1. Coral’s Early Life

Harry Bell

I was about two and a half years of age, when our mother returned from Christmas shopping complaining of a headache, lay on a bed and passed away due to a cerebral haemorrhage. Coral was about seven years of age at the time.

Coral was born at Gladesville in Sydney on 30 March 1923. After this date we moved to Queanbeyan where I was born, and then returned to Sydney, living at Bondi, opposite Bondi Beach.

Our father had been an electrical contractor, but his business collapsed in 1930 and he was out of work for almost eight years. We grew up in a society dominated by the Great Depression. Our father never really recovered from the double blow of losing his wife and having to bring up three young children alone, with no money.

On the death of our mother, Coral was sent to live with our aunt (our mother’s sister) and uncle, who owned the local hotel in Eden on the South Coast, and were quite well off. Coral later said that, having been sent to Eden, she had not only lost her mother but had also lost her two brothers and her father.

Coral attended a Catholic school in Eden, run by the Sisters of St Joseph, and did well scholastically. Coral proved to be a diligent student in Eden and, when she completed sixth class, aged about eleven, gained entry to the selective school, Sydney Girls High, and returned to live with us in Sydney. I had no memory of Coral before she returned.

When she completed sixth class she was awarded a bursary of twenty-five pounds per year to complete her Intermediate. When she completed her Intermediate, she gained eight straight ‘A’s and a bursary of fifty pounds per year. She completed her Leaving Certificate at Sydney Girls High, where her name appears on the Honour Roll, in 1941.

She won a scholarship which paid all her fees to attend Sydney University from 1942 to 1944, where she completed a Bachelor of Arts Degree. She joined the Department of External Affairs as a diplomatic cadet in early 1945.

During her years in high school and at university, she was very serious and very studious. As a teenager, she had some friendships with girls from school,
but she was not a ‘party girl’. As far as I know, she never had a boyfriend. She
did not play any sports, and had no hobbies. She liked going to the movies and
listening to classical music, but mainly she just studied.
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