

6. Nothing Stays The Same

The Turning Point

From 1939, our happy home life started to change for the worse and it was like a domino effect. I was only five years old so I don't remember the order of things but I vividly remember what occurred. First of all Keith and I were very excited to see that Mum was having a baby. As I have said before she was a tiny woman, but she was huge in this pregnancy and really struggling. So no one was really surprised when she went into labour early and delivered two baby girls; sadly, they were born two months premature in March 1939.

Our Twin Sisters

Our little baby sisters Mary and Dawn were tiny little babies and at that time didn't have a hope of surviving. Baby Mary lived for ten hours and baby Dawn lived for three days. Mum and Dad were broken hearted at the loss of their babies. I remember so clearly the day my twin sisters were buried in an unmarked grave up the back under a shady tree at Mooroopna cemetery. It was a very sad day. But it wasn't long before Dad would be off for work again and Mum, Keith and I would follow. There was really no time for grief, so everyone suffered in silence.

1939 Cummeragunga Walk-off

While Dad, Mum, my brother Keith and I were travelling back and forth from Mooroopna to work at Barmah Lakes, there was a great deal of unrest going on at Cummeragunga. Our people had had enough of life on Cummera, so they packed up and walked off, settling across the river at Barmah for a while. This had been a long time coming.

In later years my father-in-law Ronald Morgan described the lead up to the Walk-off:

we have had fifteen managers of various types. We have had those who preferred to come with their Bible and those that favoured their bullets and batons, each one believing as he came that he would in his way "achieve a revival and bring things back" (to use one of the manager's expressions) to their former glory. But they did not take long to find out

that their castles were built on old foundations and soon crumbled away. There was unrest on Cummeragunga for many years. The Aborigines had a taste of civilisation and they knew too civilisation was coming in on them. They knew too, that not far away was something people called democracy. Were they enjoying this on the Station with all its rules and regulations, perhaps under a manager who could not control his temper or one who would become vindictive at the least provocation to some or perhaps to all the people that they were there to take care of? The climax came in the year 1939. The people rose in a body and shifted into Victoria. (Morgan 1952)

I remember we were back on the Flat when we got the news of the Walk-off. I remember it clearly because of what was going on for us at home.

The Enlistment

We had set up our hessian tent at Hill 60 on the Flat (see Map of Mooroopna and the Flat) and were only there a short time when Dad and his brother Keith and Dad's Uncle Arthur headed down to the Mechanics Hall in Mooroopna to enlist for the army. It was World War Two and they were among the first to get down there that day. But then someone down the Flat told Mum about Dad being up at the Mechanics Hall enlisting. Mum was absolutely shocked and frantic, as she didn't know he was doing this, so she and I ran as fast as we could all the way from Hill 60 to the Mechanics Hall (about two miles) to try and stop him. But we were too late: it was done. Mum was devastated but there was nothing she could do about it.

I don't know that I really understood what it was all about at that time nor the consequences of war, but I knew the men were pretty proud to be there and I was proud to be with them that day as they stood in their uniforms. But I could see that Mum's heart was breaking and she was really suffering over Dad's decision; a decision he made without her. It wasn't until I got a little older that I fully understood the enormity of what Dad had done in not including Mum in his decision.



Enlisted Nelson Boys. Bob Nelson jnr, George Nelson (Dad) with little George Nelson (me), Keith Nelson Snr with little Keith (my brother), Uncle Bob Nelson Snr with boys Arthur Nelson and Dimpsey Johnson (boy on right).

Source: GBRN Collection.



Nanny Pris and Aunty Ruby Near with Dad's brother, Uncle Keith and one of our pet ducklings that turned into a swan and stayed with Aunty Ruby.

Source: Museum Victoria.

The Tea Leaves

Long ago Auntie Ruby Near was renowned for tea-leaf reading. All the family would gather around to see what the future held for them. I clearly remember Mum going to her one day and what Auntie Ruby saw was astounding, so much that from that time she swore she would never read another person's tea leaves again. She told Mum that she saw her going down into a dark black hole and never coming out again. Soon after Mum was told she had cancer.

A Broken Man

Following Dad's enlistment Mum seemed to start to go downhill in her health. It seemed minor at first but when Dad was shipped off to war he got as far as Darwin before Nanny Pris had him pulled off the ship and returned home because my Mum had fallen very ill from cancer; Dad had to come home to look after Mum and us kids. To this day I still wonder if Mum had any inkling that she was so unwell that terrible day we ran to the Mechanics Hall to try and stop Dad. Her anguish on the day really makes me wonder now.

It turned out that Dad's brother, Uncle Keith, didn't get to go to war either because when they did his medical assessment and discovered he was missing all his toes on one foot (from that accident in Melbourne on his paper run), he was refused enlistment. However, his daughter Carol Collie (nee Nelson) tells me now that he remained on the Reserves list, just in case.

Friday Night Special

When Dad got back from Darwin he really started to change. It seemed that the frustration at being forced to return home was weighing heavy on his mind. Regardless of Mum's medical condition we soon headed back out bush for Dad to return to woodcutting and charcoal burning to make a living. It was a really rough life for a woman suffering cancer, but what could she do?

While he went back to his usual modes of work he started to drink heavily and got more difficult to live with, being less settled and easily angered. For me and Keith as little boys we didn't understand the change in our dear Dad. We used to love spending so much time with him but now he seemed to be annoyed even by having us around at all. He was now full of rage and this greatly confused and frightened Mum, Keith and me.

Dad soon started heading straight to the pub on pay-days while Mum, Keith and I spent many long hours sitting outside the pub waiting for Dad, with empty bellies. This was a huge strain on all of us, especially Mum with her ill health.

Wrestling

Then when we would return to our camp Dad would start mucking up by picking on my brother Keith and me forcing us to wrestle and fight each other until we hurt or cried. We were both only tiny little fellas and neither of us had a mean bone in our little tiny bodies, but that didn't matter to Dad. He seemed to enjoy living vicariously through us, releasing his anger and frustration through us. Mum would step in and try desperately to settle things down and protect us kids but then she would cop the brunt of Dad's aggravation. This was the sort of pressure Mum didn't need considering she was battling cancer during this time.



My brother Keith and me with Dad.

Source: GBRN Collection.

Another Baby

But Mum was soon pregnant again and this time really struggled with both her illness and the pregnancy. She was so tiny and frail but huge by the time she was ready to deliver. Then on 19 December 1940 she gave birth to another brother for Keith and me and he was named Brien Hurtle, taking Pop Hurtle Mackray's name for his middle name. It seems that Pop Hurtle Mackray had finally won over my Dad after all. And Keith and I were very excited to have a brother to join us in our little men's business.

One particular day I was out on the Flat, carrying my baby brother Brien around getting to know him. I was a small kid only about six years old then but he was an awful heavy bub so I used to have to fling him over my shoulder to carry him while we walked. On this day as I flung him over Nanny Pris yelled at me and frightened the life out of me so much that I lost my grip and poor baby Brien kept going straight over my shoulder landing on the ground behind me. I bolted! They didn't see me for dust! I was ducking and weaving through the trees thinking 'I am gunna be in big trouble for this', and could hear his squeals quickly fading into the distance behind me. Don't worry, he was fine. I was only a short fella in those days so luckily for him it wasn't such a long way to the ground.

Distance Between Us

Later on and to make matters worse, Dad learnt that his entire regiment was killed at war. I don't know if this is fact, but that is what he told everyone at the time. This was a weight he couldn't bear. He felt overwhelming guilt for not going to war and standing with them. He became so unhappy, drank much more, and became increasingly detached from being a father and husband. This was devastating for Mum, Keith and me and would eventually impact on our brother Brien although he was too young to see what was happening around him then.

My Saviours

At one stage in late 1940 Mum, Dad, Keith, Brien and I returned to Mooroopna and were living with Dad's sister Ruby Near at the back of the Mooroopna Hospital. Nanny Pris and Pop Mackray were living in Leeton on Wattle Hill and had also just returned home to Mooroopna for a visit and were staying with Auntie Ruby too. Nanny Pris took one look at me and was so shocked to see that at the age of seven-and-a-half I was wasting away from fretting over Dad; though I was two or so years older than my little brother Keith, I was tiny compared to him. Nanny and Pop would turn out to be my saviours. Nanny

immediately took control by telling Mum and Dad she was taking me back to live with them while Mum and Dad continued to care for Keith and baby Brien. Thankfully, Dad eased up on Keith without me there. I really don't think Mum and Dad had any choice with the strong character that Nanny Pris was.



Nanny Priscilla Mackray at Daish's Paddock opposite the Flat.

Source: GBRN Collection.

I moved to Leeton and started my regular schooling up there with cousins Dimpsey and Fay Johnson (Dad's sister Iris' kids) who were also living with Nan and Pop. Life was good there because I no longer had the strain that I had with Dad picking on me and Keith all the time; and Pop was a real gentleman and he never drank at home at all. In fact I never saw him drink around me until I was an adult. That was a great change for me after the life we had seen with Dad over the few months since he was sent home from Darwin. It was also nice to stay in one place, go to school and make friends for the first time in my life. I missed my Mum and brothers a terrible lot, but I was lucky to have Fay and Dimpsey to keep me company and fill the void; they really became a brother and sister to me.

Don't get me wrong, Nanny Pris was very strict on Fay, Dimpsey and me. She was a pretty hard woman preaching 'fire and brimstone' every night, but I guess she needed to be tough in those days because of what life had dealt her over the years.

I know that Mum and Dad were doing the best they could with what they had but to finally have some kind of stability really made a difference to my home life, school life and general wellbeing. During this time I flourished at school and at home. Pop Mackray was a really loving and caring man and had become more of a father to me than my own Dad had now become. Sadly, my time living with Nan and Pop over the next few years would end up creating a huge divide between Dad and me.



Pop Mackray at Daish's Paddock opposite the Flat.

Source: GBRN Collection.

Regardless of Nan and Pop's love and stability I never stopped worrying about my Mum, her illness and how my family was suffering at home without me. And I didn't stop wondering why Mum and Dad never came for me. I thought after a little while they would have fretted for me as I did for them and come to take me home. But they never did. Even to this day I still wonder why they never came for me. As it turned out I lived with Nan and Pop from the time I was seven, through to my teenage years. In fact, I would never live with my mother again. That really saddens me: it's a deep sadness that has never left me.

The Tap Dancers and the Ballerina

Nanny Pris had great ambitions for Fay, Dimpsey and me when we lived at Wattle Hill. She thought we would find fame and fortune through dance and ballet. Dimpsey and I were to be the tap dancers and Fay the ballerina. She would always be telling us stories about the Merry Singers and trying to fire us up. Fay and Dimpsey's Mum Aunty Iris was one of the Merry Singers so I guess Nanny thought it was in our blood.

But Nanny's training tactics left much to be desired. She would do all the dance steps to teach us, all the twists and turns, toe tappin' and arm movements, and then flick the strap around our legs and ankles when we got it wrong!

Then when Dimpsey and I were at school the kids knew about us tap dancing and Dimpsey and I were called all sorts of names, like 'sissies', and that just 'cruelled us'. On the other hand, Fay was the 'Angel' because she had the 'Gift'; she really could dance. So Nanny had great ambitions for her until she went home to live with her Mum and that was it. Nanny just gave up on us all in the end. Poor thing!



Fay (Carter) and me at my 80th birthday party 2013

Source: GBRN Collection.

Granny Ada's Passing

Sadly it was only three years after her home burnt down that Granny Ada passed away at Mooroopna Hospital on 3 October 1942,¹ aged 74 years. She and Grampa were living with their son Carey and his family at the time at 14 Claude Street, Shepparton. Soon after her death, Grampa moved down the same street to number 8 to live with their daughter Becky and her husband Bob Murray, where he stayed for the remainder of his years.

'That' Telegram

Sometime in late 1945 while I was still living at Wattle Hill with Nanny and Pop they got a telegram from my Mum in Mooroopna Hospital saying that she had taken ill and was asking to see me. So we immediately packed a bag and Pop took me back in his Chevy ute to see Mum and spend a little time with her. It was frightening for me, the thought of seeing my Mum so unwell. I was now 11 years old and it had been four years since I had seen Mum so I really didn't know what to expect. In hindsight, I guess Pop was probably just as concerned about the impending visit but he never let on to me.

It was so great to see Mum again and spend some time with her and to my surprise she had also had another baby, a beautiful tiny baby girl they named Carmel, on 7 November 1944. While there we stayed down the Flat so that we were able to go visit Mum every day. That was the beauty of life on the Flat; families would come and go for work, and when you returned home to the Flat, there always seemed to be a family just moving out, so your family could just move in. It was real synchronicity how it all just flowed like that.

Wattle Hill and The Flat

These were camps near the rural towns of Leeton and Shepparton where many of the Aboriginal people in this story lived for longer or shorter times. These camps were often on Commons or other undeveloped public lands although sometimes they were on land Reserved for the Use of Aborigines but without any resident government manager. Such camps were sometimes called 'fringe camps' by whites, but they each had a strong Aboriginal history. Many Aboriginal people refused to live on Government Stations or Reserves because they valued their independence. This was the origin of some camps, like the Top Camp in Moree, which allowed Aboriginal people to live close to the Public

¹ Granny Ada James death certificate.

School where they fought to keep their children enrolled despite a colour bar in the 1930s. In other places, like The Flat, Aboriginal people had been forced off previously independent reserve lands when the Protection Board tried to impose controls by taking children away and resuming farming land. This happened at Cummeragunja in the 1910s and 1920s (see Chapters 12 and 14), and it was from there that many people moved to The Flat. Finally, other camps again were established when Aboriginal people were working nearby in casual pastoral or agricultural work, like Wattle Hill at Leeton and Tulladunna at Wee Waa. These camps allowed Aboriginal people to be close to employers as well as close to schools and stores.

Anyway, Mum was struggling health-wise but seemed to come good for a while now she had all her kids around her, so Pop decided it was time for us to head back to Leeton for me to finish my school exams and him to get back to his work. Our time together was so short but I felt sure that Mum was going to be okay now. After all, this was my Mum – and Mums are always meant to be there. Aren't they?

Not Another Telegram

To Grampa's Side

We returned home to Leeton and it was about 12 months later, in late 1945, when yet another telegram arrived. Nanny got word that her father Grampa James had taken seriously ill and was very low. It was starting to seem to me that only bad news ever arrived in telegrams! So Nanny and Pop packed everything up – including Fay, Dimpsey and me – and went back to Shepparton for good, moving into Auntie Becky Murray's (Nanny Pris' sister's) garage in Claude Street, Shepparton. Grampa was still living with Auntie Becky at the time and had been for four years.

The adults in the house were all talking intensively every moment of every day about Grampa's health saying that he didn't have long. This all seemed so surreal to me because Grampa was always such a huge figure in our lives. He had rescued me only a few years earlier from my accident at the timber yard and he had inevitably become a very important person in my life. I had spent a lot of time in my early childhood around his home, around him at the kitchen table, listening to him, watching him work. While I lived with Nanny Pris over the few years prior, she told stories about what a great man her father was; the great work he did for our people as a teacher on Cummera; and how loved he was by our people. He was always such a central figure to our family and community that news of his impending death just didn't make sense at all.

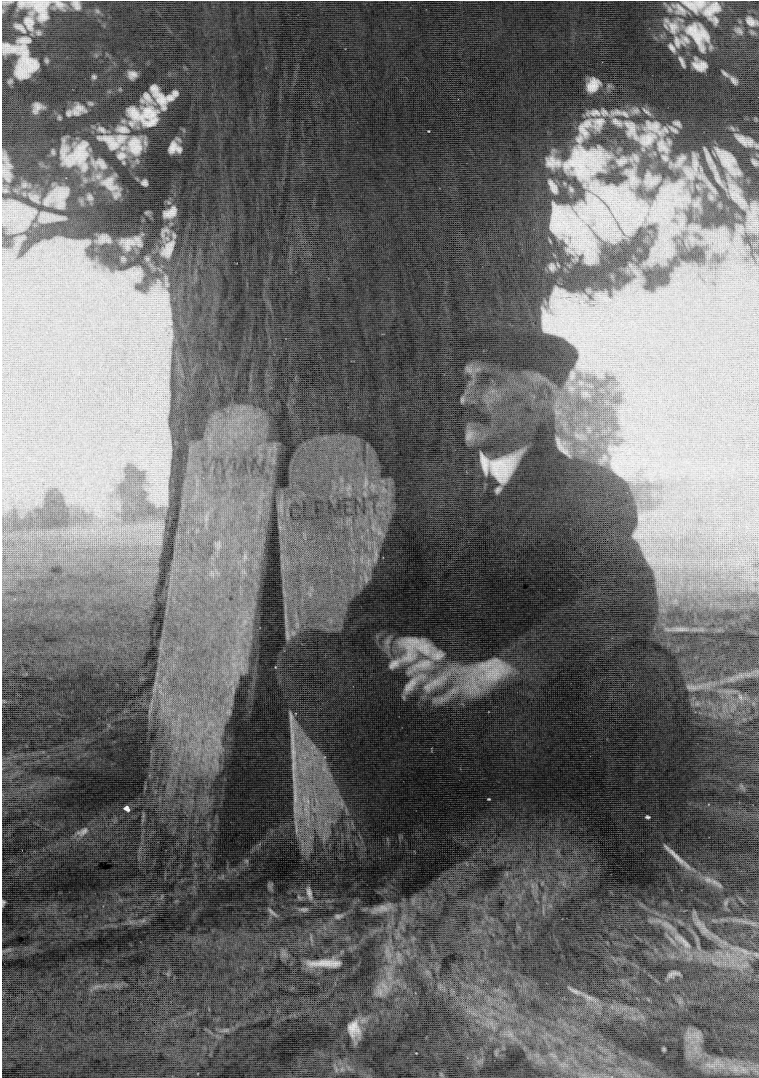
At Aunty Becky's us kids were ordered to keep clear of the adults and there were so many visitors both black and white coming from far and wide to see Grampa as he lay so ill. I guess now for me as a 12-year-old kid, having recently had a birthday, there hadn't been much loss in my short life; I probably hadn't really tackled the whole concept of death and dying. So it came as a real shock to me, the day that Grampa passed away. He was such an incredible presence in my life that the thought of never seeing him again was unfathomable. It just wasn't possible.

Losing Dada

Grampa passed on to the 'Dreaming' on 19 January 1946 and from memory the family kept him in the house for a day for visitors to come and say their goodbyes before he was taken away. And they still kept coming from far and wide. There was a lot of crying, sobbing and heartbreak. I heard Nanny and her sisters wailing in despair and crying out for their 'Dada', the name she and her siblings affectionately called their father. It was clear even to us as little kids that Grampa was very much loved and would be so deeply missed.

On the day of his funeral at Cummera, us kids watched as people piled into all available cars and headed off. Nanny Pris and Pop Mackray only had Pop's little Chevy ute and some of the men climbed in the back but we kids had to stay home because we couldn't fit in. I was really disappointed not to be able to go along and it was very hard to get used to Grampa not being around anymore; although I don't think he has ever really stopped walking among us.

Following his passing, the *Riverine Herald* in Echuca ran a story titled 'Cumeroogunga Mission – Story of Its Early Days, Tribute to Teacher'. It was a tribute to Grampa by Rev. J.K. Matthews. Please refer to Appendix 2 for a full copy of this article.



J.K. Matthews, Daniel's son, at Maloga Sandhill Cemetery.

Source: Mr Maloga, Cato and UQP.

The Flat

When Grampa passed on to the Dreaming, Nan and Pop Mackray got a home down on the Flat and they, along with my cousins Fay and Dimpsey and me, moved down there to live. Mum and Dad along with Keith, Brien and Carmel were living on the Flat then too, but Mum was very ill at this stage and spending a lot of time in hospital getting treatment. During Mum's long illness she had about three operations to try and beat it. Nanny and Pop Mackray made it known that they didn't approve of her having the operations at all because she was so very tiny, weak and frail, that her body couldn't cope with it at all any more.

During this period Nanny and Pop worked at various places; at one stage we were living at Jamieson's orchard just out of Shepparton; and another time Nanny was working at Faglan's orchard, Poplar Avenue, Shepparton. Faglan's used to send in a car for pickers, but the pickup point was at her sister Auntie Becky's house in Claude Street, 5 km from the Flat where we lived. So Pop bought Nanny a Healing bicycle, a popular top-of-the-range bike in those days. Every morning she would plonk me on the pack rack and off she'd ride dinking me to Claude Street. When she got too puffed she'd get me to hop off and run alongside her. Or we would both walk until she caught her breath and then off we would go again. She would then do a hard day's work on the orchard and at the end of the day, do the trip home all over again. She was 58 years old by then, a big strong woman who would never give in.

No Money

Sadly, my Mum was losing her fight against that deadly disease cancer. So there came a time when Pop started pre-empting my mother's death: knowing that we didn't have the money to bury Mum when her time came, Pop Mackray took Dad, Keith, Brien, Carmel and me out camping at the back of Nagambie about 60 km from Shepparton, to work at woodcutting. The most heartbreaking thing about this was that we were all out bush while Mum suffered without her children and husband around her when she needed them most. But I guess this was all Pop could do to get Dad out of town and off the grog, working to care for his kids and pay for his wife's funeral.

While we were gone, Nanny Pris supported Mum and got to work to organise a bigger home for us all to live together in down on the Flat when we returned. We had been living in two separate homes – the one Mum had made for us and the one I had been living in with Nanny Pris. Nanny Pris combined the two households to make one home.

Mum and the Curlew

Mum once told me that the call of a curlew bird was the cry of death. She said that in old times, on Cummera and beyond, whenever the women would hear a curlew flying over or calling in the distance, they would go and roll their babies over. You see, they were way ahead of their time. They were thinking of cot death (sudden infant death syndrome) and knew exactly what they needed to do as prevention. I didn't know the call of the curlew. But soon I would.

Within eight months of Grampa's passing, my beautiful Mum suddenly passed away at Mooroopna Hospital just over from the Flat. Dad, Pop and us kids had returned from Nagambie just in time. I remember that day very clearly. It was 25 September 1946. Why do I remember it so well? It was my 13th birthday. A day I would never forget. A day I would never celebrate again.

That day I was sitting down the Flat outside Uncle Bob and Auntie Elsie Nelson's hut with Cousin Gloria Nelson. We were sitting on a log having a good old chin wag, when suddenly out of nowhere a bird came flying swiftly through the bush as though it had made a direct mid-air pathway from the Mooroopna Hospital through the trees, swooped over our heads and kept going. Like an Ancestral messenger bird telling the world that a great lady had just, at that very moment, passed on to the 'Dreaming'. That bird was a curlew. I turned to Gloria and said in astonishment 'Whattt was thattt?' Gloria didn't know and nor did I. It was later that I came to realise that yes, this was the curlew and now I understood the power of this bird and its horrible death cry – that was the very moment my Mum died!

As I look for answers today at this stage of my life, I have come across Mum's death certificate which shows that Mum had died from cancer of the abdomen, cervix and uterus. She didn't have a chance. She had married Dad when she was 20 and died 13 years later. Her life was far too hard and short. And for half of my short life I had been living away with Nanny and Pop Mackray. I have never got over that loss – I hadn't only lost her in death, but I also missed out on six years of living with her, her raising me, having her cuddles, and growing me up in her way. And when you think about it, she missed out on having all her children with her too.

Mum's Funeral

On Mum's passing we – Brien, Carmel and I went to stay with Granny Kitty (Mum's mum) in Anzac Avenue, Shepparton; brother Keith went to stay with Dad's sister Auntie Lulla Grant in Leeton in New South Wales; and Dad, Nanny

and Pop Mackray made funeral arrangements. Then we all went back to live on the Flat in the home Nanny Pris had made for us, while Dad got work at the Mooroopna Council.

Dad worked there for a while until he headed off back to Barmah Forest and Bunbartha cutting wood, while us kids stayed with Nan and Pop on the Flat. This was the first time us kids had ever lived under the same roof in our lives. How sad it was that our Mum and Dad weren't there together with us. Poor Mum and Dad had never had us all living with them at one time.



Dad on tractor working for the Council at Mooroopna.

Source: Museum Victoria.

Community Life

It was a great community and family life down on the Flat with our five family huts all side by side together in a cluster. But I really missed my Mum and felt anguished over her loss for a long time. Eventually our cousin Fay was living with us again, and our neighbours were Aunty Ellen and Uncle (Pastor) Eddie Atkinson with their kids Laurie, Daisy and Muriel. Then Aunty Bay and Uncle Jeff Atkinson with Hurtle and Neville moved into a hut next door. Aunty Markie and Uncle Les Saunders had their hut beside us. And next door was Uncle Billy and Aunty Olive Muir, with Young Bill and his wife Midgee, and

Cyril – until Cyril got married and built his own hut next door as well. We were all camped so close together that we were a tight knit little family group within the Flat community.²

Leaving School

It was now the end of 1946 and I lived there with Nanny Pris and Pop Mackray fairly consistently over the next six years. I say ‘fairly’ consistently because as I started to get older, I started to move back and forth to Dad at Barmah where he was woodcutting again. Then I might go and spend some time with any one of my Aunties (Dad’s sisters) and come back to the Flat again. I ended up living in Echuca with Aunty Iris Atkinson and her family at one stage and she treated me like one of her own kids. I became a bit of a big brother to her kids as well so my time there is a great memory in my life.

After leaving school in 1947, aged 14, I joined Pop Mackray working in the shearing sheds. I picked up wool in shearing sheds all over New South Wales from Broken Hill to Mulwala, and then across the border into Victoria. The shedhand’s wage when I first started work was three pounds a week (\$6) and meals were ‘found’.

Back to Cummera Celebrations

In 1948 Dad set up home with a new woman at Barmah. So I went over for one of my stints working with him cutting wood; or should I say I went to throw a few sticks around. I was only a light teenager and so lifting those heavy five-foot logs was out of the question. But I was there havin’ a go. While there I heard that the ‘Back to Cummera Celebrations’³ were on during the period 12–14 June so I went down and stayed with Aunty Lena and Uncle Watson Atkinson (Mum’s brother) for a while at Cummera.

Following the ‘Back to Cummera’ celebrations there was another article in the *Riverine Herald* (Echuca) dated 19 June 1948, by Rev J.K. Matthews the son of Daniel and Janet Matthews. He was now living in Adelaide and had especially travelled over for the Back to Cummera celebrations. He wrote about his experience in this article:

A very happy three days was spent by the old and young inhabitants of Cumerooogunga village on the River Murray on June 12, 13 and 14 –

² See Map of Moonoopna and the Flat..

³ Anniversary of 1939 Cummeragunga Walk-off.

the 14th being the day on which the Aboriginal mission was founded on Maloga. The Saturday was given up to sports and a feast ... the Sunday was a day of pleasant remiscences when meetings were held in a large marquee in the middle of the village ... In the morning a very solemn procession assembled at the little cemetery where, around the grave of Mr T. S. James, for many years the school teacher, lately deceased, a devout service was held which I addressed.

The following photographs are believed to be from the 'Back to Cummera' celebrations, however, even if they aren't, they are from one such event held at Cummera, and so give an idea of what such a gathering looked like.



Back to Cummera.

Source: Courtesy Ronald Morgan, GBRN Collection.

It was while I was at these celebrations that a young Brenda Morgan caught my eye. We had first met ten years earlier when I was living out at Jamieson's orchard, Shepparton, with Nanny Pris, Pop Mackray, Aunty Bay Atkinson and other family while they were picking, cutting and packing fruit. Brenda was three years old and I was five. Our meeting was very antagonistic; I thought she was 'stuck up'. Nothing really happened to make me think that; we were just typical kids who didn't get on from the moment we looked at each other. Brenda was living out there with her parents in a pickers hut and I was living with my parents in our hessian tent.



Back to Cummera.

Source: Courtesy Ronald Morgan, GBRN Collection.



My wife Brenda on the Barmah Punt.

Source: Courtesy Ron Morgan, GBRN Collection.

But this time, when we met up again at the Cummera Celebrations, it was a different story. It was all shy glances and little grins until finally Brenda's sister June stepped in as matchmaker. We were soon holding hands and going steady.

But our time together was far too short and soon I was heading back to the Flat at Mooroopna with Nanny Pris and Pop while Brenda stayed at Cummera with her parents, both of us hoping that someday soon our paths would cross again.

Waiting for Brenda

It was nearly three years before our paths finally did cross again when Brenda and her family came to stay at the Flat. They had come over for the seasonal work and stayed with Uncle Bob and Aunty Elsie Nelson. Aunty Elsie was the sister of Brenda's mum Ella, while Uncle Bob was the brother of my Grandfather George. So we were already connected through them.

Thankfully I only had to fill in a couple of years before Brenda came back into my life. And as soon as she did we started 'courting', but before too long her parents decided to go back to Cummera and Brenda was going too. So Nanny Pris (again my saviour), not wanting to see us separated again, stepped in quickly offering Brenda a room and small income so that she could stay on the Flat and be nearer to me. This was a great chance for us to continue with our courtship. She had a short stint babysitting for Aunty Mary and Uncle Carey James before she managed to get a job at Mooroopna Hospital as a domestic.

A Wedding at Last

We were married a year later, on 3 May 1952, at the Church of Christ in Shepparton. It was a beautiful wedding. Brenda's cousin Des Morgan was supposed to be our groomsman but was running late due to motorbike troubles so Sandy Atkinson stepped in and Uncle Carey James (Snr) was the other groomsman. Des arrived a little after the wedding started. Brenda looked beautiful in her wedding gown and I felt like the luckiest man alive. Finally life was starting to really look up.

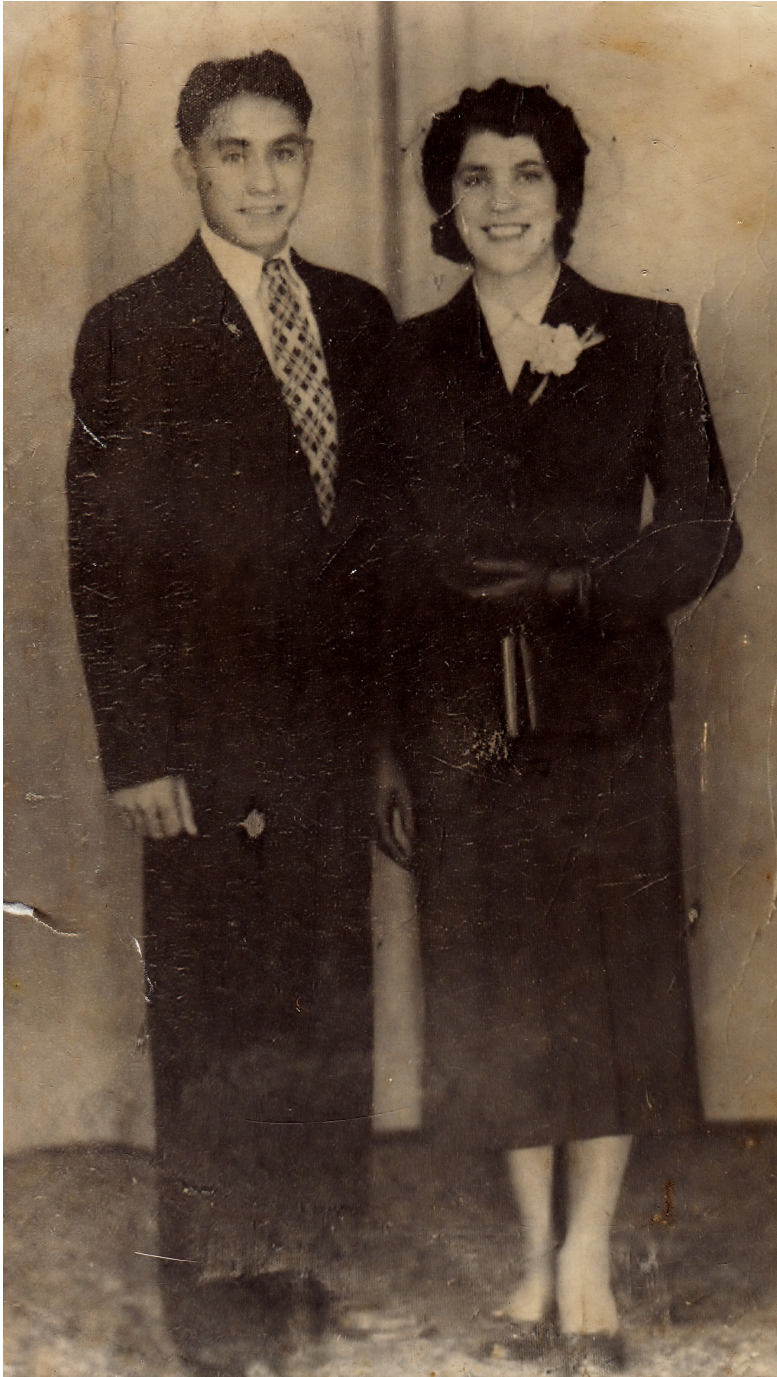


Our wedding photo, left to right: my father George, me, Brenda, her parents Ron and Ella Morgan (nee Cooper).

Source: GBRN Collection.

Our Dreaming

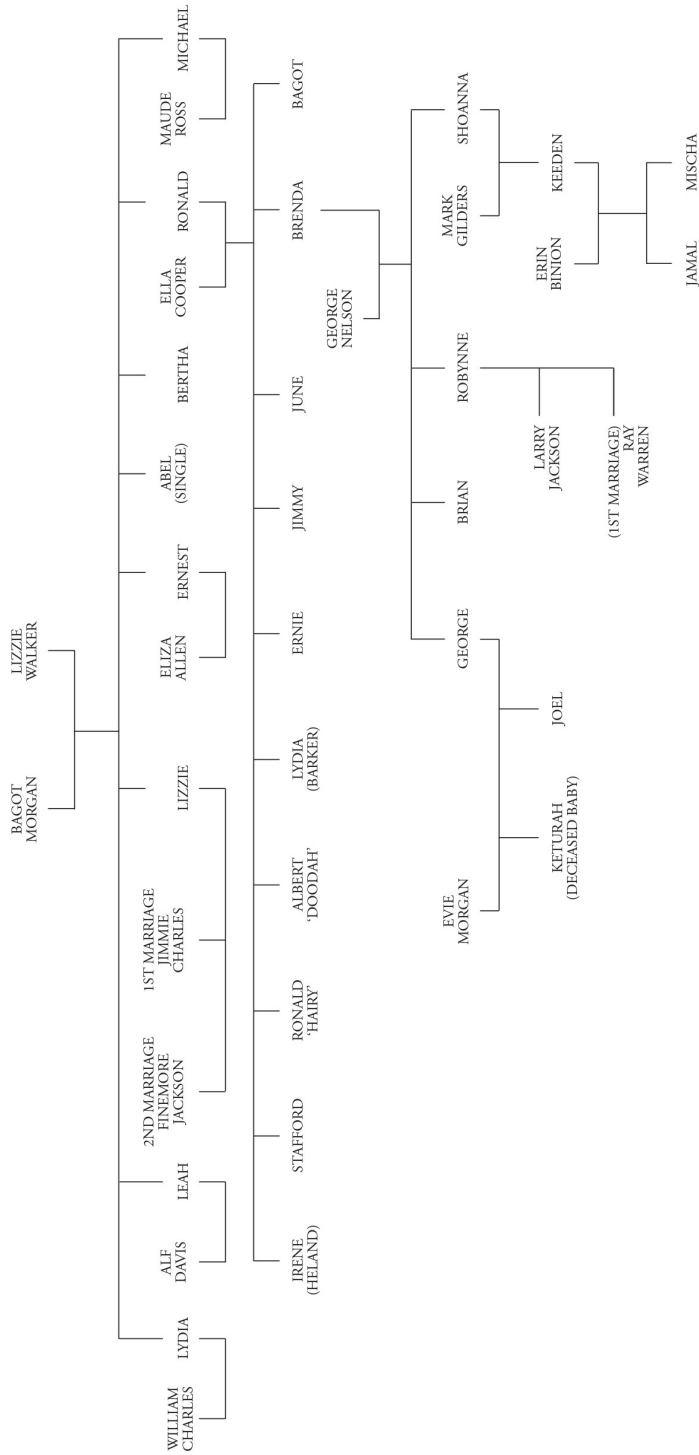
Our family of Mum, Dad and us kids never really had anything except each other. We didn't have stability so we didn't get to collect things of value such as photos or other mementoes of life because we had to travel light. But I knew that someday I wanted that kind of stability with a wife and kids. Don't get me wrong, Mum and Dad always tried to give us a home environment with what little they had to give. And Dad worked really hard to support his family the best he could with what little he had. But just thinking here now, it's probably the lack of possessions like family history and photos that eventually led me to become the researching hoarder that everyone tells me that I am today; gathering photos, stories, documents and other family history and mementoes that have taken over my home.



Brenda and me on our wedding day in our going away outfits.

Source: GBRN Collection.

FAMILY TREE: MORGAN



The Morgan family tree.

Source: GBRN Collection. Approved for publication by Brenda's cousin – Melva Johnson, 2012. The children of Bagot Morgan and Lizzie Walker are not necessarily listed in order of birth. Illustrator: Ian Faulkner.