

SOME THOUGHTS ON ILLAWARRA

Joan Darke



Family

Grandfather Eastoe was George Eastoe. His wife was Jane, and their family was Arthur, Nell, Flo, Fred, Bob, Agnes, Jessie and Elsie.

Arthur married Kathleen Nevin, and their family was Gwen, Nancy, Dorothy, Jack, Joan and Kathleen.

Gwen married Alan Rosier of Ringarooma, and their family was Marie, Peter, Alan and Jenny.

Nancy married Le von Bibra, and their family was Janice, Robert and Kaye. After Le's death, Nancy remarried, to Viv Roper.

Dorothy married Fred Brewer, and their family was Kevin, Ruth and Trevor. Kevin was killed in the Vietnam War. Dorothy was divorced, and married Trevor Badcock.

Jack married Billie Mills, and their family was Christopher, Judith and Helen.

Joan married Cyril Darke, and their family was Julie, Sue, Keith and Jan.

Kathleen married Bevan Carins, and their family was Nigel, Andrea, Dianna and Rosalie.

My mother's parents' farm was called "Forest Lodge". Grandma always had a live-in lady help who had a son called Louis. Mrs Hawke was very deaf, so Louis always shouted loudly.

Granda Nevin built his own home and was one of the first in the district to own a bathroom. It had black and white checked lino. I remember a large white basin and jug. My best memories are of a golden brown velvet cloth on the dining-room table with an amber coloured vase with Iceland poppies from Grandma's garden. In front of the mantelpiece hung a wide strip of black velvet on which white swans had been painted. There was a grandfather clock, and on the sideboard were two decanters. We were always offered a drink from these -- one had pineapple and one raspberry made from Bradbury's cordial extract.

I can't write much about Dad's parents, as I can't remember Ma, and I can just remember Da as a dark, tall, bearded man.

Life at Springfield

The first home of Arthur and Kathleen was at "Mimosa", opposite Christ Church Illawarra. Later they moved to "Springfield". There was a small weatherboard house

to commence with, but later Mr Stokes built a new section which was about an inch higher than the other part. I can recall tripping many times. Jack slept on an open sleep-out on the front veranda. Later, on, a section was built on the side of the house by a Mr Garcia. This provided Jack with a bedroom, us with a bathroom, and the in-between part was a large veranda.

Bathing prior to this time was a once-a-week event. The copper was lit, and the bath was an oval iron tub (also used for scalding pigs when killed). The youngest was bathed first in front of the fire, then the next eldest, etc., until we were all tucked up in bed and mother and father had their turn.

Washing day was always on a Monday, and took all day. There was an old wash-house, where our mother laboured over a wooden or glass washing board. The soap was hard to raise a lather with, as she made it herself.

The copperhouse was outside. It had a large draining board. The clothes were lifted out with a pine stick after being well boiled, on to the draining board. The clothes were well rinsed, starched and blued. Our clothes line was a few hundred yards away, out in the paddock. I remember many times on a windy day, the heart-breaking experience for my mother when the prop slipped. The washing all fell down in the dirt, and had to be done again.

One of the chores which my mother would have done was bread-making.

Mother made our bread until I was about ten. She mixed the flour, yeast and potato water into a dough. She placed the dough in a large tin dish near the fire to rise. After tea, she punched the dough for about half an hour, then covered the dish for the night. Next morning, the dough was knocked down again, cut into about six pieces, kneaded into loaves and placed in a large tin baking dish. The loaves were glazed with milk and pricked with a fork. Once again, they were placed on the hearth to rise. When they filled the dish, they were cooked. We often ate small sections of raw dough fried, and they were delicious.

My mother kept a lot of geese which usually nested in the gorse hedge. I have seen my mother down on her knees, checking the eggs for hatching. A gander would sneak up and attack my unsuspecting mother by flying on to her back and belting her with its wings. Mother suffered many blood-poisoned fingers as a result of thorns from the gorse.

At Christmas time, the geese were killed. One member of the family scalded a goose in the copper, the next member carried it to the old house next door wrapped in a bag to steam the feathers. The rest of the family sat around in the room with bags over their knees to pluck the geese. My mother would take the insides out, which was called drawing the geese. They were then trussed into shape, and were ready for my father to deliver them to Launceston, as we had many orders to fill.

Prunes were made by collecting the purple plums from the plum hedges. They were split open and dried in the sun on large old binder sieves. When they were dry, they were sprinkled with sugar and placed in airtight tins for the winter roly-polies.

Butter making was a very hard chore. I think Thursday was usually churning day. The cream was emptied from the large cream-can into a cherry-wood churn. I was often asked to sit on the top of the churn as it jumped around when my mother turned the handle. Sometimes my mother would churn for hours if the cream was too hot or too cold. If the cream was cold, she added a little boiling water. I was always so pleased when I heard "splish splosh" as I knew the butter had come. The buttermilk was tipped off and saved. The butter was well washed and turned on to a marble slab. To get the water out, you threw the butter down on to the marble. Salt was added at this stage. Two wooden pats were used to fill a wooden box, and when the block was released, it weighed a pound. The butter was wrapped in butter paper. The butter was sold in Herd's Mart in Launceston, along with eggs and dressed poultry. This money paid for our groceries.

If you sold butter, Dairy Inspectors came around to inspect the dairies. Everything had to be white-washed out with calcium.

Sauce, pickles and jam were made in large quantities, as we were a large family.

I can remember my mother making sauce in the copper.

Soap making was another chore. The dripping was saved from the cooking of meat, caustic soda was added, and it was placed in the copper and boiled for a long time. It was allowed to set in the copper, then cut into long bars. For soap for personal use, rose-water was added.

Mother was a good cook. One particular recipe stands out in my mind. She took apples from the tree and minced them, then she added sugar, cinnamon and currants and put it in the baking dish with short pastry underneath and on top.

The horses had to be clipped to keep them cool, and I think to prevent the bot-fly which laid eggs on the horses. One day, my mother, who had long hair down to her waist, had just washed her hair. She was turning the handle of the little clipping machine, when the wind blew her hair into the cogs, and wound her head down on to the machine with a bang. Her hair had to be cut off as it was the only way to release her.

Rats would take our baby ducklings, so we drove them into an old tank with a door for the night.

The oak tree was used to hang the meat up in a new chaff bag. The meat was drawn up on a pulley. You pulled one rope to take it up, and the other to bring it down. Magpies lived in the oak tree, and warbled early in the morning.

The wireless was our main entertainment. We listened to many serials, day and night. Favourites were Dad and Dave, Martin's Corner, Hunchback of Notre Dame, Big Sister and Blue Hills.

Shearing

Dad was a shearer. In his early days, he went to the mainland to shear. I accompanied him to the shearing shed at Illawarra every day. The men used to tease me by threatening to throw me up into the woolpress.

Mr Boyes owned the shearing shed, and many people's sheep were shorn there by my father and a cousin, Alf Wise. Dad owned a two-stand shearing plant, which was a lot quicker and better than the blades. Blades were still used on many stud sheep, as the sheep were not so likely to be cut. Mr Boyes would open his wooden cupboard and take out a tin of sardines which he shared with me, to have with my sandwiches.

Harvesting

Harvesting was a very important time in our lives. We often helped with the stooking. You took the sheaves and stood them up in a stook. The grain crops were cut by binders, strippers or mowers. When the grain had been allowed to dry in the sun, a wagon drawn by horses came along. One man on the ground with a pitchfork pitched the sheaves up to the man on the wagon, who stacked them carefully so the load wouldn't slip off. Back to the yard we returned on top of the load. Timber was placed on the ground, and one man pitched down while the other man placed the sheaves to build either an oblong or round stack. When the stack was complete, the top was thatched by folding over a bunch of straw and securing it with thatch pegs.

When peas were grown in small quantities, they were cut with a mower. A man followed the mower with a pitchfork and rolled them into heaps or windrows. The peas were left in the paddock to dry. They were loaded onto a wagon and were taken back to the farm yard. They were placed on a large tarpaulin and beaten with a flail or a stick and a half. A flail was a six foot stick and a three foot stick joined together with two linking pieces of leather. The straw would be picked up and the peas bagged and

taken to a hand drum called a winnower. You turned a handle, the sieves shook, and a blower blew out the dust.

Large pea crops were harvested by a drum driven by a steam engine. I loved the times when the steam engines came. I can still remember the smell. The owners had the engines working beautifully, and every decorative piece was gleaming. My father carted wood all day for the furnace in the belly of these big steam monsters. He also carted water in a small tank -- a large black pipe used to suck the water out of the tank and into the engine to make the steam.

Katie and I played on the bags of grain and would run our hands through the grain and eat some. We watched the man stitch up the bags with a coarse white cotton. He made an ear on each side of the bag to make them easy to handle.

Chores

My job was to produce lunch. It usually consisted of a boiled egg.

Sparrows were stripping our crops, so Jack and I were set the job of climbing ladders and taking eggs or young birds from the thatched end of the old dutch barn.

We fed out to the cattle on many a frosty morning from the float (a low cart) with

bales of hay. We cut the strings and allowed sections of hay to fall out for the cattle.

Another chore was to go with Jack to hoe thistles in the eighty-acre paddock, or pull mustard. We took a couple of lands each, and covered the whole paddock. Our pay would be two shillings each. We could do quite a lot with two shillings, as lollies were eight a penny, and icecream and iceblocks were a penny each.

The rabbits used to eat our crops, so every year we used to take a piece of bike tyre nailed to a stick, light it, then push it under every gorse bush on the hill behind the house until we had the whole hill blazing. I didn't like to hear the trapped animals squealing. If you were unlucky enough to get a drip of hot rubber on you, it was very painful.

Jack

My brother Jack was my mate. He had five sisters, so I always played with him. We played a lot of cricket, and he became very angry when my sneaky underarms bowled him out. Jack was ingenious at building billy carts. I always had to have a ride. We started at the top of the hill, on the right hand side of the house. We gained speed, just managing to negotiate the right-angled bend at the bottom, and missing the dairy under the old oak tree by inches.

Jack used to encourage me to climb the pine tree in the back yard. I was fine while I was going up, but many times I had to be helped down.

One of our favourite games was to walk up the ditches in our gumboots and collect the coloured clay which we found there. We used this clay for modelling.

We attended church every Sunday morning. One day, Jack, Katie and I were kneeling at the altar rail, when Jack was bringing his wafer up to his mouth. He breathed through his nose and the wafer shot up in the air. He tried to catch it. The result was convulsive giggles from us all.

One day, when Jack was about ten, some workmen put him on a large draught horse. It immediately bucked him off. He went way up in the air, and was winded when he hit the ground. I was so scared as I thought he was dead when he lay there so still. He soon woke up, but yelled with the pain.

Jack was always very clever at Maths, and when he attended the Launceston Technical College his marks were always in the nineties. I was not so clever at Maths, and he spent hours helping me at night when I was attending High School.

Jack joined the light horse regiment prior to the war. It was a Sunday morning, when my mother asked me to take the communion box up to the church. I was hurrying, as I was anxious to see Jack and his horse off on the train at Longford. I jumped a small ditch through what I thought was an empty panel. Unbeknown to me, there was one piece of barbed wire across the top. I tore my nose open on the barbed wire -- I suppose I was lucky it didn't blind me.

When I was standing on the platform at the station, Colonel Dumaresq, who was inspecting the horses, turned to me and said: "I hope you didn't get too near to Jack's horse, Joan". Little did he know he caused it with his strand of barbed wire.

Jack had a motor bike with a sidecar, and he had a nasty accident. He rode too close to some bushes. He turned over into the hedge with the sidecar on top of him. He virtually broke his neck without severing the spinal chord. He was plastered from the top of his head to his hips. There was a hole on the top of his head from which his hair grew out. He insisted upon working on the tractor. When he came in at night, he was very itchy. Katie and I used to put a piece of towelling on a long rod. We asked him to lean forward -- we then washed, dried and powdered him and he said it was wonderful.

Local Characters

There were many memorable personalities at Illawarra over the years.

There was an old gypsy lady called Mrs Bungeye Brown who came regularly through our district with a horse and dray. She would have tin billies hanging under the cart and sold clothes pegs made from willow sticks.

Good pegs.

My mother always gave her a leg of mutton as she was afraid she might return at night and burn down our home.

There was an ex-convict, Ghostie Downs, from Ringarooma. Dad used to tell us he saw him camped in the river bed with Mrs Brown. Katie and I were sleeping the night on the front veranda. Dad and Mum's window in their bedroom was open above our heads. Dad said "I saw Ghostie Downs down by the river today." We picked up our bedding and bundled back inside for the night!

The three old bachelor Irishmen called Teddy, Freddy and Johnny Smith stand out in my memory. They owned a cherry orchard. You were always made very welcome

-- but as they shared their home with numerous dogs and pigs it certainly wasn't very hygienic. They were very polite to everyone's face, but I believe they had a nickname for every adult in the district. I believe my father was "Big nosed Dickenson", while my mother was "The Princess". I believe when you were offered a cup of tea, the cup would be black with fly-spots. They didn't ever bath, so when one of them ate with us at harvest time, Katie and I would spend the afternoon scrubbing the chair.

There was another old man who lived alone called Dan McCloud. He had a huge white beard and wore bowyangs (strings tied around the leg below the knee).

Mr Boyes from Esk Farm was an Englishman and resembled King George V. He annoyed me by calling his men by their surnames, and did the same to my dad.

I was always amazed at Colonel Dumaresq, who preached as a lay reader on Sunday, and swore so fluently at his dogs on Monday.

Fires and Floods

When I was at state school, I remember coming out one day to see the sky black with smoke. It was almost dark at three o'clock in the afternoon. Every possible man was out fighting the fires in the bush which surrounded our district. The women

were kept very busy sending out food and large cream cans full of cold tea. I don't remember anyone losing their lives or homes.

In 1929 Tasmania suffered from severe flooding after months of rain. The whole of the Pateena district was covered by flood waters. Only the tops of the two-storey houses were showing above the water. Many of our friends remained in their homes.

On a Sunday morning we walked down to Rocky Cape, where we witnessed whole haystacks floating by with live animals on them. When the flood waters receded we saw furniture caught in the hawthorn hedges. Everywhere was very smelly. A large part of Invermay was covered by the floods. Large flood levees have since been built, so this should not happen again.

One family who lived at the Tannery at Longford had the misfortune to have the flood-waters enter their home at night. They took a flatiron and a chisel and climbed on to the table and the cupboard, then cut a hole in the iron and climbed out on to the roof. They were rescued next morning by a boat.

Further memories, added August 2009

When I was five, we went to school in the old church Rectory at Illawarra. It was a bluestone building, same as the church next door. If there was a wedding we were allowed to go and watch.

When the inspectors came with a horse and cart, they put the horse in the old stable out the back. The building had many rooms, and a large room used for a

classroom. In the large room upstairs we played on wet days where we could run around so much we could make the building sway. It couldn't have been too safe, as it had large buttresses around the bottom of the walls. It has all been demolished now but the church is still there with its beautiful stained glass windows – placed there in memory of families who always attended church services.

We walked a mile to school and I can still remember having chilblains on my toes and fingers which itched like mad when you were warm in the classroom. As my Dad mucked out the stable -- there was a heap of manure at the back of it. As a cure for the chilblains we used to dig a hole in the manure heap and place a board and sit with our bare feet in the hot manure. It was rather drastic, but it worked!!

Going back to the school, there were only about fourteen children. We sat at a long desk about 8 feet in length and had slates and at first used chalk then later we had an inkwell and had to learn copy plate writing. I remember if we put a flower in the inkwell it changed colour.

Our teacher Miss Norris rode a motorbike and one day she knocked over a student with her bike. If Miss Harris (sic.) hadn't arrived by 8.30 am we would declare a holiday and all go home for the day.

Living near a busy road, one of our main occupations was putting an attractively dressed parcel on the road. A passing vehicle (usually a horse and cart) would stop to retrieve the parcel, but after the time it took the driver to stop and look back along the road, the parcel would disappear. We were hiding behind the hedge and retrieved the

parcel with an attached string. If anyone had had the pleasure of opening a parcel they would have found a valuable item such as a dirty old rabbit's foot!!!

Bonfires were one of our great social events. One of the farmers would agree to burn a straw stack. We would dress a Guy Forks figure and put it on the top. Then we lit the fire and set off fireworks -- such as rockets, jack jumpers, tom thumbs, Catherine wheels and flower pots. I was always sacred, so I spent the evening well out in the paddock.

Once when I was enjoying a holiday with my grandparents (Nevin) my granddad had used a very sharp adze to carve a tree trunk into a stock trough for the animals to get a drink and he left the adze on the woodheap. I loved chopping so I picked it up and gave a big chop on a small piece of wood. I accidentally cut my instep severely – to my horror blood was squirting out. I was wrapped in a blanket and taken to the doctor at Longford. I afterwards spent six weeks on crutches.

While staying at Grandma Nevin's place, where there were four of our aunties, we children had to share the bed and sleep at the other end and during the night we received many a kick!!

An old lady of the district was called Mrs. "Bungeye" Brown who was a hawker with an old horse and cart. She would have many tin billies which she made for sale hanging under the cart. She also made pegs about six inches long by cutting off a willow branch and splitting one end, the other would be bound with a tin ring. They were wonderful pegs, which the farmers' wives bought. My mother was scared

Bungeye would come back at night and burn our house to the ground, so mum kept in her good books by giving her a whole leg of mutton for her troubles.

We had an open fire with a big black kettle over it. My mother was taking water from the kettle when she tripped and poured water over Katie's feet and ankles. Katie was a delicate child. I was walking home from school when I noticed my mother carrying Katie over the paddock in her arms – I saw the stark white features of my mother and knew that something terrible had happened. It has been said that barley sugar saved Katie's life during her difficult recovery.

Our mother was at a meeting in Carrick; Jack who was always full of bright ideas decided it would be good to have a nice welcoming fire for mum on her return. We split a whole kerosene box into sticks – piled them on the open fire in the lounge room and set light to it. The fire roared up the chimney and set the chimney alight. When mum returned home she couldn't believe her eyes as the hearth was covered in a wet mess and the carpet square was rolled up in the back of the room.

Both Jack and I walked in our sleep. I remember one night we had visitors and we were all sitting around in the lounge when Jack came in sleep walking, chose himself a book and returned to bed. Next day he knew nothing about it.

A very exciting day happened when Katie and I were playing jumps in the front paddock when we noticed some of the circus animals were travelling along the Illawarra Road on their way to Westbury for their next show.

We had a happy and good life at "Springfield" Illawarra with a large family of six

and a very loving mum and dad.