many would say its only one) of being distinctive. Chocolate brown, or nigger brown as it was often called with the 1950s lack of sensitivity to its racist overtones, was not a common colour for girls' uniforms. Most state schools wore navy blue.

Sydney Girls' High School was distinctive also in that it was the oldest of only six selective State High Schools for girls in Sydney. Girls who had not reached the stringent entry criteria imposed by an examination in the final year of primary school were sent instead to schools which concentrated on domestic science, business skills or cooking. The effect of this barrier was considerable snobbery and elitism between schools, particularly between academic and technical schools, highlighted by other writers such as Barbara Hanrahan, who attended a technical school and was despised by girls who studied Latin. Rose Creswell found herself snubbed by girls who went to Queenwood, a private school, but in the 1950s in Sydney, it was unusual for girls to go to private schools, which were the preserve of upper middle class families. In fact few of these schools competed academically with selective state schools; Penelope Nelson indicates in her memoir how unusual university entry was for girls from her school, Frensham.

Most students, except for those at selective schools, left school at the end of their third year, after passing the Intermediate examination. In 1956 only 17% of pupils stayed at school until fifth year for the Leaving Certificate examination and the percentage would be less for girls. A small number of girls who wished to continue to the Leaving Certificate entered Sydney Girls' High School to do their final two years, often experiencing a sense of exclusion.

> *"It was not easy for girls like us to fit in because we were regarded as newcomers by those who had already had three years in which to form friendships and cliques. ... There was also an inner group of girls, found mostly in the A class, whose friendships and loyalty to each other had been established even earlier at Woollahra Special - the primary school with special classes catering for 'bright' children. In fact a Woollahra 'special' girl carried her intellectual halo through her five years. There was some snobbishness and quite a lot of rivalry to beat the Woollahra 'special girls'."*

While I was at school, the system changed. The 1957 Wyndham Report recommended that schools should serve their own communities and that comprehensive high schools and coeducation should be extended. The area around Sydney High was working class; nearby Paddington, its terraces sub-divided into flatettes, had such a poor reputation that the 1958 school captain did not admit to living there. At assemblies we were told of the dangers to the school from loss of standards if students with mediocre academic records were introduced.

Pam tried not to stare as she looked around the A class. There was an energetic buzz of conversation. A tall girl with curly brown hair marched from the front row to Pam in the back row.

"Who are you, then?" She folded her arms across her chest. "And where do you come from?'

"I went to Erskineville," Pam muttered. "We've only just moved near here."

"Erskineville? Where's that, then? And why are you here with us? We're the Woollahra Demonstration girls. We're the Opportunity class."

"Yeah, that's right!"

"Up, Woollahra, we're the tops!"

Girls around the class were cheering and jumping up, until silenced by the entrance of a teacher, short, grey haired, in a dusty academic gown.

Pam drew back into her seat. It just wasn't fair. Erskineville was an opportunity school too. But it didn't, it couldn't, sound quite so special as Woollahra Demonstration. She would just have to show that she was as clever as all of them. If only there weren't quite so many of them. It soon became clear that only four of this A class were newcomers to the group: one girl from England, one from a private school, Pam from Erskineville and a girl with a brash and confident face who was repeating the year.

Going through the list the teacher called out a number of unusual names: Wanievzki, Papapetros, Chia. The teacher checked the spelling and asked their religion for Scripture classes. A number of girls described themselves as Jewish. What did it mean? Was it a country? Was it a religion? The teacher asked what religion Pam was.

"I'm not sure", she said. She didn't want to say a baptised Catholic. Nobody else had. And besides, her mother never went to church and Pam scarcely ever. It was always the cause of so many arguments.

"C of E, then," the teacher said. And that was that.

In 1952, two years before my enrolment, 192 girls enrolled at Sydney Girls' High in their first year. 11% were Jewish, 7% were Catholic. I remember a concentration of Jewish girls, from suburbs like Dover Heights, Bondi and Double Bay. By the time I reached the school, the large presence of girls from families recently arrived in Australia was not much discussed. But in 1950 there was a letter from the school captain in The Chronicle*, the school magazine, urging tolerance so that girls could help others, particularly New Australians who had lived through the horrors of war. In fact, as Melbourne writer Lily Brett shows, families who had survived the Holocaust did not wish to talk of their experiences. There was a wave of silence for their children to negotiate.*

Pam's head ached at the number of rules. Gloves and hat had to be worn outside the school at all times. The boys' school which backed onto the girls' school had to be ignored. Girls and boys had to form different lines when catching buses outside the school. Girls were not allowed to eat outside the school in school uniform. Girls were expected to line up in their classes when the school bell rang. Girls went up the stairs on the right hand side, down the left.

Other rules were implicit, picked up from subtle hints.

"Now you all have the results of your first year exams." The head mistress was an impressive mathematician who moved with ponderous grace around the school and frowned at girls who misbehaved. The mathematics department in general displayed gravity and good sense, right down to their practical lace-up shoes.

"There will now be offered to you a range of options for your remaining two years before the Intermediate. Those girls in the top sixty will form the A and B classes. There are a number of compulsory subjects, but you do have some choices. Your class alternatives are listed in room 18."

Pam was depressed at the thought of compulsory science. She was, of course, pleased that she had stayed in the A class where she was beginning to make some friends, although not among the girls who formed the real focus of excitement in the year. They were the sports stars, the wits. They formed a gang with Lorraine, who was repeating, and developed tricks to irritate teachers.

But not even they misbehaved in science lessons. Like the mathematicians, the science teachers assumed a position of authority in the school. Some wore tailored suits with divided skirts, shirts and men's ties. A geologist carried a shooting stick up and down the corridors. They filled the blackboard with lists of the rules of physics and chemistry. With mulish head Pam memorised the valency table and attempted equations about oxygen releasing from acids. Just once in the first year had she gained some pleasure from science, when she dissolved silica in water and crystals of various solutions formed gardens. She remembered the beauty and variety of crystal shapes, colours matching and contrasting, like floating spirits in the drab corridors of the school.

But Pam's marks were sufficient for A science and that was what she would do. In fact it would be worse if she hadn't got the marks. Already she could feel people giggling behind their hands at girls like Susan Marks, who had failed some subjects and was being moved to the E class.

"What happened to her?" said Rosemary, a thin eager girl who had become friendly with Pam. "She used to do well at Woollahra. And she wasn't mucking up."

All the girls who had mucked up had passed successfully, although with strict warnings about any future misconduct being roundly punished. But that was part of the game played with the staff. Girls allowed themselves to misbehave, just enough to gain class admiration, but not enough to affect those important marks.

"She just didn't study", serious Joan said. "Her father was sick or something. But she's messed up now. She won't be able to do German."

It was this complacent certainty that I most remember about the school. It was a place bounded by rules and expectations which became clearer as the school years progressed. Sydney High was run on a rigid academic basis. There were five classes in each year, divided according to IQ tests and exam results. Girls were moved abruptly between classes as their results changed. These classes did very different work. I recall the A and B classes having greater emphasis on languages (Latin, French, Greek, German). The lower classes gravitated to General Maths, Biology and Geology, while the top classes studied Advanced Maths, Chemistry, combined with Physics until Third Year, after which Physics became a subject suitable only for boys. For the top classes in First Year, Geography was not seen as a serious option, taught once a fortnight, alternating with Art. First Year also saw an occasional sewing lesson. Music was studied only once a fortnight, throughout the school. The value placed on creative pursuits was very low. Where the pecking order of subjects came from was never clear, but it seemed accepted by all.

What did I learn at this school? I learnt that clever girls must be segregated in order to do well. I learnt, or was told, that girls must study science in order to have a broad-ranging education. Presumably at some earlier time, it had been decided that a science speciality gave women more options for getting into university and gave them a wider range of employment possibilities; if this was the case, it was certainly never conveyed to the students. Even if we loathed science, as I did, we had to continue to study it through all our school career. We were not however encouraged to paint or draw or make. Those activities were not for the academic girls. No, we clever girls kept on with our mathematics - oh algebra, how incomprehensibly boring it all seemed - and our science. It is curious to consider the high reputation of the school as a leader in girls' education. From my experience, the school selected a number of highly intelligent girls, then force-fed them a rigid and organised set of subjects, with little encouragement to explore, create and think. Girls who were dropped from the highest academic stream found themselves condemned to the lower classes, neglected by past friends.

Eva Cox, four years ahead of me at Sydney Girls' High, remembers being bussed out to Randwick High for cooking lessons, as Sydney High did not have kitchens. It was an unfortunate experience. Not only was it time-consuming to marshal all first year students, arrange the bus, transport them all to the other school, but they were then greeted by crowds of jeering Randwick girls, who loathed these superior stuck-up girls in their neat brown gloves. The Randwick girls were getting the worst of the bargain and they knew it. They had been judged as not academic by the age of eleven and would find it difficult to claw their way out. Barbara Hanrahan, Susan Dermody and Moya Sayer-Jones all remember the divisions between girls studying Latin and those doing domestic science.

During my years at Sydney Girls' High there was only one man on the staff. Bob Winder was appointed as an Art teacher in 1955, staying just a couple of years. Girls who were doing art pointed out how he had improved the teaching in the subject, making it more than a second-best subject for non-academic girls. What must it have been like for him, in that female-dominated school, teaching one of the least respected subjects? When I worked in the bureaucracy in the 1980s, Bob Winder was Director-General of the Department of Education and oversaw the first moves to a merit system of promotion in the department, to ensure that more women moved into senior positions in schools. There is an irony in there somewhere.

In room 18, the A class gathered, looking through the brief list of subject choices. Pam's heart leapt. She could study Greek. It was on the list; she could choose Greek, History or German. It would be a blow to drop History. But Greek! It was something studied by boys in school books. And best of all, it was taught by her favourite teacher, the librarian, Eunice Dengate.

Miss Dengate was like an exotic flower in the school. She had a theatrical air, her hair drawn up into an untidy bun, her draped clothes and shawls. She clasped her throat to draw attention to her emotions. She had talked to Pam in the library early in Pam's first year.

"Oh, my dear, a girl after my own heart. You loved *Jane Eyre*, you say. My, that's advanced. Let's see what else we can find you. Strictly speaking you're not allowed to have *Wuthering Heights* until second year. That's why it's in the closed cupboard. But for a girl with your reading tastes, there'll be no problem, I'm sure. Just don't fling it around your friends."

That was the first of many loans from Miss Dengate's closed cupboard: from racier modern novels, like *Sinuhe the Egyptian*, to classics, like *Vanity Fair*. Miss Dengate watched for Pam and, stretching out her long fingers, a thick silver scarab on one, tapped her on the shoulder.

"Now, what did you think of the Meredith, my dear, wasn't it wonderful? And did you enjoy the Shaw play? Isn't Candida a magnificent woman?"

Pam registered for Greek.

"Oh, my dear, I'm delighted," said Miss Dengate, "A small class. It will be wonderful. Homer, the wine dark sea, the voyages of Odysseus."

Pam simmered with excitement. Until that night at home.

"What nonsense is this, Pam? Give up History! Over my dead body." Frank was furious. "It is the basis of our knowledge of society. It's essential for you to know about history."

"But, Dad, this will just mean missing out on two years. I can still do it for my Leaving."

Frank was adamant. "Whoever heard of a girl studying Greek. Latin, now, that's acceptable. It's a good basis for any language. I learnt two years' work in one at the Christian Bros. Caesar, *De Bello Gallico*, in one year. They said I had a brilliant future."

He pronounced the "c" as a "k" and the "ae" as an "i", as Pam had also been taught, so that it sounded like the German emperor. His mouth tightened. He thought of the success he had briefly enjoyed before he had to leave school in order to work, during the Depression.

"Get yourself back into History, Pam, that's the way you'll succeed. Find out about the forces that have made this country great."

The next day Pam changed her subjects back. She smiled ruefully at Miss Dengate, but was too embarrassed to explain the reasons. She did not go to the library so often.

The history class was taken by Miss Rothman. She had a vivid attractiveness, with dark eyes and tightly curled hair, her mouth flashing with crimson lipstick. Among dowdy suits, mannish attire and chalk-stained academic gowns, her smart suits and beautiful shoes seemed particularly glamorous. Jewish girls who knew her family said her brothers were doctors, her name was Dora. Why wasn't she married? Pam and her friends wondered, as they wondered about any teachers who seemed attractive. They developed elaborate tales of lovers lost in wars or plane crashes or, most daring of all, unhappily married to someone else. They didn't ask such questions about teachers who did not live up to their standards of attractiveness, based on photos from the women's magazines.

But the beautiful Miss Rothman was a tartar. In her classes, each girl had to sit straight behind the girl in front, then, at a word of command, move sideways on her seat so that diagonal rows radiated out from the teacher's desk. Each girl then moved her neck slightly to left or right, so that she was able to see past the girl in front and keep her eyes fixed on Miss Rothman's face. Hands had to be folded on desks, books closed. For the first twenty minutes of the lesson, Miss Rothman instructed them on the subject matter of the day, briskly outlining a series of facts. The girls listened, eyes fixed. They then opened their work books, carefully covered in brown paper with decorative illustrations cut from Christmas cards or magazines glued to the centre front. On the board Miss Rothman wrote four paragraphs of summary points, a set pattern of Background, Causes, Events, Results. With these written on the left hand page, the students then started, if time permitted, an essay based on the plan on the right hand page.

Occasionally, head stretched out to the right, Pam thought about the five girls studying Ancient Greek, saw in her mind Miss Dengate sitting on the table, swinging her legs under her shawl, stroking her throat as she translated with them the story of Circe.

In this rigid fashion, we worked our way through British history, an array of kings and queens, Civil War, Industrial Revolution, until in Intermediate year we reached Australian history. Exactly the same technique was able to be applied to the First Fleet, the Rum Rebellion, the growth of the sheep industry and of course the journeys of the explorers. With my quick memory I began to top history. It could be said that this tightly controlled method showed us ways of organising facts into an essay, but it gave us little sense of the complexities of history, the different sources which could be used, the richness of historical writing, the possibility of different interpretations.

English teaching was also inflexible. This was often not to do with the teachers but with the demands of the set courses for examinations. Some writers came alive to us through their

appeal to the highly emotional state of the teenage girl: Jane Eyre*,* Hamlet, Wuthering Heights*, anything which had a suffering hero with whom we could feel the anguish of life.*

We studied Latin. Anne Howells, our teacher for five years, was a martinet on grammar and drilled us with energy through declensions and conjugations. But she also loved the language and its writers and whipped us into enthusiasms over Caesar's birthday, or read with us gentle lyrics of Catullus, Passer mortuus est meae puellae*. We planned to enter the Latin poetry speaking examinations, reciting Dido's speech on her funeral pyre from Virgil. In our Leaving Certificate exams, three of her pupils were in the top four in the state.*

We studied contemporary languages. I studied French. Our spoken French was chanting the development of a verb, through present, past and future tenses. Our study of French society told us how to queue for a bus in Paris, by entering the bus in accordance with numbers picked from the bus-stop post. For some reason the French teachers were always much less able to discipline us than other teachers, perhaps absorbing the lessons of every girl's school story in which the French teacher, invariably called "Mamselle", was always the most incompetent. For the last two years our teacher would set us written work and, crossing her fragile ankles, open up a newspaper and study the form guide, chewing gum constantly as she was an inveterate smoker outside the classroom. No sound was allowed to disturb her concentration, as she marked a favoured horse with a firm cross. At the end of the lessons she would raise her head, fix us with firm blue eyes of a piercing coldness, and, in a strident nasal accent test our comprehension of what we had been studying.

Sport attracted some girls, but not me. We first encountered the small, straight-backed sports mistress in gymnasium lessons. We were the only girls' secondary school to wear shorts rather than small pleated skirts as our compulsory sports uniform, distinctive and suitable for running and jumping. But the major problem of these most unpleasant garments was that they were made at home by mothers skimping on yet another expense, out of coarse brown cotton, which no matter how often it was washed remained thick and scratchy, rubbing sensitive crotches, developing a peculiar smell under the armpits. The whole outfit increased the awkwardness and discomfort experienced by many teenage girls during physical activity.

In third year, as the class neared their first formal exam, the Intermediate, the roll teacher, the vague Latin mistress, gazed around the class. She frowned agitatedly, tapping the end of her pen against her teeth.

"We have to get some idea of what you girls are planning to do next year. Now as you're the A class, I would say most of you will be staying on for the Leaving Certificate. I want you to tell me whether you plan to leave this year or not, and then tell me what you want to do when you leave school, so that the school has some record of your aspirations. Girls, this will be difficult to do in the time we've got available. I want you all to keep perfectly still and answer in a loud clear voice when I call out each girl's name."

So like Miss Hills. So clear and accurate in her study of Latin. So totally disorganised when it came to anything practical. She approached life with terror. She washed her hands anxiously at every opportunity and was often found by students standing by a door, wringing her hands dry, waiting for someone else to touch the handle and open it. For her to make such a list was a great undertaking.

The class looked around at each other. Some giggled. Leaving school. Pam tensed. It seemed very formal to outline ambitions or ideas. People might laugh at her silly half-formed notions.

Rosemary, an orphan living with a short-tempered aunt, frowned and tightened her mouth. She was not staying on at school and had already talked to the local bank about being taken on as a trainee clerk. Anything would suit her, as long as she could get some of her own money, save up and move away from Aunty Vera's.

Flashing a great smile, Lorraine stretched. She had been at the school for four years, repeating one year. She was getting out. Now. This was it. She could get a good job in an office as a secretary; she could go to Business College. She would be out of this hole. In a month's time she would whip the boring brown serge from her back and rip it into dusters.

"Now girls, let's get this started." Miss Hills opened a large document, readied her pen and started going down the list of names.

"Aalbrecht; Anderson; Andrews, Lorraine ...." As Miss Hills peeled slowly down the list, girl after girl said teacher, science teacher, kindergarten teacher. One of the Jewish girls said doctor and heads whipped around to look at her. Pam stared at her placid face. Certainly Rosalie was clever, always in the top ten, but a doctor?

"Architect," said a soft voice. Pam gasped. She had no idea that her quiet Chinese friend Joan had such an ambition. An architect. Pam did not even know what they did, other than something to do with houses. And then again: teacher, primary teacher, physiotherapist, Rosemary a bank clerk.

They were nearing Watson. Pam racked her brains. Nita often talked of her being a teacher. But high school had disillusioned her. Teachers were grey, shadowy figures. And all unmarried. Her lip curled as she looked at anxious Miss Hills in her unfashionable grey suit.

At Erskineville with Janice she had begun to think of herself as a writer. And this dream was continuing at high school, where she was getting poems into the school magazine and winning prizes. But she had another ambition, secret and protected. She had been learning elocution, reciting in eisteddfods. And she had spent the last term directing her classmates in the final scenes of their Shakespeare play *Twelfth Night*. It had been wonderful, wonderful. Could she say actress?

Her brow creased. These two ambitions, writer and actress, seemed unrealistic. They were certainly not to be inscribed on a formal list. She would seem a fool.

"Teacher, teacher, science teacher..."

Pam had an another ambition. She knew she could speak well and convincingly (elocution again) even on things which she did not believe. Only that year she had great success in the Royal Empire Society competitions, with a speech on the role of the crown in the British Empire.

And the Shakespeare play they had studied last year, *The Merchant of Venice,* gave a wonderful role model. Portia was just like an actress. She appeared in court, spoke eloquently, saved her lover and lived happily ever after. Pam knew she could do that. And Vince, her favourite uncle, was a solicitor at Bankstown. Surely he would help. She played for a moment with the image of herself as a lawyer, standing in court, persuading all with her voice, tossing back long hair from under her wig.

She breathed deeply.

"Watson, Pam," Miss Hills called.

"Lawyer, I want to be a lawyer."

There, it was out, written down. Nobody said anything, nobody laughed.

Pam was rather proud. Her career plans distinguished her from the grey ruck of teachers and pupils. At recess, there was still some desultory conversation about people's choices.

"I care more about getting far far away! Imagine being around schools for the rest of your life," yelled Lorraine. Yvonne, who wanted to be a gym teacher, threw a doughnut at her and

chased her to the end of the schoolyard. The others followed, running to catch up. A few gazed towards the boys' fence just fifteen yards away. Conversation turned to that weekend's dance.

A few days later a telephone call came from her Uncle Vince.

"Pam, I'd like to have a word with you. Could I pick you up one afternoon after school?"

Pam felt proud and excited when she left the school gates. All the other girls were lining up for school buses. She crossed Anzac Parade and waited separately under one of the big fig trees.

"I'm waiting for my uncle," she said in response to questioning glances. Very few girls were picked up by cars after school, except at times fast girls, whose rough surfing boyfriends might drive up in a battered back-firing wreck. Pam straightened her Panama, pulled down her gloves and waited until Vince's black car appeared.

They drove around the corner into Centennial Park, rundown, desolate. Occasionally a car with a learner driver appeared, curving slow arcs down the road in front of them. Vince slowly stopped the car and wound down the window.

"And how is school progressing, then, Pam? English still your best subject? And what about your History? Very good, very good. That's pleasing."

Pam smiled tightly against her teeth. Uncle Vince was wonderful, but you had to be on your guard.

"Latin, it's good that you have kept that up. Ah, Pam, it's training for the brain, there's logic in it. For the study of history there's nothing to beat Latin. You get a grounding there in the ancients. Caesar: *De Bello Gallico*. It gives you your background for English, French, all the Romance languages."

"I love Latin", said Pam, "although we're doing Cicero now and I don't find that quite so interesting as the poetry, like Virgil. And Catullus."

How could she tell her uncle, with his love of Caesar, that battles, in English, French or Latin, bored her stiff. What she loved was Catullus, making playful rhymes about his sweetheart's

sparrow. And the Virgil they had just started to read, with Queen Dido mourning her lover Aeneas and planning to throw herself on the funeral pyre. These delighted her, gave her a vision of life beyond the red-brick walls, gave Latin an excitement and fascination missing in History, where all they seemed to study were interminable journeys by well-known names from primary school: Burke and Wills, Leichhardt, Hume and Hovell. In high school, they did not have to do fancy printing on top of the page, badly drawn outlines of explorers beside a tree, mopping their brows or drinking water. All Miss Rothman requested was the FACTS about their expeditions and a map outlined from a plastic Australia that lived in the geometry set and on which the student could plot the route taken, in dots, dots and dashes, dashes alone, two dots and a dash - differing minisculely for each explorer.

"Oh, Cicero, Pam, the great jurist," Vince sighed. "That speech where he sets about the defence of Verres ... *Judices* ...

He rolled the words around his mouth, the vowels exaggerated, attenuated. His impatient fingers ran through the curls on top of his head. His hair was greying, Pam noticed, and beginning to thin. He pushed his spectacles up on his forehead and rubbed his eyes.

"Now what's this I hear about you wanting to become a lawyer?"

Pam blushed. So this was the reason for his call. How could he have found out? She had mentioned it only to her mother.

"They just wanted us to say what we'd like to do after we left school. For the school's records or something. I thought I'd like to try it." Pam blushed, flustered.

"Ah, Pam, I'd be worried about that."

Pam's forehead creased. How could that be? She thought he'd be pleased. She started guiltily.

"Do you think I'd find it too hard? I wouldn't try if I couldn't manage it."

"There'd be no doubt about your ability. But it's a terrible career for a woman."

Pam's face went hot.

"It's a man's career, Pam. So few women do it. And those that do ... ! I saw that poor Gravatt girl going through the Law after me. You've only got to look at her to see the costs. Bent forward, stooping. Grey hair, hanging down all over the place. Completely grey. Losing her teeth. Ah God, it is a shocking sight. No man would have her."

Pam's eyes widened. Could that be true? All the study required by Law. Would it mean that you would need spectacles, go grey? And to have no husband, no marriage, no little children. What kind of woman would that make her? Almost as bad as the fussy old creatures at school.

"But surely, if I just studied it, I could become an assistant ... " Pam couldn't think of anything to say. She couldn't contradict her uncle. What would she know? Vince was the only lawyer she had ever met.

"You want to get married, Pam, don't you, have children? It's a dog's life for a woman, the law. Out all hours, time not your own. I wouldn't like to see it. I could not survive if Mona wasn't at home looking after me and the two girls. She has no time to do anything else. I can be of no assistance to her at all."

Pam's brow was creased. It was absolutely impossible. The strenuous brain work would put a strain on her body and appearance. But also the sheer length of time which being a lawyer demanded would make it completely impossible. Her own father was always working back at the office and he was only a proof reader. Being a lawyer would obviously take a great deal more than that.

"No, Pam, I'd be concerned. You should rethink, weigh the consequences."

"I didn't think," Pam blurted. "It was just an idea. Just a bit influenced, by Portia and all that."

"Ah, Portia. It's a very romantic view, a very romantic view I'm afraid. But you're liking your Shakespeare? A great writer, the greatest."

"We're doing *Twelfth Night* this year. I've really enjoyed it. It's such a magical comedy."

"And what of novels? You're keeping up your reading?"

"Nothing interesting at school. We're studying Conrad for the Intermediate, *Youth* and *Gaspar Ruiz* and it is a bit boring. But I get a lot out of the library. I've been reading a lot of Victorian novels, Dickens and Thackeray." And *Marjorie Morningstar* and *From Here to Eternity*, as well, but she wouldn't mention them to her uncle.

"Ah yes, Dickens, the great story-teller. And Thackeray, greatly underrated. I think he was greater than Dickens."

"Oh yes!" Pam nodded enthusiastically. Here she was on safe ground. And she believed what she was saying. "I loved *Vanity Fair*. Becky Sharpe is a wonderful character. She's so ambitious, so tough. Dickens' heroines are weak in comparison, aren't they?"

"Becky Sharpe, yes she's a brilliant creation," he nodded approval.

Pam's words tumbled out. She could agree with him on this, she could please him, assure him of her overall dependability. "Oh yes, I've read all of Thackeray, *Henry Esmond, The Newcombes*." Was that the one about America? She had of course read them all, going along the shelves of the public library, a couple of years ago, but they had become a blur except for feisty, malicious Becky Sharpe. But now, with Vince's approval bestowed on them, she thought that the novels of Thackeray had much more value than Dickens, with his exaggerated and nonsensically-named characters.

"Yes, there's depth in Thackeray, Pam. It can't be appreciated by the simple-minded."

Vince sighed deeply. That was all right then. Things were back to normal. On the right track. Slowly he let out the clutch and started the car.

When they reached Pam's home, Nita rushed around the kitchen, making tea, putting out a large plate of freshly iced cakes. Pam looked at her She had known he was coming and what he was going to say.

Pam tightened her jaw. Well she would show them, somehow. She might not become a lawyer, but she would never become a teacher.

The following year, they went through the same ritual at roll class. Teacher ... teacher ... teacher ...

Pam sighed as she waited for her turn. What a charade. Somehow she would show them she wasn't in the same corny mould.

"Watson, Pam."

"Vocational psychologist."

There was silence.

"A what?" said the Latin teacher

"Vocational psychologist."

"And what, pray is that?"

"A person who analyses the work to which you are best suited," Pam preened. Luckily she had seen the Vocational Guidance Service at the Royal Easter Show and found this was the description of the person who interviewed her.

"You had better spell it for me, miss."

And she did.

One of the history teachers was designated as careers mistress and may well have been able to provide interested girls with some information about possible careers. But in fact it is doubtful that any of the teachers, all of whom had moved from school to university to teachers' college and back to school, would have known how to guide people interested in any other activity. Sydney Girls' High was an enclosed world, where in 1958, twenty-one out of forty teachers were old girls of the school.

There was also a government-sponsored vocational testing centre near Circular Quay, whose suggestions followed accepted sexist lines: like most girls I was told that my aptitudes showed that I could become a teacher or a nurse.

It was not surprising then that most girls from this highly selective school moved into the traditional female career of teacher. Sometime in 1982, my year had a reunion. One of our number prepared a list of my classmates from the school, or all that could be traced. Ninety-nine women who attended the school between 1954 and 1958 were on the list. The first in the alphabetical list described her career as "married a solicitor". Thirteen did not mention any work. Of the remaining eighty-six, thirty-five described themselves as teachers, either at present or in the past, another six were librarians, half of them in schools. The school emphasis on science had not had a huge result: four women were pharmacists, one a nuclear physicist, one a forensic scientist, two doctors. In fact a number of women from my year have gone on to retrain in professions after they had children and have moved into a range of varied and interesting careers: lecturing at universities, becoming lawyers, architects and writers.

Other women writing about the 1950s confirm how narrow were career options presented to academic girls. "Teaching and bloody nursing," they all recall. Of all careers, medicine, law and architecture were those most restricted to girls. There were limited role models for girls in these fields and none were brought to the school to inspire us or talk to us about the possibilities.

Fourth year at high school. Pam could sense that this was their last year of relaxation. Next year all attention would be on the Leaving Certificate, the results of which would lead to matriculation. Pam could not think beyond that. She so wished to go to university, but questions such as how her family would afford it, what subjects she would study, were not easy to confront. She knew nobody at university.

She continued to devote herself to school work, but in a more desultory way. She was not happy. Her friend Rosemary had left, and so had lively Lorraine. There were pleasures in being respected as the older members of the school, less fuss from teachers about the behaviour of the A class. They were growing up.

Other girls were maturing. They talked more about boyfriends and going out. Pam closed her ears. She could not work out how she would ever meet any boys, let alone fall "in love". No, she would be an intellectual. She was becoming successful in the school. Her writing was often selected for the school magazine, she took part in public speaking competitions and this year she had been chosen as a member of the debating team.

For Pam debating created anxiety. They were given a topic one hour before the debate and then placed in a room with a dictionary. All four members of the team participated in one hour's research establishing the arguments, but only three took part. As first speaker she introduced what her team was going to say, then argued against the likely points to be put up by the other side. While the debate went on, they wrote notes, countering the points advanced by the other side, so that their third and last speaker, tall English Megan, could then demolish the opposition in her ten minute speech.

Pam often felt physically sick. Her skin was bad now, sore pimples on her cheek and chin. Nita had taken her to a Macquarie Street doctor, tall, grey-haired, in a shadowy office. "Is she a highly sensitive girl?" he had asked, pen poised above a pad. "No," Nita shook her head. "Very placid, I would have said." Pam's pulse had raced with bitter fury. How could her mother know so little!

Always in strange schools she had to find a toilet just before the debate and stand over it, retching. The debating mistress rolled her eyes. "Oh Pam, you must not carry on so. You're perfectly capable of debating like this. You've had the best performer award in the last two outings. You must not let these drama queen pretensions get in your way."

Pam felt a tear start behind her eye. She swallowed hard. How could Mrs Giles say such a thing? She *was* nervous. Each time they debated she thought she would not be able to do it, would fail publicly, embarrassingly. Yet when she stepped in front of the audience, she managed and launched into the four points she had written on a hand-sized piece of cardboard.

Tonight was their biggest test, the finals of the City of Sydney Eisteddfod Debating contest. Their team had already won the State trophy for the best girls' school. There had been a special school assembly to congratulate them. Megan had relished the occasion and made a witty speech of thanks to their debating teacher.

The opposing team were from North Sydney Boys' High, which had won the boys' trophy. The boys were fifth year students, a year older. Pam could see a number of girls from school in the audience. There were two of the girls she had met from the Brigidine Convent team, lively Kathleen and tall brown-haired Phila - she used her confirmation name Philomena, a bit of a mouthful, Pam thought, but it suited her dreamy beauty.

The subject *A woman's place is in the home?* played on the differences between the teams. As the negative, the girls were able to attack and show up the boys' conservatism. They were good, no doubt about it, but Pam found her ideas spinning after she had made her own speech, and she scribbled criticisms and repartee and passed them along the row to Megan. In fact, the boys' second speaker, thickset and spectacled, was a ponderous speaker and they made a number of jokes at his expense.

When their win was announced, the hall seemed suddenly filled with people congratulating them. The third speaker from North Sydney, tall and red-haired, joked that they would never have won if they had debated the affirmative. He chatted to Patty from their class, who seemed to know him from a youth club. Pam drew back a little. It was fine to speak on a stage, but she did not know how to embark on conversations with absolute strangers.

Kathleen and Phila were laughing with the boys, wondering whether Repins would be open to have a milkshake. Pam moved over to her friend Joan, who had helped them as fourth speaker, her calmness a foil in the preparation room, and to the teacher Mrs Giles, who would take them next year in the English honours class. If only she could stop her heart thumping. No-one was going to eat her. Surely she would find something to talk about if they all went for a milk-shake.

I had written the previous story because I wanted to show Pam enjoying some real success at school and because I remembered that my school debating team swept all awards in our fourth year. Sydney Girls' High took study seriously and we did not, like boys' schools, debate in our Leaving Certificate Year. In fact, when I did more research in the school archives, it transpired that my memory was quite wrong. We had won the English Speaking Union Trophy as the best girls' school, but were defeated by Sydney Boys' High in a friendly debate (on A woman's place*) and by North Sydney Boys' in the Eisteddfod (on* Co-education is desirable*). The subject choices even now make me cringe.*

In any case, that was it. We debated once more in our first week at University, when we were asked by the Women's Union to reform to meet a boys' team, the next year's overall champions. Was it Barker with Richard Walsh, or Cranbook with Mungo McCallum? I can't remember it. By then, it all seemed not to be something girls did; the young men, who became my friends, went on to become the nucleus of the university team, debate internationally and so on. I chaired them once, in a debate against a visiting USSR squad, who arrived with massive amounts of vodka which kept us all out of class for the next couple of days.

Lesley Johnson, in her important book on young women in the 1950s, argues that

> *"In the context of the modernised secondary school, young women would encounter alternative constructions of the self. Through the policies and practices of schools around such issues as the provision of domestic education for girls and the need for single-sex or co-educational schooling, all young women were increasingly identified in the 1950s and 1960s as, first and foremost, gendered beings."*

Using her model, I am able to see the way in which my school provided a number of competing definitions of the possibilities for young women in "growing up," although these definitions were never unpacked, never 'debated'. It was a period of significant change in what Johnson describes as "the forms of trainings provided to young women". Like other young women who attended selective schools I particularly defined myself within the "vocabularies of educational achievement circulating around secondary schools". However, chief among the difficulties with this definition is that the period also emphasised that happiness was related to becoming the "loved individual" of romance, a role which fitted ill with the cut and thrust of the Oxford style debater.

In my first year back in Sydney, I had lunch with Robin Cooper, who taught Fine Arts at Sydney University. We met about noon in the staff club. I received quite a shock, when entering the staff club, to see already at the bar the clearly recognisable faces of some of my English lecturers. They looked exactly as they had eighteen years before. I decided my aggressively short hair made me unrecognisable and scuttled past. I had never felt satisfied with my academic work at Sydney University and had retrained in England as a post-graduate sociologist, a subject I was now teaching at Macquarie University and the University of New South Wales. But even walking into Sydney University had brought back the memories of my first days there, my high excitement, my sense of difference. At that time only sixteen girls out of every thousand got to university, 1.6%, and I was the first from either side of my family to go, save for my solicitor uncle.

It was hot, hot as Pam walked up the long steps. Her legs felt strange, rubbing together in nylon stockings, so different from the thick brown cotton stockings she had worn to school. Never, never again would she have to wear those thick clothes that made her look so podgy and unattractive.

She had taken a long time this morning to prepare for her first day at university. In her mother's glory box, where sewing materials were kept, she had found a skirt which Nita had worn to work in the 1930s. It came to just above her knees and was in navy blue grosgrain, a sleek, shiny fabric. Pam thought it looked sophisticated and not home-made. It was tight and pushed her legs in their stockings closer together. She was wearing a girdle, what Nita called a step-in, tight elastic around her bottom, a sheet of satin across her stomach and the stockings attached to it. Nita said she should wear girdles all the time as they would train her stomach to keep flat. Although it was tight and uncomfortable, particularly on such a hot day, Pam felt relieved that no parts of her were wobbling. At Paddy's Markets, she had bought a long-line white cotton sailor top, its collar trimmed with navy blue braid. She looked sideways at other girls walking up the stairs - full skirts and blouses, a couple of smart A-line dresses, a shirtmaker. She felt quite pleased. She looked different, distinctive.

Her foot twisted as she reached the top of the stairs. Damn these uneven cobbled streets. The thin high heel was caught between two stones. She knelt down, skewing her legs sideways in the tight skirt, and pulled the heel of her shoe out. These shoes, white, two inch heels, made her look taller. She straightened up, took a deep breath and walked with only a slight limp down to the main street of the University.

Along the street was a colourful gathering of stalls, all the University clubs touting for business. Pam was amazed by the selection, confused about where to look. In fact, she was embarrassed because she might be caught staring. Then somebody might think she was trying to gain attention (oh, all right, *his* attention). Pam wanted to be very sure before she looked for a boyfriend. She had to be absolutely certain that he liked her. And he had to be the right sort of person, clever and sophisticated. And good-looking of course. Perhaps he might even become a Professor and then she could come driving into the University to pick him up. She would have a drift of pale gold hair to swing over her shoulder as she got

out of the low-slung red sports car. No, not red, dark green would be more stylish. She could see herself looking up at the carved stone walls like the ones in front of her now. She would smile at a beadle as she ran up the stairs to pick up her Professor husband. A Professor of Poetry, she thought, or Latin, or Philosophy. She would be wearing a tight sleeveless dress, in fine pink linen, with white embroidery around the neck. She had seen something just like this scene. It was Grace Kelly, wasn't it, in a film with Cary Grant? Well, Grace Kelly looked wonderful, and she had married a prince.

But Pam was here, now. What was she going to do? Momentarily, she wished she had come with a friend but no-one from school really had the same interests as she did. She wanted to make her own choices. She wanted to make herself something special and now she could. She was at university. Her mother was not volunteering in the tuck-shop, as she had when Pam was at school. Pam felt she could do anything. But she must stay calm and not look as if she was trying too hard. She did not want to get embarrassed. Just walk down the road, she said to herself, breathing hard to calm her panic. Look around casually, don't stare. Look intelligent.

There were a lot of clubs she did not want to join: chess, speleology, they looked boring; political clubs, no thank you. The University newspaper? Did she dare try that? No, she would need some good ideas for articles or be able to do something practical, like typing. The Poetry Society? No, that boy looked weedy and had awful pimples. Imagine having a poetry society anyway. Surely all real poets met in a coffee shop or wine bar. Debating? Mainly men on that stall and no-one that she recognised from her year of school debating. Also they looked too spectacled. Clever, but spectacled. She mustn't stare, she must keep calm. Everyone else seemed to know each other. People were shouting out greetings and shaking each other's hands. Some of the girls were even kissing boys on their cheeks. Pam clutched her handbag tightly.

Within a few weeks Pam had forgotten those moments of anxiety. She felt as if she had always been at Sydney University, so old, so gracious. Pam particularly liked coming up the staircase from Parramatta Road, blaring cars, trucks thrusting, and leaving all that noise behind. The bulk of the Union rose on her right. There was little traffic in Science Road. Occasionally students from the residential colleges might drive by, in a bright red sports car, stylish, bearing a sense of wealth and privilege. She often looked after them. They had formals in the Colleges. It would be wonderful to go to one, it would be like the May Balls at Oxford, which she had read about in novels. She would wear a long taffeta gown and whirl around an aged stone quadrangle in someone's arms. He would be tall.

From the road Pam ducked sideways through a small doorway to the right, a path cut diagonally across a small garden - just imagine dancing here - and then there was the main quadrangle. Nothing could be more perfect. Carved sandstone, a warm golden colour. Deep shade in the heavy walkways around the side. Green grass in the centre. Pam could imagine the tinkling laughter of guests around the cloisters.

In the far corner, up a wide staircase of cold stone, was Fisher Library, satisfyingly musty with old wooden shelves. This, Pam thought, was the way libraries should be, a smell of age, a sense of Europe.

In 1959 I went for the first time up the stairs of Sydney University. I was wearing a straight navy grosgrain skirt which covered the knees, stockings, three-inch high heels, to make me look taller and a girdle, even though I weighed only seven and a half stone.

Politically, the country was dominated by the bumptious Menzies, who seemed to have been in power for ever. "There'll always be a Menzies," a University song went, "while there's a DLP." As students we had little idea that such power could be directly challenged and that there could be a reason for asking questions. In 1959, student activism was non-existent, although there were stories that a year or so before, following the death of a pedestrian, students had occupied Parramatta Road, agitating for the installation of traffic lights. Other contemporaries of mine, Richard Neville, Penelope Nelson, remember political awareness and demonstrations around issues such as Sharpeville. Gill Appleton recalls an apathetic and apolitical student body and the same song about Menzies. My clear recollection is of torpor. Events in the real world did not impinge on the mock-Gothic cloisters in Parramatta Road.

There were students involved in political clubs and around the University Union: a number of these seemed to be self-consciously eccentric in a laboured way. One, for example, always wore an ancient three-piece striped suit, another flourished a monocle. Others, like Peter Wilenski and Michael Kirby, were bound up in the detail of struggles around the University Union. My group of friends found their interests in politics quaint, little realising what useful skills and contacts they were amassing. Some friends, Winton Higgins, John Pomeroy and others, went so far as to organise a Conservative Association, which celebrated the England of landed estates and gentleman's clubs; the high point was a dinner for ex-King Peter of Yugoslavia.

Sex in those pre-Pill days was a tricky proposition. The energy on campus was generated around the newspaper and theatrical societies where the self-consciously interesting students congregated. And that was where I began to find my milieu. Frankly there was little else to do.

It was lunch time in Manning, the women's union, which Pam's friends favoured as a meeting place. There were fewer engineers there than the men's union. Pam looked around her crowd, now on their third cup of coffee. They were a group of girls who had met around the first week drama society auditions and who had then begun to work as sub-editors on the newspaper. They were joined by some boys who sat near them in English lectures and who had also begun to call into the small cottage where *honi soit* was edited. Robert, short, spikily intelligent, with prominent eyebrows, picked up a *Women's Weekly* which Valerie had bought ("just to read on the train", she said, giggling to think that

anyone would think she seriously read it). They all laughed as he turned over the pages, sending it up.

"What on earth is this? What are they on about in this magazine!" Robert's voice rose sharply. "They've got a *Teenagers' Weekly*. Who are they intending to read it!"

Pam laughed. "It must be just for us. After all we're teenagers. We need our own paper."

"Oh thank you thank you, *Women's Weekly*," Peter mimicked a deep bow.

Robert was leafing through the pages rapidly. "But look at the subject matter. What on earth do these fools know? Why do they assume that teenagers are interested only in clothes and pop-stars? We're interested in more than that."

"Well, my dears, we're so artistic, we'll always be in advance of the hoi polloi." Genevieve fluttered her delicate fingers. "Oh, by the way, I've just read the most fantastic book, in that new Faber reprints series. Djuna Barnes. *Nightwood*. It's *so* decadent.

"The *Women's Weekly* really should be sent up." Janice's curved mouth broke into a grin. "It has no right to generalise so. Can we think of any way to show them how stupid they are?"

"I've heard from my father of a wonderful jape that some poets pulled." Piers, a scrappy beard beginning on his chin, spoke authoritatively, his eyes blinking. "They sent up modernism, wrote poems out of extracts from agriculture textbooks, car instructions and other total nonsense. Then they sent them to a modern poetry magazine that Max Harris had started."

"Oh how wonderful. Were the poems absolute nonsense?"

"Completely. Just words strung together. They said they were the work of a little-known poet called Ern Malley who'd died and his sister had found these poems."

"Did the magazine see anything odd?"

"No, Harris published them, all of them. Not only that, he wrote it up as the poetic find of the century. He said Malley was an undiscovered genius!"

"And then what did the others do? Did they expose him?"

"Absolutely. It was a huge scandal. The magazine was presenting itself as the avant-garde of Australian poetry and then Harris and his mates were shown up as fools."

Laughs all round. They were not like that. Mind you, avant-garde poetry to Pam and her friends was not something anyone could string together. Real avant-garde was the sort of work they wanted to write. It was written by their favourite poets or older poets at the University whose work they thought had some integrity.

"What a great idea, Piers. Why can't we do something like that?" It was Robert's school friend, Peter, chuckling away.

"Why not? Let's invent a poet, American, dead, and just write nonsense verse for him. And then we'll say that we are a group of young people who have discovered him, that we want his poetry to become better known, so we have formed a private fan club."

"Oh that's fantastic, just like they do for stupid pop-stars."

"Lets' call him Homer, Homer Ellison."

And so the Homer Ellison Fan Club was born. Over numbers of cups of coffee and drinks in the pub a series of splendidly stupid poems was composed. The *Women's Weekly* was contacted, a letter sent. Amazingly they rang back. They were interested and wanted to interview the Homer Ellison Fan Club.

Peter offered his parents' house on the north shore. They would tell the *Women's Weekly* that they were having a meeting to read the poems and commune with the spirit of Homer. They would all get there early, dressed like beatniks in dark colours, weird scarves, black stockings for the girls.

Pam woke in the morning with great excitement. What if they were found out and the *Women's Weekly* exposed them? No, it would be all right. The others, the boys, were so

clever they would be bound to sail through it. And *Women's Weekly* reporters must be a bit stupid to work for such a publication.

Her major problem now was what to wear. It was all very well people talking about beatnik clothes, but she still had to get past the eagle eye of her mother. Last night she had made an excuse not to twist her hair into curlers, saying that she would wash it this morning. Now, saying that she had forgotten to wash it, she could pull it behind her ears. When she got to Peter's, she would brush it out and part it in the centre so that it looked straight. Her hair was getting longer and could almost trail on her shoulders, like a beatnik, like a French existentialist, like Juliet Greco. There was no black in her wardrobe, but she did have a dark-coloured skirt and she could wear a dark blue blouse she had bought at Paddy's Markets. She had one pair of black shoes. As they were flatties, they would make her look short. And she had hidden at the back of one of her drawers a pair of the new way-out black tights. Nita would die if she knew. Pam thought they spoke of King's Cross, smoking, dark cafes, sex, free love, evil. And today she was going to wear them.

She rushed into the kitchen.

"I've got to be quick," she said to Nita. "I've said I'll meet Janice and we'll go to Helen's place to do some work. And then tonight we are going to the John Alden Shakespeare Company at the Elizabethan Theatre. That's why I've got this skirt and blouse on, because they'll look all right for the theatre tonight and I can wear my coat over them today on the bus." So there. Answer that if you can.

At last she was out of the house, quickly breakfasted, just a weak Nescafe and a Weetbix. Anything to stop her mother asking more questions. She pulled the new black tights out and shoved them into the pocket of a heavy winter coat. She grabbed lots of makeup; she could put lipstick and powder on now, better if she did, but if she put on too much eye makeup Nita would say she looked too fast. Even girls of her own generation were funny about eye makeup. She had stayed one night on the North Shore with Margaret who also worked on *honi soit*. As they stood side by side in the bathroom putting on makeup before going to the train, Pam applied foundation, rouge and face powder, then carefully creamed a blue shade over her eyelids, outlined the top and bottom eyelids with a brown pencil and patted white shadow between the brown lines. Then she drew out her mascara, put on one coat, then powdered, then another coat, so that the mascara caught on the powder and made the eyelashes thicker. Margaret, standing beside her, said "Don't do that too heavily, those lines round your eye. They look too thick, you look fast." Pam laughed it off, but it hurt somehow.

Pam waited at the bus stop. No sign of a bus. She looked down. Her feet and legs looked fleshy with pale nylon between the black skirt and the black shoes. She had planned to put the tights on at Peter's place. But could she bear to go all that way looking like an uncooked chicken? Could she face meeting Janice at Central, when Janice would probably be in her striped velveteen trousers? Janice was lucky, her mother didn't seem to worry so much

about proper clothes and Janice had bought a black duffel coat and a way-out pair of orange desert boots. And, thought Pam, wouldn't it be best if the boys saw her arrive looking exotic in her black gear?

She looked along the street. No sign of the bus. What if she went to the fence of the house at the bus stop? If she stood by the post, there was no window directly facing her. She could turn her back to the road and pull her coat tight. Now if she took one foot out of her shoe, she could quickly slip it into one foot of the black tights and then stuff it back in her shoe. Right, now the other one. She shot a sidelong glance out of her eye for the bus. Still no sign. She squatted down, pretended with one hand that she was feeling in her bag. The other hand, concealed beneath her coat, tugged through her skirt on the waist band of the tights, pulling them up. She stood up slowly wriggling, wriggling, to get the tights higher up, to get the crotch to the top of her legs. Phew. That was it. She looked down. Black legs, integrated with her skirt and shoes, looking sleek and shapely and slim.

Now she desperately wanted the bus to come. What if Nita came round to find her or, just as bad, one of the neighbours? They'd be bound to notice and tell. She felt hot all over at the thought of being found out.

But fortune smiled. Here was the bus. She would have time at Central to buy a present for Janice's birthday. Pam sat on the bus planning what she would get. Something really sophisticated. What about cigarettes? She could buy the exotic and perfumed Black Sobranies. Or there were the cocktail ones, all sorts of colours, so stylish. Certainly they were expensive, but they would be worth it. Janice did not smoke yet, neither did Pam, but they had to begin to be women of the world. And they would need to look sophisticated to be part of the Homer Ellison Fan Club.

My friend Libby Smith had saved a magazine cutting, from the 1959 Women's Weekly, *a page from the newly introduced* Teenagers' Weekly*. It contained an article about a group of teenagers who were artistic and fans of a little-known American poet called Homer Ellison. In a photograph, they are sitting around on the floor. An angular boy with a beard is reading with an earnest look on his face. Around him, the others are composed in draped positions. The girls have long hair and ethereal expressions.*

I can remember the occasion. Most of the others, including Mungo McCallum. Madeleine St. John, Richard Walsh, Jack Goldring, would probably not want to now. Even then most of us, except for Madeleine, used false names. But it strikes me as a poignant testimony to our desire to assert difference, distinctiveness, to show how we were apart from Australian society of the time.

Resistance of some kind to the stultifying conservative and repressed society was the common thread which drew together a number of groups in Sydney. It was most strongly

expressed by the libertarians, the Sydney Push, who drank at the Royal George. I arrived at Sydney University after the departure of John Anderson, whose philosophy formed the intellectual basis of this group. For me they presented the opportunity to listen to a radical lecture once a week during lunchtime, and visits to the Royal George at weekends, where sallow men in dark suits talked about horse-racing. But a desire to rebel, to shock the bourgeoisie around us, also led my friends to tables with Abe Saffron at the Pink Pussycat and to Vadims restaurant in Challis Avenue, where Tom Fitzgerald's Nation *journalists drank red wine out of coffee cups after hours.*

The society we were rejecting was one where books such as Lady Chatterley's Lover *and* Lolita *were banned; if they were recommended for study, as they were by some members of the English Department, the unfortunate reader was placed at an exposed desk in the middle of Fisher Library, under the sharp eye of a librarian and any other curious passers-by, interested to see the effect of banned literature on a female undergraduate. It was a society where student actors and directors were threatened with dismissal from the University when caught rehearsing on university premises on Sunday. It was a society which definitely needed shocking. Fortunately our elders showed themselves only too ready to respond in an appropriate way.*

Perhaps the most successful baiting of the establishment led to an unusual writer being represented in a Sydney Court. SUDS 1963 Revue of the Absurd *drew on the European dadaist tradition and featured a film put together by Albie Thom and Bruce Beresford from an idea of the nineteenth century French dramatist Alfred Jarry. The NSW Chief Secretary was stirred into action by reports from two members of Sydney's drug squad, who had dragged themselves away from the task of controlling after hours drinking and Kings Cross drug dealing to attend a rehearsal and who burst in with a warrant for Alfred Jarry, then dead for over sixty years.*

> *"In pursuance of the powers vested in me by Section 27 of the Theatres and Public Halls Act, 1908, as amended, I, Christopher Augustus Kelly, Chief Secretary in and for the State of New South Wales, do hereby regulate the public entertainment entitled "A Revue of the Absurd", proposed to be held in the Union Theatre, Sydney University, on the evenings of the 28th, 29th and 30th of March and 4th, 5th and 6th of April 1963, by directing that the film which was included in a rehearsal of such entertainment which took place on the evening of the 27th of March 1963, at which two police officers were present, which film dealt with human excreta falling from the sky, be not included in the program of such public entertainment."*

Pam and Janice lounged in the side rows of the Wallace Theatre. Typical of Sydney University, that they had to perform and rehearse in a lecture theatre. It was another audition. Surely now that they were second years, more exciting parts would come their way. They smiled at SUDS leading actor Fred, a tall young man with an interesting face marked by a prominent nose. Beau-laid. The fashion magazines such as *Vogue* used that term for new stars like French actor Jean-Paul Belmondo. Beautiful-ugly. Fred, they

agreed, was really more ugly, but amusing. He was a good actor. Liz smiled as she gazed up at him. She seemed so keen on him, yet he never seemed to touch her. Still, they were always together, in the centre of things, running the society. And Liz certainly was attractive, big-boned, tall, with large breasts. She had long hair that waved down her back. Pam pulled down her own tightly-permed hair. It had really been a mistake to let Nita home-perm it over the holidays. She must grow it. Blow her mother, she would. She didn't care if her hair was straight. It looked good, hair swinging to and fro.

The director was a graduate just back from England, thin, in a dark shirt. The two girls discussed him with great excitement. What plays had he brought back? What ideas? He was much older than they were, in his late twenties. They all agreed he was incredibly brave, determined to be a theatre director when there was so little work in Australia. But now, he had exploded back into Sydney, spending time between SUDS and a production for Doris Fitton's Independent Theatre.

"Oh, yes," Fred muttered to the two girls "It's hysterical, apparently. He's doing *Caucasian Chalk Circle*. Can you imagine it, Brecht in Doris's Castle! He's making them follow Method acting principles, being peasants picking up potatoes."

Pam was thrilled. How interesting it sounded! What a challenge it would be to learn Method acting or other techniques brought back from overseas.

"OK troops," called the director. He had a slight lisp. "Now scamper, scamper. Time's short. I'm getting Liz to hand around some copies of the script and I want us to do a quick read-through of - scum, scum, scum, - let's try the second half of Act I. I'll point to people and get them to change over parts once somebody's had a good turn. Now come on, quickly, let's get going."

The readings began. Fred and Liz were in the first group, Fred as a young mercenary in the Thirty Years' War, Liz as the romantic interest of the troop's commander. Janice and Pam skipped over the pages, looking for other women's parts. There seemed to be an older woman innkeeper, a small part for a witch.

"Looks like that's that," Janice muttered, "not much doing except for townspeople."

Pam rolled her eyes. It was hard to go back to crowd parts now that they had had speaking parts in the last play. She frowned angrily over at Liz. Lucky devil being so tall. Short girls were not considered for leading roles.

Janice nudged her as a stocky, blond woman swept into the room. Rhoisin had arrived earlier in the year from Adelaide, where she had completed an Honours English course and starred in revues. She wanted to qualify for a masters degree. Abrupt, intelligent, she had begun to dominate the crowd around the Forest Lodge, with a sharp wit, a strident voice and a command of foul language that had Pam and her friends wide-eyed.

"You didn't hear her talk on abortion at the Libertarians last week," Pam muttered. "She practically said she'd had one." Janice stared back at Pam, her eyes huge. Imagine any woman admitting she had broken the law in this dangerous way. "Makes me feel sick just to think of it," Janice whispered, looking over at Rhoisin with a shudder. Rhoisin seemed so tough, so much more experienced and worldly-wise than they were.

Their turns came, Janice reading the lead with a fervent passion that stopped people talking, Pam injecting comic fire into the innkeeper. But by afternoon's end it was apparent that beautiful Liz was likely to get cast as the heroine and that Rhoisin, with her angular face, would be a boisterous and amusing inn-keeper. The male actors milled about, shouting out suggestions for other actors, not there, who could fill in as soldiers, priests and councillors. Fred sat at the front, the director's hand resting softly on his shoulder as dates for the next run-through were outlined.

"Now, where was that girl who read in the middle, Pam, is it?" Andrew, the director was looking around. "Sweetie, you did very well, just a shame we can only have one inn-keeper. I was wondering if you'd like to help out, be assistant director, do some of the organisation? Oh, there's your little girlfriend as well. You're not interested in being in the crowd, sweetie? No, understood, you don't have to spell it out for me. Just so few good girls' roles!" He smiled at Janice "Are you interested in the directing caper, too?"

Janice smiled coolly. "I'm not, sorry. I've got some work to catch up with." She squeezed Pam's hand.

Pam frowned. It wasn't clear quite what was going on. Over the holidays, Janice had started going out on Saturday nights, with Peter, from their first year crowd. It was odd, the first pairing off in the group of friends. Mind you, Pam couldn't quite see why Janice was bothering. It was just silly old Peter. He was pleasant enough, but not really so bright, always laughing at Robert's jokes. But Janice went quite rosy when he was around and giggled a lot. Pam was sure that Peter had persuaded her not to go to Rhoisin's talk, which Pam had in fact found very stimulating, even if it was threatening to her sexual anxieties.

Pam nodded at Andrew. "Sure, I'd be interested in helping direct. I've not had any experience." Except at school, she thought, but that didn't count.

"Come around to my place, then, next Saturday morning. It's a flat, down under the Cross."

Pam reached the small flat in Elizabeth Bay at ten o'clock. His living room was a chaos of papers, books and discarded clothes.

"Wonderful to see you, Pam. That's your name, isn't it? Now here is the script. Since money's short, I was thinking you could look through it and divide it into scenes for the different groups. Only the three leads are going to need full copies. The soldiers and townspeople just need Act I and III, the church people Act II. You'll work it out. Type, can you? Oh, what a pity, that would have been handy. Now I'm sorry, sweetie, but I'm going to have to fly. Special rehearsal at the Independent. Just get as far as you can and let yourself out. Make yourself at home, coffee's in the kitchen."

Pam worked quietly for a couple of hours, cross-checking characters, dividing the scripts into the main areas of action and underlining the leads' speeches with blue pencil. Finishing, she gazed at the books around the floor, and began to pile them up along the wall and on low shelves supported by bricks. She read a magazine about theatre in England and frowned over books on Brecht in German. Such a shame she had not learnt it at school. She knew very little about Brecht. Going into the small kitchenette to make a cup of instant coffee, she drew back from the chaos of dishes around the sink. As she waited for the kettle to boil, she put water in the sink, washed up plates and rested them against cups on the drainer, threw out a mound of orange halves. She dried her hands on a dank tea-towel. It looked a lot more in order now.

She left a note on top of the pile of scripts. "Dear Andrew, I hope the rehearsal went well. I've borrowed your theatre magazine. I hope that is all right. I'll see you at the rehearsal on Tuesday night."

At the Tuesday rehearsal, she sat beside Andrew, as he moved actors from one side of the stage, pulling others forward. "More emphasis, Fred, throw it to the audience." Pam frowned inside. What contribution was she making? He did not ask her opinion.

The following Saturday, she rang again on the bell of the flat. Andrew gestured to Fred who was pouring coffee in the kitchen. "Fred's just been going over a few of his scenes." Pam smiled nervously. "I'm afraid I've messed you up again, Pam, I've got to head over to North Sydney again. Double-booking myself! You can see why I need an assistant! Do you mind entering those stage directions for the crowd into this master copy, enter stage left, etc, scum, scum, you got them all the other night, didn't you? Well, I must fly. Fred, are you going to come and give me your impression of those sections I described to you?"

The door slammed. Pam gazed around the quiet flat. Chaos again. She cleared a space on the lounge and started printing directions as neatly as she could into the master script. Two hours later, drinking tea in the kitchen, she found herself once again picking orange halves out of the sink and putting them in the bin. Angrily she washed her hands and went back to the couch.

"Dear Andrew," she wrote. "I'm afraid I am going to have to stop being assistant director. I wanted to tell you that Kevin has cast me in the university revue and I think rehearsals will cut into the weekends. I hope the play goes well."

She looked at the precariously balanced books. If only she had a few more ideas, had known a bit more about Brecht or been a more dynamic person, she might have been more help to Andrew. She hoped he accepted her excuse. She hoped he didn't think she was too stupid. Fred would be much more use to him.

In 1989, I was asked by a group of students organising the Centenary Dinner for the Sydney University Drama Society (SUDS) to speak for my generation, seen in retrospect as a golden age. I resisted the request initially, explaining that I had never made my way into theatre, while among my friends at university were many who had become famous as the instigators of contemporary Australian drama. The students persisted; I think I was the choice of young feminists pressing for equal opportunity. It gave me an opportunity to think about why theatre was so important to us.

Sydney theatre at the time was moribund; apart from radio, occasional big musicals, like Kismet *or* The Pajama Game*, an interminable round of British farces toured by J. C. Williamson, and the brittle humour of the Phillip Street Revue, the only independent houses were Doris Fitton's* Independent *and Hayes Gordon's* Ensemble*. Although learning elocution and tap dancing seemed driven by blind faith that Australian theatre needed an amalgam of Deborah Kerr and Shirley Temple, in fact I had not really seen professional acting as a possibility. That was done by beautiful women with long hair and English accents. Times were changing, however, with the opening of NIDA at the University of New South Wales.*

Things were changing as well in theatre at Sydney University, from the tradition where the Misses Tildesley, two elderly Woollahra spinsters who ran the English-speaking League, provided a bottle of sherry for the cast of each SUDS play. The university theatre groups introduced exciting and radical theatre to Sydney. I have already mentioned SUDS' Pam Trethowan. Her background was the English repertory scene and she kept a close eye on new developments: she brought to Australia the first productions of Beckett and Pinter, including a wonderful The Birthday Party *with Arthur Dignam. She also introduced the inspired entertainment* Victoriana *in which we recreated Victorian music hall songs for an increasingly sozzled audience. The money made from this entertainment saw us through the inevitable financial failure of the more experimental shows. When she returned*

permanently to England, other directors, particularly Albie Thom, followed a trail to the theatre of the absurd, premiering plays by Jarry and Arrabal, who was brought to Sydney for an Intervarsity Drama Festival. We took him horse-riding to Wallacia, which he described as 'le Wild-West'.

In the early 1950s some disaffected actors, feeling they were not getting enough parts, had started Sydney University Players, which had more style and gloss. Ken Horler and Leo Schofield whirled down from the city, from the Law School and Farmers' advertising department. Their contacts in marketing, fashion and photography produced shows with a professional polish - and costumes that fitted. Leo directed Purcell's Fairie Queene*, Brecht's* Good Woman of Setzuan*, Wycherly's* Country Wife, *while Ken introduced John Bell and John Gaden in a sparkling* Twelfth Nig*ht, John Alden's* Sergeant Musgrave's Dance *and* Mother Courage *with Germaine Greer and me as a prostitute.*

Another group ran the annual University Revue. By the time I arrived at Sydney University, it had evolved into a melange of fantastic and nonsensical skits, designed to show the clever eclecticism of writers linked to the University newspaper. The dominating influence on revue was Chester, an angular bespectacled student, who had supposedly failed Arts I seven times. He adored words and wrote heavily alliterative poems. His revue sketches were written with John (later Katherine) Cummings and later with Clive James, who was much influenced by Chester's example. From my group Mungo McCallum and Mike Newman became revue writers. For actors the major problem in Revue was getting the words right; writers were convinced that the audience would laugh if only the lines were delivered with enough emphasis. Clive once replaced an ailing John Menczel, a great comic talent, as stout Cortez in a script about the conquest of Peru, and delivered his own witticisms with a measured emphasis, hoping to ensure that the audience got every punch line. Again and again. They didn't, but this fact does not seem to have altered his delivery of jokes on television!

It was a coup to be involved in the theatre scene. Both Penelope Nelson and Gill Appleton recall rumours of casting couches, but my group of freshers all arrived together and nursed unresolved passions for many of the older male actors. University shows were treated seriously, reviewed in the major Sydney newspapers. We soon defined ourselves as taste-makers and spent even more time away from lectures, in the Forest Lodge pub and, after its opening, the new Union Theatre foyer, making authoritative pronouncements about authors and playwrights we scarcely had time to read.

And yet in retrospect, I wonder how innovative and exciting that golden age of Sydney University theatre really was. We ranged freely through the world of international theatre selecting almost randomly with little firm ideology. The strong tradition of exploring absurdist theatre was not surprising; our interest was the unusual, the striking and the odd; no meaning was as real as it seemed. Nowhere was this clearer than in the revues. Very occasionally sketches might engage with Australian political and social life, but these would usually satirise life in the working class suburbs from which very few of us came. Chester did write for me a song on the Chinese invasion of Tibet, but its political import was lost in its glittering rhymes. Most sketches moved through the world of our reading: the Russian

Revolution, the invasion of Peru, Othello *rewritten by Tennessee Williams, Harold Pinter rewritten by ... Harold Pinter.*

We had little commitment to Australian theatre, nor even to new writers within our own groups. There was a 1959 play by Robert Hughes, which represented life under totalitarianism, but in 1962 Hughes was accused of poetic plagiarism by Geoffrey Lehmann. The major effect this had was a jihad between the University poets, with Hughes' friends, Clive, Chester and John Cummings on one side and Lehmann and Les Murray on the other and the springing up of more small magazines in which they could publish.

Women were actors, not directors; subeditors, not writers. Recently, my friend of the time, Danne Emerson, now Danne Hughes, said to me "You were always too scared to challenge them. Do you remember me suggesting that we direct a revue? But you, little Colleen, you wouldn't risk it." What surprised me was not that I had rejected her suggestion. It was that I had no memory of her ever making it. Was that how unacceptable such a thought was?

Germaine Greer arrived as a postgraduate from Melbourne in 1960, instantly accepted for her sharp intelligence, strong language, sexual frankness and for the fact that she enjoyed using that to tease the men in our crowd. Feminism was not in our consciousness. I remember sharing a dressing room with Germaine during a 1963 orientation week revue. Also with us was our special guest star, a female stripper from the Pink Pussycat*, who had stunned Sydney by travelling bare-breasted on the Manly ferry. Our major discussion was about the fact that the sequined tassels on her nipples were fixed on with Perkins Paste. We did not think that we were exploiting Sandy by sending her out on stage in front of hordes of howling engineers; it seemed quite clear to us that she was so stupid that she could earn money only in this way. Although we thought ourselves much cleverer, in fact the roles we played as stripping nuns (a wonderful skit devised by Germaine herself) and verbose royalty were objectifying women in a similar way.*

Pam and her friends had settled into the third year Honours English class, smaller than previously, in dark rooms upstairs over the quadrangle. At last university courses were becoming a more stimulating intellectual environment. Pam had been disappointed by her first two years. Huge lecture theatres of students, especially in English, the lecturers seen in the distance. As time progressed, she had gone to fewer and fewer lectures, preferring to spend the time sitting and gossiping with her friends or listening to the *honi soit* clique at the pub.

Pam was doing both History and English Honours. She had dropped Psychology Honours at the end of her second year. It had promised so much, giving insights into sex. But what did sex have to do with dreary men talking about rats? There was nothing about Freud at all. They didn't even mention the words she loved to use like inferiority complex and traumas and obsessive and psychotic. Worst of all, in the Honours Class, they had done a test analysing pulleys and arrows which the lecturer said measured pure intelligence. Pam

had been mortified when Roger Heaney, whom she knew wasn't as clever as she was, had topped it. Why, he had gone to Waverley College and all they did was play football. She wasn't interested in Psychology as it was taught here.

Philosophy had also been a disillusion in her first year, although she had to fight to get it approved as a course under her Teachers' College Scholarship. They said she should do Latin as she had done so well in that in the Leaving. Then, with English and History, she would have three subjects to teach. Nobody taught Philosophy in schools. For Philosophy lectures they sat in a science lecture theatre behind a long tap, curving over a sink. Their Philosophy Professor, often quoted in the papers defending free love, was a short man given to wearing Hawaiian shirts. Pam thought this was not the way an intellectual should dress. He lectured in a high voice. "Is this knife good? It is good if it cuts well. But what do we mean when we say a person is good?" His voice rose. "How can this be measured?" The girls looked at each other and rolled their eyes. Not interesting. They giggled with some boys outside the lecture hall.

Some interesting students had stayed on in Philosophy. Pam still enjoyed talking to an older student, Ian Periera, who was around *honi soit* and the acting scene. He had a cap of curly dark hair and an aggressive spade-like beard. His ideas seemed exciting and radical, bursting out of him in a volcanic rush, as he explained the logical position supporting free love, the need to respect individual liberty. It was heady. "Bourgeois morality is a restrictive force on human behaviour and human creativity. To truly break the bonds, you must explore to the utmost all facets of life."

Pam was initially overawed by the power of his convictions. He took her to the Royal George pub one Saturday afternoon and pointed out exciting thinkers. He said, "I am going to write an article on abortion for *honi soit*. It is ridiculous that women do not have the power to decide for themselves whether to have children. Only in this way will they be able to enjoy their sexuality freely." Pam nodded. He was absolutely right. Yet he made her feel anxious, happier to think about free love in the abstract, not consider it in relation to Ian or Fred or Bruce. You had to be very careful not to get pregnant. Later the girls laughed around the Manning table. Ian had taken them all separately to the pub or coffee. They whispered to each other that he was not particularly good-looking. But Ruth, a lean intellectual, who had been at high school with Janice, had known him through Communist Party circles since she was a child and liked him seriously.

Ian told them about the terrible case of Sydney Sparkes Orr. A philosophy lecturer in distant Hobart, he had supposedly had a love affair with a young student. Pam sighed. What an ideal! A brilliant intellectual friendship, consummated by an affair which went beyond petty concerns. Provincial Tasmania had turned against him, thrown him out! He had strong defenders in Sydney, who defined this as a struggle for intellectual and sexual freedom. Pam and her friends agreed. When Orr came to Sydney to talk about his campaign for reinstatement, they saw him in the distance at a big meeting in Wallace. He seemed rather small and weedy, not a romantic figure. Oh well, Tasmania, what could you expect.

Pam grinned to herself as she remembered her early fantasies about university life. How she had imagined that she and her friends would pour out of their lectures and sit on the low ledges around the Gothic quadrangle. She had thought she would sit and discuss ideas and philosophies. Perhaps it was too hot. It often felt fake discussing abstract ideas in Sydney.

First Year English had been disappointing, no better than Leaving Honours at school. Lectures added nothing. The poetry lecturer looked like Chips Rafferty and recited poetry badly. "It's no go the bogeyman", he droned out the lines of Macneice, the rhythm all wrong. Pam and her friends looked at each other and tittered. And they still groaned at the memory of language lectures, studying photographs of ugly mouths, the professor's own, showing the formation of glottal sounds.

It seemed so much more significant at the pub. Bruce, the literary editor, tried out some ideas from his Hart Crane thesis. "That was as far as he could go with experimentation, the language of machines. Little wonder he ended up over the side of a ship." The enigmatic Cleaver, brilliant creator of curious revue scripts, rhymer and wordsmith, traced influences through Pound's cantos. "Pound created *The Waste Land*. It was an unwieldy mess when Eliot gave it to him. And what a brilliant thought, poems, cantos about Money, the capitalist system."

The pub was where they learnt and gossiped. "Did you hear about Selmar? You know, that philosopher from the Push. He's been sleeping with a girl who works in Fisher and he got her to borrow those Henry Miller *Tropics* books. They're banned, you know, on closed reserve. Well, he left them on an Oxford Street tram. Can you imagine the face of the cleaner on the tram? Lucky devil!" "And what are they like, the *Tropics*?" "A brilliant argument for the power of untrammelled sexuality!"

Each afternoon, they discussed books and what was happening in the world over at the Forest Lodge. People told witty stories, made up revue scripts around the table, planned articles for the boys to write for *honi soit*, devised special issues, like a parody of *Time*. Sometimes Pam flirted a bit with one of the boys, but she didn't feel very good at it. She was too serious somehow. Anyway, thought Pam, she didn't want to get caught up with a boyfriend.

By Pam's third year, people were dropping out. Some of the boys in the class last year had gone down to the law school. More dramatically, Janice was dropping back to a Pass class. She and Peter were talking about getting engaged and she wanted to leave university, to get some money together. Helen, from their group, was going out with Piers. That was a surprise: Helen tall, quiet and beautiful and Piers, angular, with a quick, destructive sense of humour. He had been dismissed from the English Honours class. His essay in second term the previous year had been judged insulting and careless. They had all been a little

shocked. Everyone had done the essays overnight, pulling them together in a great haste. Pam's friend Valerie had started hanging around with little Jake, one of the Push guitarists. Pam thought, "I just can't understand her. He's nice, gentle, a great guitarist. But he's so ugly. His glasses are held together with sticking plaster. I just can't imagine kissing him."

Pam had started to spend more time with Phila and Kathleen, who had been part of the Brigidine College debating team and who had joined the English Honours class. They both looked different now, as they had bleached their hair and Phila had started ironing hers to keep it straight. At the end of first year, they had come with Geoff into the *honi soit* office, when Pam was lying on the floor with David, the third year student she had gone out with for a short time. Pam had to pull down her skirt; Frank had hit her the previous night and there was a heavy bruise on her thigh. David was good-looking, clever but seemed insecure, wasn't able to talk about her problems at home. Pam was secretly rather pleased when he left university before Honours to work at the ABC. She didn't like being seen as someone's possession and David had been putting pressure on her to go all the way.

The class waited for its first third year lecture. The lecturer in Romantic Poetry had just arrived straight from Oxford. That promised much. This would give them a sense of thinking at the highest level. He entered the room laden down with three soft bags of books. He was a small man, with a jutting chin, a shock of black hair over a low forehead. An Adam's Apple bulged over his tight collar, pulled together with a tie knitted in cotton stripes. He wore a checked tweed jacket, despite the heat which hung still in the corners of the room. The girls exchanged glances. He was quite young and seemed interesting-looking.

He began to unpack. Book after book was stacked on the dark stained wood desk. He thrust his hand back through the spiky dark hair.

"Here you are," he said. His voice was thick and resonant, a rural burr still clinging to it. "Here's a few books I've brought out from England. I didn't think you'd be able to get them here. They're the most recent things, on Shelley, Coleridge, um, Byron. There's been quite a rethinking on the role of the Romantic poets of late. I hope we'll be able to bring something to bear on these debates here."

They sighed, stared at the bright covers. There it was. Knowledge. And certified English knowledge, not so easily found in the patchy Australian libraries.

Sydney University was not at the time a stimulating intellectual environment. Introductory classes of over a thousand students were common and there were few tutorials. There was no continuous assessment. We did an occasional essay and then frantically 'swotted' as exams came round. But in many subjects my great expectations were dashed throughout class after class.

Take for example my third year in History Honours, a course on Australian History. Duncan McCallum, stooped, with thick glasses mended with tape, came into the room with a set of small scrappy notes. He was constantly losing them, getting them in the wrong order, forgetting where he was. Not that we went very far. Less than ten miles from Deptford, in fact. The whole first term was spent on the background to the First Fleet, the prison system, victualling, provisions. In the second term we were suddenly catapulted forward by A. G. L. Shaw to look at our development as a nation. Each week the population of NSW soared as we covered another year. The population of sheep grew even faster.

Despite enthusiasms here and there, very few of us became involved in consistent study until later in our Honours classes. Even then, Clive James, two years ahead, said he had written a thesis on Hart Crane in a few weeks. During my final year, my attention was so far away from my course that I changed my thesis topic four times, suggesting the last one a month before the thesis was due. I was driven by fears I would be copying a lecturer's opinion, by enthusiasms for a poet read in class, by an attraction to one of the lecturers. In the end I completed my thesis on a subject suggested by Derek Marsh, one of more charismatic lecturers. It was on Gerard Manley Hopkins' literary criticism, a subject in which I had no interest at all.

Some lecturers were understandably irritated. J. M. Ward, later Vice-Chancellor of Sydney University, used to turn off his hearing aid whenever I entered the room, to explain that I had not completed my essays because of the Intervarsity theatre festival or some other event. By the end of our time at university, some of us had enormous amounts of revision to do. Through Push contacts, we could get hold of methedrine which kept us awake for hours of study, then gave us the assurance that what we were writing made sense.

Pam and Phila lay on Camp Cove, bikinis open at the back so that their bodies tanned without obstruction. Their fourth year American literature texts lay open under their heads.

"Jesus, I'm so tired," Phila's mouth moved languorously. "I was out till all hours with Alan last night."

Pam smiled tightly. Phila, who had spent much time at university debating how a good Catholic girl could indulge in any pre-marital petting at all, had certainly moved fast. It seemed impossible that she was the naive young woman who had pushed away that creepy Pole acting in *Lucifer and the Lord*. She had said to Pam then "The trouble is, if you give in to any man, they'll enjoy you and then go off, leaving you like a shag on a rock." She had not understood why Pam giggled so.

Tall, blonde, broad-bosomed, a slow smile moving around her features, a quaint tip-tilted nose, Phila was one of the most desirable girls around Sydney University. She sat in the pub, a couple of admirers always nearby, happy to buy her a drink. She had had a couple of serious boyfriends, and now was going out with Alan, an older law student, who also dabbled in directing Revue. Pam felt a little like a child around them, particularly if Alan picked her up, as he had at last night's party, and twirled her around and around.

Occasionally Pam tried to talk to Phila about whether she was unattractive. It was odd the way that she still didn't feel as if she wanted to have anybody as a boyfriend. Phila never listened. "Oh, but Pam, you're so witty. You have everyone splitting themselves at your stories."

Phila rolled over, rubbing oil down her legs. "Now how the hell are we going to get through these Wallace Stevens poems. I just can't get what he's saying. You like him, Pam, tell me what he's all about."

Grey Selmar, a philosopher who drank at the Royal George, came into sight. His white skin, thick socks and desert boots indicated that Camp Cove was not his ordinary milieu. So, thought Pam, he had responded to Phila's flirtation with him yesterday at the Forest Lodge. Phila could have people following her into a burning fiery furnace.

He sat beside them on a greying towel and handed around cigarettes. He placed the small volume of Wittgenstein to one side and smiled wolfishly. "You girls are looking wonderful. That's one thing I like about this contraceptive pill. It gives all the girls big titties." A thick accent still clung to his vowels. Pam's lip curled. True enough. Gradually they had all started going to a Push doctor, getting pill prescriptions so they could be sure not to get pregnant. Even Pam's breasts felt a little heavier.

Pam waved at Lou, a whippet-thin girl, who had just arrived on the beach. Lou, sharp and lively, had a car, bought by her businessman father and could drive them back to the house she had just moved to in Paddington.

"Let's leave Stevens," Pam said, closing her book. "The essay's not due till Thursday. Let's have another swim and then go back to Lou's place out of the sun." She knew they would probably then open a flagon of wine and the young lecturer from England who rented the first floor room from Lou would bring some friends around.

Final exams approached. Time and again Phila arrived at Pam's place in the middle of the night.

"Here's this stupid madame again," Nita hissed to Pam. "I don't know how you two are ever going to get through anything."

"Oh hello, Mrs Watson," Phila smiled. "Pam's done an essay on Nabokov and it's much easier to revise if you're together."

Frank came to the back door, his cigarette a dull glow through the firescreen. He spent many evenings in the laundry, drinking through the night. "How are you Phila, getting down to the last stage, then?" he called, bowing formally.

Pam grabbed Phila and pulled her into her bedroom. Frank liked Phila, the head girl from the good Catholic school, but the last thing they needed was him raving drunkenly at them the night before an exam, telling them his successes in History and Latin. They closed the door and perched on the bed, books scattered around, Pam in her baby-doll pyjamas, Phila in a long cotton sweater and stretch pants. Phila took a last drag on her cigarette, passed it to Pam, who inhaled, then stubbed it out on the window sill. "Here," Phila passed over two small yellow tablets. "J. J. gave me these yesterday. They're fifteen milligrams. We should be able to stay up all night on these." The two girls swallowed them quickly. "Pity we can't smoke in here."

"Mum'd have a fit," Pam whispered. "Though Dad still smokes like a chimney. God, I just wish I had the money to move out. Still one day it'll happen. Now quick, how are we going to get through all this stuff before tomorrow morning?"

Her heart was racing, as they laid out likely texts. Contemporary American literature had been well taught. If they went through the Wallace Stevens poems, the Hart Crane, talked a bit about Marianne Moore's animals, then that should cover poetry. Pam had written an essay on Nabokov, based on a review she had read in Fisher on how being a butterfly collector affected his choice of subject matter, Lolita as a trapped moth, that was the idea, and they'd both read Hemingway, Fitzgerald and Faulkner. They just had to sort out what the likely topics would be. Gothic melodrama in Southern novels. Lean prose style. They just had to be speedy.

Three hours later, Phila had slumped on her side, breathing heavily. Pam wormed her legs under the sheets beside Phila's curved body. Her eyes were stabbing with pain and tiredness, but her head felt fantastic. These tablets were incredible. You could just stay awake and awake. And more than that, she knew she could see it all, the whole pattern, how all these writers fitted together, how it all made sense, how she could solve any problems likely to present themselves.

At the end of our first year back in Sydney, John and Dotti Hoddinott, old friends from Sydney University, invited us to a Boxing Day party. It was a large party, a hundred people or so, crowded on a hot day into a terrace house in Glebe. People sat on benches in a small back yard or stood around a laundry sink crammed with bottles of wine and beer. Talk was energetic and lively, people shouting, glances of recognition. It was a cross-section of people who had been part of the same group at Sydney University in the early 1960s. I had not seen most of them since leaving Australia thirteen years before. It was unsettling to me to meet so many past acquaintances. I felt that I had changed a great deal while living overseas. I wondered what we would still have in common. I said to my husband that it was like an animated waxworks.

Those parties have become an annual ritual. The personnel changes. There are friends of the hosts from later periods. But the main players are still the members of a large and amorphous group of people, who worked around the university newspaper, were involved in the university drama societies, drank in the Forest Lodge Pub, just one hundred yards away from the house where the party is held. People who arrive from overseas for visits are drawn back into the crowd. The continuing contact reflects the fact that our most important experiences occurred around this huge group, that for most of us academic work took second place to our involvement in creative activities or even just the habit of sitting and talking. I no longer feel odd about the contact I make each year. These people are family, among whom I spent my most stimulating time at university.

When I was working for the NSW Women's Coordination Unit, we organised a visit to meet with women's groups at Blacktown. I was surprised to find a bustling city, large shopping centres, cinemas, a ring of hills around. For some reason, I had always remembered it as a flat desolate place, the site of Blacktown Girls' High, where I had spent an unhappy time. I had been a young teacher, sent to a large and confusing school, with a mass of girls, all of them in squeaky new uniforms. During my three years as a teacher, I operated under constant constraints and disappointments. These began when I first went to Teachers' College, under the terms of my scholarship bond, after finishing my Honours' year at Sydney University. The whole place had a conservative atmosphere and a punitive relationship with students from university.

Pam felt hollow that first day in March. This was it, the end of university as she had known it. She was to start at Teachers' College.

Going down, they called it. And it felt just like that. Down the hill from the mellow sandstone of the buildings in the main quadrangle, the mystic gold towers, to a marshy hollow, an ugly red brick building, like a suburban home. The building reeked of its

lower status.

Her sense of being cheated did not stop there. At the student welcome, the principal said that they had to learn discipline and conformity.

"You have been living in an ivory tower, studying at university. You've gone to lectures when you've felt like it, you've done essays to a very generous timetable. This year you are going to have to come to terms with living in the real world. You're going to learn to keep to a timetable, to write and mark essays on time. Only this will prepare you for the important job that's waiting out there, training the young citizens of the future."

"Oh, God, can you believe it." Pam and two friends from the English Honours class, who were also doing their year of teacher training, had fled up the hill to the coffee bar at the new Union Theatre. "It's worse than I ever imagined."

Valerie drew in on her cigarette and sent a train of small rings curling over the table. She drank her strong black coffee.

"It's like being back at school ourselves, so many petty rules and restrictions. I wish I'd never taken the scholarship."

"Don't mention it," Pam groaned. "When I think of the fight we had to put up to do an Honours year. And now, we just owe double the money."

"Have you seen the dills in our year, they all seem so boring. All those little Catholic girls. Where did they all come from?" Phila brushed her long hair back from her face. Once a good Catholic girl herself, she enjoyed her distance from those who still

conformed.

"My dear, they've been around here all along. Part of the great grey amorphous mass," Pam sighed theatrically. "We protected ourselves, but now we're part of it."

"They really are so square down there. Terrified of sex! I heard that we can't wear black or red, or at least not together."

"Why ever not?"

"They excite the passions, apparently. Those thin men in cardigans down there would get completely out of control. Or those few unattractive boys with acne in our year."

The three girls snorted. The post-graduate teacher training year was overwhelmingly female.

"God, look at the time! We're going to be out of control or out on our ears if we don't get down there. The next class begins at eleven o'clock and they're going to be marking us off on the roll."

"Kathleen doesn't know how lucky she is. To be married in Adelaide suddenly seems like heaven to me!"

"If I'd known it was going to be like this, I would never have signed the bond. Where on earth could I get a thousand pounds to pay myself out?"

Sydney Teachers' College was in the grounds of Sydney University in a hollow by the sports fields. It looked physically different to the other buildings, red-brick, functional. There was no sharing of cultures between two institutions.

Yet even in Melbourne where Josie Arnold went to Teachers' College from university, there was a sense of being punished; she recalls it as "leaving the rarefied heights for the sea-level plains where we moved heavily".

At that point in time, there was a shortage of teachers approaching as the post war baby boomers moved through the schools. The Education Department was therefore offering Teachers' College Scholarships: these gave University students seven pounds a week and a lump sum of twenty pounds to pay for books. In return students undertook to teach for a certain number of years, or else pay back a designated amount. For pass degree students the bonded period was three years, or five hundred pounds, but if students completed an Honours year, then they were bonded for five years, or one thousand pounds, to teach at a school determined by the Department of Education. The bond could be waived for married women.

"Look at these lists." The three girls leant against the walls of the college and stared at the sheets of typewritten pages pinned on to the board.

"Five classes in English! Can you believe it! How many English teachers does the country need?"

"Oh no, they've divided them alphabetically. We're not even going to be in the same English class. I can't bear it. Who can I talk to?"

Pam's group was the last. The end of the alphabet, she thought, the last resort.

Her English lecturer, Mrs Grant, briskly clipped into the class, a small woman, in a neat twinset. When she arrived at college in the morning she wore a hat perched on her tightly permed grey hair. Her manner was precise. She demanded that notebooks be open, gave clear instructions, made it apparent what should be copied down on the teaching of grammar, the study of the novel, the marking of an essay.

Pam slouched in a side row. Although inside the building, she still wore her sunglasses. Her skirt was full and dark, her fair hair trailed down her back. She wiped her hand over her forehead. She had a slight headache. Last night she had been at the pub with friends who had gone to the Herald at Broadway as trainee journalists. Her head felt as if it was still in the night before.

Oh this was complete and utter boredom, boredom. She loathed Mrs Grant's poetry classes most of all. Every single poem studied was tedious and conventional. Robert Bridges, the English Georgians. It reminded Pam of learning elocution. So prissy. What about all the exciting stuff she'd been reading in English at university - Hart Crane, Wallace Stevens. What about the poets they'd discovered for themselves, like Sylvia Plath. Imagine showing this old bat Allan Ginsburg. Pam loved his work. It was confronting, strong, dealt with real issues. Not like this predigested pap that Mrs Grant was spewing forth for the other dreary students around her.

As the lesson drew to a close, Pam stirred.

"How do you teach a poem if you don't think it's very good?"

"What do you mean by that remark, young woman? And at least have the courtesy to sit up straight when you're talking to me."

"Mrs Grant, you've taught this poem as well as anyone could. But I happen to think it's not a good poem. It's sentimentalised rubbish about snow, which most of us have never seen. What if such a poem is set for an exam, the Leaving Certificate for example? As a teacher you have to teach it to the kids doing the exam. I'm asking what you do if you can't find anything good to say about it." Pam could feel herself stumbling, her head not functioning properly.

The older woman's mouth tightened. This arrogant young miss, who had looked half asleep during the class, and indeed most of the classes that year, was being deliberately provocative. She breathed in briskly as the bell sounded.

"In my view you are being absolutely impertinent, young woman. I am not going to deal with this now. I want to see you, in my office, after four this afternoon."

At four o'clock, Pam knocked on the brown door. Mrs Grant sat behind the desk, bright red lipstick slashing her face, ashing a cigarette with quiet control into a small pillbox-shaped ashtray, its lid covered with petit-point embroidery.

"Perhaps you would like to give me some explanation of your quite unacceptable behaviour this morning?"

"I meant my question seriously," Pam wished her head wasn't throbbing quite so insistently. She had spent the hours until now drinking coffee in the Union Theatre Foyer with her friends. "I do think that a lot of the poems and stories you've used for demonstrating teaching are just not interesting for kids today."

"Miss Watson, you are in very grave danger of receiving an unsatisfactory report from me. This would have the effect of summarily terminating your scholarship here."

Pam's attention lurched. Not to have to teach! What a relief! But what else could she do? How would she pay back the bond? And what would her parents say? Her father would be furious.

"I think, young woman, that you need to reassess your attitude. The first step is to control and discipline yourself. Your whole attitude to this course has been casual and rebellious. You have arrived late to class on numerous occasions. This is just not feasible for a teacher at a school. If you don't get to the school on time each morning, you will find that your young charges are pulling it to pieces, brick by brick."

Mrs Grant slowly drew out the last words, rolling them between her teeth. She was clearly enjoying Pam's discomfort. And Pam was finding it hard to maintain her anger. Conservative old stick though Mrs Grant was, she had a point. Pam had been sloppy. She was often late. She really had to stop spending so much time with her old mates. Their lives were freer, their jobs more independent. And more of them were heading off on the boat to England. If she wanted to get there soon, she had no choice. She had to work out her bond and save her money.

"You clearly have a good brain and could make a real contribution as a teacher. Indeed you could make considerable progress in the profession. I would like to see you valuing yourself more. Look at your hair, trailing down over your face. And your clothes, they're not well-fitting and are scarcely flattering to you. If you had some pride in yourself and your appearance, pride in yourself and your self-discipline, you would get your hair cut, wear a good hat, get a neat suit. Oh, you can smirk, Miss Watson, but believe me, I know how these outward appearances reflect our own spirit, our view of ourselves."

Pam felt stupidly close to tears. Who would ever take fashion advice from Mrs Grant? Come on, pull yourself together, she muttered, this'll be a great story in the pub later.

Just look at that oh-so-precious little portable ashtray with its flower-embroidered

lid. Oh, oh aren't we refined!

"So, Miss Watson." Mrs Grant pursed her lips. "I am prepared to leave further discipline for the moment. I will, however, be looking for a change of attitude. I will personally supervise your next practice teaching session."

Pam had the two-week November practice teaching session at Canterbury Girls' High, a school in a working class area just two train stations away from her grandparents' home where she had lived until she was twelve. She was in front of 7C when Mrs Grant quietly entered and sat at the back. Pam had roneoed for the class Kenneth Slessor's *Carnival* and was encouraging the girls to look for words which reflected the clip of the horse's hooves, the swirl of the music. Pam walked briskly between the rows, her high heels clicking, her cotton suit neat around her bottom, her bobbed hair shining. She stimulated the class, she could feel their enthusiasm as the small twelve olds clustered around as the bell went. "Miss, do you think ...?"

Teachers' College courses were extremely pragmatic, with an emphasis on traditional education models. There were classes on how hydatids were transmitted and compulsory swimming and life-saving classes. I am embarrassed now to recall how I despised this potentially useful subject matter. At the time it seemed a dreary way of filling in time. The lecturers seemed tired and dispirited, following rules for which they had forgotten the reasons.

And at the end, the year at Teachers' College over, I was posted to a school in Sydney's western suburbs. In the early 1950s Sydney was dramatically expanding westward. A high proportion of staff in schools in these areas were first year out teachers. Most did not live in the area where they taught, where the recently built houses were intended for families. There was a long journey on the train each morning.

At seven-thirty in the morning the westbound platform at Central was crowded. Pam squinted around for familiar faces. Both Phila and Valerie had been fortunate and got schools close to the city, Valerie a place at prestigious St George Girls'. Phila was planning to leave her bond early. Her old boyfriend Alan was writing from England, wanting her to join him there. Pam did not know how she could reconcile this with what seemed to be a violently passionate relationship with the philosopher Selmar.

Pam's posting had arrived in January. She was to go to the country, to Grafton High. Nita stared at the paper in disbelief. "Oh, love, how will I manage, you going off to

the country?"

Pam's eyes filled with tears. "I can't stand the thought of it. Where's Grafton? What'll

it be like?"

Her heart was pounding. How would she cope? It was a country town. Pam had never visited one. What sort of people lived there? They would probably be terribly boring. How would she get on without all her friends, drinks at the Forest Lodge, the revue and drama crowd, Push parties on Friday night after drinks at the Newcastle, late night meals at Vadims. She would just drop out of sight. No-one would take any notice of her. She would end up a boring little schoolteacher in a country town. Where would she get intellectual stimulation?

"Don't get upset now, love," Nita touched her shoulder gently. "I know you wouldn't want to be away from us for long. Perhaps we can do something about it."

Frank was telephoned at work. He knew people at the Education department because of his work proof-reading the school magazine. "Leave it in my hands, Nita. I'll get onto the right people."

Next week, Nita and Pam caught the bus into town to the offices of the Education Department, dominating Bridge Street. In a gloomy room, a man with spectacles

frowned at them.

"It's a very good position at Grafton. She would be the most senior person next to the subject master. Your practice teaching reports were very favourable, which is why you were given such a post."

"She's a girl who's very close to her family," Nita explained softly. "And her father's had some ill-health. It would be disturbing for me as I rely on her quite a lot."

Pam gazed into the middle distance. She would do anything, anything not to leave Sydney. Her whole life was here. She would have no reference points in the country.

And so it had come about that she was on this early morning train to Sydney's western suburbs. Mind you, she thought, Blacktown was so far out in the sticks I might as well

be in the country. But at least I can go on living at home and keep on with my Sydney life. Who knows, I might even share a flat with Valerie or some other friends.

On the west-bound platform she found crowds of young teachers, some carrying coffee in plastic cups, the smoke drifting up. Voices rose.

"Hi, where have you been sent? What? Rooty Hill? God, what a name. Never heard of it. Where are these places? Who lives out there?"

Pam greeted some acquaintances, merry Sandra who had helped with costumes for SUDS

plays, Jane who had been teaching at Parramatta for a year. They crowded into the carriage, chattering, groaning at the prospect of interminable journeys each morning. They seemed mostly to be teachers of English, Art and Music. Sydney Morning Heralds were open. Pam inhaled the first cigarette of the day, tight, acrid on the throat. Across the carriage she noted a Vogue magazine on a woman's knees.

Pam gazed out the window with tired, dead eyes. The train crept out through the long line of stations, stopping, starting. The scenery changed dramatically as they passed Parramatta, which now seemed quite close to the city. Pam was aware of the shock of red earth, a scattering of recently built houses, the raw colour of new bricks. New suburbs dripped along the railway line. Seven Hills, Rooty Hill, Doonside. Occasionally there was a stand of dusty gum trees, but most had been flattened to deal with the spread of new building.

The school at Blacktown was half a mile from the station, a dirty walk through red dust on unmade footpaths. It was a new school, a square building of harsh brick, a half-made asphalt playground, scratchy grass covering a field with a group of demountable classrooms. Pam was dimly aware of hordes of children, the noise of screaming in the playground.

The first term passed for her in a state of shock. Her colleagues in English, three other young women and a vague, gentle subject master, were pleasant enough. On the train going back to town she occasionally talked with Eileen, a music teacher of a similar age, witty, interested in clothes. But she felt antipathetic to the rest of the staff, comfortable middle aged women, rather like her mother, but most of all to the sour head teacher, grey-faced as if she had liver trouble. There were a couple of men on the staff. "Male teachers behave as if their brains and blood were made of chalk, don't they?" she said to her friend Jane on the train one morning. "I can scarcely bear to be around such dreary people. They wear brown cardigans!"

Jane chuckled. Her own days of teaching were likely to be short-lived. She drank with the Push on Friday nights and had met an interesting anthropologist, just back from New Guinea. They'd talked of going through with a wedding ceremony, so that she could get out of her bond and accompany him down to the National University in Canberra and perhaps back to field work in New Guinea.

"Bloody marvellous, eh," she nudged Pam. "I might find myself settling down. Mind you, we're only doing it for official purposes. I don't want to end up a grey little housewife in a Canberra suburb. But up among the head hunters of Rabaul, it'd be quite good."

Pam grinned awkwardly. Unlike her, Jane had always been ready to get involved in couples, seemed to enjoy being a part of the man's world, even if for Pam the men never seemed as attractive and sharp as Jane herself. Not the sort of people Pam would get involved with. Whatever that was, she smiled wryly. She wondered whether she would ever have a relationship which she didn't run away from after the first few days.

"What about you, Pam? Can't see you settling in as a teacher. How will you get out?"

"Don't know really. I might go back to university. My Honours degree wasn't that good, I was doing so much acting, but it wasn't too bad. There's a new professor there and the whole place might liven up a bit."

Pam made an appointment with Sam Tanzer the following week. People said he was ruthless, intellectually arrogant. Pam was stimulated by the thought of being challenged.

"I was interested in enrolling in the masters' program," she nodded nervously. "I wanted to look at vaudeville techniques in Ben Jonson, the way he uses pratfalls and sight gags."

Tanzer was a short, strong-necked man, black hair curling over his collar. Behind his thick glasses his eyes fired. "I can't see any point in your enrolling here to look at something like that. Certainly not with me as supervisor." His lip curled. "To my mind, there's no intellectual justification for the study of drama or dramatic techniques. It is not a sound literary form. If you want to work in that area talk to Gerry Pike. He's a drama expert."

"Professor Pike?" Pam's eyes started. She could feel the hurt at her rejection behind her eyes. "He's never taught drama." The tall man who had so misread English poetry in her first year came back to her. She didn't admire him as an intellect.

"You're quite wrong. I'd advise you to speak to him if you wish to pursue this idea. And I would be grateful if you did not take up any more of my time."

There she was, out of the door, rejected, an intellectual nonentity. She bewailed her fate to a friend from the Honours class who was teaching in the Department. "You got off lightly," Lou cackled. "Staff meetings are like the Third World War. He's bringing in all these people who are steeped in Leavisite ideology. There is only one way to read a poem. And only twelve worthwhile poems. I'm looking forward to getting off to Oxford to read Elizabethan knot poems quietly. Have you considered New South Wales? They've got drama people there."

Pam shook her head. The University of New South Wales had risen on a sandy racecourse near her parents' home in Kingsford. She really could not consider it, its light brick buildings on unkempt sand hills, as a substitute for Sydney. In her mind, Sydney was still the Only University. She muttered, "I don't know how serious I was, anyway. It was just an idea to keep my brain active. I've been asked to be in revue again. I'll manage somehow."

The arrival of Sam Goldberg created a deep schism in the teaching of the Sydney English Department. Goldberg was a Leavisite. While I studied English literature, a careless eclecticism had reigned. The only discussion of literary theories had occurred in an English Honours class run by quiet, thoughtful Bill Maidment. We had therefore read Leavis as one of a number of possible ways of reading English. This did not suit Goldberg's perspective. Leavis' great tradition became the dominating rule. Young disciples were brought out from England to take over teaching positions, bearded, arrogant, always slightly unwashed and complaining about the price of coffee in Sydney as compared to Birmingham. They were committed to their master's philosophy and lost no opportunity to lecture about its strengths. I remember parties at which Howard Jacobson hectored his audiences about the differences between the powerful writing of Lawrence in Women in Love *and Tolstoy's conservatism in*

War and Peace. In these crowded Sydney parties, after the pub, in shabby Annandale kitchens, the difference was usually explained by the honesty of their attitudes to sex and be followed by passionate gropings in shadowy corners. The practical result of the dominance of Leavisite ideology was that all students who had graduated prior to Goldberg's time were viewed with suspicion. We had not had the benefit of a course of study based on a sound understanding of the great texts. The English Department split bitterly two years after.

"Wake up, Pam, quick, the alarm's gone!"

Eileen was shaking her, hard. Pam groaned.

"Oh, God, I don't think I can face it."

"Course you can, come on. The shower's free."

One eyelid rose.

"My head's ghastly. Oh God, why do I do it? Bloody Blacktown."

Pam stumbled out of bed, staggered towards the door, gathering a slightly soiled bra from the floor and jamming open a drawer to pull out a pair of underpants. She tripped over an edge of raised carpet and almost bumped into the comfortable form of Lauralee the Canadian maths teacher, coming out of the bathroom with her mauve towelling dressing gown clutched round her, her hair in curlers.

"Excuse me", cooed Lauralee, with heavy emphasis.

Pam realised that she was naked. Lauralee hated that. She came from a small town which Pam imagined was on the great wheat plain that covered all Canada. Lauralee's face was round, heavily freckled over a bright pinkness that had developed as soon as she arrived in Sydney's humidity. Her pneumatic body sweated softly throughout the day. "Aw Lord it's hot," she sighed, fanning herself with a piece of plaited paper.

Lauralee had made a great effort in crossing the world. She and another junior maths teacher from the Winnipeg Board of Schools had taken up the offer of teaching positions in Australian schools. They had arrived in early 1964 and both been sent to schools in the Western Suburbs; within three months her friend had been whisked into marriage by a strapping Physical Education teacher in long socks and shorts. Lauralee had slumped into a state of shock, both at losing a reliable companion and at her inability to pay the rent of the Double Bay flat, chosen so that they could enjoy weekend tourism. The school music teacher Eileen Moran and her sister Mary had leapt at the chance to move to smart Double Bay, and the threesome had stayed together until the beginning of 1965 when Mary, her violin and sewing machine were transferred to the Central Coast. At this point Eileen had suggested Pam move in.

For three months now Pam had been sharing this small flat in Double Bay. She had become friendly with Eileen on the train. Eileen came from the country, a publican's daughter, a neat and clever pianist. Her hair was dark, trimmed to the nape of her neck, her clothes smart and immaculately pressed. Mary was a skilled dressmaker and Eileen carefully studied fashion magazines on the long journey, marking with her pen the softly draped skirt, the high-necked blouse that she wanted her sister to make. Nita had been upset that Pam was moving out, but liked Eileen. It made sense for them to share the cost of the taxi to the train station. Frank had made no comment, staring out into the darkness of the backyard, smoke rising from his cigarette.

Lauralee and Pam had little in common. The Moran girls had giggled and chatted around Lauralee's passivity. They sewed, cooked, went to symphony concerts and occasional movies and brought home quiet young men, who played music with the sisters around the upright piano in the lounge room. This quietness suited Lauralee who liked to come home, change her clothes, wash her tights and underwear nightly, cook a substantial meal, watch the television, mend, prepare classes, mark papers, and get to bed early.

Pam proved a disruptive influence. She couldn't bear to be inside at night. She had a range of friends to whom she constantly chatted on the phone, she went to plays and movies, she acted with a small drama group that seemed to require rehearsals two nights a week. She would rush from the train to meet friends at pubs in town, she would leave rehearsals late and go to dark restaurants at Kings Cross to eat and drink. She rarely brought friends home and when she did they were large young men in dark turtleneck pullovers, who stood uneasily in the kitchen, puffing on smelly cigarettes, until Pam had changed into something silky and pulled them outside, giggling and talking noisily, puffing wildly on a cigarette. She was unsteady, thought Lauralee, skinny, not eating properly. Oh lawd and probably not as good as she could be. Late at night, Lauralee sometimes heard strange scuffling sounds outside the front door of the apartment, Pam's voice hissing, a deeper voice responding. Sometimes she didn't come home at all. One day she turned up at the school in the sack pinafore she had the day before, with a man's shirt underneath. Her eyes always looked as if they had last night's smudged mascara. And she never seemed to mark any homework from the girls.

Oh God, thought Pam, how boring Lauralee was, how self-satisfied. Her freshly washed tights would be all over the bathroom rails again. Pam never had time to wash hers. She dashed back into her small bedroom and grabbed a dress and jacket from the hanger. She took her clothes back in a taxi every weekend to her mother's house to be washed and ironed. She was running low again.

"Taxi's here," shrilled Eileen.

Pam poured water from the hot tap in the kitchen onto a mug of Nescafe and swigged a quick mouthful as she dashed to the front door, pulling on the short jacket that would keep her warm for the early morning train trip.

The taxi whirled down New South Head Road, then turned into the bottom of Yurong Street where an elderly woman waited outside a block of rent-protected flats. Miss Cunningham, tightly corseted under a black dress in shiny crepe, face heavily powdered, puffed as she

carried a basket filled with essays. She had recently transferred from the correspondence school. Pam and her young colleagues snickered cruelly about this. They thought anybody who had worked for the past twelve years at the Correspondence School must have suffered a complete nervous breakdown. "Haunt of the halt, crippled and lame," sharp-faced Margaret had muttered in the English staffroom. And Miss Cunningham seemed to suffer acute nervous tension. She was terrified by directly teaching schoolgirls for the first time in a number of years. "Such big girls they are, so noisy." She leant forward to Lauralee in the front seat. She confided in a whisper, "I'm relieved you're a little late. I was worried I might be. I slept very badly, I had a very painful haemorrhoid last night."

That'd be right, Pam muttered to herself, just one, she'd never have more than one. She turned to Eileen. "I'll have to get a coffee at the station. Will there be time?"

"Don't think so," smiled Eileen, "train's not going to wait for you."

"Be a wonder and take this to pay the taxi, will you? I'll charge ahead if we get a good

run in and grab something."

Town Hall smelt sooty, although the asphalt walkways were freshly washed. Pam's stiff hands felt for coins in her handbag, then, grabbing a sweet bun, she raced down the stairs to the platform, milky coffee splashing out of the cardboard cup. The small gaggle of other teachers waiting on the dusty platform moved forward as the train clattered in.

Slumped in her seat as the train gathered speed in the tunnel approaching Central, Pam rested her aching head against the cool glass of the window. "I'm so tired," she muttered as she squeezed the flat top from the coffee container and sipped quickly, wincing as the hot liquid burned her tongue. "Thank God it's Friday."

Lauralee sighed audibly at the blasphemy. She had been a regular churchgoer at a little wooden church back in Canada and still went for special occasions to a Baptist church in the city. She moved with evident relief to a vacant double on the other side as another group of teachers joined the train at Central.

"How did your play go?" Eileen asked, waving as her pianist friend Garth wandered vaguely up the aisle. A quiet sensitive man, with long tender fingers, he taught at a school further out. "Hello Garth, come and join us. Our little Pam's a trifle fragile this morning. This train's no place for stars of stage and screen."

"It was all right, I suppose." Pam was appearing in a short season of Maxwell Anderson's plays put on by the Graduate Theatre Troupe in a small theatre in Phillip Street. "Mind you last night there were more people on stage than in the audience. And you've got to admit that my part is not going to have Fellini rushing to our door begging me to be in his next film."

Garth and Eileen had come to the opening night the previous week. They nodded sympathetically. Pam played a wisecracking secretary in an unhappy relationship with the boss of the clothing firm. It was not a big part; she played it well, but the main focus was on the clash between the employer and the union boss.

Pam lit a cigarette and blew out rapidly. "Anyway, Paul came up last night, he'd finished early, so a crowd of us went off to Vadims."

Paul, one of Pam's occasional escorts, was a trainee journalist on the Herald. "We were celebrating for Fred. He's made a big decision and is leaving the law. The reviews he got last week for the boss's part really boosted him. He's ignoring his parents and yesterday he tried out for a professional theatre part. And he got it. Front half of a donkey or something in the Young Elizabethans touring South Australia. No, I'm joking, of course. They'll do short Shakespeare or something. He's over the moon."

Pam ground the cigarette under her foot and tightened her mouth. Blast the bond, or I'd try for something better too, she thought. "If I didn't owe so much money to the government, you wouldn't see my heels for dust. And I'll tell you it wouldn't be the dust of Blacktown either. Don't know how I'll bear the dump for another year. Anyway better start making myself look presentable, hadn't I, dahhlings. Do us a favour, Eileen, have you got an aspirin? I've just got to get rid of this headache. Too much red wine last night. It was hysterical. There were a couple of big chaps that Steve Vadim didn't know in the corner, so from ten o'clock onwards he was serving his red wine in coffee cups. Mine had steam coming out!"

"Why on earth?"

"They might have been licensing cops! They're always wanting to up the ante and poor old Steve's only got a with-food licence."

"Did you eat anything?"

"I had a sip of Paul's pelemeny soup and a bit of bread roll. Not hungry. Anyway, all to the good. I want to be able to fit into that red dress for the party on Sunday."

Garth lifted his head from the newspaper.

"Do you see this ad, Pam? The ABC are advertising for trainee television directors. Why don't you put in for them? All your acting at uni, your directing at school. You'd stand a good chance."

"Show me!" Pam grabbed the employment page from his hand. It could be terrific. Her first boyfriend from university, the eccentric David, had gone into the ABC as a radio trainee. But

how could she apply? She had not ever really directed at university. None of the girls had. All she had done was act. And she had not actually seen much television. Her parents had only recently been given a set by Uncle Vince. Although she sometimes watched English serials, like Z-Cars and Shakespeare's *Wars of the Roses*, she believed like her friends that most television was just American pap. *The Mouseketeers*. Who'd want to be part of that? Besides, she had the bond. And more than that, she wanted to get overseas. That was where she'd be able to get into theatre or television. Overseas she could act or direct. She would go to the Royal Court, she'd audition for an Edward Bond play, she'd have so many opportunities, she'd really

be able to break away.

"No, my pets, it's just not right for me now. I've got my little bank account for the overseas odyssey started and all of fifty pounds in it. But remember that's half a steerage ticket. So Australian telly will have to do without me, I'm afraid. I've got bigger fields to fry, or something!"

Pam rested her hot forehead on the window glass. She felt things were flying out of control, as if life was somehow moving away from her on a faster trajectory while she sat on a train to Blacktown, dressed conservatively as a teacher, going out with Eileen to buy fabric at the Tissus Michels factory in St Mary's. Yet her friends from university, those left in Sydney, were flinging themselves into other things. Robert, now studying medicine, had started the magazine PRIVY, with student journalists from other universities. Lively and provocative, it had got them into court, challenging the conservatism. Yet what role could she have in that, in her little school suits, too scared to risk Department of Education ire? Geoff had begun making short films. She had been in the most recent, a character part, a club-footed Nazi spy. There were other scenes filmed down the Northern Beaches, with crowds of young women in bikinis with long swathes of hair. Even their bodies, long-limbed, sleek, seemed different to those of Pam's friends, not small like hers or heavy-breasted like Phila and Helen. They were beautiful, sexually confident. Where had they all come from? How had she suddenly come to be middle-aged, the character part?

She concentrated on the small mirror in her hand, frowning as she drew kohl lines along her lower lids and smothered bright colour on her lips. "Well, now I'm beautiful and here we are at Seven Hills. I've got 5B for poetry first period. Ohmigod, what am I going to give them?"

Another day starting. They pulled themselves from the train at sandy Blacktown station, the sun already beginning to feel scorching. Pam slipped out of her turquoise jacket as they ran up the stairs to purloin the station's only taxi for the short journey down to the school.

Those were tricky days to enter the teaching profession. The combined effect of the explosion in numbers of births, increased migration and the introduction under the Wyndham scheme of an extra year of school dramatically increased the numbers of pupils in schools. In new residential areas, like Sydney's Western Suburbs, schools

seemed almost like factories.

The times were a'changing. Let's say we're now early 1965. The tectonic plates have shifted slightly. Oz *magazine began in April 1963, and journalism changed dramatically. Rupert Murdoch's* The Australian *also brought in new journalists, questing, inquiring. There was a Sydney production of* Beyond The Fringe*. Television satire was beginning, opening more possibilities for critical comment.*

A new group of youth were defining themselves. The Beatles came in 1963, the Rolling Stones in 1965, Bob Dylan records were beginning to be heard, the voices of protest were getting louder. Kennedy's assassination signalled that gradualism would no longer be sufficient. Deep fissures were emerging in society.

On a mid-winter day in 1966, Des McFarlane entered the door of the English staff- room, frowning. It had not been a satisfactory meeting with the headmistress. More complaints about his staff. He was going to have to raise it with them.

He enjoyed this position as head of the English Department at this growing new school. Four of his staff were in their first posting, just out of their various unis, all of them except for poor old Miss Cunningham who had arrived late the previous year. He hoped she would head back to the correspondence school before the year was up. But the others were first rate. Beverley, Jenny, Barbara and Pam, all full of ideas, all now in their third year of teaching. Pretty girls too, bit of style about them, probably not long before they got themselves married off and out of teaching. Still, you never knew, some stayed on, like that young art teacher whose husband taught next door at the boys' school. They'd decided against starting a family and were saving up to have a trip overseas.

But his young teachers seemed to rub Miss Elliot up the wrong way. She was really one of the old school. Science teacher, firm disciplinarian. She liked her pupils and her staff to toe the line. She had got it into her head that his lot were flighty, trouble- makers, too popular with the girls.

It was true too. After all, they were only just older than the girls. None of the other masters seemed to have this problem. John Mark of Science had a couple of older women teachers and a young bloke, which was different. The maths staff, too, only had two young women and they were quiet, wouldn't say boo to a goose. Like that plump Canadian girl. Miss Elliot seemed to expect the Art and Music lot to be a bit odd.

No, it was the English staff that had really run into trouble. And particularly Pam Watson. She was the brightest of the lot, mind you, an Honours graduate. They wouldn't keep her long. She'd be off, into what he didn't know. She was mad about acting. The play she'd done last year with the senior girls was the best thing he'd ever seen in a school. She might go to the ABC, or back to university, not that she seemed too keen about that. Pity, if she only settled down she'd make a good teacher. The girls ate out of her hand, always crowding round her, looking at her clothes, admiring her new haircut.

He groaned. That was today's problem. Her hair. She'd come in this morning with her hair cut short right up the back, like a little cap on her head, with a cute fringe. And streaked

blond.

"What do you think, Dessie," she'd cooed in the staffroom, twirling around on her toes. "Do you like what my hairboy Alex did for me. Do you think I look like Barbra Streisand? He does. Ooh I wish I could sing like her." She mimed a microphone.

"It suits you Pam, you look really smart. And what's that suit?"

"What do you think? Kangaroo leather, isn't it fantastic. It's taken all the money I was saving. I saw it in a shop in Double Bay and its just sooo different."

Burgundy leather, a short jacket, a skirt, perhaps three inches above the knee, but not obviously, as she had on dark burgundy stockings and matching shoes.

"Yes, and tonight I am doing it, doing it, doing it," she crooned along. "I'm going off to the Rolling Stones concert with this fantastic new bloke I met at the weekend. He's a photographer in advertising. He came with my pal Alan and me for a pub crawl on

Saturday... all the way from the Quay to Sydney University. Bet you don't know

another girl who could do that."

Particularly not one so tiny, he thought, and still with such bright eyes. A beer in

every pub?

"There were forty-two pubs and we went into every one. Oh it was such great fun. At Adams Hotel, we had to sit in a dirty corner under the heating system. Women aren't allowed in the Marble Bar. There crouched under huge pipes, were the three of us and two tram conductresses. I don't know why the conductresses were there and not in some lovely ladies bar somewhere, shelling peas. Time, ladies. Drink 'em up then.' No, I think the *Waste Land* is too hard for any of our girls. But I am celebrating my date with a wonderful pile of poetry for all my classes. 4A are having Yevtushenko, because he's been here and he's so gorgeous. And I've written out this little poem by John Lennon for 2E. Do you think that's a good idea, boss? They don't know what poetry is, complain and moan, so I'm showing them even their favourite rock stars write it."

It had been wonderful to see her in such high spirits. Sometimes she seemed so low, depressed or as if her mind was far from the job in hand. Sometimes he wondered if she had had a bit too much to drink the night before. She ran with a wild crowd as far as he could tell, and was always dashing back into the city, not joining him and John Mark and the other girls from the English staff who lived more locally at Auburn and Parramatta for drinks in the Workers' Club after they left the school. Once or twice he had come in to find her stretched full length on two desks, her own and Barbara Allen's, sound asleep with her shoes on the floor and her head cradled on a bright silk scarf. He had surprised himself on one of these occasions by feeling a desire to kiss that soft pink cheek as she softly breathed in and out.

He'd not thought like that since he and Marie had married, and he loved the four kids, but there was something wild and daring about this girl, and something lost. An exotic bird in the wrong cage.

One lunchtime he had come in and they were all giggling. "Come on Des. Join us, shrieked Pam. "I met this chap the other night who was a flight steward. Seriously, his flat was full of these little sample bottles. And that's the medicine we're having today. I told him we desperately needed something at this school to perk us up. Now what have you got after lunch, Des? Ah, 3C. Well then, choose your poison. What'll it be? Benedictine, Drambuie or this little brandy?" She waved the tiny glass bottles before him. "Come on, Des. Screw the top off and down it goes, just what the doctor ordered." He'd coughed as the sweet aqueous substance slithered down his throat. Never before. "Now then, that's lifted all our spirits so much that we can even contemplate doing grammar. I think we should just get a few of these little bottles each week. Just a teaspoon a day will make even vile Rhoda Crews look bearable."

Rhoda Crews was a large aggressive girl, not academically bright. Pam told them how Rhoda had sat in the train returning to the city one day, yelling abusive allegations about Pam's and Eileen Moran's sex lives. "Honestly, we didn't know where to look. The whole carriage was staring at us, while she told them what we got up to with Garth Bingham. And Garth looked so shocked. I am sure he did not know half the tricks he was being credited with."

Remembering the drinking of the liqueur samples, Des shook his head. How could he have let them persuade him? If Miss Elliot got to hear of it, there'd be hell to pay. Or disciplinary charges to face. No, today's complaints were bad, but not that bad.

"And what about Miss Watson's hair?" Miss Elliot had said.

"What about it?" he'd replied.

"It's blond."

"I rather like it," he'd laughed, deflecting the complaint.

"Well I don't," she had snapped. "And I would be pleased if you kept a firmer eye on your staff in matters of dress and deportment."

"Steady on," he'd said. "They're good girls. And Miss Watson's a fine teacher. Her Leaving Certificate results in English last year were the best this school's had. She even had two girls with Honours. And that was only her second year."

"That could be a mitigating factor. But the long and the short of it is, they're not presenting themselves as objects of respect, as teachers should. Mr McFarlane, it's gone too far. I'd like to speak to Miss Watson this afternoon after three. And in fact send Miss McGrath along as

well."

At three o'clock, the two young women entered the front hall of the school. It had been a sports afternoon. Outside the front steps, Miss Cunningham was rising slowly from a padded kneeler, placing a trowel in the hands of one of the small group of girls gathered around her. She ran a gardening class for girls who did not wish to play sport and spent Wednesday afternoons planting hardy shrubs and bright annuals in the raw brown earth around the school.

Inside the front hall, the headmistress, narrow mouth tight, and her deputy were frowning as they knelt in front of a row of girls also kneeling on the cold linoleum. The deputy measured each girl's sports uniform with a long ruler. Those girls with uniforms more than two inches above their knees had their names noted by the headmistress. Next week they would have to demonstrate that they had obeyed instructions to let their hems down before beginning their sports lessons.

Her frown of disapproval increasing, the headmistress ushered the two young teachers

into her study.

"Thank you for coming," she spoke soberly to them.

The two young women were silent. What choice had they had?

"You are aware that I have asked you here because I want to speak to you about the suitability of your wardrobe and demeanour as teachers in this school. As you are aware, we have a heavy responsibility here. These girls need guidance, particularly in matters of style. As teachers you must be well equipped to provide that."

Beverley and Pam stared straight ahead.

"Now, I wish to express my disapproval of your skirt lengths. I am aware that there is a passing fashion for a shorter skirt length, after that English model in Melbourne last year. Nonetheless, teachers must show that they are beyond these shallow trends. You have just witnessed our difficulty in ensuring that girls keep their sports uniforms at a decent length. That attempt is jeopardised by every sight of you younger teachers in unsuitably short skirts."

"Oh Miss Elliot," Beverley burst forth. "That is not acceptable. Both of us are very neatly dressed. Our skirts are quite a restrained length considering what is being shown in the shops right now."

"I also think you've got to remember that we are wearing dark stockings." Pam pointed down. "The colours complement the skirts, draw the eye down to the feet."

"That is another issue," Miss Elliot frowned. "Thick stockings in these, what are they called,

mod colours are just not appropriate for young women in your position. You are here to maintain discipline. An appropriate flesh coloured nylon stocking is what other members of staff wear and that is how I expect you to be clad."

The two young teachers stared in astonishment at the older woman, her mouth drawn. Beverley, closely involved in the union, was the first to speak. Clearing her throat, she spoke slowly. "Miss Elliot, I am not quite sure what sort of disciplinary hearing this is. As far as I know, there are no guidelines against coloured stockings, or skirts of this length, just two inches or so above the knee. We know that the Department of Education has restrictions against wearing trousers. Now, none of us wears trousers. I happen to favour them at weekends. I have a number of smart tailored trousers which I think would be suitable for school wear, particularly on these crisp winter days. But I do not go against Departmental policy."

Miss Elliot's frown deepened. She was not used to this type of debate about her decisions. Other teachers accepted her strictures. Mind you, she would not have to speak to members of the maths or science departments like this.

Pam saw the frown, recognised that there was a weakening of position.

"Surely much of this, Miss Elliot, is a matter of taste, rather than appropriateness. It is my view that Miss McGrath and I are dressed smartly and in a relatively conservative way. I can assure you that I don't wear any of my most up-to-the-minute clothes to school." She smiled as she thought of the two velvet outfits which she had just had made by a Glebe dressmaker. Loosely based on photographs of Mary Quant's latest collection, they were in dark velvet, straight, skimming the body, cut low in front, with ties and chains drawing them together below the bust. They stopped four inches above

the knee.

"Today, for example, I am wearing a suit. True, it is made of kangaroo leather, but that is an acceptable and stylish fabric. It also happens to have been bought at considerable expense in that heart of fashion, Double Bay." She smirked inside. Boring Miss Elliot would probably never get to Sydney's smart eastern suburbs.

"And as you can see, my shoes are the same maroon colour. In fact, I am rather pleased with the way it is also picked up in my burgundy and navy checked stockings. And these stockings, which you so much dislike, are in fact wonderfully warm and sensible for the early morning journey out of Sydney. Miss Moran, the music teacher, is wearing smart navy ones she bought at the same time."

Miss Elliot rose. Her hands were clenched tightly by her sides. "I did not call you here to discuss fashion. My point is that as headmistress of this school I do not believe that this mode of dress is suitable. I do not believe, Miss Watson, that you should have your hair cut in that short style and streaked blond. I accept that nothing can be done about that, now.

However, I am requesting you both to wear longer skirts and to refrain from wearing coloured stockings, particularly those in bright colours such as red."

Pam and Beverley exchanged glances. "Thank you for bringing this to our attention, Miss Elliot," said Pam, smiling as sweetly as she could manage. "We will try to follow your request, as far as we can, considering the financial difficulties involved in getting a completely new wardrobe. I assume this suit would be acceptable if I just wore it slightly lower on my hips?"

Beverley's rather prominent teeth grazed her lower lip. "I am pleased that you are prepared to rely on our own judgement about what is suitable, Miss Elliot. I take your point about bright red stockings. I'll assume that these bottle green ones are in fact quite suitable."

They breathed deeply as they left the interview.

"Well that's torn it," said Beverley. "Stupid old cow. She's pushed herself into a corner, but she had no legitimate reason to discipline us."

"I suppose she wants us to dress the way she does!" Pam began to laugh. "Can you imagine me in that grey twinset and one string of pearls. Or little gloves."

"What about her peter pan collar!" Beverley hooted.

"Oh God," Pam burst out of her laughter. "I can't bear it. I can't bear how boring she is, and Miss Cunningham and her bloody garden, and teaching the girls how to behave properly, and even dear old fussy Des. I've got to get out of here. I've got part of a fare saved to get on a boat to London. I'm going to really start saving up. I'm going to try and get off at the end of the year."

"Haven't you got two years left to work out your bond?" Beverley stared at her.

"Yes, but I can't bear to go on," Pam cried. "It's driving me crazy. It's making me feel like a delinquent. And Miss Elliot will give me a delinquent's reference, the sort we give kids who've played up. The sort I wrote this afternoon for Rhoda Crews."

And so she did. When I left teaching, I received a reference which stated only that I had taught at the school for a certain length of time. It in no way outlined what my skills or contributions had been. It was exactly the reference which was written for girls whose attendance or behaviour had been poor or who lacked the intellectual capacity to complete schooling.

The head teacher still had enormous power in schools, but was often dealing with situations with which he or she had little familiarity. The teachers union was not at that stage a powerful force, and had not changed its policies to develop ones more suited to the increase in number of young women teaching, and the lack of relevance of the union to them.

Many teachers in these new schools were scarcely older than their students. Like me, they had great difficulty in identifying with the principal rather than the students. It was an era of

emerging generational conflicts. There were conflicts over style, as Australia learnt about Carnaby Street, Mary Quant, Jean Shrimpton at the Melbourne Cup, mini-skirts. I wore these clothes, the children copied them in sewing lessons, although they appeared most unsuitable to the conservative headmistress. Magazines like Vogue *and* Nova *were presenting different styles against the declining power of social arbiters, hats and gloves for lunch at Romanos. New music was exploding, the Beatles and the Rolling Stones and teen culture. Young teachers were also close to their students in their appreciation of these. Such differences were exacerbated in the second half of the 1960s, when societal schisms occurred over Vietnam and Aboriginal rights. But these were just then emerging. While I was teaching I followed the media stories of the 1964-5 freedom bus, travelling around western New South Wales towns, and in 1966 Sydney erupted at the visit of L. B. Johnson. These were, in fact, small harbingers of a greater change coming.*

Glenda Adams has said that women of our generation left Australia because of sex, to have it and to feel free about having it. Lesley Johnson has suggested that the crucial fact that pertained to women who were babies during the war was that they never really worked out a satisfactory way of 'growing up'. This particularly related to their ease in accepting their sexuality. Sexuality is always a difficult terrain to negotiate, yet it seems to me to have been particularly repressed and kept silent after the second world war.

Pam, just six years old, skipped along the street from the shops, clutching a newspaper parcel with six lamb shortloin chops. There was a van by the side of the road. The milkman smiled out.

"You want a lift, little lady?"

Pam tossed her hair back and smiled up. That was nice of him, even though Grandma's was only two streets away. It was exciting to get into his van. Most of the other tradesmen, the ice-man, the garbage-man, the clothes-prop-man came around in horses and carts.

She clambered up the high step into the front seat and perched awkwardly, half standing so her feet could reach the floor of the van. It moved off, wobbling uneasily beneath her bare legs, bottles chinking in the back. It went up the hill past the doctor's, swaying to a stop at the vacant block where gritty paspalum waved softly.

The milkman grabbed her hand in his large, hairy one.

"You're a nice little one, aren't you? You're going to be a good friend to me now."

He put her hand down on his shorts, on a wriggling lump. Pam pulled back. She hated spiders and snakes.

"Go on, can't hurt you, lovey!" The milkman was smiling down at her, a gap in his front teeth.

She looked away from that hole and stared horrified down at the hole in his shorts, where she could see a sausage uncoiling, soft, moist, red.

She pulled away again and he let her hand drop. "Silly little thing!"

Pam could not swallow, as if the narrow van was squashing her.

"I can't stay any longer, my grandma's waiting for me." She smiled up at him, she must not be rude.

"Just never open your mouth about this or I'll give you such a hiding." He thrust open the door.

Pam ran down to her home, banged on the door.

"You took a long time, what kept you? We've been worried sick." Nita pulled Pam into the house. It was the first time they had allowed her to go around the corner to the butcher's.

"Oh, I was just ... "

"Dreaming your way along the street, while we're all waiting round." Nita grabbed the chops and clattered the griller out with her other hand. "Now will you go and bring Brian in from his pram. We haven't got all day, madam."

Each time after that when Pam saw the van, she felt she stopped breathing and brushed her hand roughly over her skirt. Better not tell.

The 1950s were a period of sexual ignorance and avoidance. I was fascinated in my reading to see how Australian women writers described pain and outrage with their first menstruation, using this as a symbol of sexual ignorance. Barbara Hanrahan worries about her lack of information, Jill Golden's heroine is anxious and has not had any instruction. Penelope Rowe's heroine finds out about her body in a stiff interview with her mother. Leone Sperling has a heroine who rages against her painful menstruation, her obsession with food and her sexual naiveté. Barbara Brooks, a tomboy who doesn't want to dress as a woman, is told by the Kotex booklet that "she was growing up and should wear dresses, at least for a few days every month".

For Jennifer Dabbs, prudery about sex and bodily functions becomes a crucial component of her plot about Kathleen's repressed upbringing in her loveless Catholic home. She is shown to use rags and cloths and told to make sure that her father does not know. Menstruation is shameful and potentially dangerous; she is not allowed to have hot baths. She is not allowed to call it 'The Curse', which is common. Her family's repressive attitudes are reproduced in the school's treatment of sexuality. Her class is taught reproduction, in the

shadow of shame and embarrassment: "these classes are privileged and confidential. No need to discuss with yourselves or any other girls." When the girls' and boys' schools are brought together for dancing, they are told "let daylight be seen between you" and later that "red inflames the senses". Dabbs' plot resolutions involve Kathleen's favourite cousin Hannah being rejected by the family because of a registry office wedding, and Kathleen's own transgressive affair with an Italian opera singer. Both of them are reacting to the puritanical attitudes of the 1950s.

In many cases, girls' first experience of menstruation could be extremely frightening, as there was no universal sex instruction in schools and girls were often ignorant. Furthermore, it is clear from many of the stories that menstruation was an unpleasant and awkward business. Tampons were not known about; most girls did not use paper pads, though Creswell is shown a used one on the beach. For many, menstruation involved getting cotton rags, washing them out in cold water, hanging them on lines, without fathers and brothers seeing them.

Girls in academic schools were often more ignorant, as they were taught science rather than biology; I know a physiotherapist who says that learning physiology at Dulwich Hill Domestic Science School has been of great benefit to her life. Even then, teachers' prudery intervened. Another friend, at age sixteen, sat with eyes closed in a room with blinds drawn while their biology teacher dictated the human reproductive cycle, a section of the Leaving Certificate Biology Course. "Listen carefully girls, take no notes and ask no questions. I will deal with this subject once and once only!"

I was a beneficiary of a forward-thinking headmistress, Lucy Woodcock, who called Erskineville's eleven-year-old girls together to show us a sex education film.

"You girls are getting to an age when you need to learn something about your bodies."

Miss Garville drew her tongue firmly over her lips and breathed in.

"I have an opportunity to show you a very good film. It's only short. But it will give you much useful information. Now I am going to write a letter to your parents. Some of them may have objections, in which case you may be withdrawn from the film. But in fact it is done in a very considered and tasteful manner. All parents will, in fact, be invited to view the film prior to your seeing it."

The children gathered together after she left. What could it all mean? Pam collected the note and took it home to her parents. She felt anxious, perhaps she would not be allowed. But no. Nita said, "I'll call by the school."

On the following Monday, only Nita came to view the film, wearing a neat hat with a feather. Pam thought it funny that other parents hadn't come, but she enjoyed seeing her mother around the school and smiled at her when the class were shown into the school hall.

"I'll wait and get the train back with you, dear," Nita said.

Pam flushed at times and felt a little ill when it mentioned blood or showed diagrams of the body. But then merry cartoon birds would appear on the screen and a soothing, American-accented voice would begin a detailed commentary. It provided a thorough understanding of where babies came from and why the girls should not be worried when they started to bleed. Pam thought it sounded as if you should worry, as if it would be very strange and messy. But Miss Garville had said the film was important, so of course as a sensible and mature student, Pam watched it with seriousness, not giggling like some of the class.

On the train back to Belmore, Pam nestled up to her mother. She was excited by what she had seen, and wanted to ask more questions, find out more about all these new words: sperm, ovulate.

"Mum, what do you think they meant about flushing the egg away? Can you see it?" She could feel herself blushing a little.

"I wouldn't know," said Nita. "No good asking me. You probably know more than I do now."

Pam's brow creased. How could that be? Her mother had just seen the film, the only parent to take up the opportunity. Pam stared up, wondering if she had asked the wrong question, but her mother's mouth was set. She remembered standing outside her parents' door one morning. Frank was panting. Nita was saying "No! No, Frank, not now!" There was the same sound in her voice. That was it then. No more questions.

Few girls had parents who talked openly, as we have all done so self-consciously with our own children. Were there particular pressures for privacy in the multi-generational families in which so many lived during and after the war? Did the men being away make some women more conscious of the importance of respectability? Australian historian Marilyn Lake has described these years as crucial in developing new views on female sexuality.

Yet even when a teacher like Miss Woodcock demonstrated such open-mindedness, it was not carried through into high school. There we were given a badly written pamphlet at the

end of our first year. Sally, Wendy and Jane Wondered *why Jane's sister was unable to go in swimming. There was no real attempt to give us any guidance about menstruation, no information about sex. We were flung back into our own reading to try and find out about life and relationships.*

Pam lay on her stomach, her fingers jammed over her mouth. The rough burgundy feltex on the floor of her bedroom scratched her bare legs. She heard Nita calling them to dinner. She wrapped *Peyton Place* in a scarf and hid it in a corner under her bed, near the wall.

Jill had lent her the book, covered in brown paper, the day before. They all knew about it at school. It had been discussed in newspapers, analysed on radio. A shocking story, the outline of a young girl's sexual awakening in small town America.

At assembly the week before, a senior girl had been brought to the front of the school, having been found reading *Peyton Place* in German class. The Headmistress made her views clear.

"This is a book which I believe is deeply unsuitable for any girl in this school to read. Now while I cannot control what you are permitted to do at home, I can in these buildings. Any copy of this book will be confiscated immediately and the girl responsible suspended from class for the duration of the week."

There was a collective sigh from the school. Severe punishment indeed.

Pam did not talk much during dinner and the washing up that followed.

"Your head's in the clouds, my lady," said Nita, handing her the final cup to dry.

"I've got some reading to finish," Pam said as she hung the tea towel over the rack. "It's a Walter Scott book about the Crusades, a little hard to get through and I'm behind."

She backed away from more questions, to her bedroom and onto the floor. She opened *The Talisman,* just in case of an unexpected knock, then pulled *Peyton Place* out of its hiding place. Tomorrow morning she would worry about how to conceal it in the house, since she knew her mother cleaned and vacuumed her bedroom every day. But she couldn't risk taking it back to school until the moment she could transfer it from her own case to Jill's at the bus-stop. Perhaps since it wasn't ironing day she could smuggle it to the bottom of her drawer of underclothes.

More important to get it finished. It really wasn't a fabulous book, but there were some clear descriptions of things she did not know. She was stirred by words like fumble, fondle, stroke. Not that she understood some of the descriptions. It seemed as if even now that she was thirteen she was only told about certain things. Other things seemed shameful and nasty, not to be spoken about.

So many rules at her school had to do with controlling the girls from mixing with boys. Pam knew no boys, except for her little brother Brian. There was an amorphous mass of them across the wire fence in Sydney Boys' High, but they did not seem individuals. The girls were forbidden to speak to them while wearing school uniforms. That rule always brought a few snickers when it was read out at assemblies. But in fact most girls didn't.

The girls came out of school in the afternoons five minutes after the boys, hats jammed down upon their heads, heavy school cases tugging down brown-gloved hands. The school buses, no matter what direction they were going in, called first at the boys' school. The boys clambered in, roughly shoving. Usually they went to the top deck of the bus, well out of the way, and the bus conductor stood guard at the bottom of the stairs. One minute later the bus pulled up outside the girls' school and Pam and her friends politely filed into the bottom deck, consciously trying to ignore the boys upstairs, the watchful eyes of prefects ensuring that they focused attention only on their classmates.

She had heard that the bus that took people to Elizabeth Bay was transformed after it turned into Bayswater Road, when the conductor alighted. Then, the rumour went, boys and girls clambered out of their seats, the girls rushed upstairs and for the rest of the journey they sat in couples, girls and boys, talking, giggling, flirting.

When I was twelve years old and had started to go to high school, I actually knew no boys. My weekends were totally bound up with my mother. At elocution, my little brother seemed to be the only boy who learnt from Mrs Goldstone. I had three boy cousins but they lived at West Ryde. My godfather had sons but they were miles away at Parramatta. Once when we were visiting, the boys had shouted at other boys over the fence. "Kings' boys are queens," they'd yelled. I did not know what they meant, but the general atmosphere made me feel anxious, as if this household of three boys was foreign to me. They wore dark blue shirts for their school uniform, which to me at the time looked vulgar. I could not imagine myself having anything to say to such rough boys. Nice girls didn't.

Pam found that books excited and stimulated her with images of romance and passion. She read and re-read *Wuthering Heights,* breathing hard.

> He got on the bed, and wrenched open the lattice, bursting, as he pulled at it, into an uncontrollable passion of tears.
>
> "Come in! come in!" he sobbed. "Cathy, do come! Oh! do - *once* more! Oh! my heart's darling! hear me *this* time, Catherine, at last!"

By the age of fifteen, she found books with modern heroes. She was stirred by words like thrust, power, loins. Faulkner's heroes carried the violence of the Deep South. In Tennessee Williams' *Streetcar Named Desire,* Stanley, with brooding menace, pulled Blanche out of her bedroom and made her kiss him, forced her to admit she was attracted to him. Hemingway wrote of war, in exotic places, France or Spain, with heroes who drank, but not the way her father drank. They were bitter and sad, but she couldn't imagine them hitting their wives or peeing in their trousers in the backyard. They were strong when drunk and watched bull-fights. They wouldn't be like her father, who last week had stumbled in when she was lying reading on the floor by the paraffin heater and started stroking her bottom. Pam shuddered thinking of it. He was saying "Nita, Nita." He was so drunk he didn't know who she was. Pam had curled up, silent, feeling ill.

Many girls cut out photographs of their heroes and stuck them in clear plastic sections in wallets, pin-ups of their favourite stars and singers, Elvis Presley with his dark burning eyes and casual lick of hair and dimple, Johnny O'Keefe an Australian rock star, who sang at Stone's milk bar in Coogee, even Johnny Ray, an emotional crooner. Some girls even included photographs of boyfriends and became the objects of teasing.

"Come on Rosey, who do you have?" Lorraine tried to pull out Rosemary's wallet. Lorraine, lively, attractive, with dark eyes, short dark hair in a fringe, sun-browned, was flushed. Would Rosemary have a photo of Rick from the rowing team who had asked her to the boys' formal? Pam knew that if Rosemary had a small photograph of her boyfriend, she would squeal, roll her eyes, clutch a girlfriend, blush furiously and pull the wallet shut. "Don't look!" she would say, but that was exactly what she was hoping everyone would do.

Pam too had a wallet with a collection of heroes, four photographs, cut out of fan magazines or the *Women's Weekly*. She blushed when her wallet fell open.

"Oh, don't look," she said, closing it quickly, slipping it back into her blazer pocket.

But, in fact, she felt quite proud when Rosemary grabbed it, crying "Let's see, let's see, who does Pam fancy?"

They were after all a distinctive set of photographs. First of all, James Dean, young, beautiful, dead, whom they all adored. In *Rebel without a Cause* he acted out the rebellion

of a generation against parents and teachers and they turned this around in their minds, tested its applicability. Pam had in fact pasted seventy photos of James Dean into a black album but did not want to show it to any of her friends at school. That seemed too corny, not like reading poetry in the playground or directing her class's performance of the last act of *Twelfth Nigh*t. She concealed it as well from Nita, teetering awkwardly to hide it on top of the wardrobe. It would seem as common as reading comics. Frank would be furious, likely to flare out and slap her on the back of her legs. "What bloody nonsense is this, Pam? Is it for this that we're keeping you at school!"

Next was Marlon Brando, another rebel, another soft but resentful face. As Stanley Kowalski, his sheer physical power could overwhelm Pam, although she could resist, pretend to be unattracted. Both Brando and Dean were Method actors, a term Pam had read in the prefaces of *Modern American Plays.* Teachers like Lee Strasberg wanted actors to draw on their own feeling and emotion, their lived experience. Pam worried that she was too shallow, too well-brought up. How fortunate were actors like Charlie Chaplin, from the streets of London, fighting their way into the acting business. Pam would fantasise: she would get away from Australia, to the black and white horrors of New York and fill her life with Experiences to draw on for the Method.

Her third photo was Laurence Olivier, handsome, married to Vivien Leigh, who was Blanche to Marlon Brando's Stanley. He therefore must be strong and masculine. On screen he had played Heathcliff, the passionate outsider of *Wuthering Heights* and Mr. Darcy, detached lover of Miss Elizabeth Bennett in *Pride and Prejudice,* two books which Pam loved. He was not just a sex symbol, she thought (be still her heart), but an actor-director.

Finally Pam had carefully cut from the *Women's Weekly* a photograph of Somerset Maugham, old, in a wheelchair. There was something deeply attractive to her about the lines of his brow and the world-weary cynicism of his writing. He was an experimenter, had lived beyond the edge, had even been a spy in exotic South-East Asia. Yet the photograph had come from an article about his villa in the South of France, in exquisite taste, Pam thought, walls and curtains white, antiques, books everywhere. And Maugham had gained this not from trade, but from his writing.

So she smirked a little when her wallet fell open at that spot. It symbolised her difference from her friends. They all squealed about James Dean and Marlon. Rosemary's nose wrinkled as she looked at the Somerset Maugham photo. "Who's this old bloke? Your grandfather?" She nudged Lorraine. Really, Pam was a bit queer. Pam picked it up quietly. No callow youth from the Sydney High rowing team could compare with these. But they were so far away. Somehow Pam would get there. To America, to Europe, to England in particular, and meet men of sophistication and intelligence there.

During the year of her Intermediate, Pam watched around her as more and more of her year talked about going to dances or parties or each Saturday to the movies at the Rose Bay

Wintergarden. Pam didn't. It was a long way from Kingsford on buses. And Nita was concerned that Pam would come to harm, travelling long distances by herself and going into movie theatres with no supervision. "You're only fifteen, Pam, I don't see why you should be rushing all around town by yourself." Sometimes Pam would have an elocution lesson and then go to the movies in town with Nita and Brian.

One Monday towards the end of that year, the whole class stared as Lorraine came in. She was completely shaven, her legs, her arms, even her eyebrows. Her thick hair looked rather strange amidst this bareness. The whispers went round the class during the morning. On the Saturday Lorraine had gone into the back row of the Wintergarden. It was obviously connected with a boy. Some girls knew his name. Pam found it hard to comprehend. But clearly there was some connection between the movie theatre back row, boys and shaving all the hair off your legs. And when a few weeks later Lorraine left the school just after finishing her Intermediate, and Rosemary as well, Pam realised that paying too much attention to boys meant that you lost your ambition to use your brains, to go on to further study. Pam was becoming more friendly with quiet, thoughtful Joan.

I became aware of changes in my classmates when girls began to group together at recess and laugh over things that had happened at the weekend. Some bolder ones would stand on the slight rise to the left of the back playground and look over the distant fence to where the boys were having their recess. An area of ten yards on each side of the fence was kept clear, presumably to protect us from this strange giggling infection.

Girls began to talk about boys, and dances, particularly Fellowship dances. Girls and boys, I understood, went to Fellowship if they were in the Church of England or Presbyterian to read things about Christianity and then play some games. Or dance. Or even just talk a bit.

Now I was not interested in Christianity. It was clear that the shadowy people who darted into the school on Wednesday morning to teach Protestant religions were the most boring one could see. But it would be nice to go along and meet some people of my own age. But what could I say to my mother? I couldn't say I wanted to go to Fellowship. She had never shown any interest in religion, other than her opposition to Catholicism. And it would be degrading, I thought, to say that I wanted to go just because I wanted to meet some boys. She would look at me askance. It wasn't for that that I had been given these brains. And my father would be furious.

After Christmas in 1956, when Pam had just finished the Intermediate, the whole family went on holidays at the Entrance with Nita's brother and his family. Pam lay on the beach reading her novels, but this year she spent more time gazing out to sea, thinking of herself acting out some of the scenes in the novels. Her cousin Leonie was leaving school, going to work in a bank. Pam thought Leonie had become rather silly and she did not like Leonie's school friends whose parents had rented a house nearby.

Leonie and her friends were going to a teenage dance at the Catholic church hall and Nita and Frank allowed Pam to go. She wore a sundress, sandals and just a trace of Nita's lipstick.

The hall was hot and crowded. Pam was puffing after a round of progressive barn dances. She became aware of a thick pair of legs, in blue cotton, in front of her. It was one of her barn dance partners, the slow-speaking son of a mayor in a small town. She blushed.

"Do ya wanta come outside and have a lemonade?"

Pam nodded, looking around to see if anyone was noticing.

The church mothers were selling chips, chocolates and drinks in a crowded corner of the hallway.

The boy (what was his name? Jeff?) stared down at her.

"Ya wanta wait? We could go over to the milk-bar opposite."

Pam knew she wasn't supposed to leave the hall, but if Leonie hadn't seen her? She nodded again.

The lemonade was cool and fizzy. Pam gasped as the bubbles hit the back of her nose. She wasn't used to drinking bought drinks, just milk and water and her mother's passionfruit squash. She swallowed hard. She had to say something soon, he would think she was stupid.

"Are you going on to your Leaving, then?" she blurted out. "What subjects are you doing?" How dopey she was, she didn't even know how old he was. He was very tall, perhaps he was sixteen or even seventeen.

"Not me, mate, no way. I'm not much of a one for ed-ju-kation. I left last year, soon as I was fourteen. I've been helping my dad in the carting business."

Pam swallowed heavily. Not even the Intermediate! She stared sideways up at him. He was quite good-looking really. Light blue eyes. His neck, however, was thick and his brow was very narrow. Strong, silent. In fact he did look a little like Marlon Brando, like Stanley in *Streetcar Named Desire*. She tried to imagine him in a white singlet.

"Hey, they've all gone back in over there. What say we go for a walk on the beach?"

Pam gulped. What could she say? If she just went back inside ... she would never know what happened except in books. And he <u>was</u> good-looking.

The track to the beach went down beside the milk-bar. Pam tripped behind Jeff's bulk, asking more about the town he lived in (far to the west), what he read (not much), did he have sisters or brothers (one of each). Suddenly just before the beach, he pulled her into a section of trees.

"Jeez, you talk a lot, don't you?"

Pam giggled for a second, then his mouth, seeming enormous, pressed down on hers. While she gasped, he dragged her on to the sand. It scratched her neck but the kiss was wonderful. She drew in her breath. Like Hemingway. Little rabbit, little rabbit. Her body was throbbing. Was this passion? Was she scared?

His hands, large like the rest of him, were fumbling her bra aside. Oh God, he'd feel how little her breasts were. She pushed against him, squeezing her body out. He was squashing her. Another hand was fumbling around her bare legs, fumbling upwards.

"No, no, don't!" She felt as if she was a small bird striking ineffectually against a great column. "Don't you think we should get to know each other a bit more?"

"What's the matter with ya. Scared? Jeez, have you never done it? Hey hang on, stay."

"No, no, it's just ... I've got to get back to my cousin. Look, I'll see you on the beach tomorrow."

She jumped to her feet, brushing gum leaves out of her hair, feeling her back for scratches. Then she was running back up the stairs from the beach. What would they say when they

saw her? It was so embarrassing, her cheek, her mouth felt huge and bruised. But it had been stirring. And he must be attracted to her, so violent, such an outburst of feeling.

The dancers were beginning to mill outside the hall as she reached the top of the stairs. She pulled her bra strap up and ran quickly over as the lights were dimmed.

"What happened to you? Where were you?" Leonie stared at her curiously.

"Oh I had a lemonade and then I've just had to go to the toilet," Pam breathed out.

"I thought you went off with that urger, Jeff. Did he try anything on you, the old hot pants? Margot had to push him off yesterday on the beach at lunchtime. He thinks we're all only wanting one thing."

Pam stared. How could Leonie talk so casually about it? And was he ready to go for anything? So what did that make her? Certainly she didn't want to be associated with that dilly Margot.

"Oh no, I couldn't be bothered with anyone like that!

Margot nudged Leonie, staring at Pam's red cheeks.

"And we've really got to get home now, I've got to get some sleep," Pam stuttered. As they walked the long road to their rented cottage, she said to Leonie, "I won't come down to the beach tomorrow, I've got to do a bit of reading for next year's school."

She just couldn't discuss it with Leonie and Margot. They'd left school, she had nothing in common with them, they would be the sort of girls who'd get married young. But just wait till she got back to school. She would not mention it to Joan, but she could tell Jill about this experience, her affair on the beach with a passionate, monosyllabic man. She would describe how he had fondled her breasts, sucking them up between his teeth until she felt her body was going to burst, so intense was the sense of juice building there.

After we had finished the Intermediate, when we were fifteen, it became more accepted that we should meet boys under certain circumstances. There were Friday night monthly dances organised at Sydney Boys' High, strictly monitored by the fathers from the Parents' and Citizens', who would occasionally walk around the grounds outside the hall with large

flashing torches. Imagine anyone being so crass as to go outside with a boy from a dance, I thought, and risk having a harsh light flashing on you as you were kissing.

We were taught the rudiments of dancing. Nothing unusual. And certainly nothing sensible like encouraging the boys' school to learn with us. As dances at that time were based on couples holding each other, that would never have done. The rumour said that the boys learnt to dance holding chairs, explaining why they held us so far away. We learned to dance in consecutive pairs, each girl partnered with the next shortest. I turned out to be the second shortest girl in the class and hence only learned the boy's movements.

We learnt four dances in the bare wooden gymnasium: Pride of Erin, Gypsy Two Step, Waltz and La Bamba. They were all learnt to the rhythm of a teacher muttering a one-two-three-four beat, and then at the very last we heard music on an old scratchy gramophone. I remember only that the La Bamba was danced to Caterine Valente singing Jealousy*. One-two-three, swoop and turn.*

We gathered at each others' houses, though never at mine as my father was too unpredictable. We spent hours washing and curling our hair. We put on tight elasticised girdles to pull in our tiny stomachs, fastened our new bras. I sometimes stuffed cotton wool in them so the bra had something to hold onto. We then dressed: a flowered frock with a tight cummerbund around the waist in summer, a straight tweed skirt, with a white orlon cardigan buttoned up the back in winter.

In doing all this I would sometimes feel overcome with embarrassment. Why was I doing this? This was not going to be the place for me to meet my distinctive, sophisticated, adored one. I was not likely to meet a man steeped in literature and philosophy who would be able to look past my boring appearance, my orlon cardigan and padded bra, to my fine eyes and my deep mind.

The most common dance was a Barn Dance, when you moved around the floor from partner to partner. It gave you no time to make an impression on the person you were dancing with. And that was all that I wanted to do. What I wanted to indicate through my conversation was how intelligent, unusual and, yes, distinctive I was. So I thought long and hard about my brief moments of conversation in the Barn Dance. Quick and distinctive: "I'm mad about mainstream jazz, aren't you?" I had actually not heard any jazz, but I knew it was something that cool people, heroes of Hemingway novels, discussed. Or "Do you like cricket? I went over to the Test after school the other day and saw Keith Miller take those three wickets. My father's a Member, you see," indicating that I lived a rich and exotic life.

If I was asked for a longer dance, say a waltz, there was not much opportunity to indicate the fineness of my mind. Most young men wanted to jam their chin on my shoulder and move around slowly. But I was away as soon as we stepped together: "What do you do (until I

read this was a boring conversation starter); what have you read; do you play chess; music; cricket. Do you like painting, poetry, the Beat generation, films?" Words were my protection, my fan of attraction, my repellent.

The fifth year farewell at the end of school was an approved place to meet boys. A lunch for all the girls in their last year and their teachers, served by the prefects from the year below, time for photographs and then in the evening, a special school dance with boys from the boys' school.

Pam had been worried about what to wear but had gone with her friend Joan to a shop in Oxford Street and there found a lovely fabric - pale pink cotton with a sheen that looked like satin, a pattern of black abstract flowers all over it. Nita, who thought the fabric too grown-up, with the black, had made it into a v-necked frock, sleeveless, with a full skirt which belled out over petticoats.

Teachers supervised the Fifth Year Dance and Pam found herself swept up in the emotion of leaving a school where she had been for five years. She and Joan sat upstairs in the gallery with their favourite English teacher, watching as their classmates tripped through a Pride of Erin. Everyone looked different, almost glamorous in their special frocks.

"Now, don't let me keep you," Mrs Giles rolled her eyes. "You young ladies must go and have some flirtation before the end of the night."

As they pattered down the stairs, Pam found her way stopped. She had met a couple of boy prefects during debating competitions and at a luncheon for the prefects of both schools. One of these, Ken, she thought, asked her to join him for a waltz. A tall boy, not a sportsman, with a cadaverous face. He studied history, she remembered.

He danced rather well. In a corner of her mind she became Mrs Giles, looking down. Ah there was her best student, the clever Pam Watson, with her fine eyes and intelligent brow. Look how gracefully she swept onto the floor with that interesting young man, the light glowing from the soft pink sheen of her swaying skirts, her fine eyes flashing, like Elizabeth Bennett's. "Oh indeed sir, and pray why would you make such a statement!"

"Did you say something?" Ken asked.

"No," Pam blushed, "just mumbling the words of the song."

He asked it he could see her home on the bus. He lived further out, by the bay. He was going to study law.

They paused by the squeaking gate at the bottom of her stairs. "Sorry, I won't ask you in," whispered Pam. "My father can be a bit funny late at night."

He bent low and awkwardly pecked her cheek. Pam waved as she opened her front door. Well, he wasn't fantastic looking, but he was interesting at least. Next week, hesitant, she rang and asked him to come to the girls' school formal.

"It's just proving such an expense, all these dresses for your end of term things and the black skirts for your shop job." Nita shook her head. "What to get you for a formal dress, I don't know. Fabric's so expensive when it's not on sale."

She was smiling when Pam came back from her French exam.

"I've had a brainwave," she drew out a froth of green net. "Here's an old ball gown of mine. It's beautiful, like wattle it always seemed to me, with this full green skirt of double net, and the overskirt in golden flowered lace. You're much the same shape, so I'll just have to remake the sleeves into today's fashion, and take off the bustles."

Pam stared. It was certainly wide. But it would look so different from the other girls. Some had brought patterns into school. They were planning straight satin skirts with lacy tops or even new A-line dresses. But in this she could swirl. And Ken could waltz.

The formal at a local town hall involved big tables of girls of the school and their partners. Frank accompanied her in on the bus and walked her along Oxford Street. She kissed him quickly on the cheek when she saw Ken in a crowd of other boys waiting on the pavement. "There's my friends, Dad, I'll not be late," she said, waving him back towards Taylor Square. She pulled the waist of her dress down. The net was harsh, scratching her legs through her stockings. She wished her mother had got her another dress. It might remind her mother of wattle, but she felt as if she was sprouting prickles.

Their table of school leavers was merry but Pam felt distant and awkward. Ken was silent and absorbed, livening up every now and again to joke with one of the other boys at the table. Pam felt no real stirring when she looked at him. His face was thin and his cheeks hollow. Perhaps he was missing some teeth at the back of his mouth. She was embarrassed to admit that her whole body shivered when she saw the school vice-captain move onto the dance floor. He looked rakish, a lock of blond hair, a broad grin. He was jiving. What could a girl like her see in someone like him? He was a surfer, a rower, played

cricket and football. He wasn't even in the A class. She had tried to talk to him at the prefects' lunch, but he gazed miles over her head. How could she feel so wobbly when she looked at him? He had come to the dance with a skinny little surfer girl from third year, with dyed blond hair. They were both common.

During the last dance, Ken said, "Look, I won't take you home. I'll go into town and get the train. I don't think it's any point pretending that we've got anything going. I've been seeing someone else, a girl from Fellowship. Anyway, she's decided to come across - and well, you know ..."

Pam's face was scarlet when she returned to the table and headed off to the toilet.

"Are you OK?" Jill Slatter followed her. "Would you like to get a taxi with me and Steve?"

Pam was not going to accept. How could she let someone like Jill know she was upset. Anyway, she wasn't. He wasn't a true love. That would be someone really special. And until then, she wasn't going to giggle or moan to other girls about how wonderful or how stupid her boyfriends were. Particularly not to Jill and her boyfriend with his crew-cut. She stared into the spotty mirror with her fine eyes.

"I'm fine. I was never going home with Ken. He was just my partner for the dance. I have money for a taxi, to meet my parents, oh, quite soon now."

The sobs began in the taxi, but Pam told herself it was only because it was degrading and because she would have to wake Nita up to pay the taxi-driver. If she behaved in a dignified way, no-one would ever know. And she would just hope that she would beat all of them in the exams.

University was the first time I had ever consistently spent time in the company of young men. It was the same for most of my friends. We had all been brought up in single-sex schools and in a society which did not provide easy ways to meet and become friends with the opposite sex. Mind you, I think my upbringing was more dysfunctional than most. My close identification with my mother, my fear of my father's violence, did not provide me with many examples of how to relate easily to others. In fact, while I did become friendly with young men in my first year at university, around honi soit *and the drama societies, my major circle of friends was female. Eight of us were so constantly in each other's company that we became known as The Octopus. I suspect this gave us the strength in numbers needed to get fully involved in the creative set.*

Lesley Johnson suggests that in the 1950s there was great emphasis on the management of heterosexual desires. Young women were expected to be responsible. Even if they were not under parental control, they had to be able to control desires for the 'proper purpose'.

The major concern of the 1950s and very early 1960s was how to do It without becoming pregnant. Abortion was still illegal, a criminal offence. One friend died, another had a baby and had it adopted. There were other practical problems. Most students still lived at home under parental control, residential colleges were strictly policed. There were a couple of group houses, set up by friends who had become linked to the Push, both in Annandale, but that was later in our University lives. Some older students had rented flats, in the Cross, Glebe, Randwick. Not many students had cars.

For me, however, the major concern was how to avoid becoming involved with a young man. I was absurdly frightened that this might constrain me, tie me down, involve me with someone who might prove to be unworthy and let me down. I enjoyed the freedom this provided, the flirtations I could have with other actors around revue and the newspaper. My friends in couples deferred to their boyfriends, typed essays. It was with a shock that I woke up in Third Year to realise that there were not many other virgins around, that I was among the few young women in my circle who was still on my own.

Pam vomited into the bushes by the side of the drive. She grabbed the hand of the young man beside her. It was so embarrassing. How could she have got so sick? Surely she hadn't had that much thick claret.

"This is so embarrassing," she said, "I usually don't get like this."

Let that be, she thought. He needn't know that I often wipe myself out at parties, dancing, shrieking at jokes, telling stories, kissing in the side stairways, often being sick, but usually after drinking a great deal more. Such behaviour didn't quite go with this early evening garden on the Upper North Shore, home of one of the English Honours class, parents handily away on holidays at the time of their last exam. And it certainly didn't go with thoughtful Edmond.

Edmond had been in the English Honours class for the last two years. Tall, with a shock of red hair, he was an eye-catching figure. And more so for the fact that until just three months ago he had been in a priest's uniform, high dark surplice, curved collar.

He had taken part energetically in discussions, been caught up in enthusiasm for the Romantic poets and done a brilliant essay earlier this year on Donne. As the group of students debated with passion the banning of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and arranged to borrow the increasingly tattered copy which had been smuggled back by Chris from St Paul's

Anglican College after an overseas trip with the Debating Society, Edmond grew quieter, frowned more. And then in August he had appeared without his clerical collar, looking somewhat more flushed than usual.

Pam had seen him around with a plump girl from the Newman Society. She had talked and chatted with him after some classes and noticed that he had adopted a charming old-world courtliness towards women. One hot day she had worn into university the black and pink flowered dress she had worn at her school leaving dance. Fashion was becoming freer, she felt she could wear something in a shiny fabric even during the day, and with its thin straps it looked a little like a sundress. Edmond had stood back from the stairway up from the Quad and bowed low. "Doesn't she look like the spirit of spring," he had said to her actor friend Arthur, blushing almost as red as his hair.

Of course he liked her. And she was fascinated by his cleverness, his good looks, even if the thought of the Catholic Church connection chilled her. And here she was vomiting on his shoe.

"I'm so sorry," she breathed hard. "I don't know what you must think of me."

"You must know what I think of you," he blurted, "I think you're absolutely wonderful. You're the most fascinating person I've come across. Look at how involved you are in the theatre scene and everything. You know so many interesting people at university."

And suddenly his mouth, moist, loose, was on her mouth and Pam was drawn forward into his embrace.

That evening drifted by for Pam, as they lay in a corner of the large lounge, listening to the recording of Bernstein's *Candide* they all loved. Crowds of their friends poured through the house, exams over, some planning on long holidays up the coast, others about to start money-making jobs in downtown shops or government offices. Pam was going back to work as a clerk at the Education Department, through a contact of her father's before starting final Honours the following year. Fred from SUDS was energetically trying to interest people in a play for children over the school holidays. "Come on, it'd be fun. We could do *Blinky Bill*. We'd make heaps, pack them in." Her long hair flailing over her shoulder, Pam jived to the insistent rhythm of a blues record, grabbing Edmond and pulling him into the throng, his awkwardness concealed in the crowd. They kissed again and again, holding each other in the dark corner.

Cries from the kitchen had them all rushing forward. Susi from the year below, who had been having an affair with bearded Geoff, director of SUDS latest French absurdist play, had climbed into the washing machine. "Turn it on," she moaned, her mouth broad with laughter,

"I must be cleansed, I must be cleansed. I have sinned." Someone poured a glass of beer over her head. Rhoisin was regaling the crowd with her story of leaving Bruce from *honi soit* naked in the corridor outside her flat in Oxford Street, still dripping from showering in the flat opposite. "He fucking thought he was onto a sure thing," she shrieked. "Deirdre from opposite and I were rolling around on the couch looking out the glass door and he was panting like a little dog!" Pam saw Edmond wince at the words. He really wasn't used to these scenes.

At about three, six or seven of them headed out to cram into Piers' small car for the journey back down to the city. Lecherous Polish Tom, who had made such a play for Phila the year before, was passed out on the path, trousers down. Phila, giggling, picked daisies and clover from the lawn and her boyfriend Alan twined them around his drooping penis. Pam, blushing a little, chanted "Forgetmenots in the man-hair. Here be a little gift for thy John Thomas." As she climbed onto Edmond's knee, Pam whispered, "Bet you're impressed by our passionate adoption of Lawrentian principles." They laughed, hands intertwining, kissing again.

Edmond lived in the Catholic men's college. Next day, Pam met him at the Union, and they wandered in the warm sun across to the Oval outside Andrew's College. They lay under the trees, white clad figures quietly moving around the grounds. Pam let the waves of desire wash her, not drawing back as she usually did, falling, falling. He was going back to his parents' house in Queensland in a day or so.

They drank beer at the Lalla Rookh in Newtown, Pam staying away from the gang at the Forest Lodge. Someone would be bound to tease them. Late in the afternoon, she crept behind him along St John's corridor. Smell of thick polish on the stair rails, creaky linoleum underfoot.

A narrow bed, white sheets. Outside it was almost dark. Pam fell towards him and drew him onto the bed, pulling down her slip, wriggling out of her step-ins and attached stockings. She tried to conceal the step-ins, an inappropriately bright American Beauty pink. They rolled together on the bed, hips grinding. She felt a thrusting, pain, a rush of hot fluid.

"I'm sorry, I had no idea," he held her tightly, lying still, hand drawing though her tangled hair. "You just always seemed to have so many chaps around." His heart pounded as he drew Pam to him.

Pam was still slightly smarting, but tingling as well. So that was it. "It was great," she muttered in his ear, "Please don't worry. I mean, I just never really wanted to go the whole way before." It's almost happened so many times, she thought, and now it has, and shouldn't I feel more?

He cried the next time, when he came abruptly just as they made a steady rhythm, then stopped suddenly, disturbed by creaking in the corridor outside. Pam drew his head onto her shoulder and felt her heart spill at the stiff beauty of his red hair, the awkwardness of his stammering emotion.

He checked the corridors and corners urgently as they left, and Pam shadowed him quietly until they reached the open air and could embrace again in the stiff hedge around the building. Opposite was a wine bar, where folk singers gathered later, and they pooled funds to share a dish of garlic prawns and two glasses of thick red wine, while in the corner a woman sang softly over her guitar, "Come down, come down Mary Hamilton, and won't you lie with me."

On the next day, Edmond borrowed a car from another boy from the college. In the dark they drove to South Head and sat at the Gap, where a full moon laid out a path across the water. There were dark corners near the Army reserve and they coupled urgently, Edmond pulling on a condom awkwardly under the steering wheel. As they drove back to Kingsford, Pam lay with her head under the wheel, his soft tumescence grazing her cheek. She ran her hand down his leg. They stopped again in a dead-end near the oval where the Randwick Council travelling library came each Tuesday. He was catching the train to Brisbane next day.

Thick letters arrived over the Christmas period. His handwriting was distinctive, thick and sloping, in bright blue ink. Pam tried to intercept Lenny, the wall-eyed postman. She really didn't want Nita getting suspicious. She wrote back awkwardly. Her handwriting was untidy and she found she could not make quick-witted jokes on paper. She sent an occasional card, a Chagall print, or a Miro, bought in Rowe Street at lunch time. By January, they were in the full swing of rehearsals and performances of *Blinky Bill*, and there wasn't a lot of time. They were an amusing group of people doing it, and there were some good parties after, more of them with the Push from the Royal George and the Newcastle. Robbi, a lively soprano in the cast, had moved into a group house in Camperdown with three other girls from the women's college and Pam sometimes stayed there after the show. Robbi had started a scene with enigmatic and witty Cleaver, who wrote revue scripts. There had been a peculiar party in December when a crowd of boys from the men's colleges had come down to drive away the Push men who were seducing their women. In the dark outside the large house they stood around awkwardly, in their moleskins and Harris tweed jackets. Piers and Fred had negotiated, indicated that the girls didn't want rescuing. The dark-shirted party crowd roared with laughter.

Edmond's results were extraordinarily good, topping English, Latin and Ancient History. Surprisingly Pam had got a distinction in English. Well, she would do Honours in it, not Modern History, next year. If only she weren't on the bond. The Honours year would double what she owed.

Edmond's next letter was relatively short. He had got a scholarship to an American Catholic University. He was going to come down and see Pam. She met him at the station and they went to the cafe there. Metal tea-pots clashed in the background. They kissed. Pam was surprised at how red his face was. He'd been in the sun, up in Queensland. She hadn't seen much of it this summer. He wanted to talk, earnestly, about what they should do. Pam found herself drawing back. There was no doubt that he would go to the States and term there was already underway. A charity would pay his airfare.

There's no way I'd ever get the money to go and see him, she thought. Besides, he is very serious. She smiled as she thought of Fred, her close friend from the acting scene. Son of a big legal family, with a dry sense of humour, a leading figure in their productions, he was unhappily studying law downtown and putting more energy into the theatre groups. They had found themselves kissing passionately at a party at Robbi's last week. Yet he never seemed to want to press her further, which Pam liked. Or liked until she feared that he might be more attracted to Robbi's wealthy friend Susan, Piers' cousin, with whom he had gone skiing, or with lively flirtatious Kathleen. Or Phila, whom everyone fancied.

She patted Edmond's hand. "Look, it's been fine," she said. "Just great. I've got a friend, Robbi, who's said we could use her room." Pam blushed as she wondered whether she was being too forward, but she could feel her insides straining towards him.

Edmond returned to Queensland the next day. Pam felt sad and cried a little when she sat with Phila and Kathleen at the pub. At least she had made the decision, not been dropped by him. She hated the thought of someone rejecting her, hurting her. He would probably write. She didn't know why she couldn't find someone to settle down with. But then, she wouldn't be keen on going out with someone like Alan. He didn't seem highly intelligent to Pam, yet Phila seemed happy with him most of the time. "I think Edmond was a bit boring for you though, Pam," Phila was waving at a greying philosopher, a friend of Rhoisin's who had just entered the pub. "You really need someone more artistic." Pam nodded. There were so many people around in their group of friends. And the last thing she wanted was to get tied down into a steady relationship. What if the person didn't match up to the liveliness of her group of friends? She might miss out on something, a party, a performance. They were all having so much fun as a crowd. They were taking *Blinky Bill* up to the Central Coast to perform at an RSL club. It'd give them all a beach holiday, staying in a house belonging to Fred's family. It would be a good laugh.

Judy Ogilvie suggests that in the 1950s there was greater freedom for women around the Push. My memory is that most of the women, able to choose their lovers, seemed strong and honest. Yet in the power circles of the group they seemed relatively marginalised, not really role models for me.

The increasing general availability of the contraceptive pill after 1963 solved the problems of unwanted conception, but did not make it any easier for girls, particularly those who had lived in ignorance, to establish satisfactory relationships. Penelope Nelson's memoir, Penny Dreadful*, documents the sexual hypocrisy of the period, the pressures to conform, the shame of being hounded by a rejected lover, the ignorant abuse of alcohol. She sees her generation, which is also mine, as a transitional one, between the conservative pre-war generation, the Iron Maidens, and the liberated baby boomers, with their access to contraception, radical political ideologies and resources. She notes that there were many casualties as the young women born between 1940 and 1945 tried to make sense of their lives.*

And that was particularly so when the circumstances began to change so rapidly. The Pill made it more difficult to extricate yourself. I had awkward evenings trying to repel the advances of university lecturers, the father of one of my boyfriends. I withdrew more in my anxiety. Where did we develop an understanding of what the new limits were?

Pam and Phila had arranged to meet at the pub, early in their first term of teaching. There was a farewell party that evening for some of the crowd going overseas. Phila's boyfriend Alan had gone overseas, for a couple of years' work, and over the summer she had been having an affair with the philosopher Grey Selmar. Phila, her long legs extended, watched the smoke rising from her cigarette. "I'm telling you, Pam, it's incredible. Fantastic," she said. "He's so great in bed. You can't believe some of the things we do."

Pam nodded. She had no idea what Phila could be referring to. Phila had been experimenting a bit, even before Alan's departure. She had raced off with a guy from Melbourne last year, when they had gone down to the Intervarsity Drama Festival. It wasn't as if she, Pam, was straitlaced. She was occasionally sleeping with boys from their group or blokes from the pub. Usually before they went away. It seemed simpler, not so complicated.

She still liked Fred, but then he was different. Sometimes they slept together, but it seemed more for companionship. He respected her, wasn't really interested in urging her to sleep with him. It was comfortable, though she sometimes wondered if he was more passionately interested in other more beautiful women, like Libby, who had done Architecture with her schoolfriend Joan, but transferred to Arts. Or Rhoisin, who suddenly appeared in the doorway of the beer-garden.

Rhoisin had been in Adelaide over the break. Now she was back, teaching Psychology at Sydney University. She strode into the pub, puffing on a cigarette, her light coat streaming behind her

She marched to their table, leant over, slapped Phila across the face, stinging.

"Just look at this woman, you bloody bitch." She was shouting to the pub at large. "You've been making a play for a year for my bloke, and as soon as I'm away, you can do it. Couldn't hold onto yours, eh? Where's Alan? Gone away. Why would he want to stay, you mealy-mouthed little bitch, butter wouldn't melt in your mouth. Did you drive him away? Just take a look at this Catholic bitch, into flagellation like all the saints! You come on to my bloke, swallowing him with that monstrous Mons Veneris," she turned to the rest of the pub. "Look at it, can you see this mound, straining against her skirt? They'd love to know what you get up to at the school! Get your filth away!"

Phila stood, flushing. "Get out of my way, you old slag," she said, grinding her butt under her foot. "He's able to make his own decision. Perhaps I give him something you can't."

Pam scuttled after her through the sudden patch of shade at the door and they headed across to the university. Pam sat on the floor in the Union toilets while Phila wept, washing her face, smearing on pancake makeup over the red blotch. "Bitch, bitch," muttered Phila, "but she's done herself more damage. Oh God, why do these traumas happen to me?"

Pam patted her. Traumas always seemed to happen to girls in relationships. Janice had got pregnant and married, Robbi had whispered that she had to have an abortion, sad Ruth, in love with Ian Periera, had committed suicide when he fell in love with someone else. It was complicated. And how to make decisions about what to do, where to go? Would Phila ever get married, now that she had got used to so much change in her relationships? Surely she, Pam, would one day. Yet it was so difficult to get involved with boys, still living at home, Frank rushing out to grab their attention, shout abuse at them, even once insisting on making Fred a steak at three o'clock in the morning, haranguing him about the war. She felt as if she was drowning in Phila's problems, unable to think of anything to say. Grey Selmar seemed so old, she couldn't work out what Phila could see in him. She thought of her friend Libby. She was so amusing, attractive, doing Honours now in Italian. She had no long-term boyfriend either. Might be better to spend a bit more time with her.

We talked so little about relationships. I was terrified of being involved with anybody that I might then have to rely on. I was unable to trust. Many of the men I was in love with have later come out gay. I don't think I knew in most of these cases; often, I suspect, neither did they. I was drawn to their gentleness and to a sense of not being owned. While outwardly scoffing at restrictions and conventions, I had in fact deeply internalised the repressed and forbidden nature of sex in the years after the second world war. It became disturbing only when I felt that I wasn't desirable because of a lack of sexual involvement. For the rest of the time, it was less complicated to sleep with men just before they went overseas.

Like my contemporary Les Murray, I fear that "I will live and die in colonial times". Growing up as a child and adolescent in Australia after the second world war was to grow up in a country which represented itself as a child or adolescent. Images of youth, striving, maturing, growing up, were common. As a child is focused on the adults around, we were consistently focused on the powerful nations overseas. We sought approval, asked the opinion of visitors, followed instructions. Now I am a passionate supporter of the new republican movement, which affirms our capacity as a nation to stand alone and independent.

Our chief model was England. From the time I could read, I was engrossed in a world of fairytales which told the adventures and loves of princes and princesses. British History at the time dominated the syllabus: it seemed extremely important to be able to recite a list of the kings (and two queens) of England or the names of King Henry VIII's wives, in order of marriage and, where apposite, death. It was a short step to transfer my fascination from these fairy tales to a living, breathing royal family.

Like thousands of others in Australia, I spent much time contemplating the doings of the royal family, not with the salacious enthusiasm for details of their romantic lives that marks today's popular press, but with a distant devotion that seems in memory to sit somewhere near my abdomen: it feels important and worshipful. Exactly why my feelings for the royal family should have taken on this significance is not clear. My mother's family were, after all, Irish and working class. One could assume they would have had some distance or cynicism about the matter of British royalty. But no. As well as the fact that they all called England 'home', although both my grandfather and grandmother were born in Sydney, they always referred to royalty with respect. My grandfather even kept a painting of Queen Victoria in a heavy frame in his shed down the back of the garden; it had been removed from the walls of the house after my grandmother had seen a scratch on the frame and condemned the item as damaged goods. Nonetheless both of them always referred to the painting, and to Victoria, as "The Old Queen, God bless her" as if this was her patronymic.

The headmistress Miss Macintosh came to the front, a tall woman with brown hair pulled tightly from her face and twisted into a bun. She wore a long skirt and floating cardigan she had knitted herself in a pale pink wool. She had others in mauve and apple green. Pam thought they were beautiful, particularly the skirts which were ribbed and tight, long columns falling straight from the loose cardigan.

Miss Macintosh gestured to the school, which fell silent as she could be fierce with children who did not obey. They chanted "I honour my God, I respect my King" and then in a rising crescendo, as one of the teachers pulled at the ropes and the fluttering colours rose up the flag-pole, "I salute my flag." A ragged verse of "God Save the King" followed, the teachers standing erect.

Then Miss Macintosh raised her hand. It was going to be a longer assembly than usual.

"I wanted to talk to you children about history," she said in her fading voice. "I imagine you think of it as something that happened a very long time ago."

Pam stared up at her fiercely. Nita had plaited her hair that day, pinned it across her head, with a red bow on top to hide the place where the uneven ends joined. The plaits pulling behind her ears, the pins jabbing into her scalp, did not explain the frown that creased her forehead and the cross looks she flashed at her classmates. She wanted to know more. Miss Macintosh never talked about things like this at assembly, big ideas like history. She talked about picking up rubbish and not shouting. Pam knew that she cared more about history than anyone else around. She read books, after all, more books than any other child in the school. She had written a long poem in rhyme about the founding of New Zealand which she had read about in the *Countries* book, and her teacher, Miss Folkes, said she did not have to come to lessons, but could sit outside, read for herself. Now she felt singled out. Miss Macintosh was surely speaking straight to her. Pam had to concentrate.

"To think that history is only in the past is a mistake. History is not something dead. It is a living thing. It is happening around us all the time." The headmistress's fingers gently pulled a piece of hair from in front of her eyes and patted it into her bun. "Can any boy or girl tell me something that will go down in history that happened today?"

There was absolute silence. Pam's stomach churned. She so wanted to think of something to say. Her teacher had made her class captain, she waited to do messages in front of Miss Macintosh's office, she was special. She must know the answer. But she had no idea of what had happened in the last couple of days, which could be called history and written up in the pages of books.

"No? Well, here is an example of history in the making. Queen Mary, the King's mother, turned eighty today. She is the oldest person in the Royal family. Think to yourselves, 'Here is living history'. Look around you for other things which make up history."

Queen Mary. Living History. Pam's heart shifted. She stopped listening. From photos she had seen in newspapers she disliked grim-faced and disapproving Queen Mary, her high neck blouses, her hair pulled up seamlessly into a straight squat hat, with a brooch on the front. Pam could not remember how she knew that it was called a toque. And how did she know that Queen Mary was also called the Dowager Queen?

From now on, she would take more notice of her. No matter how cross she looked, Queen Mary had been transformed to the significance of history. Pam stared back at the headmistress as she moved away from the dais. As a good student, she knew this was serious.

When she could afford it my mother bought the Women's Weekly*, which then as now featured numerous stories about the Royal family. I would press close to her and look intently at the photos and stories. I particularly remember the stories told by the governess Crawfie about the little princesses. It was as if the princesses were still the same age as me. Week after week, there were photos of the princesses with their hair shining and brushed, parted on the side as mine was, twisted into little curls, wearing small coats, with velvet trimming around the collar. Even though I knew that they had grown up and went to dances wearing low-cut strapless gowns (Margaret) or sat in stiff chairs nursing an ambiguous shape in woollen shawls that curved to the ground (Elizabeth with baby), in the pages of the* Weekly*, they were fixed in time. And the clothes that I wore, brown tweed coats, brown velvet trimming around the collar, little pleated skirts and tightly knitted cardigans, these were exactly the same as the ones they had once worn.*

The afternoon newspaper had a photo and huge headlines DEATH OF THE KING and the story said: "peacefully, no pain, in his sleep". Pam was swept up by the occasion. As if for a school project, she cut references to the King from newspapers and magazines, and glued them as carefully as she could into a scrap book, Perkins Paste all over her fingers. The headings she printed in Indian Ink, outlining the significance of the events, particularly the funeral with its catafalque - what a wonderful word to roll over her tongue.

In the following year Pam and Nita went early to Farmers for a sale of dress materials. As usual Pam persuaded her mother to leave her at the book section to browse while she dashed upstairs. This day, Pam's eye was caught by a large box, where Farmers were displaying a specially produced booklet about the forthcoming Coronation ceremony. Pam became engrossed, intensely flicking her way through the pages describing regalia, photographs of past Coronations, Buckingham Palace, Westminster Abbey, plans of seating and line drawings of the "gown likely to be worn by the young Queen".

Suddenly, Nita tapped her on the shoulder.

"Quick, quick we'll miss the train and I won't get dinner on in time. Come on, it took much longer upstairs than I thought. Get your nose out of that book."

Pam followed her rapidly out of the shop, still clutching the booklet.

"Hang on, Mum, wait for me." She grabbed Nita's skirt in the crowds of people rushing down the stairs to Town Hall station.

On the train, Pam squeezed into a corner and opened the book at the description of the orb. "The orb is one of the most sacred objects in the ceremony. A perfect sphere..."

"What have you got there, madam?" Nita's voice broke into her concentration.

"A book they were giving away at Farmers, Mum."

"Giving away? Let's see," her mother grabbed it from her hand. "What's this on the back?"

Pam's eyes went to the spot her mother indicated. "17/6," she stuttered. "But Mum, I didn't see it. Nobody said anything."

"Oh God, what have you done, look at it." Nita's lowered her voice, looking hastily around the crowded carriage. "What if anybody's seen you take it?"

"It was in a box, Mum, not on a shelf, perhaps they meant us to take it!" Pam's eyes filled with tears. It might be benison from the store, a giant Coronation sample bag. She sniffed quietly.

"17/6, eh," said Nita. "Just think of paying that for it. Look, only a soft cover on it."

Pam stroked the book. Soft cover or not, it was still a beautiful book. And had so much information.

The train clattered on. By the time it had reached Sydenham, it was obvious there was nobody following them. The thudding in Pam's heart calmed and she began to breathe more easily.

"Well, there's not much point taking it back, now that you've got it," Pam's mother declared. "Just count yourself a lucky one." She began to chuckle. "Well I thought you'd be the last one to get something for nothing, always living in a dream world, nose glued to the page."

Pam smiled back at her. She felt curiously justified by the theft. Her desire to know all about the coronation was so strong, the detail in this book so overpowering, that she felt that this invaluable document had come into her hands by destiny.

She opened it up again. "When the Queen takes the orb into her left hand assisted by the Usher of the Black Robe, and utters the words ..."

It's an odd connection, the Coronation, for my first successful piece of shop-lifting, not that that was a term we would use. But out-of-character events occur during periods of immense public emotion. And that is how I remember that time. Coronation excitement went all through the year. The cast of characters was always expanding and for an earnest autodidact there were names of ladies in waiting to learn, and their relationship to the Young Queen or her mother, correct gradations of the British nobility to assess (which is more senior, a Duke or a Lord). There was the wonder of the day itself, with the appearance of unexpected stars; Queen Salote of Tonga, an enormous mountain of a woman pouring out of her flimsy coach was a great topic of discussion. Finally at the end of 1952 there was the appearance of the full-colour film, narrated by Richard Dimbleby in rolling tones. It was shown appropriately at the State, Sydney's most splendid theatre, and the glitter of the State, its rolling red curtains, the magnificent Mighty Wurlitzer and the tapping terrazzo floor, are all still associated in my mind with this film.

The Royal Tour of 1954 marked the peak and the decline of my affair with royalty. I still had enormous enthusiasm for the arrival of the Queen. Like thousands of others we took a packed lunch and went early to town, to see the royal arrival and procession. I remember vividly the crowds of people and the pastel lemon of the Queen's dress, stiffly starched around her legs like the dressing up clothes of one of my dolls. In all, my family must have made seven trips to see the Queen.

But at school different forces were at work. It was my first year at high school, and along with every other school in the city we assembled at the Showground to view the Queen and wave flags. Our school, just over Moore Park from the Showground, was among the last to assemble but the wait, the heat, the lack of drinks, the boredom, all were beginning to stir the rebel and the cynic in us. And over the next few weeks, this reached a climax. The Sydney High Schools were on the road to the airport and as the royal couple drove back and forth to the airport in order to visit outlying areas, the classes of Sydney Boys and Sydney Girls were marched out to form loyal convoys. Not at the same time, that would lead to far too much uncontrollable behaviour, but boys came out one day, girls the next, all waving away on the verges of Anzac Parade. It was a wonderful opportunity to miss classes, but as we approached our seventh or eighth flag or handkerchief (not soiled) waving, even the most die-hard royalist must have ceased to worry about what pastel shade would be chosen by the Queen for her dress and matching hat that day.

My books on royalty, the scrap books were put away, the enthusiasm tempered. Nonetheless, those years of reverence had created in me a climate of conviction about the right of royalty to rule us. As I turned fourteen or fifteen, becoming adept as a polished public speaker, I was one of a group of girls entered by the school in the Royal Empire Society Public Speaking Competitions, each year preparing a short speech on a subject

linked to the British Commonwealth of Nations. In most of these, loyalty to the monarch featured prominently. As I pored through books of quotations, which we were instructed to use as the basis of any speech, strung together with a small thread of original commentary, I continued to be moved and swollen with belief, intoning after Winston Churchill "It is the golden circle of the crown which binds these disparate nations together". Even with the disappearance of the pink that had marked the dominance of England from the maps in our text books and the lessening of the rule in our hearts of the royal family, there had been instilled a sense that what was best had always been, that conservatism was somehow worthwhile, that it was best not to think originally.

Even when I had become cynical about the power of the royal family, I continued to be devoted to the country in which they lived. England was Home. It became the place of my imagination. The dusty streets of Erskineville, the long rows of identical houses running up and down the hills of Belmore or Bexley North, these were not my landscape. Instead my friends and I filled our stories with the soft gentle green of the English grass, dotted with oak trees where we could climb, surrounded by a coastline where people did not sunbake and surf but where smugglers brought ashore booty into mysterious inlets. Australia in contrast was presented as a mine, with sheep.

The first year back living in Australia I often found myself staring at the landscape with a sense of loss. We would drive out of Sydney and I would find my attention distracted, turned to the outside. And outside the window of the car was somewhere not familiar. It was bare. It was brown. The trees had an uncomfortable drooping appearance, their leaves thin and scant. There was little variation. And when there was, when a hill suddenly emerged on the skyline, it was worn and rounded. There was no ruined castle on its peak. I sometimes felt close to tears.

I did not know this landscape. I had been away for twelve years but that did not explain my sense of dislocation. As a child, I had not been taken into the country, yet that was not enough to explain my lack of familiarity with it. I had never learnt the words to describe it or developed a passion to celebrate it. It was completely foreign to me and I mourned the loss of the European landscape that I had learnt to call my own.

"It must have been so romantic back then," Pam sighed. She had been given a wonderful book by her Uncle Vince, a book which told stories of knights and ladies in the middle ages. He also gave Pam a small case, made of crocodile skin, open at the top, with smooth round handles. He had bought it in Egypt during the war. Pam put her pencils and lunch in it and took it to school. It looked much more beautiful than the hard brown globite cases the other children had. She ran her hands over its surface.

Anthony Hordern's, Pam's favourite store, was enormous and dark. Above the heads of the shoppers was a long wire and when they paid for their purchases, the shop assistant placed the money in a small brass cylinder and sent it shooting along this wire to the other side of

the store, making a curious whistling sound, like a distant train. In its book section, she found books called *Countries of the World,* with covers of stiff cardboard striped in blue and white. She particularly liked those about England and Scotland, with shadowy photographs of castles and richly caparisoned horses, while that on Holland told about tulips, clogs and starched white caps, like those that she wore in dancing and the boy with his finger in the dyke. Her favourite was on the Balkans, exotically named countries like Croatia and Slovenia, people in embroidered blouses with puffy sleeves and ribbons flowing. They were like *Grimms' Fairy Tales*, dark forests, rushing streams, kings and princesses of shimmering beauty. She practised saying Bosnia-Herzegovina. On United Nations day, when children came in the costumes of various countries, Pam aged nine wore a white frilly blouse and a pinafore dress in blue and red made by Nita. She said she represented the Balkans. She recited a speech about how the prince of Austria was killed in the Balkans, which started the first world war but that after fighting these countries had now joined together. Everyone else dressed in kilts to represent Scotland or Ireland.

She loved the words rills and rivulets, run of water's creek, coves and gullies, deep forests, castles and turrets.

At Erskineville we spent a great deal of time doing individual projects, writing on a theme, illustrated, either by your own drawing or photographs cut out of magazines and stuck down with Perkins Paste. We had a book which showed us a range of printing styles and for headings I traced the required letters from the book, using greaseproof paper purloined from my mother, pencil at first, then filled it in with thick Indian Ink. I loved Old English best, of course. But I hated Indian Ink. I was always knocking the bottle over, after I had printed my essay and carefully copied or pasted in my drawings. It was agony trying to work out what to do about the splotches and blobs of ink which often went right across the page, until I hit on the idea of converting them to add extra life to the project: Christopher Columbus' ships; trucks carrying coal during the Industrial Revolution; a flock of black sheep which, together with Broken Hill, made us one of the richest countries in the world.

I remember doing many projects about countries, like Ceylon, India, Canada. I would sometimes go with my mother to Bridge Street in the city, stone buildings with grand porticoes. Here were the shipping companies on the hill, and below the city broke into a warren of little streets with grubby offices right on the road, before the noisy pubs and smelly fish cafes along the Quay. I went into the shipping offices, with high ceilings, big brass urns with palms and thick woven rugs on the floor. I asked for information, for a school project. They would hand out piles of pamphlets with pictures of famous destinations, The Tower of London, Suez Canal. The pamphlets carried a faint smell, like the shipping offices themselves, a smell of money, strange spices, salt. Down the hill the sun struck sparks from the waves splashing around the boats at the Quay. I learnt John Masefield:

> *"Quinquereme of Nineveh from distant Ophir*
>
> *Rowing home to haven in sunny Palestine,"*

James Elroy Flecker was my favourite poet. There was an exoticism in his work which made my heart leap. Samarkand, The Golden Road. Line drawings of dashing men in turbans, heavily veiled women. He wrote of rich-sounding spices, bell-like names of cities, Marrakech, Trebizond. I gazed down to the harbour or returned to the shipping company with its large painting of a market in Port Said, shadowy jostling figures in gleaming draperies.

Overseas had romance. I could not imagine, in the absence of culture that represented Australia, that we could produce anything. In primary school we were shown a film set in wheat fields in Canada. I remember rushing to talk to my friend Marilyn about it. Something like this could be made in Australia, couldn't it? We had wheat fields, didn't we?

In many of the novels about the time girls find Europe and overseas through reading. Joan London has a story, First Night*, about two young girls who put on a play. One, Jonelle, has written most of it, but the prime mover is her new next door neighbour, Antonia, the eldest daughter of a privileged South African family The girls are obsessed with English literature (the play is a sequel to Alice in Wonderland): Jonelle dreams of stories like "The ragged girl shivered and looked for wild berries before she set off across the moors". Or 'the mountains' or 'the snow'. The Northern Hemisphere. Nothing inspiring ever happened in Australia."*

Esther, who had been ahead of Pam at school, was doing Law and nearing her final year. She had come back into Pam's network through her relationship with Rex, law student, theatre director and wit. Pam had always admired Esther. Now, clever, stylish, always well-dressed, Esther stood a little apart from the others at noisy drunken after-show parties.

In the Italian coffee shop in Elizabeth Street, Esther stirred her cappuccino. "But look at how restricted my time at university is, nothing but study, study. You're having wonderful times in Arts, acting in all those plays. And I would love to have studied English."

Pam rubbed her hand through her hair. "Yes, it's wonderful, Esther, what it's preparing me for. I'm in the midst of my Honours year, then I'll have five years serving out my Teacher's College bond. I'll never have the time to become an actress. I don't even know I've got the talent to be anything other than a support. Sure, Rex has got me doing the prostitute in the Brecht, but Rhoisin's playing the lead. And besides, studying English is managing to destroy all my love for poetry and writing, pulling the lines apart, analysing how it was done. It's killing it stone dead."

Esther laughed. She couldn't believe it. She had been encouraged to do Law by her father, who had migrated from Hungary after the war. He valued professions for girls.

Pam was surprised to be invited to Esther's twenty-first birthday. Just twenty of them, mainly friends from Law. Rex said he would pick Pam up. They were to go to dinner at a restaurant by the harbour.

Nita had made Pam a dress out of dark green satin, bell skirt, just below the knees. It suited her slimness. She twisted her hair into a French roll.

The Caprice was on the shores of Rose Bay, dark waters outside, heavy curtains framing the view, the glow from splendid chandeliers glinting on shining frocks.

Their table was a large circle, and scattered among the young people were Esther's parents and some of their friends, the women in thick fur capes, with splendid earrings caressing their cheeks.

Pam tried to sip her wine slowly. It tasted wonderful, so different from the thick clarets they usually bought in flagons. She must try to stay relaxed, not drink too fast and get tiddly. She inclined her head as her grey-haired neighbour, elegant in a black dinner suit with a black silk tie, asked if she enjoyed the filet mignon they were eating as main course.

"I am from Hungary and we appreciate our red meat. Here of course the quality is quite exceptional, but the cooking techniques, pah, it does not bear thinking about. They fry them as if they are trying to ensure that no morsel of taste will survive. But things will improve. Why do you not try a little more of this red? It is from the Hunter and for a domestic claret it is of really quite a reasonable standard."

Pam nodded her head, overawed, and listened as Esther's mother chatted to Rex's friend Martin Grant about the recent Sadler's Wells version of *Orpheus in the Underworld*, the Budapest Opera, the latest Saul Bellow novel, an Ingmar Bergman film. Esther's parents were planning a visit to Paris, buying for her Double Bay dress shop. Reflections from the chandeliers twinkled on the heavy silver cutlery. Pam wanted to sink into a velvet cloak.

Then Esther's father was standing, proposing a toast. "To my beautiful daughter, her great good fortune now and forever." A waiter padded behind the chairs, filling high glasses with bubbling golden champagne. They all stood, glasses tinkling, and then the grey-haired father, tall and straight-backed, drew Esther, wearing a red full-length dress, with slits to her knees, onto the polished floor. Pam found her eyes filling with tears as she watched them glide around to the beat of *Strangers in the Night*. What must it be like to have parents to whom you could talk about things? Who cherished you and gave you beautiful things? Who took you to Paris and concerts and discussed books with you?

Her mood was broken when Rex dragged her onto the floor, suggesting they jive and show what the younger generation were capable of. She laughed as he twisted her around.

The presence of an increasing number of European migrants among our friends indicated that overseas also had culture. Within Australia, the only excitement, glamour and sophistication came from exposure to people from overseas.

*Madeleine St John has her heroine Lesley/Lisa taken up by the Hungarian Magda of model gowns. Lisa sees European sophistication through literature (*Anna Karenina*), clothes (all the gowns come from Europe), men who are able to flirt, sophisticated eating habits (the Hungarian Christmas menu is pate, duckling with black cherries, bombe surprise and absolutely nothing to drink but champagne) and charming mature relationships between the sexes. Jennifer Dabbs' heroine finds excitement in a European lover, although he is presented as trifling with her affections. Aviva Layton is liberated by entry to university "a magic world" where she reads, and also flings herself into the bohemian world, finding through one poet lover "the dark underbelly of Europe's culture".*

Autobiographies of exile written by women who migrated to Australia, such as Susan Varga and Elizabeth Wynhausen, emphasise how uncultured and boring their European families found Australia of the time and how they introduced new ways. Any style in food, drink, restaurants in Sydney in the early 1960s came from the post-war refugees, the new Australians. When I first went out with a young man to a French restaurant, I ordered a minute steak. I thought it meant it would be small (minute), and I was so nervous that I thought I could not eat more than one mouthful. My family did not eat in restaurants except for an occasional lunch at the David Jones cafeteria or toasted sandwiches and waffles with caramel sauce at Cahills.

At university I started going to restaurants with friends. They were all 'foreign'. Some were for large meals after the library and pub, others were special nights out with boys from colleges or in their first jobs. Here are some:

> *Lorenzini's (Elizabeth Street): an Italian coffee house, smoke and sophistication. My friend Cathy says the waitress there was the first woman she ever saw with hair under her arms.*
>
> *The Aurora in Ross Street: bolognaise sauce, lasagna, and veal.*
>
> *The Tai Yuen near the Railway: round tables and chop suey.*
>
> *Vadims in Challis Avenue: Steak Diane, beef stroganoff and pelemeny; everything was flavoured with sour cream.*
>
> *The Swiss, in Victoria Street: famous for cold fruit soup*
>
> *The Balkan in Liverpool Street: small, smoky, grilled meats on what it called "squers".*

Stuttgarterhof in Oxford Street: meat and vegetables presented on a plate that was divided into neat compartments.

The Hungry Horse in Paddington: Artists in dark berets, the first place to employ one of our friends as a waitress.

The Ozone at Watson's Bay: French fish with the smell of the water.

Beppi's in Yurong Street: Italian food that was more than spaghetti bolognaise, for formal nights out.

The Volga overlooking Cooper Park: borscht and romantic violins.

It is hard to reproduce the ways in which we devalued all things that occurred in Australia and how glamorous and exciting things happening overseas seemed to be. It affected even our municipal representatives. Lord Mayor Harry Jensen went on an overseas trip and came back to say that he had seen Hanging Gardens there. He reproduced them in Hyde Park, a few baskets of flowers hanging from wire cages.

It became not enough just to think of overseas. Everybody who could went overseas. It provided a validation of our view of ourselves as intellectuals. A ticket on an Italian or Greek boat could be bought for just under one hundred pounds. Nobody went by plane unless the ticket was provided by government authorities, like a Commonwealth scholarship.

Everything was happening elsewhere. People went to opera overseas. People went to plays overseas. The West End, The Royal Court, exciting and radical. In Sydney, theatres were being pulled down. Tyrone Guthrie came from overseas, from Stratford, Ontario and put on Oedipus Rex, *in the Clancy Auditorium at the University of New South Wales. Like the Wallace Theatre the desks clanged when people walked to their seats. Call this a theatre! It would never do overseas.*

The kitchen of the shared house at Annandale was packed. Geoff from SUDS, one of the renters, was shouting as he passed bottles of beer from the ice chest over the heads of the crowd. "No, that's for Piers and John," he yelled, "They won't be getting good Australian beer in India, or even worse when they get to England. Warm as piss, Bruce says."

Pam pushed through the corridor, out to the concrete back yard. It was difficult to get through and she lent against the damp patches on the wall and guzzled the thick red wine. She was tired, having spent these holidays once again working at the Education Department checking Leaving Certificate results. There seemed to be just her and all these trainee Catholic priests. She was lucky that Frank had arranged it, the money was good. And the young priests were pleasant, though she often found one staring at her.

Piers brushed against her as he pressed back for his beer, squeezed her bottom and kissed her hard on the mouth. Her heart lurched. She had slept a few times with Piers over the past month, since their Honours exams had finished, at his parents' home when they were out, one whole night at this house of Geoff and John's. They'd kept it quiet around the crowd of friends. He was going overseas; besides, although he and Helen had broken up just before the exams, she was still upset. He'd had a week away with Helen just before Christmas, at her parents' house on the South Coast. He muttered to Pam that he'd try to get together later, drive her home.

It was going to be a crowded ship, the *Fairstar*, the last cheap boat of February, before the prices rose. Robbi and another SUDS actress were going to study at Perugia in Italy. Dick from the Film Society was going to try his luck in England. Piers, John and Martin Grant were taking a Volkswagen, getting off in Colombo and driving from India to England. His parents had friends on a Greek Island and he would stay there, perhaps write a novel.

Pam leant her head, spinning slightly, back against the wall. Sure, she liked Piers, his clever use of words, his intelligence, but it probably wouldn't have gone on for that long. It was much worse for Phila who staggered past her, tears running down her cheeks. Her boyfriend Alan was also going later that year and Phila had been having traumas at most of the parties recently. Mind you, there seemed to be a lot of people round to comfort her.

So many changes. In a week they would be beginning Teachers' College. Pam's Honours result, high in seconds, was as fair as you could expect, but there was no hope of going on as a scholarship postgraduate student. Phila had only got a third. It could well have been that she had taken too many methedrines. Lou had topped the year, and was going into the Department as a tutor. It was amazing how she had managed to concentrate, but then she wasn't in SUDS. Genevieve had got seconds as well. She had already married, and her husband, a quiet young man from the History honours class, had been accepted by the Film School at Stanford in the United States. They'd all been to her wedding in a big church on the North Shore. "Just imagine her being the first of you all to go," Robert had chuckled into Pam's ear. Kathleen had dropped out of Honours through the year and, having quietly married a Professor of Science she had met through the Newman Society, had moved with him to Adelaide.

Pam moved out to the back yard. There was so much gossip about overseas. Bruce, the literary editor, had recently written to Martin. He had worked for a year as a journalist, continuing to write revue scripts, then went overseas with one of his Honours co-students, with whom he had a relationship. She had a Commonwealth Scholarship to study at Cambridge. They had visited Oxford. Martin quoted his scathing demolition of the eights, the May Balls. He was enjoying Cambridge and had got involved in Footlights Revue. "You know, the people who did *Beyond the Fringe,*" Pam said to John. Cleaver was hanging around the Sorbonne, living on the Left Bank. Martin had also heard from his old school friend Rex, who had flown overseas after his final law exams. He had managed to get attached to the Royal Court Theatre, where some of the most exciting new theatre was

being performed, kitchen-sink realism. Fred poured beer down his throat, punching the air around him. One bloody more year of law to go. Pam hugged his waist, dear funny Fred, such a brilliant actor, so dilatory in his studies. Geoff, interested in the French absurdist drama, asked if Rex was sending any scripts out.

The next night they gathered at the wharves in Walsh Bay, inky black water lapping on wooden piles. They piled into the boys' cabin with flagons of cheap red wine, bought from an Italian shop in the Haymarket, shouted and drank until the hooter sounded. As they moved off, debating whether to finish off at the Newcastle near Circular Quay, Phila grabbed Pam's arm. "Come with me. I've said I'll go for a drink with Grey Selmar at the Royal George." The word went out, Pam linked arms with Fred and Geoff as they headed up above the wharves.

In Australia nothing happened. People lived in suburbia. People rode surfboards. It was crass and vulgar. I wore neat little suits out to my teaching job.

We absorbed the ideas of Robin Boyd. The Great Australian Ugliness. *Australia was a desert, an intellectual desert. Our parents, everyone living here were Alfs. Or as Martin Sharp called them in a revue, Norman Normals. We weren't normal. We were unusual, creative, original. Overseas, people like us sat at cafe tables. It was cold, the coffee steamed, they puffed cigarettes, they discussed ideas. They created art and were appreciated.*

It was Pam's third year teaching at Blacktown. She was feeling more and more isolated and irritated. So many of her university friends were now overseas. Eileen was pleasant enough, but really not so similar to Pam. Besides, she seemed very keen on that young lawyer from Newcastle, where she had gone to the Conservatorium.

Pam couldn't imagine being married. She did seem to be going to a lot of weddings. Both her cousins. Jenny and Barbara from the English staff. She hated wearing those little bits of net and flowers to cover her head in church.

No, she had to get away. The graduate drama group was fun, but not really stretching her. She enjoyed playing bridge, once a week, with a couple of friends of Lou's from the English Department. But she was sick to death of hearing about all the political differences there. What did she care about Leavis or whether you could study writing in translation?

People came back so sophisticated from overseas. Kevin came back, with beautiful Liz from SUDS, whom he had married in London. They were going to open a second-hand clothes and jewellery market. Pam and Fred went to dinner at their newly-purchased Paddington terrace.

"They've got marvellous markets in London, darling. Everything's happening. In Portobello Road, people buy wonderful old things, clocks and Tiffany lamps and fringed scarves and fur collars and magnificent beaded gowns from the 1920s, original Mainbochers, Fortunys. It's fantastic, exotic. You can wear anything in London. We've got trunks full of stuff coming out. But I bet we'll come across some hidden treasure troves here, chatting up old biddies in Haberfield. Or Strathfield or Pymble."

His eyes creased and Pam embraced him. She adored Kevin's energy. He and Liz had bought the terrace dirt cheap and were renovating. Kevin shrieked, "What they're starting to do with these houses! So many coach lamps outside, we'll soon be able to attach the greys and drive them away!" Liz made what she called a daube, a stew with wine eaten with warm French bread and a green salad in a brown wooden bowl. London sounded fantastic. Kevin played opera records. They had heard Lucia Popp sing the Queen of the Night at Covent Garden and had seen *Norma* at La Scala. "There was *Trovatore* this year," Pam said. "The Australian Opera put it on at the Elizabethan Theatre Newtown. It was really beautifully sung, they said." Pam had been with Garth and Eileen from the train, who had said just that. Somehow Newtown did not sound the same. "Opera here!" cried Kevin. "It's too terrible to contemplate. They are treating Utzon abominably. We'll be the laughing stock of the world. It will never get finished now. Imagine paying for an Opera House by lotteries. Australians are such Philistines! I don't know why we're back!" Liz smiled, her hand grazing her pregnant bulge.

Piers had recently returned from England, on his way down to Canberra where he was going to join the Diplomatic Service. He and Helen, their little daughter almost three, did not seem to be getting on too well. It was difficult to know what to talk to these young parents about. With her bridge friends, Pam had been having an evening of charades, acting out the syllables of words for your team. She'd caught a baffled look in Piers' eye, almost pity. Did he think they were just backward and provincial? She couldn't bear it. What else was there to do?

No, this was it. She could not wait another moment. Her bond went for another two years, but she would have to resign after this one. She would still owe five hundred pounds, but she would deal with that later. Something would happen. Something would turn up.

She had been saving in a desultory fashion. She had almost one hundred pounds. That would pay for the ticket, ninety-six pounds one-way, the very cheapest on one of the Greek or Italian boats. Then if she put more money aside for the rest of this year, she would have some to live on until she got a job in England. She could go back to her parents to live. That would save some money. And she could cash in her superannuation. She was never going to be a teacher again or any kind of public servant. So boring. So like her father.

She booked for just after Christmas, when fares were cheapest, on the *Fairsky*. She stood in front of her classes at Blacktown. Some of the girls cried, which was affecting. Poor kids, she had done as well as she could. They would probably get someone must less interesting, much less mod, as they said. Miss Elliot looked pleased to be rid of her.

There was the usual hectic round of Christmas parties. The art school crowd had wonderful drunken noisy sprees as usual. Barry, a tall, camp man from the art school, was telling a baying group about his Volkswagen, with a surfboard on top, being stopped by police in Oxford Street. "You should have seen their faces! We were all going off to a party dressed as nuns. And there was the bloody surfboard on top!" He told Pam that he would be in Athens in April. "It will be wonderful to see you, sweetie. We'll have a ball. We'll go off to Mykonos. It's magic, I've heard." They agreed to be in Syntagma Square on a certain day and time. At Push parties, the guitars still crashed through *Twelve Gates to the City* and *House of the Rising Sun*. Many of Pam's links to that scene had left. The other editors of Robert's *PRIVY* magazine had left heading for London after another trial for obscenity. There were still some people around the University drama scene. Rex had come back, his directing stint at the Royal Court cut short by a family death.

"It was incredible there, Pam," he said, at dinner at Esther's, in a cheaply rented stone cottage on the water at Balmain. Esther was enthusiastic about catching a ferry into her law office in town each morning, saying it gave her a totally different view of Sydney. "You've got no idea what theatre is like in London. Just so challenging and confronting. And each year they bring the best of European theatre for a festival. Marvellous Eastern European stuff. Are you sure you have to go now? I think the time is ripe to start a theatre group here. I want to do this fantastic play *Saved*, a new writer, Edward Bond. It is so strong, so savage. Why not stay and do the lead. I'd cast Fred and Arthur as the two male leads, thugs who attack the woman and her baby."

Pam shook her head, sadly. "I just can't, Rex. I've got to get away. I am going crazy here. I'll just have to hope Fellini discovers me tap-dancing on the street in Rome." She pulled what she hoped was an ironic Giulietta Masina face, shoulders shrugging.

Her excitement was soaring. Esther grabbed her at a party.

"Do you remember Meredith Boycott? She's going on the same boat as you. And so's David Ziegler, who used to be at the boys' school. He did engineering."

"Meredith? She was a year or so behind, is that right? Did some cartoons for *honi soit*?"

"That's the one! She's been teaching too. You'll probably see her around."

There were last minute purchases. A large case. Pam wanted to take so much: lots of books, Elizabeth David cookbooks, a wooden salad bowl. "Mum, I'm still going to need to cook and eat." She could not say she was never coming back.

"Don't worry. Mum, I won't need a new winter coat, so don't bother making one. They're so cheap in England. Or I might get a suede one in Florence." Excitement rose. Her friend beautiful, dark-eyed Libby, who had got an Art History scholarship to London University, had bought a second-hand fur in Portobello Road for only two pounds. She couldn't tell Nita. Second-hand indeed! Full of germs.

It was late afternoon when they reached the ship, the good *Fairsky*, in the Darling Harbour docks. There were not many people to see her off, not so many close friends now. Her old friend Rosemary who had left school at the Intermediate was there. She was still working in a bank, living with a much older photographer. "I'll get there myself, kid, soon as I can." There were Rex, Esther, Arthur. Fred was acting interstate. Garth and Eileen were both away. All her family were there, except for her grandparents. Even Frank arrived late from work. Brian gave her a Good News Bible wrapped up in brown paper. What on earth would she do with it? It wasn't even the St James, just an awful new translation. Good News indeed!

She ran into Meredith in the corridor. Meredith's cabin was higher up the ship. She had a lean, clever face, a sharp tongue. They'd had a couple of good chats at various Christmas parties.

As the visitors milled off the ship, they headed for the highest deck. They looked down at the diminishing figures below them, threw the thin bright streamers.

Pam clutched them tightly as the ship nudged softly against the wharf, then shuddering softly drew away. Meredith poured a glass of champagne from a bottle left in her cabin. The streamers tightened, Pam's nails bit into her palms. How could she control this exhilaration? If she held tightly enough to the streamers she would be lifted from the deck and would float to Europe, more quickly than the five weeks this slowly turning monster would take.

The boat turned laboriously, the streamers snapped.

Meredith's face creased with triumph. "Well! That's that then!"

Pam smiled back at her as they clinked glasses. "Here we go, my dear," she crowed. "Let these thousand glittering waves carry us to the rest of our lives," she intoned.

They downed the sparkling drink and threw the glasses over the side. Then as the ship lumbered towards the Heads, Pam clasped Meredith's arm. "Let's get ourselves another drink."

The idea that propelled Australians of this period was a sense of life being better, more exciting, more vivid elsewhere. Yet it seems to me reading novels of the time that the passion was stronger for young women. As they reached maturity, it was not enough to dream of overseas. They must get there, this would be their way out. Glenda Adams points out "most Australians of my generation felt they had to go away ... This exodus was seen as a kind of getting of culture." Aviva Layton's heroine escapes by leaving the country: "The shore line recedes. The faces blur. I'm free. No longer my parent's child, my country's charge." For these women, who see themselves as intellectuals or creators, the journey bears the mark of maturity and escape. Only in another country can they develop themselves, can they reach fulfillment. While for many Australian women, the trip overseas filled in a gap between education or work and marriage, for self-conscious creators it seemed to be for good. Many of the women I read could not see a way of remaining in Australia as intellectuals and writers.

Like many of the other women writers I have quoted through this book, I felt I had to get away. Only in Europe, I thought, would I be able to fulfil my dreams. There I could act, write, create.

*Writing and reading had informed my life. When I was a young girl my life took place through a series of dreams and fantasies, derived from books, films or shared stories. My childhood provided a perfect excuse for my mother, who loved reading, to form a closed world of imagination around her little daughter and herself. And reading took up much time in those days when families did not have television. When still quite small I would curl up in her lap and she would read to me, marvellous stories of fairies and elves. I passionately believed in them. There was no sense to me that they were make believe as I curled up in my mother's lap, my head next to her breast, her soft voice filling my mind with wonderful vision*s.

Nita was always reading to Pam. She herself had always been a great reader. "Always with her nose in a book," Dora would say, and not with approval. Nita used stories to take Pam's mind away from the agony of her hair being stretched over stockings and rags to make sausage curls. Pam sat on the floor, her head next to her mother's knee, while Nita twisted and twirled hair with fingers and brushes and hair pins. Mostly the stories she told were old favourites, simple tales, and Pam chanted some of the lines with her. "I'll huff and I'll puff and I'll blow your house in." But one night, the story was extraordinary. There were a queen and jewels and suspicious meetings with a young prince and challenges and duels. Pam could not breathe with excitement. She felt no pain from her hair.

The next day, Pam's birthday, Nita gave her a book, with a bright red cover, *Rose Fyleman Fairy Stories.* Excited, Pam ran down to the end of the garden and started to read it, all the way through, mouthing and sounding out words that she didn't recognise. And there, first in the book, was the story her mother had told her the night before. Nita hadn't made it up, she had read the book and told Pam a shortened version. Here it was in the book, rich and detailed.

That evening Nita placed the book in the linen cupboard. "You don't want to get it dirty."

Pam tried to tell Nita her disappointment. "You tricked me, you hadn't made up the story."

Nita laughed, "Of course I hadn't made the story up. Silly you."

Pam scowled at Nita. Her mother wasn't taking notice of her, fussing over that silly baby Brian. The story-telling sessions were getting shorter and shorter. But Pam could stand on her toes and reach behind the sweet-smelling towels and read the book to comfort herself.

She was just six years old, she was reading the words. Here was the story. It was Rose Fyleman's, not her mother's. She loved it. She loved Rose Fyleman.

By the time I went to Belmore North primary school in 1946 I was reading very well. At school the teachers read to us, stories like the ones my mother told me at home. Fairy stories, nursery stories. Around the walls of the hall were huge drawings, bright in pink and yellow and green, of a little rabbit, wearing human clothes, in a lettuce patch, and in a bedroom. The teacher explained that these were drawings from a book called Peter Rabbit*, a book I did not know. She showed me the drawings in a small book, the size of my hand, and showed me how she copied them on the blackboards with chalk. I tried to copy the drawings but couldn't. It was back to words.*

In one class I wrote out the story of the Three Bears. It covered four pages in a small lined book. The teacher told my mother that this was exceptional. I was told I could stay out of reading and writing classes from then on, do messages for the headmistress and read my books.

My mother decided that the only way to deal with my obsession with reading was to find a public library. Her family did not buy books. The nearest public library was in Lakemba, just one stop down the train line from Belmore North. So once a week after school, I went with my mother and my brother to the library. It was in a small building and had low shelves all the way round. I could crouch down and look at the books. There I could borrow three books a week, by Enid Blyton, Noel Streatfield, Clare Mallory.

Pam read a lot of books about children who were orphaned, or whose parents were overseas. They had to fend for themselves, or go and stay with a distant relative. Or at a boarding school. It must be exciting, she thought. It must mean you could do anything.

One day, at West Ryde, Pam asked her grandmother quietly if she could go and look in Vince's bedroom. It had a comfortable musty smell. All around the walls were narrow shelves of books, in soft covers, with broad green, blue or orange stripes. Like a rainbow. She climbed carefully on top of Vince's desk. She moved around the narrow shelves, pulling out books, putting ones by the same writer together, as they did in Lakemba Library. She mouthed some of the names: Evelyn Waugh, Aldous Huxley, Compton Mackenzie, George Bernard Shaw. Such odd names, hard to pronounce. She sniffed their dust. She began sorting each group into alphabetical order, by the author’s last name. She frowned over one called Ford Madox Ford; it was hard to work out what his last name was.

When Vince came bursting in, he shouted, "What a wonderful girl. Who's my favourite niece, then! I think we'll have to take her out to the garden and throw her up a tree."

She stood among the fruit trees at the bottom of the garden. Her heart seized inside her at the thought of all the things she wanted to do. If only she wasn't here, now. If only she wasn't called a boring name, like Pam. Pam, Pammie, Pamela. If only her name was Elizabeth, she could be all sorts of different people. She could be called Elizabeth, and be a writer, Lisa, and be an actress, Liz, an explorer, Lisbet, a star dancer, Bess, a doctor, Beth, a teacher and Eliza, a solicitor like Uncle Vince. She could be all these things, and still be the same person. Underneath.

My life as a lone reader changed completely when I went to Erskineville Opportunity School. There I met Marilyn Taylor who had read, just as I had, along the shelves of the public library. We shared the same imaginative territory. We wrote continuously, in class and out of it. At times the teacher would direct our energies to some set topic. For the most part we translated it back to a reproduction of the latest children's story.

Glenda Adams' story Friends *is a wonderful picture of these close links between intellectual girls. My memories of the last years of my primary school education are to do with the joy of shared learning. Of the excitement of reading, of trying to emulate the writers we admired. There were, of course, jealousies and disagreements, but mostly an enthusiasm for the process.*

Janice and Pam loved naming. They decided to invent a country somewhere in Middle Europe, called Transitania. It had wonderful countryside, with high mountains, taller than the Alps, jagged peaks, waves splashing up against towering cliffs, green and pleasant fields and great forests where the knights rode their chargers. The capital Inferon was an old walled city, there were castles on echoing crags, a sea-port with smugglers.

"It's more exciting if you can imagine yourself in the middle of the story, isn't it?" Pam wrinkled up her nose. Pam went to the beach with Janice's family. Janice and Pam walked away from the others after lunch and found a rocky inlet called Shelly Beach, where the waves did not crash onto the golden sand. "It's just like a secret entrance to a castle," Pam breathed quietly. "Let's pretend we're having an adventure."

"Let's work out the names of places first," said Janice, and so they did. Rocky outcrops, headlands, small pools were named: Buccaneers' Cove, Pirates' Landing, Aurora's Cave, Princess's Tower, Pool of the Nymphs, Craggy Castle. They lived out their dreams, spurred each other on to write.

After they met, Pam wrote in an essay:

> "When I grow up I want to go to England. I will go with my family. My friend Janice will go with hers. We will both buy little cottages on opposite hills and we will teach in

the village school and in our spare time write stories for children. I will have a little room for writing in. It will have a beautiful white desk and pink flowered curtains at the window. When I am finished writing for the day I will wave from my window and Janice and I will ride our ponies down to the little rill at the bottom of the hill to talk."

One hot October Sunday the next year, Dora, Pam's grandmother, said, "Get out of the house. Get out and sit in the sun. You're looking peaky. If you have homework to do, do it outside. We'll set a table for you."

So Pam sat at outside, her skirt sticking to her legs. Miss Harries had told them to write about a person they admired. How boring. Pam couldn't think how to start. She didn't know anyone she admired. She scratched at the page with a dry pen.

Frank reared up behind her, puffing at his cigarette. He held it with his hand curled over, so that the smoke oozed out from under his fingers. His little finger stuck straight out.

"Get on with it," he said. "What's your problem?"

"I just can't think of anyone I admire to write about."

Frank pulled back his head, his red-blotched nose curved. "A person you admire?" His eyes searched the fierce blue sky. "What about Our Great Pioneers?" The cigarette glowed red as he drew in, a curl of smoke drifted down across Pam's nostrils. "This Great Nation would not have been Developed without the Pioneers." His pale blue eyes glinted. "I'll help you," he said. A piece of ash dropped to the concrete and he ground it in. "Follow my dictation. We'll start with a quotation. Indent and put in inverted commas."

"Carving a nation from waste and wold

Mighty of purpose and stalwart of limb

Clove they the forest so dim

Forward, adventuring, knowing no fears,

Honour and praise to the old Pioneers."

"End quotes," he said. "Normal spacing." He took another puff on his cigarette.

Pam felt ill as she dipped her pen again into the ink bottle. "Waste and wold." What did it mean? Much of her writing had an overblown feeling, influenced by Gerber's *Myths of Greece and Rome*, which Uncle Vince had given her for her eighth birthday. She had written poems, which made her feel quietly uplifted, about Phoebus Apollo, rose-tipped Aurora, nymphs in a stream. But this piece of poetry of her father's seemed terrible to her, with no meaning Pam could relate to. "Clove they the forest."

Frank's face was flushed. "Do we ever reflect comma as we enjoy our civilisation today comma on those who left us the fruit of their labours," he paused, "put a dash and a space - the Pioneers. New paragraph."

On it went for what seemed to be hours that long still spring afternoon. Flies buzzed noisily, a trickle of sweat ran down Pam's leg behind the knee, her hand was sticky as she held the pen.

Frank was beaming: "braved the unknown ... carved a nation ... abandoned luxuries of the Old World (capitals for those last two words) ... long and hazardous journey ... hardships to bear ... dangers and heartbreak of flood, fire and famine ... toiled from sun-up to sun-down ... lay the foundations of the great country we know today ..."

Pam's head was aching; she was having trouble keeping up. Her writing was becoming more scrawly and indecipherable, and when she moved too fast to bring the pen back from the bottle, she made pale blue blots on the page. Oh no. What a mess.

"Put another dash," said Frank, hearing Dora call them for tea, "then capital letter Australia."

"Now start a new paragraph, and indent and let's finish:

> Are we not justly proud of them?"

Pam handed the composition book in on Monday. She was very nervous. Would Miss Harries call her out, ask her who had written the essay? Ask her whose poem Pam had quoted. Usually Pam would show her compositions to Janice or other friends, and they would giggle and admire each other's imaginative stories. But not this one.

It was Wednesday before Miss Harries gave the essays back. Pam had 98/100, the highest mark she had ever received and the highest mark in the class. But beneath it Miss Harries had written, in red ink

"I'm not very proud of your writing though. Terrible, awful, horrible writing. Rewrite again in your best hand writing."

And so Pam did, through all Wednesday lunchtime, hoping that somehow she would be able to finish it before any of her friends asked what she was doing. She hoped that Miss Harries would not ask her to show it to Miss Garville, who would be bound to be suspicious. She wondered how quickly she could finish this composition book. Somehow she had to get another book in which she could write some of her own stories, Enid Blyton-type stories, to share with Janice.

When I was a child and adolescent I wrote all the time. I made up stories to fill the unhappiness that existed between me and the adults around me. I enclosed myself in a world of books and imagination, where I was able to inscribe a different reality for myself.

During high school, I mainly read the shelves called English Literature or Poetry or Drama, but as I grew older I found myself also reading American Literature. One name led to another. Through biographies and autobiographies I found out more about the people I admired. My favourite writers were English, and had little to say that was relevant to my life at the time, except that a book like Jane Eyre *will always reflect the experience of an isolated clever girl.*

But it does seem to me that my lack of knowledge of significant Australian literature established a belief that writing was not something which Australians undertook. Those crucial girls' stories Anne of Green Gables *and* Little Women *both feature heroines who struggle to become creators and succeed. Sadly I did not read* My Brilliant Career*. But I did read* Seven Little Australians. *How much did it affect my ambitions for myself as a writer, as an Australian, that the heroine Judy does not emerge as a writer? Instead she is destroyed by the hostility of the bush around her, the tree crashing out of the sky.*

In fourth year at high school, Pam was one of the students selected to assist teachers edit the school magazine. At the last moment she had written a poem herself, but had really had to force herself. Her pleasure in writing was fading. It was not just a question of how well she wrote compared to the writers she was reading at the time. How could she think up some of the situations in which Hemingway's heroes found themselves, the First World War, bull running? It seemed to her that her writing came out heavily. It seemed flat.

She didn't keep a diary. Where could she hide it at home? And who would want to keep a diary when so many of her ideas seemed embarrassing? She couldn't say, for example, that she was attracted to Mac, captain of the rowing eight. What would people say? If anyone saw it ...

Each girl in fourth year had to submit a story for the school short story prize. Pam had delayed. The weekend before the story competition closed, she had no idea what to write. But there was an expectation that she would enter. Everyone was supposed to. She was supposed to be the best writer in the year. But what if she couldn't think of anything to write? She could not delay any more. She really had to start. It was compulsory.

She wrote a story of a child. The child lived with an alcoholic father by a railway track. The child was given a dog, a black spaniel called Nigger. Pam herself had never had a dog, but she had seen her brother's insistence that he have one and how much he enjoyed playing with it. She made the dog the focus of the child's happiness, the companion he loved. And then she had the father in a drunken haze, kicking the dog accidentally, damaging it internally.

Pam handed it in with gloom. It was meant to be a gloomy story, but she felt it was lacking in imagination. She was almost sixteen, yet still writing a story about a small child. It was babyish.

Two weeks later, as they were travelling to a debating engagement, Mrs Giles leant over the train seat. "We enjoyed your little story, Pam."

"Oh really," Pam blushed. "Didn't you think it was a bit, ... well, mawkish."

"Not at all, not at all," Mrs Giles was shaking her head. "A sad little tale, certainly, but written with restraint. I think you'll be pleased by tomorrow morning's assembly announcement."

Pam blushed as her team mates congratulated her. "Who won last year?" she queried.

"Alison," Mrs Giles named a tall, quiet English girl. Pam admired her enormously. She had a long plait which draped down her back.

"What did she write?" Pam asked. The short stories were too long to be published in the school magazine, where she had read some of Alison's witty essays.

"Oh, a little stream of consciousness piece it was, by memory. Quite interestingly handled, if a little pretentious." Mrs Giles' forehead creased with reflection.

Stream of consciousness. Pam scarcely knew what it meant. Some of the critical books she had come across mentioned it, and writers she did not know. She must try to find some. James Joyce, she remembered, Virginia Woolf.

It must have been a marvellous story. How clever of Alison. What a lot she must know, to be able to write in such a sophisticated way. What a worthy winner. And no matter what Mrs Giles thought, she must seem immature with a dreary little story about a boy and a dog and a drunken father and a railway line. She really had so little real talent. She was feeling quite sick again.

I won prizes throughout my schooldays for stories, poems and plays. Increasingly, however, I began to feel as if I was writing by numbers, as if the very desire for self-expression and fulfilment of personal fantasies which had propelled me into writing in the first place had been lost. I believed that there were forms of writing that were 'better', more acceptable. I find it difficult to remember just when it was that I began to undervalue my writing, when I became self-conscious about what I was doing, particularly about anything that seemed childish or sentimentalised.

In my final year in high school, there are two poems of mine in the school magazine. One is a dry little piece about Australia, its youth and immaturity, derived, if I remember correctly, from a poem by A. D. Hope. The other is derived from Wordsworth's Ode on the Intimations of Mortality*. This poem won first prize in a statewide* Poetry, Poets and People *competition judged by Judith Wright. Having written this poem, I grew to dislike it, feeling the ideas inflated, the expression cloying. Winning the competition not only disturbed my own critical judgement, although it did not make me revise my opinion of the poem, but also shook my faith in the judgment of those determining the prizes.*

In the Leaving Certificate Honours class they read the poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins for the first time. It amazed Pam. Loving words as she did, she was spell-bound by his descriptions, by the adjectives piling one on top of the other. The effect was of tall mountains, overbalancing with the sheer weight of descriptive richness.

> "No worst, there is none. Pitched past pitch of grief,
>
> More pangs will, schooled at forepangs, wilder wring."

Dinner was over. Silence from her father, the stale gravy of an argument. Pam's spirits were low. A feeling of depression settled behind her eyes. Life was boring, terrible. She would never get away from this small, stultifying house, this sense of blighted opportunities.

A storm blew up, a great wind whipping from the South West as only Sydney winds can. In Pam's street, it whisked the thin layer of sand from the garden beds, sending it whirling, clattering on to the asphalt, caught the stiff branches of the palm trees, twisting and crackling in its force.

Pam rushed out to the front verandah, with the wind dragging her skirt tightly round her legs and lent over the brick fence. She shouted at the wind:

> "Comforter, where, where is your comforting?
>
> Mary, mother of us, where is your relief?"

Her hair stung her eyes as it was blown back into them. The wind and the words of the poem were becoming one, embedded with violence, with power, with emotions that were pushing themselves through her body. Her head was a confused blur of images. Giant crags with spray whipping up, mountains towering skyward, winds that swept through vast landscapes.

She did not feel the smallness of human emotions in the face of huge natural forces. Nor did she reflect the desperate anger of Hopkins' poem. Somehow, the power of his language, the violence in his words, signified for Pam that she could take on board the strength of nature, battle with it, overcome it. The wind called to her feelings, her potential. She felt the small voice shouting into a gale in the suburban street become huge with the force of the wind, speaking of power that could be unleashed, of journeys that could be taken, of words that could be forged.

She was shaking at the violence of it, shaking with the emotion which had been given expression. She felt, with the wind, with the crashing of the palm branches, the noise, that she could do anything. She could step onto this wind and fly, go down Hopkins' cliffs of fall, or scale his giant mountains. With the pressure behind her, with this power, she would be invincible.

I was influenced by extensive and disorganised library reading of literary criticism. People wrote about other writers and they all seemed to know each other. I found the Bloomsbury set and read their novels and critical books. I read Cyril Connolly, fascinated by the boredom and ennui represented in The Unquiet Grave *and* The Rock Pool*. I read Edmond Wilson, whose savage critical sense was a strong influence. He was married to Mary McCarthy, so I read her. I wished I could read French poetry. Why didn't we study Verlaine at school? We had been doing French for five years.*

I found the section called American Humour. There was a wonderful group of writers who sat at a round table in the Algonquin Hotel in New York. How did you pronounce it? I read the only woman, Dorothy Parker, her crisp, witty poetry, so bitter about men. I could be like her. Perhaps when I got to university I could sit around a table with witty friends and make bon-mots.

Yet when I was at university, women did not write. The pages of honi soit*, the weekly newspaper,* Arna *and* Hermes, *the annual magazines, are spare indeed of the words of women. Glenda Adams, in a thoughtful consideration of her years at university, read a number of back issues of Sydney University newspaper* honi soit. *Most students who wrote were men. In eight issues, she found only four pieces by women, and a debate on abortion was conducted solely by men.*

> *"The young men knew what they wanted to do and were doing it the moment they left high school and set foot in the university. Given the state of our society it took the young women longer. They had to struggle much harder to grasp the possibilities open to them and to discover what it was they could do."*

I looked at five years of Hermes. *No women were editors. In 1959, there was a story by Jan Robert Lowe and a poem by Venetia Nathan. Nothing else until 1963, when Judith O'Neill had an article on Kafka and my friend Lee Sonnino (now Cataldi) had two poems and one more in 1965.* Arna*, the Arts magazine, was even worse. In 1959, Geoffrey Lehmann and Les Murray formed the Sydney University Writers and Artists groups and produced a roughly printed journal called* Kam*, on the basis that the other magazines did not come out enough and did not print enough poetry. They actively scoured for contributions and there were poems by five women in the two issues that I have, equal to the number of men.*

I actually worked on honi soit *in my first year at university. With Richard Walsh, I regularly joined Graham Macdonald, the dedicated medical student who was editor, laying out the paper at the* Sydney Morning Herald.

On Thursday morning the university newspaper came out. Pam, Helen, Janice, Genevieve, the whole crowd had become volunteers, helping to type out the newspaper and lay out pages, strip after strip, counting words to make sure each article fitted onto the page. Pam loved the newspaper work, the clear deadline each week, the explicit tasks to be performed. In the last weeks of first term she had begun to go down early to the Herald building, with spiky, amusing Robert, to help with laying out pages after they had been typeset, a great excitement in the mysterious smell of hot type, while silent men in dark blue overalls moved with concentration around huge machines. Pam always rushed to get the newspaper, excited to see what the final version would be like, the transformation of the scraps of handwriting she had first layed into printed pages.

This week as usual there was another clever poem by Bruce, the strutting literary editor, one of the authorities of the group of grand old men around the University, who was so sure of himself, his cleverness and his attractiveness.

Sitting in the back row of the English lecture in Wallace Theatre, Pam pushed the newspaper across the desk to Janice.

"Just look at this, he's so up himself. The thing's so corny, he's just copying e. e. cummings."

Like Bruce, the literary editor, Pam had read her way along the shelves of the public libraries. American poetry, that was where e. e. cummings was found, with his use of distinctive lower case. Pam could see that this seemingly clever little poem of Bruce's was not saying anything new, just using a new technique to say it.

As the lecture progressed she found herself scribbling away, parodying his poem. *hey little boy*, she wrote, using the lower case letters which he had purloined. The poem chided him on his derivativeness.

In Manning afterwards, she and her friends giggled over her poem.

"It's good, witty," Janice said, grinning at her. Pam flushed.

Helen showed it to a couple of her friends, poets whose work was not often published in *honi soit*, Graham, a big, awkward boy from the country with a wobbly head and a love for learning foreign languages which he rolled over his tongue, and his thin, spectacled friend who always wore a formal suit around university, like an undertaker. They also laughed at the parody. They disliked Bruce, blaming him and Cleaver for not publishing their work. They asked to print Pam's poem in a new little magazine they were starting.

"Oh no," said Pam, "I don't think it should be published. I just threw it off."

She hid what she wrote. Very occasionally she showed it to friends. Her last poem, a depiction of a Manning conversation, had upset Helen and Genevieve, who thought she was making fun of their pretensions. She did not write for magazines or for *honi soit*. None of the girls did, although Janice was still writing stories, Genevieve wrote clever, cynical rhyming verse and Helen some wonderful translations from French verse. Around the pub, where they had begun to drink, Cleaver dominated conversation, with Bruce throwing in

examples from his writing. They span stories about previous years at University, the clever writers who had been around, the witty Revue scripts they had developed, the writers they admired. Day after day, they sat, crowds of people who wanted to talk about what they had read. They prized new discoveries, discoveries not covered in their set courses. Geoff had found poems by Allen Ginsburg. Piers brought in volumes of Edith Sitwell and they read the coruscating *Facade* poems. Now they were clever.

"There's a marvellous book by a writer called Karen Blixen. She's actually a Danish countess, but this one is about a farm in Africa."

"Scott Fitzgerald has the most pellucid prose style. Have you read that section in *Tender is the Night* where the two women go shopping. Isn't it wonderful? Absolute luxury. And you enjoy it along with them."

Perhaps one day she might write something for publication, Pam thought, but it would need to be very good. She would need to be very sure about it. Until then, she would just lay out other people's work.

"Don't underestimate your poem," said Graham, the big country poet. "It's amusing and sharp. And we need some other poets for the journal."

"Well, OK. If you really want to. But don't put my name on it. If I become famous I want it to be for things I've really put some effort into."

When the photocopied poetry journal came out a month later, Pam found herself blushing. The little poem read quite well. She hoped it didn't cause a problem. Still, it was unsigned and Bruce might never find out.

Next day she was in the queue at Manning, when he strode in. He came around the corner. She could feel herself going hot.

He drew his eyebrows together and stared down at her. Pam put a lamington onto her plate. His lip curled.

"OK, I've been looking for you," his words came out of the side of his mouth. "It was very funny, kid, but don't do it again."

He swung out of the cafeteria.

Oh, God, Pam thought, what will he be saying about me. How did he find out? Will everyone dislike me? Was it an awful thing to do? Was it sly?

She drank her malted milk at a table with her girlfriends. They began to laugh to each other. "Who does he think he is?" Pam spluttered. "Kid indeed. Hairy-chested Hemingway."

But that week Janice went into *honi soit* by herself. Pam said she had to write an essay. Three weeks later, there were four of Bruce's poems on a beautifully laid-out page, lots of white space as the editor requested.

"There supposed to be about four women he's slept with," hissed Janice in the English lecture.

Pam read them quietly. They were wonderful. Words echoed each other, crisp similes glittered, the subtle differences between four women were developed through the rhythm and images.

She went in to *honi soit* that week, tense and alert. She tried to avoid Bruce's eye but laid out the poetry pages for him. He wasn't really good-looking, but he did seem very sure of himself, sexy. She concentrated on counting the words in an article.

I found it difficult to assert myself among the quick and competitive male tongues who dominated the university creative groups. Outside lectures we followed a reading path, with strong influence from Chester and John (Katherine) Cummings. They were older and had read widely among the new literature of the post-war period. With such examples, we were off on an eclectic hunt for anything available.

When I returned to Australia, my friend, Jennifer Haynes, who had become a poet under the name Jennifer Rankin, was already dying from cancer. I never saw her. She told our friend Michael Newman that she was driven to write poetry from anger at how stifled she felt by our group of male friends at university, the brilliance that excluded us. She said, "I was worth more than that. I had been the dux of Ravenswood. But all those years I behaved as if I was just a beauty." I had never talked about writing with her, nor with any of my friends after our first term.

In the same year at university was a quiet attractive woman called Juliet Rolleston. She had published a novel called Pink is for Girls*. She did not take part in discussions with other girls about her fiction being published. Probably from jealousy we all kept our distance from her. She has, to the best of my knowledge, never written since, yet in fact her mother is a published writer. The connection between that fact and a one-off sophisticated novel by a pretty sixteen-year-old girl is intriguing.*

Bob Ellis, at Sydney University three years after Adams, and at the same time as me, reflects on this from the perspective of one of the successful honi soit *writers. In discussing his generation of "remarkable undergraduates", (those he lists are all male, except for Germaine Greer, who in fact came to Sydney at that time as a postgraduate), Ellis says:*

> *"they had the double advantage of an era of effortless prosperity in which all seemed attainable, plus an early childhood when all their fathers were away at the War. Fathers are there to teach you limits, mothers are there to teach you overweening hope. In my generation, the overweening hope supervened."*

It seems to me that his description may be true for the young men. Reading the autobiographies and autobiographical novels of young women, I suggest that young women, particularly during the war, identified with their mothers' anxieties and sorrows, did not believe they were able to achieve.

As an English Literature student, I could not see my writing in the same context as the poets and novelists we studied. Women writers were rarely studied in English literature. In our first year, the novel was taught by Gus Cross, small, aggressive, black-bearded. This, we thought, was what a real intellectual looked like. His quirky ideas were volubly expressed. He told forthrightly of his passion for James Joyce, his dislike of D. H. Lawrence. "They say that you can only go one way in modern literature and my preference is clear ..." And so was ours. Of course Joyce was more interesting, so much less aggressive and showily sexual than Lawrence. More brilliant. I do not know how to confirm my memory that Cross said that he had been forced to include a lecture on Virginia Woolf and would therefore resume classes in two weeks time.

Wesley Milgate, a vague Charm School professor, taught a second year course on Jacobean prose, an eccentric choice one would think for a class in distant Australia. With the current debate about the canon, it is interesting to realise that during my four years as an English honours student I had few opportunities to study any of the major novelists, except for the first year introductory course and one course in fourth year Honours. In his course we read Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy*, Fuller's* The Worthies of England*. The decorative brilliance, the bastinado, of the prose enchanted us. And so did the presentation of the Professor. His lectures consisted of a lengthy reading from the writer selected for that week, then a discussion of the charm of the prose, the scintillation of its metaphor. There was no situating of it in time or place, just an appreciation of the methods. But in this course, we did*

read one woman. The Letters of Lady Dorothy Osborne*. Well there you were, pets. Women wrote letters, and quite charming they were too.*

We did not read Virginia Woolf's scathing dismissal of the mimsy Lady Osborne in A Room of One's Own. *Indeed, would our self-perceptions have changed if we had read that wonderful essay?*

How much were we affected by the unfortunate anomaly that, in the courses on the novel offered during our years, the adored books of our adolescence, by Jane Austen, the Bronte sisters, George Eliot, were not on the syllabus? Did we assume that we therefore should value them less, put them away as childish things? After all, they were only by women. Now, Conrad, by comparison ...

At the time, little Australian literature was studied at university. My generation of students paid scant attention to Patrick White, although we did admire The Tree of Man*. Bruce Beresford went to speak to White about the possibilities of a film of* Voss*, with enormous enthusiasm and no budget. We knew nothing of Christina Stead, although I remember becoming aware of* The Salzburg Tales *and relating it to the* Winter Tales *by Karen Blixen, one of my favoured writers for the mystery and sophistication of her stories and the exotic, glamorous photo of her by Cecil Beaton.*

"I've got to write this essay. When is it due? Not till Tuesday. Let's go to the pub, to the party."

"You'll write to me, Pam," said Edmond. She bought a card in Rowe Street, scribbled a message. That sounded stupid. She screwed it up.

Early in my second year at university, when I was, briefly, literary editor of honi soit*, I stopped doing any writing of my own. Over the following years, I lost a clear consciousness of self. I felt displaced, decentred, inauthentic. I ran away, in the belief that somewhere else, somewhere other than Australia, I would 'find myself'. During the years that followed I lost the capacity to write so completely that I could not write even letters.*

I continued to have the reputation of being a great spoken raconteur. Yet I find speaking different. It is more slippery, you can judge instantly the reaction of the listener, you can adjust what you are saying to please, or to draw a desired response. The writer, however, is on her own and must be able to face that 'I' on the page.

After the birth of my second child in England I recreated myself through a second university degree and a postgraduate thesis in sociology. I learnt to write in this abstract and arcane

language. After my return to Australia, I entered full-time work, first at university, then as a government adviser and mastered the techniques of the academic article, the bureaucratic minute, the ministerial speech and the government report. Embarking on each of these careers in writing was a struggle with demons. It seemed as if every time I put words on paper I was convinced that this time I would fail, that I would not find the right words, that I would never know the right words. I found, however, that I did. Each of these forms of writing had its own rules, which could be acquired. Each time I wrote again in the form, it became easier.

Writing this book has been a return to a form of writing I had ignored for over thirty years. I wanted to move away from the calm certainties of government reports to writing which drew on my own ideas and experiences, even though this was the writing that I had most feared. I was still terrified at the prospect of putting words that meant something to me on the page. Yet I also knew that I had to try to do this, that in a significant sense my valuing of myself relied on taking this chance to tell my story my own way.

My father was a cricketer, who stopped playing during the war. Coming back to writing for myself, not having done it for over thirty years, I felt at times like an out-of-form batsman. I watched David Boon during 1995, not moving his feet, padding awkwardly to and fro in front of the wicket, not timing his shots, waiting for one of those glorious pull-shots to emerge.

A review of Ronald Fraser's wonderful autobiography In Search of a Past *notes that one of the levels on which the book operates is that of "the act of writing itself, simultaneously a means to seek out the past and a hope to lay it to rest". Fraser himself describes the writing of the book as "recuperative", becoming the subject rather than the object of his own history.*

Theorist Paul de Man says that the site of autobiography is in the reading process itself. Centred in a commonality of others, the writer makes a self. Readers can see what it is that is distinctive about this person. Some of this I have done by looking at the stories of other women, sharing their experience, recognising our similarities. Seeing how we were shaped as women, and as women in Australia during that particular period. And then writing it.

Virginia Woolf sees autobiography as a rehearsal for other art forms; she says that writing the self is practice for writing the world. With the completion of this book, I know a great deal more about how writing was connected to my sense of self. I can understand how my sense of displacement was related to doing things I thought I should do. Growing up in Australia after the second world war filled my head with other people's instructions. In writing myself I have found a way of returning to what I think - and to writing.