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## A Banquet of Life

Later in life I realised that Melbourne in the 1950s housed a tightly structured society. Access to people was relatively simple. You could seek out anyone you wished to meet. This network of contacts was to play its part in my own life.

After I discovered that I had matriculated, enabling me to study Arts at the only University in Melbourne, I visited Newman College, the Catholic residential male college where the chaplain for Catholic students was based. I had made an appointment to see him and waited in a side corridor of the Spanish Gothic warren surrounding the dining room.

I caught sight of a tall, silver-haired man in a black university gown with large sleeves. He had magisterial bearing, but his face was placid and his expression benign. He held out his hand, emanating warmth. Before I had even opened my mouth, he said, with a firm handshake: 'Welcome to University.' It felt good. But I was taken aback when I heard my inward voice announce boldly: 'The chains have fallen from me!'

The Jesuit priest before me, Father Jeremiah ('Jerry') Golden, became a soothing presence in my life and something of a friend. I was not the only one to feel comforted by his tranquil spirit. Other students and even staff attested to his reassuring influence.

It seems odd now that such a sense of liberation swept through my mind and body, since I knew that my problems were far from over. I was aware, however, that I had crossed from one zone to another, and that perhaps life would never be as difficult again. And in some respects that was how it was.

Born in Ireland, but educated from the age of twelve in Sydney, Father Golden still spoke with a soft Irish brogue. He gave me practical advice. He told me to see the Commonwealth Scholarship branch in town, to review my case. He also told me to visit Miss Alice Hoy of the University's Secondary Teachers' Training Unit to negotiate a teachers' training bursary. He told me about the Catholic association of university students, the Newman Society, and suggested I put down my name for its annual camp at Point Lonsdale. 'That's where older students meet "freshers" and induct them into University life, and clubs and activities for Catholics,' he directed.

Since the nuns at the Academy, for their own reasons, had not alerted me to the requirements for a Commonwealth Scholarship, I had no hope of picking one up now that they had all been announced. 'It's a pity,' the clerk told me, 'but we depend entirely on entry forms being lodged on time!' My lack of knowledge about how the secular world functioned was demonstrated by my ignorance of the way the government does its business through its agencies. I had no idea that allocations of funds had to be streamlined and accounted for within strict budgets on an annual basis. I was to find out later that a living allowance was means-tested against the income of one's parents, who were still held responsible for providing for a student's keep.

Since my father was secretive about his earnings and assets, I had no idea whether I qualified or not. He was certainly anxious for me to become financially independent. I had not even known how he compensated the nuns for my time as a boarder and paid school fees after I became a day student. Consequently, I had felt over-beholden to the nuns when I need not have been over-grateful.

I was equally innocent as I approached Miss Hoy. She expressed cordial interest in my applying for a teaching bursary. The Department of Education was short of teachers, but only in some subject areas. Were I to take up a bursary, which paid for my study costs and which provided a modest living allowance, I would have to sign a contract that on completing my studies, I would teach in a state school for three years, probably in a rural school. Should I fail to complete my degree, or not meet my obligation to serve the state of Victoria on my graduation, I would be obliged to repay all that money.

Given my feelings of insecurity, that was a problem. But I kept this to myself ‘And what is it you wish to study and teach?’ Miss Hoy asked me kindly. ‘My interests in learning and communicating are in this order of significance,’ I stated with self-conscious German high seriousness: ‘Philosophy, Fine Arts, English and German Literature.’ ‘Oh,’ she replied in astonishment, ‘we don’t teach Philosophy and Fine Arts in our schools. We have enough English Literature teachers. There’s little demand for German. However, if you’re prepared to teach French and History, then we can offer you a bursary on the basis of your results. They would need to show that you have application. I do see that French and History are your weakest Matriculation results.’

‘In that case, Miss Hoy, I will have to turn down your kind offer,’ I said, primly. ‘But thank you for your generous assistance.’ I offered a half-knee curtsy to the elderly lady. ‘A pity,’ she muttered.

I walked away with mixed feelings. I now had time to study with enjoyment and fulfilment. History at school had been dictated and learned ‘off by heart’ with the assistance of one textbook. There was no interpretative dimension. And our one Australian History text had been written by a geographer.

French had been a struggle for me. I could not overcome the surge of negative feelings which continued to link me to a time when I had to deal with English without a systematic bridge from German. Emotions dominated mental activity. On the threshold of puberty I had been forced to jettison my own much-loved first language and get into a muddle with a strange tongue. I had learned without systematic guidance. Traces of dyslexia affected me afterwards. What I wanted to say sometimes came out of my mouth as its very opposite, and ‘sorry’ was too often on my lips.

A great impediment to my accepting a bursary was the legal obligation to repay what the state laid out for me in training. What if I could not find a job? What if I wanted to teach for the nuns? If I did want to do this, it would take six or seven years to make that a possibility. I could not even think about such obstacles.

I was always hasty when I needed to be decisive. I had said ‘no’ to Miss Hoy and did not regret my decision to avoid French and History. I was not ready to study a subject as difficult as History at that time. I realised that it required massive amounts of reading, guided by an understanding of structured and thematic chronology.

As for English, I had lost my accent and it was now fluent, but a long way from being either correct or elegant. At Matriculation level, I had won those inter-school essay competitions. But my imperfect English was still slowing me down. It has been said that it takes at least six years to learn a foreign language really well. I had an almost pathological fear of speaking in public to an audience.

But I was not lacking in courage. I hid my extreme self-doubt by becoming defensively opinionated. Many of us lack confidence. This should not be used as a manipulative tool to gain sympathy and approval. But I was still confused about the different order of counting in English and German, differences in sentence structure, and the use of idiomatic language and prepositions. I frequently lost the mental clarity to communicate well. Besides, I lacked the linguistic skill to serve my personal need to see deeper meanings in everything, something attributable to both my German and Catholic upbringing.

While I waited to begin my new life, I worked on a conveyor belt at the Vacola tomato bottling factory near the Glenferrie Railway Station, counting rubber rings. This work made me realise how lucky I was to be going to University. I felt I ought to have some rapport with the girls who worked there and did get on reasonably well with them. But we had hardly any interests in common and I simply endured the tedious work, probably much as they did. I felt very sorry that they seemed to have fewer options in life than I.

Fortunately my mother supported my strong desire to continue my education. Some time in January 1953 her well-connected Irish-born neighbour, Mrs Yourelle, learned of my interest in University. She took a lively interest in my development, and had herself adopted two orphans. She was friendly with a woman whose husband worked at the University's School of Agriculture as a personnel officer. During a morning tea session between Mrs Yourelle and Mrs Johnson, his wife, my mother's friend learned that the School needed a student to work as a technical assistant to Miss Yvonne Aitken, a Lecturer in Botany. She was conducting research into leguminous nitrogen-fixing plants, like subterranean clovers, peas and lucerne. The aim was finding ways of increasing soil fertility, testing their capacity to prevent soil erosion, and providing fodder for animals in drought-stricken country. Her fieldwork supported her studies for a doctorate.

Mrs Yourelle arranged for me to meet Mr Johnson and he in turn made an appointment for an interview with the Professor.

To my shame, my father also insisted on turning up for the interview, as if I was too dumb to cope on my own. Fortunately, the two men took an instant liking to one another. What Professor Wadham thought of what I had to say, I never learned. After answering a few questions and reminding him with foolish honesty that his name had been on two of the questions set for our Matriculation Biology paper which I had failed to pass, I was immediately employed full-time, with three hours spare time a week for my own study.

I did not know at the time that Miss Aitken had lived just behind my parents' Croydon property, and that she was still friends with a pair of women—a same-sex couple—who had owned *Glenfern* before the person from whom father had purchased it. 'Small world,' I said to my father.

Thus began that marvellous but exhausting year of travelling long distances between my home in Croydon and work in town at the University, thirty-seven kilometres away. I had to juggle thirty-seven hours of paid work with twelve hours of lectures and tutorials in Fine Arts and German Honours. I did the latter illegally as a part-time student, and also took some evening classes at the National Gallery Art School.

I was involved as well in the politics of the Newman Society's 'intellectual apostolate'. It became a year with too many commitments. But I nevertheless thought of it as a banquet of life.

My mother refused to take board from me. Instead, every pay day, I bought her something practical or beautiful. I also offered my brothers pocket money when I could afford it. I had experienced how embarrassingly dependent one could be without money.

With so much going on in my life of new-found freedom, I made some big mistakes. Other students made them as well, especially those from same-sex, lower-ranked religious schools. Traces of trauma from my earlier youth, so well repressed in the secure environment of school, now surfaced as I made my own choices. 'What will I do with my life?' became an urgent preoccupation. I spent far too much time probing that question instead of throwing myself into proper professional training.

The religious idealism generated by the Newman Society unfortunately diverted a number of us from the path of focused study. The girl who had studied so well at school now wasted a lot of time after a full day's work. Instead of going to the library, I enthusiastically joined the activities of the idealistic Catholic student community.

The Newman Society's summer camp at Point Lonsdale introduced newcomers to their program. The free social life which happened around simple huts under a lighthouse on the beach had its serious component: the Society's 'intellectual apostolate'. The conference program listed speeches and discussions on theological topics, including the role in the Church of an intellectual laity.

The Newman Society's intention was also to strengthen the ties between Catholic men and women, and unite them against the liberal secular ethos of the University.

At the core of the Society's thinking was that Catholic students ought to have a leavening influence on University life, and challenge the content of their study. Using exemplary scholarship, they ought to influence secular knowledge and civic morality through their expansive Catholic vision.

Secular intellectual life was ideally directed at the search for 'truth' and the greater reliability of knowledge of the natural order. The Newman Society sought to reconcile the secular ideals of the University and a liberal Catholic vision based on the writings of people such as Jacques Maritain, Yves Congar, Charles Péguy and Teilhard de Chardin. As I understood it, a complex ideology emerged in which the Incarnation of Christ had its relevance to the natural order. Implicit in it is a theology in which all creation has its place in the mind of God and evolves its sacred character to reach the purpose for which it was ordained.

The environmental implications of such a philosophy only emerged three decades later, although the poet James McAuley was already addressing the issues. He said that even rocks had a place in the redemption of matter.

Admirably, the Society aimed to challenge the University's purely utilitarian and vocational goals. An element of proselytising was inevitable in its moral program. We were proud to be linked to the avant-garde theological liberalism that emanated from France. It was an attempt to break with the Jansenist taint of conservative traditions with which Australian Irish Catholicism was then saturated. Such a project demanded from us intense

application and intellectual clarity. We needed to know what we were defending. Such heady sense of importance is not unusual among people who feel insecure. But our young hearts were also fired by the desire to 'do good' and by the adventure of participating in the sacramental life of a Church still evolving within history towards its final destiny.

The Newman Society of 1953 consisted of a small cluster of leaders. At the helm were two academics, Max Charlesworth and Vincent Buckley. Max was a gracious, lucid philosopher who was an authority on Thomist theology, while Vincent wrote poetry and taught English Literature. While Buckley styled himself a public intellectual, it was Charlesworth who, later in life, became much more what his colleague had set out to claim for himself.

Max remained essentially the activist scholar while Vincent surrounded himself with a court of tough young men whose putative working-class origins and macho self-consciousness were cultivated with lashings of booze and disdain for so-called 'bourgeois' living.

Unlike other Catholic Action bodies, such as the Campion Society or the Young Catholic Workers, the Newman group was less involved in social issues of a political kind than in the mystique of their 'intellectual apostolate'.

I am pleased to say that Buckley and Charlesworth and the other leaders rejected the politically divisive, anti-Communist program of Bob Santamaria. Father Golden had the support of Archbishop Mannix in rejecting Santamaria's attempts to involve the University's apostolate in his own brand of political intrigue.

Many newcomers like us were confused and befuddled by the theology of Vincent Buckley's camp. Max Charlesworth, a true scholar, stood somewhat apart but made it his business to communicate in rationally accessible ideas. The quasi-mystical component of the theological investigations undertaken and extolled by the leaders of the Buckley camp demanded opinionated assent. Instinctively some of us thought we understood what they knew so positively. But I could see as well that the composition of this almost exclusively male leadership, with only a sprinkling of women, had severe drawbacks. Acceptable women were required to condone the almost prescriptive alcoholic over-indulgence of the leaders, and worship at their throne. It was all based as much on the cult of personality as it was on intellectual engagement.

Even then I saw this as a serious flaw in the way the Newman Society functioned. Max had won a postgraduate scholarship to study at Louvain. On his return from Belgium, he became increasingly alienated from the Buckley cult of personality. By then Buckley and his acolytes had become dominant, and presided over all 'apostolic' activities.

While I admired the integrity of Max Charlesworth and his commitment to his wife and family, I was quite enchanted by Buckley's poetic gifts and his mission as a 'visionary'. He and I shared an empathetic but distant association. When in early 1954 I asked him if the 'will of God' meant that God was the great puppeteer who pulled the strings according to His plan for us, he had no answer. Instead he advised me to flee my tensions and confusion by entering an enclosed convent in France, there to write poetry. I shrank from the elitism and dismissive gestures of Buckley and his followers towards 'bourgeois' students whose minds they assumed to be filled with trivialities. In fact, many of these despised outsiders were actually training themselves by focused study to become responsible professionals serving the community.

The Newman Society was designed to promote moral conduct among its members while engendering a very relaxed style of interaction. Some of its self-styled leaders did not provide a fitting example in either the way they conducted their personal lives or in the time they gave to reading and study. They were, however, ever-ready to express authoritative opinions. The male chauvinist leadership spent their social time in an apostolic ghetto of their own choosing, emerging only for formal occasions. They loved it like that.

By 1955, much of what we had been discussing appeared summarised in a mystifying ideological text. Unsurprisingly, Max Charlesworth was absent from the list of its authors. The essays were based on speeches delivered at a Universities' Catholic Federation of Australia conference. They were written by the self-appointed leaders of the 'intellectual apostolate', with official sanction by Co-Adjutor Archbishop Simonds. Needless to say, the collection was edited by Vincent Buckley. Entitled *Incarnation in the University*, it makes little sense when read today by someone not trained in theology. How did we understand it even then?

Outsiders ridiculed these mystifications we treated with such awe. I thought I understood instinctively what it was about and did not then see its contradictions. Few of us were equipped to have any real impact on

the life of the University. Our opinions were still raw. Few of us studied philosophy at all or beyond the first year. But what was marvellous about *Incarnation* as applied to everyday and academic life was that it endowed secular life with a sacred character. This included secular knowledge. It eliminated the divide that had always existed in our thinking between spirit and matter, soul and body. Ordinary activities could be luminous, it told us. It extended academic studies beyond purely professional goals. We were excited to be seekers in a process of development, on the edge of new things.

There is no doubt that real value was extracted by many of us from the enlarged view of the world the apostolate was offering us. Not all Catholic students belonged to the Newman set. The Society was designed for idealists. We exchanged books by contemporary foreign authors in translation, and the works of our gifted Australians. We attended theatre, shared and made music together, and spent many hours in discussion over endless cups of coffee. We loved the sense of community it generated. The word 'dialogue', so commonly used today, was at the time relatively new.

Ecumenism, found in the writings of Dom Bede Griffith, was one discovery which matched our further need to associate with people of different faiths. Dom Bede attempted to link his English Benedictine Catholicism with the austerity of Hindu monks in south India, where he had settled. He tried to relate what he had learned in his Catholic upbringing to the Hindu path for reaching God.

This was particularly important to me. Many of us at the University associated with students from Southeast Asia supported by the Colombo Plan. I found myself surrounded by groups of encouraging friends. There was a heady atmosphere in my extra-curricular engagements. From insular Australia, the University's and the Newman Society's activities strengthened our bond with a wider world.

I had acquired a special friend on my first day at the engrossing German Literature lectures. She was Liesl Husak, another so-called foreigner. I enjoyed so constant a friendship with her that one observer, having difficulty with foreign names, unwittingly gave us a composite one, Lysol Girkhish. The name stuck with a number of our friends.

Liesl had a great sense of humour and taught me Mozart's crude nonsense canons. We used to sing them in two parts while walking at night through the University's parks. We still sang together as we walked barefoot along the wind-swept beaches during my second summer camp at Point Lonsdale. As we scanned the waters of the Great Southern Ocean we laughed at the audacity of one of our favourite Biblical psalms: 'Bless the Lord, all ye whales.'

War had displaced Liesl. She was on her own. She had suffered her parents' death by starvation. Anglicanism attracted her, although her origins were Austrian and Sudeten-Deutsch (Czech-German). She thought that my early experiences in the camp had equipped me better for community life, since it had offered the possibilities for many friendships. She herself preferred the depth of loyalty of single friendships to numbers of friends.

When I turned eighteen, I received an official invitation to become an Australian citizen. The alternative was to retain my Austrian and Turkish birthrights. I did not hesitate to take this serious step. I felt I had no real homeland in which I had lived as a child, no place to which I could say I belonged, no bonded loyalty which I might betray. I was by historical accident a displaced person. Australia was now offering me a haven.

It seemed to me a land of opportunity in which ordinary citizens could compete with the wealthy and privileged. I was by now acquiring an increasing sense of psychological freedom.

I made the necessary arrangements to become an Australian citizen without involving my family. When I turned up at Ringwood Town Hall in October, I was the only person there. In an empty room the Mayor of Ringwood was dressed in full regalia, with robes and chain. His clerk acted as scribe and witness. With my hand on the Bible I was asked to forswear all other foreign allegiances and devote myself in exclusive loyalty to Australia, its 'head of State, the Queen of England and all her heirs'.

With the signing of my name I dismissed my inherited connections with both Austria and Turkey. I had done nothing to earn Australian citizenship except to live here for a number of years. In Germany even a third-generation Turk could not obtain citizenship because of a law which attempted to control the privileges associated with the blood lines of Germans. I thought that was an unjust law based on a fantasy.

There was no ceremony to celebrate my citizenship. I went back to the University and read some poems by Judith Wright to celebrate my official kinship with an austere and brave land. In *Bora Ring*, she found a way of linking Australian situations with the larger canvas of culture and tradition:

The song is gone; the dance  
is secret with the dancers in the earth,  
the ritual useless, and the tribal story  
lost in an alien tale.

In *South of My Days*, she described the character of an Australian landscape in all its harsh beauty:

South of my days' circle, part of my blood's country,  
rises that tableland, high delicate outline  
of bony slopes wincing under the winter,  
low trees blue-veined and olive, outcropping granite—  
clean, lean, hungry country.

The south of her days, so eloquently described in her poem, was to become the north of mine.

My brother Peter, and then my parents, became Australian citizens a few years after I did. When my parents were 'naturalised' at Lilydale Shire Hall, there were at least twenty candidates. Father's fine Viennese sense of farce got the better of him when the officiating councillor pronounced the 'Queen's heirs' phrase as her 'hairs'. To show off his knowledge of English, my father laughingly shouted out 'her *hairs*' so loudly that the clerk in attendance stooped to whisper in the ear of his superior to correct him.

At home, so energised was Rudolf by the occasion that he uncorked every bottle in his cupboard, obliging us all to 'drink up!' even when the essence for Black Tulip 'cocktails' was the only drink left in his liquor cupboard.

Well before then, in late 1953, I was being respectfully courted by a young man from the inner core of the Newman Society. His fine physical attributes were the product of the Irish-Australian working class.

My parents had taught me to admire social battlers. My escort was a hero. He had risked his own life in the 'rip' at Point Lonsdale to save a drowning fellow student. He drove me home late in the evening on the back of his

motorbike. As our friendship deepened he called with his mother one Sunday to take me to the Dandenongs. He came right into our Croydon home to collect me.

I was concerned at the direction towards domesticity of this situation, but I was too timid to say anything. So it was fortunate that the young man spoiled his chances forever in my eyes by making scathing remarks about my 'bourgeois' parents. He reached that swift conclusion from one brief visit, based on the way my mother had furnished our simple, rambling wooden home in German style.

I was not myself conspicuously bourgeois in those days. On the contrary. At the first opportunity, while my friend was away chopping wood to earn money, I wrote to him that I intended to become a nun. It was at the time both a true and a self-protective declaration. Catholic students respected such an intention. To them it was not the world-denying final act it appears today.

My own paid work for Miss Aitken involved me in mostly the boring routine detail that is essential in experiments. But it also opened up new horizons, bringing me closer to my adopted homeland. Miss Aitken was a good role model for independent women. She and another woman lectured in Botany and Agronomy to classes of all-male students. A tall and gentle Anglican who lived at Janet Clarke Hall at the University, she took her faith seriously. She belonged to the Moral Rearmament Movement. Her hobby was watercolour painting, at which she was still awkward.

The family of my young colleague in the laboratory, Susan, lived in Ballarat. She was a Science student engaged to be married to a young chemist who practised in Charlton. She suffered her separation from him. We two laboratory assistants got on well and were equally bored with the work of recording numbers of peas and lengths of cross-bred clovers. We welcomed our field trips to the country to plant up experimental crops of legumes, as far away as Walpeup beyond Ouyen in the Mallee, Dookie Agricultural College, at Scoresby near Ferntree Gully, and Newstead near Castlemaine.

Once we arrived at Ouyen at 4 am and had to wait until 7 for a train connection to Walpeup railway siding. On arrival we found only a wheat silo beside the track. Then we were met and taken to the agricultural

research plots. We slept in a shearing shed on sleeping bags on the floor, and during the day watched the mournful crows flap above the red earth in which we planted our crops.

Wherever we travelled I took a drawing pad and pencils to record my observations through pictures. The paints travelled with me in tins. I dipped my brushes into creek water to record how bushfires had left some weathered community of ghostly gums that had failed to come into leaf again.

The constantly nagging pain in my heart was easing. I found solace everywhere in the countryside. The hybrid clovers I looked after in the University's glasshouses carried the names of their places of origin: Walpeup, Traralgon, Scoresby and Tallarook. These names still evoke the fragrance of freshly cut clover. At home in Croydon, for the first time, I began to help my parents with the gardening they practised with such skill. And my father also took us on long day trips around Victoria.

At University my over-full calendar began to affect the studies I really enjoyed. Examinations loomed. I needed to 'swat' in preparation for German and Fine Arts. Full-time work was a major impediment to this. Arriving home late at night at Croydon, I was obliged to walk the three kilometres from the railway station along the unlit bush paths that shadowed the roads. I feared I would be kidnapped.

My father refused to collect me from the station. He merely insisted that I was to come home by the last bus. This left the railway station at 7 pm. When I once discussed the matter with him, he said: 'You have a choice. You have made your choice to come later.' In my crowded timetable my 'choice' was 'no choice'. I had to walk in fear.

Enthusiasm for my 'banquet of life' was bringing on a gluttony of involvement. It also meant I half-completed many tasks. I had to do something. First I gave up singing with the University's Choral Society. Then the art lessons with Charles Bush at the National Gallery School had to go.

Then I was offered the opportunity of a twenty-hour job by the acting director of the Conservatorium of Music which was next to my place of work. I jumped at the opportunity.

My boss was the flamboyant Catholic priest, Dr Percy Jones. I had not known him personally, but had often watched his confident rotund figure in white robes as he conducted the outstanding St Patrick's Cathedral choir. He also trained it. In his home, I was to become his switchboard girl for twenty hours a week, have free lodging in an attic, and a little pocket money as well. Father Jones thought it 'a good deal'.

I thought that this arrangement would give me time to study in the library. I could perhaps use his books as well, and be rewarded occasionally by listening to the sound of music from a collection of records built up by an expert musician—if only through the key-hole.

When I arrived to take up my position at St George's Presbytery in North Carlton, I was told that the housekeeper whom I had been hired to assist was ill, and had gone on leave. I later heard she had left with a nervous breakdown. Surely I could do some of her work, Father Jones suggested.

I could make the beds, do some sweeping, cook the evening meal for him and two curates, and also attend to the phone.

My cooking skills were confined to one recipe, for a German apple cake. Surely I could learn to do a simple meal of grilled chops in a jiffy, he persisted. I was to be his servant. After two weeks I realised that I had jumped from a difficult situation to an impossible one. Both my father and Professor Wadham had been angry when I left the School of Agriculture job. I began to think they may have been right. So little free time did I now have, that when I did get some hours off I tended to fritter them away in the reassuring company of friends who called to take me to town.

Father Golden was concerned about my situation, and he was right. I failed Fine Arts and achieved indifferent results in Honours German, largely because of my woefully inadequate attendance.

He was able to secure me a position as a waitress-in-residence at Newman College when the following University year began. I was privileged, since at that time female students were generally forbidden to work at this all-male college. I was also able to obtain work during the long vacations as a nurse-waitress at Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital. This job I obtained through the University's Appointments Board.

I put my written resignation on Dr Jones' desk I wrote that my contract had been to work for twenty hours answering the telephone, but I had found myself instead involved in all manner of housework for seventy hours a week, for the same small pay. I was not seeking more money, but my freedom.

Next day I found my letter scrunched up in the waste-paper basket I had to empty every day. I wrote the same note more emphatically and posted it formally, through the mail. Dr Jones was furious as he read out the letter in his study: 'What do you think you are doing?' he demanded. I repeated the words of my latest letter. He could do nothing but protect his pride by stating that I had been a disappointment to him. He had hired me because German girls were said to be orderly and industrious. I had, he said, embarrassed him when the Italian Ambassador was obliged to use his toilet.

I was surprised at the words which came out of my meek mouth. They stated that I was not aware that I had been employed to clean toilets. Dr Jones and I parted acrimoniously. But he did not bear me a lasting grudge and acknowledged me as a 'friend' when our paths crossed on a few future occasions.

My knowing where he slept was also a bonus when, a couple of years later, after a Newman Ball in the nearby Exhibition Building, a group of us gathered outside his bedroom at midnight to serenade him in harmony, through one of his own and other liturgical compositions. He did not appear, but we found out later that he had been deeply gratified.

Despite the increasing liberalisation of my ideas, subordination to the authority of bachelor clerics prevailed for a long time. Such attitudes can be summed up in a conservative poem that was being circulated at the time, which I loved. It was Gertrud von le Fort's *Hymn to the Church*. Two lines sum up my dilemma, the choice between adherence to painful authority and what the English divine, Ronald Knox, called 'enthusiasm': 'My will fell on your law as on a sword' and 'Your nights are like rich wine'.

But then I had also discovered *The Waters of Silence* by the American journalist who had become an ascetic monk, Thomas Merton. Merton and others kept the ideal of contemplation alive in modern Catholic society. A number of us were thinking of entering a religious order to

better engage with this. I also met an inspirational Thomist scholar, Tony Barton, just before he began his training for the Dominican priesthood. He introduced me to his friend, Jim Provan.

My lifelong friendship with Jim had its origins in his loan to me of his grandmother's white bakelite radio. Instinctively he knew that I needed music in my lonely work breaks at Heidelberg Hospital. Our love of music and the Catholic liturgy which had influenced his conversion to Catholicism, initially cemented our friendship. Tony Barton's and my good friend, Kevin Keating, told me that on the night of James Provan's reception into our Church, he had walked like a cat on top of the bookcases in Barton's modest South Yarra flat, singing liturgical praises.

Tony Barton, who used to iron his shirts on the floor—so limited were his worldly possessions—influenced a number of us with his uncompromising virtue. The Jesuit scholastic John Cowburn also attracted a cluster of cultured people. Margot Boyd, Doreen Breen and Philip Martin became my friends.

The relative merits of the contemplative life and lay initiatives were challenged by the 1954 Newman Society summer camp. Those of us flirting with the idea of entering religious life stuck together. One hot evening while we waded in the sea near Deirdre O'Connor's home, Peter Wertheim outlined the virtues of the Franciscan order, Deirdre the Poor Clares, Margot and I the Dominicans. We knew of Jim Provan's love of the Benedictines, and that Peter Crane was to join the Jesuits, while his sweetheart, Christine Boland, had committed herself to the Franciscan Missionaries of the Sacred Heart who worked at a leper colony in north Australia.

Middle-aged John Dormer, a kind of Al Grassby of the lay apostolate, had appeared at the previous summer camp. He stressed the work of the laity in the Church. Educated at Downside Benedictine Abbey and at the military academy, Sandhurst, he had then served in the Spanish Civil War on the side of Franco. He had returned to Melbourne after a visit to France, an ardent promoter of the Belgian Cardinal Cardijn's Jocist teaching which was already an inspiration for our lay apostolate.

In France, 'worker priests' were sent to factories in ordinary clothes to serve those who had no time to go to Church or who had left it altogether. Dormer had memorised what he had to say to us and kept repeating himself in long and repetitive monologues. As the heir to Toohey's Brewery,

and with his background as a British military officer, he had a certain cachet in some eyes. His dress was untidy and his mind bemused by the message he felt he had to preach. Repetition, he must have thought, leads to absorption. He always lived in rented rooms in guest-houses and gave little indication he had inherited wealth. He ultimately forfeited much of it through his communitarian interests and his improvidence.

About that time there also appeared in our midst, with motorbike and guitar, a young peach-cheeked German priest. He had been studying for the Catholic priesthood when he was forcibly conscripted into Hitler's defence forces. He had risen through Navy ranks to become the commander of a submarine and, while decorated for bravery, was also placed on a Hitler death list for rescuing enemy shipwreck survivors. Being taken as a prisoner to England had saved his life.

After completing his studies he was finally ordained and came to Australia. For a while he was a charismatic presence at Newman Society functions. A delightfully relaxed and loving human being with a sense of fun, a propensity to blush and no trace of repressive prurience, he preached a social philosophy that nevertheless embraced traditional values.

Women and men, he told us, were designed as two halves of a whole. Women were intended to bring out the best in men by rendering joyful service. Sylvester had been born in Breslau, and came home with me to enjoy my mother's Silesian hospitality. He continued to associate with my agnostic parents long after I had left home.

The Easter of 1954 was a particularly heady one. It was soon after the first midnight vigil at St Patrick's Cathedral that Margot Boyd and I decided to enter the Dominican order of nuns at Carisbrooke on the Isle of Wight. It was an enclosed contemplative order.

Margot was a part-time Arts student with a passion for music and she worked at the University library. She knew where we might go to become contemplative nuns. She turned up the correct pages in the British Catholic Directory and pointed at Carisbrooke. We decided then and there that we would go together.

Margot's parents were 'good Catholics'. When I told my non-conforming mother of our plan, she became so hysterical that I immediately abandoned the idea, temporarily at least. I argued with myself that something was wrong if God's will demanded such sacrifice from one's parents. I knew

that Jesus had said that those who followed Him had to abandon their parents and siblings. It was a lesson that appeared repeatedly in our Catholic education. In our Church this was interpreted as a direction to priests, nuns and brothers. Marriage was not advertised as part of that theological scenario.

I decided to wait and see. Love for people was the most important imperative, I had come to believe. My father's disgruntlement I viewed as a product of his internment and of his lingering attachment to European formalities in a much freer society. I began to strengthen my evolving Christian humanist viewpoint as central to my search for meaning. The test of love should be that one was prepared to walk through Hell for those to whom one was committed.

The intoxication of our thinking left an imprint even in our dreams. I recall dreaming one night about the famous poetic lines: *As idle as a painted ship/Upon a painted ocean*. In my dream I found myself in the two-dimensional space of a painting. I was in an open train on a hilltop in a thunderstorm which ended abruptly as if the next slide had been shown. Grey smooth air lay all about. I stretched out my hand and found the air frozen. My hand in the frozen air activated the sound of a bell. Then the two dimensions opened up further into a glorious panorama: a beach far beyond the hill. The sound of the bell chimed the sound of peace right down the beach.

I have often pondered how the human mind can grasp in a dream a contradiction otherwise impossible to conceptualise, such as 'to be' and 'not to be', or air and ice, at one and the same time. Perhaps, I thought, that is what 'talking in tongues' is all about: a private trick of the mind born of desire and not readily communicable to others.

By June 1954 Dormer wanted to bring all the factions of the Newman Society together. To this end he held a party at his home in July. What this achieved for me personally was of a different order altogether. His party sealed my fate. There I met a teacher from Xavier College, James Griffin.

Jim and his best friend Vincent Buckley spent the evening talking to me. Vin asked me to sing the Nazi *Horst Wessel* song, as satire. I could not remember it. Had I ever known it?

Jim won my heart on subsequent meetings with his fine voice and trenchant mind. His body, too, was palpably energetic and pleasing. He had been an outspoken critic of the way the Newman Society conducted itself. Vincent Buckley had heard it all at first hand. At first Jim's criticisms disturbed no one.

Jim proved a steadfast lover during our courtship. He neither left me for the Australian booze-ups of his regular male acquaintances, nor showed any of the controlling characteristics of my Austrian father. Neither Jim nor I had been truly happy before we met—so we told each other—with him taking the high ground in this commiseration.

We were both confused about the direction of our lives. I felt more comfortable with Jim than with others because he combined in his life an informal Australian upbringing with a deep interest and understanding of the history and culture of Europe, and of Britain and Ireland. Neither of us fitted happily into the social circumstances in which we found ourselves. We found inspiration and comfort in our loving association. He was an accomplished and well-read teacher and a beguiling lyric singer.

I admired his refusal to accept received knowledge at face value, and his nonchalance regarding social and materialistic advantages. We agreed on this. An independent thinker, who quite courageously defied social conformity, he told me he had known no truly happy day until I walked into his life. 'When I first met you,' he said, 'you were like a figure that had stumbled out of *The Book of Kells*.' That's the way he described my awkward shyness.

I was touched by his compassionate response to all the contradictions with which I was quietly wrestling. I held out a loving hand to his temperamental anguish.

Jim brought a new focus to my life. He had the ability to bridge Australian and European ways. His religious scepticism was a challenge. I perceived him not as someone bent on desecration or iconoclasm but impelled by the right for each of us to discover what was correct or true.

He shared my love of music and I thought I was being courted by someone with a future as a singer. I could live with a singer. On reflection, I could not have followed a religious path that did not include classical music. It is as essential to my well-being as the air I breathe.

We sometimes stayed up all night, innocently walking the streets of Melbourne. Then we began to become more intimate. On one occasion he serenaded me all night with songs by Schubert, Schumann, Mahler, Handel and Purcell. He sang old Irish folk songs and seventeenth-century Italian songs. I already knew them, but the depth of feeling he brought to them was particularly persuasive.

He told me, however, that there was a degree of narcissism in being a singer. He asserted that to follow a profession in singing would make his intellectual life difficult to maintain.

I consented to become his wife not long after we began to 'go out'.

My lover had of course taken me into his arms and away from the camaraderie of other Catholic students. We had embarked on a private journey. We maintained, however, some strong community involvements.

An image comes back to me when I think of our courtship. It is afternoon. We lie in each other's embrace in the faded boarding house where he is living. The pious school I once attended is nearby. It is the Academy's sports' day. We can hear the girls barracking for their teams behind the high, grey convent walls. I can see the four colours that attract their screams. I reflect on how far I have moved in just over three years.

I hear again the German verses from *Tristan and Isolde* which he and I speak in unison. T.S. Eliot had quoted them in *The Waste Land*, which Jim knows and I have been studying. It links German and Irish legends, and our forebears:

*Frisch weht der Wind  
Der Heimat zu.  
Mein Irisch Kind,  
Wo weilest du?*

[Fresh blows the wind towards the coast.  
My Irish child, where do you linger?]

Indeed, I think, is he waiting for me, or I for him? Each is thinking of the other. We are both 'the child' which the poem is calling from a legend about lovers. He identifies with his Irish antecedents. The Nordic legend is familiar to German writers, and I know it.

In the latter part of 1954, Jim and I became not only inseparable companions, but lovers. Then the feathers began to fly. The inner core of the Newman Society behaved as if they owned me. Father Golden, John Dormer and Vincent Buckley tried to separate us. The friendship between Vincent and Jim broke up over this issue. My self-appointed guardians conveyed that I belonged to the established community. I had no right to leave it with an intellectual sceptic. Father Golden began to spy on us and had me in tears in the rain one night for the best part of an hour.

When John Dormer could not win me over to abandon Jim and become a key worker in his apostolate, he followed us at the end of the year to Portsea. Jim and I were working in a hotel dining room to make money for a planned overseas trip. Ostensibly he came to paint with me, but then he made the preposterous suggestion that he and I could conduct a celestial platonic association while Jim possessed my baser body. He told Jim to leave the apostolate alone and stick to his schoolteaching. He then wrote a sprawling ninety-six-page letter to this effect.

I had never encouraged his attention in any way. If anything I was aloof, almost rudely so. All this now seems strange. But it is how ideologically oriented associations often run their affairs. Officers in the various Christian churches and in political parties can be equally careless of individual rights. None of this was unique to the Newman Society.

A number of people outside the University were also opposed to the prospect of a marriage between two people they judged as so different in temperament and attitudes. Never mind the friendship and camaraderie that underpinned our love affair, which included our writing small essays to each other on the principles of aesthetic judgement, and attempting to teach each other philosophy from a textbook in the sand caves along the beach. Jim and I were both comrades and lovers.

One woman warned me that if Jim went overseas, I would never see him again. Another of his 'friends' bet two bottles of champagne that a marriage between us would not last. My English tutor, Tom Dobson, wrote to my home address after I announced that I was quitting my course to save money to marry abroad: 'Please put off your marriage until you have completed your studies. You are one of my more promising Literature students,' he urged. I was of course flattered that the intelligence testers had been so wrong in their cliched predictions for me.

There were other people who failed to understand the person I was and my potential as wife, mother, companion, teacher and scholar. Many young women were similarly disadvantaged.

High on the list of those intractably opposed to my marriage was my father. Like Tom Dobson's, his viewpoint was also unexpected, but much more novel. In April 1955, not long before he left for Rome on the Otranto, and with the respectful formality then expected when daughters had not reached their 'majority', Jim had asked my father's permission to marry me. He had invited my parents to dine with us at The Italian Society, our favourite cheap restaurant. The conversation was cheerful enough but Father Rudolf and Lover Jim made men's talk on politics, Jim treading warily, while Mother Elfriede and I somewhat apprehensively exchanged pleasantries.

When the coffee arrived, Rudolf abruptly asked: 'Well, Mr Griffin. There is something you wanted to talk to me about.' 'It's quite simple,' replied the host. 'I want to marry your daughter.'

'Well, I have nothing against you. You seem a decent young man,' Rudolf conceded, 'but Helga—she is not fit to get married.' He then proceeded to present 'Mr Griffin' with a catalogue of all my failings. 'Well, if that's all,' Jim replied cheerfully, 'I will take her with all her faults.'

This led to a brief but thunderous silence, and the subject was dropped for the time being. But my father's uncouth conduct put my mother firmly on our side.

I must have ignored the catalogue of my shortcomings, so used to them had I become, for I do not now recall what my father said so publicly and so rudely. And I held back my tears. My father could not abide to see anyone close to him in tears.

Jim was avidly interested in Italian Renaissance history and Italy's great traditions of art and architecture. In early May, on the eve of his departure for Italy for an indefinite stay, he rang my parents to say goodbye. As casually as he could, he informed Rudolf that he had put a deposit on my passage on the Otranto the following year.

Rudolf reacted angrily: 'Why did you do that?' Jim told him that if he saw fit to give permission we would marry immediately I arrived; if not, then we would wait until June, when I turned twenty-one.

In May 1955 Jim sailed away. He was joined by his friend Desmond O'Grady and my friend Margot Boyd. Both had asked Jim if they might accompany him on the journey he had already planned. Margot was beginning her travels to the enclosed Dominicans on the Isle of Wight. Jim Provan and the Newman Society's motet choir were there to farewell the three travellers.

I usually told my mother almost everything. Such openness is surprising, given my shyness and reticence. However, while she and others knew that I had planned to marry my love, no one knew anything of our deeper relationship, or of the specific content of our twice-weekly letters after Jim had left Australia.

'Your Nordic name is to me like a distant bell ringing across wastelands of snow,' he wrote. Before his departure from Australia he and I had playfully speculated that we would honeymoon in the Scottish Highlands and call our first daughter Solveig.

His feelings for me were too precious to share with others. But even so, it is unlikely that if I had informed my father of this romanticism his heart would have softened. It may, in fact, have hardened it further. At a time when few women were in the paid work force, a father like mine sought in a future son-in-law a sound financial provider, not a writer of poetic sentiments.

I wondered whether my father had learned anything from his internment. After all, he had lost everything, then had imagined and made a new life in this land of promise.

In June 1955 I dropped my University studies and moved back home. I was prepared to brave my father's boorishness in order to save money. I managed to secure a clerical position at George Taylor's Secondary Coaching College, having secretly (and immorally) put my age up to twenty-one to earn a better wage. I need not have worried about the rights and wrongs of this. Taylor's used me not only as a clerk, but had me coaching private students and migrants in English as a second language, for which I had no qualifications. I worked assiduously, preparing my lessons separately for each student. Unaware of my plans to marry, Mr George Taylor, his son-in-law Mr Whitehead and Miss Sexton, who together ran the institution, offered to have me trained as a secondary teacher in return for joining their staff. I had to tell them the truth. They were good about it.

Meanwhile, I kept up my association with people at the University. Some of Jim's older childless friends indulged me with their concern. Although much older than I, and better-educated, they provided me with protective assurances.

One night, two cars with six of my own associates, three women and three men, brought me home after dinner at a restaurant. Liesl was with us, and her male companion, John, who played the violin. I served tea to the group and took out my inadequate violin, hoping that someone with experience could make something of it. Our performance was quite good and we sang along in harmony.

Suddenly the door of my parents' bedroom opened and my father came stomping out in his striped pyjamas. Even though his residence was a three-acre farm with no near neighbours, he shouted at my companions to get out of his house. What were they thinking of, visiting so late at night and disturbing the peace?

My friends slunk out. I apologised to them in the driveway. It was all my fault. I ought to have known that parents raised elsewhere still valued the stricter formalities of their own upbringing.

I often brought friends home during the day, and mother was always ready to feed them and exercise her tact and charm, delighting in intelligent company. One evening, months previously, the courteous but eccentric John Dormer, whose nose was dripping from colds that winter, had absent-mindedly wiped it on a tea-towel while helping my mother with the washing-up. I was horrified, and thought that she would reprimand him. But she silently signalled me to stay calm and, after our guests had gone, washed all the dishes again. She retained both her presence of mind and her admirable style when she was enjoying herself.

All this time I was getting ready to leave to go overseas. My father still refused to give me his permission to marry Jim. I was not sure he wanted me to marry at all, except perhaps a man of means from his cultural background. His insistence on thwarting my intention to marry Jim made things bad not only for me but also for my mother. She continued to support my proposed marriage. Had she and Rudolf not done exactly the same thing, left home and got married against the wishes of his parents? She could be more rational than he and told him so, over and over again.

She then arranged secretly to have a wedding dress made for me by a Russian dress-maker who lived close to Melbourne. She borrowed money from her sister's husband, promising to pay him back in small sums from the house-keeping money she was given each week by Rudolf. She had no money of her own, and could not buy presents independently. She was beholden to him for everything.

The white lace dress took a long time to finish, and I was obliged to make far too many compromises about its style. My mother was all fired up by what she presumed to be my future social life in Rome, at diplomatic functions. Jim had secured a position in the city as a translator with the Australian Legation. I did not share her optimism. The two older women designed a three-quarter-length dress with a halter neck and matching fitted jacket. It was to serve as both wedding and cocktail dress. But these two European women were out of touch. One did not wear white lace dresses at the cocktail hour.

However, since my mother would not be at my wedding, I humoured her dreams for me. While her own dress-making was perfect, her once-impeccable dress sense was now hopelessly out of fashion in Australia. I loathed the stiff tulip-shaped cap tailored to hold a veil. I was relieved when Jim's gentle and generous mother knitted me a lace wool shawl for our first baby. I knew immediately when I would first use it. Naturally I did not show it to my demanding mother.

My mother urged my father to present me with a useful wedding gift. But he balked at the idea. He remained unmoved even when he helped my brother Peter choose an opal on a gold chain in a jeweller's shop.

I was to sail away on a Saturday in February. My father was prepared to drive me and my luggage in his Hillman sedan to the ship, which left at five in the afternoon.

On the day, I was packed and ready to leave whenever it suited him. But it was still only mid-morning. Suddenly, impetuously, he told me to come into town with him. Just the two of us. He wanted to buy me something. 'Another of his mad schemes!' I thought. I liked to be discriminating in how I spent his or my money.

It was already 11 o'clock, and we would not arrive in town until 11.30. On a Saturday, the shops closed at noon. But he was set on taking me. I was concerned that no accident happened to the car on the day it also

had to take me to the ship. But off we went and in one shop father urged me to pick forty pounds worth of linen. It was a fortune! And how was I to pack all this so late? He assured me that he would provide me with one of his own suitcases.

In a space of less than twenty minutes I came away with two sets of double bed sheets with matching pillow cases, the first coloured sheets I had ever seen. We added four towels, a blue checked table cloth with serviettes, and a set of four table mats and serviettes with a fish motif. When moved by sentiment my father could be extremely generous.

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