A Life of Action

By Topsy Evans

November 2019

Introduction

My daughter Susan says that I have a “Big Story”. I actually have about four stories so I just wonder which one she is referring to. Let’s be chronological but I must warn you that my husband David and I decided very seriously many years ago that we would write things down and we had to start with a timeline. But we never got a timeline that we could agree on and things were out about ten years in our memories. So, I think a timeline is unlikely to eventuate and this will be just my version of events. I think that is why Susan suggested this biography because she keeps nagging me to write my story.

My Family and Early Years

I was born in Clare, South Australia on 2nd May 1936 and I was the third child. My name was Eleanor after my grandmother, but I was called Topsy because I had a lot of black hair. I think Topsy is better than Nellie which is what my grandmother was called. I never met my grandmother. My mother was 40 when I was born, which was considered very old then.

My grandmother had what was referred to as "a heart" and she died young. I gather she was bed-ridden for quite a long time and Mother had to housekeep for her father. Then her father remarried, a Mrs Collins and Mother always called her "Mrs Collins" and she hated her with an abiding hate. Mrs Collins had two daughters and they all lived together so it can't have been very happy for poor old Grandpa. He would have been considered a good catch as he was Superintendent of Schools. As you will find out later, there was a possibility of my mother moving to London to study music and I think she saw this as her chance to escape from Mrs Collins. It sounded a real *Cinderella and the Two Ugly Sisters* story. My maternal grandfather's name was William Hand. I have looked up a few things about him, but not much.

On the paternal side, there are numerous family books on the subject as we have a genealogist in the flock and they have done lots of study. My family on this side came from England in 1839 on the "*Duchess of Northumberland*". They were some of the early settlers down near Willunga and McLaren Vale and also in Port Pirie. There is a book of family letters which was just produced last year and letters from a woman who was called Faith Hewitt, the wife of Charles Hewitt. They were the original settlers in my family. They built one of the first sort of houses, humpy-type things, up at Port Pirie. Of course, when the high tide came, they got flooded. It is all in the letters.

I am not sure what took them to Port Pirie. It was before the smelter and so on. We are certainly related to the Forgans who were connected with the smelter but I don't know why my ancestors went there. At Willunga, they were farmers and indeed Charles Hewitt preached the first sermon on the back of a dray and all that as there were no buildings then … *(laughs)* David and I went down to the Maritime Museum and found their names on the ships' lists and so on. It would have been quite an exciting experience for them. They were certainly among the people who used hollowed-out trees as bedrooms when they first went down to Willunga. I am not made of that sort of stuff! With all the corsets and the long dresses and so on, it must have been hell.

My mother was born Dorothea Florence Hand in 1896 and Father was Edwin Ralph Johnson in 1890. I am not sure where they met. I think Mother felt very restricted by society.

I had two elder brothers. Peter was 16 years older than I was and Jeffery was 11 years older. Jeffery was a family surname on my mother's side. I came as a complete and utter accident and Mother and my father were informed that she would not survive the birth. She decided that she would proceed with the pregnancy and so Father allegedly delivered her to the hospital and sat up for the night with my brothers wondering if Mother and I were alive. In those days there were no husbands allowed near the delivery room. Anyway, he did find out about three in the morning that Mother and baby were well, and my brothers immediately assumed they would have to look after me. They took that role until they

died, I think. In a very restrictive way. I was not allowed to know the family scandals, as I was too young. And that wore a bit thin.

Father was the Headmaster of the High School and he was moved in his job from Clare to Nuriootpa and it was a long time before we found out why. He had been in the Army in the First World War and we found out the reason why he was moved to Nuriootpa only probably 20 years ago. He was part of the security looking at the Barossa Valley which made sense and he was considered to be reliable as an officer in the Army. I found that rather disturbing actually, because my memories of living in the Barossa were quite happy ones really. For years afterwards, Father would go back once a year for the band competitions. He went to judge the bands but he was really there to judge their marching. *(laughs)*

Nuriootpa was a very interesting place, and we stayed there until I was at the end of Grade Two. And then we moved to Renmark and we were there for a few years, I don't know how long. And then he was moved to Port Lincoln and I spent most of my growing period there, until I left to come to Adelaide for my Leaving Honours year at Adelaide Girls High and then University. So, we sort of moved around a lot.

My mum was fine after my birth, but she used to say, "I've got a heart, you know", you know how they used to! I used to think, "Well, I'm glad you have, dear!" Mother was never able to do much housework, because that would have involved bending down and that was bad for her heart. So, we had Black Suzie to do the housework. This makes me cringe! Black Suzie was a very large aboriginal lady who lived in humpies in the aboriginal camp at the back of Port Lincoln. Mother used to say to her visitors, "Of course, I don't let her in the kitchen."*(laughs)* Black Suzie had to eat in the laundry and if someone was coming, she would put flour on her face to make it white. Mother gave her all her old clothes. I spent a lot of time with Black Suzie because she used to do some of the gardening and I had a pet rabbit which was a Chinchilla and he used to get sick and Black Suzie would take the rabbit home and get him well again and so on. My mother's attitude was dreadful, not really human … Black Suzie looked after me a lot because Mother was ailing. Mother would get furious because Suzie would go walkabout and Mother would say, "You can't depend on them!" I presume Suzie had her own family but I never met them. I do still cringe at the thought…

I had to do most of the shopping because that would involve carrying things and Mother couldn't do that. I was allowed to do the shopping because I had a large Red Setter dog called Laddie and Laddie and I were allowed to go anywhere really as the assumption was that I would be safe with him. So, I used to spend gorgeous days out in the bush with sandwiches and Laddie, as mother didn't like "the other children". They were not of the right standard, they were not quite up to par. This is an appalling situation and even then I used to think that was dreadful. She was a snob, poor dear.

She had a beautiful contralto voice and was getting ready to go and take up a scholarship and study music in London. But Father came back from the war and married her, so tough … That used to happen then, didn't it? But she did have a beautiful voice. I haven't got a recording of it but she won all sorts of competitions and things in Australia. My childhood was spent sitting in agony in the audience while my mother sang at local concerts and things. I can still remember her singing some gorgeous things. She used to sing the solos in "The Messiah" and that sort of thing. She didn't pass that on to me. I was told, "Be quiet and listen to your mother"! *(laughs)* So that was unfortunate, but my son John did have a beautiful boy soprano voice but as soon as his voice broke, of course he didn't ever use it. I still don't know what he sounds like as an adult as he won't sing.

After Port Lincoln, I moved to my final year of schooling and University in Adelaide. I always all my life wanted to be a doctor and the week before I started University (and I had won a bursary into medicine), Father said I couldn't. I said, "Why?" I was actually a bit of an obnoxious child because twice I took to my bed and I wouldn't get up unless he gave in. I wanted to do Physics and Chemistry at school because I knew I needed that for medicine and he said no, no daughter of his was going to be the first girl to do Physics and Chemistry at his High School!

There was a tradition in the family to go to University. My elder brother was a chemist and he did most of the chemical research and stuff for CSR. He wasn't allowed to go to the Second World War, which he desperately wanted to, because it was supposed to be an essential service. And my other brother was really interested in music and classics and so on, and Father said he had to do medicine and after a year he failed everything so then he did law. The logic was impeccable. *(laughs)*

It was accepted that we would all go to University, but Dad wanted me to do a BA and be an educated woman, not an educator and not vocationally adept. He assumed I would get married and, in his eyes, married women didn't work. He just wanted me to know "A" from "B" and that was it. So, I took to my bed for a week. My mother was on my side. She said, "Ralph, the child should do what she wants to do" but that didn't count. So, that was unfortunate. I don't know how many people knew about it but Mother used to smuggle food in, and I obviously had to go to the loo *(laughs)* but that was it - I was staying in my room.

My first episode of taking to my bed which was over doing Physics and Chemistry at school which was a trial of strength really. But with the second one, my father said, "Well, I can't afford it" and he probably couldn't. I had the bursary for medicine but I got it transferred to Science. Father had said, "What else are you going to do? How about Dentistry as that is one year less?" I said, "No" as I didn't want to do Dentistry. So, I did Science and I achieved a Science degree in Zoology and Biochemistry which was a new thing at that stage. Of course, Zoology isn't a vocational thing. My mother wanted me to go to University and do what I wanted to do, but when I married, she was horrified that I went back to work! I don't know, it was all mixed up. I supposed it was a battle between her personal views and society's views.

Apart from the bursary, what made it possible for me to go to University was that my father won a half-share in Tatts before I got the bursary. He and one of the teachers at the school whose name was Slattery shared the first prize. Apparently, they used to put in for a ticket every week! I am not sure how much he won but my Dad put it all into some sort of Government bonds or something so that the kids could go to University. In actual fact, "the kids" were me as my brothers were already at University and so every week when I was in Adelaide, I had to go along to the Treasury Building in Victoria Square and get £2 something. That was my allowance! There were no fees in those days but the bursary paid a certain amount for kids from the country. I don't know what the bursary did but it meant that I didn't have to pay anything to go to University. On the Tatts win, I have always felt a bit ambiguous about gambling…

I can remember having to do first-year Physics and it was my first year away from home and I was desperately unhappy. I stayed at Miethke House on Dequetteville Terrace which was set up as a hostel for girls coming from the country to be teachers. Father pulled a few strings and got me in there. It was a little spartan. After two years, they said no, they didn't have space any more probably because there were more teachers needing rooms. So, I boarded with a lady.

In the meantime, I had gone from being brought up in a very atheistic if not agnostic family and when I came to Adelaide for Leaving Honours, religious instruction was there and I had a violent conversion. I went to Adelaide Girls and I hated it. At 17, I used to have to walk down the street in a three-pleat dark-coloured gymslip and I used to think, "Please, God, don't let anyone see me!" The length of the tunic was important: you had to kneel down and you were allowed three inches from the floor!

The only good thing about Adelaide High was the Chemistry teacher and I got on very well with him. He was Mr Anders and he was the only male teacher. I didn't have a crush on him which was lucky, but I did have a crush on the Physics teacher (Mr Waite) at Port Lincoln but that's alright! Mr Anders let me paddle around in the laboratory at lunchtime and he obviously thought I wouldn't blow myself up so that was great and I enjoyed that.

The conversion led me to go to Holy Trinity in North Terrace and the minister there found Mrs Richardson for me to board with on Holbrooks Road, Underdale. It was a long way out and not built up at all. She was a dear old girl and I was the only one staying there. I think she had been fairly recently widowed and was probably impecunious.

I started school in Nuriootpa, and I used to walk to school. My memory was it was about two miles. I have been back as an adult to look and I don't think it was two miles but it was an awful long way for a kid to walk. There were always some bigger boys about half-way home. They were real bullies and I used to be scared stiff of them. They used to tease me, "There's the teacher's kid", all of that.

It was quite fun in Nuriootpa going back. The house isn't there anymore. We have been back to look for it but the house is now demolished and made into a classroom. It gave me quite a strange feeling. It was a schoolhouse in the school grounds.

The first thing I remember clearly at Nuriootpa was the man next door. His name was Mr Coulthard and he had a great big mulberry tree. I used to sneak off and go and nick mulberries and I could never understand why Mother knew. *(laughs)* So she marched me over to Mr Coulthard and I had to apologise. I can still remember the look on his face, thinking, " I have to be upset about this!" *(laughs)* But he was sweet and I used to go over and talk with him quite a bit. He had a very big two-storey house and I gathered he owned quite a lot of property. He was that sort of person but he lived by himself in this enormous house.

But really, I was the only child in the family. My brothers had gone, when I was at school. My younger brother joined the Airforce and he had to go to Canada as the Airforce had decided he should be a navigator so he had to go to navigator school in Canada. When he arrived, they weren't expected and they had to dig trenches and things in the snow which was just keeping them occupied. And within about three weeks, he got rheumatic fever and was quite ill. He was months getting over it as it was a time before modern treatment and that was the end of his time in the Airforce. For his recovery, he was placed with the Bishop of Calgary (Bishop Ragg) and his family. That would have been in 1944 or 1945. We met Bishop Ragg later. My brother very nearly married one of his daughters, Rosemary I think her name was. But in fact, it was probably lucky that he didn't because he was gay and of course he couldn't say that. Neither the Bishop nor my father would have had any sympathy with that.

When my brother came back from the war, he told Father that he was gay and Father is alleged to have said no son of his was gay and that all he needed was the love of a good woman. I don't know

what Mother thought, that didn't come into it really. In fact, Father picked out his wife. He said, "There is a very good family up the hill and they have two daughters. Which one are you going to marry?"

My brother Jeff did in fact marry the elder daughter Esther and they had four children. His son Michael, the eldest, had leukaemia and died and this upset Jeff so much that he left. By then, he had a gay partner and they went to Canada. The other sister has only just recently died and she maintained a matriarchal eye on the kids because Esther died about ten years after he left. Jeff alleged at the time that he and his wife were getting together again, exchanging letters and so on, and I have somewhere a tape of her feelings towards him which she sent to him, saying, "I still love you and you can come back if you want to." It was awful! That left three of his kids and they were all mildly disastrous, well more than mildly actually. It is still working its way out and I am now the matriarch of the family! Every now and again, something happens. But Susan has made a tremendous difference in outcome with one of the kids, which is good.

Living on the school grounds, we didn't get much of a break from the school but at least I wasn't at that school as I was at the Primary School. I can remember the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester visiting. There is a picture of it somewhere. Mother was getting all agitated over what she was going to wear. She had to have a hat and gloves. It was a different life then.

I was never sporty. I used to dread sports, absolutely loathed them and would never have done that. But I did very well at school academically. And of course, that doesn't help your popularity at all. It was a funny time. I had a different dog then. I was very fond of the dog and the cat but I don't remember any close friends there at all. I was a solitary child. We played cards at home. I went off even then with the dog and I loved reading and doing sums and all that stuff but I was very solitary really. I also had a little black Topsy doll. Here is a picture of me in my early Primary years:

Dad was marvellous. Every night he would read me stories and I can still tell if it is made up or not the proper words. You know, "*The Wind in the Willows*" and "*Winnie the Pooh*". No television. I still remember those stories and I still have some of the early books. Some years ago, I found The Wind in the Willows and it was given to us by an American Army person. There was an American Army base nearby in Nuriootpa during the War and every weekend we would have one or two of the American people come over and stay with us. Mother loved cooking and she thought, "These poor lads", you know, "They need filling up"! They were very good to me. In fact, one of them even sent me a wedding present and he gave me "*The Wind in the Willows*". So, I think it was a very happy childhood, although it was a very unusual and a very solitary one.

Father's father was a Wesleyan preacher and he didn't die until he was 98, I think. I can remember going to see him with Father and his first question for everybody was, "Are you saved?" I would mumble away as did my father. David went with Dad to see him once when we were getting married and my grandfather told Father off once (who was retired by then) for smoking. It was a completely dysfunctional relationship. Dad was one of ten, all of whom except one survived and they all lived in Adelaide. Most of the family stayed with the Methodist Church and it was a bit much! They all died late. When I came to Adelaide after my marriage, I made a conscious decision that I really wouldn't look out for any of them, as I couldn't cope with that and David is one of four. I thought one family is quite enough! I have met some of them since but I felt that I didn't really need family. They are still good Methodists.

Then we moved to Renmark and we were there one, possibly two years. It was an agricultural High School then and we had the house next to the school near where there was a flock of sheep. My memories were of the sheep, really! There were an awful lot of crows and I couldn't stand the crows. They used to come and peck the eyes out of the sheep. Awful! But also, of course, we lived near one of the irrigation channels so I was pretty good at catching the yabbies. I did a lot of roaring round outside. I think I had a bike in Renmark. I can remember going out under the sprinkler on a hot day and turning brown because a dust storm came in. I don't think they have dust storms like that now.

I can remember Mother, when we went there the first day and she saw the house that we had to live in. She said, "Oh, it's all Government brown" and she had to stick to it. She was pretty unhappy about moving. She would never say too much. I think she just accepted that she had to go where Dad went and that was it. As they did. It was a whole different society then.

At Renmark, I made probably my earliest close friend, Ann. She was going to be my bridesmaid but she had a baby instead. She still lives here in Adelaide. We are not really friends any more. When we moved to Adelaide from Cairns, we looked them up as we knew her and her husband at University and we thought it would be nice to meet them again. We invited several of our friends, who believe it or not were from the Evangelical Union, which is where we met. (*Sigh*) (I am telling you warts and all!) And our friends came to our previous house and had afternoon tea. We did our best, but we had obviously "back-slidden" and they didn't ever ask us back.

Anyway, we didn't stay long in Renmark as Dad was sent to Port Lincoln and I was there from about Grade 4 up until the time I left to go to Adelaide High and then University. Dad retired a year after I went to University and they came to Adelaide to have a house for the first time in their lives and to be near me. By that time, my brothers were thoroughly married and were long out of the way. I think it

was a good move for my parents to move to be closer to me as it meant I had a base here instead of having to go back to Port Lincoln.

Dad (seated in the middle) and staff at Port Lincoln High

It was a great learning experience leaving home and coming over to Adelaide. But it was a bit strange moving back into home during the holidays because I was beginning to feel that I could be independent.

I can remember the first holidays to go home, I had to pack everything up and empty my room and then go to and fro. I went on the steamer, "*The MV Minnipa*", and I remember the first time I did that, I thought, "Mmm …, I have to pack everything up". So, I got a tea-chest and filled it up with books. Then of course just before I had to leave to take it the boat, I couldn't move it!

"The MV Minnipa"

My time at Port Lincoln was very formative, I think. The Primary School was at the bottom of what they called the Oval. It wasn't really an oval, it was just an open paddock. Then, the High School was at the other end and we had the house next door, which Mother called "Bleak House"! *(laughs)* It wasn't a beautiful house. It had a front with a sort of façade and the house went back. I don't know, it was a very odd place. And of course, it was all on tank water. There was an enormous underground tank which every morning I had to pump up to make the reticulation through the house. And we had chooks and bantams and there was a fine bit of scrub at the back which I would go and play in with the dog. This was a different dog, called Toby. Mother and I didn't think about any risks like snakes. I don't know what my parents were doing, really! It was a very happy time in Port Lincoln.

It was in Port Lincoln that I moved to my father's school and it had its moments, (*laughs*) made worse by the fact that I was always at the top of the class by umpteen feet! Father taught me maths for four years, but he also arranged that I was always in Colin Thiele's English class. I still have very fond memories of Colin.

My parents never saw the need for me to learn to swim. I used to jump off the jetty. How I didn't drown myself, I don't know! I also used to hold on to Toby, who was a Cocker Spaniel and he would take me way out over my depth. I don't think it occurred to anyone that I might drown, and I didn't! You know, I think we had a much freer life. The only bad thing about swimming was it was just after the War and Mother knitted me bathers out of bits of wool which she happened to have. Mostly, I remember they were khaki with green and red stripes. The problem was that when they were wet and you stood up ... I would have given my soul for ruched bathers. I saw some of my friends in them and … (*big sigh!*)

As I have said, I used to do all the shopping and I would do that with the dog. The greengrocer was owned by a Greek man and he was horrid. I could have an ice cream for doing this and I would pay an extra penny from my parents' money and I would get another ice cream and feed it to the dog. He

told my mother this and all hell broke loose. (*laughs*) I thought he was a nice man till then. I don't remember whether Toby got any more ice creams!

I didn't do fishing then. My father did. He would go away once a year on a fishing boat to fish and he would come back all bristly bearded and so on, usually with a bag of oysters which he loved. My mother didn't like them. Dad used to smoke a pipe incessantly, either that or a cigarette. When they were on holidays once, my brothers decided it was time that I knew the facts of life and they gave me a cigarette and an oyster. I have never looked at either since! (*laughs*) I used that when I had children. John, my youngest (they were all within three and a quarter years) came and asked me what it was like to smoke. I said, "Would you like to try?" And he said, "Yes!" So, I toddled off and bought a packet of cigarettes and I lined them up against a wall, sat them down and I said, "Now, we will all take a big puff together" and they have never smoked since! Susan thought she might try again later but I don't think she has.

At Christmas, Mother cooked, and she cooked on a wood stove. I can remember once seeing her sitting down at the end of the table, putting the meat on the table to be carved by Father and just drooping. She was fairly large, and it was fairly hot and she was very red in the face and dripping with sweat. And of course, the pudding was on the back of the wood stove, boiling away. I don't know how they did it.

We had a copper and because of Mother's heart, Father would have to do the washing which was most unusual at that stage. He had to boil the copper up every Saturday and I used to hang up the washing and turn the mangle. In the end, we got rid of the copper and a friend of my father's made a little copper kettle out of the original copper. We used it for years afterwards. Mum and Dad had a wood fire in Adelaide and every night that they had the fire on, they would put the kettle on for tea before they went to bed. Every Saturday, I had to clean the copper pieces, dreadful! So, when their house was broken up, I said to my brother, "The kettles are mine. I have earned them!"

Port Lincoln was a lot smaller then. My memory was that there was a population of 4000. We never came back to Adelaide for holidays when we lived at Port Lincoln. I can remember coming back with Mum and Dad once but I can't remember why. Perhaps one of his parents had died. We stayed at the RSL Club but I can't remember where that was now. There was a restaurant there and I can remember the white tablecloths. All that was on the menu was roast of the day, or fish and chips or something, but I thought it was marvellous! Dad came to Adelaide more often, but he always stayed there. He was very aware of being a veteran of the War and in fact after the First World War he stayed in London for a year and did some of the collections for the War Memorial in Canberra. Anzac Day was very big in his life. He always marched. And I think his consciousness about being a returned serviceman may have been part of his role in the Barossa.

Both my brothers are dead now, but there is a theory amongst us that Dad formed a liaison in London in that year. I think my elder brother would have known but he didn't ever pass on any information. He was very close to Dad. Before my father went to the War, he had wanted to be engaged to Mum, but she said no as you never knew what would happen, that he might find somebody else. They were married at Pirie Street Methodist Church within a fortnight of him getting back. So, you don't know …

He talked a lot about London and when David and I were in London several times, we came across the names of the streets, Horseferry Road and others. He was living in St John's Wood and when

I have been in that area and seen the street names, I think, "I know you!" My father never went back to London. So, I don't know. I suspect something happened and that's natural. People are people.

Dad came back in December 1919. He and Mum were married on January 10th in 1920 and in February he opened the High School in Peterborough. So, he must have had some teacher training before the War. Peterborough in those days was far from anywhere and my brother was born in the next December so almost immediately she was pregnant with no relatives. They had a drought. The story was that he came back every lunchtime with a beer bottle of rainwater from the school tank to make up the baby's stuff and Peter was very ill quite often.

There is a hilarious story about my mother who loathed her mother-in-law. My mother had hates for a lot of people. She came down with Peter as a baby and saw Grandma. Grandma put her on the train back to Terowie and she had to find her way back to Peterborough. Mother got on the train with the baby. The train took off and Grandma still had her handbag. Of course, this meant she had no money, no tickets and it was all rather nasty. (*laughs*) Dreadful! At that stage, the train stopped at Terowie, so she had to find her way from Terowie to Peterborough! We don't know we are alive! I mean I can't imagine how she managed. No mobile phones – no telephones really. They had them but that wouldn't have helped in that situation.

When my elder brother was dying in Sydney and he died over about six months, my younger brother had had to leave Australia for various legal reasons. He had had a fight with Don Dunstan, and he felt he would be arrested as soon as he got back to Australia. Also, as a lawyer, he had done something wrong in the practice. It really is worth a book, this family. And he describes Mother's horror at the handbag incident because he remembered this or had heard the story about the handbag. While my brother was dying in Canada, he said, "I can't come back to Australia but I can write to you" and he wrote the story of their lives in Peterborough and described Peterborough as a country town. Now, I think the letters are almost worth publishing and they are written in the most beautiful handwriting. If he made a mistake, he just screwed it up and started another page. He was absolutely obsessive. The letters really are beautiful.

I have the letters because he sent them to my brother and my brother sent them on to me. When my brother died, they had almost got up to Clare in the story, so I wrote to my second brother and said, "Hey, I am not born yet, so come on…!" And he did, so I have the complete set. But it is difficult to have them published because he mentions so many names… He describes what was in the house, what they ate, what Mother did, a real social history. But there would have been people with the same surnames and Mother was not known for her forgiveness and tact!

My second brother got married when we were in Port Lincoln. He married the elder daughter of one of the early settler families in Port Lincoln. They owned Boston Island and some farms down near the swamp. We used to go for picnics on Boston Island on a fishing boat owned by Axel Stenross. The Museum named after him in Port Lincoln is where the slip yard used to be. We would go down there and go across to Boston Island with Axel on the boat. There was a rookery of fairy penguins there on the island. We would sit down and the two mothers, Esther's mother and my mother, would set down the rug on the beach and the two elderly, rather portly ladies would sit down in their winklepicker shoes, all dressed up for a picnic, and they dispensed food. It was hilarious!

The two mothers got on in a funny sort of way, but there was a big competition between three ladies in Port Lincoln. One was Mrs Dent, the wife of the bank manager. One was Mrs Bishop, my sister-

in-law's mother, and the other was my mother. The competition was over who made the best sponges. So, three sponges would be produced at picnics and other events and they were surreptitiously compared. Mother thought that her sponges were the best because the other ladies used to use four eggs and Mother only used three. But the problem was there was no aid to beating eggs then and you had to beat them with a fork. And I was the fork beater for twenty minutes!

They were lovely days. Further round from Axel's slip yard, I was paddling there once and I saw Father jumping up and down on the beach telling me to come in. So, I did and there was a large fin!

So, Jeff married in Adelaide while we were in Port Lincoln. I was the bridesmaid and I had my first long dress. Peter had married in Sydney in January 1947 while I think we were at Renmark because Father drove from wherever we were to Sydney in an old Vauxhall. It was very hot and we took a week to drive to Sydney. Father believed that 30 miles per hour was quite enough! On the way back, we camped overnight at the side of the road near Ouyen, and I still remember Mother, who believed in corsets and things, standing up in her corsets and the train went by. We hadn't realised that we were camped on the side of the railway. (*laughs*) Talking of corsets, after I had Susan, I was washing up sometime and my father sidled up to me and said, "Dear, when are you going to get your corsets on again?" and I said, "Never!"

Peter married Rua, the elder daughter of one of the High Court judges, Judge Williams, and I was eleven at the time. Rua had a sister , Alison, who was about my age and we got on quite well. I wasn't a bridesmaid in this wedding because she had three or four sisters and it was all very posh.

When Dad and Mum moved to Adelaide, they bought a Housing Department house in Marden. It has been extended now with another storey put on. I was in my third year at University and I moved back into their house. I had Leaving Honours and my first year at University at Miethke House and then a bit more than two years with Mrs Richardson. Mum and Dad's house was in a new Housing Department area and Dad was always the Father Christmas. It had a sort of common area in the middle where the Christmas party was held, with Dad as Father Christmas. It was quite fun!

Then I graduated and got a job with Professor Morton, and he had been appointed the Professor of AgChem here at Waite, but he was still in Melbourne. So, I went to Melbourne for three months to learn the experimental things he was doing with mice and rats and things.

On August 2nd, 1955 and before I graduated, David and I decided to get married. I was in the middle of a Physics prac and I had to go out to lunch to meet David on a Tuesday and we decided to get married and that was it. We had met at the Evangelical Union at the University and we had known each other about a fortnight when we decided to get married. It was another conversion really. It wasn't very romantic. We were walking across the street on the Saturday before and David said, "I am getting very fond of you." Such a romantic proposal! I said that I would think about it. And that was about it! In the fortnight before the lunch, we had gone out a few times … It has worked quite well really! But we had to wait until he got through medicine and he was in second year Med then. We were eventually married on 8th January 1960.

When I did graduate, I got this job in Melbourne and David thought, "Good heavens, we ought to make this legal." We hadn't told our parents at that stage because we thought they would have a collective heart attack! So, David announced to his parents that we were going to get married and I did too. As I have said, David was in second year in Medicine and we had to wait until he got through. The

day before I was due to leave for Melbourne, David said that he would take me to the airport and Dad said OK. But David wasn't there when it was time to go. So, Father in the end in his pyjamas drove me into town to pick up David, who had had a long motor bike ride the day before and he didn't wake up. So, he met us in town on the corner of King William Street and North Terrace and Dad very nobly went back on the train in his pyjamas! *(laughs)* Poor David, he took a long time to live that down.

I then arrived in Melbourne and was met by the Professor who took one look at my engagement ring and said, "I didn't know you were engaged!" I told him that we were not getting married for years and he said, "Oh, yes, that's alright!" My most celebrated time of that period in Melbourne was when I nearly burned down the Bio-Chemistry Department. *(laughs)* At that stage, we had to distil our own water for dissolving things, you know. There was a big glass still and the steam was boiled out into a big thing and then it went over into a condenser, with a lot of rubber tubing. I went home one day, and I hadn't turned off the gas so it burnt through the rubber tubing and set fire to the bench. The next morning, I turned up and everyone was standing around looking solemn. For some reason, there was a recessed floor to the laboratory like on a boat with a thing so high (*gestures*) to step over and it was full of water. The gas had set fire to the bench. Then, the rubber tubing had burnt through and it had squirted water over everything which had put it out! The whole laboratory was a wreck! The Professor hadn't arrived yet and I remember thinking, "Oh, I am in trouble now!" Anyway, he was very forgiving. *(laughs)*

I had failed Biochemistry the last year at University. I went into the exam at Wayville and I had terrible period pain. I remember looking at the second or third of the exams and I thought, "I can't do this", so I walked out. They called me back later and said that if I had written anything, I would have passed. Of course, I couldn't tell them why I had walked out. So, I turned up at my mother-in-law's house which was on Goodwood Road for tea and said that I had walked out. I had to sit a Supp in Melbourne. They said, "Look, she's OK" and the Professor monitored me doing the exam. After about two hours, I had finished it and he said, "Are you sure?" And I said, "Yes" and it was fine. I had done quite a lot of work for that exam!

Melbourne was quite an event and I learned how to perfuse the livers of the mice, analysing them afterwards and so on. Then I came back to Waite and worked there for three or four years and then we got married. Probably by the end of the three or four years, I was of much more use than I was in the beginning. They always say the first year out for a Science graduate is hell for everybody!

I said to the Professor at Adelaide that I was getting married so I would have to resign. This was because I didn't have a car and we had to live on North Terrace because David was an intern at the hospital and Waite was a good way away from North Terrace. There was an arrangement whereby I could move down to the Bio-Chemistry Department in Adelaide from Waite, but not with this bloke. And the original Professor said, "We could get you a car." And I said no, that I wanted to be in Adelaide. Which was lucky because very shortly after we were married, I got pregnant within two months and I was terribly morning sick. I would turn up to the laboratory and be sick in the sink and go home again. So, after about five months, I had to stop work as it was just useless. And that was Susan. Mother was very relieved. She said, "You should not be working now you are married."

My wedding had been so long coming that I didn't really believe that it would. So, I took no interest at all in the dress or anything. Poor Mother had to organise it and she got a dressmaker to do it. It was rather nice actually. I cut it up a few months ago: I took the applique off it to go on to some

embroidery I was doing, and there were pearls around the top which I have still. The rest of it was very yellow. When the day finally came, I still couldn't really believe it and it was 108 degrees. My wedding dress was lined with Vilene and had a train. It was a choral wedding at Holy Trinity at 6 o'clock at night. David had joined the choir there. In the morning on that 108 degree day, I rushed to everybody I knew who had white agapanthus … Mother had said that I should have roses, but I said they would wilt … and I got back late to lunch and Mother was in a right stew. *(laughs)* She was beginning to go demented then, although I didn't realise it really, and she thought I had run away!

David and I were involved in the wedding planning and we had the rector and two curates and the choir. It was big production! I didn't want a reception as I knew Dad was short of money but he said no daughter of his was not going to have a reception. So, we went to the Grosvenor Hotel and the two sides of the family sat in different places at the reception. And my brothers were very naughty because they tried to get David's grandfather drunk! He was a dear old man and he didn't get drunk. As soon as we could, we left, rushed out and got the taxi and went up to where we had planted the car in the North Parklands. We rushed out of the taxi, got in the car and the taxi driver called out that we had left our suitcases in the taxi! *(laughs)* Anyway, we went to the Crafers Hotel for our honeymoon because I get very sunburnt and I had said that, "We can't go to the beach in January!" From our point of view, our wedding was an excellent occasion but our families didn't click.

Topsy and David on their wedding day, 8 January, 1960

David had a very small salary as an intern and we lived in Frome House, which was opposite the hospital. It was a big old house with a beautiful staircase. We had a flat on the top floor. There were two flats there to be used by interns at the hospital. Everybody else was seen to be living out but he was close enough to be called in. We had the odd one or three disturbed nights! So, we had our first year and a new baby there. Mother assumed that after I had had the baby, I would come home to live

with her. I don't know what she was thinking but after about a week, I said, "Mum, I think it's time I moved back with David." As I have said, she was going demented already at that time.

Continuing My Nomadic Life

We actually moved nine times in ten years. In those days, the inventory for moving was very detailed. You had to say how many baby singlets and everything. After the first time, you just didn't care so much.

New Zealand

I went back to Frome House but very soon we moved to New Zealand and David got a job in the Wairau Hospital at Blenheim. We had a glorious year in Blenheim and in fact David's sister married a farmer in the South Island of New Zealand. She married in the October 1960 after we were married and I can remember being terribly pregnant at the reception, with Susan being born at the end of November. She wore my wedding dress. So, when we went to New Zealand the next year, we were just across from the South Island from them and we used to go over and see them. She had a dreadful time. She had married this man who had never left the immediate vicinity of where he farmed, ever. As people used to, she went "back home" to England for a year or two. She was a pharmacist and went off and while she was in England, she formed a friendship with a New Zealand girl. On the way home, they called into New Zealand and she met her friend's brother. She was determined to marry him and for the first time leaving home, he came over to Adelaide for the engagement and then later for the wedding.

And it was an absolute disaster because his family were farming people and farmers' wives did not operate pharmacies and she had a pretty dreadful isolated time. By the time we got there about a year after, she was thoroughly depressed, and she spent the rest of her life alternating between the psychiatric ward and home. Awful! She had four kids as this is what farmers' wives did, too. I remember after their first baby was born, she got very severely depressed and we went over to see what we could do. He was living there with the baby, no living-in, you know. So, we went over and I can remember he said, "Oh, that's good, there's the baby". And there was the baby in the cot and a pile of dirty nappies on the floor … As we say quite often, "This is how it used to be!" So, she had a pretty rough time.

Topsy and Susan in New Zealand with a neighbour

Sydney

After that, we came back to Australia in February 1962 and David still didn't know what he wanted to do as a graduate so that the two intern years were sort of filling in time. Then, he decided that he wanted to do Pathology as that was the basis of medicine and he could do that. And he was a Pathologist from then on, really. We went back to Sydney so he could study Pathology as a specialist course there. He had a pretty unhappy time there. Professor Black was the Professor and he had married Nora Heysen. It was a pretty odd sort of arrangement. We went to see them one night for dinner and the whole place was full of cats and overgrown with jungle.

Rowena was born in Sydney in 1962. I had become pregnant for the second time in Blenheim and there was a German Measles epidemic. The afternoon I came back from seeing the doctor and saying, "Yes, I am pregnant", David came home from the children's ward with spots. A few months before that, an Australian man called Gregg had written the first article linking German Measles with disabilities in babies. David and I had looked at it from a scientific point of view. We found it interesting, but only one in three at that stage were thought to be affected. We thought, "Good heavens, we are not going to have an abortion, we will still have the baby." So that was Rowena and she was born deaf. Since then, we have seen other Rubella babies who were far worse and we got out of it very easily. David gave me the only treatment that was possible then, which was 20 mls of gamma globulin into the bum. Twenty mls …you know, it is usually one ml! He kept saying, "Stay still!", but I couldn't sit down for ages …

When I was nearly about to have Rowe, Mum and Dad decided they had better come to Sydney to see us. We didn't have a spare bed, really. We had one single bed so David and me and the baby had the single bed. Let me tell you, sleeping with a very pregnant wife is not a nice way to get rest.

The injections may have helped Rowe, I don't know. She was born with retinal changes, a lazy eye and deafness which was of course diagnosed later and the possibility of a heart murmur. She got over that and the retinal changes are OK.

In Sydney when Rowena was born, I embarrassed David mightily as I wanted rooming-in for that birth and they said, “Oh no, we don’t do that here.” So, I said, “Oh, I am leaving!” I rang David and said, “Come and get me.” I didn’t have any clothes, only my dressing gown and the Matron said, “You can’t just walk out” and I said, “Yes, I can!” Being a well brought up medical student, David was concerned about opposing Matron! (*laughs*) Anyway, I walked out with Rowe.

Townsville

Then we moved to Townsville in July/August 1962, where David worked in Pathology at the Commonwealth Health Laboratory. Townsville was still a little town at that stage and the available housing there was pretty dreadful. I took one look at our house and burst into tears and said, “Do we have to live here?” and David said, “Well, the rest are worse!” He had gone ahead from Sydney. He drove up by himself to Townsville, leaving me with my mother-in-law in the house to pack up. That was interesting! Then, we flew up and it was an exciting thing, really.

The great event there was the cyclone. We didn’t know anything about cyclones really, and it wasn’t very well forecast. One of David’s duties was to go out and look for quarantine ships, but the Townsville port wasn’t very good, so to get out to where the ships had to anchor, you had to follow some little posts in the sea. That day, some of David’s staff wanted to have a picnic or something, so they went out to do the boat with David being sick as usual, which left me at home with the two children. And the cyclone came. We were in a house on stilts and the water started coming in under the house. I thought, “What am I supposed to do?” I had two children to get up the back stairs and the wind was ferocious. Rowena was sitting in a car seat which doubled as a seat for sitting in the house. I left her in her seat looking at the water and took Susan up the stairs. There were no warnings and no advice on cyclone preparations. There was no television either. So, that was a bit exciting! The house stood up to it. David got back – they had been unable to do the boat trip in full because they couldn’t see the little posts in the sea. *(laughs)*

Launceston

From Townsville, we went to Launceston in March 1963 where David was working at the Commonwealth Health Laboratory on Howick Street.

A few weeks after we had arrived in Launceston, the Police knocked at the door and said, "Did I know someone called David Evans?" And I said, “Y-e-s ...” The policeman was quite a fatherly old man and he said, “ You had better come to the hospital, dear love.” So, I had the two little kids and we knew hardly anyone. I rushed in next door to our landlord whose name were Manty and Don Bridgebourne. Manty was virtually a grandma to the kids , and she took them in. I went to the hospital and there was David unconscious and with 50 stitches. He had not given way to a car on his right on a very steep hill and he had been thrown through the windscreen. It was before the seatbelt era and apparently the ambulance people said that they didn't have to hurry with him! But he wasn't dead and he took ages to recover.

A week after the accident the doctor came to me and said, “Mrs Evans, do come along here” and sat me in a nice room. He said, “Have you noticed that Dr Evans takes a while to reply to questions?”

I said, “He is always like that!” *(laughs)* They thought he had brain damage, but he didn't. He must have a thick skull! Anyway, he came home and he was in terrible pain whenever he sat up. I said that there was something wrong and it turned out he had some crushed vertebrae that they hadn't noticed. So, he was in a brace for several months.

This of course was on the front page of the Launceston paper about this poor woman with two babies. The local skin specialist offered us a car and the local obstetrician said they had a shack at Green's Beach nearby and we could use it for David's recovery. So that was great and then the administrative person from the Department of Health came and said, "Of course, he hasn't been with us for long and we can only pay for a short period of time." David was off work for three or four months as he was really quite badly bashed up. Our son John was conceived at Green's Beach, but we are not sure how ... John was born in Launceston.

The next day after the accident, a lady knocked on the door and said, “My name is Nancy”. We had gone for a few weeks to Newstead Baptist as David had been a Baptist. Nancy said that she would mind the children and she did. So, we had a car and a shack and someone to mind the children. It couldn't have been better. We did go to that church and they welcomed David with open arms and had a special service. During that service they said that, "We will pray that Topsy will see the light!" And I thought, “You buggers!” They saw me as a pagan and I was allowed to look after the babies at Sunday School but no older. And I did not like this! So, after a little while we left that church and we went to St Aidan's Anglican and that was a bit better but not much!

Very shortly after the accident, two or three days later, my mother-in-law arrived. I had rung them to tell them that David was poorly and my father-in-law said, "Oh, OK " and hung up. Gran arrived the next day by plane with a cheque for a new car which was really nice. She stayed for several weeks until we got David back to a more ambulatory state at Green's Beach. They also visited while we were in London. They stayed for three months, a fortnight with us and then a fortnight somewhere else.

While we were there, we had John in 1964. John, we never knew quite how he arrived because we didn’t think we were having any more! *(laughs)* And I can remember going into the hospital to book in and I said, “I would like rooming-in, please” and they said, “Oh, it’s your first baby, is it dear?” I said no, it was my third and they made it as difficult as they could make it. The nappies weren’t ever there and there was nowhere to put the dirty ones. So, I left very early again. The sky didn’t fall in and they do it all the time now.

At Launceston Airport awaiting visitors

Until we got to Launceston, nobody would agree that Rowena was deaf. Now, we knew she was because I could walk in and if she had her back to me, she wouldn't notice and that sort of thing. So, in the end, we went to Melbourne as we then had to go to the Children's Hospital to have her diagnosed as deaf. She was two and a half by then and we asked that the report be sent through to the paediatrician in Launceston as they didn't want to give us the full report except to say that she was deaf. During the investigations, Rowena was in the children's ward and I was on the fifth floor up with John as he was being breastfed and I had a poisoned toe! No husbands were allowed up to the top. After a while, we smuggled David in and one of the nurses came in and said, "I haven't seen a thing!" So, David could help to mind John and I would trot up and down to feed him and look after Rowe. The report came back to the paediatrician and when we asked to see it, he said, "Do you really want to?" We said, "Of course." The report was from the psychiatrist who did the assessment on the parents as they used to do and it said, "Dr and Mrs Evans are denying that this child is handicapped." And we had been trying for two and a half years to have Rowena diagnosed. It was really quite blistering and horrible. He was a bugger! It was how it was …

So anyway, we then had to teach Rowena to talk. There is a place in Los Angeles called the John Tracy Clinic, which was set up by Spencer Tracy and his wife because they had a deaf child, John. It provides lessons by correspondence for people to teach children in isolation to talk. So, we enrolled. I think we were possibly their worst parents because they had very strict ideas and you had to sit down with the child for an hour a day and you had to make them take notice of what you were saying. We took a much more fluid approach but they had very good ideas about teaching. We learned how to teach children to talk. It went on for some time and it was constant. They used a method of linking mouth movements to items and we had little labels on things round the house so Rowena learned to read at the same time. Rowena did very well and she used to win lip reading competitions. She is a

brilliant lip reader although we think that skill may have deteriorated since she had a cochlear implant because she is not so dependent on lip reading now.

London

From Launceston we went to London in late October 1965 as David wanted to do a Post-Graduate Diploma in Tropical Medicine at Hammersmith Hospital.

Going abroad

● BELOW: Dr. and Mrs. D. D. E. Evans are pictured at their Norwood Cres., Launceston, home with their children (from left) Rowena (3), John (1) months) and Susan (4). The family will sail for Melbourne this week on the Princess of Tasmania. On Monday they will board the Fairstar for England, where Dr. Evans will take up a World Health Organisation fellowship at London University. They expect to be away about 15 months. Mrs. E. Dudley invited friends to a morning tea party at her Walden St. home as a farewell to Mrs. Evans.

From "The Examiner", 3rd August, 1965

The trip over was fairly horrendous. *(laughs)* We went on *"The Fairstar"* which was full of whingeing Poms going home and an epidemic of measles and mumps. The only care for children was an enormous nursery and they had hundreds of kids there and one or two staff who really didn't know what they were doing. So, we looked after the children ourselves. David was sea-sick all the way and lost a stone and a half. We had a cabin pretty well in the bottom of the ship all in together and most of

the floor space was taken up by John's cot, with David sort of "sea-sicking" all the way. At one time, Rowena tried to go to the toilet and David was in there. He slammed the door and squashed her thumb. It was hell!

Topsy on the way to New Zealand

The only thing that kept us sane was "the lady from Launceston" and her surname was Fist. We knew them in Launceston and they were travelling too, so they would mind the children so at least we could have meals together. David didn't do all that much eating, but still! They had circular tables for the children with a hole in the middle where the poor Chinese stewards stood and dispensed tomato sauce around and so on. My children had never had tomato sauce and they learnt the most horrible eating habits and so on. But anyway, John learnt to walk on the boat so when we got off at Southampton, he had a nautical roll, along with his nappy bottom!

Topsy, Susan, Rowena and John with the lady from Launceston

We set out from Melbourne and went around the top of Australia across and through the Suez Canal. This was 1965 and we could see the bullets holes in the houses along each side of the Canal. We couldn't get off at Aden because they had just had a coup or something. It was a long trip, six and a half weeks and with three children under five!

We got off at Southampton and we had luggage that was all painted red. We had trunks with D.D.E. Evans in white on it. When we arrived at Southampton, because Susan was big enough to walk properly, we left Rowena sitting on the trunks while we went and did the ticketing and so on. She just stayed there as it was the only thing she knew. It was all rather difficult.

Anyway, we looked for a house in London and in the meantime, we stayed at a hotel which said it had a nanny, which was a help while we were house hunting. John got measles and I said, "Look at the heat-rash on this child!" I was terrified that we would be tipped out. We bought a house in Kenton, which is next door to Harrow. It was two storeys, sub-divided and on a roundabout. We also acquired an ancient car, an A 30. David went off to buy the car and came back very late. I said, "What's the matter?" and he said, "Well, it stopped on the way!" The car had a hole in the floor at the passenger seat, so we put an enamel dish over it because you could see the road, you know, which was a bit much. It was a little tiny car and we put the three kids in the back with no seatbelts. The great joy for the kids was when David went around and round the roundabout. They thought it was hilarious. I don't know what the neighbours thought! It was good fun.

Anyway, David was at Hammersmith Hospital for a year and we got lessons then from a Peripatetic Teacher of the Deaf, they are called. She came and her idea of rewarding a child was Smarties. I had firm views on lollies so that was a bit much. I can't remember her name. She came about once a week and taught Rowena and taught me a bit more. And we went to a clinic at a place called Neasden, I think for "Rubellas," because that was the time when there were a great number of

outbreaks. They sort of monitored her eyes and her heart and so on. Then we thought that Rowena needed to get out and see more children. So, we went around looking for a childcare place, a kindy. At the time, the hearing aids they had were that square *(gestures)* and you had to wear it on the front, even on the outside of overcoats. I made a holder for it but they were terrible things, useless. So, whenever we went to a kindy, and they saw the hearing aid, they would say, "No ,no, no. We don't have space." After a while, I went to a Montessori kindy at the back of a hall somewhere, quite an odd place, and the woman there took one look at Rowena and said, "We can't not have her." She was a Jewish lady and she ran the place. Whenever she was short of staff, she would ring up and say that I needed to go and help. They were lovely people.

Susan went to school and she was known as "that naughty Australian girl" because she refused to eat rice pudding. It is a real classic! She wasn't allowed to go out until she had finished her school lunch. I got called around several times to be admonished. *(laughs)* I can remember one day the roads were all icy and I still had to take her to school. We sort of walked along, holding on to the fence to get her to school. She didn't like that school. Rowena was too small for school and so was John.

We had an au pair girl, recommended by the next door but one neighbour who was a British lady. I was invited to morning tea one day and I heard her say on the phone, "Look, I have to go now. I have a lass from the Antipodes here." Anyway, she had a friend who was at the Sorbonne who was looking for work. My neighbour said that we didn't have to pay her, just give her a bit of lodging. The friend moved in and she was an absolute disaster! She didn't know A from B and after a while she left. She (the au-pair) decided she was sick one day and I had to go out and get her medicine. And I had a cold too! Her departure was mutually agreed!

Topsy, John, Rowena and Susan and a friend all wrapped up in England

Sydney again

Then, David had finished his Diploma and we moved back to Sydney in 1966 where David got a job as Lecturer at the Institute of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene at Sydney University and that is when the drama with Rowena's eyes happened. We went to see an eye specialist about her lazy eye and he said, "We had better operate on the eye muscles to stop it and we will just cover both eyes when she wakes up." I said, "No, you can't do that because she is deaf and she will go hysterical." The specialist said, "Oh no, that is what we always do." I said, "No." I wasn't going to have that done to my child! He said, "It will be your fault if it goes wrong!" And I walked into the operating theatre with her and I stayed until she was asleep and I was there when she woke up. And she was perfectly alright and now she has a cochlear implant which has worked very well indeed.

When Rowena was nearly three, we thought that we needed to find a School for the Deaf for her. There was a big school at North Rocks which taught Auslan not oral. We wanted her to speak and lip read not sign so we went to the Education Department and asked for the best oral school. They said, "Well, there is Penshurst." We had never heard of it so we said, "Where is Penshurst? Is there anywhere else?" And they said, "Well, there's Penshurst!" Penshurst was a suburb, down near Lugano and George's River. I had never heard of it and in the end, we got the message: they wanted us to go there. There they had a class for deaf children in an ordinary school. They said, "If you want the best teacher for the deaf, that is where you are going." So, we did and Rowena at that stage, all she could say was "Thank you", no other two words together. She had a lot of single word vocabulary. I could write them all down.

We met Betty Allan at Penshurst, she was the teacher and this was November. She said, "Ah well, we will have her in the Christmas party and here is the poem she has to say." I said, "Pardon?" She said, "Yes, it will be alright." The poem was:

"I'm a fairy doll, sitting on the tree,

All the little children dance around me."

And Rowena did it! Betty insisted she do it and she had a will of iron, that woman. Her heart was definitely in the right place and she became part of our family. She and sometimes friends of hers would come down every Christmas holiday and stay with us. The kids would be having a ball. You had to go out with Betty, she didn't believe in staying at home. We went out and we did all sorts of explorations.

We found a house to live in at Lugano once we had found the school for Rowena. There was a system in the Education Department that deaf children would be picked up by taxi for school and taken home by taxi. The trouble was that Rowena didn't always get up in time and the taxi wasn't good at waiting! So, I said to Betty, "What are we going to do about this?" and she said, "Send her in her pyjamas." I said, "Really?" and she said, "She will only do it once!" And she did, never again! You have to win! *(laughs)*

So, Betty was marvellous. She is still alive, but she herself is now very deaf and it is a bit sad. In a way, she was part of our life for two decades. We realised at Penshurst that the parents of deaf children needed support, so we started setting up a parents of deaf children group. It went very well. The parents of deaf children really appreciate being able to talk shop, to learn what other parents have done and it is a tremendous support.

Actually, something has happened during the writing of this story. As I have mentioned, Betty Allan who was so important in the family, had gone very deaf and it turned out she was in a nursing home. We had been sending her cards at Christmas and birthdays and she hadn't replied for two or three years. We had discussed it and thought well, perhaps she is not hearing the phone or perhaps she has decided that we were part of her life that is over.

Then, recently, Susan got a phone call from her niece, Annette, who had traced Susan by seeing something on endometriosis in the paper in Brisbane. She said that Betty had been in a nursing home in Sydney for two years, that she was very deaf and going demented. She said that Betty was not going to live very long. So, Susan rang me and said, "What are we going to do?" I rang Rowena (who had had a special relationship with Betty) and said, "Dear, if you feel you would like to go up, we will pay the fare." Rowena said she would go and she was terribly distressed. Nobody had thought to contact us and we kept wondering why we were not getting any response. Annette said that she had been visiting her regularly because some two or three years ago she noticed that Betty was not very clean, and Betty had never been like that. Apparently, she was living in the house with no electricity and no hot water. She obviously had not been paying the bills and it was a horrible story.

So, Rowena went up to Sydney on a Saturday because Annette was working in Gosford and she came down every Saturday to see Betty and the previous Saturday, Betty had asked about Rowena, hence the phone call from Annette. Rowena said that Betty didn't recognise her at first but Rowe, bless her heart, had thought to take some photographs and that sparked Betty's memory and they had a conversation. What an awful way things have turned out!

It is a moral for people living alone. All her friends had died and Betty had looked after them all. She ended up alone and Annette said that her father who was Betty's brother had died after Betty had looked after him and his wife and all their friends and she had no-one looking after her. It is awful and I feel terrible. We felt useless. We had contacted her four or five years ago as we were going to Sydney and we would like to get together. She said, "Alright, I will meet you at Wynyard Station." I did think at the time, "Why aren't we going to her house?" But, Betty had got confused and I thought then that that was strange. I didn't think at the time that she was the old Betty but I hadn't realised that things had deteriorated so much. I did think that she might have been so deaf that she couldn't hear the phone.

Anyway, she is still with us in a nursing home which is near her church and Rowe has been to see her. Betty is a devout Anglican and there was a man visiting regularly from her church but he has decided he doesn't want to go again because she had informed him that there was a head in the bar fridge, and the next week it was a body in the bar fridge. She was obviously away with the fairies which is very sad. Betty was the backbone, arms and legs for that church for decades, including being the Rector's Warden. Quite a difficult situation. But then I suppose you can see from their point of view that the number of people who had known her in her heyday were gone.

Canberra

We went from Sydney to Canberra in 1968/69 when David got a posting in the pathology laboratory at Canberra Hospital. By then, we had a black Morris Minor, an ancient vehicle, as well as a Datsun which was the one that Gran gave us. I drove the Morris Minor. We also had a scrawny looking stray cat which we used to call Mother Cat because she kept producing kittens and we could never get

her to the vet on time. As we left the house in Lugano, she was sitting up on the house, calling. We got her in the car and she cried all the way to Canberra. I was driving that car with the cat! We got to Watson which then was the northern most part of Canberra and the engine seized and the car stopped.

Rowena went to Ainslie School which had a special class for deaf children. The Canberra teachers were not as good as Betty Allan. In fact, the second year we were there, a teacher called Miss Heaps actually hit my daughter with a ruler on her hands. So, I decided I was going to sit with Rowena in her class every day so she didn't do it anymore. But there, we met an amazing woman called Betty Dawson, who had a deaf daughter, Belinda. Her husband Peter was the GP in Campbell and Betty was in touch with all the parents of the deaf children. They had started a group for these parents and we helped them. It was a very active little group and it was very, very important.

Betty had actually been to John Tracy Clinic to learn how to teach Belinda to speak. Belinda was profoundly deaf, much deafer than Rowena, but the two of them communicated very well. Belinda had a lot of determination but no hearing, and teaching her was hard work. She and Rowena got on very well and they could communicate, we don't know how. Betty and Peter remained our friends. Betty died unfortunately with dementia about three years and Peter died about a year ago. They made it possible for us to settle into Canberra very well.

John went to Watson Kindy which was close and Susan went to Watson Primary. One day, I was rung up because John had had an accident. He had skidded with his chin on the wooden floor of the hat room. *(laughs)* He had an almighty splinter in his chin! At that stage, they were also busy trying to teach Susan to write italic writing. The headmaster had decided that italic writing was what was needed and he was going to bring it in! I said, "Look, we are only here for a few more months and please don't teach my daughter italics, because we will have to change it!" They did nominally stop teaching her italics.

Hobart

Then David was transferred to Hobart in late 1969 to be in charge of the Commonwealth Health Laboratory in Stowell Avenue. He was also the Histopathologist. We were in Hobart for six years. We enrolled the children at Friends School because before we were married, my parents and I lived next door to some people, the Goodenoughs, and he had taught at Friends School. He had said that it was the best school he had ever taught in so we thought we would send the children there. When I realised we were moving from Canberra, I read something about Friends and thought, “Oh, well this is not too bad”, so we enrolled them in October. I told them, “We have three children and the middle one happens to be deaf. Will this be OK?” And they said they would see what they could do. I didn’t realise that William Oats who was the Headmaster, his wife was the person in charge of the State Education Department area for the placement of handicapped children in education.

I went along to see the class in Campbell Street where there was a deaf class and I said that we really wanted to know if we were doing the right thing. The Headmaster said that this was a serious thing and he would need to see Rowena. About an hour later, he came out and said that we were doing exactly the right thing. So that was good. Rowena stayed in the school and they really bent over backwards. They were marvellous. Rowena was in an ordinary class and she again had this beast called a peripatetic teacher of the deaf, Mrs Miller. After about a year, Rowena said, “Mum, I really don’t want

to see Mrs Miller anymore because it makes me different." She continued there right to the end of school and each year there was a teacher who kept special care of her. It had its moments but generally it was great. The other children did well there as well and went all the way to the end of their schooling there.

I was the first female President of the Parents and Friends. A few days before the election, a gentleman rang me and said that he didn't think it was any job for a woman and he was going to stand against me. I said, "That's fine. Thanks for letting me know." He lobbied frantically but he didn't win! *(laughs)* After we enrolled the children at Friends, we thought that we had better go along to the Meeting and see what they were going to be indoctrinated into. A dear old man got up and he said that he was going to read from Advices and Queries which is a document I don't actually like much, and it said, "Friend, consider you may be mistaken." And I thought with relief, "Ah, they are not going to tell me what to believe! That's marvellous!" Because every time we had moved, we had gone to the nearest church, whatever brindle it was, and I got more and more fed up by people telling me what I should believe … So, we decided that we would stay and after about two years, we joined.

The Society of Friends was really a life-changing thing for me because later on, the position of National Secretary became vacant and I thought that I could do that job. I went to see Bill Oats who by that time was a good friend and I knew he was on the selection committee. I said, "Bill, is it worth me applying?" He said, "I reckon." The application date came and went and I hadn't got around to it. Bill rang me and told me that I had a week … and I got the job!

But before then, Friends School costs a lot and David said, "Well, you will have to go to work!" Of course, I hadn't till then, so I thought, "Oh well, I suppose I am trained as a bio-chemist, but it is nine years later!" Then I heard that the Professor I had worked with in Adelaide was the Professor in Hobart at the University of Tasmania. I thought I should get a reference from him, I suppose. So, I trotted along and knocked on his door and opened it and he said, "Oh, where did you come from?" I said, "Well, I was wondering if you would give me a reference." He said, "Oh, you have a job in a month . We are looking for a tutor for the med students." I said, "But it is nine years and I don't know anything!" He responded, "Oh, that's all right" and he picked up all his text books and said, "Here you are and come back in a month!"

It was a fascinating time because by then, bio-chemistry had really taken off. I always feel that the thing that hit me most was that, when I left bio-chem, haemoglobin was a sort of bundle of protein and somewhere in it was an iron atom. No-one knew anything about it. And by the time I went back into work, a man called Rudi Lenberg had deciphered the whole protein sequence and how the iron was attached to it. (Rudi was one of the greats of biochemistry. He was a German Jew and later a Quaker. He was smuggled out of Germany into England where he studied before coming to Sydney.) However, at the time, I was really, shall we say, slightly rusty!

So, I had got this job in the Med School of the University of Tasmania and for that month, I did nothing but read. I did the swat and poor David had the kids! When I started, I turned up somewhat apprehensive and there were two other tutors. One was a man called Harmer who had depression. The other was John Coates who the next year decided he wanted to enter Parliament and he became a Senator. Then the two blokes said, "Look, we know you are a bit rusty. If they ask you anything you don't know, kick them in the kneecaps and come and ask us!" And they did. They helped me through that first year. I was about one class ahead each time, you know, it was really something! I was there

until 1975. That was a really fascinating time as there was so much to catch up on and so much to learn. It was very exciting!

When Betty Allan came down to visit us every Christmas holiday and often with one of the other teachers from the school, we always had a riot! We went to all sorts of places. We went camping. We looked over apple boats, we climbed the mountain and I think the kids had a pretty good time. In the meantime, Betty kept an eye on Rowe. By the time we got Rowena to Year 10, the two ladies were not getting on, Susan and Rowe! Susan was in her final year at Friends and she felt we gave too much to Rowe. We bent over backwards not to, but the perception was there. Teenage girls being what they are, I used to think well, perhaps the hinges will stay on the doors and if all they do is slam the door, then that is not too bad! So, we rang Betty one day and I said to her, "Betty, would you like to stop being a middle-aged spinster and become the mother of a teenager?" She said, "Yes." *(laughs)*

So, Rowena tracked off up to Sydney for a year with Betty and she came back much more independent. We had assumed that Rowe had to be helped a bit and Betty assumed the opposite. It was pretty traumatic for both of them, I think. I can still remember seeing Rowe walking across the tarmac to catch the plane to Sydney and I thought, "Ooh …" She went to Blakehurst High in Sydney, then she came back and did some more at Friends. It was a good thing to do, I think, although pretty traumatic all round.

In 1975, I decided I was sick of teaching. I really enjoyed speaking to and sorting out the students. They used to call me "Mum". (*laughs)* It was when Whitlam was in power and I thought, "Right. I will do a proper social work course." I had that all set up to do and then of course came the dismissal in November 1975 and the all of that was off as there were no active scholarships to be had. I had had to give six months notice to the University and I had done that, so I was in effect unemployed. I thought, "Oh, dear!" So, I went along to the State Community Welfare Department and asked if I could do child welfare work. The man looked at me and said, "How many children have you got?" I said that I had three children, including one handicapped child. He asked, "How old are they?" and I said they were teenagers. He said, "If you have weathered that, I think you will be alright!" I said, "What about training?" and he said, "Well, we can't worry about that, as we are short of staff."

So, I had a month or so handover with the previous person who was the Welfare Officer for the Midlands and she showed me some of the back tracks because some of the tracks in Tasmania are "interesting"! My area was full of what they called "shepherds' huts", mostly dirt floored lean-tos with no heating and no running water. These places were cheaper for people to live in. I did that for nine years and I eventually became fed up, not with the clients because I thought they were great, but with the bureaucracy which was too inadequate to respond to the kids' needs. I had 18 Wards of State who I had to look after, plus the miscellaneous complaints and the odd adoption.

The first few days I was in the Department, they gave me some of the files for the families I would be looking after. There wasn't a Child Protection Department then and I got halfway through one of the files and read that one of the children had died after being beaten to death. I thought, "Ooh, this is for real!"

I did feel threatened from time to time. I got chased by a man with a knife once and that was quite exciting as I was by myself in the Midlands and no-one knew where I was, no phones in those days. But mostly, I learned from the families. There was one woman and for some reason no-one wanted this family on their caseload. They were known throughout Hobart for being "The Joneses". Mum Jones

had this sprawling family of appalling kids, half of whom were in jail. I got to know Nancy very well actually. I went to see her in hospital when she was dying and she said, "Tops, who is going to keep this family together?" And she did, she had kept the family together. Oh, it was awful.

I took Susan to see her one day. It was a Saturday and I was going somewhere and I dropped in to see her about something. She lived in North Hobart which was why it was strange that I had her as a client but in fact nobody else wanted her. And, as Susan and I stood outside, one of the kids came with an air gun and shot around our feet. Susan said, "What do I do?" and I said, "Stand extremely still!" *(laughs)* So, it was a really learning experience. It was a challenge and I have always liked a challenge.

In 1986, I was appointed National Secretary for the Society of Friends. I was getting increasingly fed up with the administration and bureaucracy of the Community Welfare Department. I had been there about nine years and I poked David one day in bed and said, "I want to resign" because they had done something that I thought was quite appalling. He said, "Don't resign until you have something to go to." So, I survived the last year thinking that there was an end and I would get some long service leave!

And that is when the job was advertised to be the National Secretary of the Society of Friends. That was a paid employed job, not paid well but it was enough. That was actually terribly exciting as well because there is a group called Quaker Service Australia which does overseas development aid. It was based in Hobart and I was on their Committee. The group did work mostly in Cambodia, Vietnam, Uganda and some in India. We divided the Committee into two: one half was the Indo-China Committee which was Cambodia and Vietnam and the other was the rest. I was on the Indo-China Committee as Convenor and David was on the other.

Shortly after Pol Pot was defeated, Bill Hayden went to Cambodia to see what the Government could do and he found that only five people in Cambodia could speak English. They were shut off from the rest of the world and it would have been impossible to assist if there was no common language and nobody outside Cambodia wanted to learn Khmer. So, Bill Hayden persuaded the Government to set up training for interpreters and teachers of English.

Quaker Service Australia had been doing a very small project in Cambodia making reed mats for people to sleep on and we were one of the very few Australian groups who were doing anything in Cambodia. So, we were offered to run English training. None of us knew how to do that, but a woman called Audrey Cornish with whom I am still friends went to Cambodia to see what could be done. The Cambodians were very suspicious and said that they would have to choose the ten students (in other words, they wanted their kids to do it) and the training would have to be done in Vietnam because they didn't want foreign influence in Cambodia. So, it was all set up. After the first year, it came back to Cambodia and we had more students and it became obvious that different training was needed for interpreters and teachers. That ran for a number of years and we got our first graduates from the five years course. And because I had been sent to monitor the project and keep an eye on it, as well as being the Convenor, I was asked to speak at the graduation ceremony. It was held in a terrible old classroom but we did have the Ambassador and all that there. I had to give my little speech and I produced about three words of Khmer! It was quite fascinating. We had in the end about 15 teachers of English there and we had to advertise for them and select them. I went 13 times to Cambodia to keep an eye on the project. It was very exciting and completely different.

The first time I went, we had a male teacher there, Mark Deasey who was a Quaker in Melbourne, and he said, "I will meet you at the plane." We had to leave from Bangkok at 4 30 in the morning on this funny little old plane. When I got there, he was at the bottom of the stairs and we walked over to the airport which had dirt floors and which were like sheep yards really. We got through the formalities and we drove through Phnom Penh. It was not all that long after Pol Pot and it was all wrecked and awful. When we first went there, we had to have minders and Mark who was very tall with red curly hair would stand out!

I was involved in this work until 1998 when I stopped being Secretary. But that English program lasted five or six years or longer, I forget, and I have all my documents in boxes downstairs. I haven't opened them yet. I also have a book about it with lots of pictures of the team. Then, the Australian Government decided that the program would be given to a University in Australia and I think that decision was absolutely right. So, we had to see through the handover. The University of Technology in Sydney (UTS) people were not polite but that is alright! They thought we were amateurs which we actually weren't by the end.

That was the biggest project that Quaker Service Australia had done. The selection of teachers was interesting because we had a range of people who wanted to speak English and do good, we had a range of people who wanted to go to Cambodia and get away from something here, and everything in between really. And of course, they would tend to live together in a house and there were the usual ructions: they would always have bowel problems and get Dengue fever and we had to sort that out. I was always on the selection panel and one applicant came with great recommendations from a fellow Quaker and lasted a month. I rang the Quaker who was a friend of ours and he said that he thought she would do better over there if she got away from the problem here!

We had to deal with the Ministry of Education in Cambodia and after a few years we thought that really the students weren't progressing with their English because they were not using it. So, we brought ten students over to Hobart to stay for a year to give them English by immersion. We found a house so most of them could live together which was not ideal as they could still talk Khmer. But before we could bring the students here, we had to bring three of the top Cambodian officials to Australia because they in effect wanted a holiday! We had to look after them and they had to be convinced that it would be safe here.

I think that the Cambodian English program was a major step forward for the country and in fact when we left, we didn't realise that we would be coming back. About 18 months later, we devised a program and we got funding to go back and do an HIV Prevention and Education program. David was on the Advisory Committee to the Tasmanian Government on HIV and we thought that Cambodia was in real strife. I went back and talked to the Cambodian Government about the possibility of doing this program and I was told to front up to the Minister. It was a boiling hot day and they always say the first few days Topsy does a melt-down! I was absolutely drenched and one of our students came down and said, "Mrs Evans, I am your interpreter. You will be perfectly alright. It is going to be fine. So-and-so who is one of the people you will be interviewing went to Hobart!" He said, "When can you start?" and I said that we needed official permission first. He said that it would take a few months but we could start next week! Of course, we still had to set the program up!

So, those types of spin-off programs were also a legacy of this work. I was pretty proud of the program and I was acknowledged as a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) for my overseas aid work and also for the work I did in Hobart on domestic violence.

Topsy receiving her Order of Australia from Governor Phillip Green, 11 June 1996

In 1983, in about the February, we had a couple come to the Meeting in Hobart. They had moved there and he was in the CSIRO. They got on quite well with the members. Then Maureen left her husband in about the March or April and she came and had lunch with me and she said, "Topsy, I am frightened he is going to kill me." And I said, "Well ..." I was working in the Welfare Department at the time. She said that the children had to see him because he was their father. But, he was a really odd bloke. So, I said, "If you are handing over the children every weekend, you can have a supervised handover." That practice was really new then, no-one was doing it much. So, she agreed and that was set up.

The father still used to come to Meeting and we would sit with Maureen so that she wasn't sitting by herself. I can remember the Sunday before she died, I was sitting with her and I saw him looking over at her with a funny smile on his face. But then a few days later, she disappeared. He had rung and said that he couldn't come on the pre-arranged day for the handover and was it too late to change it? Then, she disappeared.

There was a group of three or four of us who were doing the shepherding and on the Monday after, I went to the Head of Department and said, "I think he has killed her somewhere and I want the case to look after the children." He sort of looked at me and said, "Alright, Topsy", thinking that I must have been imagining things. *(laughs)*

We found out that she was dead after he advertised in "*The Mercury*" on the Monday for a child minder, saying that he had two children who needed looking after. At that time, the children were five and seven years of age. And then he said that his wife was missing.

The police became involved and it became obvious that in fact he had killed her. He had chopped her up into small pieces and flushed her down the toilet, except for her long bones and her skull, which he hid up on Mt Wellington. So, in the middle of the night, we had to go and snatch the children and I had to tell the little kids that their mother was dead. And the little boy, aged five, said, "Oh, he must have hit her harder this time!" All rather awful. Anyway, it was a *cause celebre* because he was in fact very high up in the CSIRO and he wrote an apologia from prison entitled "*Mad Scientist*". I also have some of the newspaper clippings.

She didn't have any relatives in Australia, only one sister in America, and he had a brother. I thought that the kids really couldn't cope with the stuff that was in the paper and that some other arrangement would need to be made for them. In the Meeting, we had a couple who lived way down in the south of Tasmania who were registered foster people. I rang them and they agreed to take the children. They said that they didn't get the paper, nor did they have television, so it would be OK to take the children. So, we took the kids there and it was a two-hour drive each way, there and back.

The father was charged with the murder and I had to sit there in the court next to him as I was there to report on the children. It was all a bit nasty. We appointed a lawyer called Miriam Court to be the lawyer for the children. She was great and she would go down with me to see the children.

I had had to get the children from down south up into Hobart without seeing any of the news stands. There was another couple in the Meeting who knew them so I took them to that house where they looked after them for the night and then we did the shift. We had to get the sister and her husband approved as adopting parents. It was quite an active time!

Within a fortnight, we had arranged for the children to be fostered by their aunt. She came out from America with her husband. But, for that to be approved by the court, you had to get permission to take them out of the country and the children had to be in court at the same time as their father. I jumped up and down a bit and the Magistrate said that as long as they were in the court building, that would be alright. So, I went into the court with the dad and the children would be in the building, which technically satisfied the rules and they were then given permission to leave Australia.

So, within a fortnight of the mum's death, arrangements had been made for the children and their dad was in jail waiting conviction. It was obvious that he had done the murder. Unfortunately, a year or so later, the American husband gave up and separated from his wife, but she stuck by the kids.

In the early days, I had to take the kids to see their father in jail and one time I was sitting in the room with the father and the kids and of course a warder, and the little boy said, "Why did you kill her, Dad?" And he said, "It was a sort of love." Then I went cold because I thought he was in effect admitting it in front of a warder. At that stage, he hadn't admitted to the crime and he hadn't been sentenced.

I found out that the dad had been married before and he had beaten his previous wife up and she left. He had been tipped out by his alcoholic mother at age 13. It really was a dreadful story! His father came over from California and we talked through all that. The husband, Rory, had had a dreadful life but he had been absolutely brilliant, one of the top oceanographers in the country. During that time, on one occasion I stopped off in California to see his brother and sister-in-law. They lived at San Luis

Obispo on the San Andreas fault line. Looking from their farm down the valley, you could see the nuclear facility that they had built on the earthquake fault line! Can you imagine it, in the Diablo Canyon? So, that was interesting and I was glad to get out of there. But his sister-in-law said that she could remember when he was agitated, he would go towards someone and shake. She was terrified of Rory. He seemed to be better with blokes.

I had to go to see him in jail fairly regularly and tell him about the children and I used to be put in the cell alone with him. They kept him in the hospital section because they thought everybody else would have a go at him. One day, he said to me, "You know, I had to do it." And I think I said something like, "No you didn't. It was your choice." He got terribly annoyed and I was glad to get out of the cell. He then sent me a letter saying that he never wanted to see me again and he had got so annoyed with me that he had hit a warder and he was in isolation! I didn't like it. I looked at the letter and thought, "Well, good!"

He wrote his book from prison and when it came, I sent the family away for a weekend so I could read it. It contains not one word of remorse. It was all, "She made me do it, it was all her fault as she wouldn't do what I told her." Luckily, he committed suicide about five years ago, best thing he could have done, really. He was jailed under a Tasmanian law which is also in Scotland where you can be found "not guilty but insane" and he was detained at the Governor's pleasure.

Even his relationship with his children was very controlling. About six months before he died in prison, his son contacted him and they built a fair relationship with writing and phones. He came over to see his father and his sister came too and they got on reasonably well.

And then, he escaped from prison. At that stage, he had been a model prisoner and he was in charge of the garden outside the prison. He would go out there every day and work in the garden.

After ten years, the dad said he had done enough time, and he wanted to get out of prison. The Chief Psychiatrist in Hobart, a man called Russell Pargiter who was getting quite old by then, said that he should be released as he was no longer insane. And of course, everybody went into orbit. There was quite an impassioned little group who wanted him out and I thought, "Really, if I didn't know about this man, I would think the same." But, he would have gone straight on and done it again. So, I went to see the Attorney General. Tasmania is a funny place; everybody knows the politicians and they know you. But, the Attorney General gave me a hearing. I talked about the history with the first wife and that he was not remorseful and he said that as long as he was Attorney General, he would not be released. It would not be in the community interest. I felt terrible saying this about the dad, but I could see no good in that man.

Then one day much later, he just didn't come back in from the garden for roll call. What happened was that he had walked out. He had some money, so he bought a bus ticket from the bus stop outside the jail and went into town to the bank where he got $490 out of his account and was actually getting on a plane to Melbourne! But, there was a woman at the bus stop who had had a funny conversation with this funny man and had then told the police. And so they got him off the plane and took him back to jail. He tried several times to be released but without success and in fact, he was due for another appeal hearing when he hanged himself.

After that, his son came back and said that he understood that his father had a lot of money in an account in Switzerland and that he wanted some of the money. He left it all to the World Wildlife Fund. *(laughs)* It was definitely a saga from beginning to end!

Quite a few of us who had been involved in all this thought all this was appalling because Maureen actually had a restraint order against him and, when she had gone to the police saying she was frightened, they had said, "Just keep the restraint order with you, love." And that was all that happened. So, we thought something had to change and we formed an ad-hoc little group, which later became the Domestic Violence Action Group and we lobbied Parliament to get the law changed. And it was changed so the police had to act and it got things out of medieval times. We ran workshops for police, social workers, psychologists and teachers and anybody who would listen. The law is now much better. Also, the Government set up a Crisis Unit which was just for domestic violence and it became law that the police would involve the Crisis Unit if they were called out to a serious situation.

Maureen's death was a pivotal, life-changing thing as I realised then that I could stir. *(laughs)* During my involvement in domestic violence, I was employed by the Quakers and I could see then that I could speak out against the Government, it didn't matter because they couldn't chop off my funding. So, her death on September 13th 1983 changed a lot of things for the better and it certainly changed the way I saw domestic violence. As a welfare officer, I would be the duty officer for the day and people would come in and say they wanted food orders and so on, and many of them would say, "Oh, he beat me up last night." I would sometimes think, "You only say that because you want a food order" but now I don't.

So, in the end, we were running workshops for ministers, which went really well. On one classic occasion, there was an Anglican minister from a very big church in Hobart who attended and he asked whether we would come and present the workshop in his church. But there would be only one restriction, "You mustn't tell the women to leave their husbands." This was because the husband was the head of the household and it was a woman's cross to bear. We refused to hold the workshop as there was obviously not a sufficient level of understanding there. Unfortunately, it is still like that in many churches. A while ago, the Uniting Church I think it was produced a thing called, "*Not in My Church*". I thought that this sounds exciting, but it was bordering on the same traditional message.

We really got underway, because a woman called Priscilla who was in and out of mental hospital all the time joined our group. She said that she had been a victim of psychological violence from her husband. They were both Catholics. She decided to leave as he would play mind games with her, take things away and tell her to find them and then tell her she was dumb if she couldn't find them. She said that it was time we did something about it instead of just talking about it.

So, we set up a group called SHE ("*Support, Health and Empowerment*"). Good sabre rattling, feminist stuff! That was in 1987 and I went to the head of department and said, "Dennis, we need money!" He said that he couldn't do it until SHE had been running for two years and it had proved to be satisfactory. So, we ran it with volunteer help for two years. We got an upstairs set of rooms above some shops in Sandy Bay and we furnished it by begging. We would go around and get old carpet and chairs and stuff. We started training ourselves because we really didn't know what we were doing. We got hold of a thing called the "Duluth Model" which was named after a place in Minnesota where they set up the first really active and integrated domestic violence agency. They worked out the theory of what people needed to know and why things happened the way they did. It was really good, extremely

feminist and it was also used as the absolute model for years in Hamilton in New Zealand. We trained ourselves and we ran these workshops. We found that to get change, you really had to push.

I have some lovely letters which I found recently from the Attorney General, the Premier and so on saying that they would give us money and support. Once we got money, we found a place in North Hobart with a big red door on it and of course, it had to be relatively secret and safe. You had to have an escape route, one front door and all this sort of stuff. We began there two years after we started and it is still going.

The first poster we produced was black, with a white hand. It was Priscilla's hand. She was an artist and she drew her hand and it said, "Hands Off!" Quite brilliant and very powerful. And we produced a "Stop" card, which you folded over and it said "Stop Domestic Violence" on the front and inside, the phone numbers of the police and the various shelters and so on. People could keep these cards in their handbags or whatever for easy access if they needed to yell for help.

The STOP Card

At SHE, we didn't provide people with accommodation and shelter. Our role was to talk to people before they left their partner to help them clarify if a domestic violence situation was involved and then after, so they could grow the skills not to go back. So many people go back! We used to say that they would go back three or four times and then they will stay away.

That was pretty heavy stuff, really. Just recently, when I was in Hobart, I thought it was time that I went back to see SHE. I went to the place. The red door wasn't there but there was a very tough security door and I knew then that they were still there! I knocked on the door and a woman came out and I explained who I was. She said, "Oh, come in!" and she showed me around. They have it really nicely set up now, but she said that there was one thing that I might not be happy about. I said, "Oh, what's that?" She said that they had changed the name to "Engendering Equality" because they were getting men coming as well, saying either they were victims or seeking help on how they could stop their actions.

The organisation was also the most highly paid (from the Government) domestic violence unit in Tasmania and doing well. Every now and again, SHE was faced with the possibility of not getting any

further funding so we used to get all the women politicians together from both sides and have morning tea. This was to get them to take a bi-partisan approach. We held a public demonstration with a microphone in the Mall in Hobart in the middle of the city because we put the "Stop" image on the back of a yellow bus. We also got Peg Putt, one of the Greens Senators who wanted to talk. She got on the loud hailer and she said, "I have never said this before but I was a victim of domestic violence." Good old Peg!

Topsy on the hustings!

I was involved with domestic violence from 1987 to 1998. It was pretty exciting stuff and very life changing. I ran a fortnight's workshop in Singapore for psychologists and social workers on domestic violence and we kept up the relationship with the group there. SHE was an amazing group! I think it was only possible in Hobart because we had contacts in Parliament and elsewhere. We could ring up Judy Tierney at the ABC and say that we wanted something on the ABC and it would happen.

I have recently contacted some of the women who were involved with SHE with me and we all went out to lunch on Friday September 20th when we are back in Hobart for a gathering of people connected with the Collection of Medical Artefacts (COMA). *(laughs)* A man called Phillip Thompson who is a retired General Practitioner has this collection and he has formed this group, COMA. The Women's College at the University, the Jane Franklin Hall, is going to house it in Hobart. We know quite a lot of people involved with it. The Saturday morning workshop was on medical artefacts and the chief speaker was a man called Paul Duncombe who wore a large condom at the HIV/AIDS demonstrations. I walked along the streets with him!

Because we were going there and we all had the Friday free, I decided that just for once we wouldn't do anything medical and we would do something that I wanted to do. So, I contacted some

people and we had lunch with the SHE-ites as we used to call ourselves *(laughs)* and they were all keen. There were about six people there, an all-girls thing. We went somewhere quiet so we could gossip and where they didn't mind that we stayed for a while. The others were all feeling a bit peeved because they feel a bit taken over and the new people didn't consult them or try to get in touch. So, I think we can build a little bridge there. Isn't that exciting!

The SHE-ites in Hobart, September 2019

As an aside, when we were running the AIDS campaign in Cambodia, I was due to go on a monitoring visit, and the teachers wrote back and asked if we could bring a variety of condoms to make a joke of it. So, one night we were all dressed up to go somewhere and I said, "Let's call in at the pharmacy." We asked if we could have some of all the condoms they had and they looked at this well-dressed couple getting into a sportscar which David had at the time and wanting a variety of condoms! Everybody thought this was terribly hilarious! But, you can get them with spots on and bumps on and in different colours. As it turns out, the women's condom is not very attractive. People have tried to push it for a long time in Africa but the advantage is that they are re-usable and the woman has control over using it. But it certainly is not an ascetic beauty!

After further study, I achieved the qualification of Master of Social Sciences in 1983 when I was working with the students and also received a Diploma in Welfare Law in Hobart in 1985. This latter study was after I became a Welfare Officer and I thought that I had better do sociology. I went to enrol for sociology and the man doing the enrolment said, "Don't be stupid, do a Masters" even though I had said that I hadn't done any sociology before. He said, "That's alright." And that was a really exciting course because it was a whole new re-learning. I had to get some new glasses because there was so much reading! It was sociology theory, Weber, Marx and all sorts of things. I have a great respect for

Marx. I think Marx was on the thing! The way he was interpreted was a bit of a problem but he knew what he was about.

My involvement with HIV/AIDS all came about because David used to run the STD Clinic in Hobart. He was invited by I think it was the United Nations to go to a conference in Singapore on laboratory testing for Sexually Transmitted Diseases. When he came back to Hobart, he found that there was no-one running the STD Clinic. Nobody wanted to do it so he said that he would do it. And then AIDS came and I can remember him and Susan sitting around talking about how it was funny that there was a group in New York with this condition. What was it? And nobody knew anything about transmission and there was a lot of fear in medical circles. The nurses refused to look after people and it was horrible.

David and I thought that this was a social problem, not a moral one. So, we followed anything new that came out. I was on the Family Planning Council when it was first set up in Tasmania. (I am a Life Member now.) We were doing a lot of stirring at the time because if a woman wanted an abortion, she had to fly to Melbourne. Unfortunately, it is still the case now. For a while it was better, but now it has collapsed again.

The family planning people became concerned because it became clear that AIDS was transmitted through sex, so they had to do something about it. At the time, people saw that gays from New York and people from the Caribbean seemed to be involved. Then it became obvious that gay men were having sex with other men who may have been having sex with a woman. So, we had a hilarious weekend. We got all the information and videos on the subject, and the people in Family Planning and the Sex Unit together and we went through everything to try and get ourselves up to speed. It was an interesting weekend! *(laughs)* We still talk about one or two of those videos which were absolutely memorable. One was called, "*Chuck's Party*". Chuck was one of the gays in New York and he knew that he was going to die. So, he had a grand fancy dress party and it was videoed. There were princesses, with hair and crinolines and the lot. It was quite amazing! And his parents came and there was a reconciliation after a long time. That was very memorable.

We finally got a bit of fact together and we ran workshops for nurses. We got the nurses from the Fairfield Infectious Diseases Hospital in Melbourne to come because they were treating AIDS patients by then and none of them had got AIDS. So, they could say, "Look we are nurses, we are doing this, this is what we do to protect ourselves." And David and I also went twice to the warders at the Risdon Gaol. They were awful sessions as the warders were pretty tough and they would say, "Oh, it's all very well for you" so that was a bit grim. We did try to change the philosophy in the gaol and the medical fraternity and I think we were partially successful.

AIDS was a big part of our life really. In the late 80s, after the English language program in Cambodia finished, the UN was struggling to get people to talk in developing countries about HIV as there weren't many people who knew what they were talking about. So, I was invited to talk at United Nations Development Program conferences. They had a series of ministerial level conferences where they talked to the Minister of Health, the heads of various departments, the police chief and so on. And I talked at those in Burma, India and Malaysia. They were interesting because I was allocated to talk about women who were not prostitutes. All these countries were happy to say, "Oh, yes, it is the gays and the prostitutes". But, in most Asian countries, men visit prostitutes as normal. In fact, some people believed that you would get sick unless you visited a prostitute once a week. And then, of course, they

would go home to their wives who weren't promiscuous and give them HIV. So, that had to be talked about in conferences. To support my conference presentations, I would get the medical information through David and I would encourage dealing with AIDS through a social lens.

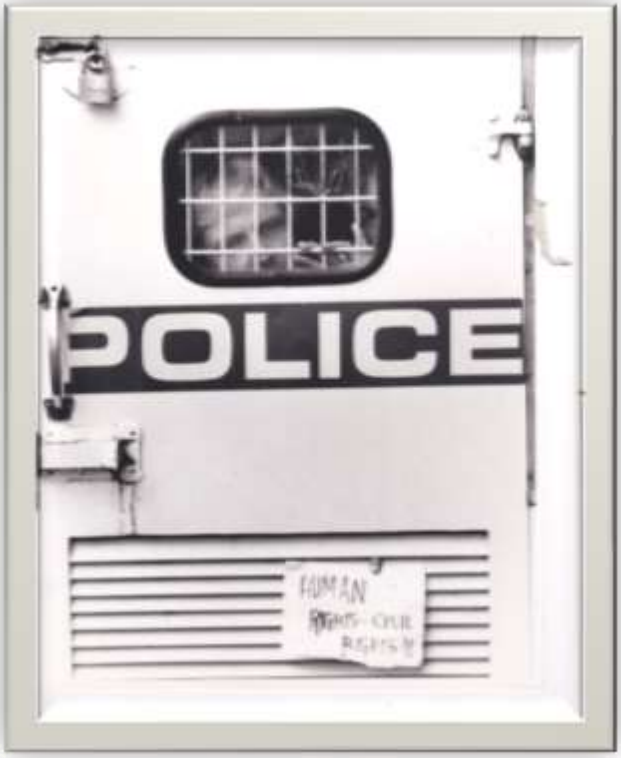
Back in Hobart, there were several demonstrations. The Meeting was interesting because we said that we wanted to march in the protests under a banner that said, "*Quakers Support AIDS Victims*" or something like that. The Meeting said that we couldn't say that as one old bloke didn't like that and Quakers won't do anything unless there is unity. So, we changed it to say, "*Quakers Supporting AIDS Victims*". Isn't that gorgeous! David thought of that. I was so cross that I just wasn't thinking! The difference was that we were there marching as Quakers but the banner didn't say **all** Quakers were in support. We have used that little sleight of hand several times.

Hobart is probably the "Demo Capital of the World". I don't think people realise that. There is a standard route for marches after gathering in Franklin Square. And then came the Salamanca riots in 1988. There were six weeks of riots. The AIDS Council said that they wanted to change the law which at that stage was supposedly the most homophobic in the western world. You could be arrested for being in drag after sunset; I am not sure what sunset had to do with it*! (laughs)* And homosexuality itself was illegal and if you were branded as a homosexual you would go to gaol and be locked up for long periods of time. It was absolutely draconian, horrible stuff! So, they said that we had to change the law.

They decided to have a petition to seek support for a change in the law. They also decided to set up a little stall in the Salamanca markets and we would ask people to sign a petition. But, because the City Council used to close off the road for the markets, they said that we were on Council property and that they had received a complaint or complaints saying that it was offensive. We had a poster or sign involving a map of Tasmania and HIV. The aim was to show that we were trying to get rid of AIDS in Tasmania. It turned out that there was only one complaint by one of the women on the City Council but they said that we were trespassing without approval for the stall on Council property.

This was at the stage of the Franklin Dam and so on. As a result of the Wilderness campaign when people were protesting against the Franklin Dam and trespassing on Crown land, a law was passed by Parliament that if you were convicted of trespass three times, there was a mandatory prison sentence. This meant that the usual suspects acting against the Government could be plonked in gaol. At the time, there was a great story going around Tasmania that it was the best thing that had happened to the gaol for a long time as they had international people coming for the dam protests, who complained about conditions, so they all got new mattresses and better food! There was a man called David Bellamy who was well known worldwide, and he was gaoled and he made a big fuss!

So, anyway we were there breaking the law of trespass because we were asking people at the markets, very politely, would they like to sign a petition? And then, there would be a Council man standing nearby with a police officer and you would get arrested. I thought this was pretty outrageous *(laughs)* and so I toddled along one Saturday morning. David was in England and my son was rowing in a school or Uni event and he was going off to rowing training. I said, "Look dear, I may be home late for lunch as I may get arrested." And he said, "Oh, alright." So, I tootled off and did my little bit, and I was arrested and put in the paddy wagon.



Topsy in the back of a paddy wagon, 1988

Recently, my grandson decided to write that event up. He is doing Engineering in Melbourne and as part of his course he has to do creative writing. It has to be of a "creative non-fictional event" so he decided to write up my escapade. The draft has been rather lurid and I asked him to tone it down. I haven't yet seen the final version but I will ask him for it.

After they had filled up two or three paddy wagons, they thought they had done enough so they left the markets. But, after two hours in the paddy wagon with 11 other people, it got very hot and we were taken off to the police station to be charged and processed. When we were charged, we were processed by the police wearing white rubber gloves and so on. They were scared stiff of us, obviously! I did ask, "What is it with the rubber gloves, young man?" and I was told it was routine police procedure!

Anyway, we were hauled up into court and the problem was that I was the court office quite regularly for the Welfare Department. The Magistrate was there on a Saturday morning and he was bored to tears going through all these things. And when I was charged under the law, he looked up and said, "I think we will adjourn the Court." *(laughs)* Poor man, he didn't quite know what to do!

We all got charged and this whole process went on for six weeks. But the thing that worried me most was that the atmosphere at the markets got increasingly aggro and I thought very soon this is going to turn into violence. So, David was away but I got two sympathetic doctors with me and we asked to speak to the Council for five minutes. They weren't very happy about that but we went in and by then I had done some conflict resolution workshops, so I thought, "What have we got in common here?" So I said, "As a member of the Council, I am sure each of you would be concerned that we are coming up

to the Christmas break and people will have holidays so that means that most of the gays in Australia will come down to Tasmania for this issue. Do you want that?" Then, after half an hour's discussion, we were asked to wait outside. They had given us five minutes! Then, they came out and said, "We have decided to drop all the charges" which we thanked them for. There were over 100 people who were facing charges at the time.

Twenty years after in 2008, there had been a change on the Council. The man on the Council, a doctor, had been the most vehement opponent, he was still there but the others had changed. The doctor on the Council was very well-known and he went on the equivalent of *The 7 30 Report* and said, "I am appalled that someone like Topsy Evans, of all people, is supporting this!"

The Mayor was sympathetic and I think he thought that the events needed some sort of acknowledgement. It came out of the blue. Everybody who was arrested got an invitation to a reception in the Town Hall. We were in Nepal when the invitation arrived and the reception was to be the day after we arrived home from Nepal. And I said, "David, I don't care if I have to crawl to get on that plane, I am going!"

And it was great! We had all the people who had been arrested. We had Bob Brown, Christine Milne and Rodney Croome. We had the lot! There were waiters wandering around in dinner suits and white gloves with champagne, not a rubber glove to be seen. And the Mayor and Rodney Croome embraced on the stage. Oh, it was hilarious! And the collective apology was given to the people who had been affected by the events twenty years earlier.


GROUP BAN AT SALAMANCA MARKET

TRESPASS

POLICE

Topsy with Bob Brown at the Apology Event in 2008

As a result of all of this, I was consulted by the three political parties in Tasmania to stand for them. I must have been acceptable to them all and of course, here we have the very acceptable Quakers doing naughty things. Bob Brown was the one I considered the most. He came to me and he said, "Topsy, I want you to stand as my running mate." And I said, "No Bob, I have too much to do with where

I am going." It was really quite nice to be approached by the three parties, the Greens, the Liberals and Labour. I was delighted! And we changed the law on domestic violence and AIDS and that was nice.

Aside from my AM, I also got a Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission Humanitarian of the Year thing in 1994 in Tasmania for my involvement and "outstanding commitment to human rights issues particularly involvement both locally and overseas in the education and prevention of domestic violence and HIV/AIDS." I was terribly excited to get that!

When I was National Secretary of the Quakers, they were great as they gave me liberty to work in the area of domestic violence and to go overseas for QSA. They said it was alright to have these involvements as long as I could get the secretarial things done too! Looking back, I think I was very lucky but I was officially advocating for things that they thought were a good idea. When I finished, and because I had been the convenor of the Indo-China Committee, I proposed to the Quakers that there be a continuation of the work on AIDS in Laos as we were winding up the Cambodian project. Unfortunately, they turned it down as it was a lot of money, sex wasn't an easy area of work for some members and they were tired out after all the work we had been doing in Cambodia. That was a very great grief to me.

I received a letter from Basil Hetzel in respect of my work with Quaker Service Australia in Asia. It related to iodine deficiency disorders and I was trying to get some help for the H'mong people in Vietnam. They were an unfortunate people as they had backed the wrong side in the Vietnam War. They backed the Americans and after the war they were persecuted. They lived on the tops of mountains and I went to this village near the Chinese border and there were little "cretins" running around, it was awful! I talked to the villagers about iodised salt but they said that they didn't go down the mountain to get that. But what they did get from somewhere was fish sauce, so I said that they should be putting the iodine in the fish sauce. Unfortunately, Basil Hetzel missed the point entirely and I don't think it is better now for the H'mong people. You do have to have iodised salt in the diet.

The H'mong people are very interesting group. As I said, they backed the wrong side and Australia gave them preferential refugee status. The first one that came out worked for David in his laboratory in Hobart. He made a great success of his migration and then sponsored all his family in the village. So, there were lots of H'mongs and there is quite a thriving H'mong community in Hobart. They were Vietnamese as well as some H'mong from Laos. They all set to in Hobart and applied to the various landowners for access to any vacant blocks near the city and they set up market gardens. They said, "We will look after your land" and they are a thriving and healthy community now.

In 1997, there was an STD Conference in Melbourne, a World Congress, and I talked at that on Quaker Service Australia and the work we had done in Cambodia on HIV/AIDS.

I was also appointed as an independent member of the Medical Complaints Tribunal in Tasmania in 1996 until I left Hobart in 1998. That was fascinating! I was also on the Red Cross Ethics Committee which was also quite an interesting experience. Mostly, that work was around people wanting samples of blood for surveys and things. I remember one concerned a person who was doing a Zoology thesis on liver flukes and he wanted us to give him 100 consecutive samples, just a little bit from everybody to test for antibodies to liver flukes. The project seemed very good indeed until we asked what happens if you find a positive sample. Unfortunately, he hadn't thought of that! He hadn't thought either of getting permission for the blood to be used in this way. It was that sort of ethical question that we dealt with. In another case, a woman from Laos who was a gynaecologist wanted blood samples but she also hadn't

thought about what would happen if something was positive. She thought that the blood donor did not need to know.

I finished as Secretary in 1998 and two days after that I went off mountain climbing with Susan. We did the Cradle Mountain Walk, 67 kms in 6 days! We stayed in the huts, they fed us and we only had to carry a daypack - the posh way to do it. It was beautiful!

Cairns

We then moved to Cairns in 1998 for David's work. Before I finished up as Secretary, David had got a job in Cairns because his pathology laboratory was being closed down in Hobart as the Commonwealth had decided not to run a State system of laboratory testing. So, he went first and I had nine days to pack up and sell the house, which happened. I then went up to Cairns, but overnight I was no longer employed, I lost any social contact that I had, there wasn't a Meeting in Cairns as the nearest one was in Ravenshoe and the kids had all flown. I can remember waking up and thinking, "What am I going to do?"

The following year 1999 was the year of the problems in East Timor. I didn't have much to do and I heard that Foreign Affairs or ACFOA (Australian Council for Overseas Aid) was setting up an office in Darwin to make sure that NGOs which were going to stream into East Timor couldn't get in until INTERFET said they could come and that they didn't duplicate services. Also, they needed to be aware of what they were going to. So, I rang Janet Hunt who was the head of ACFOA and said, "Janet, do you need any help?" And she said, "Yes, get up here now!"

So, I spent three weeks in Darwin and my friend Sieneke was there too as head of Caritas. We vetted the people and organisations wanting to go in. A lot of people really wanted to help but they were pretty clueless! The worst one I think was a rather portly German gentleman who arrived, who said, "Yes, well, could I buy a booking to get to East Timor?" I said, "Not yet" And he said, "Oh, well I need to be able to go to the shops and get my supplies!" I said that there weren't any shops and he would have to take his bedding, his water and food and everything. He was most upset! He said, "But I have come halfway round the world!" And I said, "Sorry, but you are staying here."

We had to go daily with the Army to get briefed on what was happening in East Timor. Also, often I would tootle off to the local supermarket in Darwin and get all the supplies that people would need including cooking pots, water purification kits and everything. You had to get a "berth" on the Army barge (whatever that meant) to go over to East Timor and that could have meant standing up or sitting on the floor! I didn't get to go to East Timor. When I left, they asked me if I would like to go over and have a look but I said, "No, I have seen third world countries. I would just be another person on the barge taking someone else's space."

At this time, I had enrolled to do geology at James Cook University. The East Timor involvement happened in my second year and I could not sit the exam or anything as I was off in Darwin. They wanted to charge me HECS and I wrote to Amanda Vanstone and I got off my HECS obligation. I didn't finish my geology degree because by then we had decided to move to Adelaide.

David went to Nepal four times to do voluntary work in the pathology laboratories at Patan Hospital in the slum area of Kathmandu. We lived in that area each time. It was very, very interesting. I got quite good at going around Kathmandu on buses and things.

One day, I had been out shopping and it was the week before we were due to come back. I left my purse in one of the little taxis and I suddenly thought that I had my passport in my purse. So, I rang the Australian Embassy on the weekend and said, "Waagh, I have lost my passport!" They said, "That's alright, love. We will get you another one!" Very cheery, it was a real "ocker" voice on the other end. Then he said that the real trouble was that I would have to get through Nepali immigration as I had had a visa for so many days and that was in my lost passport.

By this stage, it was Friday and we were leaving on the Sunday. And Saturday is their holy day. So, I contacted the relevant Nepali agency and I had to go to the other end of Kathmandu to get the visa stamp. I had to wait and the woman said, "Where is your passport?" I handed it over. Then she went out to lunch and I noticed that she locked a drawer on her desk. Then, a man came out of the other part of the office and said, "Where is your passport?" I said that I had given it to them and he said, "No, you haven't." I said, "I am sorry, I did and your receptionist has it." He said, "Oh well, she is out to lunch." I said, "I suggest you open that drawer" as I suspected he wanted a bribe. I ended up insisting that he open the drawer and there was my passport! Clearly, the woman was waiting to come back and she would find it and then get a reward. So, I did get home in time with the visa stamp but that was very scary.

Some years later, Topsy and David viewing "temporary" housing in Nepal after the earthquake in 2015

The only other time that I have been really worried overseas was in Burma. While I was in Burma to speak for the United Nations Development Program in 1992, I was in Yangon and I was approached by an Australian man who was running a project in Burma, and he said, "Topsy, do you want to know what really happens here? If so, come about 11 o'clock at night and I will take you." So, we tootled off late at night and he told me about the problems he was having running an NGO. He said, "Just last week, I had two local staff working for me and people came with balaclavas and took them away and we haven't seen them since." He said that everyone you talk to has to go within 24 hours and report the content of your discussion to the police. If there were two there with you, they are interviewed separately to make sure they say the same thing. He said that things were very, very repressive.

I had been asked by Quaker Service before I went to look for a project in Burma that Quaker Service Australia could do. I came back with ten reasons why they couldn't do a project there, one of which was that for every dollar that comes in, the Government which at that stage was a military junta, takes 95 cents! So, any money that you spend will be supporting the Government and this was a real threat to the locals. These were the two reasons I remember the most.

I was very scared because before I went, I was approached by a Burmese student saying that he had left with his family in a hurry and he had left his notes for his PhD behind. He asked me if I could go and see his family and get the notes and I agreed. As a speaker at the conference in Burma, I was given a driver who could not speak any English, of course. On the Sunday, we had the day off and I approached the driver and asked if he could take me to this address which was written down. He said, "Yes" or "Madam." He drove me there and when I got there, the whole family had collected and they had a banquet. So, I took quite a long time at the house after which I picked up the notes and came out again. As soon as we were away from the place, the driver said in perfect English, "Why did you visit that family?" And I thought, "Oh God, they will all be shot!" So, I said, "Oh, they are old friends" to which he said, "Humph" and kept driving.

Then we ran into a military checkpoint and I could see that the driver was absolutely terrified. He went white and the sweat was dripping off. I thought, "Well, if he is as scared as that, then so am I!" He just kept pointing to me in the back seat, saying "UNDP" and in the end they let us through. And I thought, "Oh, well!" He dropped me back and I thought, "We will see what happens next." And he never did report to the police. I think he realised that I had got him off.

But when we got back to Hobart, every time I thought about it, for weeks I was panicking. So, occasionally, I would ring the Burmese student and ask how his family was, and he would say, "Oh, alright!" So, it didn't happen. But I thought there were at least twenty people there who could have got shot. It is better now, but back then it was terrifying. I have never been so frightened. It would certainly not have been the right thing to do a project there, not only for our staff but there would have been risks for the locals.

Adelaide

We took six months touring around to get back to Adelaide in 2002. We also went back to Nepal for a while. We came back to Adelaide because Susan was here with her children and neither of the other children had produced any babies. After we had left Cairns, it turned out that John was transferred to Cairns: it looks as though he waited for us to leave before he went there, but he didn't! He has now

moved to Buderim. Rowena was in Brisbane and she got married and had a baby. They were older parents and they decided they would come back here because both of their parents were here in Adelaide and they thought grandparents would be helpful to have around.

We had bought a house in Myrtle Bank when we were in Cairns and we rented it out for two years until we moved to Adelaide. We moved into Fisher Street, Fullarton in March 2017.

We joined the Meeting here in Adelaide and I got involved with running the Quaker Opportunity Shop on Kensington Road. Shortly after we arrived back in Adelaide, I was rung by someone on the committee, who said, "Topsy, you have been involved with QSA for such a long time. Would you like to take over the shop?" I was involved with the shop from 2006 to 2016. I gave up when I broke my hip which happened when I was making the bed! *(laughs)* I tripped on the electric blanket cord. Not even a demo was involved!

I learnt heaps at the shop. I had never even been in an Op shop. Just in the last month, the person who took over from me has handed over to one of my closest friends here.

The Quaker Opportunity Shop on Kensington Road

Topsy with a donation of wedding dresses to the Op Shop

And The Wheels Keep Turning

Something exciting happened just before we went to Tasmania recently. Susan said to me, "Mother, you are a great great aunt!" And I said, "Really?" Susan found on Facebook that a baby called Arthur Dixon was born. Now, I didn't know Arthur Dixon. When I was younger, my brother went to Canada and his son Simon was a nasty young man. He was a lawyer and I suspect he became an alcoholic. He was a terribly aggressive and nasty person. He married a lady who had two sons and they had a daughter and the daughter has had the baby. He is now three months old.

Susan said, "We must get to know the mother." So she contacted Arthur Dixon's mother, how I don't know, and she came for morning tea with the baby who was a delightful young man and she was a lovely mum. She said, "Oh, you know, my dad was so gentle and caring and he has gone to live in Tasmania." And I thought, "Simon? *Gentle and caring*?" I said that we were going to Tasmania and she contacted Simon who rang me and said that he was living in Scamander and would we like to stay the night on the way down to Hobart?

So, we did, and indeed he is a reformed character. I suspect his wife had something to do with that. She is a very competent lady and while we were sitting with them, we were downing the grog and he was on the apple juice. We were told that they had designed and built a lovely house and he has a permaculture garden. And he does all the gardening around Scamander, odd gardening jobs for people. I said, "What has made the difference?" And he said, "Don't be silly. You lent me a book." I had lent him a book written by a friend of mine who is a permaculture expert. It is called "The Earth Users' Guide to Permaculture". And he has swallowed it, hook, line and sinker. The garden goes down the hill. I recognised it because when I was in Vietnam I had to look at permaculture gardens, and Simon had all the swales right and so on. They live virtually entirely on what he grows. It is lovely.

He is gorgeous and his wife came to see the grandchild again shortly after and we had a lunch for his wife, the daughter, the baby and my two daughters. Isn't that exciting! And there is nobody left of my generation that I can say to, "Ha ha! Isn't this great!" There is no-one left to tell.

We had lunch downstairs here with David and me, our two daughters, Simon's daughter and the baby, Simon's wife, and we also had another great nephew and his wife and their baby. This great nephew was related to my other brother. It was fantastic! They all said, "This is marvellous and we must all ignore what our parents did. We are really enjoying seeing people and getting together." And they were all genuinely pleased to see each other and they gossiped about being young parents, you know. Isn't that lovely! I just wish my father had been there and I could have shaken him and said, "See!" *(laughs)*

But that was actually marvellous because Simon's wife said, "When you came to see us, you explained why Jeff went to Canada and all of it. And all that time, Simon had been thinking it was his fault." She said that he was relieved of all that guilt. Jeff left when we lived in Canberra so it is a long time ago. So, it is never too late and I feel very, very happy about it. I have lent them the Hewett family tree books (my father's family) which they had no idea about as there had been no contact.

While we are on the family, Susan has just been to a conference and met my brother's grand daughter who has gone to London for experience. They met in Yugoslavia or something, as you do. Without Susan, that kid was lost really. But now she is fine.

I have said quite a bit in this story about Susan and Rowena, and I would like to say something about my son, John. He is an excellent son. He was definitely an accident and we were very pleased it happened because we were both accidents! He "takes great care of his mother" to quote AA Milne. He did medicine, with an Honours year in Sydney to do some research after he got his MBBS. Then he went on with his medical degree and specialised in radiology. He has always been very keen on physics and maths so radiology suited him very well indeed. When he went to Cairns, he was in charge of the private radiology group there, Cairns Diagnostic Imaging. Before that, when he was training in radiology in Brisbane, he met his wife Leith who is a dermatologist.

On one of my trips back from Cambodia, I stayed overnight in Brisbane with them to meet Leith and after I had got back to Hobart, I realised I had scabies. And I knew exactly where I had caught it because the night or so before I had left Vietnam, I had stayed in one of the guest houses in one of the villages out the back of Vietnam. The sheets had obviously been used by other people, and they were damp and smelly, but there was nowhere else to sleep. So, when a few days later I developed scabies, I knew I had caught it there. So, I had to ring my son's girlfriend and say, "You had better boil the sheets!" It was most embarrassing! Leith took it very well and they married afterwards.

Their wedding was hilarious as it was on her father's hobby farm which was out the back of Noosa. They had a lot of cows. What they had arranged for the wedding was that there would be a marquee on the top of a hill but to get to it you had to walk through the paddock with the cow pats. So, the day before, I went out with buckets and picked up the cow pats. The trouble was that I had to throw them over the fence and just leave them there and I kept thinking that I would have loved to have taken them home for my garden. Not much you can do!

Anyway, during the night it rained and to get to the marquee, you had to go over a little creek which was usually dry. But of course, it poured with rain. So, John got up in the middle of the night and built a little wooden bridge to make it possible to get there. It was a lovely wedding. They wanted a Quaker wedding. Leith's family is staunchly Uniting Church with Ministers all over the place and she said, "Well, I don't want any of them." So, they had a Quaker wedding and then we had to think who would be the celebrant because Quakers don't have Ministers. What we have are Registering Officers. We have to allocate a few people in the Meeting to be Registering Officers with the Attorney General and so on. The person getting married chooses the one they want to marry them. They were mostly in Brisbane and John was a staunch Cairns-ite and the north/south divide is very strong with him. He said he didn't want anyone he didn't know coming up from Brisbane.

Then I remembered that his cousin, my elder brother's son had become a Registering Officer years before because someone in the northern part had wanted to get married and he had to become a Registering Officer and it turns out, he still held that position. So, John was married by his cousin, which was lovely. They have three beautiful daughters and we see them regularly. We all arrange that at least once a year all the cousins get together.

Every time I see John, he waits until everyone has gone and he says, "Now, Mother, is there anything worrying you.?" He is very supportive. I find that a relationship with sons is very different from a relationship with daughters. John says he is delighted to have his three daughters, but once he

complained that he had a wife, a mother, two sisters, three daughters and a female Premier, Governor General and Prime Minister! There was no place for a white male.

Rowena, Topsy, David, John and Susan

While on family, I am having fun teaching one of my grandsons how to cook. He comes every Saturday morning and I have taught him now to make a cheese omelette, a shepherd's pie and then he wanted to learn to make a pavlova. I thought, "Oh, God, I have never made a decent pavlova in my life!" Anyway, I looked up the recipe and we did it last weekend. It was perfect! And we made lemon curd to go on the top with cream. He is actually enjoying it. We have some for lunch and I offered him the remaining three- quarters of the pavlova to take home. He said, "Oh, yeah, I have my mates coming tomorrow!" And I thought he is going to present them with something he has cooked!

The whole family: Christmas in Adelaide in 2017

Reflections

My biggest reflection is that people are human. Everybody can make mistakes and everybody can be wrong. I think back to my first Quaker meeting where someone stood up and said, "Friend, you may be mistaken." The more I think about it, the more I believe that is absolutely right. Oh, the frailty of humans. The ability to look back and say, "Gosh, I got that wrong" is really important. I can often be wrong!

I also know how extremely lucky I am to have married David because he is very tolerant, poor dear. We have a very even relationship. He has given me complete freedom to follow and do what is important to me. We will have been married 60 years in January. All the family is coming to celebrate and this will be this year's annual event. The family all know each other so well and the younger ones (the little girls) think the older ones (the bigger boys) are so "beautiful"! And the boys think it is nice to be adored! I think we will be inviting the newest addition to the family, my great great nephew, to the celebration as well, as it will be nice to extend the family.

My involvement in the anti-domestic violence and HIV/AIDS causes were life changing for me and shaped me as the person I am today. They contributed to the creation of my identity . The murder and my domestic violence activities convinced me that it is possible to change things. If you try hard enough, you can do it! But you have to be careful how you do it. You have to think sort of like, "Now, the Council, what will they respond to? The people who are going to receive the stirring, how are they going to see it?

My father was an agnostic, I am sure. He started off as a strict Methodist, and came back from the war as an agnostic. I have got past the agnostic stage now. I am a non-theist. I can't see the personal God-bit at all. I am happy with the Quakers. They tend to be very tolerant and we try to listen to everybody's point of view and you don't have to agree with them. You get what is called "the sense of a business meeting". When everybody has had their say, the clerk says, "This is what I hear people are saying." And they propose a minute. So, they write the minute and then they say, "Does this reflect what you want?" If someone feels really strongly about the minute, it doesn't go ahead. Or if they feel they can live with it, that's fine. To go forward in unity is a central thing with Quakers and we feel that if you vote, you immediately alienate people as they have had to stake their position. And if you don't vote and get everybody's points of view, you are more likely to get unity. This has been very important to me.

I don't know how I would like to be remembered. I think that is up to the people who are doing the remembering really. David and I have decided that we are not going to have a funeral. We are just going to have a party for the family, with I hope a lot of champagne! It is the Quaker tradition that usually later, at a time convenient with everybody, you have a Meeting for Rememberance, not with the casket and definitely not with the videos, nor any bits on the coffin. I think the body really disturbs the whole occasion and it can be so morbid and not honest!

Looking back, I know that you have to be a stirrer but you have to be careful how you stir. One of my most treasured possessions is a cartoon about the stork and the frog. I wish I had kept the original as I have kept photocopying it over the years and it just got worse and worse. We had the cartoon in

the tea room at SHE and I think it is lovely: "*Don't ever give up!*" Now, it is not a very good copy but I always have that beside my computer. It really reflects my life and how I feel…