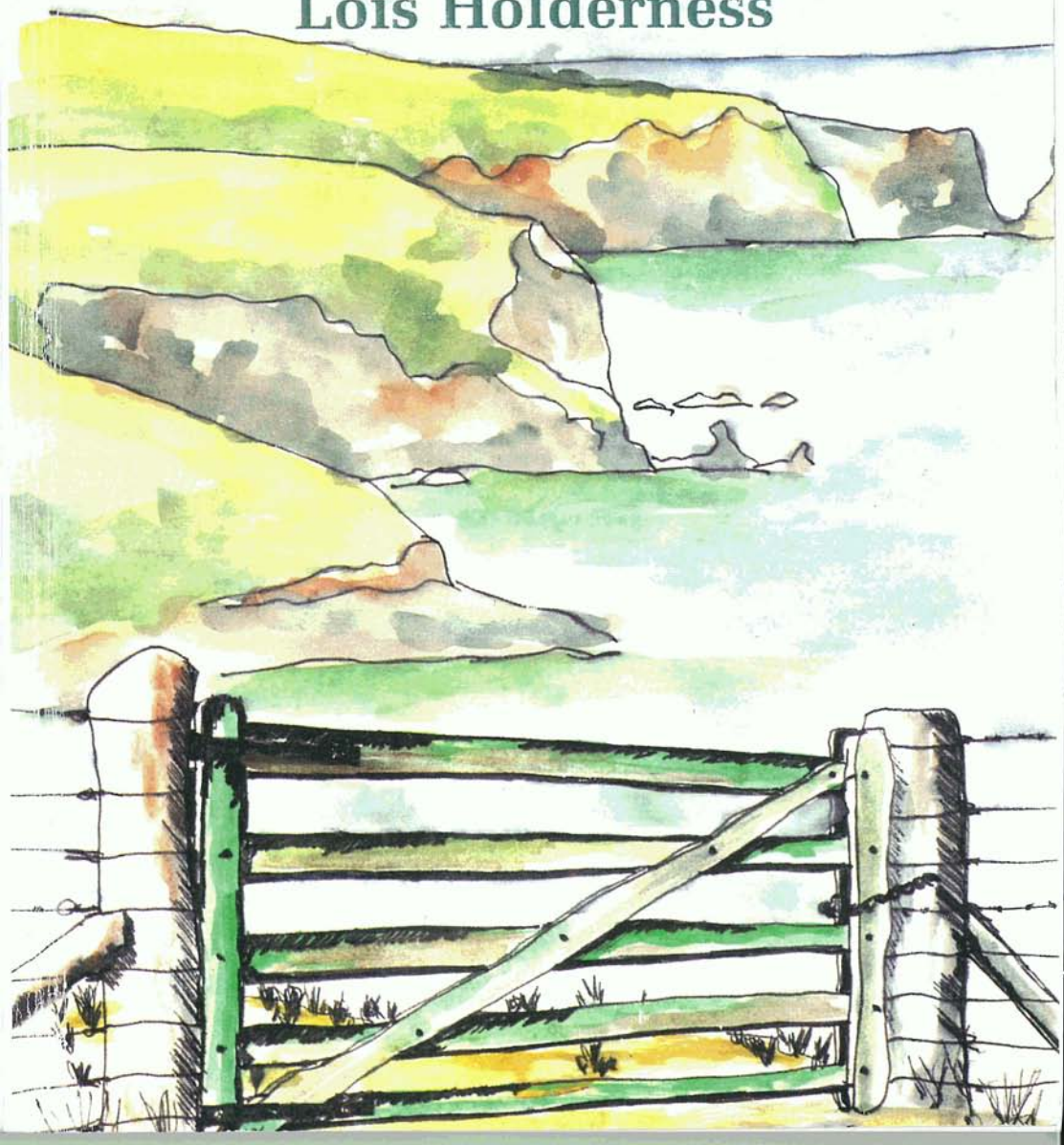
THE GREEN GATE

Lois Holderness



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Hazard Press

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For all my family

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Right: My 70th birthday, 1987.

During my years at the Langlois-Eteveneaux House and Museum in Akaroa constant streams of people came in search of information about their forebears or to see treasures their families had owned. Their delight in seeing a family tree, a letter, perhaps a piece of bobbin lace or a snuff box, anything that had a personal connection was ample reward for me. I made many friends and helped to unravel a few mysteries.

One day, I thought, I will write *my* story.

And tonight, 19 January 1988, I am about to begin.

LOIS HOLDERNESS

PART I : EARLY DAYS 1917-1940

Chapter 1

I was born in Dunedin on 22 June 1917. The cold grey winter's day mattered little to Gladys Petrie, my mother, for her baby was pronounced strong and well. There had been complications throughout her pregnancy and her doctor had been adamant that this must be her only child. Her joy was unbounded yet tinged with sadness, because her husband, Alan Julian Petrie, could not share with her this wonderful event.

He was in the trenches in France, and news of my arrival took weeks, even months, before it filtered through. He had volunteered for war service and after training was sent overseas as a chaplain in a New Zealand infantry battalion.

My father was born in Naseby, Central Otago, towards the end of the gold rush days. His father, James Andrew Petrie, was a banker, and his mother, Miriam Brooke Hickson, was a daughter of John Smith Hickson, magistrate and warden of the Otago goldfields.

The Hicksons had interesting relatives. One of Miriam's cousins was Sir James Brooke, the famed white rajah of Sarawak, North Borneo. In my possession are some heirlooms from the Brookes — a silver coffee pot and cream jug and a lovely christening gown, handmade on the Sarawak estate. Another treasure is a bishop's cross of opals and pearls set in gold filigree.

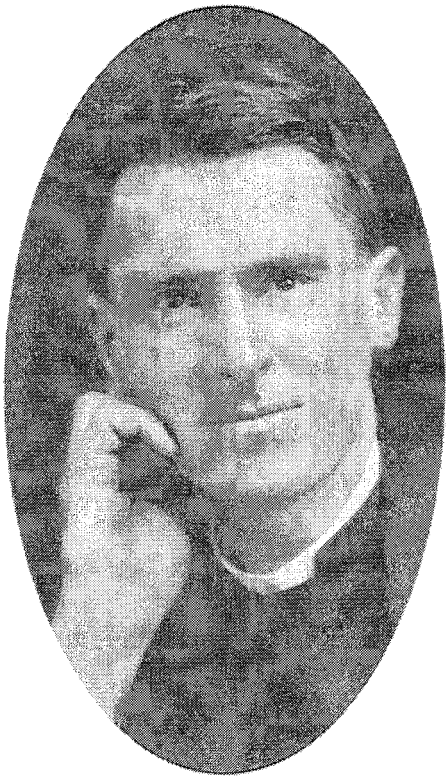
I would love to know more, but all I have discovered is that the Hicksons were of Irish origin, having lived for generations in County Kerry. They were Protestant and many of them were ecclesiastics.

Several years ago I went with to Naseby with my husband Jim. We had imagined a gold mining settlement with derelict buildings and heap upon heap of tailings

Right: With my mother, 1917.

such as we had seen on our journey. But the little town, solid and well built, nestled in a hollow shaded with trees dressed in the reds and golds of autumn. Its restful old-world charm was in sharp contrast to its turbulent past, but there were reminders everywhere — old sluicing equipment lying rusted, sludge channels, and a tiny church made of sun-dried brick. The Athenaeum was still used as a library, the watchmaker's shop had been restored, and the Ancient Briton, a quaint old pub, housed a makeshift surgery.

We spent hours in the Early Settlers Museum where we found references in the *Mt Ida Chronicle* to my grandparents and great-grandparents. How I wished that a genie could bring them back to life for a day. Our time there was enhanced by the curator and her husband who invited us home for a drink, and so for an hour we talked



Left: My father.

of the joys and sorrows and the incredible hardships of those early gold mining days.

In 1891 James Petrie resigned from the bank, and with his wife Miriam and their two small sons, Kenneth and Alan, moved from Naseby to Greymouth. He became a grain and seed merchant there and did so well that he was able to play a large part in local body affairs. In 1899 he was elected mayor and served, I think, for two terms. Although Miriam was a wonderful support to her husband, her real love was her home and family. She took a special interest in the boys' education, and she was delighted when Kenneth, who was five years older than Alan, went to Dunedin to study dentistry.

Alan was in his first year at secondary school when he first met my mother, and of all places it was at a poultry show. He was with his parents and saw her in

the distance. Always impulsive, he thought she was beautiful and on the spot he decided that one day he would ask her to be his wife. As the two families wandered around the cages of noisy birds, they met and stopped to talk. Alan was introduced to Gladys Parkinson and could not believe his good luck.

During the next few years their paths seldom crossed as he was busy at school and loved sport. When Miriam died in 1905 aged only forty-two, her obituary told of her work as mayoress and the affection the people of Greymouth had for her. Both James and Alan felt the loss intensely: the family house seemed like a vacuum, empty as it was of her warm and lively personality. With Gladys in mind, Alan joined a youth group at the Anglican church. He did well at high school, gaining the dux medal. He then left school and went as a clerk to work in the Bank of New Zealand.

Before long he was invited to the Parkinson home for meals and was warmly welcomed there. His friendship with Gladys blossomed, and at the same time his interest in the church increased so that when he was twenty he decided to take holy orders. He must have been committed, but James was outraged and never really forgave him. But he had the support of many other people ——his vicar, Archdeacon York, a number of his friends, and also the Parkinson family.

In the following year, 1910, having been accepted at Selwyn College in Dunedin, he studied there and at the University of Otago for six years, graduating with a BA degree and a Durham licentiate in theology. Fees for the first years were lent to him by his brother Kenneth and were repaid many years later.

Like most students, he worked during vacations, taking any job he could find. Every second year he rode his bicycle from Dunedin to Greymouth — a long and difficult trip even now, and an amazing one in those days of no sealed roads and no ten-speed gears. The journey must have seemed endless. Now when we drive in comfort over Arthur's Pass and down the breathtaking Otira Gorge, I think of him and am filled with admiration.

Alan and Gladys were engaged for seven years, and

after his ordination in 1916 they were married. To be together at last was almost beyond their belief, and this time Alan was able to take Gladys back to Dunedin, for he had been appointed to the inner city church of St Matthews. They were soon immersed in the busy life of the parish, and they worked well together, both enjoying every moment of every day.

Sadly, those halcyon days were brief, for within a year Alan was overseas in the Army. Gladys, befriended by the parishioners and helped by Minnie, an Irish girl who became my nursemaid, stayed on in Dunedin.

My maternal grandfather Parkinson had died in 1902, leaving a widow, Emily, and three children. I seldom heard his name mentioned. A chemist by occupation — a consulting chemist, my mother always emphasised — he seemed a shadowy figure in the family. This may have been because of his early death, but perhaps it was also because of his shy retiring nature. Impractical at home, and always wearing a skullcap, he spent hours reading and sharing his love of books with his children.

My grandmother Emily was the dominant figure in the Parkinson household. Although she was a stern disciplinarian she was also caring and thoughtful, and her life was governed to the letter by the Anglican faith. It must have been a bitter blow when her only son, Leslie, was killed in an accident when he was twelve.

Emily had a problem when it came to schooling for her two daughters, Maysell and Gladys. The centuries-old religious division of Protestants and Catholics was heightened on the West Coast by the influx of Irish immigrants who had come to the coal mines and the gold fields. So it was with some trepidation that she made a decision to send the girls to the Convent school even though it had a splendid reputation and specialised in drama, music and art. Without doubt religion would be in the curriculum, but surely, she thought, her own influence would be stronger than the influence of the nuns. But she was wrong. Gladys loved it and worked hard to achieve good results. Maysell did the minimum amount and excelled. Popular, headstrong and rebellious, Maysell became a Roman Catholic at seventeen — not, I think, by conviction. She wanted to go her own

way, to be different. And the following year she eloped with an older man.

Poor Emily. How she must have despaired. Maysell was certainly the black sheep of the family. I remember as a small girl pricking up my ears if her name was mentioned. It was always spoken in a whisper in case I should overhear.

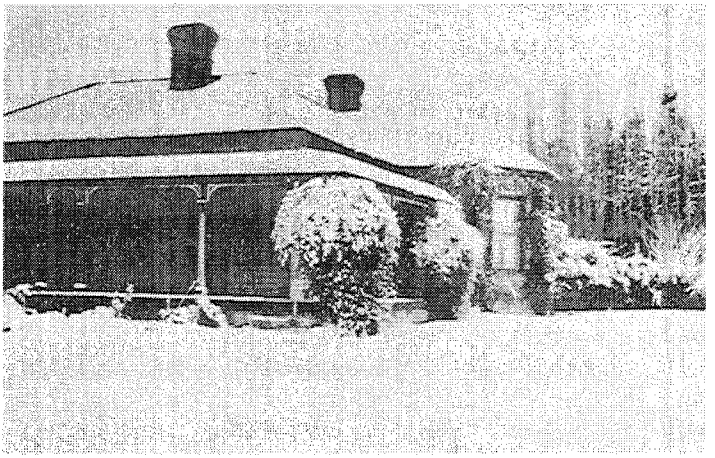
Years later I met her — an unusual and interesting woman who was studying music, botany and astronomy at Victoria University, and married to a Wellington lawyer. Surprised and very pleased to see me, from that time on she sent wonderful books for Christmas and birthdays to the Stony Bay children. I suspect she was one of the forerunners of women's liberation — certainly a woman ahead of her time.

2

My mother, like other war brides, waited anxiously for news from France. Mails were few and far between and often erratic: several letters might come together, and then there might be a long wait. Almost inevitably, it seemed, the day came when a dreaded official letter arrived. My father had been gassed and wounded and was in a military hospital in England. But it was a relief to hear that his wounds were not serious. Within three months he was again in the trenches. Several months later he was gassed again and this time was invalided home

He first saw me in December 1918 when I was seventeen months old. My mother and Minnie took me by train and boat to Wellington and I guess I was a handful. How strange a busy wriggly little girl must have seemed to this frail soldier.

The war was nearing its end and the devastating influenza epidemic had suddenly hit New Zealand. There must be no time lost before travelling home to Dunedin, but we had to wait our turn. For years afterwards, graphic details were told by Minnie of our journey, of people taking ill on the ferry and train, and



Left: The Vicarage, Mt.Somers.

some dying. Miraculously our little family survived.

A wonderful welcome awaited my father in Dunedin, but to his dismay there was now no work for him. Advised by his doctor to go to the high country, he applied for a parish in Canterbury. And so one day we arrived by a coal train at Mt Somers, a small settlement inland from Ashburton at the foot of the Southern Alps. At the station we were met by the churchwardens and driven by horse and gig to our new home.

3

They were happy days at Mt Somers. The challenge of country life helped to heal the physical and emotional scars of the war years. We became a real family and I have faint memories of gathering hazel nuts in a lovely woodland behind our house and listening to a ram as it pumped our water.

The parishioners, mostly farming and mining families, were wonderful. There were no worries about church attendance, for church each Sunday was the event of the week. Life on the surface seemed uncomplicated, but there were many missing faces from the years of war and there was much unemployment.

My ever adventurous father soon had a horse and gig, a cow, a pig and some bees. We drove for miles round the parish in all weathers, fording the streams, getting stuck in the mud or losing our way.

My mother, who was nervous of animals, learned to milk the cow. Although very proud of her skill, my father loved to tell how, after tying the tail and all the legs, they sat together on the milking stool, he in front and she behind him with her arms around him. Gradually she learned to manage on her own and proved to be a very good milkmaid.

I hated bees and always went to bed when the honey was gathered. My father, covered from head to toe and with a black veil over a wire contraption on his head, looked frightful. I thought he was so brave because I thought the bees were very angry. But how we loved the honey.

The time came for the horse and gig to be replaced. The parish bought a Model T Ford, a Tin Lizzie, and it was great. Along the dusty or muddy roads we drove, through the watercourses and river fords, the hood down, the spare tins of petrol rattling on the running board. My father tried to teach my mother to drive but gave up in despair when, passing a horse and gig, she

Right: Playing in the snow.

turned too quickly. Minnie in the back seat was terrified and so was the horse. The car ended in a ditch and the gig and driver went galloping off into the distance.

All too soon, the days in a country parish were over. In 1921, my father was offered and accepted the parish of Lyttelton.

4

My parents looked forward to this new challenge. They had learnt so much in Mt Somers and so they said goodbye with many regrets. But the future beckoned.

In the 1920s Lyttelton was a bustling and thriving port, and the tonnage of exports was at its peak. Ships steamed between New Zealand and England with cargoes of wool, butter, timber, and refrigerated meat, and they vied with each other in having the fewest days at sea and the quickest turnaround in ports.

Passenger ships also came regularly and the ferries were usually full. The busy waterfront, the steady stream of inter-colonial and inter-island passengers, the hundreds of sightseers and the seamen on leave created growth in the town. The shops and hotels flourished and the needs of people increased. Our doorbell rang day and night.

I have memories of my grandmother who lived for a time with us in Lyttelton when I was a little girl, but much clearer are memories of her brother, my great-uncle Frank.

Frank was delightful, a large man with a curling moustache and a booming voice. He often came on Sundays in the train from Christchurch and looked splendid in his black shiny suit and bowler hat. After a sloshy cup of tea (we had a moustache cup especially for him) he went to matins, donned a cassock and surplice and sang with the choir. His voice was always heard above the rest. It was loud but in tune, and as he continually reminded us it was not everyone who was a soloist with the Christchurch Male Voice Choir. But Uncle Frank had a failing. He loved whisky and sometimes arrived the worse for wear. Maybe it was because he was a Penfold, for his family were wine and

spirit merchants. I still see Penfold wines for sale, but it must be just the name that lingers. And although Frank would be in disgrace sometimes, I liked him. And he always brought me a bag of blackballs.

Holy Trinity, the pilgrim church of Canterbury, was built of red Sumner stone, and its beautiful furnishings, paintings and memorial tablets portrayed the story of the settlement. Rich in history, it was the church of the moment, a focal point of the town.

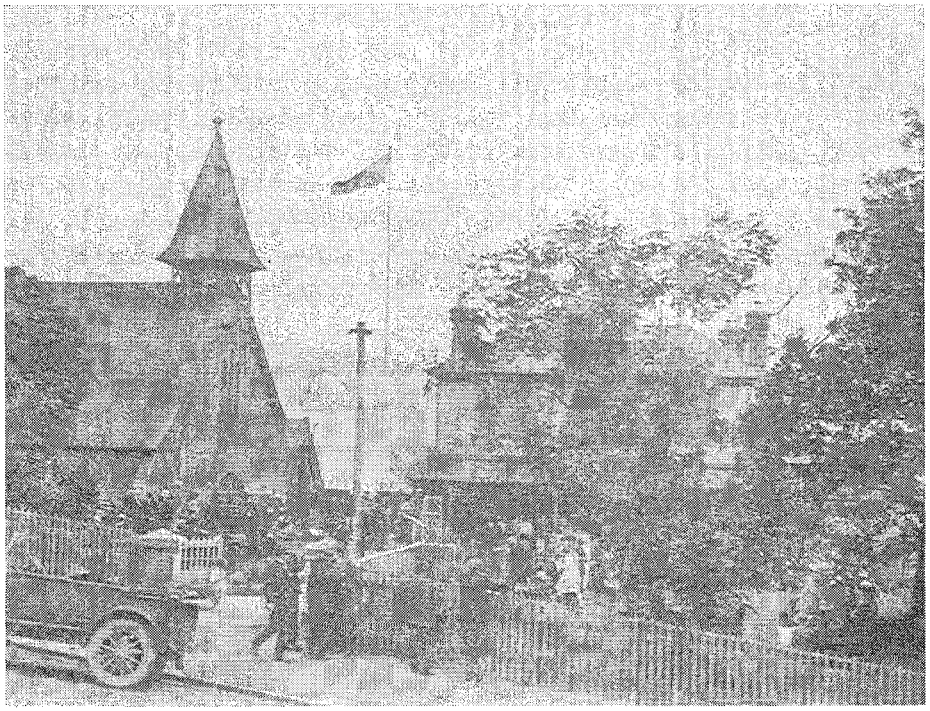
Ships and seamen played a large part in our lives. At evensong on Sundays my father invited any strangers in the congregation for supper. Our home was a meeting place for men homesick for their families, and because ships called frequently we knew some seamen very well. My mother welcomed them: I can see her now in a long red dress with a matching necklace. After Minnie had served the supper, I, who was supposed to be asleep, sat at the top of the stairs peering through the bannisters and listening to the wonderful music and singing.

Among the seamen was an engineer from the *Corinthic*, Frank Llewelyn, a Welshman. A brilliant pianist, he took an interest in this little girl who sat spellbound whenever he played. The result was a gift from my grandmother on my seventh birthday — a piano, a new one and chosen by Mr Llewelyn. It was magic and belonged to me, and it is still as lovely as ever. That year I started piano lessons.

One of my favourite games was to sit upstairs and watch the kaleidoscope of people on the street. I sat entranced in a wonderful world of make believe, and invented stories about the children and everyone else who passed by.

There were the prisoners from the gaol walking each side of horse-drawn drays on their way to quarry the red stone which is such a feature of Lyttelton buildings and walls. Late in the afternoon they would all be shuffling wearily back, the warders cracking their whips to hurry the plodding men and horses along.

And the funerals held me spellbound. The procedure was always the same. Strangely, it seems now, I have no recollection of ever feeling sad, maybe because funerals occurred with such regularity. First came the people



Above: Holy Trinity and The Vicarage 1925. Seventy-fifth anniversary of Lyttelton.

walking slowly into the church, the women in black, the men with a black band round an arm of their coat. Soon I would hear the clip-clop of the horses and the jingle of harness, a fleeting glimpse of the undertaker's top hat as it bobbed to the rhythm, and the next moment they were pulling up at the gates. Mr Lester, the undertaker, was also the mayor and he lived in our street. A large man, he looked very impressive sitting high on the box-seat resplendent in striped trousers, frock coat and top hat.

My father in cassock and surplice waited while the pall-bearers lifted the coffin carefully down and on to their shoulders. He opened his prayer book and in his strong, convincing voice he began the great prayer: " 'I am the Resurrection and the Life,' saith the Lord." The words faded away as the coffin was borne into the church. Mr Lester sat very still, and the horses nodded, while I listened to the singing and the murmur of prayers. At the end the doors suddenly opened and our

daydreams vanished. We sprang to attention for the exit The coffin, piled high with flowers, was lifted onto the hearse, my father and the mourners two by two took their places behind, and the journey up the hill began. As it grew steeper the horses with their heads down seemed to strain every muscle, and the people too found it hard to keep up. I sat transfixed until they were out of sight.

Our garden was beautiful. On summer days men could be seen leaning over the fence and smiling as they tried to capture the scent. There were men from Morocco in red fezes, Indians in turbans, Scotsmen in kilts, black men from Africa and the Pacific Islands and crowds of Chinese. After so much time at sea they loved to wear their national dress. Sometimes my mother gave them bunches of flowers.

If I looked through the window on the west side I saw another side of life. The Arnesens, the greengrocers, owned the corner shop. Mr Arnesen, a tall, thin, mild-mannered man spent his days sitting on the steps chatting to the customers. Mrs Arnesen, a buxom woman with an apron tied round her copious waist did all the work, and there was a son, Charlie, whose hair was flaxen and tousled. He was clever and had won a scholarship to Christ's College. Every morning except Sunday he left home before eight o'clock, immaculately dressed in black suit, stiff white collar, black and white tie and black cap, replaced in the summer with a straw boater. He looked magnificent, but I felt deflated when late in the afternoon he returned and was out playing on the street again, looking as scruffy as ever.

The Dix family lived next door to the Arnesens. There was a small shop in front and an alley-way at the side which led to an old house, so small that it was invisible from my window. Mr Dix was a shoe mender by trade. One leg must have been shorter than the other for he had a heavily built-up boot and he limped. He tapped and hammered all day long and I felt sorry for him as he looked so unhappy. Mrs Dix was a powerful woman and had a nasty temper. I often saw her rounding up the children and strapping their legs as they ran down the alley-way crying. I longed to ask them to play with me

but Minnie didn't agree. They would wreck our house, she said.

On the opposite side of the road was a large house surrounded with trees. It was a house of mystery to me. In it lived Dr Upham, his sister Mrs McKenzie and their maid Ruby. Dr Upham, an Englishman had married an admiral's daughter in the 1880s, and brought her to New Zealand. Mrs Upham, accustomed to a gay social life, hated Lyttelton and within two years she was in England again with their baby son. Feeling sad for her brother, Mrs McKenzie, a widow, came with her small son to keep house.

Sometimes Dr Upham's three nieces and his nephew, Charles, stayed with them during the school holidays, and the house seemed to smile as it rang with their fun and laughter. During the Second World War Charles was awarded the Victoria Cross and Bar. Dr Upham must have felt very proud of his nephew, and I like to think that those decorations were a small compensation for his own loss. (By that time Mrs McKenzie had been dead many years.)

When we first met them, Dr Upham and Mrs McKenzie were both middle-aged. She was quiet and retiring and never left the house, but she was fond of children and sometimes sent Ruby to ask me for tea. Not my mother, just me.

I loved to hear Mrs McKenzie read wonderful stories which we acted together, and once she made a dress for my birthday. It was of white calico, the hem and sleeves embroidered with gaily coloured butterflies. But there was a feeling of sadness in her room, and I learnt much later that both her sons had been killed at Gallipoli. Their memorial cross is on the outside wall at Holy Trinity

Dr Upham practised for over half a century in Lyttelton and was much loved. Acclaimed by many as the most practical Christian in New Zealand, he took nothing from the poor and gave his last blanket to keep them warm. He gave my father 1000 cigarettes every year for Christmas — to last until next next Christmas, he said. And they did.

My mother did a great deal of social work, especially with the women alcoholics, and the police held her in

high esteem. My father told a story of how she nearly landed in prison herself. A young girl escaped from Paparoa and arrived one evening at the vicarage looking sad and bedraggled. My mother gave her hot food, a bath and clean clothes and persuaded her that there was no choice but to serve the sentence. After ringing the police, my mother drove with the constable and the girl back to Paparoa in the Black Maria. "Oh dear," exclaimed the admission officer when he saw two women, "I thought there was only one prisoner to admit."

It was no wonder my mother belonged to the Women's Christian Temperance Union and no wonder I solemnly signed the pledge at the age of seven, for the images of alcoholic insides on the magic lantern slides were a sight to behold.

The year 1925 was a memorable one for Lyttelton in several different ways. In that year the leper station at Quail Island was moved from New Zealand. My father had been chaplain to these most unfortunate men who were completely isolated. Even when they had been pronounced cured, they stayed in quarantine for another three years. During the summer we often camped about half a mile from their compound and could see them in the distance. My father grew very fond of them and one stayed with us for several nights before leaving for his home in Makogai. He had been on Quail Island for twenty years.

Also in 1925 there was the seventy-fifth anniversary of the arrival of the first four ships. Lyttelton was very festive, with gay coloured bunting adorning the streets, balls and receptions, church services and a garden party at our home.

And that was the year too that the American fleet came. What a debacle! It was the time of prohibition in America but Lyttelton had pubs aplenty. I can still see the drunken sailors being flattened with wooden batons by their police.

In 1927 when I was ten years old our beloved Minnie left us as I went to school in Christchurch, as a day girl at Rangi Ruru. During the second term my father was offered an archdeaconry and the parish of Ashburton. He reluctantly accepted.

5

Ashburton was a large parish and even with a curate the work load was heavy. My father's strengths lay not so much in administration but in pastoral care. The challenge of Ashburton was different, and although he succeeded at his duties he lost a little of his sparkle and vitality. I'm always at meetings, he used to say.

Their stipend was 500 pounds a year. As well as tithing (a Biblical custom of giving a tenth to the church), they needed a car and they also wanted me to continue at Rangi Ruru. Looking through a history of the school years later, I saw that tuition was four to six guineas a term and the boarding fee 23 to 28 pounds. My mother held the purse strings, and she said we must have faith.

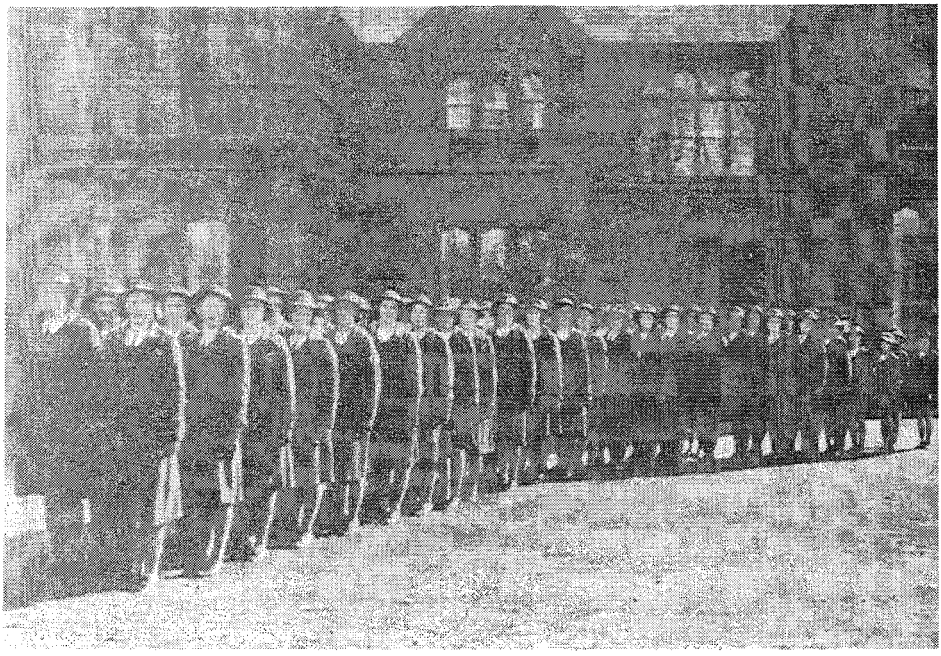
And so I went as a boarder. Rangi Ruru was a special school due to the founder, Miss Helen Gibson and her three dedicated sisters, Miss Ethel, Miss Ruth and Miss Winifred. The boarding house, set in spacious grounds had been owned by the Rhodes family, descendants of an early whaling and farming family who settled in Purau in 1840. It was a beautiful home built of timber in a pseudo-Tudor style. The Rhodes entertained lavishly and among their guests were the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall, later King George V and Queen Mary. One dormitory was named "Kings" and another "Grey" after Governor Grey. We felt the sense of history, and one of the daring acts of the boarders was to dash up the forbidden grand staircase, often to be confronted by one of the "Miss Gibbs" on their way down. It was never worth the excitement, as one of our few term outings would be cancelled.

I was in my element at Rangi Ruru. I loved everything, and most of all the companionship of other girls. I had longed to be part of a large family and this was the next best. But how I wished my father looked like other fathers (mostly farmers), in tweed jackets and slouch hats, not a dark ecclesiastical suit and white dog collar. One clerical father, Rev. Sparrow, wore a frying-pan hat and I was thankful to be spared that. I guess my feelings were part of the growing up process of conformity, for I loved my father and was proud of him.

How things have changed in the years since I was a school girl. Our pressures were few, as apart from some senior girls who went on to university, we were not thinking of a career. The emphasis for us was on English, and I will always remember Miss Ethel's classes in that subject. There was emphasis too on good manners and that indefinable phrase *esprit de corps* which was brought into talks at assembly. Miss Helen translated it as the spirit of living, loyalty to the school and to oneself.

I was content with my average place in class, but every year I won the music prize and often played on special occasions. This must have been a small reward for Miss Winifred because, when she realized I was not taking music because it was an extra, she taught me free of charge. There were five pianos downstairs, and at the beginning of each week practice times were put on the notice board. We dreaded the 6 am to 7 am and the 7 am to 8 am times, for the cold in the winter was intense and our fingers froze. We certainly needed a spartan

Below: Boarders leaving for church.



philosophy — as did the sleepers upstairs, for the noise was dreadful.

Attention to diet was unheard of, and our meals were revolting. They were so starchy that we put on weight, and no amount of exercise helped. Porridge for breakfast, a hot greasy dinner in the middle of the day, and for tea, bread, butter and jam with a piece of Adams Bruce cake as a treat on Sundays.

One of the joys in the senior common room was an old gramophone which we played before prep.

We were very romantic and were enthralled with music from the latest films. "Goodnight Sweetheart," we sang, and "Walking My Baby Back Home" and "California Here I Come". Everyone seemed to be singing, from the paper boys to the milkmen swinging along on their horse-drawn milk wagons. Maybe these songs that were such fun were a forerunner to the hit parades of today. We read film magazines avidly and wondered if we ever could resemble Greta Garbo or Marlene Deitrich. Not likely on our diet. How naive we were and quite unprepared for the pitfalls of growing up.

Sex (even the word brought pallor to the cheeks) was unmentionable. There was no such word in the Miss Gibbs' vocabulary. Not their fault, but that of the Victorian attitudes of the times. If confronted with a problem it was the Bible they turned to for assistance, as I found out after the dance.

During each winter term there was a boarders' dance in the lovely assembly hall which had been used by the Rhodes for private balls and receptions. Fifty senior girls and fifty boys from Christ's College were invited. A few days before one such dance several girls developed flu, and although I was only just fifteen a new list included me. I was very excited, but what about a dress? I rang my mother, and she was wonderful. On the day of the dance a cardboard box arrived, and sheathed in tissue paper was a beautiful dress of pale pink *Crepe de Chine*, embroidered with tiny pink beads. My mother, a good dressmaker, had made it in three days.

It was a programme dance and I was very shy, but wonder of wonders my programme filled. Maybe the boys felt just as anxious. My first partner swapped with

others, and I had four dances with him including the prestigious supper dance. Not only was he really nice but was in the First Fifteen, the much revered football team. I learnt later that I was the envy of at least half the boarders.

About a week later I was called to Miss Gibson's study at lunchtime. My heart missed a few beats, but I couldn't think of any misdoings. She looked grave and held a letter in her hand. Our mail was always scrutinised and if the handwriting was unfamiliar the letter was opened and read. This one was from Hugh saying how he had enjoyed my company and could we see each other again. This was too much for Miss Gibson. She was very disappointed in me she said and that I must resist evil. I felt strangely guilty. Guilty about feeling happy? The outcome was that Hugh and I became the greatest of friends until we left school and for a year or so later. He was a very special person.

I must have been forgiven, for I was made a school prefect in my last year. This brought many responsibilities and I took them seriously, but there were privileges too. We could go into town without supervision, could accept invitations to other school dances and we went to concerts and plays. How we loved this independence.

All too soon the day came when we sang "Lord dismiss us with Thy blessing" for the last time. I had loved school and was sad to leave. I wondered what the future would bring.

6

I left school during the great Depression. The impact on the lives of people was so great that it became part of New Zealand history, ranking with the war as a period of horror. There was much misery in Ashburton and a constant stream of people in need knocked at our door.

These were the days of the swaggers, men on the road walking from town to town looking for jobs. For the most part they were genuine but some were old soaks and if given money would make for the nearest pub. It was well known that swaggers had road signs in a code of their

own and so knew who to ask for help. My father made an arrangement with a local tea-room and paid for ten hot meals a week. But it was never enough.

After our sheltered life at school I was stunned at this other world, this inequality of life. It didn't seem fair, for my school friends lived in a whirl of excitement and I did too. There were tennis parties and private dances, point-to-points (horse riding), and weekends in the country. I seemed a dual personality, one day helping in the soup kitchens, the next out and away.

My mother was a wonderful cook and housekeeper. It was time I learnt to cook too, she said, but we both found it hard. She was not used to a second cook in the kitchen and my efforts never matched hers. And my polishing and cleaning never came up to expectations. I guess I was difficult, trying to spread my wings in too many directions.

I began organ lessons at St Stephens and towards the end of the year played for unimportant services. I continued once a week in Christchurch with Foster Browne, who later became the renowned organist and choirmaster of Christchurch Cathedral. He was the best teacher by far that I ever had. His lessons were brilliant and I worked hard. He suggested I enter for a scholarship which I did and came second.

We had a Chrysler sedan car and it was easy to get my licence. There was no written test and little in the way of a driving test, so like everyone else I had no problems.

I "came out" the following year at the Rangi Ruru Old Girl's ball. It was a fairytale evening at the Winter Gardens, a programme ball and very formal — the highlight of the year. For the girls in lots of families, to "come out" was traditional, a part of growing up, but a tradition that disappeared a few years later with the onset of war.

Not long after the Rangi ball my father was awarded a military medal and received it at a reception at Government House in Wellington. I was invited to a ball the following night and although nervous I need not have worried. It was a glittering occasion and not nearly as formal as I had imagined.

For a long time I had felt my life quite aimless. We had discussions at home about my future and it was agreed that I should apply for Karitane to train in the nursing of babies. The fifty pounds I had in the bank would pay my entrance fee. I applied and was accepted for the following year, 1936.

While waiting I was offered a job with the family of Archbishop West-Watson at Bishopcourt in Christchurch. I was to do anything that was required. This was mostly helping to prepare for their many overseas visitors and to help with the entertaining. Every day was different and every day was fascinating. Such a variety of people coming and going, from churchmen, young and old and of many nationalities, to a charming Irish duke and duchess. I was often called on to make up a four for tennis, and I remember once mending a night cap for the Bishop of Norwich.

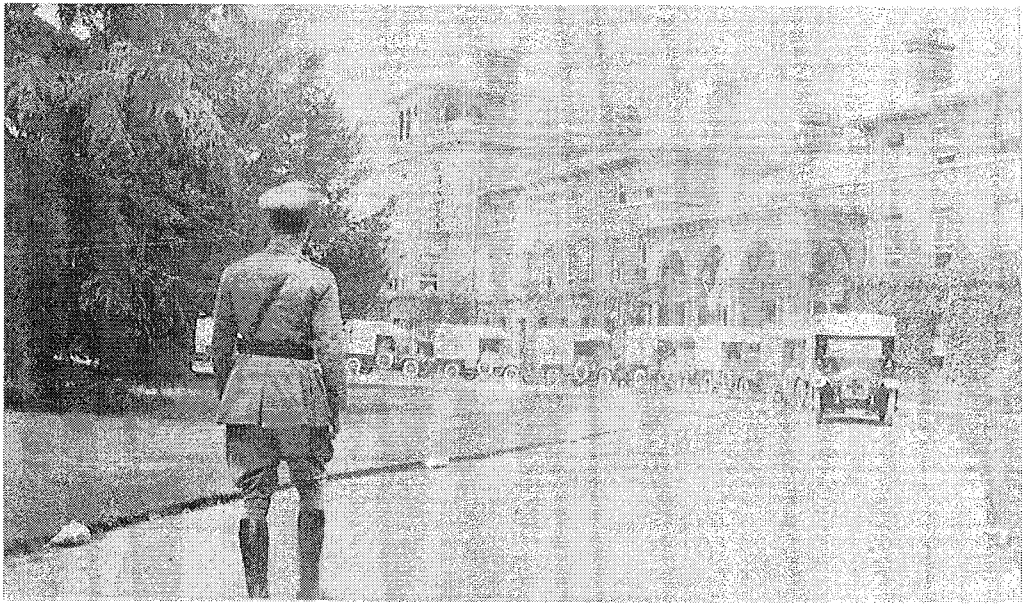
Thistle, the Bishopscourt Scotch terrier, was a character. The Archbishop read matins every morning and Thistle never missed. But sometimes, distracted by outside noises, she would dash down the aisle, the chapel resounding with her barks. Matins would cease, and resume only when she returned. It all seemed part of the service. I loved that little dog and was overjoyed when sometime later the West-Watsons gave her to me.

In 1936 my father had a severe illness and was ordered a complete rest. Three months later he accepted the smaller parish of Akaroa which was still part of his archdeaconry. Once again we moved and a week later I was called to Karitane.

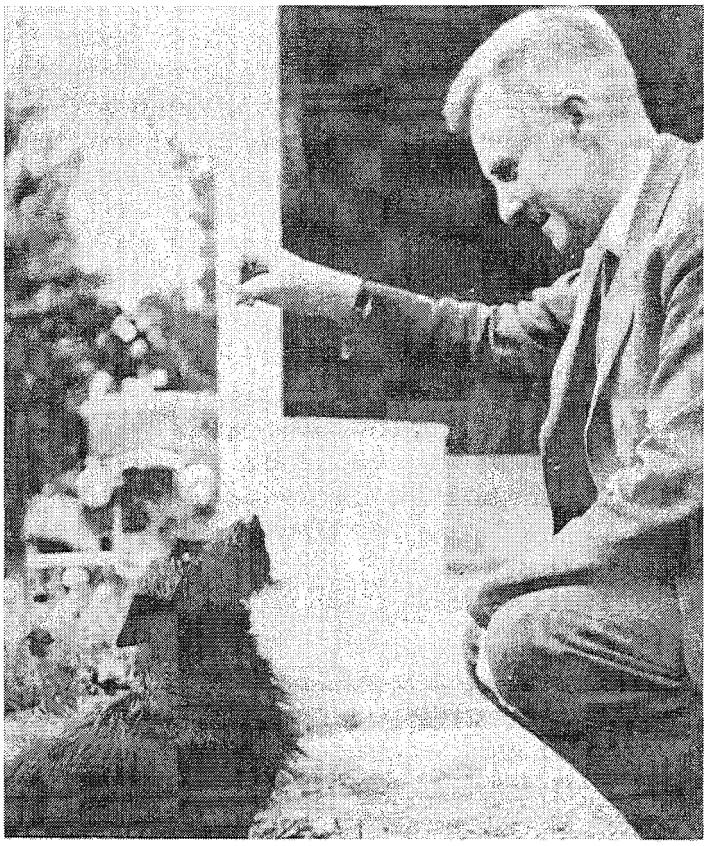
7

Karitane was a lovely red brick building at the foot of the Cashmere Hills in Christchurch. It was in a sunny position, and with doors opening on to wide verandahs it always looked welcoming. Founded by Truby King, later knighted because of his contribution to child care, it was one of a chain of five hospitals in New Zealand. His philosophy of fresh air, sunshine, regular feeding hours, breast feeding (and when that was impossible a

Off duty. Karitane Days.



The military hospital in England where my father convalesced after being gassed in the trenches. Ambulances waiting to take men to the station en route home to N.Z. August 1917.



Left: My father with Thistle.

formula of cow's milk with additives) was sensible, but its application was often too rigid. Sir Truby did not take into account differing needs and personalities. Some babies were livelier and hungrier than others and would just about explode while waiting for their four-hourly feeds. Consequently mothers too would be nervous wrecks.

Thankfully our matron compromised and we were taught to use our common sense. She was brilliant and we admired her tremendously. We tried very hard and even harder when she praised our efforts. Now at nearly ninety she still has the same charm and charisma.

Training lasted for sixteen months and there were 16 nurses, one beginning and one finishing each month.

There were two trained sisters and the matron. We worked nine hours a day and had one day off every six weeks. The first month was a real shock to the system, and some trainees gave up before the month was over The work consisted of stoking the huge furnace continually to keep the central heating going (and woe betide the nurse who let the temperatures drop); turning the washing on the racks in the hot steamy drying room; and sterilising feeding bottles. But that passed and work in the wards began.

We loved working with the babies, watching their weight gains and seeing the delight of parents as their babies improved. But it was not always straightforward. Some parents seemed not to care and never visited, some babies were there through neglect, and some were awaiting adoption. I learnt again that all men are not equal, and felt sad that some babies we had grown to love would not have much of a chance in life.

Off duty we played tennis in the summer and indoor games in the winter. We had a little social life too, but studying took most of our time, as well as having to hand sew a complete set of baby clothes.

I graduated at the beginning of 1938 and all too soon I was the senior nurse and it was time to leave. From all accounts, caring for babies in private homes would not compare with our happy training days.

How true it was! There were no written contracts, so work hours and time off was at the whim of employers. As well as caring night and day for a new baby, we often had to look after toddlers too, and sometimes take responsibility for the management and cooking for the household as well. Every "case" (as we called it) was different: just the luck of the draw, as directions often came from our Karitane base. Our wage of two guineas a week was abysmal, especially as we were expected to pay our fare one way. Often we were out of pocket. But there were wonderful employers too, and gradually things improved — although it was a long time before contracts were written.

Above: Hungry babies (Lois centre).

8

After the hot dusty plains, Akaroa's tranquil beauty helped to restore my father's health and he became involved with life in the parish and the community

He had left lovely gardens behind in Mt Somers, Lyttelton and Ashburton, and now here was another challenge. Every Monday he could be seen in his oldest gardening clothes breaking in new ground. The result was magical. He had green fingers and a flair for growing the right things in the right places, and I specially remember the night-scented stock which he grew in all his gardens.

I was seldom home from Karitane, but by changing duties one day's leave could extend to 48 hours. One evening I was invited to a party by the Mayoress and found I could accept her invitation. There I met Vernon Armstrong. A red-head with a dynamic personality, he was the life of the party but underneath the facade there seemed a sadness. I learnt later that he had been to

Christ's College and had been totally involved and very happy there. He had the reputation of being a dare-devil and quite a character, but he took his school work seriously and did well at sport, especially gym. and rowing. At the end of the second term in his last year he left because of the slump and very hard financial times. His dream of going on to university to study engineering was shattered, and reluctantly he went home to help on the farm. When I met him several years later he was still finding it hard to settle. We became friends.

During the months I was at Karitane and later "casing" (as we called our regular work), Vern leased 500 acres in Stony Bay. This land adjoined the Mt Vernon property and had originally belonged to his great-grandfather. As well as working this farm, Vern was still helping his father.

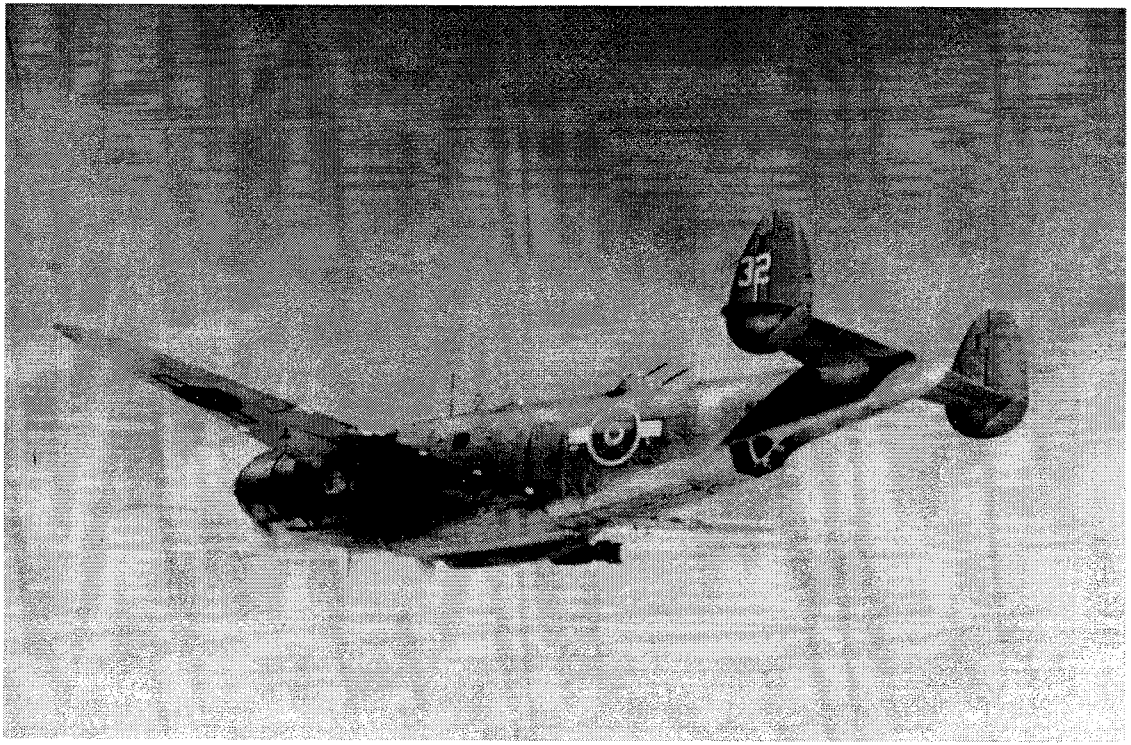
I was in Christchurch caring for a baby and two small boys when war was declared in 1939. Although we were aware of war clouds on the horizon, the reality was unbelievable. For my father still suffered from the effects of the First World War and that, it was said, was the war to end all wars. Not many hours later when we were listening to the radio news and the expected announcement of New Zealand's participation, Vern arrived to see me.

He had ridden to Akaroa, borrowed his father's car and made a lightning journey to Christchurch. He would enlist straight away, he said — not in the Canterbury Yeomanry Cavalry in which he played an active part, but as a pilot in the Air Force. Could we become engaged? Suddenly our youthful thoughts of the future beccame uncertain and fragile. Midst tears and excitement I consented.

Looking back now this seems almost melodramatic, but it has to be remembered that in our youth great emphasis was placed on our loyalties to Britain and the Empire. Patriotism was born and bred in us all. My father, a second generation New Zealander, spoke of England as home. New Zealand became geared to the war effort, young men from all over the country enlisted and people became united in the struggle for peace.

Vern and I announced our engagement. He enlisted,

Vern in the Canterbury Yeomanry Cavalry before war was declared in1939.



No.32. The Hudson reconnaissance plane they flew on many occasions.

but being a farmer and in an essential service he was turned down. He tried again, and it was only after a written statement from his father agreeing to manage Stony Bay that he was accepted. Then it was to Wellington for an interview and a written examination. He passed for the Air Force but there were still many months of correspondence study before he could start training as a pilot.

During this time I was nursing in Marlborough, but I took a week off to help with shearing in Stony Bay — a very new experience for me. Because I was an only child my mother was worried about my future. She whose experience of life was far greater than mine wanted us to wait until after the war, and the thought of Vern as a pilot added to her anxiety. Reluctantly she acquiesced, and on 23 May 1940 we were married at St Marys, Merivale. Because of the war it was a small wedding, followed by a reception at Bishopscourt. After a short but wonderful honeymoon in the Sounds we returned to Akaroa and prepared for our journey to Stony Bay.

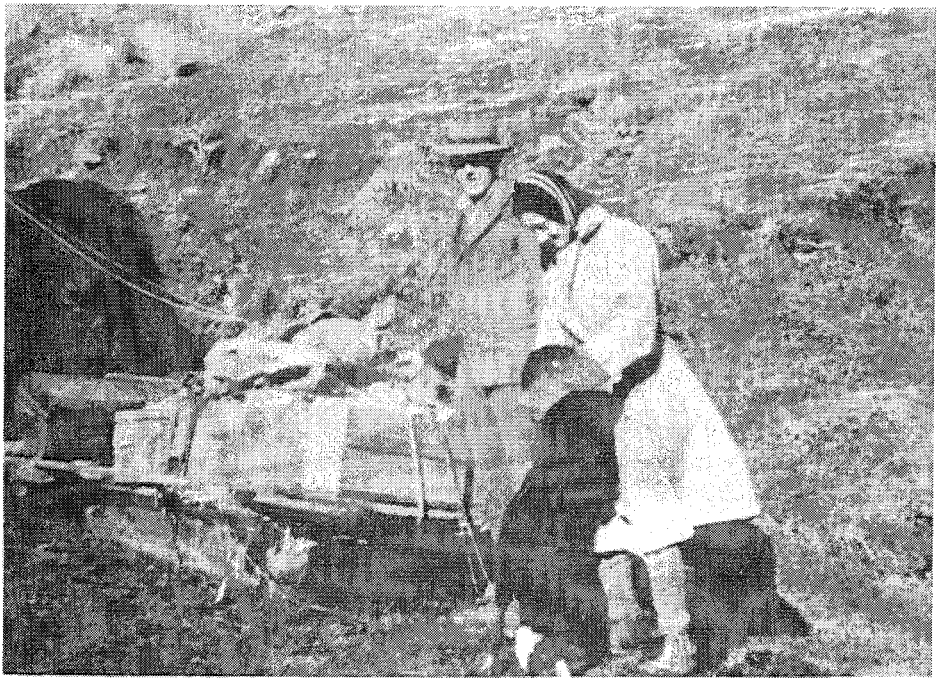
PART II: STONY BAY 1940-1974

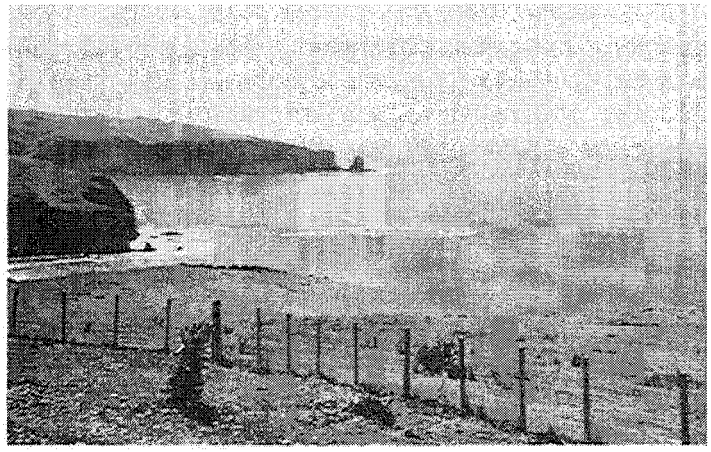
1

It was June and very cold when we set out, and snow lay deep on the hills. Coaxed by Vern, Old Mary, the draught horse plodded along, pulling a sledge laden with wedding presents, furniture and stores. I rode behind, contemplating my scant knowledge of the backblocks, but Vern's warm smile reassured me and I was happy.

Thistle, the dog from Bishopscourt, looked happy too as she rode on top of the sledge. After an ecclesiastical

Below: Ready for the journey.





Left: Pompey's Pillar from the Green Gate.

life, what wonders on the farm would open up for her. It was hard going in the snow, but by late afternoon when the shadows were lengthening Pompey's Pillar came into sight.

We rounded the bend and to our amazement and delight there in the valley below was smoke curling out of the chimney. My father-in-law had taken a shorter route and arrived in time to have a huge log fire burning and a meal cooking on the old wood stove. It was magic and a most wonderful home-coming.

We did our best to make the house comfortable. There was no electricity but we managed with fires and kerosene lamps and candles. At first the stove was an enigma. Without a thermostat the food was either burnt or raw. It was trial and error and I learnt in time, but how well I remember a visit from our neighbours in Long Bay who rode round to welcome us. We had caught some moki which I cooked with their scales still on, a disaster which they teased me about for years.

Soon work from the Correspondence School arrived for Vern — algebra, geometry and trigonometry, and there was morse code to learn. Sometimes Lance Le Lievre, who was doing the same course, rode round from Paua Bay and they practised together. "Dit Dah Dah" echoed round the house. The sessions always ended in a few drinks and speculation about the future.

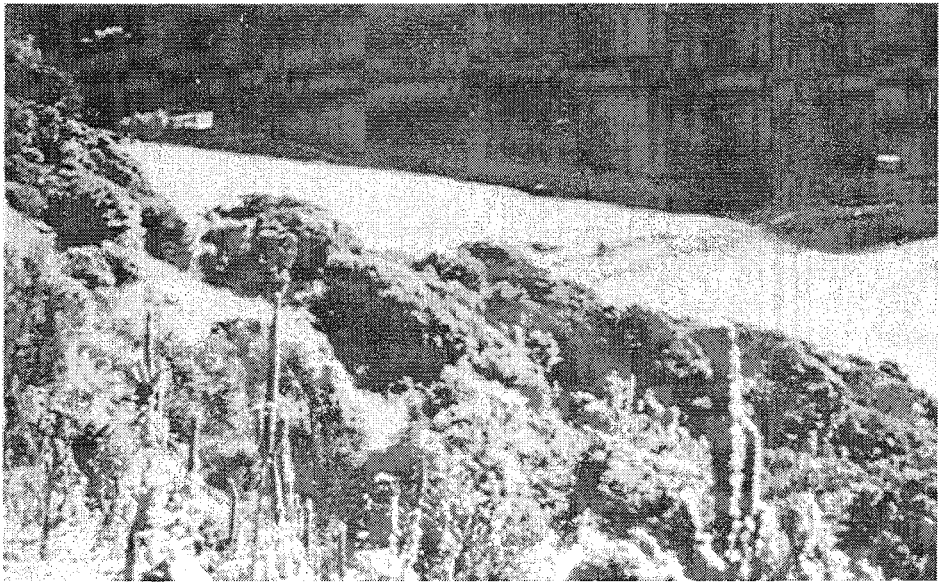
Even in our isolation the war was always in our minds. At dusk each evening we drew our blinds, as it was an offence to have even a chink of light showing. All over the country there was complete darkness. Butter, tea, sugar, meat, clothing and petrol were rationed, and for years we did not see luxuries such as bananas and oranges.

We listened to news bulletins several times a day, but as Vern had to pack out the batteries for recharging we were careful to conserve them. So he built a water wheel which ran day and night. Although it was a great success and charged enough electricity for the batteries and two house lights, there were problems as the flow of the creek was never constant. The maintenance was endless but the link with the outside world through radio made it very worth while.

Sometimes we rode to Akaroa to farewell friends who were on final leave. Out of seven who lived in Rue Balguerie, five never returned.

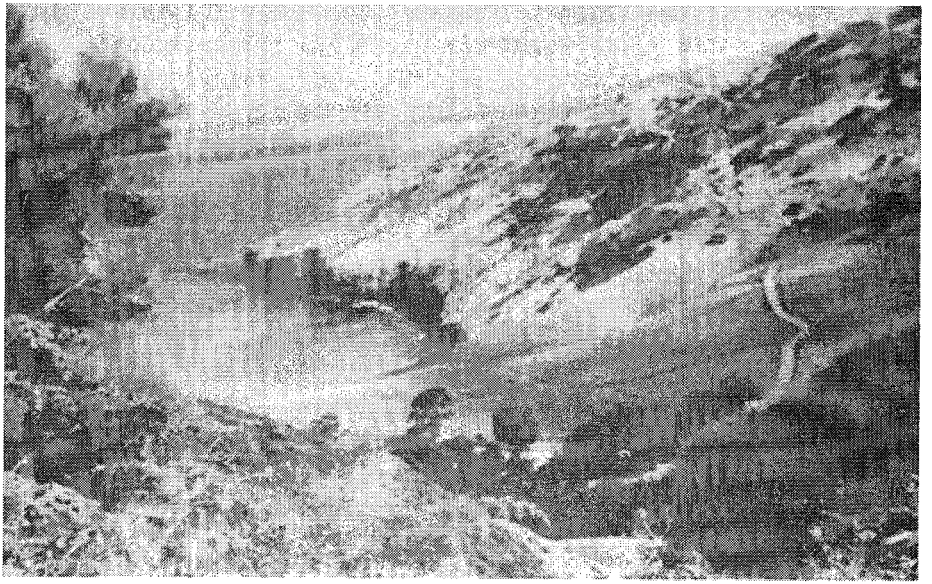
I grew to love Stony Bay, the ever-changing moods of the sea, the brown parched hills in the summer and the vivid greens of spring. But it was the sounds that made

Below: The homestead in the valley below.



Left: The Landing.

Below: The road after it was reformed in 1958.



the bay so alive. Most prominent was the surge of the sea as wave after wave crashed on the beach, followed by the movement of the stones as the waves receded. The birds too — the haunting calls of the sooty shearwaters, the cries of the little blue penguins reaching a deafening crescendo as they came ashore to feed their young, and the chatty conversations of the wild geese. There were also the calls of lost lambs and the answering of their mothers, and, to keep us still in the material world, the chug chug of the passing coastal boats.

How could one ever feel lonely? I was grateful for that first year when I became aware of the beauty and timelessness of Stony Bay. Vern already understood.

There was a great deal to do on the farm. I helped with tailing, and soon it was November and shearing, which we dreaded. Vern's father used our woolshed and yards, and that meant a week of shearing (longer if it rained), with the men staying in the house. Breakfast, lunch and dinner, morning and afternoon tea for eight men, and everything to be ready on time. What a struggle, but, more or less, I managed.

I was pregnant too, and although I knew how to care for babies I was lost when it came to pre-natal instruction. There were no classes to attend and my Christchurch obstetrician was no help. Leave it to me, he said. I wondered why it was not in our curriculum at Karitane.

Tony was born late one Sunday evening at Nurse Haywards, a private nursing home in Christchurch. I was given an anaesthetic towards the end and knew nothing about the birth. I somehow felt cheated, but Tony was beautiful and we were very thrilled. After a fortnight we stayed for a few days with my parents who were now at St Marys, Merivale, and then it was home to Stony Bay. It was March, the road was dry and we bumped along in the old Dodge as far as the green gate — The Green Gate, which was to become a landmark for many years.

From there we walked for the last mile, I carrying our precious bundle and Vern laden with luggage. Thistle had stayed on at Merivale as she was pregnant for the first time and needed to be near a vet. My parents loved her as much as I did — she was such good company.

But her puppies were still-born and she never fully recovered from the ordeal. Not long afterwards she died in her sleep.

2

The last nine months of 1941 were special. We tried to do as little work as possible at weekends, and with Tony in a pack or in the pram we went for picnics up the valley or down to the sea

One hot December Sunday we set off for Akaroa to a lunch party at Mt Vernon. We pushed the pram up to the Green Gate where the Dodge was parked. It started straight away but came to a spluttering halt at the end of the flat road. Vern had miscalculated and there was no petrol, so all we could do was to push the pram and walk. Luckily half way up the hill there was a spring where we cooled off. We tied wet handkerchiefs round our necks and journeyed on, but Tony soon got fed up with all the bouncing, and the more he cried the hotter he looked. We arrived during the afternoon, too late for the party, but none the worse for our adventure.

Next morning we rode one of the big draught horses bare-back up the Purple Peak track and over the top, Vern with a tin of petrol in front and I clinging on

Left: Tony

behind. I guess we looked a sight, for we met up with a troop of Boy Scouts who whistled and cat-called until we were round a bend.

Those were fun days and we felt almost carefree, but they were soon to end. Early in 1942 Vern sat his final entrance examination in Wellington and passed with distinction, and a month later a course at Wigram began. Tony and I lived in the Bishopscourt gardener's cottage which was empty, gardening not being an essential service during the war. It was tiny but adequate, and an added bonus was being near my parents. Tony was walking now and a very busy little boy. Countless times I apologised for his misdemeanours although I secretly felt his enthusiasm was great.

The Archbishop was a chrysanthemum grower and had about fifty named varieties. One morning Tony proudly brought me his sand bucket and emptied out all the markers. That same day while the painters were having a tea break he climbed a few rungs of a ladder and tipped out a pot of paint. I expected to be evicted, but no: the West-Watsons were just wonderful and put it down to their war effort. The worst offence nearly turned my hair white. I had a key to the kitchen quarters and I sometimes used the stove there. One evening Vern was bringing some Air Force friends to dinner, so I turned on the electric stove which was without a thermostat. When I thought the oven temperature would be right I found the key was missing. How crazy of me to leave it on the table but Tony seemed to know. He led me on a wild goose chase, under trees, in flower beds, in the rubbish bin — a dozen places. To my horror I could see smoke through the window, but just as I was off to look for a telephone to ring the fire brigade, Tony remembered. There was the key half pushed into the front door lock. What a relief! The stove still worked, the smoke disappeared, and I didn't confess to the West-Watsons when they returned a few days later. But I never used that stove again.

Philippa was born in October that year on Nurse Hayward's doorstep. Determined to be awake and aware I had left it a bit late. Vern, now at Woodbourne, was given 48 hours leave, and although travelling from

V. Armstrong.	T. Simmons.	B. Haar.	R. Walker.	D. Wilson.
Pilot	Navigator	Wireless Operator	Gunner	Gunner

Blenheim and back took a chunk out of the time, it was wonderful for us to see each other and to share our little daughter.

The gardener's cottage seemed smaller than ever, and when Vern returned to Wigram and spent some week-ends with us there was scarcely room to move.

3

It was a very special day when Vern and others in his course were presented with their wings. He had topped his class in both high and low-level bombing. Because of his age, twenty-seven, and his family commitments he was posted to the Pacific as a bomber pilot. We were delighted, as pilots so near home usually had a week's leave every four months. His last month in New Zealand was at Ohakea training in Hudsons and Venturas.

The children and I returned to Akaroa to stay for a while with his family who were very welcoming. Theirs was a real war effort as my father-in-law and his two men had Stony Bay to care for, as well as Mt Vernon.

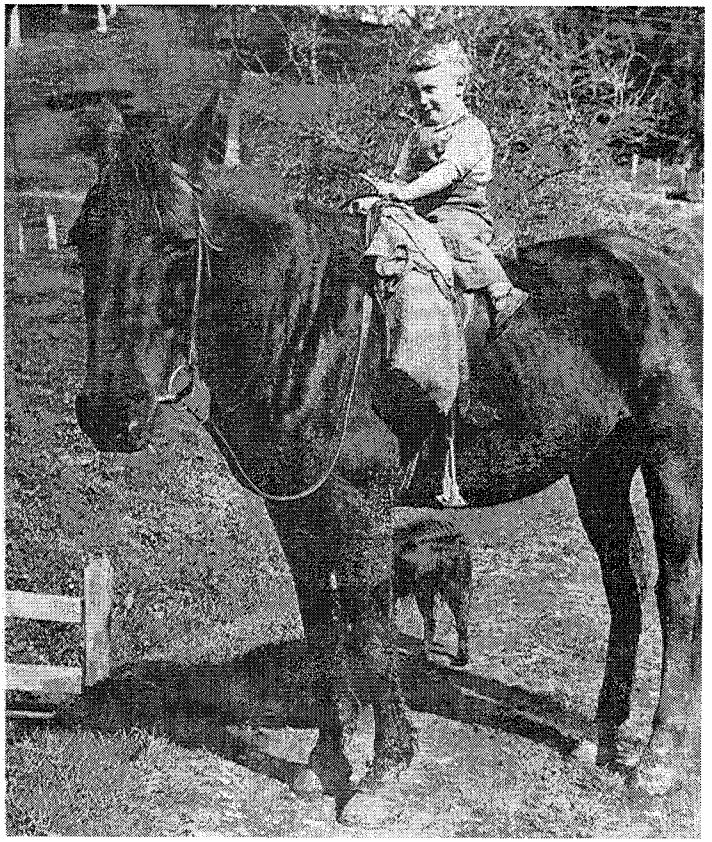
The inevitable day came when Vern was home on final leave. After a day in Stony Bay, time to ourselves in Akaroa and the usual farewell party, we travelled together to Wellington. We spent a night at the luxurious Waterloo Hotel and said goodbye the next morning. I shall never forget my desolation as I watched through the seventh storey window. He walked slowly across to the station, waved for the last time and was gone. We knew this moment would come, we would not have it otherwise, but the reality was hard to bear.

On my return to Christchurch the ferry was crammed full, and every face had a story to tell. There were wives like me looking lost and forlorn, couples oblivious of all but themselves, and happy servicemen returning on leave. They slept on the decks, on or under the wardroom table — anywhere there were a few square yards to spare.

I was thankful to get home to the country, to the warmth of the children and the companionship of Vern's family.

Right: Final leave at Mt.Vernon.

Vern was stationed in Fiji for some months, but for security reasons all I knew was that he was somewhere in the Pacific. My letters were sent to No. 426030, care of an Air Force address in Auckland. His letters had "Censored" in large letters stamped across the envelope. I knew he was the captain and pilot of either a Hudson or a Ventura and there were a crew of five — pilot, navigator, wireless operator and two rear gunners. Their work was reconnaissance and accompanying the convoys. Like the wandering albatross they spent their days or nights scanning large tracts of ocean. We too were on



Left: Tony on Old Bill.

the move. Sometimes we stayed with my parents in Christchurch or with Rosemary Deans, a Karitane friend whose husband John had been killed night flying. Her children were the same age as ours.

It was always good to get back to Mt Vernon, Tony's favourite place. With Pippi in a back-pack we would wander the hills in search of rose-hip berries, the vitamin C replacement for orange juice. Tony, who was devoted to his grandfather, loved to help in the garden or to have a ride on Old Bill.

The war progressed. Sometimes the news was good, sometimes dreadful. We knitted socks and balaclavas, made up food parcels, wrote letters and hoped. When Vern came home for two or three days, it was just

Right: Presentation of Wings, 1950.

wonderful, and afterwards more like a dream. It was meant to be a week but by the time he found compartment room in a returning plane, a space in a train from Auckland and room in the ferry, the days were whittled away. Once when he came from Green Island north of Bougainville there were only 24 hours left. Nevertheless we were lucky. The troops in Europe and the Middle East could never come home.

Vern and his crew had been together for two years and had become the closest of friends. In spite of many bad times, losing their bearings in bad visibility, flying through terrifying electrical storms and limping home with bullet holes in the fuselage, they managed to remain intact. Even now, forty years later, I hear from two of them.

I guess it was inevitable that I was pregnant again. My

Left: Vern's parents with some of their grandchildren, 1950.

poor mother was overwhelmed with anxiety, but we wanted at least three children and I was always hopeful of Vern's return.

Lester Hudson, Tony's godfather and a very good friend, wrote to Vern suggesting that after nearly three years in the Air Force it was time for him to take up his responsibilities at home. We knew that Stony Bay was proving too much for his father who never complained, but found the constant riding backwards and forwards to the bay a heavy burden. Added to that, the leg which he had broken when young and had not had properly set, was more painful than ever. And there was our ever increasing family to consider. Lester, a lieutenant commander in the Navy, felt he would have some influence with his friend who was Vern's C.O.. This intervention, however, was most unsettling for Vern who was torn between his duty to the squadron and to us at home. Several factors helped him to make a decision: besides his father's poor health and the impending birth, his aircrew underwent changes in personnel, and there was the realistic prospect of the war coming to an end, both in Europe and in the Pacific. So he applied for release and his application was granted.

Humphrey was born on 16 January 1945 just after

Vern was released. It was so good to have him there, and we were both thrilled to have another strong little baby. As we were now a family of five, we rented a house in Akaroa for a few weeks.

4

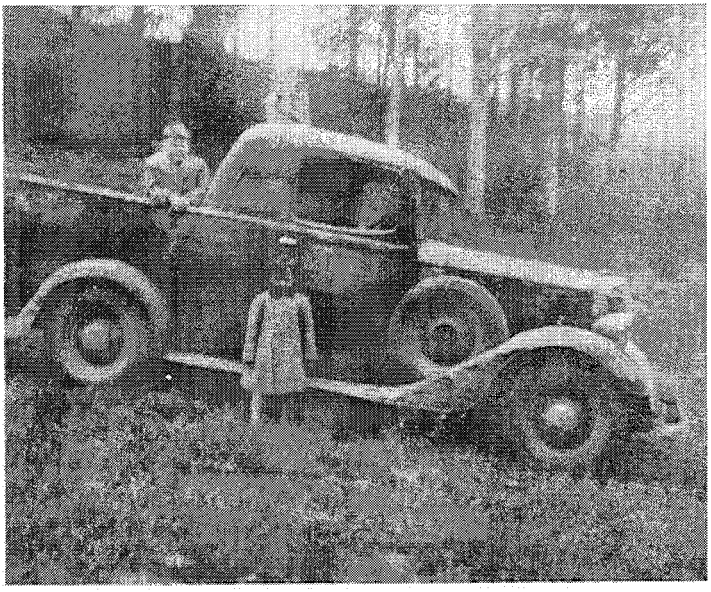
To be a complete family again was a joy beyond our dreams. Although Vern was weary and slept fitfully, often climbing out of bed thinking it was time to go on flying duty, he gradually became accustomed to this other life. There were so many plans to make, the first consideration being a vehicle, the old Dodge being beyond repair. An International, a baker's van, was for sale. Its engine was sturdy and the price was reasonable so we bought it, and with the help of Digby Smith at the local garage Vern converted it into a truck.

The great day came when we were ready to go home. We had been wandering for over three years. Vern suggested that he go on his own for a few days to make it habitable but I insisted we should all be together.

How could we adequately thank his parents who had housed and helped us for so long? Theirs had been a magnificent war effort.

With Tony and Pippi fitting tightly between us and Humphrey on my knee we journeyed over the hill in the red International. It never missed a beat and we reached the Green Gate in less than an hour. In those days we opened thirteen gates between Mt Vernon and Stony Bay. Then we set off down the hill, Vern carrying the baby and I guiding the other two, and although we tried to pretend otherwise it was daunting to see the house. Grass grew as high as the windows, some of which were broken, and the rooms used by the men were a sorry sight.

Vern's description of the house was a reality, but the home-coming which we had dreamt about for so long was real too. We set to work. I lit fires and cared for the children while Vern caught Mary and harnessed her to the sledge. He brought down several loads, and the last



Left: The International.

time carefully tied the large canvas cover on the truck. The winds blew hard up there and over the years we renewed the cover many times.

By nightfall we had beds ready and a meal sizzling on the stove. Our happiness must have been infectious, for Humphrey slept and Tony and Pippi were content among the mess.

5

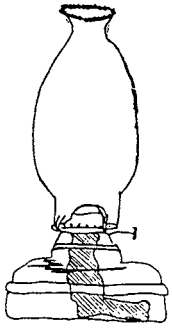
The days sped by and we seemed to make little headway, but all things are relative and we were ever mindful of our good fortune in having the chance of starting again together.

Having kept house in Christchurch I now felt lost without electricity, even though I had managed at Stony Bay before. Everything took so much more time as I adapted to the old stove, the flat irons, and the copper, all made more difficult with three little children to care for now. It was harder for Vern who spent hours cutting down manuka, sledging it in and endlessly chopping,

but he soon had the water wheel working again, and that meant two lights and charged radio batteries.

The children took most of my time, but they were happy and as easy as any little children can be, and Tony, now five years old, was eager to learn. I wrote to the Correspondence School and before long the green canvas bags arrived.

I missed my piano. It stayed at Mt Vernon until our road was extended to the house, so I attempted to play whole pieces in my mind, and although it was a hard mental exercise it was the next best thing. We still kept Sunday as a special day. Neighbours rode in from Long Bay, or if the road was dry we struggled up to the Green Gate and went out for the day. Sometimes we went for picnics or to the beach. It was a world of our own, and it was good.



Vern's gratuity cheque came. All returned servicemen were given this bonus. We had spent it over and over again in our minds and the final decision was a sewing machine and a clinker-built dinghy. I was delighted the day the machine arrived. My mother had given me a very old rusted one before she went to Merivale, but while waiting at the Green Gate to be sledged down it had blown away in a westerly gale. It wasn't much loss as there were parts missing, and this new Singer was beautiful. The dinghy came later.

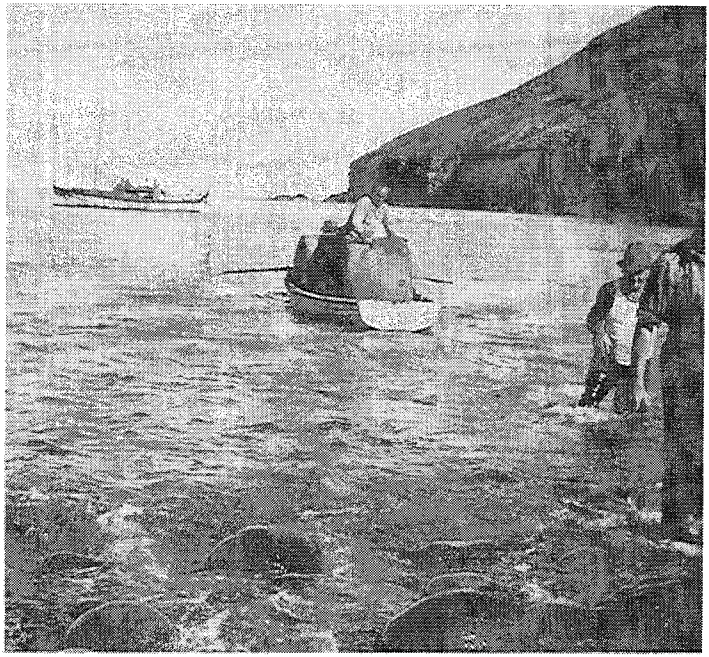
6

Shipping out our wool each year was a worry. We listened to the weather reports, watched the sea, made tentative arrangements with Billy Poole, skipper of the *Orari,* and had our wool ready to move at a moment's notice. When the sea was calm and the tide was right, the Pooles were alerted and Vern and Gus Sergison sledged the bales to the beach. Several hours later the *Orari* came into sight, anchored in the bay and a crewman rowed a dinghy in. Carrying the wool out was a hazardous exercise — the bales so heavy, the boulders so slippery, and so many trips to be made. Everyone had their eye on the weather. Sometimes the seas increased

Left: Loading wool.

and the *Orari* departed before loading was finished, sometimes a bale fell in and had to be hauled out with baling hooks. Laying out the fleeces to dry was an awful job and without their sheen the price was poor.

The wool brought in half our income, and as we needed something more dependable Vern built a crane on the landing. The upright and arm were of heavy timber, the main bearing was an axle from an old bullock wagon and the winch was made from an old mangle. He set the crane into a concrete base on the landing, a large flattish rock on the north side of the bay. Every part had to be very strong as the sea swept over at high tide. Vern and Gus built a road to the landing, just wide enough for the two draught horses. When the day came for the wool to leave, Gus sledged the bales to the beach, across the creek and along the narrow track. I held my breath as I watched him unload, turn the horses round and return for another load. When the bales were in place, Billy Poole moved the *Orari* stern in to the landing with a bow anchor and two stern lines, trying to judge the swells when backing off the rope on the winch drum.



Right: Rowing out to the *Orari.*

Everything had to be perfectly timed and in tune with the movement of the swell. And perfect it was, for they never lost a bale again.

7

The Green Gate assumed the importance of a Wayside Inn to us — not that it was in any way connected with shelter and warmth and hot steaming food, but the truck was parked there. The track to the house followed the contours of a rocky outcrop and on the other side there was a steep drop to the sea. About halfway down where there was tusock and grass, it wound in a zigzag pattern until it came to a gate high on the cliff above the beach. Through the gate and we were in the home paddock. How the children loved tumbling head over heels in the long grass or sliding when it was dry. When they got older, they had hair-raising competitions racing down the hill on dried punga leaves.

Of course it wasn't all roses getting up and down the hill, and it wasted so much precious time. The draught horses, Big Horse and Mary, belonged to Mt Vernon and although they were often Stony Bay residents, there were times when we had to think of other ways of moving our stuff. Much of it was too bulky for Betty, our faithful pack horse. Vern made a hand barrow, and among the assortment of things we carried I remember three: an almond tree, a lemon tree, and — heaviest of all — a small Briggs and Stratton engine.

The trees were a gift from my father. The almond tree bore fruit until the possums discovered it, but the lemon tree still thrives. Several years ago Mark extended the kitchen and this necessitated moving the tree which after forty years had grown huge. Remembering the stories we had told, and anxious that it should survive, he made careful preparations and then hired the garage breakdown truck. The crane lifted it and set it down without mishap, an expensive exercise but most rewarding. The Briggs and Stratton replaced the water wheel. It ran at specified times and whoever was in the house had the job of starting it. The kick start was temperamental and our tempers were sorely tried. Our language certainly deteriorated.

Vern decided to build the road, and what an undertaking that proved to be. The unformed section from the Green Gate followed in part the line of a sledge track. From there to the house needed surveying, so I held one end of the tape while Vern made calculations. We walked for miles, peeping at each other over hills, changing the pegs and starting all over again. The children loved it and couldn't wait to get home to survey their own little roads by the creek. Finally, after several days Vern was satisfied, but because of the volcanic rock it seemed as if part of the road would be on a grade of 1 in 3.

When he had completed the first 100 yards using a pick, shovel and wheelbarrow, he hit solid rock. To blast this rock out, he used hand rock drills hit with a striking hammer, and then turned a quarter of a turn at a time — a very slow job and a heavy one. Gelignite was used in the blue rock, and gunpowder in the volcanic rock. The children loved to hear the bangs, followed by the

echoes in the valley, and the birds screeching as they flew off the cliffs, but I watched anxiously through binoculars to make sure he was safe from falling rocks. With the help of a bulldozer on the grassy slopes it was completed in two years, a mammoth task. He looked so weary and worn that I felt it must shorten his life.

The first journey in the truck was unbelievable. We were so excited, and a bit scared too. We loaded her up and set off, clinging to the seat and to each other as we bumped along. It was very steep, very rough and very narrow, but it was our road and Vern's great achievement We opened the bottle of chanpagne we had kept for so long in readiness for this momentous day, and we had a celebration dinner.

Soon, I thought, my piano will come. And it did.

8

My father died suddenly in 1947, only fifty-nine years old. Always an enthusiast, he had worked beyond his capacity and the war had taken its toll. I felt bereft, and sad that the children, now six, four and two years old would never remember their grandfather. How he would have enjoyed sharing with them his love of life, of books and of the outdoors. I thought of the times I had camped with him in faraway places. Cars were his downfall. He expected them to go everywhere, and the times we were lost or stuck in rivers were legion.

And I felt sad for my mother who now had only us, and we were miles away. It was no pleasure for her to come to Stony Bay as she felt too isolated. I resolved to see her more often.

My father was greatly mourned. To this day people say to me, "And so you were Archdeacon Petrie's daughter. He married me (or christened my daughter or buried my father). He was a wonderful man. We still remember him."

And so do I.

Left: Fording the Awatere.

9

After the war, returned servicemen were rehabilitated on farms at an interest rate of three per cent, but as we had agreed to buy the 500 acres during the war we, sadly, were not eligible. However we were fortunate in another way. Because of long family associations with the stock firm of Pyne, Gould and Guinness, they let us have the stock without security. Later, with a loan from State Advances, we bought 200 acres of original Armstrong land adjacent to Stony Bay. Frank Enright, the Peninsula representative, was a legendary figure. He was considerate to all his clients, and showed special concern for the really isolated farmers. When he came to Stony Bay he brought presents for us all, fresh fruit, perhaps a roast of beef or a currant loaf, and always papers and our mail. Sometimes he stayed overnight, as did Guy Nicol, the lamb buyer who took his car to Long Bay and walked. Next morning at daylight he helped to start the lambs off on the tricky journey round the coast to Long Bay where the trucks were waiting.

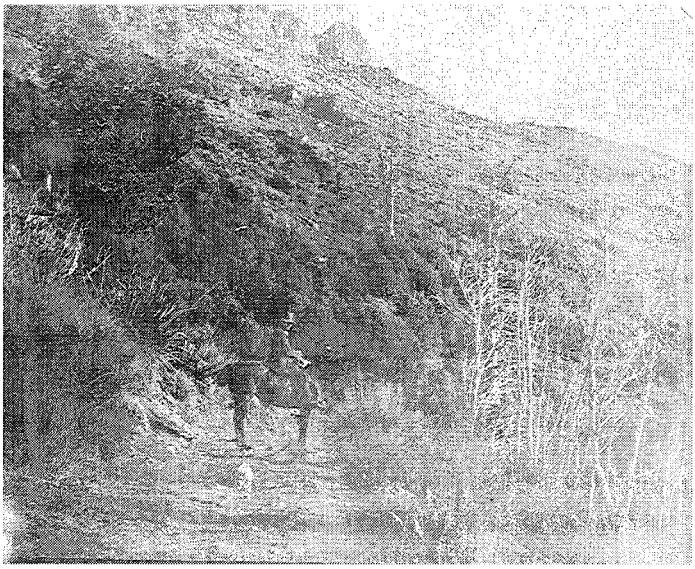
In 1948 Gus Sergison came to help us. Gus knew Stony Bay well as he had been on the payroll at Mt Vernon for years and was a good worker. Descended from an early French colonist, he was a colourful character, a heavy drinker, and he had quite a reputation with the ladies. I wondered however we would manage with him living in the house. A large thick-set man, he wore a snow-white singlet (a clean one every day), and a black and red football jersey in the winter. But his pride and joy was a shiny black suit. This he wore on Sundays, if we had visitors, as he loved to wait on the table.

Gus always arrived on a Monday. There would be shouts of excitement from the children when he came in sight on his scraggy old horse, Olympus, as without fail he brought them each a cake of chocolate. We had cups of tea while he told us the news of Akaroa, what had happened at the pub and who had won the football. The more exciting the stories got, the more he stuttered, and we would rock with laughter, he included. Gus who was a bachelor seemed to have a great affection for us all, and in a way regarded us as his family. He called me "Missus", and he was courteous and very thoughtful.

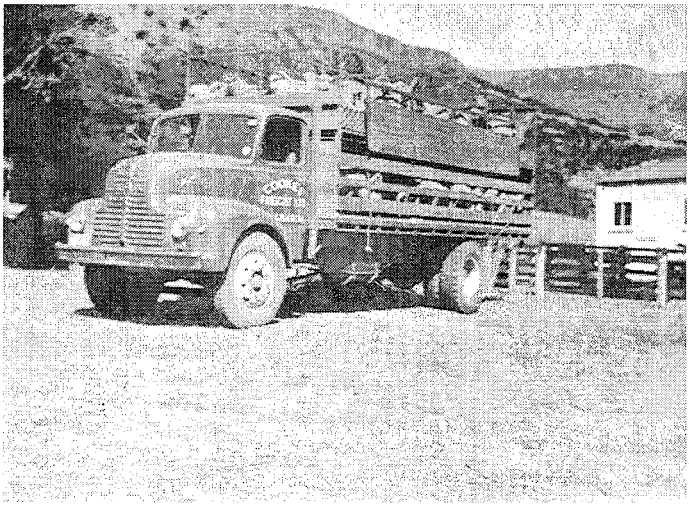
Every morning he was up with the larks, lit the fire and brought us a cup of tea. While he drank his very strong brew he rolled smokes and read the National Geographic. Just before seven he put the pressure cooker on the stove, stirred the oatmeal until it was boiling, then shouted down the hall, "Missus, Missus, it's ready!" Nothing would induce him to bring it to pressure and he hurried out the door when it began to whistle.

He did the evening dishes, and on wet days helped the children with their arithmetic — his best subject, he reminded us — but his calculations were never right. On Sundays he gathered up the children and stuttered his way through a Bible story, adding his own comments from time to time. And he became so engrossed he didn't notice them wandering off.

He used to work for ten days, and then he and Olympus would be away at a canter to Akaroa. In his best black suit, he went to the Grand for drinks and dinner and stayed until he was put out.



The Stony Bay Road in the late 1930's.



The Stony Bay Road in the late 1930's.

En route to Long Bay.
The first dtage of our winter holiday.

Gus was a First World War man and too old for the Second. His main worry was the shortage of tobacco. Determined never to be without again, he kept all his cigarette butts on his bedroom table — a mountain of them, which he unrolled in his spare time and stored in dozens of tins.

Some of us remember calling one day at Grehan Valley to take him to Stony Bay. He woke with a start and looked very puzzled. "But I went there yesterday," he said, and for ages afterwards he was still trying to puzzle it out.

But for all his eccentric ways and awful habits, he was the most loyal of men. He died soon after Pippi was married. We saw him many times in hospital and he had a sparkle to the end.

10

The fourteen-foot dinghy, made from kahikatea, was built by Samson Brothers. Whenever Vern went to Akaroa, he called in at the yards to watch progress. At last it was finished and he sledged it home.

The engine, an inboard, was imported from Australia and was one of the few types of engines available after the war. We named her *Taranui,* the Maori name for the Caspian tern. Vern decided to launch her from the beach at high tide, but it was agonising work. With the boat tied securely to the sledge, we pulled and pushed as we stumbled over the boulders to the sea, and at the next high tide we dragged her up again, using a rope attached to the truck. The wonderful hours at sea compensated for the aching backs but, not satisfied, Vern once again drew up plans.

My heart sank, for he was single-minded whenever there was a challenge to use his special skills. His sense of time vanished; even food and sleep were unnecessary hindrances.

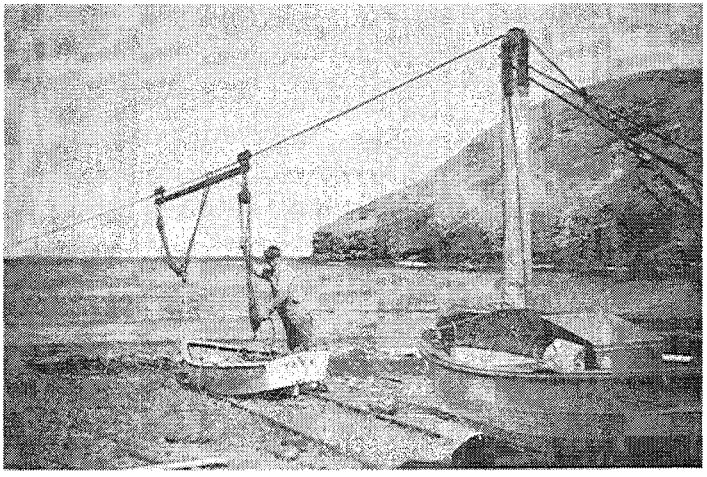
We all remember the scramble it was to get the important stock work done, the rams out, the tailing done, and the sheep shorn. But as he assembled all kinds of gear, his enthusiasm increased. There were wheels

and axles for a boat trolley from the Goughs Bay lagoon, there were rails from the Glentunnel coal mine, and from Lyttelton there was wire rope — used but strong.

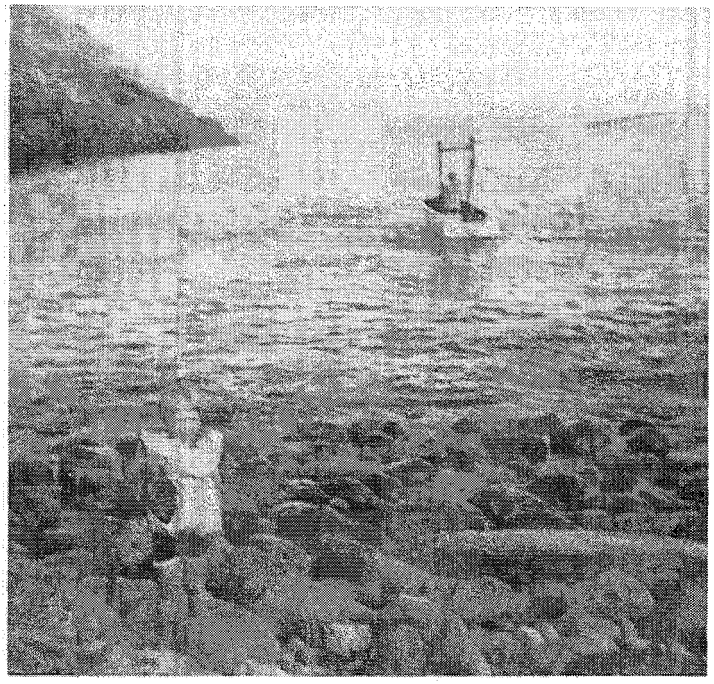
The idea was for the boat to be run on the trolley from the boat shed, hitched to the wire rope with a block and tackle, and guided along the wire rope until it reached the sea. When the boat came in at the next high tide, the reverse happened and it was winched up.

There were difficulties of course. The inshore end of the wire was anchored by a huge block of concrete originally intended to be pyramid-shaped. But the hole dug by hand turned out to be much larger than planned because of the huge boulders encountered. The trolley wheels were rusted to the axles, and took two days to free up. They were heated red hot in the forge, a tricky job as they were made of cast iron. The wire rope was very heavy, and after being taken out to the landing it proved impossible to tighten and lay on the sea bed, until with triple blocks it was raised with the drum from the wool press.

At last this enormous undertaking was finished, and it made all the difference to launching the boat. What a tribute to Vern's skills, ingenuity and determination!



Right: Hooking Tara to the wire rope.



Left: Safely launched.

11

The children depended on each other for companionship, and the games they invented were brilliant. Apart from the usual trolleys, scooters, strong metal bulldozers and trucks, among their treasured possessions were lengths of fine rubber surgical hose. Luckily, the Para Rubber Company always had this in stock. Hoses were a necessity for their water projects.

On the banks of the creek and in the shallow pools they created ports, harbours,wharves and docks. They buzzed and hummed as they pushed their tip-trucks, laden with goods down to the wharves to be shipped to faraway places. The clay houses and buildings of the little town, made by Pippi, were oven-baked and painted. A hive of activity, and very imaginative, this project lasted for several years. Although they stored their machinery away, each night the rains and floods inevitably would come and wash everything away, but

after a time they would start again with more ideas and renewed vigour.

They loved the changing life of the creek, the wild ducks, the mountain trout and eels, the rushes — excellent for hide-and-seek — and the bunches of watercress and wild flowers. Our house overflowed with jars of foxgloves.

From an early age Mark would often disappear in a flash, and we would find him quite oblivious of our calls, looking for little fish, dragonflies or bees — his most favourite of insects. Sometimes he brought them home in matchboxes and someone would be stung, usually Pippi who was allergic to bee stings.

When Tony was ten, he was so fascinated by the *Kontiki*'s journey that he set to and made a raft with sails, a rickety affair which, with the children on board, he sailed on the lagoon near the mouth of the creek. Although I kept a careful watch from the house, it is a marvel to me now that the children remained intact.

Vern and I watched them play with great interest as they so often based their games on our activities. With balsa wood, Tony made a water wheel and had it turning in the creek, and when Vern built new sheep-yards Humphrey made yards too. We bought two guinea pigs who, after running down the race and into the pens a hundred and one times, got fed up and had to be enticed with sour thistle. Inevitably there were baby guinea pigs so, before long, Humphrey's flock were lining up for turns.

12

The summer holidays were wonderful. It was a time for friends. Some came for the day, others for the weekend, and we always suggested they bring their night gear in case it rained. Sometimes Vern's Air Force friends arrived without warning, and then all work stopped while they lived in another world.

Vern made a grass tennis court, and as with all his projects he took great care in each step,. How well I remember him wheeling barrows full of rich sifted soil

from under the plantation to mix with the grass seed, and how when it was completed, a howling nor'west wind blew it all away. And so he started again. His work was well worthwhile, for the court was superb and has been a joy ever since although it does take a great deal of maintenance.

I always looked forward to the visit of the rabbiter, Jack Reid, who came twice a year and stayed overnight. He was a competitive tennis player, and as I had once beaten him he wanted to make sure it didn't happen again. Into battle we would go, playing the best of three sets — and how we enjoyed it! Although I was never again the victor, there were times when I was close.

One summer we had a ring from an English family who had come to New Zealand to live. Keen ornithologists, they had heard from Vern's sister Stephanie that there were penguins to be seen in Stony Bay. To their amazement and delight, their first glimpse of a little blue penguin was in our old wash-house. It was nesting underneath a disused copper on an onion. Some months later a letter came from Joan with a cutting enclosed. She had written a story and sent it to the *Times* of London, and here it was. And so began a very special friendship with the de Hamel family.

During the 1960s there was a shortage of professional people and skilled workers in New Zealand. Men and women from the U.K. were encouraged to settle here or to come for a period of time, their fares being paid by the government. Among them was Eric Penny who came to Akaroa as a school teacher. A most unusual man, he had a photographic memory, and his knowledge of music, art, history, architecture and English never ceased to amaze us. Stony Bay became his second home and we enjoyed his company. Eric walked everywhere, and in the summer would arrive at all hours, having renamed the peaks and rocky crags on the way, for he had a vivid imagination and loved the sound of words. He held me spellbound as he related Edward Lear's nonsense poems, and rhymes of his own making, and with maps and photographs he guided us round the English countryside and the great cathedrals. And he introduced me to Haydn's 102 (or was it 101?) sympho-

Right: Chris and William de Hamel, Pippi, Mark and Kate.

Below: With the Holderness family, 1954.

nies and the magical *Lord of the Rings.*

The children thought him very odd, although they absorbed more than they realised. Vern enjoyed him too, but I was the one who found this source of knowledge stimulating and very exciting. It was just what I needed. Eric returned to England after ten years of teaching. We still correspond, and although he sounds more absent-minded than ever, he remains a special person in my memory.

Among our school friends were the Holderness family. One August holidays Julian and David stayed while Jim and Joan were overseas. Their boys and ours had a riotous time careering down the hills on trolleys and snigging in manuka with the draught horse, Mary. They seemed to get more daring each day, and I remember how thankful I was at the end of the holidays when they were still in one piece. Little did I know that one day the lives of both families would take a new direction.

During the early years we had a mid-winter holiday, and the easiest route out was via Long Bay. There was great excitement as Vern saddled the horses and I prepared the packs. The basinette was tied on to the top of Mary's saddle and a pack tied to each side. Vern and I took turns on Betty with Tony and Pippi before and aft. The one on foot carried the baby. It seemed a long four miles, for the track was steep, narrow and often muddy, but as we rounded the last headland and the Long Bay homestead came into sight, our spirits soared.

Archie Narbey, his wife and their daughter Molly were waiting to welcome us with cups of tea and a bottle of port, and there were drinks and biscuits for the children. Each year it was a celebration. We sat at the large kitchen table and shared news, while I fed the baby and Molly took Tony and Pippi to feed the turkeys. Large oval-framed portraits looked down on us — Archie's parents who had bought land at Long Bay in the 1860s. Each year we heard how the wedding festivities had lasted for three days, and how the guests came in chartered ships from Lyttelton and Akaroa.

But all too soon the dogs began to bark and we heard the sound of the car. Vern's father had arrived to take

us to Akaroa. Our holiday sped by and how we loved it, enjoying family and friends, shopping, going to a concert or the cinema and introducing the children to new experiences. But we were equally happy when we came in sight of Stony Bay again, and there in the distance was home, nestling in the shadows of the valley.

OUR FIRST PENGUIN.

(This is a copy of Joan de Hamel's article about their encounter with the penguin at Stony Bay, just as it appeared in the *Times* [London] in 1959.)

We were all on the verandah of the homestead. In front of us the garden soon reverted to paddock and sloped to the stony Pacific beach. A giant horseshoe of mountains curved behind us and stretched seawards on our left and right, to form the arms of the narrow bay. That morning we had come seventy miles and over the shoulder of the mountains down to this farm, out in the New Zealand sheep country.

Now our three sons fidgeted meaningfully. They wanted to ask *the* question. My husband and the farmer were discussing birds, and at last the question came up quite casually.

"Do you have penguins nesting round here?"asked my husband.

The boys waited anxiously while the farmer rolled a cigarette, considering his answer. We had been in New Zealand for six months and still had not seen a single penguin. The boys had been counting on finding some here in Stony Bay.

"I dare say you'd see them in the holes up the cliffs." The farmer waved his cigarette seawards, then he grinned at the boys. "But I'm pretty sure," he added, "if you'd like to look, you'll find one Little Blue Penguin in the wash-house."

A blue penguin in the wash-house? The elder boys thought they were having their legs pulled. The youngest

was more hopeful. Starched white shirt fronts and blue rinses for blue penguins did not seem altogether impossible.

"Come and see," said the farmer, and we followed him across the yard and into the wash-house.

It was not used as a wash-house any more. We edged past kerosene tins, possum traps, bundles of onions and the lawn-mower. The farmer picked up a torch and, kneeling down, shone the light into the flue under the copper.

"Have a look," he said.

Three children bent down, three heads clashed as they all tried to see at once.

"There she is," cried the eldest.

"She really is," squeaked the second.

"She's laid an onion," gasped the third.

It was nearly true. When it was my turn to look, I could see her crouching there, her white breast brooding over an onion, which she seemed to have adopted as an egg. She poked her head suspiciously from side to side, sharp eyes and stout bill on the alert. She was right at the back of the flue, under the grating of the fire

"I'll get her out for you," said the farmer.

He knew better than to risk his hand near that bill. Instead he found some wire and twisted it into a loop. With this he managed to lasso the tail end of the bird. Extremely reluctant, but chivvied from the rear, she emerged from the flue.

Once held firmly in the farmer's hands, she no longer seemed afraid. He carried her out into the daylight for our inspection.

Her eyes never blinked. They were grey, like the sea in winter, the colour, perhaps, of Antarctic ice in the polar night. She must have been about thirteen inches tall and the crisp, short feathers on her head and back were a pale sky-blue, frosted with grey. Her breast was white, but grubby.

The boys admired her enormously, though one of them said with mock severity that she could have washed her front while she was at it in the laundry.

The farmer laughed. "She's waddled a long way through the paddock," he said. "It wouldn't improve

your plumage either, going through the mud on legs that length."

"Well, why did she come up here?"

"You ask her that one," the farmer said. "Plenty of old rabbit burrows on the cliff. That's where the others nest, and a fine shindy they make at night. But this one has to be different and come all the way to the yard, among all the cats and dogs and people."

The penguin kicked with her short, thick, pink legs and webbed feet.

"We'd like to see her walk," suggested the boys.

"I'll show you how she swims too," said the farmer, and he led us down the paddock towards the sea. A creek came from the mountains, skirted the farm, and flowed into the bay. We stopped, a stone's throw from where this creek widened into a pool, which the sea flooded at high tide.

"She'll make for the water," said the farmer, and he put her on the grass and opened his fingers.

She was off. She was running, flopping, stumbling.

"Like a clown," shouted the boys, doubled up with laughter. "Like a sack-race," they gasped, as the penguin tripped and fell flat and scrambled up again, thrashing with her useless flippers. On she went, top-heavy and unco-ordinated, wonderfully ridiculous. The boys hooted with delight and followed her towards the creek.

One moment the Little Blue Penguin was flaying about on the bank, the next she had dived. In a trice the ungainly hobgoblin was changed into a mermaid. We saw a streak of blue shoot swiftly beneath the clear water to the far side, twist back, circle round, and then surface under the bank. She floated very buoyantly, high in the water.

"She's magic," sighed the youngest child, filled with wonder.

Now she was diving again, effortless, streamlined and sinuous, like an underwater ripple. She seemed to be soaring in the reflection of the sky in the water, more gracefully than a bird in the air.

The boys tried to run up and down the bank, following her, but she was too quick for them. With each rapid, stroking movement of her flippers, she leapt

forwards. Her feet, held close together, made a sensitive rudder, so that she doubled back, darted and swooped, scarcely pausing for breath. Suddenly she turned resolutely against the current and swam straight off upstream.

"Where's she going?" cried the children.

"You won't see her again today," said the farmer. "But she'll be back in her nest by morning."

I was thinking of the Little Blue Penguin as we strolled up the paddock, picturing the short-legged hobgoblin trekking in the dark through the mud, back to the wash-house in the yard, home to her flue and her onion egg.

13

School was no trouble for the first year of Correspondence. Tony's half-hour lessons were spread throughout the day, but as my pupils increased we had regular school hours. When Tony went to Grammar School there were only two pupils but with the addition of Mark in 1950, and Kate in 1952 life in our small kitchen was busy to say the least. I heard their multiplication tables while I bathed the baby, and their spelling while I washed the dishes, and somehow I learnt to do several things at once. It was a real challenge, and I loved teaching. Washing, cooking and housework seemed so transient and repetitive.

The children of course weren't as dedicated. When Vern was doing interesting things outside they would disappear, and however furious I was they were quite undaunted, and returned sweetly very pleased with themselves. We certainly had our moments, but good days surpassed the bad.

During the winter Vern rode every fortnight to post and to gather the mail and stores. Our excitement grew as the day progressed, and when the dogs barked, usually long after dark, we rushed out to welcome him. Stiff and cold after long, slow hours of travelling, he dismounted and we helped lift the damp, sweaty packs and saddle, rub down Betty and feed and cover her.

While Vern thawed out and drank hot bowls of soup, we opened the pack sacks.

It was just as exciting as Christmas Day with everyone talking at once. The children opened the green canvas bags and out spilled library books and the marked sets and letters from their teachers. Good marks, bad marks and encouraging interesting letters. Sometimes a bag of boiled sweets from the grocer, a larger bag if it was the end of the month and the account paid, and always the children got a little surprise from Vern. And later, when they were asleep we would talk and read our mail and scan the papers and our library books.

As we knew our holidays would be few and far between, we subscribed to the *National Geographic* magazine, our way of widening our horizons and seeing the world. After 45 years, Mark and Sonni in Stony Bay, still teaching by Correspondence, continue to get the *Geographics*. The bookshelves which reach to the ceiling are full, at least a quarter of them housing this superb magazine. They, with my father's encyclopedias and their own collection, are a real asset to life in the schoolroom.

During his last two years of Correspondence, Mark had a delightful teacher, Nancy Hamilton, who also had a son called Mark. Our Mark just loved to hear about this other Mark and his daring and exciting adventures. Little did we know that one day they would know each other well, for Mark Hamilton married Jim's daughter, Joanna.

Our days with the Correspondence School lasted for twenty years, and we had nothing but praise for their help and encouragement and the interest they took in our family.

14

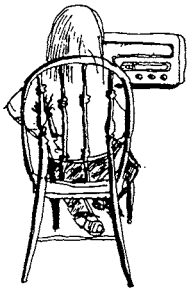
One year Vern gave me a brand new washing machine for my birthday. What a wonderful surprise. It was powered by another Briggs and Stratton and was magic — until we did the washing. It was so highly geared that the agitator tore the clothes, and they shot through the wringer at a most alarming rate, so the two of us were

now needed to do the washing. The children thought it very exciting, and some days later invited us to a play which Pippi had produced. We were fascinated to see our new acquisition and frantic efforts through their eyes Although Vern managed to improve it a little, the clothes still wound round the wringer and I thought with nostalgia of the old brass copper and the washing board. Briggs and Strattons were not for me.

This was the time Pippi became addicted to a very strange game. As soon as school was out she rushed to the swing, put a plastic bucket over her head and as she swayed back and forth she talked or sang to her imaginary friends, Johnny and Lye. I guess her head being inside the bucket gave her added concentration, but although the boys teased her by throwing blue gum nuts at the bucket, she remained undaunted. On and on she went, and the stories that emerged were charming.

The Children's Hour on the radio was a special time, and woe betide us if the reception was faint because the batteries weren't charged. Often someone would dash down to the creek to try to get more water over the wheel.

A well known children's broadcaster called Major took the session, and he was brilliant. When Pippi was ten she entered a radio competition and to her surprise and ours she came first in the story section. It must have been a magic bucket, the boys said. She was asked to read it during the Children's Hour at the station, 3YA. We practised often as she was a shy little girl, and at last the day came. We left home early one morning, exchanged the truck at Akaroa for the Mt Vernon car, and drove in style to Christchurch. There were rehearsals during the afternoon, and during the session the two winners were introduced and they both read well. We were pleased as we were ever mindful of our isolation and the difficulties the children would experience at boarding school. Tony was already at Cathedral Grammar School and finding it hard. Pippi's confidence grew as from time time she was asked to read more of her stories at 3YA.



A DAY OUT FISHING.

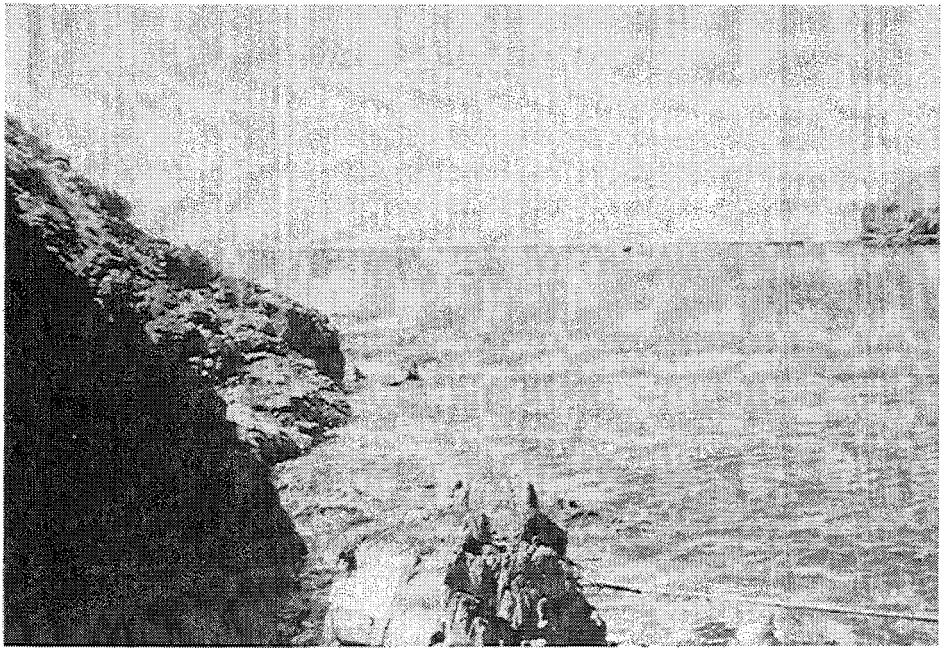
Philippa Armstrong

That evening held the first breath of summer. There was the smell of new-cut grass and the scent of flax. The hills where the lambs were playing were green from the spring rains and the sea was as still as the air itself. To Johnny and me, winding our fishing lines on the verandah, the hills seemed to grow closer with every rush of darkness. We were very excited as we checked our lines, for tomorrow we were going out to fish.

When the morning came the weather was promising. It was a still morning that throbbed with life and the faint murmuring of a calm sea. The day began as the sun came round and bright over the horizon, as every fishing day here begins.

At low tide Johnny and I go barefoot down to the beach. With our knives we prise pauas off the rocks, and by the time we've gathered a tin full of this juicy bait, the boat is on the way to sea. She's a 14 foot dinghy with

Below: The Landing.



an inboard motor and we think she is marvellous. We call her *Taranui,* and she is run over the beach on a wire rope and lowered into the water halfway between the beach and a natural jetty of rock on the cliff side. The far end of the rope is secured there and a well-worn track connects it to the beach. It was from this rock that our wool was shipped out by launch before we had a road. Autumn brings the yellow-eyed penguins to sit on the tussock ridges above it. There they moult and do look funny as they peel off their dress suits.

Taranui is nosed in to pick up the fishing gear. Clad in our yellow life-jackets we stand waiting for a lull in the swell. Far out on a still summer's day the sea can look calm, but inshore it brings the rollers ceaselessly breaking over the rocks. One minute the bow rises right within your reach. You jump, and the next minute she begins to drop. As you land in the bow you push off with all your might and she is carried on the swell. All this is very tricky, but once we are all aboard, *Taranui's* motor is started up and away we go.

The rudder is set for the southern side of the bay. There's a channel there where the fish come between the cliffs and a reef of rocks at the heads. We set the nets in the gap and that's the most exciting part of all.

The men take an oar each and row in towards the rocks as close as they dare, and as they pull hard away a curved line of corks bob on the surface.

The nets down, we set course for our favourite fishing ground. The motor is stopped and we wait for the slap of water against the hull to die. Then splash, the heavy anchor goes over and the rope snakes after it, down twelve fathoms to the rocky bottom. The boat swings into the tide and we throw our cod lines over the side. There is nothing to do but dream of the hapuka we hope to catch. Sometimes there won't even be a guffy bite, but we must keep alert in case the anchor drags or the weather changes. On the open sea trouble can spring from nowhere for the careless fisherman. The hours are long but very exciting. There are spotted shags flying low over the swell, mollymawks gliding over the wind, clean red-billed gulls and greedy black-backs. A blue penguin bobs up alongside and gives a cry of surprise,

the prions flutter swiftly and overhead the terns dart and dive all day.

In May on a calm sea whales can be seen blowing as they go north for the winter. Then Johnny and I pretend we are the whalemen at Tory Channel and we shout, "There she blows!" And we've heard them blowing quite often.

The boat pitches on the swell, and soon everything is drenched with spray and our faces sting with salt. We move farther out and the cliffs along the coast come into full view, great rocky drops of 500 feet and more, with birds' nests high on the ledges.

When the sun hovers low over the western hills, the anchor is brought up for the last time, and hand over hand we wind in our lines. As we gather speed a tail of foam is all that is left behind us. On our way inshore we pull in the net and to everyone's delight it is heavy with fish. It is full tide as we come in and an eerie silence follows the shutting off of the engine, but it is broken by the slap against the side of a passing swell that will run in and break on the shore.

The sun has already set as the men row us in, but beyond the shadow of the coast a ship catches its last rays. Maybe it is one of the Holm boats or the *River City* glinting in the sun.

Johnny and I feel shaky when we get ashore, and the ground seems to go up and down. We carry the gear round the track, then plunge into the sea to meet the boat and help pull her up the wire. She seems to get more and more heavy as everyone shouts, "Heave!" and "Pull!"

So we are tired beyond words and hungry too, as with fish slung over our shoulders we turn homewards through the darkness. We splash through the creek and plod through the paddock. The catch has yet to be cleaned by lamplight at the creek, where in a last burst of energy we gaff the eels that swarm to the scene.

But how wonderful it is to see the dim lights of home ahead. Soon we will be warm and dry, and there will be fish. Fish fresh from the sea for our dinner.

15

Our excitement knew no bounds the day Humphrey raced home with a greenstone tiki. He was playing near the mouth of the creek, and there it was partly lodged in the bank, the translucent colour just poking through. After examining it carefully and speculating about this magic find, we decided to take it to the Canterbury Museum. We made an appointment with the Director, Dr Roger Duff, and hoped and prayed the road would be dry on the day of our journey. It was, and we were able to go there and back on the same day, a rare occurrence.

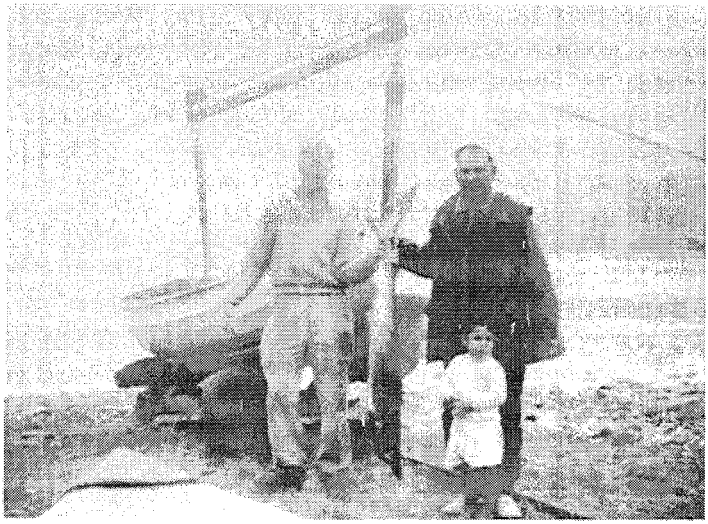
Realising this was a very special day for our children, Dr Duff welcomed us warmly and assured us that time was of no importance. He held us spellbound as he related the story of the Ngai Tahu tribe who every year sent an expedition to the West Coast, the only place in New Zealand where greenstone or poenamu is to be found. They knew of the secret pass through the mountains and with great endurance spent weeks carrying it through the rivers and over the plains home to Banks Peninsula. Some of it they used for trading with the North Island tribes, the rest they used for themselves. The Ngai Tahu were hunter gatherers, and although there was no evidence of a pa in Stony Bay they camped there to gather shellfish, or in the season to look for mutton birds that nested high on the cliffs to the south. He suspected that on the bank of the creek where Humphrey found the tiki, there would be charcoal remains of fires, bones, and maybe more artefacts. Would we mind if he came to investigate?

And so a few weeks later Dr Duff and Jim Eyles, his young enthusiastic assistant, marked out a site and set to work. They dug each square carefully and sifted the soil, making sure not to damage any artefacts that might be there. As he had predicted, the soil was black with charcoal. The painstaking search revealed broken bits of shell and bone, obsidian used for working greenstone, some complete bone needles and fish hooks, and one day a lovely incised pebble. The finding of the tiki had opened another door for us all in Stony Bay, and the beginning of a lasting friendship with Dr Duff.

For many years the Duffs came soon after Christmas and set up their camp among the trees in the valley. A tranquil and peaceful place, the creek opened out there and it was easy to cross. With them came Charlie Tuarau and his family from Wellington, and Ian Paterson, a gadget man who made things that seldom worked. He and his wife Betty had a family too. There was only one toddler the first year, but it seemed no time at all before there were six.

Charlie was a delight, and we all loved him. Originally from Rarotonga, he had come to New Zealand, enlisted and gone to the war with the Maori Battalion. He was wounded many times and after three years of service was invalided back to New Zealand, where he spent eighteen months in the Rotorua Hospital. There he was visited by Sir Apirana Ngata who suggested he serve an apprenticeship at the school of carving. This was the beginning of a brilliant career as a master carver, and at 65 he is still much in demand.

Charlie loved the long summer days at Stony Bay. They reminded him of his boyhood where time was unimportant. But for now he had work to do — the gathering and the preparation of the seafood for the New Year's hangi. It was his own idea, a ritual, and every year



Right: Vern, Charlie and small Roger.

it was the same. He was up at dawn to gather flax for the making of the crayfish pot which usually took most of the day. While stripping the flax and constructing the pot he sat at our large kauri table telling wonderful stories to the children and teaching them Maori songs, or talking over a mug of beer to Vern and Roger.

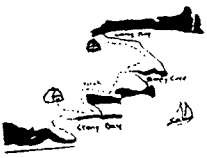
The following days were spent setting the new net and the old; Roger, with his snorkel and flippers diving for crayfish; and Ian, ever the enthusiast, in his wet suit, too often disappearing from sight; and the children at low tide gathering pauas.

On the morning of New Year's Eve the hole was dug for the hangi. Towards evening the fire was lit, and when the embers were very hot they were covered with stones. Later everything was removed from the pit and the food wrapped separately in green leaves, mint, parsley and water-cress, and carefully lifted in. The hot stones were placed, the coals raked over and the hangi covered with sacks to keep in the steam.

While the food cooked our party began and was soon in full swing. Charlie played the guitar and taught us action songs, we sang folk songs and hits of the day and we danced.

Midnight came all too soon. We sang Auld Lang Syne, drank to another year and opened the hangi. As each leaf was unwrapped, the scent of the wonderful food permeated our whole house and garden. The crayfish, the moki, the butterfish, the pauas and sea eggs, the mutton and new potatoes seemed even more delectable, if that were possible, as each one of us had helped in the gathering. We talked, we ate and drank, we sang and danced again. We tucked the little ones into bed, others drifted off but there were always some on the beach to watch the dawn and the sea rising out of the sea.

New Year's Day was a rest day, but the following day was special, for the Stony Bay and Long Bay families met in Sleepy Cove for a picnic. We each walked about two miles round the cliffs, and it was a marvellous moment when we came to the last headland and waved and whistled as we each came into sight, and then plodded on in single file down the steep winding track to the beach. After greetings and an exchange of news — for



many of us hadn't seen each other for a year — we had a picnic lunch. Then it was the traditional walk to the waterfall, fishing from the rocks, swimming in the safe and picturesque bay and games on the beach. How we loved it, but when we set out for home Stony Bay seemed a hundred miles away. It was always a struggle for the little ones, and for us too as we coaxed them along and had turns giving them pick-a-backs. But when we rounded the last headland and saw the homestead in the lengthening shadows, we were spurred on with renewed energy and were there in no time at all.

One year Charlie carved a tekoteko as an appreciation, he said, of our hospitality. We felt honoured as it was rare for a tekoteko to be presented to a European family. There was much tradition attached to the finding of the totara log, the carving and the installation, for it was tapu for any female to see it in any of these stages. Kate, nearly three, was more than a handful. She adored Charlie and could not understand why she was confined to the garden. Countless times we caught her climbing

Below: The Duffs, Tuaraus and Patersons, the Agar boys and our family, 1955.

over the gate or squeezing through the fence, and she grew ever more furious. So the ladies went to the unveiling ceremony with great relief and jubilation.

The tekoteko still stands as a reminder of a very special relationship with the Tauraus and the Duffs.

Above: The Tekoteko.

16

Dr Edginton was our first doctor. Luckily we were not often in need of attention for, although he was a kind man, we could not imagine him riding to Stony Bay in an emergency. And so we were horrified when Pippi had a nasty fall. The deep gaping gash in her leg certainly needed stitching. It was very cold when Vern set out for Akaroa with this little two-year-old all wrapped up, sitting in front of him on our faithful Betty. Towards evening they returned after nearly four hours in the saddle, stiff and weary, but Pippi all smiles with a new doll cuddled beside her, and seemingly none the worse for her adventure.

Allan Stewart was our next doctor. He came to Akaroa just before Humphrey was born and was in practice for 35 years. Retired now, he is still very able and fills many gaps for the doctor in residence. The practice covers a large area, and in earlier days it necessitated travelling on back-country roads in all sorts of weather. Wisely, Dr Stewart schooled his patients in the art of commonsense as he diagnosed as much as possible by telephone. Everyone, however anxious they felt, learnt to give thoughtful and accurate answers to his searching questions. Then if in doubt he travelled by car, boat, on horseback or on foot. But there *were* problems. The telephone shut down from midnight until 6 am every week day, and from 8 pm until 8 am at weekends. Thursday was his day off and he loved to play golf on Saturdays and Sundays, so of course we hoped our families would be well and free from accidents when he was not on duty. All the same, in spite of his gruff manner and hot temper he had a lovely sense of humour, and soon forgave us if we needed him on the wrong day.

Whenever he needed an assistant, he called his wife

Alison who was a trained nurse. As well as a large house and children to care for, plus the telephone to answer, she often helped in the surgery or went with him on emergency calls. Although she had help, she must have found it hard at times. We had many reasons to be grateful to them both for like all families we had our share of sickness.

Nothing seemed to run smoothly in 1952, the year Kate was born. Tony, in his second year at Grammar School was still homesick and had developed a sinus problem which in spite of specialist treatment did not improve, and he lost weight. I too wasn't very fit and the doctor advised me to go to St Georges to have the baby. Lovely to be near Tony, I thought, but awful to be away from the rest of the family. As I had no choice, Pippi and Mark stayed with friends who had an awful week as Mark fell off a gate and broke his leg. I just felt miserable for everyone. But time passed, Kate arrived and we were soon all home again, Tony too, as it was school holiday time. And I had wonderful help, Grace Hinton, who over the years came to our rescue many times.

Kate was an unhappy restless baby, and although there was no obvious reason, she didn't thrive. After some weeks of little weight gain, Allan Stewart suggested I take her to Akaroa for a few days where he could observe her. Grace returned to Stony Bay. and while we were away Mark developed an ear infection. So with antibiotics and oranges in my pack, and leaving Kate in Pat Masefield's wonderful care, I set out for Stony Bay. The weather was appalling — gale force winds, heavy rain and a danger of the creeks rising. My brother-in-law, Ross McWhannell, took me by truck to Long Bay where Vern arranged to meet us, but when we reached the spillway at the head of the bay the creek was raging. We left the truck, held hands as we were swept across to the far bank perilously near the swirling fall of the water.

As we neared the first homestead we met Vern racing along with ropes as he had remembered the spillway and wanted to arrive before us. He returned with Ross and saw him safely across while I had a hot drink with the Amies. We continued on to the Narbey homestead where

Huia joined us, and with planks and more ropes helped us over the Sleepy Cove creek. On and on we struggled through the storm until we came to the Stony Bay crossing which was just below the house, and there we saw the anxious little faces of Pippi and Humphrey peering through the window. We waved to each other as Vern worked out a plan. For before us was a raging river, logs and debris swirling down, and the noise of the moving boulders and howling wind a nightmare. Vern tied a rope securely to a tree and after several attempts at throwing against the wind it landed on the far bank, and he tried to tighten an old wire which was once the bottom wire of a fence. He took off his boots and oilskin and hand over hand he clung to the rope as he crossed on the wire, praying they would hold as he was tossed in and out of the water. Scrambling out on the other side, he tied the rope to another tree and shouted for me to start. With my feet on the moving wire and my hands on the swaying rope I began, but halfway across I froze. With the waves swirling below, I was giddy and disoriented and scarcely knew what I was trying to do, but far away above the noise I could hear Vern calling. I don't remember getting there but somehow I managed. *Never* will I forget his care and strength and perseverance on that awful journey.

The ordeal ended happily. With the help of orange juice I was able to get the four-hourly doses of antibiotics into Mark. When the storm subsided the doctor rode over to see him, and although he was a sick little boy he gradually recovered.

And there was soon great news about Kate. The cause of her colic and debilitation was a slight tongue tie. She was sucking more air than milk, a defect which should have been found in the maternity hospital. It was ages before she was strong again.

Keeping appointments with doctors and hospitals was never straightforward. I remember the time I was to have the veins in my legs fixed. All was arranged. The boys were to stay at Mt Vernon and the girls at home with Grace. It was October and I was due at The Limes hospital on a Monday at 11 am. The weather report was good, although a storm was predicted for later in the

week, but on the Sunday evening it was changed. A southerly was sweeping up the east coast and would reach Christchurch about 9 pm. We woke Humphrey and Mark, dressed them warmly and set out for Akaroa, but the storm in all its fury hit us at the Green Gate. We just made the summit because it was snowing heavily, and we slipped and slithered down the other side until we came to rest in a ditch below the Sugar Loaf. We climbed out, but in our haste found the torch had been left behind. With our luggage safely in the cab we set out for Mt Clair, about a mile down the road. Vern, carrying Mark, guided us inch by inch, and all the time the snow was getting deeper, making it almost impossible to find our bearings. We were at the end of our tether when we reached Mt Clair. It was 2 am, and we had been nearly five hours on our journey. I guess we could have all died of exposure, Mark especially, because he was icy cold. Ted Armstrong was wonderful. He drove us down to Mt Vernon where Vern's family helped to thaw us out with baths and hot drinks.

We woke late, stiff and sore and our faces marked with hail, and as so often happens the day was cloudless with the snow sparkling on the hills. After ringing the hospital, Vern saddled a pack horse and rode up for our luggage. The truck was nearly buried in a snow drift, and he dug for ages to get the door open. And so it was late afternoon when we arrived in Christchurch, and although we apologised again we weren't given much of a welcome, for of course it was a brillant day there too.

Next morning I had the operation and was just coming out of the anaesthetic and feeling muddled when there was a rumbling noise, followed by an earthquake. The Limes had been a gracious and lovely home built in the 1880s. The heavy bedroom wardrobes reached to the ceiling and swayed so perilously that Vern lifted me and waited at the window, wondering if he should carry me down the fire escape. Luckily the shocks lessened and he had me in bed again by the time a nurse arrived.

I recovered quickly, but what an effort and nearly a disaster it had been.

17

When he was ten Tony went as a boarder to Cathedral Grammar School. No wonder he was homesick, for the contrast could not have been greater. I remember during his first holiday finding a crumpled piece of paper in his suit pocket. It was a plan of the river Avon which flowed past the school. A little stick figure was sitting in a canoe, and a line was drawn down to the sea and round the Peninsula to Stony Bay. Another little figure was standing up and waving. Underneath were the words — "I wish this was me."

Left: Tony

Above: Pippi was a flower girl at her aunt Rachel's wedding.

There were other Peninsula children and parents who were anxious and sad too. One small boy set out to walk home and was not found until the next day.

To his credit Tony managed, but after leaving College, he wanted to work at home. We needed him, but with years of school fees ahead for the younger ones it was not financially possible. And so he did a variety of things, driving a loader for a top dressing firm, trapping possums and working on and later managing a farm.

He married Daphne Clarke and they had three daughters, Felicity, Caroline and Annabel. Life was a struggle for they moved many times and financially it was hard. Eventually they separated. Tony works for the City Mission now and is currently doing a university diploma in sociology. He married again, to Naomi McLean who has a daughter, Susannah. Tony's great love is the sea. In his yacht which he moors in Purau he sails in Lyttelton Harbour and round the coast, and like Vern he is innovative and practical.

The girls are all talented musically. Felicity is on the staff of the United Building Society, Caroline is at university, and Annabel, in the seventh form, hopes to be accepted for the School of Fine Arts.

18

Pippi had a vivid imagination and was by far the hardest working pupil in our school, although Kate came a close second. I despaired of the boys, who did as little as possible.

Rangi Ruru had become a Presbyterian girl's school since my time there, and as my father had been a chaplain at St Margarets we sent her there. She did well and made friends, but like the other girls hated the regimented life of the boarding house which was senseless and quite cruel.

When Pip was eighteen she began a three-year course at the Occupational Therapy School in Auckland, and after graduating was accepted at Braemar in Nelson, a hospital for physically and handicapped children.

Left: Pippi, 1962.

It was good to have her back in the South Island where we could see her more often. She married Richard Harris in 1966 and after their three children, Alison, Jonathon and James started school she returned to Braemar. They are a musical family, Richard having been both leader and conductor of the Nelson School of Music Orchestra.

As a reminder of Stony Bay they now have *Taranui*. They take her to the Sounds for the summer holidays, and as they chug along I guess Pippi dreams of her imaginary friends of long ago and the days out fishing in the bay. My dream is that when she retires from Braemar she will write and draw and paint once again.

Alison, having completed a university degree is now on a working holiday in the U.K. Jonathon, who hopes to go into the Police Force, has many interests, from singing in the Nelson Cathedral Choir to parachute jumping. James, in his School Certificate year, has a flair for drawing and design and is a very keen sportsman.

19

Humphrey was always homesick when away from home for more than a day. We went to Wellington for a Correspondence School week and it was hopeless as he spent most of the time begging for stories about his dad and Stony Bay. So we dreaded him going to Grammar School, and as we expected he hated it.

"If all the days are like today," he wrote, "I am going to ride home on my bike. It is horable here. Easter is 17 days and 408 hours away and it is too long to wait. Correspondence is best. Latin is tearable."

Pippi was distraught at this time too, for she had a tyrant of a matron, and it was also Tony's first year at College and he was finding it hard. So for a time we had a sad little trio, and we all felt wretched. But gradually they settled and our decision to give them the opportunity of living in both worlds seemed justified.

Humphrey worked hard at College, and before going to university he spent a year in Fiji on a Volunteer Service Abroad scheme. He graduated with a B.Sc. degree and worked in Christchurch for a time.

In 1969 he married Hilary Duffill, and early in 1971 when their first daughter Bridget was small they moved to England where he continued his studies at Lancaster University. Equipped with more qualifications and another little daughter, Lucy, they returned to New Zealand and not very long afterwards they moved to Sydney where they have lived ever since.

Both Bridget and Lucy are gifted instrumentalists and are at the New South Wales Conservatorium.

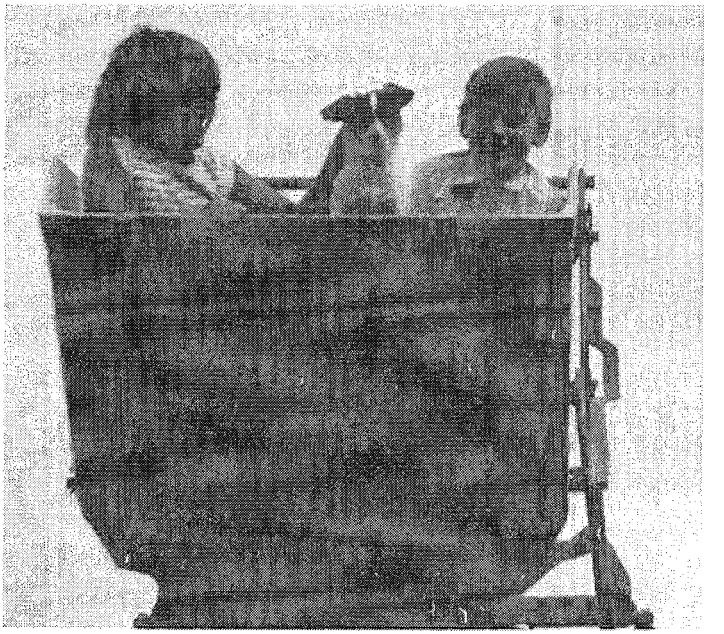
Far left, left and below: Humphrey

20

When Mark was little we kept losing him. From the earliest age, if he could find the smallest hole in the fence or hedge he escaped, We would find him along the bank of the creek examining weeds and flowers, and bugs and beetles. His love of natural history was there from the beginning.

We could not afford to send him to prep school so for him it was from Correspondence School to Christ's College. I dreaded it and, anxious that he should have some knowledge of Form 3 subjects, we did Latin and French together during his last year at home. But he wasn't a bit interested and always felt like a caged bird when he was at school.

Inevitably, the day arrived. "The noise is terrible," he wrote. "Bells all day long and my feet hurt. Do you know I have to wear shoes all the time and I can never be alone?" But he did much better than we expected and, like the others, made friends. At the end of his third year he left school, as Vern was having problems with his



Right: Mark, Kate and "Jan", in the loader bucket.

Left: Mark with Miriam and their Labrador.

back, and he has farmed in Stony Bay ever since.

Over the years Mark has worked thoughtfully and hard, and has enhanced Stony Bay with his plantings of both native and exotic trees, and now has a Queen Elizabeth Trust Covenant on the stony ocean-facing beach front, to prevent any future development there.

His flair for drawing and design grows, and together he and his wife Sonni have created a wonderful home and garden. I think of Stony Bay as his canvas and the result gives me the greatest pleasure.

Their three daughters, Miriam, Hannah and Rachel are Correspondence School pupils, but unlike their father they come to school in Akaroa one day each week. Boarding school will be easier for them.

Right: Mark holding the piston of the Lanz.

21

When Kate was eight or nine we took her to the musical *South Pacific* and she was entranced. "One day I am going to be a ballet dancer," she sang as she whirled to the music of *Swan Lake.* As soon as morning school was finished she changed into Daphne's present, a tutu and a pair of ballet shoes, and danced in and out of the house and garden.

Never will I forget the face of a visiting Bible salesman, who after knocking at our door one lunch time was confronted with Kate in all her finery. I guess that, lacking any sense of humour, he thought he had arrived at a den of iniquity. We had many Bibles in our house, I told him, indeed I was a vicar's daughter, but he hastily departed. I felt quite sorry for him, as it was a hot day, and in collar and tie and thick dark suit he walked up to the Green Gate where he had left his car.

Kate's dancing dream continued until she went to boarding school, and it stood her in good stead, for although she was the only one at home for two years she was always happy. She enjoyed St Margarets and did well, and so it was a bitter blow when she became ill during her School Certificate year. On the day of the *Waihine* disaster she had an operation at Princess Margaret hospital.

The doctors had warned us that she only had a 50-50 chance of pulling through. We were desolate as we sat with her that evening in intensive care while the storm still raged outside. News had come through of the *Waihine's* sinking and the loss of many lives. We were concerned too for Mark who we had left in Stony Bay.

Left: Kate

Right: Kate and Mark.

Telephone lines were down and power everywhere was off, but although we didn't hear for 48 hours, he had managed to walk out. We took it in turns to sit with Kate, for sometimes she recognised us and the nurses felt she was less restless when we were there.

But we had another worry, for Humphrey and Hilary were to be married on Easter Monday, just five days after the operation. Kate's doctor thought we should go, so we drove to Dunedin and for a few hours shared in their joy. By 3 am the next morning we were back at the hospital, and Kate, heavily sedated was unaware we had gone. She recovered slowly and was at school again three months later. To our surprise and pleasure she passed School Certificate at the end of the year and University

Left: Kate

Entrance the next. We were full of admiration for she was not strong and had had many spells in hospital.

Both Kate and Pippi have a genetic defect in their blood which is manifested by spontaneous clotting, and to prevent clotting they are on permanent medicinal therapy. How fortunate we are to be living in the days of great advances in medical science and technology.

Never daunted, Kate began her nursing training and loved it, but after too much sick leave she was advised to give up.

In 1973 she married Allan Buckingham who had just completed a degree at Lincoln College, and a year later they went overseas for a working holiday. They had wonderful adventures in strange places and Kate grew

stronger. On the way home they stayed in Sydney and decided to settle there. Kate was delighted to have a home of her own, but Allan found it hard to stay in one place and after some years they parted although remain good friends. Kate is married again, to Bob Ravich, a Sydney haematologist and, having gained more qualifications, has become his practice manager.

It is wonderful to have two families in Australia and it is surprising how often we see each other.

22

Vern kept diaries in 1947 and 1948, and reading them forty years later I am filled with admiration. The entries were short statements of each day's work. Our isolation and road problems meant that he spent his time in back-breaking work, so much of it economically unprofitable. The wartime dreams of the peace of Stony Bay faded. There must be better ways, he reasoned, of improving the farm and our lives without such endless toil. And so with his innovative mind and natural skills he set out to replace the pack-horse, the axe, the water wheel and the Tilley lamp, and the host of time-consuming necessities that constituted our lives, for we were one of the last of the pioneer families on the Peninsula. Vern was 30 when he returned from the war, and when he died in 1971, Stony Bay, because of his foresight and determination had caught up with the twentieth century. For now we had an all-weather road and electricity, two of the greatest labour savers that man has devised. Admittedly the farm was run down, but with school fees finished, the possibilities for Mark, if he could struggle though the first years, were good.

An all-weather road was the first priority. As there were few ratepayers and only one homestead, maintenance had been neglected. A converted horse-drawn grader pulled by a Cletrac crawler tractor came once a year. It made a good job but was hard for the operator who controlled the blade by winding down large control wheels. The next grader was an Austin Aveling, a model

with poor brakes that worked off the main drive shaft. Once the front wheels went over the bank on the flat road, and it was fortunate that the whole machine did not land in the valley below.

The roadmen hated cleaning culverts and water channels, and spent more time leaning on their shovels and having smokos than working. We all remember Cecil Johnson, geriatrically slow while still in his thirties, who was obsessed by the number of our culverts. "Ninety eight," he would say, "No, it must be ninety nine. I must count again." So in desperation Vern would clear them himself.

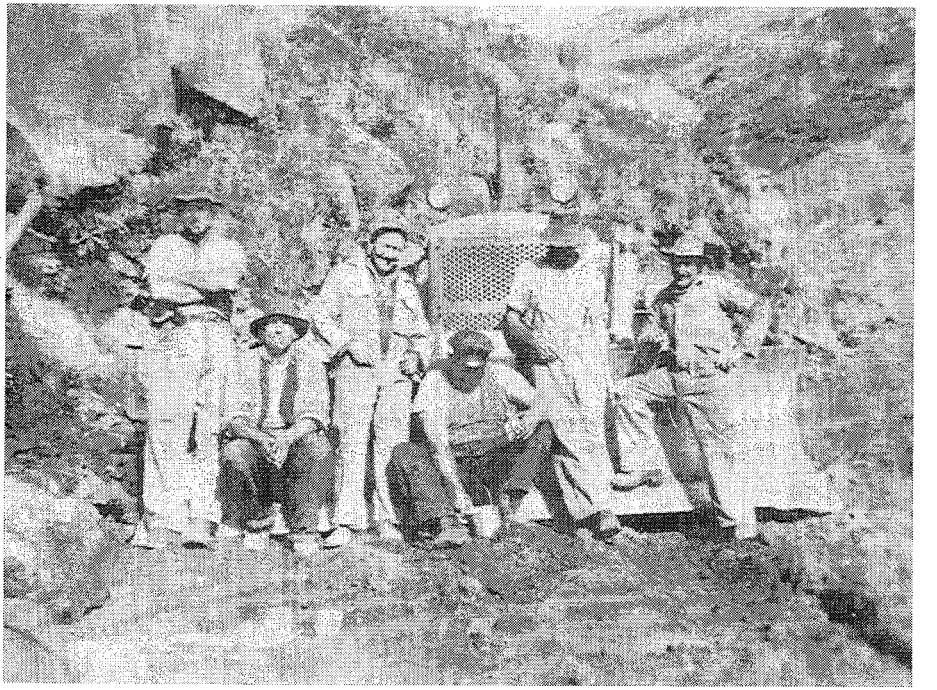
He waited on the County Council many times. The resulting reports in the Akaroa Mail were colourful to say the least, for he never minced matters. Promises were made but little done, so he stood for our riding, and to his surprise topped the poll.

At the end of the 1950s work began on the reformation. Even Vern's part from the Green Gate was improved with the addition of two hairpin bends. A metal crusher was set up on the Stony Bay beach, a jaw type and very noisy. It had difficulty digesting the boulders and frequently broke down.

For nearly three months the workmen lived with us in the house, and the County employed a cook, Jean Sunckell, whom we will never forget. Large and cumbersome, her sense of humour matched her size, and her cooking was a disaster. We were just so thankful when the project came to an end, Vern especially, as to hurry it along he worked too, and Tony, during the school holidays drove a Ford V8 tip-truck, stockpiling metal from the crusher. We all felt we deserved every inch of this long awaited and magnificent metalled road, and I know I will never take it for granted.

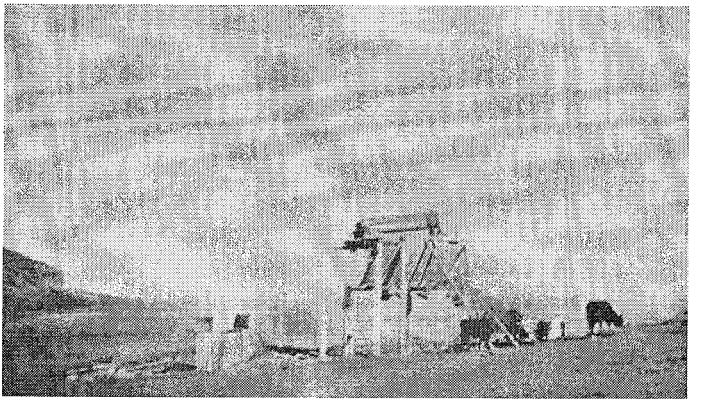
Below: Getting boulders to feed the crusher.

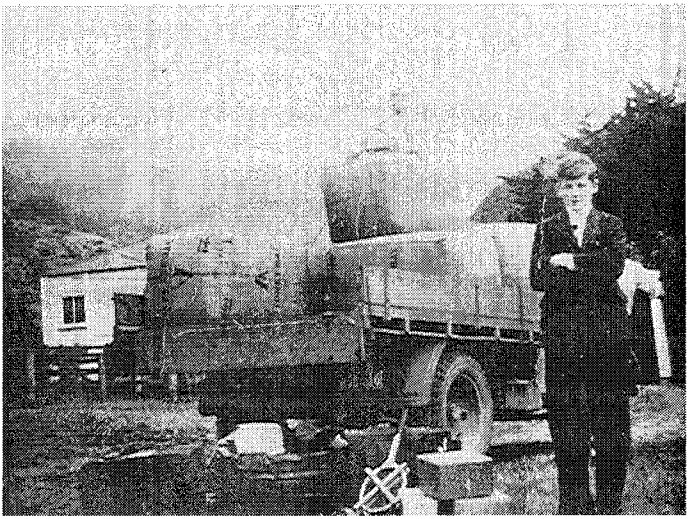
To have an all-weather road was quite unbelievable; now we could plan ahead. For the first time our wool could go when it was ready; farm equipment and household supplies could come when needed; school trunks would never have to be packed out again; and the visiting teachers could drive themselves. Above all we would be able to keep our appointments. Suddenly everything seemed possible.



Above: The road gang.

Right: The metal crusher.





Left: Pack horses no longer needed.

The other great step forward was the coming of electricity: in 1958 we were joined to the national grid. We bought an electric stove, a vacuum cleaner and an iron, and it was sheer magic to have a light in every room. No more days of bringing in cords and cords of wood to feed the hungry stove; no more explosions from the primus; no more burnt arms from the heat of the petrol iron. It was just wonderful, but strangely there were things we missed — the noises of the gadgets working, but most of all the smells, the warmth of the stove and the wood crackling and burning. They were part and parcel of Stony Bay, and we had grown as used to them as we had to the smell of the salt spray and the roar of the sea. Our house had lost some of its personality.

23

My mother died in 1965, and I was doubly sad as I knew I hadn't come up to her expectations. It must be hard for parents to have an only child, especially one like me, who had married a backblocks farmer. Our lifestyle and isolation were an enigma to her, but she loved us all and was wonderfully thoughtful and kind.

With the money from her estate we bought a car. It was new, and our first vehicle apart from a very old one we had for a short time. More than twenty years later and still on the road, the Hillman has developed into a real personality.

That year I accepted the position as resident organist of St Peters and was thrilled to play a pipe organ again. My driving licence had lapsed years before, but Vern was a lay-reader and usually happy to take me.

With the children away I was able to spend time on the farm, and although I was not equal to even half a man in strength and ability, I loved it. We made cattle stops, sprayed gorse and did stock work together, and on warm days had a picnic lunch on the hills. On winter evenings we lit the fire, and like the oil lamps the fragrant scent of manuka resin still lingers in my mind. These were happy tranquil days.

The following year Mark finished school and came home. He was needed and had always wanted to come back to the land, but it was hard for him, with his friends so far away. It was hard too for Vern who had a painfully sore back and a strange sense of urgency driving him along. He seemed to know that his working days were numbered

Vern's health deteriorated. He developed cancer, and after a long and painful illness he died in 1971, only fifty-five years old.

The first few sentences in an obituary in the *Akaroa Mail* read — "A man who became a legend in his own life time — no, not that perhaps, but certainly a man who had gained the respect and admiration of all who knew him — whether they agreed with his opinions or not. He fought his long battle against ill health in the same way he had approached all this life's vicissitudes — with fortitude".

It seemed so cruel, for his hardest goals had been reached. But it was not to be. And so without him we started again.

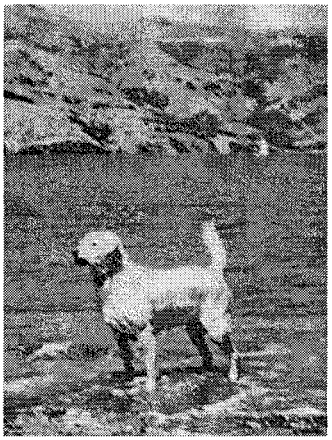
Left: Vern, 1969.

24

With a husband and father gone, our family were wonderful. So were our friends.

One vivid memory is of Mark and me with our brief case walking in to Pyne Gould and Guinness to do all the necessary business. We felt very much on our own.

One day Humphrey, Hilary and Kate arrived with a surprise — a very small Labrador puppy, and she was for me. My heart sank at this bouncy bundle of fun, but I pretended to be delighted. But we already had hundreds of animals and how could we manage one more? Little did



Right: Steve in her prime.

I dream that Steve would become my devoted and inseparable companion for fifteen years. She helped me through the loneliest times, and I adored her.

Determined to be self-sufficient, I regained my driving licence and continued to play the organ at St Peters. And there I was lost in another world. I bought a foot loom and tried to master its intricacies.

One Sunday afternoon a friend of Mark's brought Sonia Lindsay for a drive. They seemed undaunted by the slushy road, and the snow which was beginning to fall, but we knew the summit might soon be impassable, so with Mark accompanying them they returned to Christchurch. He came home on top of the world. Sonia was really special, he said. They became friends, and as she was teaching in Christchurch they often saw each other. Full of life and interests she was much in demand, and Mark, living so far away, often felt at a disadvantage. Once, there was a long silence and he was sure all was lost, but one evening when he was working late in the woolshed there was a ring from the North Island and it was Sonni. Mark was once again on a high. Their friendship blossomed and they were married in 1973. Sonni, with her warm personality, many skills and questing mind would bring a new dimension to Stony Bay. I was delighted.

The time had come for me to leave, but Kate, engaged to Allan Buckingham had a dream. She wanted to be

married in Akaroa with the reception at Stony Bay. A wonderful thought, but what if it rained and the road was a mess. The Buckinghams and their friends from Auckland were nervous. We decided to hope for the best. An immense amount of preparation was needed, both in the house and the garden but the catering was taken care of by our special family friend, Jeanne Wendelborn. All our worries vanished when we woke on the wedding morning. The day was brilliant and Stony Bay looked beautiful.

After the service, the journey home, the formalities and the superb wedding meal, we danced till morning.

Kate's dream had come true.

PART III: AKAROA 1974-1987

1

I moved to Akaroa soon after Kate's wedding. There were nostalgic moments as we packed, but good ones too, as I knew I was leaving Stony Bay in caring and capable hands.

Once again I was on the threshold of another life.

Needless to say Steve, and James (my Stony Bay cat) and I felt very homesick and quite strange at first. The first house we lived in belonged to a lonely old man who was travelling in Europe for four months. Knowing I was leaving Stony Bay, he had offered it to me, rent free. He had been chairman of the County Council during Vern's term, and he and his wife had visited us occasionally. Sadly they had become alcoholics.

Will we ever forget the night we were invited to dinner, even Kate who was only three?

Jacko, as we called him, and Doreen gave us a wonderful welcome, and after a few drinks sat us down at the well-set table. It appeared we were going to have three courses. But they must have had a few swigs before we arrived for they suddenly became quite helpless.

We sat for so long that I whispered to Tony to see what was happening in the kitchen. The soup was bubbling, he said, and everything else looked ready. So with suggestions from me and smiles of relief from our host and hostess, the children took over and we had a merry meal.

The highlight of the evening was a slide show of their holidays overseas and it was a disaster, although very, very funny. Most of the slides were upside down and the slurred descriptions seldom matched the images.

What a wonderful comedy it would have made. John

Cleese would have loved it, but it was sad too. I still have a lovely series of comic strips that Pippi drew next day.

Doreen died, and Jacko filled the house with memorabilia of their travels in the east. Surrounded by Buddhas, lacquered boxes and chests, carvings of dragons and fragile objects of porcelain, I felt I was living in Japan. Even Steve seemed bemused, and I was always worried about her wagging tail.

Before I had time to adjust to this new life I was offered the position as curator of the Langlois-Eteveneaux House and Museum. I refused, knowing I was totally inadequate. I was asked again and again, until with a push from Roger Duff I reluctantly accepted. It was an easy job, everyone said. Nothing to it.

The first day was a nightmare, although Kate added a light touch. She rang the museum, and in a deep, muffled voice asked for some information. I hadn't a clue who I was talking to nor did I know the answer but said I would do some research. Her peals of laughter were just what I needed. My sense of humour returned.

Jacko came home from Europe. He brought me a lovely camel-hair coat from Italy, but I couldn't bring myself to wear it. It was time for us to move on, and I found a little cottage in Rue Jolie. Steve was pleased for we were near the Garden of Tane and could go for runs every day. James had no traffic sense, and waited in the middle of the road for me to come home from the museum. He hated being shut in the house and so the inevitable happened: he was run over and killed. We did miss him, and I felt mean for taking him away from Stony Bay.

The County Council gave me permission to build just out of the town boundary on a section we had owned for some time and had used as a holding paddock during the days of the Duvauchelle cattle sales. Sale day had always been a great event for the farming community of the Peninsula, a day not to be missed. We used to fatten about twenty beef cattle a year at Stony Bay, and as they spent their last weeks grazing on the flat paddocks near the house we grew very attached to them. These were the days of the bigger and fatter, the better, and Vern was delighted

when he sometimes topped the sale. He drove them over the hill, where they stayed overnight before going on to Duvauchelle. The next day he returned with calves.

I was lucky to have that piece of land, for Akaroa sections had become very expensive.

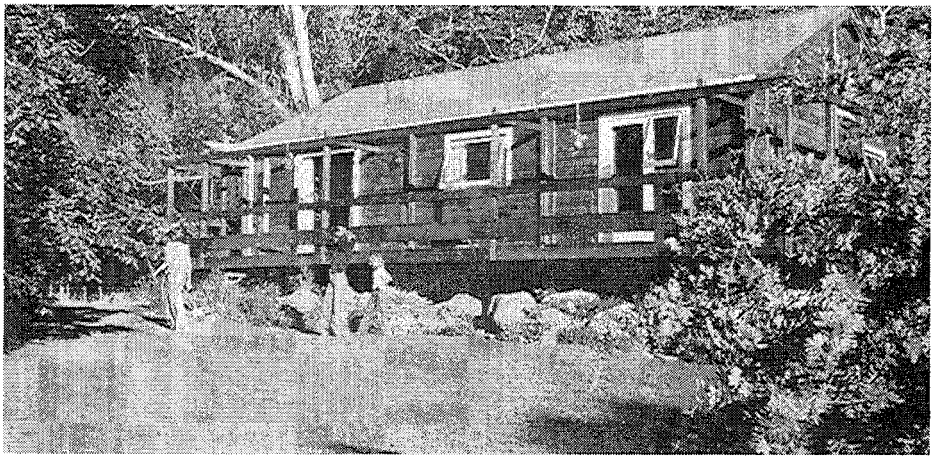
The museum was an enormous challenge, and I felt thrown in at the deep end. I needed immediate knowledge, for tourists came from all over the world, and schools booked in and expected me to know about the history, the architecture, the early families and a hundred other things. There were many official visitors, including the Governor General and the French Ambassador. And so I spent each evening reading, and the more I learnt the more enthralled I became.

It was so easy to be swept up in the cultural life of Akaroa. I was asked by John and Peg Walton to join them in a venture at The Gallery. A lovely old brick building, it was originally a power house, generating power from 1911. In the 1960s it was leased to Kobi and Pat Bosshard, who used it as a dealer gallery. To entice the public to visit their exhibitions, they arranged with the Music Federation of New Zealand to have three chamber concerts each year. In 1973, after a European tour they moved to Dunedin and The Gallery became vacant.

With some trepidation John and Peg and I, without any financial assistance, decided to lease it and to have both exhibitions and concerts. They had experience in the art world, and I had a little in music. It was so successful that later we became an incorporated society. Now, fifteen years later, we have 200 members, and are well known throughout New Zealand.

I was still resident organist of St Peters, and I had replaced Vern on the Civic Trust, so my days were full to overflowing.

At the end of 1974 my house was built. Although small, it had heaps of character and fitted well into the environment. It was a sloping section, the lower half covered in impenetrable bush. The Balguerie stream formed one boundary and the Stony Bay road the other. I was thrilled to have a home of my own, and Steve was in a seventh heaven for there was space for her ball games at last.



Above: Stony Cottage

I felt useful too for the family. We both pricked up our ears when we heard the distinctive sound of the Stony Bay truck as it turned in our drive. Steve's tail nearly wagged off when Mark and Sonni, followed by Beans, their lovely Labrador, called in or came to stay. Mark often brought his paint brushes and gardening tools and was a tremendous support. Slowly part of the paddock was transformed into lawns and a garden, and in time the shrubs, the trees, and the flowers grew, and the stark new look had gone.

Tony Woodley was a character. Full of energy and with a lovely sense of humour he became my right-hand man. He even extended his help to my garden. How well I remember the day he found me trying to dig out a stone which the lawn mower constantly hit. He set to work too and we dug until we almost disappeared down the hole. The stone had become a boulder and there seemed no end to its size. Undaunted and enjoying the challenge, Tony was sure he would find a solution. Next morning he returned with Michael Price and his digger. It wouldn't fit through the gate so the fence had to be cut, and the digger was so heavy it broke the lid of the septic tank and tore up my lovely lawn. But out came the boulder with no trouble at all, and I never received an account. Tony left Akaroa a few months later. I have often wondered what happened to him and where he

went next. Although, in his enthusiasm he made a few blunders, Akaroa missed this colourful and generous man, and he was certainly a good friend to the museum and to me.

Another project under way was the restoration of the Custom-house. Finding the appropriate artefacts and furnishings was my responsibility. Drawings of early Custom-houses were published in the *Akaroa Mail* and the response was encouraging. We were given navigational instruments, sea boots, hand-made nails, a kauri table, a telescope, even a cabin trunk with "Mrs Armstrong" printed in large letters on the outside. Maybe it belonged to Vern's great-grandmother, but my research revealed no clues.

The Custom House

We needed a model for the Customs Officer, and even secondhand ones were three hundred dollars. One day, when discussing my predicament with our bank manager he told me he was driving to Greymouth the following weekend to visit his brother, the manager of Millers Drapery. The business was closing and perhaps there were a few spare models for sale. And there were, and the price only thirty dollars. I took the model to Gary Sutton at the Canterbury Museum who gave him hair, side whiskers and a moustache, and when dressed he looked as a sub-collector should, but I secretly wondered if a Customs Officer in Akaroa in the 1850s would have looked so smart.

All this preparation took a year to complete, and at the end of 1977 Colleen Dewe, our MP opened it, and Christopher Bridge, a great-great-grandson of Akaroa's second Customs Officer turned the key of the lock.

2

In 1977 Joan Holderness died suddenly. It was so hard to believe. Only a few days before she had rung to invite me to a party to celebrate the sixtieth birthday of her husband, Jim. She was such a vibrant lovely person and would be missed by everyone who knew her. We had been friends during our school days, and as she lived

Left: Joan Holderness, 1963.

in Gebbies Valley on the Akaroa-Christchurch highway we were able to continue our friendship. Jim and Vern had been at College together and our children were friends. I was full of sorrow for them all.

3

In 1978 I spent my holidays in Australia. It was wonderful to be with Humphrey, Hilary, and the children and Kate and Allan. Sydney was a magic city. I loved the tall skyscrapers interspersed with the small beautifully ornamented stone nineteenth century buildings. And everywhere there were people. I decided that where the population is large everything happens. We went to lunch-hour concerts, to the opera, and a superb

Right: Jim and Kate. Australia, 1988.

organ recital; we ate strange and lovely food in French and Italian and Lebonese restaurants; we cruised in the harbour; and as a complete contrast we spent a weekend in the Blue Mountains.

I had another reason for going to Australia: to find a firm who would change and record a Standard 8 film to a Super 8, and to add a sound track. I guarded this film with my life as it had taken a year to make and had caused no end of worry and time and effort, as well as being tremendous fun.

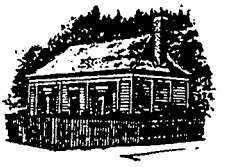
What sparked off my idea of making a film was a

proposed exhibition in the museum of the Banks Peninsula cocksfoot industry. I talked it over with Vern's friends who were full of enthusiasm, and although now in their sixties were delighted at the thought of using their skills again. This industry, lasting from the early 1850s to the 1930s was responsible, not only for making New Zealand famous for its seed but for putting the name Akaroa on the map. Banks Peninsula cocksfoot seed was superior to all others, and during each summer gangs of men poured on to the Peninsula for the seasonal work. Because of the nature of the land the methods used were similar to those of Biblical times — the sickle hook for reaping, the flail for threshing and the pack-horse for carrying-in.

Because our knowledge of filming was so scanty, our trials and tribulations were beyond description, but the men loved it and never minded doing the scenes over and over again. At last it was finished, my Sydney quest was successful, and with the sound track added, the final and most difficult task was the synchronisation of text and music with the sequences of the film.

It is a film made by amateurs and of course far from perfect, but it is a wonderful record of the past and is shown on request at the museum.

4



The museum had been in existence for ten years when I went as curator in the summer of 1974, and already plans had been made for a large new wing. One of my duties was to help raise the necessary finance. A section to raffle at ten dollars a ticket was givn by a Mr Grofski, and I found myself sitting outside the museum after closing hours selling tickets. Others helped too in strategic parts of the town. I hated it but the tickets sold well and added ten thousand dollars to the fund. The contract went to the firm with the lowest tender and the building began. But the workmen were slow and there were endless problems. It was to be opened during the 1979 centennial year of the County Council. By September the money had run out, the builders had gone and

the interior finishing was still to be done. Voluntary labour was needed. As the architect and the Board members lived out of Akaroa, I took the responsibility of having it completed in time for the opening on 10 December.

I heard of Tony Woodley who had come to live in Akaroa. Forced to retire early because of back injuries, he was a community minded man and loved to help where needed. He agreed to become clerk of works and to borrow scaffolding and the necessary gear if I provided the helpers. There was a great deal to do, but I must have transmitted a sense of urgency as every morning men arrived — even fishermen when the days were too rough for the boats to go to sea.

It was ready just in time for our architect, John Hendry, to move in and arrange a temporary exhibition, and under his direction we worked hard.

With a sigh of relief, and delighted with the transformation we closed the museum doors at midnight on the 9th and went home for a much needed sleep. But we soon woke to the sound of pelting rain. I rushed back, followed by others, and to our horror the roof was leaking and rain was just pouring in. Luckily the storm was short lived, but damage was done and there was a lot of clearing up to do. By 10 am the sun was shining when our member of Parliament and invited guests arrived for the ceremony. We were ready just in time.

5

In 1980, Jim Holderness and I were married. It was perhaps a natural progression and our families were pleased, which was an important consideration for us both.

Jim was happy to retire in Akaroa, which was wonderful for I was still very involved with my work. We enlarged my house and the result was brilliant, the new part blending perfectly with the old.

We were married in the spring at Holy Trinity in Lyttelton, the church I had loved so much as a child. Having been recently restored by Miles Warren, it was

Above: 11 August, 1980

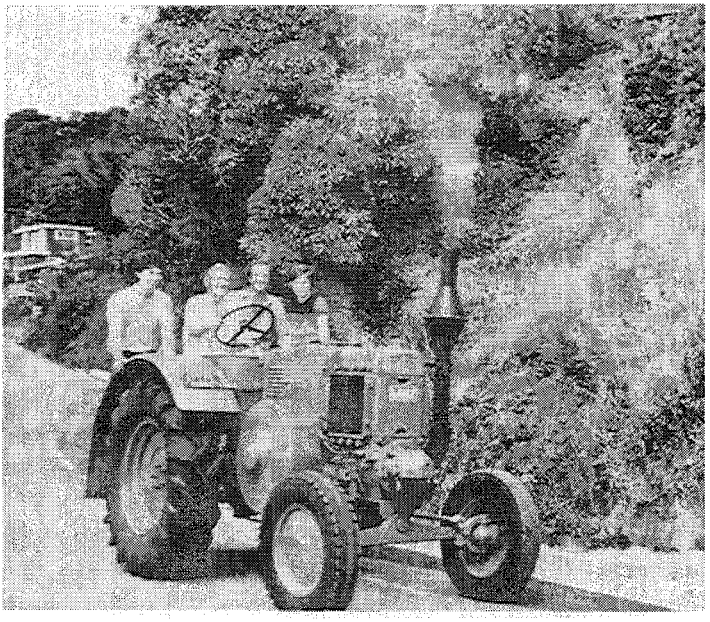
beautiful. Many of our children and grandchildren were there, and the service was simple and lovely. My thoughts travelled back over the years. Yes, everything was there. The eagle still looked disdainfully down from the lectern. No wonder I had said the Lord's Prayer so fervently, for I had always thought the words were, "Deliver us from the eagle". The gleaming corona hung high above the altar, and the murals in the window recesses seemed more vivid. Even the organ had the sound I imagined.

Here we are at the beginning of another era, I thought. We will make it very special.

6

Not long after Jim and I were marrried Mark bought an old tractor. A Lanz Bulldog 1930 model, it was made in Mannheim, Germany. Jim was just as thrilled as Mark and agreed to restore it if Mark bought the parts. He worked for a year or more, and during that time we met enthusiastic members of the Case and Vintage Machinery Club and went to many strange places looking for spare parts. At last it was finished and it looked magnificent.

His new friends persuaded him to take it to a three-



Right: Louis , Jim, Julian and Rebecca.

day rally at Prebbleton where tractors, traction engines and big mills were to be displayed. The Lanz, a single cylinder tractor, designed to run on fish or waste oil, has tremendous personality as it chuffs and puffs along. Jim took two days to get there, breaking the journey at Gebbies Valley with Julian and Rosemary. It was quite an ordeal as its top speed is only 11 mph, and the seat although sprung is hard. But he enjoyed it, as did the people who drew their cars to the side of the road and watched and waved him along.

There was something about that rally, the delightful men who could talk and think of nothing but their vintage machinery, and the tractors and traction engines themselves, who dressed in their best looked just as anxious to please as their masters.

The Lanz is in Stony Bay now and leads a quieter life, but is still greatly loved and admired.

7

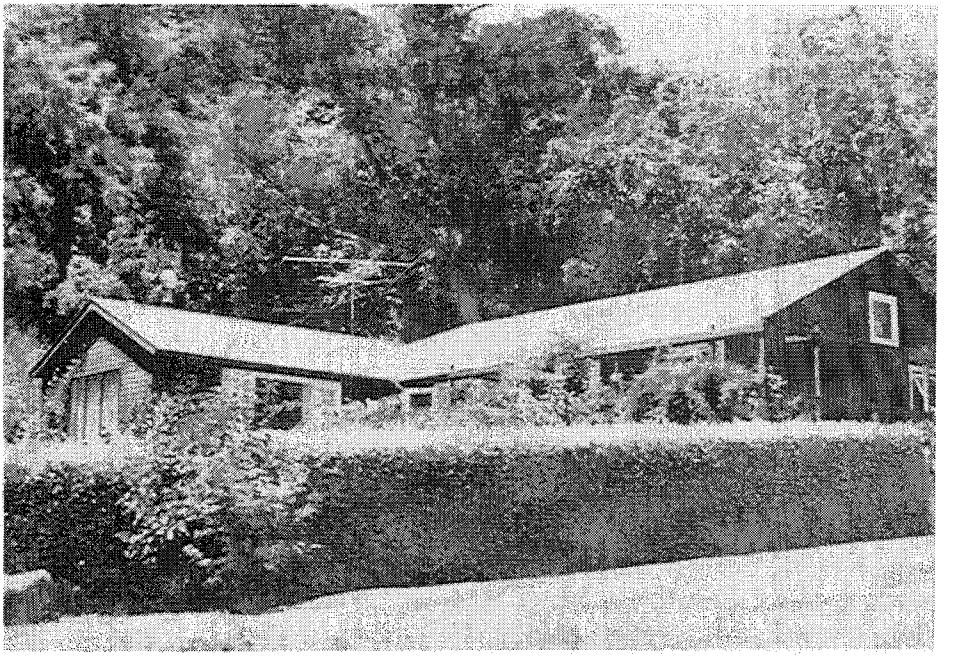
We both loved the garden, and Jim spent months tackling the undergrowth and muhlenbeckia in the bush. As it began to take shape we found new names: the bush became the forest, the creek the river, and the cleared land the orangery, for there we planted citrus.

Hoping to attract more bird life, Jim left the native trees, kawakawa, whitey wood, and added a kauri, a rimu and a totara, and with great care transplanted a six-foot rimu which he moved by Land Rover from Steve Hamilton's home in Christchurch. He made winding paths between the ferns in the forest, planted clusters of violets and wood anemones on the banks, and in spaces where the sun filtered through he planted camelias, fuschias and rhododendrons. Along the way there is now a garden seat which Mark made for us. Covered with a green film of moss it seems part of the foliage.

Jim continued as a member of both the Lincoln and Canterbury University Councils and gradually became involved in the activities of Akaroa, and we began the most wonderful yearly holidays journeying from Cape Reinga in the north to Stewart Island in the south.

In 1980 the lighthouse was moved from Akaroa Heads to near the town, and we were both asked to be on the committee. As there was to be an automated light at the Heads there was no longer any need for a lighthouse and its keepers, and so the immense structure was gifted to Akaroa.

It was an exciting and challenging project. Luckily there were plans which showed it could be cut into three parts, making the tortuous journey possible. A site was chosen, extensive preparations made and at last a date in October chosen. A Titan crane lifted the three pieces onto heavy trucks, and in convoy they drove slowly over the steep narrow road. To make it even more hazardous snow fell that day, but all went well and by nightfall it was on the new site. My task was to do much of the display inside and I found it fascinating. After many letters to Scotland I discovered Craig Mair who had just finished a book, *A Star for Seamen,* a story of the Stevenson family, who for five generations had designed



Above: Our enlarged house, 1984.

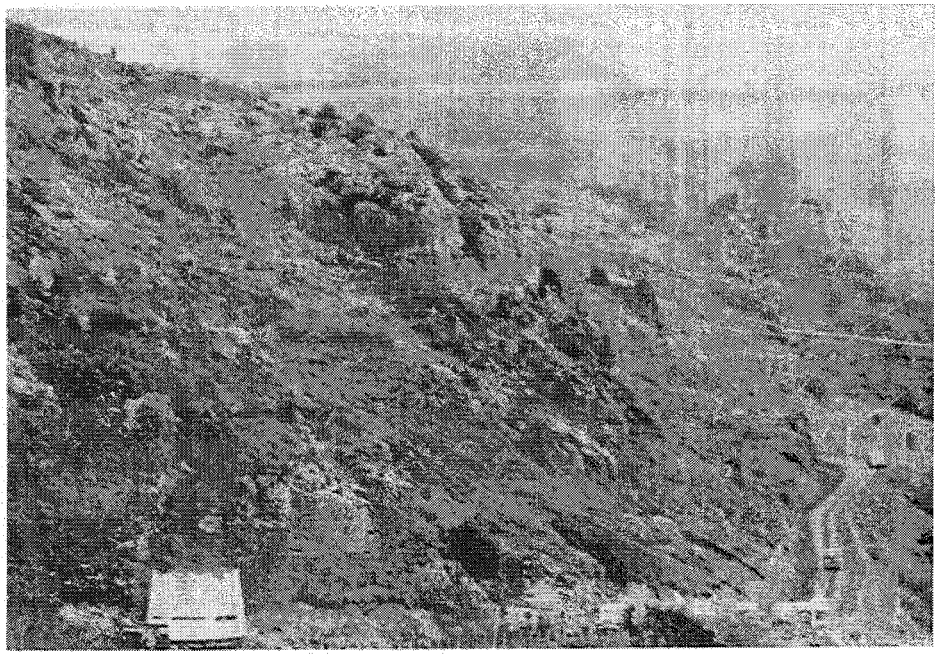
lighthouses all over the world, among them our lighthouse. We corresponded and I was able to get all the information I needed. The men worked tirelessly. There was a great deal of restoration and painting to do and finally the landscaping.

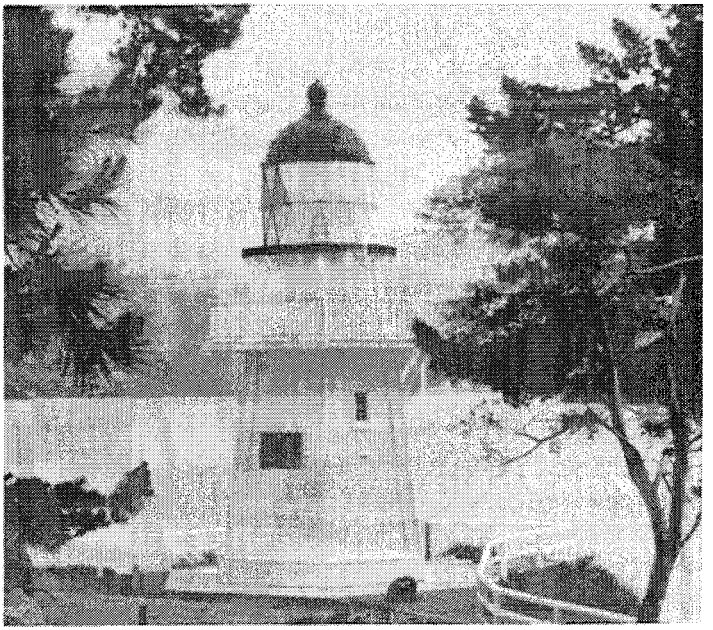
It looked magnificent and was opened in November 1981.

8

1981 was an exciting year. With the inclusion of the Information Centre at the museum, we now had a staff of two. Jeanne Wendelborn was appointed and it was wonderful to share the work load with her.

Not long after Jeanne's appointment Steve Lowndes and Lisa Potts, who had been travelling in South America arrived in Akaroa. They were expecting a baby, decided to stay, and a year later bought "Togidre", a small farm in Grehan Valley. Steve, needing work, came to help with our house extensions and we became





Above: The journey from the Heads.

Left: The restored Lighthouse.

friends. Julian was born and they settled happily. During their wanderings Steve had taken all kinds of jobs, and as a result his skills were many and varied, but what interested me most was his degree in fine arts and his love of history. After he had done some free-lance work for new displays, I was convinced he was the right person to succeed me as curator. But how? I must first persuade the Museum Board and the County Council that the museum, which had grown so much should soon become professional, and with a salary to match.

With a change in government and radical new fiscal policies, there were few job opportunities and much unemployment. But various government-funded and subsidised schemes came into existence and we qualified for an assistant. And so Steve came to work for two years.

Now there were three of us on the staff and our progress was brilliant.

By 1987, after several years of hard work and persuasion my dream came true. The Museum Board was dissolved. We became a standing committee of the County Council and we had professional status.

As I watched the sea of faces at my wonderful farewell I felt a real sense of achievement, and after thirteen years very happy to retire.

Now, as I near the end of my story, Steve has been curator for three years and the museum goes from strength to strength. Jeanne is stiil there and I too play a small part, being a member of the new Board and President of The Friends.

9

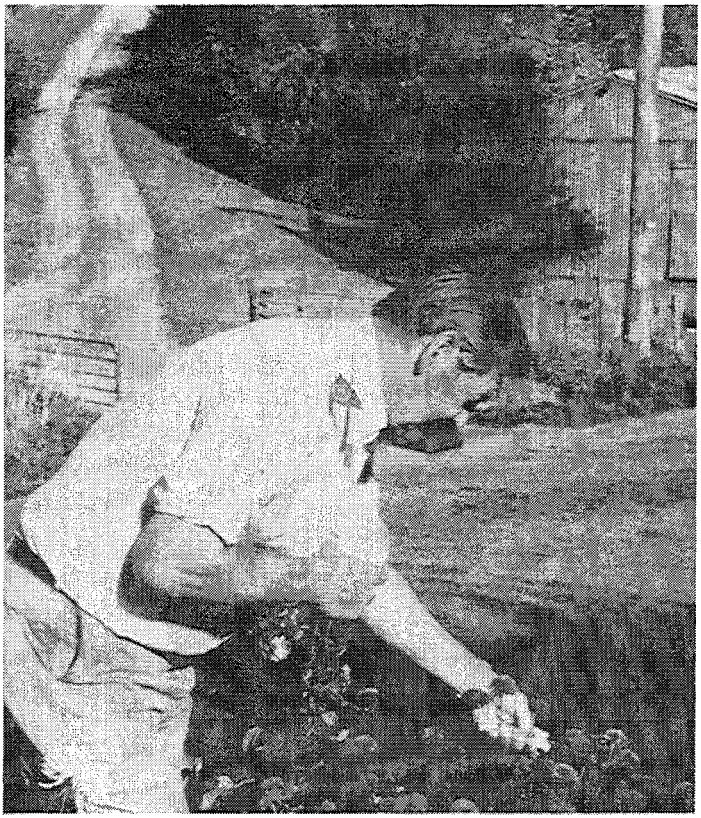
My forever faithful friend Steve grew very old. At fifteen, she was deaf and so full of arthritis that unless I was somewhere near she felt insecure. I was her whole world and I never ceased to wonder at her love and devotion.

But the time came that I dreaded most. One summer's day we sat together under the silver birches. Our friend the vet had given me a tranquillising pill for her, and after she grew drowsy he crept in and gave her an

Left: Picnic at Stony Bay. Steve is old now. With us are Felicity, Caroline, Annabel and Alison.

injection. She scarcely knew he was there. That evening Jim and I buried her in a grave scattered with rose petals Now a beautiful buddleia, the favourite food of Monarch butterflies grows there.

Jim, remembering the Monarchs in Auckland where he lived as a child, felt sure we could establish them here. All we needed were plenty of swan plants. The following year when the swan plants were thriving I spent a week with Pippi and the family in Nelson, and armed with a butterfly net and a special box I was commissioned to bring home as many Monarchs as I could find. I guess I looked comical and decidedly odd to passers-by as I flitted through the Cathedral grounds trying to snare these elusive creatures. I came home very proudly with a male and a female. I don't think they reproduced but it was a beginning, for friends sent us caterpillars in boxes, and when later we had too many Jim sent them to Dunedin, to Judy Egerton, his Monarch



Right: Jim and the Monarchs.

friend and mentor.

They have over-wintered here for several years now and in many other parts of Canterbury, but, says Jim, if we fail to keep up their food supply they will quickly disappear.

With their beautiful colouring, their empathy with people and their graceful movement in flight, we feel privileged and delighted that they are happy to settle so far south.

10

In March 1987 Jim had his seventieth birthday. Unbeknown to him, his family arranged a party. Keeping the secret was not easy, and finding a reason for being in Christchurch at 5 pm on 11 March was even more difficult. But although suspicious, he was overwhelmed when he saw the sea of faces waiting to welcome him. It was a wonderful party, followed by a family dinner.

We talked about it for weeks afterwards.

As Humphrey and Kate lived in Sydney, and Pippi in Nelson, I knew my seventieth birthday in June could not match Jim's. But to my amazement and great joy who should march in single file though our door, singing "Happy Birthday" but Tony, Pippi, Humphrey, Mark and Kate, followed by Sonni and Naomi. And they carried flowers, presents, a birthday cake, the dinner and champagne.

Jim had kept the secret well.

Their day had been busy. Tony had met the Sydney and Nelson planes late in the morning, and they had driven to Akaroa where Sonni and Mark were preparing the birthday dinner at a motel. They hadn't been together for years, and I think it was a miracle that they managed to gather themselves and their lovely gifts and arrive here soon after 6 pm.

Quite overwhelmed, I shall never forget that magic time. We were still having dinner at midnight. In between courses we sang from the treasured Blue Book, the favourite song book of our Stony Bay days, and the house rang with our fun and laughter.

We talked of the long-ago days, of Vern and all he meant to us. We talked of the present and we hoped for the future.

For me, with Jim at my side, this was the culmination of all my years.

14 FEBRUARY 1990.