

Growing Up In A Large Family

This is an edited version of a talk, given by Elizabeth Donovan (nee Carrucan)¹, Probus Member, on 8th October 2010 at a meeting for the Blockhouse Bay Ladies Probus Club, Blockhouse Bay Community Centre, Auckland.

My father, Thomas Michael Carrucan, was born in 1892 in Clunes and grew up Kew, Melbourne, Australia, the eldest of 6 children. He had 2 brothers and 3 sisters.

He served Australia during WW1 in France, was injured and recuperated in a hospital in Bristol, England. Records show he went AWOL for a half -day, losing a half days pay.

An elderly cousin of my father (who never met my father and never met any of my family) wrote a letter in approx 2002 to an Australian cousin, writing what he could remember of my father. It was quite moving. After the war when he came home to Melbourne, to enable other family members could get sleep, he would sleep in “stables” as he would have nightmares. His medals went missing, either taken or one story was that his mother may have given them away. Apparently one day his war uniform was left laid out on his bed - when he came home, his Mother had burnt it. The names of those who grew up in Kew and served for their Country are etched on the town Clock/monument this day.

We keep in touch with Aussie relatives and some have visited New Zealand.

I met my Dad’s youngest sister, a lovely lady, quite a character. His family always kept in touch with Mum. One sister of my Father was known as Madge - her name was Marguerite and unbeknown my eldest daughter is named Marguerite.

My Mother, Agnes Beryl Connolly (Beryl) was born in 1905, the seventh child of 14 children, and grew up in Thames area, then lived in the Grey Lynn area, Auckland. Due to family circumstances, she left school at age 11. She had a very good general knowledge at subsequently sat and passed a leaving certificate. She had a saying “Obstacles build your character”.

One of her brothers, Brian, was killed at the age of 28 during WW2. His wife had died (baby also) while giving birth the year before he went to war. I was named after her.

My father came to NZ, was a Tram Driver, and met and married my Mother. Although I was only 5 in 1951 when he died, aged 58yrs, I still have memories of him. My Mother died in 1986, aged 80.

Mum said Dad was extremely proud of all his children.

My parents had 13 children - 7 boys and 6 girls - I’m number 12. Most live in Auckland at present. At times some have lived out of Auckland, and one has lived for nearly 50 years in Australia. There were 45 grandchildren and now close to 70 great great grandchildren. I never met any of my grandparents.

A cousin lived with us when he was aged 11yrs. His mother had died when he was 2 years old, and he and two other siblings had to be taken by relatives. My uncle in Huntly asked Mum if she would look after him. My cousin always appreciated Mum and keep in touch with family. He has a lovely family.

¹ Elizabeth is a great granddaughter of Peter Carrucan and Hannah Woods

We all went to school, all have had jobs and all own our own homes. Many of my family are quite community minded - volunteers etc. Some learnt music and many played sports. One of my brothers was 440yd NZ Champion hurdler in 1953 and was nominated by Waikato Athletics for the Empire Games (now called the Commonwealth Games).

Mainly we grew up in Pt Chevalier, a large weatherboard home at 30 Muripara Ave. It had no car or carport or garage. I remember it had 4/5 bedrooms but no built in wardrobes, a large living area and fire place, a large country style kitchen/dinette with window seats, a stove with 3 elements, a coal range and a Zip hot water heater which didn't have an auto off switch. There were times when it wasn't switched off and no one was home, so someone, either family or neighbor, would have to run and switch it off. You would hear it from quite a distance. There was a double-door fridge, a large laundry with a copper, double tubs, roller iron, washing machine, drier, blender/juicer. etc.

We had only one toilet and one bathroom. Sometimes on a Saturday afternoon, Mum would get us younger ones to have our bath so there was still enough hot water for the older ones going out Sat. nights.

We had a piano, radiogram. One brother had crystal sets. The telephone was connected around mid-50s, if I recall.

On the property was an "ARMY HUT" - on the ceiling were American Services Reg. Nos. In the summer the males of the household would often sleep there. One of my sisters and her husband lived in it while their home was being built. Later one of my brothers converted it into an aviary and bred canaries & budgies.

Dad had a great vege garden. I remember chooks, eggs, fruit trees and, on the front lawn, large lemon and puriri trees and a white rose bush. There was a hedge on the front of the property. I remember having a little garden plot in the back yard, and old fashioned marigold plants.

There were always people coming and going - family, friends and relatives. One of my sisters recalled counting one day the number of times a new pot of tea had been made - over 30 times. My Mum thought a brew was old if it was over 5 mins in age and she often made a new one.

I remember daily - 7 quarts of milk, 7 loaves of bread, a bench of **veges** prepared for meals.

We always had pets - dog, cats, guinea pigs, rabbit, white mice, gold and tropical fish. The dog and one cat used to clean each other, then the cat would fall asleep on top of the dog. They both had their litter on the same day.

We lived near Chinese Market Gardens and Trammies Park, sometimes used for circus and picnics, dancing competitions, etc. At the end of Walker Rd were paddocks and in summer we picked buckets of blackberries. Living on edge of Walker Park meant athletics, cricket, rugby, league and soccer, and plenty of ground on which to play.

My Mother had great Faith and led by good example. She was a good neighbour and also had good neighbours and good friends. Often people would turn to her when in needed help.

Especially at Xmas, Mum always left a couple of bottles of beer out on the roadside for the Dustmen and the busy postie, etc.

She also liked the clocks 10 minutes fast. Apparently my Father liked his watch to be the exact time.

Mum had lots of cacti, succulents and African Violets, etc.

My Mother played the piano beautifully and she enjoyed Classic Music. Apparently when the piano arrived in the house, she had not played for some 16years, but sat down and played.

At Christmas, there was always a crib in the fireplace with wooden nativity figures, some animal ornaments etc. The baby Jesus manger was made of plaster of Paris. Mum always covered this until Christmas Day. My brother in law still brings out and uses the same Nativity set in his fireplace each Christmas.

Growing up, we counted approx 350 Christmas cards.

Schooling:

Leo, the eldest, won a scholarship. This covered the school fees and enabled Him to further his education and attend Secondary School. Younger family members had to pay secondary school term fees - 3 or 4 guineas, 6 or 7 guineas.

Monday - brought lunch - and in winter 3d for a cup of Milo.

Take 1d each Friday for the Missions for the poor - (Affectionately called the Black Babies)

Notes

Ted, a brother, was lost in the bush in the 1950's while pig hunting. He was with 2 others, and was the only one who knew how to use a compass. It made news on the front page of the "Waikato Times".

We would take in billets - for out of Auckland players selected for the Roller Mills rugby tournament.

Some family members were on the last ride for the tram at Pt Chevalier.

The milkman came on a Monday for account payment.

Fruit & Vege order: Westmere - on a Saturday - shop would phone for the order, and then deliver on the same day.

Butcher - later years - Mum would phone meat order through, one of us school kids bring list in to the shop on way to school. Mary or Leon would pick up the meat early Friday morning.

On my way to school would call in to Mary's (sister) home, for money for her bread at bakery, and pick bread on the way home. If I remember it cost four & a half pennies, daily.

In Muripara Ave, a few houses away, lived a man who was the Elephant Keeper at Auckland Zoo. Mr Lane was killed by the elephant 'Jamuna'. The elephant picked him up with its trunk, and thrown against the wall.

On either side of our house - was 1 owner - had no children & the other owner had 1 child.

There is a saying in the Irish language, still spoken in the land where our forebears were born, which, when translated in plain English, says

"If you do not sow in the Spring you will not reap in the Autumn." **

In all Seasons - We are still reaping.