CHAPTER 15

HOUSEHOLDS

PATRICIA GRIMSHAW AND JOHN LACK

MOST AUSTRALIANS considered a family of husband, wife and children in a home of their own to be the most natural way to live, the proper goal for couples marrying and the best environment for bringing up children. About 60 per cent of households contained families of this kind, with the average family having two or three children. Households including aunts, uncles, grandparents or servants made up another 20 per cent of the total: a smaller proportion of such households than there had been in Australia in 1888. Single people, or people separated, divorced or widowed, headed the remaining 20 per cent of households.

Few newlyweds could afford to buy a home of their own and most rented accommodation or lived with one set of parents. Wealthy households sometimes had live-in servants; households struggling to make ends meet often took in boarders. In both country and city, keeping boarders was a common resort for widows, particularly those with young children, and farming households often included young relatives who lived with the family while learning the routines of farm life.

Paid servants might or might not be part of the family. In very rich households servants wore uniforms, lived in separate quarters and used the language of deference. Among the less wealthy, households sometimes included a maid with a separate bedroom; she wore no uniform and lived as one of the family. Large country properties employed a labour force graded according to status. There were outbuildings for labourers and transient workers and a house for the manager, but jackeroos might be taken in as part of the family. Such distinctions generally disappeared on more modest holdings, where young workers were often drawn from other farms in the district; workers usually ate with the family and slept in closed-in verandahs or sleepouts close to the house. The cost of their 'keep' was part of their pay.

In most households, having no servants or live-in relatives, the wife was responsible for domestic work and management. Yet wives did not 'work';

husbands were by definition breadwinners. The man provided; the woman kept house. The *Women's weekly* declared that

> the true sphere of the average Australian woman is the home ... More and more the world needs homes presided over by humane, well-informed women with an intelligent grasp of the great social movements of the day. Such women are the very props of civilisation.

Usually only needy families tolerated a wife working outside the home, and the consequent sense of failure in an unemployed or partly employed husband could corrode family relations. Childless couples appear to have adjusted most easily to the idea of a wife in paid employment, although when a couple had one or two children of school age and had not achieved an important material goal, such as home ownership, the wife might go out to work part-time or take in work. Wives who did work often protected their jobs by concealing their married state. Ideally the husband worked, brought home his pay packet and kept work troubles to himself while the wife coped with the trials of the home. Breadwinners were not to be disturbed at night by telephones, sick children or waking babies.

This advertisement for Clyde Lawnmowers suggested that the man of the house could propel his machine with one finger while smoking a pipe. Australian garden lover, *1 Jan 1938.*

Although only rich families could afford full-time servants, other families did have regular part-time assistance with the washing, possibly with the ironing and occasionally with the gardening. Working-class families might employ a washerwoman or ironing lady in times of domestic stress, such as the weeks after childbirth or when the wife was ill, although even then such households were more likely to depend on help from relatives and neighbours.

Work and school gave home life its basic rhythms. Men did contribute to household work, particularly on Sundays, doing recognisably 'men's work'. The suburban husband usually brought in the milk, put out the garbage, cut firewood, carried water, mended the bicycle, washed the windows, mowed the lawn and planted the garden. Women also did heavy physical work, but not outside. 'The inside of the home is mine', a wife would say, 'the outside is his'. Except in emergencies, and then only for short periods, most husbands did not cook, sew, sweep or shop for perishables, or bath, mind or entertain babies and young children. At most a husband with a young family might bath, dress and read to the children on his return from work before or after the evening meal—'tea' for most people, 'dinner' for a few. On the weekend he might help hang out a big wash. Ethel Watkin, a mother of ten whose husband was a customs inspector in Coburg, Melbourne, thought him 'kind' although he

> wasn't much good at looking after children. He was all right while I was there, but a lot depended on me. I had to work by the clock every minute. My husband would get home at twenty to six ... his tea was always ready. He wanted his meal when he came in. I would have the children fed up to their sweets when Dad came in ... I could give him his dinner, and then I'd have mine. I'd have a baby this side [of me] on the high chair, and I'd be feeding her. Sometimes I had a baby on my knee too. I could never have a meal in peace. But ... I accepted what I had to do [although I] felt tired and weary sometimes.

In the country, too, where home and work were close, men seldom did inside work. Mary Young, a dairy farmer's wife from Young in southern New South Wales, explains that

> The men didn't help ... inside, because they were too jolly busy outside. See, a good wife hurled him out to get at his work ... because there was so much to do ... If your husband was a good husband he brought the wood over; if he was a poor husband you had to cut it yourself.

Left. Vic Wolski at his parents' home, a farm near Toowoomba. Right. Dorothy Krause in Laurel Bank Park, Toowoomba.
V. WOLSKI, 1938 COLLECTION

The differences between men's work and women's work were less pronounced in country households, however, because women did involve themselves in work outside the home. On the Youngs' dairy farm, Mary said,

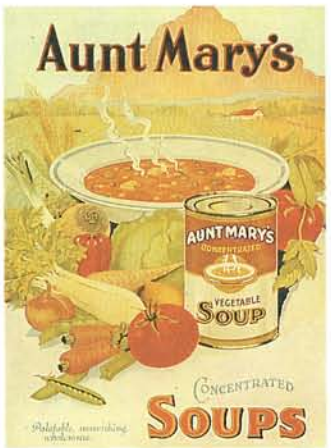
> We worked together. You can't do it any other way. I don't think any farmer could make a go of it . . . unless the wife was willing to co-operate and do all she could . . . You just took it as a natural course of events that you got up early and went and milked in all weather.

Men directed the outside work and undertook the heavy labour alongside adult sons or paid help. They usually decided what to sow or what animals to buy, and when to start new jobs or do maintenance on buildings, dams, gates and fences. On their farm at Gowrie Flat near Toowoomba in Queensland, Vic Wolski's father found a way of doing everything, even greenhide work. Nobody went to a barber, and Vic's memories of work around the farm are that

> we practically did most jobs, we did them all ourselves bar just some of the main, bigger jobs, cutting tyres on wheels, and shrinking the tyres back on wheels like that, we always used to take them to a blacksmith, the rest we always managed one way or the other ourselves.

Vic made little distinction between men and women in his understanding of this co-operative labour. When he proposed marriage to his nineteen-year-old sweetheart, Dorothy Krause, who was employed by Vic's brother as a household help and dairy hand, he made this clear. 'You are only working for somebody now', he said, 'you come and work for me, and it'll be for yourself!' Women and children could help with dipping stock, feeding pigs, turning hay, running chooks, milking, mustering, carting wheat and fruit, grooming horses and cooking for workers. On fruit blocks they picked, spread, shook racks, boxed fruit, pruned and irrigated.

Advertisement, Guide to the suburbs, *Sydney 1938.*



Advertisement, BP magazine, *1 June 1938.*

Housework was hard, especially where houses had no electricity or where water had to be carted from tanks or wells, making laundry and cleaning and bathing children heavy chores. Even in cities and towns with piped water, sewerage and electricity, the absence of running hot water and labour-saving devices still made it tiring to prepare meals, bath children and clean houses. Moreover, the ideology of housewifery, proclaimed by the wireless, magazines and daily papers, could easily turn housework into a fetish even in the best equipped homes.

The spacious and well-appointed homes of the rich demanded liberal home help. Even they sometimes lacked wall-to-wall carpets, vacuum cleaners, refrigerators or laundry hot water services. The kitchen was the best equipped service room, usually containing an ice chest or Coolgardie safe, hot running water, sink, benches and cupboards, and a fire or gas stove. House cleaning required a duster, mop, carpet sweeper and straw broom on a mosaic of surfaces: carpet squares and rugs surrounded by polished boards in the main living rooms and master bedrooms, carpet runner or Feltex in the hallway, lino and rugs in the other bedrooms and the kitchen. Mistresses rarely worked in the laundry, which therefore remained spartan, with just a fire or gas copper, a trough, a scrubbing board, and perhaps a mangle or hand-wringer. It was a place for tough washerwomen, often women impoverished by widowhood, spinsterhood, desertion or a husband's drinking.

Such laundries—'wash-houses' to the working classes—were common to most homes, but in other ways domestic facilities differed greatly. Only the poorest homes lacked running water, yet even these could inspire affection. Alice Croft lived with her parents and brothers and sister in an old, cracked, leaking five-roomed home in Fitzroy in Melbourne. The bath was upstairs, water had to be carried up in buckets, and 'by the time you got the second bucket of water upstairs, the first ... would be gone, run out'. Yet she remembers being 'very happy there, and [having] ... wonderful times in that old house—it nearly broke our hearts when we had to get out of it' when it was sold in 1938.

Serving breakfast, preparing cut-lunches, cooking a big evening meal, feeding and washing young children, making beds and cleaning were the constant chores of housekeeping. There was no respite unless daughters were old enough to help more than hinder. In large families authority and responsibility developed quickly in the older children, and young girls were soon bathing and dressing younger brothers and sisters, minding the baby and going on errands. Thus were they introduced to homemaking. Women without domestic helpers, especially if they had young children or large families, had little opportunity to move outside the house, but many wives rarely needed to. In established suburbs milk and bread were delivered daily, ice and groceries once or twice a week, vegetables, meat and fish as often as required. Where such services were available, only the fussiest housewives with time to spare insisted on shopping personally for perishables. In suburbs where grocers, fishmongers, butchers and 'fruitos' did not come to the door, someone went to the corner store, generally an older child running 'the messages', or mum, dressed to go out, with young children in tow or in a pram. Shopping was a precise, calculated exercise—and not just for people obliged to count pennies and shillings. Little food was precooked or tinned or packaged, and perishable food was bought in small quantities as required, especially in summer. Even so, considerable effort went into storing bread, cakes, biscuits, sugar, eggs and other groceries, each in its own crock, tin or jar.

An orderly home gave housewives a sense of purpose and achievement in an exhausting and sometimes boring daily routine. Monday was washing day. 'Personals' might be washed throughout the week and babies' nappies daily. But the big wash of bedlinen and towels, underwear, shirts and outer clothing was a

Slum housing at Erskineville, Sydney. Some of the drudgery was taken out of household chores for Mrs T. Bates when, just before Christmas, she and her husband and their 18-month old baby moved into one of the 56 new flats in seven blocks built on part of Erskineville Park by the state government. The flats all had kitchens and bathrooms with hot and cold running water, separate toilets and built-in cupboards. Each block had a special 'garage' for 'perambulators'. Pix, *7 Jan 1939.*

MAGAZINE PROMOTIONS

full day's work, which is why women who could afford to often employed others to do it. The copper had to be filled and lit, the clothes immersed, boiled, and removed with a copperstick for rinsing, blueing, wringing and pegging on the clothesline. Very dirty clothes had to be soaked overnight in preparation for the copper and rubbed vigorously on the scrubbing board; collars and cuffs had to be soaped and rubbed, whites and colours blue-rinsed. Afterwards, copper fires had to be raked, dirty water baled out and carried to the gully trap or used on the garden, and the copper scoured and vinegared clean. The Monday wash was probably the most onerous of all household tasks.

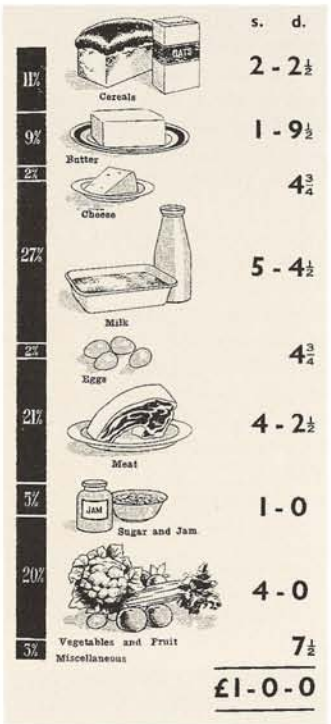
Tuesday was ironing and airing day: blanket and sheet on the kitchen table, iron and clotheshorse at the ready. Almost everything was dampened, starched and ironed. Wednesday and Thursday were for sewing, darning, jam making or letter writing; Friday involved preparations for the weekend. Stores were laid up and perhaps shopping for clothes or furniture done. Friday or Saturday were house cleaning and baking days: rugs were beaten and floors swept, and scones, biscuits, cakes and sponges cooked for Sunday lunch and tea.

Country women, especially, preserved food. They might fill two hundred bottles of fruit a year, make jams and pickles, and grow vegetables for keeping as well as fresh for the table. Often they baked their own bread, scones and cakes, laboured to turn an everlasting supply of mutton and rabbit into palatable roasts and stews, produced big breakfasts of eggs and chops, and made desserts of stewed fruit with custard or milk pudding, and teas of cold meat and bread with jam or dripping. They kept chooks mainly for eggs: eating a fowl marked a special occasion. The cities, too, had seasons for making jam, sauce and pickles, for bottling fruit and vegetables, and for 'putting down' eggs and fruit cakes.

In working-class households the skills of needlework and dressmaking were highly valued. Mothers knitted pullovers, cardigans and other woollens instead of buying them, and made up nappies, school shirts, dresses and pants on a treadle sewing machine. Evenings were spent finishing off sewing, darning the heels of socks and elbows of jumpers, and making table runners, doilies and serviettes. These skills were the crowning arts of household management. Poorer women made

Advertisement, Australian woman's mirror, *31 May 1938.*

Advertisement for an 'up-to-date, automatic gas cooker', South Australian homes and gardens, *1 Apr 1938.*



'This Chart shows how Professor V.H. Mottram recommends that the family allowance for food should be spent, in order to obtain the greatest nutritive value. Professor V.H. Mottram is Professor of Physiology, London University.' Household budgeting was seen as the housewife's responsibility. Ministering Children's League, Happy children in your home, *Melbourne 1938.*

eiderdowns from poultry feathers, chopped up old clothes for mattresses and pillow fillings, turned wheat bags, old stockings and other materials into mats, and crocheted the uppers of slippers which their husbands then soled from old leather.

As breadwinner a husband had authority and respect in the household, and he was expected to be a good provider—a steady worker who would bring home his pay rather than drink or gamble it away. All but the richest families had to budget carefully, with husbands and wives sharing the management of finances. Many husbands handed their wages to their wives, either untouched or with something deducted to cover fares and general expenses, and it was often decided jointly how much went for the breadwinner's expenses, housekeeping, rent or house payments, bills and, if any, savings. Few wives were not aware of their husband's earnings and most were consulted about its disposal.

In middle-class families an ideal breadwinner was punctual for meals, a moderate drinker if not a teetotaller, agreeable and good-tempered, loving towards his dependants. Working-class families, remembering and sometimes still enduring the penury, separation and bitterness of the depression, were concerned about keeping the husband and breadwinner in good health and continuous employment. Ethel Watkin remembers her husband as 'kind' partly, perhaps, because he was 'a wonderful provider', working as many as two or three nights a week overtime. 'He used that money to pay the house off. He was a hard worker you see for the family. He was very proud of his family.' Ethel ran the household first and foremost for the welfare of the breadwinner. Children came second, the wife came last. She was often exhausted by her ten children:

> I got up at seven o'clock in the morning, but I was up and down [at night] for the children. I'd have to get up for the babies ... they'd get cold, or need changing ... Dad had his sleep because he was the breadwinner. That was most important ... I made sure he wasn't disturbed at night.

Some wives bore the additional burden of a husband's long or irregular working hours—if he was a doctor, for example, or a shiftworker, milkman, tramdriver or tugboat operator. Absence at night and presence during the day upset the rhythms of home life. Who was to control difficult children at tea or bedtime? How were young children to be kept quiet during the day while father got his all-important rest? Long absences could be even more disruptive. Myra Wilcox, married to a travelling salesman, remembers having to

> make a separate life. When [my husband] was away, he made a lot of friends, but they were quite apart from me. So I ... had to make my own life and I did things I wanted to do, which is bad in a way because you don't share ... I was envious sometimes of other people when their husbands were with them when they were going out. I felt sometimes they'd say 'Oh, hasn't she got a husband?' ... When your husband is home, though, you speak a different language, so you miss a lot. You're so used to doing your own thing. Weekends came, and there'd be a little bit of friction.

In some marriages there was more than a little friction. Anne Miller's husband had been on and off unemployment relief since their marriage in 1931, and June 1938 found them in a cottage at Prahran in Melbourne with no furniture except their bedding and the baby's cot. The rest had been repossessed. Even when Jack at last found steady work their problems continued. Exhausted by his rages, Anne ignored his entreaties to stay and took her three young children to live in Carlton with her mother and drunken, unemployed stepfather. Shirley Grey, steered by a security-conscious mother into marriage with 'a future bank manager', found

herself unhappily married at 22 to a bank clerk and his in-laws. Her memories are of moving 'from my parents' happy home . . . to the prison of my religious in-laws' home with a vindictive husband, no laughter, dancing, [or] singing'. She was trapped. There were strong sanctions against divorce or separation, and a woman's economic dependence rendered her vulnerable, particularly if she had young children.

Male dominance was normal. A few men ruled with a rod of iron, like Vic Wolski's stern father, of German Lutheran stock, who treated his wife like a child, though she supported all his decisions loyally. In a few families the wife was the dominant partner, and in many both decided on expenditure. The grazier John Russell was a rare case of a husband who never put his wife on a household allowance. 'Whatever she wanted she bought and I paid for it. We were fortunate that she wasn't restricted to the amount she wanted to spend on the household activities.'

Most children were firmly controlled within sight or sound of adults, whether at home, school or out. Tom Walker, a country boy of fifteen from Wesley Vale, a potato-growing area in Tasmania, had strict parents. 'I think in the country this didn't become such an issue as it does in the city because you've nowhere to go', he says. He mixed largely with family friends with similar standards of behaviour. Jack Neighbour of Horsham in Victoria remembers the strap in school as an extension of corporal punishment in the family. 'You got a belting from your mother or whoever was the dominant one in the family. All kids got beltings.' Women usually hit children with their hand or a ruler; sometimes they used a strap, although this punishment was often kept until father came home. Men, especially dealing with older sons, might use a cane, a riding whip or even a fire poker.

In towns and suburbs child rearing and discipline fell largely to mothers. Working a 48-hour week, and being dependent on public transport and bicycles, fathers might be seen only briefly in the mornings and evenings and part of the weekend. Mothers set standards for family conduct and public behaviour and schooled their children in honesty, politeness, tidiness and respect for elders. Except in cases of serious punishment, fathers usually did no more than monitor children's behaviour, particularly at mealtimes.

While some rich parents paid nursemaids to care for their children, especially in the messy and onerous early years, most parents lived closely with their children. Ideally families ate together, adults listening to the children recount the day's activities, teaching table manners and exchanging news and gossip. In reality meals were not always as idyllic. Beryl Phillips has memories of a father who sulked, flew into rages, refused to speak or eat if offended, and went on business trips without leaving any housekeeping money. Beryl had to sell old newspapers to earn enough for a rabbit and some bread and butter. Sitting in the kitchen with her mother, as the rain plopped into buckets through the black tar paper lining and their mugs of tea kept hot on the stove, she would sing hymns in sheer joy because her father was away. In his absence they stayed up after sunset, slept late in the mornings and talked to the neighbours.

More typically, fathers either left decisions about child rearing to their wives or were deftly manipulated by wives and children in collusion. Dorothy McEwen, daughter of a public servant in Newcastle, regarded her father as 'the head of the house', but recalls how she and her mother managed him skilfully, one softening him up for the other on delicate matters where he might otherwise demur or oppose. But on drinking, smoking, late hours, reading forbidden literature or keeping unacceptable company, parents rarely disagreed and made few concessions. Children and young adults usually had to submit.

DIVORCES PETITIONED BY, 1938

	Husbands	*Wives*
NSW	1112	1224
VIC	399	547
QLD	147	155
SA	127	175
WA	130	195
TAS	57	55
NT	3	1
ACT	3	4
TOTAL	1978	2356

Commonwealth year book 1940, 204.

DIVORCE GRANTED, 1938

GROUNDS	
Adultery	870
Bigamy	13
Cruelty	18
Drunkenness	48
Imprisonment	10
Desertion	2086
Insanity	18
Other	11
Total	3074

Commonwealth year book 1940, 204.

Children made their major life decisions after talking to their parents, for sons and daughters generally stayed at home until they married. Marriage was usually considered only when the man had prospects of steady employment and could provide a home, and few couples thought of setting up one before gathering crockery, linen and basic furniture. Parents wanted their children to make good marriages; beyond that, they had different hopes for sons and daughters. Daughters were rarely encouraged to think of a lifelong vocation other than as wife and mother, and if financial considerations forced a choice between further education for daughters or for sons, daughters left school. Most girls could best occupy the time between school and marriage learning dressmaking, cooking and other domestic accomplishments. Boys needed skills which would get them good jobs.

Parents' hopes for their children varied with their own social situation. In wealthy, educated families it was generally assumed that sons would complete private secondary schooling and then prepare themselves for business or the professions. Daughters from such families were privileged but were not obliged to prepare for a career. This sometimes led to uncertainty, even malaise. Kathleen Baird of Peppermint Grove, Perth, whose father was the managing director of a large retail firm, spent the years after university 'dithering about'. She knew that a higher education might be useful if one ever had to earn a living, but

> nobody suggested that girls went on and did a career, through the university. If they could get to the university they went, and just did a degree of some sort, but there was not much idea of what it was leading to, except those few who decided to do medicine or law.

The young men, busy making careers, were not yet ready to marry, and Kathleen was not drawn to retailing, office work, teaching or social work. She settled for a life divided between home and her old school, where she did part-time tutoring and sports coaching.

May Osborne, her husband Bert, her sons, Nick (in suit) and Bob, and her daughter, Shirley, in the garden of their home at East Brunswick, Melbourne. 'Everything happened to me inside the house; that was my world.'
A. OSBORNE, 1938 COLLECTION

At the other end of the social scale, Millie Harris and her sister, daughters of an unemployed brewery worker in Collingwood in Melbourne, had little choice about when to join the workforce. The family had only grandmother's pension and mother's wages as a waitress, so the son and two daughters left school early to work as machinists in boot and clothing factories. The girls had to put most of their money into keeping the household. 'Finance was a worry,' says Millie, 'but we never expected a great deal. Having employment and earning a wage, we thought we were lucky.'

The children of the poor went into menial jobs, the girls as domestics, factory workers or salesgirls, the boys as labourers or factory workers. If they could, respectable artisans, clerks and small businessmen got their daughters into dressmaking, tailoring, office work or perhaps teaching. A parent might interview a prospective employer to ensure that the position offered his or her daughter was sufficiently respectable and the atmosphere moral, but the jobs children got usually reflected their parents' class: father a boot repairer, one son a bootmaker, another a blacksmith; father a carpenter, son an apprentice plasterer; father a foreman, son an apprentice draftsman; father a self-employed grocer, son an accountant; father a clergyman, one son an industrial chemist, another a commercial artist.

In the country, parental authority was exercised as long as the children remained at home, which could be until their twenties. Most children left school at fourteen, sometimes because their parents could not afford board, books or uniforms. Sending children away to private secondary schools was one of the most obvious signs of rural wealth. Tom Walker went to school in Devonport, the only one of his family to do so, and stayed there longer than his father had expected. Although 'mother was very keen', he remembers

> my father would've liked me to stay on the farm. He wasn't opposed to my going to school but our family generally speaking—uncles and aunts—the generation before me—had all stayed on the land—it was a bit of a break with tradition ... If your family owned land it was traditional for the sons to stay on the land.

But when Vic Wolski wanted to be a policeman his father made him stay on the farm. Such parental choice of vocation was common.

Children, even twenty-year-olds, were seldom paid for farmwork. John Henty could scarcely afford to pay his older children: 'they'd help with the farm work and I gave them a little wages, I suppose, and they had their own little banking accounts, but I couldn't add to it very much, of course, we were just getting out of the depression'. More usually farm youths were given a few shillings when they were going to a dance or the pictures, unless they could get seasonal work and had their own earnings. At the same time many could expect help to set up on their own when they married. Vic Wolski's stern father helped each son get a farm and gave each daughter money when she married. In 1938 he gave Vic £700 as down payment on a property. Tom Walker's father in Tasmania bought a second farm and put Tom's brother on it. Urban working-class youths could rarely look forward to such rewards.

Neighbours and relatives lent a hand in times of need. On farms, neighbours gave immediate help when machines broke down or stock needed attention, and everywhere neighbours commonly looked after one another's children during crises. Strong community ties were reflected in get-togethers in halls or woolsheds, and working bees to help the local school, district families in trouble and community projects. Farm families often put on their 'glad rags' to visit one another for Sunday tea, taking goods with them as presents and coming home with more.

Kathleen Bulloche worked for D.H. Clarke Ltd, quilt manufacturers in Elizabeth Street, Sydney. Here her young foster-sister is about to go off to her first school ball. They are in a backyard in Balmain under a mulberry tree. Kathleen is wearing a blue chiffon dress shirred at the shoulders with puffed short sleeves on a band. Kathleen and her family usually spent the evenings at home. We made all our own clothes, all were excellent needle women, knitting, crocheting, smocking, beading, etc. The men usually read or worked out problems.'
K. ROGERS, 1938 COLLECTION

In Mabel Hutchinson's district they exchanged 'Anything for anything that each didn't have like butter for eggs, mulberries for fish, chutney for jam, hand-me-down clothes, shoes. Neighbours *all* were friends'.

Blood was thicker than water, and relatives were usually the main help in times of real trial and the main participants at weddings, funerals, birthdays and Christmas. Mothers came for daughters' childbirths; cousins stepped in when a wife was ill or children were motherless; fathers and uncles assisted financially if they could. Relatives in town offered a chance for country people to get to the city to see a doctor or a lawyer or to have a short spell, while the city folk could come to the farm for holidays. In poorer homes Christmas presents might be few, but there was still a clan gathering in the old home, a tree, high spirits and as much food as possible.

In cities and towns where families had lived for two or more generations, some relatives usually lived nearby and grandparents, uncles, aunts and cousins were part of the daily world. In new suburbs links with kin could be more tenuous, confined to a weekend visit by public transport or, for people from the country, to visits during school holidays or at Easter or Christmas. Contact was rare only where relatives were interstate or overseas, where there had been a serious family row, or—sometimes—where one member of a family had risen in the world beyond the rest. Normally, people tried hard to maintain regular contact. Daughters crossed suburb or city to see their mothers; parents nursed sleeping children in trams and trains halfway across a metropolis; kiddies slept at 'Nanna's' and later took their schoolfriends and workmates there for tea. Urban neighbours, on the other hand, generally only lent a cup of sugar, minded a child, called a doctor or cooked a meal.

Kin were crucial for widows, the most vulnerable people. Women widowed before the pensionable age of 60 found that any work skills they had were lost or outdated, yet most needed money and had to work. Doubly unfortunate was the widow with dependent children, even if she was left clear of debt and owning a house. Only New South Wales had widows' pensions, and they were modest. Other states paid small allowances to children dependent on widows. Widowed mothers typically battled on alone, maintaining separate households rather than returning to their parents' home with children in train. Those with young children had to work at or near home, sewing or cleaning, dressmaking or tailoring. A widowed mother or aunt or an unmarried relative might join the household to give moral and financial support; some widows took in boarders or let rooms to bring in extra money. Yet many lived in poverty, which eased only when their children reached school leaving age and got work. Widowers were not usually in the same straits, but were often nonplussed about running a household. Those with young families had to either move in with the parents or in-laws, hire a housekeeper or remarry. In families with daughters over school leaving age the eldest usually stayed home as housekeeper.

Family life was precious. After the evening meal families settled around the wireless, father with the paper, mother with the ironing or knitting or darning, young adults with games or books, children with their homework or board games. Fathers might go to professional, union, lodge, party and club meetings, and less often, mothers to women's unions, school meetings or ladies' auxiliaries. Weekends might involve family outings to the pictures, or children might go to Saturday matinees alone. On Sunday morning one family in four went to church and a higher proportion of children went to Sunday school. Older children might play sport at weekends, or spend Saturday night at a dance, picture theatre or party; fathers might go to the races or football, mothers to a baking afternoon. Couples came together for card and supper parties, or had regular seats booked for a night at the pictures. Families might gather around the piano or at a board game, with supper to follow, sometimes with the children's friends or with neighbours.

When grown-up children left home, parents maintained the family home if they could, whether the house was rented or their own. The loss of their children's contribution strained many budgets, but independence in old age was precious, even though jobs were gone and medical bills grew, and glasses, false teeth or a truss might become hard to pay for. It was considered disgraceful to leave parents in want, and when it happened the alternatives were not attractive. Outside charitable help was reserved for those without kin, old people's homes were few, and often the senile or destitute elderly were simply put in lunatic asylums. To prevent this miserable outcome a single daughter might decide to devote her life to ageing parents, or adult children might pay rent or maintenance to supplement the meagre old age pension, or, perhaps most commonly, aged parents might live with the families of their children. Vic Wolski's paternal grandmother moved in when her husband died. She had two rooms to herself and ate with the family, but often spent the day with her married daughter Tina who lived just across the road. Either Tina or Vic's mother did her laundry. She was becoming feeble, walked on sticks, and could at most prepare vegetables for dinner or fruit for jam, but her say in disciplining grandchildren was formidable.

Families mattered. They stood for security and stability, and on them society relied for morality and order in the coming generation. Where they flourished all was well; chaos threatened when they foundered.

SIX FAMILIES

'Six Families' represents a slice of rural and urban society in Australia during 1938: from the wealthier professional and farming families to those struggling to overcome the effects of the Great Depression. The story of each family is based on material from the 1938 Oral History Project and the Melbourne University Oral History Project.

Catherine and Walter Thompson, Trida station, western New South Wales

Catherine Emma Gray and Walter Thompson at their wedding, 20 June 1925.
E. KEMP, 1938 COLLECTION

Catherine Thompson, her husband Walter and their ten-year-old daughter Eda, lived on Trida station, 750 kilometres west of Sydney. Walter Thompson had leased the 92 000 hectare sheep run in 1922, married schoolteacher Catherine in 1925, and built the 14-room cypress pine and fibro homestead in 1928, the year of Eda's birth. Their first born, a son, had died the previous year at fifteen months, after suffering brain damage at birth. Trida was only one of the family's enterprises. Walter and his brother Tom ran three other properties, one near Goulburn, another near Orange and a third between Dubbo and Wellington bought during the current drought, and some town property in Orange. Nonetheless 1938 was a year of continuous worry about keeping the property going.

Trida was 'like a little town'. Apart from the large house there were jackeroos' quarters and men's huts, stables, garages, a grain and hay shed and a workshop. There were also gardens, mother's rose garden and lawn in front, a vegetable garden and orchard at the back, a neglected tennis court, a fowlyard for hens and turkeys, and beyond the long clotheslines 'another little cottage too for an odd man'.

The numerous inhabitants of this world were carefully distinguished socially by their relation to the grazier family at its centre. At the top of the hierarchy of employees was the genial Mr Ayres, the manager, very skilled with sheep, and two cheerful jackeroos, young men being groomed for property management. One was a nephew, Tom Thompson. They had separate but comfortable sleeping quarters, ate with the family and spent their evenings at the homestead. For a time Tom's eldest sister also lived in the home and worked as a kind of mother's help, for which she got a small wage.

Next on the social scale came other hired help. The cook and maid were young Aboriginal girls, about sixteen years of age, whom Catherine considered herself to be training. She found it impossible to attract white domestic servants to the outback, and even Aboriginal girls rarely stayed more than six months. The young women slept in maids' quarters attached to the kitchen, and ate their meals there with the 'groom', a sixteen-year-old lad who did odd jobs around the yard. He kept the gardens in order, killed and hung sheep for the house and chopped wood. About twenty men were employed on the station, and they were sorely needed in that drought year to hand-feed stock. They ate and slept in their sparse hut. Two men lived alone on outstations, looking after sheep, wells, dams and fences. They came in once a week for supplies.

Young Eda had for a short and glorious period a real friend of her own age in this small world, a girl whose father was a fettler at Trida siding four kilometres away, and whose family lived in a cottage of rough timber, galvanised iron and four-gallon kerosene tins beaten into flat squares. Eda remembers the cottage's fierce heat during that terrible summer. Then her small playmate moved away and

THE THOMPSON FAMILY

Eda Thompson, c1931, in front of her parents' homestead, looking towards the general store for the Trida district which her parents ran between 1931 and 1937.

E. KEMP, 1938 COLLECTION

The Thompsons with Eda and a neighbour, Elsie Chambers, captured by a street photographer at Circular Quay, Sydney, c1934. They had been staying at the Hotel Manly, a popular spot for country people on holidays.

E. KEMP, 1938 COLLECTION

At the end of 1938 Eda and her family took a holiday at Phillip Island off the coast of Victoria. It was a very lonely period of her life.
E. KEMP, 1938 COLLECTION

Eda was left to do her correspondence lessons under her watchful mother whose 'rod of words' was more devastating than any whipping could have been. Otherwise the girl's jobs were few: she made her bed, kept her room tidy, cleaned lamps and dusted. Father and mother adored their daughter, and Eda and her mother had a pleasant month's holiday in New Zealand in 1938, as well as several trips to stay in hotels in Sydney. But her upbringing was strict. Children were taught to 'be respectful—not to interrupt—be courteous', and there was little hugging or kissing.

Eda's girlhood impressions were of a strong 'matriarchal system' in Australia. Walter's mother was a matriarch in every sense. Widowed at an early age, she had reared her sons to feel great respect for her opinion and they discussed all their business dealings with her. In addition, Walter had married a capable woman whose business sense he respected. Catherine was the family bookkeeper and busied herself with 'all the other things that a grazier's wife can contrive to be in sixteen hours a day'. She supported Walter as head of the household, yet he rarely acted without consulting her. Some ewes on the property were called 'Mrs Thompson's ewes' because they had proved an excellent investment when bought on Catherine's advice. 'I doubt if my father would've made any major decision without consulting my mother—if he did she would've ticked him off.' Catherine ordered the food, bought the clothes by mail order catalogue, supervised the maids' work, and did some cooking, sewing and preserving. She had some money of her own from her father, but Walter did not like her to use it for the household—indeed he was always pressing money on her to go and buy more dresses. The house had no electrical appliances and a Fountain camp kettle on the wood stove provided hot water, but 1938 was memorable because in that year the Thompsons bought a generator which gave them electric light.

Henry and Annie Coupland, Reservoir, Melbourne

Henry and Annie Coupland and their daughters Jean, Joyce and Doreen, lived in a five-room weatherboard house. Born in Leeds, England. Henry had been a blacksmith and farm worker before service in the Great War. Annie had gone into an embroidery factory on the death of her parents, then become a shorthand typist. They had married in 1922, gone to Western Australia in 1924 to clear land, spent several years in Victoria, returned to England to hard times, and emigrated again in 1929. Henry had found casual work as a tracklayer with the Victorian railways and often the Couplands had depended on sustenance; but after about 1935 steady work as a labourer and watchman had come Henry's way, mainly at the Newport workshops and North Melbourne depots. By 1938 they had a small property, which they were struggling to pay off. It had cost £275, with £25 deposit and 10s a week payments, and it let them combine subsistence farming with city work.

Henry planted trees on three sides to protect the house from winds, and built a milking shed and hay store for their seven cows and roosting and laying pens for their poultry. Annie's brother, Ernest, lived with the family from time to time before his marriage in 1938, but most of the work about the place fell to Henry, and what with overtime and shiftwork on the railways, the children thought their father never stopped working. Overtaken by exhaustion or affliction, Henry

would occasionally note in his diary: 'left eye still cruk went to bed all afternoon' (23 July), or 'cruck in legs especially left one' (27 August).

Annie rose at 6.30 to light the lamps, make the fire and cook breakfast. If their father was on night shift, the children 'would have to be quiet. That was the big thing . . . we had to consider Dad because he was very tired'. Annie milked the cows, fed the fowls a hot mash of pollard and bran, cut school lunches before the girls left at 8, and got her husband a hot breakfast. The big vegetable garden had to be watered by hand, for the Couplands only had tank water. A hot midday meal had to be cooked if Henry was on shift work and another at night. 'We used to have hot meals right through summer. We'd have sometimes soup and vegies and meat after that, or quite often meat and vegies and steamed puddings, apple dumpling and jam roll, chocolate pudding, ginger pudding, all steamed. And custard and cream mostly, because we had the cows. We always had plenty of cream and fresh milk.' Annie also occasionally made butter.

The children helped their mother to collect and wash eggs and wrap them in newspaper for sale to Reservoir grocers, clean the silver and the bath, wash up and do a little ironing or dusting. With school an hour's walk each way, they had little spare time. Annie had even less: keeping house was a full-time job. Boiling up the laundry, washing and rinsing were all done by hand and took a whole day. Water was on tap in laundry, kitchen and bathroom, but had to be heated in the wood

THE COUPLAND FAMILY

Henry Coupland (centre back with hat on) at a Victorian Railways' camp.
D. DABITZ, 1938 COLLECTION

Joyce, Doreen, Jean and their mother, Annie, at Reservoir.
D. DABITZ, 1938 COLLECTION

copper or in wire-handled kerosene tins on the stove. Ironing was done with three different sized flatirons, kept heated one after the other on the stove.

Unemployment and poverty made the Coupland family close-knit and self-supportive. Old economies became entrenched. The parents cut one another's hair and Annie cut the children's. Henry mended shoes. But comforts were appearing. There was lino on the floors which 'Mum used to polish with wax till it shone like glass'; packing cases were replaced by a second-hand dressing table; and a wireless and piano graced the dining room. 'Mum had been able to play so well when she was single in England, and he [Dad] wanted to buy her something, and the family, that would entertain us because there wasn't any other means of entertainment.' The children had other diversions—the long walk to school, fossicking at a local pottery, swimming in the creek, mushrooming, berry picking, picnicking, and in the evening drawing by lamplight on the dining room table. There were no books but a few newspapers, and they went with neighbours to community singing at Preston Town Hall, to Sunday school at the Baptist church, which was the nearest, and by furniture van to an annual picnic at Eltham. Annie contributed to church bazaars and she and Henry occasionally attended a concert, but they rarely went to church or to the pictures.

Neighbours were few and seemed as reserved as the Couplands. According to Annie: 'they really kept into their own yard, and they didn't really mix much closely. They ... would talk at the door or at the gate, rather than having people in the house, apart from relatives'. But the neighbours came in times of sickness and childbirth, for the Couplands' relatives were on the other side of Melbourne, at Brighton. Henry did most of the shopping on his way through Reservoir to work, and he controlled all the money, paid all the bills and kept methodical records of all transactions. Doreen recognised him unmistakeably as head of the house: 'It wasn't the man's place to do any household work at all. It was always the man outside and the woman inside ... The man did the man's work and she could do the man's work as well as the woman's work'. The children were Annie's responsibility, both because of her husband's long absences during the day and because they were girls: 'Anything that ... had to do with us was her decision, both in schooling and entertainments'.

Muriel and Arthur Scotney, Wharfedale, Kondut, Western Australia

Muriel and Arthur Scotney and their two young sons Brian and Peter lived on a 1200-hectare mixed farm, on which they ran 500 sheep and some poultry, pigs and cows, and grew wheat. The year was memorable because they moved into their 'fine' new house, for which they had begun making the bricks the year before. Arthur had migrated from England in 1923, where as a farm labourer he had loved the variety of work in the fresh air. But with no family to help him he had had little hope of getting land in England. In Western Australia he had been well on the way to buying a small farm when he had met Muriel, the 'general' at the post office in Kondut. They had married in 1930. Their first home, shared with Arthur's mother, had been made of poles, with earth floor, hessian walls and a bough shed

for hot nights. Their second, not much better, was a two-room asbestos cottage they built themselves. Muriel had lost her first baby and then miscarried before having two healthy sons. When she entered the small new house in 1938 she burst into tears of joy. It had a pantry, a bathroom and, in a corner of the verandah, a copper and wash pump, with rainwater laid on. There were jarrah floors and galvanised iron roofing. She and Arthur had been desperately hard-up in the depression, with frightening debts for machinery bought on time payment, and only the fact that they had nowhere else to go had kept them on the farm at all. Never again, they vowed, would they use time payment.

The boys were too young to help about the farm, so the Scotneys employed two youths as teamsters to drive the horses. They were paid 30s a week plus keep, slept in a general purpose lean-to and ate with the family. Muriel cooked for the shearers when they came, and they slept in the lean-to on bags of wheat. 'They were farmers' sons, and used to roughing it, and it wasn't anything unusual for them.' Only large stations had shearers' quarters. A local woman, Mrs Whitworth, came once a week to help Muriel with the washing and other heavy work.

Most farmers' wives in the district were able to earn 'pocket money' selling eggs and poultry, but Arthur was happier to keep Muriel from outside work. 'Outside affairs were purely mine and inside affairs were purely my wife's. She never did any outside work—which is unusual really—and I never did any inside work either ... that was our arrangement. I said, "I'll keep the larder full and you put it on the table". That worked very well.' Muriel sewed all the children's clothing and her own, and although they had little cash they were able to eat well off the farm: meat, milk, butter, eggs, cream and vegetables, including what they exchanged with neighbours. While it may have been hard to sell produce, 'you could eat it all you liked'. Like their neighbours, even when Arthur and Muriel were struggling during the depression they believed they were better off than city folk: 'we had the opportunity to produce our own food and good food. City people depended on getting money to buy from shops'.

Arthur kept firm control over both farming matters and rearing the children. The boys were raised to 'be seen and not heard', and were expected to behave respectfully towards their elders. In the Scotney household there were no battles between parents and children over what the family would listen to on the radio. Arthur usually carried out punishments in response to Muriel's complaints: 'we never used weapons or anything—just a slap across the face and I've got a big hand of course'. The boys came with them to all the local functions, where they would sleep with the other children on mattresses at the back of the hall.

The local community was a lively and close one, relying on one another for entertainment through fundraising activities, church and school events, and biannual race days followed by a dance. 'In a thin population like you have in the wheat belt that's the usual thing. The neighbours get together on these occasions and exchange gossip and so on.' There was no phone. Christmas was the great event, even though it fell in the busy harvest season. People joined relatives and friends under a big Christmas tree for a huge party meal and a dance. The Scotneys tried to take a coastal holiday after harvest each year, though many farming families did not. Muriel insisted that it was cheaper than paying doctor's bills.

THE BROWN FAMILY

Bill, Johnno, Frankie and Jim with Daisy wearing a hat.
Daisy was nicknamed 'Gadabout' because of her taste for freedom.
BROWN FAMILY, MELBOURNE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Three of the sisters, Ellen (in netball costume), Vera (right) and Irene (seated), with brothers Johnno and Bill grouped around their cousin Peggy from Port Fairy.
BROWN FAMILY, MELBOURNE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Christine and John Brown, Allansford, Victoria

Christine and John Brown and eleven of their children, Johnno, Ellen, Bill, Jimmy, Irene, Frankie, Ron, Edna, Lex, Betty and Patty, lived on a dairy share farm near Allansford, outside Warrnambool in Victoria. Their land and farmhouse were owned by Goodwin Evans, who lived across the road. The Browns provided the labour to milk the cows on both properties, from 200 to 230 cows depending on the season, and in addition they maintained their farm. In exchange they got one-third of the milk cheque. There were many large families in the district: 'the more children there were the more cows you could afford to keep'.

The demands of milking dominated their days and their lives. The day began early. 'No-one would have an alarm clock', Frankie recalls,

> because my father had a voice on him to make you all wake up. About 4 or 3.30, he'd go out and he'd say, 'Wo-back! Wo-back!' That's fair dinkum. He'd put the kettle on, then he'd go out the back and open the gates, then he'd roar out ... Everyone else would say, 'Time to get up! Jack Brown's bringing the cows in!'

Everyone of school age reluctantly scrambled out of bed for a drink and then raced up to the milking yard. The younger children started four or five cows each, which Christine then stripped. The rest milked on till all the cows were done, perhaps by 8.30. An older daughter would be on house duty for the day, and would cook a breakfast of porridge, eggs or sausages and toast, and see the schoolchildren off with lunches of bread and homemade jam or dripping packed by their mother the night before. Sometimes they got a ride in the pony cart, otherwise they walked. They went at first to Allansford State School, but after a visit from Dean Kennelly, a priest with pronounced sectarian views, they had been obliged to transfer to St Joseph's, Warrnambool—a long walk. Before they left, they would collect sticks for the fire and find the hens' eggs.

After the milk had been taken to the Nestlé depot, the other farm work began. John and his sons harnessed the great Clydesdales for ploughing, planted crops for winter feed, fixed fences and dams, or worked in the vegetable garden, John's special province. The women often brought morning and afternoon tea out to the men in the paddocks. Harvest time was especially busy and expert haystack builders came to assist, increasing the work of the women in the kitchen. Between milkings, Christine, 'the boss of the house', and her daughters did the laundry, cleaning and cooking. A boiler full of dumplings and a pot of soup always hung from the chimney, and the cast-iron kettle was constantly simmering.

They may all have had time for an hour or so's rest before 3.30, when John came up to the house to make sure the schoolchildren were not shirking, then the hours till dinner were taken up milking again. Dinner was a big meal, and the family went to bed early. Saturday and Sunday brought some relief. The older children played or watched sport on Saturdays, though football matches and weddings had to start around midday so that the participants could get back to the cowsheds. On Sundays the family went to mass at 11 am in Warrnambool, the little ones making sure the nuns from the school noted their attendance, and then to a late breakfast with Maggie, the oldest daughter who was married and living in town.

The children got on well together. 'There was no bickering with one another because you had your work to do', Johnno recalls, 'and knew you had to do it. But oh, it was tiresome ... She was that constant'. Frankie remembers that 'Everyone looked after the younger ones. It came down from the top and it was sort of a given thing in the family. You look after him and I'll look after the next one and

John Brown milking Coronation.
BROWN FAMILY, MELBOURNE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

so on down. I don't think we ever had any big accidents or anything'. The lives of the older children were firmly controlled by their parents. John would have half a dozen beers at the pub in Warrnambool on market day, but not his sons. 'Oh Gawd, no such thing as a pub. You'd get your head knocked off if you were caught in a pub. They were very strict.' The young people would be given a shilling when they went out, which would get them into the pictures, and pay for a pie and a cup of tea. The largest sum the oldest boy ever received was 2s 6d. Still, after the older girls had bathed the little ones in the wash-house with water heated in the copper, and given them some syrup of figs, they were allowed to go out to dances on Saturday night even if they did miss sleep. The smaller children shared a bed. The house had four bedrooms at the front, a huge kitchen and two back bedrooms for the boys. Life wasn't so bad: 'we never looked for money, but we always had good tucker, clean clothes and always good sheets for our beds and everything'.

Christine was in charge of family finances. She was saving to buy a house in Warrnambool. There were no family holidays. The cows could not be left. But some of the children went to Port Fairy where Christine's sisters and mother lived. Grandmother smoked a clay pipe. When Christine's sisters could afford the 2s train fare, they would visit. At Christmas they all gathered, and at John's invitation the stack builders joined in, together with anyone else who had helped on the farm during the year.

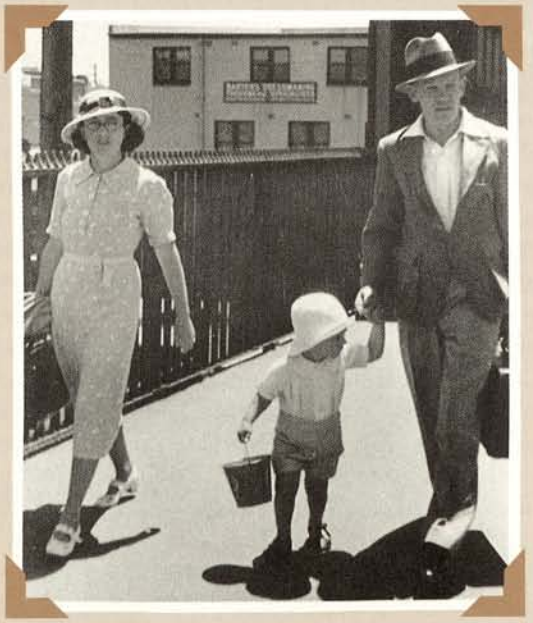
> You talk about the last supper ... I think there were fifty there. It used to be a beautiful night. Oh it was fun! Sponges—that high! Cream! He used to come and get people. He'd never forget 'em. He'd always bring 'em out for Christmas because they couldn't afford a big Christmas, the people that used to help us on the farm. He used to make sure they came out and had Christmas dinner and Christmas tea.

George and Clare Parr, Hurstville, Sydney

George and Clare Parr rented a five-room semidetached brick house at 118 Durham Street, Hurstville, which they had moved into after their marriage in 1934. They had met in 1926 when they were nineteen and eighteen, but unemployment had made for a long engagement. George had first got a job on the railways and later went wheat lumping and gold prospecting before returning to live with Clare's parents, the Stringers, in Sydney. Clare's father, a bricklayer, could only find odd jobs, and she had felt obliged to continue at Farmer's in the city until her sister had almost completed teacher training. 'I was the only one in the whole house doing any work.'

Clare had worked in the main office of Farmer's department store from the time she left Kogarah Domestic Science School in 1924. She sorted sales dockets and analysed transactions on Burroughs adding machines. 'You'd sit there for hours putting in the figures from every docket. And when you finished, the amount of those dockets had to balance ... And if it didn't balance you hunted for it ... if you were twopence out, you would work back to look for it.' Farmer's was in many ways a model employer, but Clare's 'immediate boss ... was so strict and so petty, and so mean with it, that the six or seven who were under her, I think we all ended

THE PARR FAMILY



George and Clare Parr and their son, John, at Hurstville station. It is Sunday and, as usual, the Parrs are about to catch the bus to Cronulla for a beach picnic. They take a packed lunch and swimsuits and John his beach bucket.

C. PARR, 1938 COLLECTION

Clare's sister, Rene, John and his dog with Clare's parents in nearby Bexley.

C. PARR, 1938 COLLECTION

up hating her ... she made our lives misery'. For most girls, Clare judged, and especially for her, marriage was a way of getting away from Farmer's, getting away from work. 'You were delighted to get married and keep house to get away from ... that type of work.'

By 1934 George Parr was earning £5 1s 4d a week as a toolmaker, and almost as much again by teaching technical classes three or four nights a week. He and Clare, with no thought of living in Hurstville permanently, had chosen a house convenient to public transport and furnished it themselves. 'We thought we had to have everything ... we didn't go into that house till we were able to buy the bedroom [and] the dining room [suites].' Ricketts and Thorps at Banksia were considered the best tradespeople for furniture. Clare recalls 'walking down to Ricketts and Thorps with a cheque, and feeling very important, that I was able to pay for it'. The 30s rent was high for their income, but the house was spanking new, with built-in cupboards and a linen press, a gas stove and copper and cement paths. Clare had a carpet sweeper, an ice chest, an electric jug, iron and toaster. Milk, meat and vegetables were delivered, and shops were close by. She settled easily into the new routines. 'We didn't expect to go back to work—you know, you got away from work, you were thankful to. You stayed home and had your little luncheon parties and cooked, and learned how to cook, and exchanged recipes, and had card nights, and played tennis ... You accepted married life.' George and Clare's first child, a son, was born that year, and Clare took child-bearing and raising for granted. For family planning and child-rearing advice she relied on her friends, not her mother. 'My husband told me that if I became pregnant that was it. He didn't believe in abortion.' After her first pregnancy Clare went on the advice of a friend to Dr Katie Bryce in Martin Place, who fitted a diaphragm.

The Parrs had a settled domestic routine. George 'had to catch the half-past seven train, ... and I always got up to get his breakfast, always. I felt that was the least I could do'. Baby John came next, bathing and feeding being followed by washing the dishes and cleaning the nappies: 'housekeeping ... it was a novelty, and it was interesting. I couldn't cook ... My mother was in despair. She said "What are you going to do? You can't even cook", but I learnt'.

George gave his wife his pay after taking out what he needed for the week. 'My husband knew I'd always handled figures', she says. He 'was quite content for me to do it, not that he couldn't do it, but he knew I could do it, quite well, and it saved him, that was all it was'. They saved George's earnings from night school teaching, and kept themselves on his pay. 'On that £5 odd, we lived—and ate well ... and we were reasonably dressed.' They also had a full social life.

Although they had met at a Methodist church function, once the Parrs married they had little to do with the church. The weekends were filled with visiting, surfing and picnicking.

> We had hosts of visitors ... weekend visiting mainly ... and you'd spend all Saturday afternoon cooking all the fancy cakes and whatnot, and you'd do it the other way round, you'd visit them, all in the St George district, no cars, all on public transport. Babies and all. Visiting was a big part in your lives, visiting other people's homes and people visiting us. But we always found time to play tennis. My mother minded my first child when he was old enough to be taken away from me, every Thursday night, because that was our night out, and she kept him there all night. [We went] to Cronulla practically every weekend, because we loved the surf. And my baby was in the water very early on.

Clare's mother remained of central importance, indeed quite crucial in a crisis. In 1938 Clare had a very bad pregnancy culminating in the breech birth of a baby

who lived only two days. After three weeks in hospital she came home to be nursed. 'My mother didn't live far away—I think in our time our parents lived handy ... And my mother helped me wonderfully always.' After some weeks she was back at her housework.

> When I was first married, after I settled down, I must admit that although I said I was happy and I was busy getting on with it, I did get an urge sometimes for something different, you know, perhaps like—I always did office work, and I thought, oh, washing up and cooking and—I had the urge then to sit at the office desk ... Although I had been fed up with it and bored, it was easier than housework. Nothing easy about housework! But of course you don't succumb to it. I don't think the opportunity was there, anyway.

Angus and Constance Murray, Pymble, Sydney

Angus and Constance Murray and their four children lived on Sydney's north shore, where Dr Murray was in general practice. One of eight children of a country schoolteacher, Constance and a sister did science, and two sisters and her brothers did medicine. In 1914 she had followed her sisters to Sydney Girls High School, living in a boarding house at Glebe Point before entering university and the Women's College on a scholarship and an annual allowance of £30 from her father. 'I was not a forward female—my father wanted us to go to the university. I went up to university wanting to play tennis more than anything else.' She had studied first year medicine and then chemistry, physiology and organic chemistry —industrial chemistry was closed to her because of a prejudice against women— and had become the first biochemist at Prince Alfred Hospital on £168 a year. There she had been planning a holiday in Scotland when she accepted Angus's proposal. 'I had been asked several times before and I had said "No", and I knew if Angus Murray didn't ask me to marry him I wouldn't marry anyone.' Angus was going to London for further research. Constance had her holiday and they were married in London.

The four Murray children with their dog Dugald in the bird bath. Clockwise, Jock, Alison, Sina, Kathy.
C. MURRAY, 1938 COLLECTION

Though not expected to resign her position at Prince Alfred, she did. 'Angus would have let me [continue], he would have let me do anything I wanted. But I felt I had responsibilities. I would never have got married if I hadn't wanted children. At least, I don't think I would have.' At the time of her marriage Constance had known little about pregnancy and childbirth—'I just had a baby'—but she had a husband who told her about reproduction and was supportive, and she had a nurse. Between 1928 and 1933 the Murrays had four children, and by 1938 Constance was in charge of a large household which combined a private home with consulting rooms for her husband's growing practice which extended from Roseville to Wahroonga.

The Murrays had a two-storey house of fifteen rooms and two balconies, with two bedrooms and a bathroom backstairs for the live-in maids. Angus's father, who lived there in retirement, bought it for them and they paid it off from the practice, which earned £5–6000 a year. There was another income from playing the stock exchange, and Constance had an inheritance from her father. Angus's father ate with the family, but had his own suite—a bedroom, sitting room and bathroom.

Upstairs there were four bedrooms, a bathroom, a dressing room for the children who slept on the balcony, a sitting room and a dining room. 'I had all the modern conveniences there were at that time.' There were five servants: cook, a housemaid, a maid to look after the consulting rooms, a part-time girl who took the children for an afternoon walk and a laundress. The household was Constance's responsibility. She didn't bother her husband with domestic worries. Constance also handled the accounts.

The day began early and ended late. The cook brought in morning tea at 6.30, and the Murrays rose and dressed for breakfast at 8.30, when they each read a newspaper. The cook was then instructed on the meals for the day. Elsewhere in the house the children were being dressed and fed before being taken to school or kindergarten. By nine Angus was off on his rounds or operating, and he was back for lunch, which might well be interrupted by a call. As Constance recalls, 'Gladys, who was the cook, said "As soon as Dr Murray hears me putting the lunch on the table he goes out"'. At two a girl would come to take the children for a walk in the park, give them their tea, put them into their pyjamas, and bring them to Constance for a story before they went to bed. 'I used to buy all the Arthur Ransomes, and the Mary Grant Bruces, and the Dr Doolittles.' Because Angus kept

THE MURRAY FAMILY

Constance Murray outside her front door.
C. MURRAY, 1938 COLLECTION

rooms from seven until eleven, tea was served at 6.30 sharp. He and Constance would supper together before bed.

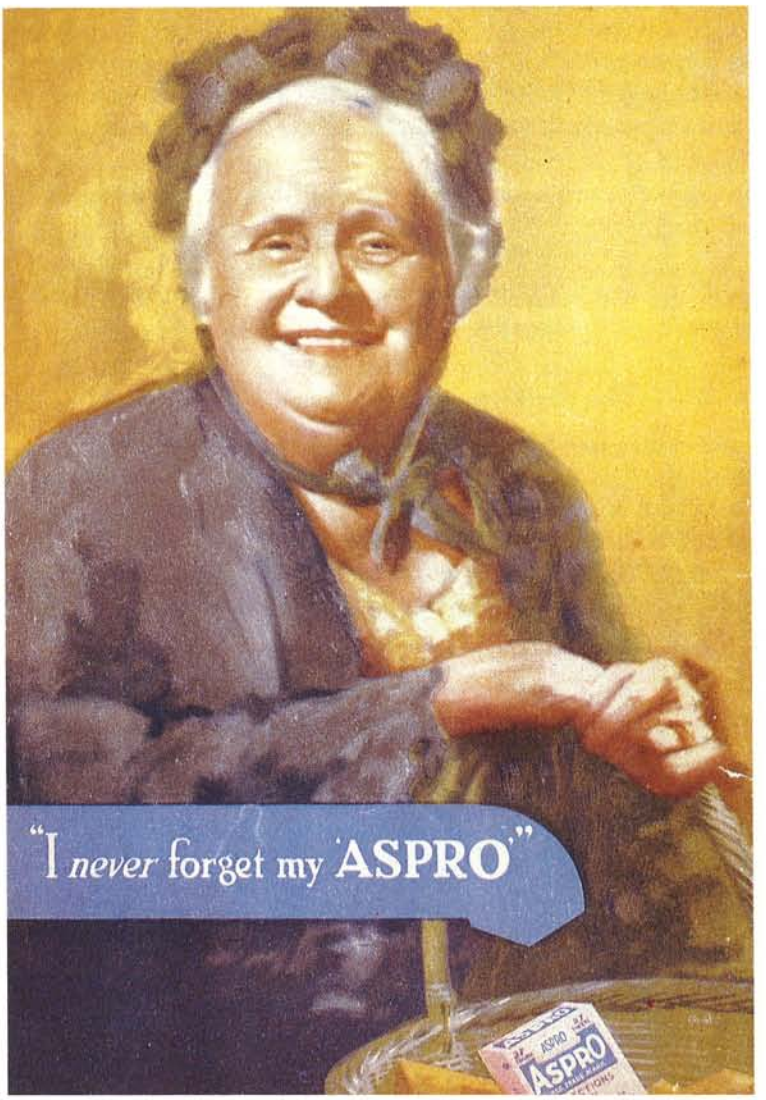
The bedroom was Constance's favourite room. 'I was so tired ... it wasn't just minding my husband, and my children, and the practice—I used to mind the telephone after hours at night—and keeping the maids happy.' Apart from their day or day-and-a-half free each week, the servants were off duty at night after dinner, 'and the telephone always went at some time through the night'. There were no holidays at all for the first six or seven years, but then every April the Murrays spent two weeks beyond Ulladulla on the south coast. They never took the children on holidays. In Constance's view, 'That would be terrible. We always went without the children'.

A lady had once told Constance,

> 'I'll give you one bit of advice when you're getting married. Whenever your husband asks you to do something, *always* do it. Even if you're leaving your baby to drown in the bath, let it drown if your husband has asked you to do something.' And I always stuck to that. If he asked me to go to a football match I'd make some arrangements for the children and I would go. I *never* put the children before him. And I think that's terribly important.

They visited galleries and museums—'we were always interested in pictures and books of course'—and went to concerts. Constance took her children for holidays up to the mountains, or to her sister at Collaroy, and Angus would join them for the weekends. 'Angus had a Wolseley. He would only buy English cars. Every Sunday she visited her parents at Beecroft. For some time, 'if Angus couldn't come I would take the children by train. Then one day when I saw everybody driving in cars—[he] didn't ever think I could drive a car, he was always frightened I'd get hurt—so I made a fuss and got a car and it was easier then'.

On weekdays people came to afternoon tea. 'In those days people called on you ... in hats, gloves and beads and [with] cards. Everyone called on you, you returned the call, in hats, gloves, beads and cards.' More welcome were visits from close friends, a varied company, not just in medicine, but lawyers and 'industrial people'. Friends often came to dinner, and every Saturday a group played tennis on the Murrays' court. Constance rejects the idea that her family and friends 'were an upper class'. Her Scottish background saw to that, she says, remembering that there were many people on the north shore with similar roots. 'Everybody's poor ... [in Scotland]', she explains, 'so there's never any class feeling in Scotland'. In the clans—and her father was a highlander from Clan Ross—'the laird and the ploughboy respected each other'. When such people came to Australia, she says, 'we never felt in any way more than the same as anybody else—the market place was for all of us. No—there was never any feeling of class'.



Advertisement in Aspro Year Book, *1938. Aspro produced this slim volume annually. It contained predictions for the year ahead, hints on 'How to Plant by the Stars' and lists of sporting results and records. For 1938 it predicted a risk of war and 'critical times for 1940-42'. 'At the end of 1937 or early in 1938 Australia could most probably see a change in some of her Governments. A certain amount of unrest and labour trouble also marks our year. But whilst the stars warn us against expecting too much, they also reveal some golden opportunities for progress.'*