

THE ÉMIGRÉ STORY: PART 3: STARTING ANEW

Reimagining a Working Life: 1939-1943

I find a photograph of my father taken in early 1939. It is his first job in Australia. He is working as an architectural draftsman at Buchan, Laird Architects in Geelong. This requires still more learning and adaptation, no mean feat. He must learn English technical words pertaining to architecture and design. I find notations to this effect in a diary. Regrettably, I have no knowledge of this part of my father's life but imagine he enjoyed this work which brought him close to his thwarted ambition to become an architect. In the photos below he is clearly engaged and a comfortable team member, quite a feat after so short a time in Australia and all he has been through. I look up Buchan, Laird and find that this prestigious firm is alive and well. A few years after his brief time there, Buchan, Laird commissioned Wolfgang Sievers and Marc Strizic to document their buildings. Both Jewish refugees, these esteemed industrial/architectural photographers were well known by my father.

With his interest in photography, he takes his first steps toward becoming a professional photographer in their new homeland. Believing it would be difficult to succeed in a large city due to competition and imperfect English, he feels a regional town would afford a better opportunity. In July 1939 he decides to set up as a street photographer in Mildura, almost 500 km north-west of Melbourne. Happily, he has confidence and charm on his side, helpful qualities when required to approach strangers in the street. Confronted by the provincialism of Melbourne at the time, my mother is adamant that she will *not* move to a small regional town. She has secured a part-time position teaching French at MLC, a private girl's school in Kew, a Melbourne suburb adjacent to Hawthorn where they lived. A letter from the Principal indicates that she held this position for only one term and that though much valued, they regretted not having a position to offer her for the following year. However, she enjoyed teaching, was well respected and was there long enough to develop a favoured relationship with student named

Leslie, with whom she apparently kept in touch for some years. The significance of this relationship became apparent when I was born.

In January 1940 after six months in Mildura, my father Hans, now professionally known as Harry, returns to Melbourne and Gerta. Their commuting relationship is over. I find his first printed business card H.A. BONNEY PHOTOGRAPHER. Handwritten on the back is the date 12.5.40. Interpreting rediscovered scribbled notes, I confirm that he worked from home. Is this the time when my mother first goes to work assisting my father in the studio? In September 1940 he writes to the Victorian Police requesting permission to purchase a small car to alleviate both time loss in contacting customers spread across many districts, and the difficulty of moving heavy photographic equipment. This time things move fast. I find a letter dated 20 September 1940 acknowledging receipt of full payment of £60 for a blue Austin 7 Roadster. After only eighteen months in Australia, he establishes the studio in the Dillon's Building at Camberwell Junction in July 1941. By December, another business card announces, *photo studio H.A. BONNEY*. He is thirty-six years old.

They have begun establishing their new lives but are not yet sufficiently secure to begin a family. Enter Rusty, a golden cocker spaniel puppy who my mother came to describe comically but truthfully as their 'first child', who was to live to advanced old age.

An Interruption, 1943-1944

His newly embarked-upon profession is interrupted when he is required to contribute to the war effort. In August 1943 he receives a direction to serve in Civil Aliens Corps. It is addressed to Hans Adolph Bombach even though in June 1939, following the immigration officer's 'advice', he had officially changed his name to Harry Allan Bonney, reinventing himself as a new Aussie.

All but business associates and customers, however, continue to call him Hans not Harry. Amused by this obvious error, I mention it to Jon who quips that 'the wheels of bureaucracy turn slowly, and they haven't changed

since'! He was granted a one-year deferral, then assigned work with an engineer who operated a small business producing machine parts for the war effort. The owner was kind man, sympathetic to his refugee status. In May 1944, now correctly addressed to Harry Alan Bonney, he is granted an exemption and returns to his photographic work.

Officially Australians

In the same month Hans and Gerta, under the Commonwealth of Australia's Nationality Act 1920-1936, acquire British nationality and receive a Certificate of Naturalization, formally renouncing '*allegiance to the Republic of Germany if and in so far as allegiance was imposed on him.*' This must be a moment of enormous significance for them, the next step in adjusting to a new life in a new land imbued with a sense of permanence and a future to look forward to. Is it also around now that *Rusty*, their first dog who my mother referred to as their 'first child', appears on the scene adding to the sense of permanence and stability they are building?

An Intervention

Somewhere around this time my mother's brother Erich visits Australia briefly when on furlough leave from the US army while based in the Pacific. As an American citizen he had enlisted in the army when America entered the war in 1941; he desperately wanted to fight against Hitler. As this was not possible, he was sent into the Pacific arena. What did they speak of during their time together when they still did not know about the fate of their parents, Max and Lola in Europe? Had Erich already decided to pursue enquiries once the war was over and, if so, was this discussed with my mother? Or did he already know that the subject was taboo, too painful for my mother to contemplate? It would not be until 1955 that my mother would see her brother again when she, and I aged nine years, went to America for her to reconnect with family members who had emigrated there.

Elizabeth

Six years after finding safety from persecution at the hands of the National Socialists in Austria, and now ever-grateful Australian citizens, 1944 is also

the year my parents acquire their second car. They name her *Elizabeth*, a suitably 'Anglo' name chosen by European émigrés clearly wanting to assimilate into Australian society. An internet search allows me to identify it as a 1939 Morris Tourer, a grand name for a humble car. Then I remember the dark green leather folio, age-worn, still beautiful, stashed in a cupboard somewhere amidst our Queensland clutter. Having lived on a shelf in my father's cupboards throughout their Melbourne life the folio, brought from Europe, contains documents. To my amazement there I find *Elizabeth's* registration papers confirming my internet search results. My dear father, the great hoarder, keeper of the family records, sentimental, and I in his footsteps! But little wonder that they loved that car, the only one ever named, with her bulging fish-eye headlights, cooling vents like gills on the side of the bonnet, handsome metal spoke wheels, and roof and windows of flimsy canvas.

By August 1944 aged 36 and most definitely planned, my mother is pregnant with me. I imagine this was a potent symbol of renewal in the wake of the devastation of WW2, the Holocaust and all the personal loss it entailed. Several months later armistice is declared. WW2 is over. Did my mother believe her parents may have survived or had she already assumed they had died in Auschwitz as she incorrectly believed until her dying day? But for now, she and my father are looking toward to the future and in May of 1945 I entered the world. 1945 was momentous in another way also as it was the year that my parents purchased the home which they had rented for six years, two adjoining single-story red brick maisonette flats (in today's terms a duplex) in Auburn Road, Hawthorn. The price was £2,361. It was here that I spent the first seven years of my life with my parents and our dog Rusty.

1945, What's in a Name?

What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet.

This is Juliet's line when she is telling Romeo that a name is nothing but a name, a convention with no meaning behind it. It speaks to the power, or lack thereof, of names. For poor Romeo and Juliet their family name spelled disaster. Well, what *is* in a name? In my case, happily no disaster but a quirky

and amusing occurrence. It dates from the day my father went to register my birth. Was he too excited, or simply flustered after Gerta's long hard labour followed with an act of unkindness from a nurse my mother retrospectively described as a 'war-horse?' Unable to produce sufficient milk the 'war horse' accused her of being a bad mother, deeply upsetting. No doubt my father came to the rescue. As with naming the car *Elizabeth*, they had agreed upon another suitably Anglo name, Jill Leslie, 'Leslie' in honour of that favourite student who my mother had taught at MLC. However, my father, evidently a little discombobulated, registered me as Leslie Jill Bonney. Perhaps in this error he had inadvertently set in train my future relationship to 'name'? Or maybe the business of *what's in a name* is embedded more deeply, dating to my parents' change of family name from Bombach to Bonney in 1939, pre-empting my future name changes of which there have been several, both official and unofficial. In any case, as I had no use for a second name, I did not learn about his funny error until seeing my birth certificate when applying for a passport twenty-two years later.

Snapshots

Given the back story of all that had been lost and given that my father was a photographer and a documenter, it is hardly surprising that he took a so many photographs of me from babyhood onward, diminishing in number as the years progressed. Some baby photos remained, but after his death, amongst all his boxes I found a small, hand-made album entitled *Snapshots*, pages of handsome taupe card bound with silky brown cord. The first few pages consist of congratulatory letters from friends within their close circle, written in either English or German. Thin strips of names cut from still more letters and telegrams, artfully arranged, fill two more pages. I would see this form of creativity over his long life in the scrap books he made documenting their subsequent travels.

The pages in the *Snapshots* album, most of which record my age, consist of black and white photos and tiny proof images. The first photos are taken at seven days. I am a scrunched up little thing, eyes tightly closed, a mop of dark hair and jaundiced which gave me a slightly Asiatic complexion. My mother always joked that I 'looked like the Chinese greengrocer's daughter' when first born. Later I made sense of this comment, as I recall in my early

childhood a Chinese man who walked door to door in our neighbourhood. He bore a bamboo pole across his shoulders. A basket containing fruit and vegetables hung off either end. He was, in effect, a travelling fruiterer! His presence was also significant in another way because some of the neighbourhood children taunted him with the refrain, 'ching chong chinaman'. As a Jewish child of non-Australian background, I found this deeply offensive and embarrassing. It was my first encounter with racism.

In another photo my mother bathes me in a small round plastic basin. Carl, the older neighbouring Andrew child with whom my mother had a close relationship, together with another boy, look on devotedly. And in this one, Mama looks at me solicitously through the netting of my pram. At 3½ weeks she coos with pursed lips cradling me in her arms. I can almost hear the sounds that she would have emitted, the familiar improvised German language-based terms of endearment—*Püppchen* (little doll), *Puppele*, *Pupinka*, *Push-kush*, the 'u' of course pronounced as in 'oo', the same words that *I* have adopted when talking to babies and animals!

At six weeks I suck on my bottle and look deeply into her eyes. At 10 weeks I am learning to smile, at 13 weeks am able to prop myself up just a little on my elbows and at 15 weeks I giggle with delight, tongue poking out, swaddled in warm winter clothes. Chubby, a cowlick sweeps upward, a mad kind of hairdo, cheeks plump. I push myself up higher on sturdy little arms and the world takes on a different shape.

At five or six months it is evident that I am a curious child, lively and cheerful. My mother looks relaxed and happy. Here we are together, she lovely in a 1940's waisted summer dress cut on the cross, a dark background with white leaf pattern and collar. Its sleeves come just above the elbows; her thick black hair is beautifully coifed. She is wearing earrings. As I write now, the dress in the tiny black and white photo has transformed to burgundy. Is it possible that I suddenly remember its colour? Indeed, it is more than likely she would have still been wearing it three years later, within 'the time of memory'. She has dressed me up too, a string of coral beads around my neck, a gift, I believe, from my 'pretend' Nana, Mutter (mother) Watkins. Elsewhere, my father has photographed me proudly sitting in a wooden highchair; on the ground in a playpen; taking first steps with mama holding

my hands. At eight months I am sitting up alone, at 10 months enjoying a pram ride. Is it shyness or the first signs of coquettishness, my head cocked to one side? Was it my mother who took the (rare) photo of me in my father's arms on a country road? And here are both Andrew children, our lovely Australian neighbours who became close family friends, Carl aged eight, Claire aged four standing beside me in the highchair. And there by the gate, a younger, not yet grey Rusty. And how I love the sea already, brown as a berry in the shallow water. Rusty loves it too.

First Birthday

Who is 'Grany Herset' who sends a telegram on my first birthday? Perhaps the name is a misspelling by the telegraphist due to the European-accented voice. Nonetheless here is someone offering themselves as a granny for me, though not the one who became 'Nana'. And 'Auntie Lisa' likewise offering herself as extended family in lieu of the one I do not have, and which perhaps they too lacked, the plight of many emigrants. I speculate on names barely remembered, faces perhaps recognized from photos. My father has of course taken photos to record the auspicious day. Mama has tied a ribbon in my hair and baked a perfect cake glazed with chocolate, one candle in the centre. Cake and I perch proudly together on a small round table covered with a beautiful tablecloth brought from Vienna. It is still in my possession seventy-six years later, long ago dyed pink to cover stains, now relegated to a worktable in my studio. Next to us, an array of presents—a rocking chair in the form of a swan, dress and shoes, a book, two framed pictures, a set of Beatrix Potter baby crockery. Many were from my parents, but undoubtedly also from loving friends, a few of whom belong to the time before memory. Others however, assumed a significant role in my life. Though not related by blood, I now think of these affectionately as my 'not aunties' (surrogate aunties), second mothers and even a Nana.

An Outing

I have no memory of the car *Elizabeth* and 'know' her only from a tiny proof sheet image found after my father's death. Less than two square centimetres in size, it nonetheless tells a story. There I am, a two-year old determinedly pushing the gate open with my foot, behind me at curbside sits *Elizabeth*,

ahead of me our dog Rusty. Have we both just jumped out of the little car? Rusty heads down the short path toward the front door clearly intent on entering the house, his greying snout evidence of middle age. It appears that I, on the other hand, could have happily continued playing footsies with that gate, though my responsible parents would not have left me alone near the busy road. Clearly the car is used not only for my father's business but also for outings. Where might we have been? As Australian citizens they are no longer restricted as they had been when designated Enemy Aliens. Perhaps we were visiting friends, for by now they have a network of (mostly) other Jewish émigrés. But, being great nature-lovers, perhaps we simply took a drive and a walk in the bush.

Establishing Kinship

We were a unit of three, my mother Gerta, my father Hans and me, known then as Jilly or Jill. I can only speculate as to how the lack of other family members in Australia played out in my parents' early life in Australia but certainly their friendship circle, once established, was close and undoubtedly provided them with a sense of security and warmth. Did they intentionally set out to create a substitute family for themselves and for me or was it an organic process? Though many were childless it is apparent both from photographs and from 'the time within memory', that my relationships with several of their friends was mutually loving. Just as with my parents, they too had escaped from various parts of central Europe having lost family members but bringing with them hope and determination along with loss and silent grief. Swept along in the tide of their history they all needed connection and thus shared strong social bonds.

Very few had managed to bring parents to the safety of Australia, but Mutter Watkins was one of the few exceptions. The elderly mother of my parents' friend Peter Watkins, she significantly impacted my early life. She became 'Nana'. Though her son Peter lived in Melbourne with wife and two children, Nana lived in Sydney with her other child and grandchildren. Periodically she visited her Melbourne family and, on such occasions always came to see us bringing warmth and joy, and usually a present for me. Although I have no memory of her touch, her love rests in my heart. While sifting through my father's photos, I find three, precious in their evocation of Nana. In one, her

plane stands on the tarmac, two men clad in white overalls refuel the aircraft, the words *Trans Australian Airlines* writ large on its silvery surface above the propellers; in another she is surrounded by friends who have come to meet her at the airport. The little group consists of a teenage girl, probably her granddaughter, a man and three well-dressed women, including my mother. The women all wear winter coats, some with brooches in the lapel. One wears a fur coat, they all don smart hats, some with feather. All wear gloves. One face is familiar, some belong to the time before memory. I am very small, perhaps only two or three years old, warm in my little coat and hood, looking somewhat bewildered in front of Nana who clasps a posy of welcoming flowers. All the grown-ups are smiling.

I loved Nana whose poor eyesight demanded spectacles with thick coke-bottle lenses. Her Melbourne visits and the time she spent with us in our home in Auburn Road. Hawthorn always thrilled me and it was, I believe, from her that I received two special gifts whose importance never diminished – my favourite childhood toy, *Teddy*, a handsome furry koala who remained with me for so many years that he had lost one glass eye and some of his soft leather claws. The fur on his head was rather diminished unlike my love of him which was abiding. Long after I outgrew cuddly toys and well past childhood he remained in my possession, relegated to a cupboard.

The other gift from Nana was a necklace, a string of pale corals worn on special occasions from babyhood and throughout my childhood. Just weeks ago in the *Snapshots* album, I discovered a letter type-written in German. It was in response to my father's telegram announcing my birth. *Ich schicke Ihnen Fini's Korallen für das baby*, (I am sending you Fini's corals for the baby.) She goes on to explain that she would have not given them to anyone else as for her they were a reminder of Fini's infancy and Fini was *ein entzuckenes Kind*, (an adorable child). I falter as I can't decipher the signature in the letter, nor do I recognise the name Fini. Were the corals indeed from Nana? I resist the thought that perhaps I have misplaced their origin. Association is more powerful than fact. All my life I have believed *she* had given them to me, and the symbolism remains intact regardless of truth.

Inherent in love is the possibility of loss. It came on a day in my late childhood in our second and last family home when the phone, located on the 1950's polished timber telephone table in the entry hall, rang. I am standing next to my mother when she answers. She turns toward me, our eyes locking, and tells me that Nana is dead. There was no forewarning, and I am now crying bitterly. It is my first experience of loss of a loved person, palpable still in the retelling. Her time had come, there is no longer anyone to call Nana and I am bereft. And now, decades later, I wonder what my mother felt about this death, what did Mutter Watkins represent to her? She did not cry and nor discuss her feelings. Did she associate the death with that of her own mother, or that I was in effect deprived a second time of a 'grandmother'? Or was this too painful to bring to consciousness? But Fini's corals are still with me. The necklace eventually became too small to wear and was put away. Years later my mother repurposed an antique gold chain from which she had two delicate bracelets crafted; some of Fini's corals were incorporated into one, pearls into the other. She wore them in tandem almost constantly until her death at 101 years, though, somehow I did not really associate the 'new' coral bracelet with Nana. It had become my mother's and thus something else. To my amazement, I recently re-discovered the remaining corals of the original strand, still partially strung on linen thread. I recognize them instantly. Yes, Nana lives on.

Aside from a surrogate grandmother, there were others who felt like family, first and foremost Lisl and Fritz Magid who had arrived in Melbourne from Vienna around the same time as my parents, and their son Ray, just thirteen months my senior.

Adjacent to the Andrews' side of our twinned homes and flanked on both sides by a timber fence, ran a narrow laneway sixty meters down to a dead-end court in which Ray's family lived. Their modest 1930's red brick maisonette was almost identical to ours with two bedrooms, bathroom, small kitchen, lounge and adjoining dining room. From toddlerhood on, as with the Andrew children, Ray and I were constantly in and out of each other's home, sharing mothers, later running up and down 'the lane', the magical connective tissue of our childhood lives, our two families inextricably bound. We attended the same nursery class, pre-school and for a time primary school

at Preshil, Ray ever protective. When as a five-year-old my parents took their first holiday without me it was with them, as trusted as family, that I stayed. It was Lisl who took my hand and led me to some distraction as they departed, who saw me through my tears when I broke a treasured tea-set my parents had given me. On occasions Ray came on holiday with us and I with them. Lisl and Fritz were like second parents to me, and Ray was, and remains, my 'pretend brother'.

Our lovely Australian neighbours, the Andrew family

Our neighbours in the adjoining, mirror-image maisonette flat were the first people close to my parents and me who were neither Jewish nor refugees. Frank, a graphic designer, was an artistic, cultured, intellectual man with left-wing sympathies. Fine looking with an aquiline nose, strong facial features and soft brown eyes, he sported a moustache and possessed a full head of fine wavy hair which reached to his shirt collar. He was the only person I remember who smoked a pipe and was never without it. Kenney, his short, pretty, slightly plump wife, was a stay-at-home mother, efficient always bustling around cheerfully. Both were warm and loving and Kenney's pet name for me was *Chickey*.

Their first child Carl was born five or six years before me, his sister Claire two. Both children doted on me. In one photo they flank the highchair I am sitting in, tender and solicitous. Carl expressed interest in learning the piano, but his parents did not possess one. Music had always been part of my parents' lives; my mother played the piano in Vienna, my father the viola which he continued after emigrating. Wanting to encourage the sensitive, musical boy, my parents placed their Viennese 'baby grand' at his disposal and he comes over to our place to practise. After he finishes, he goes the kitchen to find my mother with whom he has a special bond. But there is something more, a story she loved to tell later in life, of Carl looking longingly toward the kitchen cupboard. She knows what he is after. Opening the cupboard, she reaches in and removes a tall red-brown tin originally containing baby milk formula, inscribed with swirling gold writing. She now flips open the lid to reveal a huge lump of dark, bitter cooking chocolate from which she conjures up her famous European *Schokolade Torte* (chocolate

cake). She hacks off a small lump and hands it to him. The bitter chocolate is one of many European items available only in a continental delicatessen. Luckily Priester's deli is in Burke Road. Camberwell, a convenient two-minute walk from my father's photography studio where she works with my father.

Just as Carl and later Claire frequent our house, so too do I run in and out of theirs. Just as Carl hangs out for my mother's bitter chocolate and cakes, I hang out for their traditional Sunday roast. The aroma of roast meat and baked vegetables is seductive, not being part of our European food tradition. Claire, a slender, pretty child with flaxen hair is two years older than I and we are closely bonded through our childhood, and intermittently well beyond, spending a great deal of time together. She joins us on many of our Sunday outings—there we are, hand in hand walking along a beach; here, striding up a sloping grassy field toward a line of trees, arms slung around each others' waists. Seventy years later I write this poem.

THE PHOTOGRAPH

(for Claire: and in memory of my photographer father)

A proof sheet image no larger than
a Thumbelina doll fetches me back
to an unremembered day
seven decades past.

Dressed in summer flimsy we stride
a grassy paddock scattering air, my
younger head bowed in uphill concentration,
one foot determinedly follows the other.
Eucalypts clump dark on distant hills.

Her hair, tender as citrus blossom, drifts
over shoulders, a satin bow peeks like
rabbit ears, skin pale as moonlight
high contrast to mine.

Our little girl arms slung round each other
as if we'd never part, a moment
captured in black and white,
my father, camera welded to hand,
invisible behind us.

Bonney Bombach

2017/19

Unforgettable, Auburn Rd.

To this day, the potency of those early childhood memories of my world in Auburn Road remains undiminished, perhaps even augmented by a recent discovery of undeveloped film strips stashed in a fragile envelope. In these I discover a window into my parents' early years, some perhaps predating my birth. It is a little like looking through a microscope, where enlarged, all becomes clear and bright. My mother sits knitting, holding the knitting needles in the European manner while next to her my father reads the newspaper, feet resting on a nearby stool. And here they sit at a low table in the living room, my mother typing, my father bent over, writing. Is this activity work-related or personal correspondence? I recognize an old painting hanging on the wall behind them. In yet another photo they sit side by side on the couch reading a letter. And here's a surprise; tucked into their bed, white sheets pulled tight to their necks is Rusty, their beloved and spoilt cocker spaniel asleep under the bedcovers beside them! In another photo my parents share the task of drying dishes, each with dishcloth in hand. There I am, in my favourite dress patterned with tiny stars, firmly holding the white enamel bowl in which my mother is preparing a cake. She is using the old hand beater, still in my possession, while I am grinning at my father as he snaps the photo, their love splashing all over me.

It is in this house that I celebrate seven birthdays, each year a little party with my friends. It is from the garden that my mother picks an enormous bunch of dahlias now cradled in her arms, and where ranunculi line the curved path leading to the front door. It is in the little bedroom that I arrange soft toy animals around my pillow at night, keeping both them and me safe and

sound; and on the other side of the wall against which my bed rests, Claire tucked in her bed in their twinned flat. We, the ‘not quite sisters’, dream of a peep hole through which we could hold whispered conversations. Outside my bedroom window a narrow strip, wedged between house wall and fence, runs to the small back garden where on occasion my mother and I sit, eyes closed, resting in striped canvas-covered deckchairs basking in sun. Carpeted with thick, spongy moss, this secluded corner of garden becomes a magical ‘fairy garden’ in which Claire and I kneel, busy making mud cakes decorated with a rainbow of flower petals and the soft moss. It gives rise to another poem.

THE REHEARSAL: *For Claire*

In yesterday’s mossy garden
on small girl knees, entwined
in childhood’s kiss, we conjure
fairy cakes of earth and petals,
our mother’s kitchens close,
our bedroom walls transparent to
our wills and wedded beds,
our nightly whisperings
an unheard rehearsal
for the day.

Bonney Bombach
2017

It is in Auburn Road that Claire and I regularly encounter the gentle Mrs O’ Loughlin who we thought old. Evidently fond of children, she unfailingly stops to talk with us at the top of the lane, unclipping the leather handbag slung over her arm, reaching inside it. And then always this wonderful outcome—delicious, caramel-filled chocolates encased in gold foil, then an outer wrapper of paper. In large red letters the brand name *Caramello* sweeps across the glossy brown cylindrical surface. She hands one to each of us smiling, another a lesson in gratuitous kindness with which my childhood was blessed. It is in Auburn Road that early each morning while still tucked in sleep, clip clop, the milkman in his horse-drawn cart with wooden spoke wheels. He runs along the street with a handful of wide-rimmed glass milk

bottles, placing them at each front door, the horse slowly proceeding. Surprisingly, it was not until 1987 that the last horse-drawn milk delivery took place in Melbourne. Bread too is delivered by horse-drawn cart but not to us; we eat only European rye breads purchased at the continental delicatessen.

The Expanding Kinship Circle

Within my parents' circle of friends through my early childhood and beyond, were several childless couples who clearly doted on me and are present in early photos. The attractive milliner, Grete Becker, featured frequently as did Wally Loebel, and Lisl Fischer in whose heart I evidently held a special and enduring place. She lived to old age and was always in close contact with my parents. Late in her life I came to think of her as 'auntie Lisl' and understood the significance of her love for me. There were others who later, on their return from trips to Europe brought back special presents for me, small dolls clad in various national costumes amongst my favourites. Although I have no recollection of dinner parties in our small Auburn Road home, I am sure meals were shared amongst small groups, as were holidays and days at the beach or in the nearby Dandenong and Macedon Ranges. They were certainly establishing and expanding their kinship bonds.

Aside from Nana in Sydney and our Australian neighbours the Andrew's, there were others, all fellow Hitler refugees from Europe. Gentle Robert Schreiber, married but childless, crouches lovingly next to me by the front gate and in another photo holds our dog Rusty in his arms; and those who had sent the telegrams at my birth.

If there was a substitute grandmother and brother there were also substitute cousins, children of other of my parents' close friends with whom I had a great deal of contact from early childhood onward. Closest amongst them were Wendy and her first cousin Jennifer. Their mothers, Hannah, and sister Dina, together with *their* elderly parents, had managed to escape from Czechoslovakia (today's Czech Republic) to safety in Australia. The elderly parents, their two daughters with their respective husbands and children all shared a large 1920's house on the then still semi-rural edge of

Heidelberg, nine km north east of Melbourne's CBD. They were the only multi-generational extended family group I knew, and in this respect not typical. My parents referred to them as 'The Heidelbergers'.

I loved visiting the Heidelbergers, usually with my mother in the daytime, and remember much in detail. The 1950's suburban streetscape through which we drove in her Austin A40 ends abruptly as we dog-leg into the unpaved Martin Street, where paddocks on either side unfold gently across hilly terrain. A final left turn up their long, treeless, gravel driveway, arriving at a flattened parking area from which we walk up a path toward the white painted stucco house with gabled roof and attic looming large before us. White balustraded steps lead to the verandah onto which two large rooms face—one is the bed/living room of Wendy's parents, Hannah and Erich; opposite is the equivalent set-up for the elderly parents, *Omama* (grandma) and *Opapa* (grandpa) the appellation Wendy and Jennifer, and thus I also use. Despite this designation, they do not represent grandparents in the way that my Sydney Nana does though they are lovely with me, and I feel close to them. The wide entry hall from which these two bed-sitting rooms are accessed, leads through to a narrow dining room, the long dining table stealing the entire space and easily accommodating up to ten people. At the end to the left, is a miniscule kitchen. I marvel now that delicious European food in such quantities was prepared in so small an area. Suddenly, memories of my favourite meal in that convivial dining room flood back, a hearty soup comprised of potatoes, carrots and other vegetables with chunks of sausage the name of which I remember as *chabasa*. I turn to the internet and find a Polish sausage *kielbasa*, (*klobása* in Czech), indeed pronounced *chiobasa*, ground meat with much garlic, caraway seeds and sweet ground paprika.

Once a chicken farm set on sloping land, the small acreage property still retained large chicken pens behind the white stucco house. Omama kept chickens sufficient for the family's needs. As an animal-lover this was fun and part of the attraction as no one else we knew had chickens. Another exciting feature of our visits was the presence of Mr Patch, a single man who lived in a caravan on the adjoining property which we accessed through a

gate behind the chook pens. Again, I knew no one who lived permanently in a caravan, and in hindsight wonder what had led to his unusual lifestyle. His caravan sat amidst beautiful and extensive rose gardens which he tended lovingly and escorted us through, talking about the different roses, always sending us home with a bunch. He was kind and a joy to visit and clearly both the Heidelbergers and my mother felt comfortable about we three small girls going there alone, and their judgement was sound.

Wendy, Jennifer, and I spent a great deal of time together, at their home or ours. Wendy, with or without her parents Hannah and Erich, close friends of my parents, sometimes shared holidays with us. Aged five or six Wendy alone comes on a camping holiday with us at Wilsons Promontory. We sleep on canvas stretchers close to the ground. We romp around the campground with wombats and wallabies, play in the sea and wade along the edge of Tidal River. My mother cooks an evening meal served on bright red melamine plates. The meal includes carrots and suddenly Wendy bursts into tears. Seventy years later I write the poem *Spilt Milk* about this amusing incident.

SPILT MILK

I know nothing of the Gunai
or Boonwurrung people,
nor of sealers or whalers;
no memory of dolphins or penguins
playing the cold ocean of Bass Strait
where promontory juts, though
I've shared their sheltered coves and
thrusting headlands.

But clear in mind's eye, sweeping
beaches, a tidal river, my almost-cousin
and the salty lick of summer.

My émigré parents make bush and beach
their own. Seated at camp table, eucalypt
and canvas our constant companions, a

Tilley lamp throws light white as stars,
its mantle transparent as jellyfish.

Mama serves dinner on bright plastic plates,
my 'cousin', fair as I am summer dark,
reddens, tongue-tied, then bursts to tear.

Startled, I look to Mama who works her magic.
It's not spilt milk that's made a small girl cry.
'I. I. I..don't..like.. cooked.. carrots' she blurts!
Her teasing family will have had a field day with it!

Bonney Bombach

2016/19

On another beach holiday in Mornington, our families share a small rented a house. Wendy and I sit side by side in a milk bar perched on high bar stools wearing little sun dresses, licking ice-creams. As we are leaving, we find a one-pound note on the ground outside, take it to the shop keeper who, to reward our honesty, kindly promises to return it to us if unclaimed. Two days later the 'not quite cousins', divide the enormous sum of money between us. We are one pound richer.

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