

Melbourne – After the War

Diary entries from October 1 1945 to December 31 1949

Bird diary entries from July 12 1951 to 10 January 1958

A pictorial diary with sparse notes covers the period 29 December 1975 to December 1976

1945 Monday, October 1

I have so completely forgotten the past fortnight that I am calling on my cash book to tell me what happened at least financially.

I had another memorable experience on this Wednesday, for – the second successive day – I fell among books. I went to the Lonsdale Street end of Myer's and looked disapprovingly at the prices of dolls and sheepskin dogs and whatnot – Diana – will be one year old on Oct 3. Coming away I browsed the bookstall and lo – the 'Complete and Authentic Works of Rabelais' 16/6. We were together and I fell. [*Note from Lester added on 17/2/1953 – that is still my recollection of a book I took a year to finish*]

I took no chances on the Sunday [*of being caught in the rain without a raincoat*] when I went out to Grandma's. They had just been listening to a broadcast home by Darrill in a long Dunlop Rubber-sponsored session. He spoke very well – had had '43' attacks of malaria, but none for the past 6 weeks; had gained weight rapidly; had had 35 letters and odd parcels; ..hoped to be home for his 22nd (in Dec) and 'make it a good 'un'. His wish is being granted, as he was on the Esperance Bay, due to dock at Darwin yesterday. Mum is pretty well resigned to not seeing Ulva again. Like me, she had little hope from the start. Dad, she is sure, never had any. Merl has lost most of hers.

Tom went in with enquiries the other day, and due to knowing a chap from Horn Island was shown the files on Ulva. As I expected there'll be no step to presume

him dead till a thorough investigation has been made by the special personnel going to the Celebes and other islands.

At Grandma's Pauline and Uncle Jack waxed talkative over the vicious match of the day before, which Carlton won by such a splendid recovery (after Collingwood had come to a standstill in the savage battering game). Since then, in a match perhaps even more vicious, Carlton have (*sic*) won the premiership and made League history. And this dyed-Blue-in-the-wool supporter can't help feeling glad.

Tuesday October 2

To complete this resume. On Saturday morning I went into town too late to take the time to bank my war savings certificates.

I still had to settle the question of what for Diana, so I revisited the Myer toy counter. There I decided I might as well be hung for a sheep and spent 23/6 on a bright red and green felt Dutch doll, which on the shelf looked as though little damage could be done to it. (When I got it home I found it had three or four tufts of soft curly hair poking out under the cap, a ribbon round its neck, and several fragile little white buttons.)

On Sunday, a very beautiful day, I had dinner with Merl Val and Diana and presented Diana with her first doll. She held it with more interest than most of her toys and planted her open mouthed kiss on it a number of times. She had soon tugged all the hair out.

Today the tram strike started...by this evening apparently involved all the sheds.

Wednesday October 3

Last night I mailed Diana 10/- from Dad and Mum, in response to Mum's wish to give her some present.

Today and tonight I walked to and from the station, saving the large sum of 4d. I left work at 5 to 5 tonight and I could easily have left till just after 5, judging by the ordinariness of the crowd at the gates.

Thursday October 4

I am filling in time now till Les' middle-aged divorcee man friend decides to go home and Les and Mrs Niddrie decide to put the wireless off and go to bed. I resolve again as before that tomorrow night, should all be in bed when I come home, I won't be so careful with my tread in the echosome passage, and will be emphatic in shutting the doors, but I'll probably weaken again. Damn them just the same, at the moment I'd sooner be in bed than on it.

Sunday October 7

I hope, free of visitors, we have an early night tonight as Thursday night I lasted till after midnight, when he had palpably gone though it was another hour before Les or Mrs put the light out; on Friday night I came home – quietly I hope – at 25 past 11 and was in bed nearly midnight; last night midnight again.

When I went over to Merl's I found Diana walking cockily with her legs wide apart. Merl says she nearly runs sometimes. I brought back my two photos of our baby, which Merl had got covered for me. Val was not there, spending the weekend at Glenferrie with some friends.

I didn't go to town during the daytime yesterday, to the wellbeing of my wallet.

Monday October 8

Today was a beautiful day. For the first time in months I was wise enough to go without a jumper, and benefited in my lunch time stroll by not arriving back at work in a bath of perspiration.

Part of my lunch – my last sandwich I should say – I ate looking out of a window of Mr Ingram's deserted room at a motor procession of returned soldiers, passing up Collins Street in the Spencer Street direction. It was the first I have looked on one of these numerous processions, the others have occurred in working hours when this room was occupied, and the windows of the lesser workers' rooms no doubt occupied fully by girls' broad bottoms.

The crowd either side of the route pressing on the streamered and paper-spattered cars, was not vociferous, but was enthusiastic from head to toe. Every here and there someone, usually a girl, was recognising a soldier and riding on the running board for a short distances as the car slowly forged ahead. The other side trams were banked up with heads craning from them, and afterwards when I went outside before the procession had finished there was a vast bank of trams up the Russell Street hill. ...The procession was very slow moving in my Collins Street section, as airmen hurrying out of Phairs' with glasses of beer – one in each hand – halted every car. Sometimes the glasses were recovered a chain or so further on. I hope none was lost, as it was a generous gesture, even if 'publicans can afford it', and even though a cynic might call it a boost to the goodwill.

It's a troubled world, and it was good to see such a happy welcome and the pleasure of men returning to a peaceful life – for how long?

Tuesday October 9

This morning started beautifully sunny though windy. Before 10 it had been raining. Later it was sunny, while the Changi POW (they must have been POW yesterday) were being driven through the city.

[Lester goes out to post a letter at lunchtime and is cut off by the parade of cars.]
and from various parts of the crowd watched the soldiers at close quarters as they were driven past. When the last car had taken on their way the last group of broad smiles, The cars were still passing here, to much enthusiasm. ...a cheerleader on the band rally pavilionet was raising successions of cheers.

Monday October 15

Last Wednesday, a dull drizzly day, and in a dull drizzle, my Chinese friends from Little Bourke Street congregated in a truck before Myer's, gaily dressed, making the old dragon go to town to the accompaniment of the usual banging, which sounds like a number of empty milk buckets being kicked over by rhythmical cows, but which in their use of it sounds also oddly attractive. I hope it sold a few bonds.

On Thursday afternoon when I was waiting for my tram, Beverley Canet told me Darrell had arrived home. When I was lying on the bed, reading, a little after eight, Gavan came across to suggest I come up as one relative and another and a lot of friends were there. I put on my boot, Gavan in the meantime inspecting my library, which resulted in my lending King's Row to him. At the gate we were met by Uncle Charlie and Jessie, just coming along from phoning Pauline.

At 3 Wyuna Road, the first person I saw was Winnie, whose breath, when we kissed, whiffed of brew. Gavan introduced me to three or four of his cobbles as Lester Canet, and Auntie Kitty, looking much older in the several months since I saw her, came and kissed me. Then I met Darrell, somewhere about my own height, with the olive tinge of the returned man, looking very fit, but with that something

about his eyes they all have. Of course it was too soon to have an evening, but as various non relatives, rather thoughtlessly, had said they would drop over, they asked the various relatives to come. Auntie Daisy (*Hoarey*) (and Mrs turner, Auntie Kitty's sister) cooked the tea, as there were a number present, and Auntie Kitty can still only hobble about. Auntie Daisy and Winnie left soon after, together with Lorraine, who has changed out of recognition in the almost two years since I had seen her. Much of the evening Darrell sat with one arm about his mother, and the other about his girl, Joyce, to whom he sent his love in each long-delayed card. ...She was showing me a painted wooden mape of Australia, inset with a photo of the family and two Australian scenes, which Darrell had cherished through the three and three quarter years [*that he was a POW*]

Uncle Charlie had to leave about half past 10, as he had only till midnight. He had to report back to the Heidelberg Hospital, where he is being examined prior to discharge, which he expects in two or three weeks.

A number of relatives went into town to see if they could pick Darrell [*in the procession of POW's*]. Joyce apparently missed him, being on the wrong side. Pauline got on the running board, Honorine inside, and Myra and Auntie Renee chased the car from Spencer Street to Spring Street. Val skipped work and went in with Evelyn and in Friday's Sun her face under its swept up hairdo, smiled over the extended barricading arm of a smiling MP, under whose other arm Eveleyn's profile gaped hilariously. The girls at Hilliers had been wasting a lot of sympathy on her as she had rheumatism (a sickie) on Wednesday. Fortunately, she made no bones about where she'd been on Friday, although she had no idea her picture would be in the Sun. Funny thing was, even Diana picked on it when they showed her the scene. They tried to get her to repeat the performance when I was there. She looked for a moment as though she wasn't coming up to scratch – then she placed her finger on Val's face and started scratching at it. She takes the doll to bed and cuddles it.

When I shook hands saying goodnight to Darrell at the front door I said the trite 'It must be a great feeling' and he answered the all too sincere 'I'll say. A man can't realise it.' He was a boy when he was taken, a little over 18. He'll be 22 in December. [*Lester was 24*]

Yesterday afternoon I visited Grandma's. Uncle Jack Canet was there for a while and this time, together with Pauline, we talked the Premiership. Of course Carlton, compared with South [*?Melbourne*], *were a bunch of lilywhites....* Auntie Renee was absent kalomining at her Frankland Street flat.

Today I browsed the Myer Bookstall. All I saw was a Tristram Shandy edition with an introduction I'd like to have read through. The book made my mouth water. Whenever I see a new edition of a prized book I own, I wish I was buying it all over again. It would have been 13/- this one (3/3 my little World Classic).

Tuesday October 16

A mixed day of cloud and sunshine, sunny at lunchtime. Now it is raining. I looked in the Book Depot with intent towards Everymans or World Classics, but nothing had appeared since my last visit and my recreation expenditure for the current period after 5 days stands at 10 ½ d.

Thursday October 18

I spent Friday night and Sunday afternoon and evening with Merl, Tom, Val and Diana. The three women will be going home next Tuesday morning, Merl and Dian' to Daisy, and Val to mum and dad. For about a fortnight, the Manns. Val of course for the summer. Tatts. Tatts. She'll have a lovely time of it. No electricity. No fresh water. No nothing. New stove not even in.

On Saturday morning I went in primarily to see about depositing my war savings certificates (now 49 x 16/-) and was given an application form which I filled in last night. I lodged them today: consequence need not now carry them wadded tightly in the lining of my coat: consequence, if tomorrow is again muggy, can wear my unlined donegal. My winter drawers will soon be off.

Saturday October 27

Merl had her top teeth in last night. They alter the whole appearance of her face – we've been used to a gummy mouth for months now. Of course her being conscious of them the whole time has its effect on the set of her mouth and on her expression. They fit very well, and suction is good. Bottom teeth to follow.

Our brat's latest:- Merl opens the front door in the morning and she [*Diana*] trots out and gets the paper. But before bringing it in she goes to the gate and has a shot at opening it.

Tuesday October 30

When I was at Merl's on Sunday Tom suggested he and I go down to see the pyrotechnics display at Point Ormond, which had been postponed to Monday night.

..we at length unwound ourselves in blowy dimness to wait patiently at the barbed wire midway along the mound where the main rocket firing positions were. Large crowds had swamped vehicles and sheds at either end, and we were cut off from sight of the sea, except the northern area flooded by the docked warship's searchlights. Thus we missed the lower, more material half of the flamethrowing displays, merely seeing the red-glaring oily smoke after each rumble; and also missed the descent of various projectiles into the sea. I hear the flat top carrier which came into the bay, was nearly caught by phosphorous flares or shells and had to signal to direct fire elsewhere. Other shipping was of course warned off.

Tom had showed me a telegram 'Do not travel tomorrow. Writing. Charles Dudley.' I gave him my phone numbers. He was sanguine, but my private construction was that the most probable explanation was – Mum didn't wish to bluntly inform them by wire of presumption (or more) of Ulva's death and feared that if Merl and Val came up on the train someone they knew might get in at Shepparton and start talking of it. When Val rang at 2 o'clock she told me one of Mr Nelson's children has paralysis. So Val goes up tomorrow afternoon and Merl's trip is off indefinitely.

In the intervening months the dull dread I often knew before January the 6th [*when given news that Ulva was missing in action*] and the numb revelation of that day, had dulled, as thought, between discounting hope, and with my escapist mind putting off the morrow (unlike so many with whom the suspense grows worse) I had gained some kind of relief. But since I saw the telegram, especially this morning, all that dread expectancy redoubled, and though the phone call brought a feeling of thankfulness, in the wake has been an unhappy renewed consciousness, and a knowledge that he will die again when I finally learn of his death.

Thursday November 1

Today was hot and clear. I was at Food Control all day, and like other anticipated evils it was not as bad as in expectation. I am to do the Vegetable Accounts Section annual balance, but Mr Kerr has not got around to formulating directions yet. I concentrated on Commonwealth disposals Commission stuff, and also wrote a report on a sugar file that had been marked to me on the first of last month and which I had shied at every intervening moment I thought of it. I hope it doesn't come back. The matter's actually as soluble and digestible as concrete. At lunchtime I bought Mrs Niddrie for her birthday tomorrow, a box of those gaudy 'Pink Pearl' chocolates (I've badly transposed my adjectives) which I took to Gracie's concert. I hope she likes them.

Monday November 5

On Friday night I did what I had not been expecting to do a week before (since it was Tom's night shift) and went across to 4 Flowers Street. Diana was exceptionally bright and flirtatious. Merl said she kept looking for Val after Val went. She still brings in the paper.

Thursday November 8

I didn't go anywhere on Cup Day. In the afternoon I listened to Silver Link in second place giving back 10/- each to Mrs Niddrie and me, in her case to cover 8/- invested in sweeps, in my case 3/-.

Sunday November 10

Last night when I opened the living room door at Tom's, at a snap glance there were two Toms. However, the second glance disclosed Jim, Tom's brother, who only really resembles Tom in a family way. I met him some 18 months ago when he was down on his way to Ballarat with leave following the birth of twins. Now he is in Melbourne for his discharge, which may come next week. Next weekend, all being well, I spend Saturday night at the Manns and on Sunday we got up to 'the hills'.

Today I voted – for Hughes, without enthusiasm.

Monday November 12

The election wasn't nearly such a decided swing to Labour as I expected, but bad enough. I might as well frankly admit to myself that my sympathies are not Labour with a capital L.

Monday November 19

On Saturday I went into town in the morning, spent an hour in the Century, as a change from the Tatler (*theatres showing one hour newsreels*), bought chocolates for us, and for Bell and Jessie (for Belle's current birthday – today I think – and Jessie's passed birthday) and went up to the Metro, where I got a ticket for the opening night of National Velvet next Friday.

In the afternoon I went over to the Mann's, and slept the night. In the morning...we caught the 8.12 tram.....we just caught the Upper Ferntree Gully train, comfortably full, at 5 to 9.

The sky had clouded over again when we were still in Brighton road and gave us cause for concern all the hour long journey to Upper Ferntree Gully. There, after a wait while Merl changed diana, we managed to catch a bus for Emerald – its limit, which attracted Merl. Only intermittent sunshine was glimpsed during the almost hour-long drive, which we enjoyed, though Tom and Merl stood much of the way. You'd want to enjoy a drive which cost 1/8 both ways for 11 miles.

[The group spends a chilly day in Emerald but enjoy the views once they find them]

Thursday November 22

Yesterday I made my first move in the direction of a post war job when I posted an enquiry to 'No 100 C/ The Argus', who had advertised on Saturday and the previous Wednesday, for an accountant. ...I have little expectation of even getting a reply, and am not keen anyway on being accepted – it sounds too much like an office out of the city area. My letter was only an enquiry, as I felt I could not go on passing up the few possible adverts in the Professional Engagements column, which I have been studying for weeks.

Les' 'boy' friend is here again tonight (I notice October 4 was the last such evening, let's hope Christmas is the next). The night's only a pup, but it's a bridge foursome

counting Joan, so God only knows when. And I'm a boy that will be up late tomorrow night and wants to be bright and fresh for 'National Velvet'.

Sunday November 24

In my lunch hour on Friday I bought a Pelican at Mulens' – B. Ifor Evans 'Short History of English Literature'. I have read forward 25 odd pages, but also first dipped into its distances to find what it said about Dickens, Sterne, and Fielding, probably my three favourite novelists.

Thursday December 8

This afternoon at lunch time I posted a second job enquiry, this time to No. 114, C/NSO Bourke Street. As in the other case, I don't expect a reply. I have little I can put on paper, bar exam qualifications with two small institutes, and lack both the ability and the inclination to puff it up. That permanently on crutches will always scare an industrial firm too.

Wednesday December 12

Saturday afternoon I spent with Tom listening to his two place cards (*?racing*) being demolished. He had been over Friday night in my absence. Merl and Diana and Sid (for Christmas and New Year and maybe most of the holidays) come back late this week or early next week. I have hardened in favour of going home on the Thursday morning train next week (if one runs) even though reservations have been cancelled and it leaves at 7.10 a.m. It sounds a better proposition than the Friday night train, which is certain to be packed. Even getting to work looks like being hectic, if as they propose, they cut down even peak trains to four carriages.

Dear God, imagine all the people who catch the Dandenong train at night packed into four carriages.

In this rising tide of gloom I go about the business of buying presents. Merl informs me Daisy is making me a sheepskin rug to give Mrs Niddrie and a couple of flower painted enamelled glass dishes if I care to give them to anybody else. This will solve part of the problem (I may give the dishes to grandma's lot). Daisy still owes me £10 but it looks as though it'll have to go by the board, as Bill will probably get his discharge any time. I've a book 13/9 at Whitcombe and Tombs', 'Lovely Britain' for Mum, and six numbers of Penguin new writing for Val. That leaves Dad, Merl (whom I want to give stockings), Tom, Diana (something less elaborate this time), Daisy, Maurice and Sid. I knew knew such a dull unexpectant Christmas. It's all problems and no pleasures.

Saturday December 15

On Thursday morning I caught the quarter past eight express and bought a ticket to Tally. As I hadn't put in my application and Mr Kerr hadn't caught the drift of my intention to go up the week before, thinking I was only to take the Monday, he was apoplectic when Mr Pearce informed him. The auditor general's report is due early January, and Mr Kerr has all the cares in the world. Mr Pearce rang me 'as Mr Kerr wasn't speaking in case he said something for which he'd be sorry' to say I couldn't count on the leave being officially approved. I said to Mr Pearce, though no doubt he didn't say it to Mr Kerr, that I'd still go. A few minutes later Mr Kerr rang me to say the Chief Auditor had approved the leave, but would have to consider whether it should be without pay. I answered that that was my expectation, and that I had written out my application to that effect (in it saying the delay in applying had been occasioned by the extreme uncertainty of the position. A hollow excuse, as if there had been a last minute change for the better or worse, I could have worked the days granted and been paid.)

A fresh complication is introduced by the curtailment of country trains, beginning next Friday. This will no doubt continue till post strike stocks rise appreciably.

...I'll have to come back the day before New Year at the latest, not that New Year matters to me. But I may come down the Friday before, as if I missed the Monday train, I would miss Wednesday at work. And it is enacted that if we miss the Wednesday we forfeit our holiday pay (incidentally we are paid the fortnight in advance next week for some stupid reason.) In that event I would feel obliged to part company with my job while still without hope of another, something I have no stomach for.

Yesterday my wanderings brought only, with much doubt, 'These Are My People' (Allan Marshall) at Mullin's for Dad. He may even have read it – Val may have it – and Lord knows whether he'll like it anyway.

When I got home there were two brown paper bags on my bed and Joan, who is home sick, said Tom had left them and I was to take care in opening them. He also left word Merl had come home. The contents of the parcels turned out to be two oval pincushions, four enamelled little glass dishes, each with a painted bread flower, ..and a bread flower spray. All attractively done. Daisy's quite a handicraftswoman.

So instead of smapling the dubious charms of 'Fanny by Gaslight', I was kissing Merl. A long legged apparition in the shadowy passage was Sid, and down below, in singlet and nap, for it was a sweltering day, Diana grinned up at me. After I come back, I'll do what I can to leave Sid as few loose ends as possible, for on his own down here, he's bound to find some dull moments. Daisy gave diana three lovely big lambswool toys (bear, rabbit, dog) from herself and the boys. I think mine will be a war savings certificate.

Lester buys more gifts] ...I still feared to tread where the hosiery was hanging with unenticing labels.

Sunday December 30

I took this diary home, but as might have been expected, it wasn't touched.

Tuesday night I went to Merl's. Wednesday night Tom and Sid came over to take my case and a tin of foodstuffs (consigned as luggage) up to the station. They also brought a bright green sheepskin rug for my present to Mrs Niddrie, who gave me a tie. I gave Tom a tie, Sid a tennis ball and 5/- spending money, and Diana a war savings certificate. I produced some chocolates, and Merl, taking them as my present to her, refused to take 10/- I was going to give her in lieu of some article. Tom and Merl gave me a box of chocolates, still in my drawer unopened. Diana gave me a stud box, with two of Tom's packets of razor blades in it.

[*Lester catches an early morning train to Tally*]. I spent nearly all the journey trying to relax. I succeeded so far at one state that the train left Nagambie and went on and on and came to Murchison East. What happening to Waring can only form matter for conjecture. It was back in its place when I came down on Friday night.

Dad, stooped and shaking awaited me. So did 257 flies. We didn't wait for my case, but took my little case, the flies, and a dull headache home. ... Val went up during the afternoon and returned with the case, but the tin hadn't arrived. It arrived on Monday. Four green bananas had become one black ooze, which drooled over oranges, lemons, apples, a parsnip, carrots, and a packet of jelly crystals (which it spoiled). A packet of coffee was untouched, and of course the tinned pudding knew nothing about it.

Daisy and Maurice came down on Sunday, and again on Christmas day, when I gave Maurice the same as I gave Sid. Daisy gave me two hankies and I gave her a good box of chocolates which she made family property. That's the disadvantage of that form of present.

From Thursday, nearly to Wednesday night, the weather was dry heat, usually without much wind. Dad and Mum felt it severely. (On Friday Dec 14, it had been

110, and muggy, killing 5 of the chooks, all but one of the boys's ferrets, and scores of chooks belonging to other people.) ...I scrapped coat, shirt and socks, and wasn't unduly uncomfortable, except that heat and limited fare (no fresh vegetables or fruit except rarely) didn't induce appetite, and smallness of appetite reduced energy.

That is what hampers Mum, and particularly Dad.

On Christmas Day Maurice and I passed much of the time hand-patting his tennis ball to one another on the bounce first in the dining room and later in the vestibule.

As we had heard there was a strict quota on train-catchings from Wunghnu, Val enquired on Monday and learnt that 4 was the Tally limit each day. ...It transpired when I went up on Friday with a written application that he [*the station master*] kept no regular list, but I was safe. He told me 12 had been allowed to go on Wednesday, as there were as many people with return tickets, allowance just had to be made. In any case I had got in early with my application through Val.

[*Lester catches a train at 5.45 reaching Spencer Street at 11.28 – he is always precise to the minute and reaches home at half past midnight.*] As I half expected the back door was locked. As the key would be on the inside, and the damn keyhole's hard enough to find at any time, I went round to my window, ignoring the light that had come on in Ian's room when I rattled the door knob. Of course, he switched on my light as I was following my crutches and case through the window.

I was across at 4 Flowers Street before 10. We had an early lunch and Sid and I caught a tram to the city. [*They watched a movie, caught a train to Caulfield and picked up the case. Due to circumstances they walked to Mrs Niddrie's place and then over to Merl's*]. Before we had gone halfway my right leg felt a foot longer than the left, and I've never been so glad to get anywhere as I was when we arrived at Merl's. the trouble was, I was tired before we started.

1946

Thursday, January 3

[*Lester and Sid visit the Museum – for hours*]. ..strolled down Bourke Street and had two unsatisfactory spiders at the Anglo-American Café. A brusque man set them up, dabbed the icecream on, handed us two spoons to stir them, and turned to be brusque to some other customer.

We went down to Point Ormond in the evening arriving in the dusk of 7.45. It was too cold and windy for Sid to go into the water, so we wasted no time in strolling up to St Kilda. Sid looked assiduously for money. A couple of days before he had found 3d and Tom 6d. Diana kept wanting to get down and toddle.

At St Kilda the throngs were in Luna Park and the playgrounds outside. Sid and Tom went in one of the electric boats.

Missed Date

On Friday, Jan 4, Ulva had been missing a year. Jan 5 was the anniversary of the notification to Mum and Dad, and Jan 6 of the day Uncle Charlie came and told me. I wonder have they been informed in the last several days of presumption of his death?

Sunday January 12

I visited the Mann's last night and beat Sid both times at crib. I am going over again tomorrow morning, so had my weekly bath this afternoon. I posted another fruitless job enquiry on Wednesday. I cut down the detail and forgot to mention the wage I am getting.

Monday January 14

Yesterday I went over to Merl's by the 11.8 tram. It was a hot day, rising to 105 at 5, and we didn't go out till 20 past 4, making Point Ormond beach after a dally in the ti tree there, about 5. It was still too hot under the sea wall, but Sid in his trunks dashing in and out, more in than out, of the water; Diana in pink panties, sitting down in the water, and puddling with her bucket and spade, while Merl and Tom stood by bare footed, enjoying themselves and were reluctant to come away when we left after 6.30. We should have gone down a little later, with tea, as so many did.

Today Messrs Dunbar and Wood shifted over the passage to one of those boxed in inner rooms, to stake our claim. Commerce is coming down to Reliance House, so the Audit Office must have room for all its members.

Thursday January 17

It had been raining all yesterday and when I returned from the pictures an electric storm was in progress. Although Mrs Niddrie and Les were up, the wireless was not on, but it was some 10 minutes before I realised the reason for my good fortune.

Which brings me to the gem I just inserted in a letter home: 'I can hear the rain falling on the palm tree next door, which is my nearest substitute for the sweet sweet song of an ugly iron roof. When I become a manufacturer I'm going to make my fortune selling a special patented tile to old retired country people in the suburbs still a trifle homesick for the bush. A tile that sounds like an iron roof when it's raining.'

I did not add, however: 'I can also hear a succession of bastard inkspots and bughouse bawlers and music makers whose charms hve been blotted out by three hours' continuity of wireless, including one loud volumed Amateur Hour in which I

finished Joseph Andrews with my fingers wagging in my ears. Now Bing Crosby moos with perceptible increase in volume and now once again I forlornly seek solace by recoinng that speech I'll never make to Mrs Niddrie, 'When I'm leaving, if post war wirelesses are out in the market and you're thinking of buying one, maybe I'll make you an offer for yours and then what happens to it will be the concern of nobody but myself (thank God, it's off – 10.20) and the wireless and mallett. The three of us will go to some vacant allotment, and the mallet and I will return together – alone.' As usual, when the source of the pain is removed, I now feel a little contrite at my bellyaching and muttered 'bloody bitches' (too, too, distressingly frequent.) But if Les, lingering up, put that wireless on again, even softly, my rage would return and redouble.

Saturday January 20

More rain yesterday and today, steady and soaking. To register my letter home I went by filthy Flinders Court to Flinders Street and the little Commerce House Post Office.

My wages were short by £2/12/1, being £9/4/0 instead of £11/16/1; together with tax .1/7/6, a loss of £4/10/7 in the gross. (£10/11/6 instead of £15/2/1.) Who cares.

When I came out the ticket gate the reflection of the tram was sliding along dead on time. Philosophically giving it up I mooched along on the station side. The tram started off and stopped a second later a chain away squarely before me. I suddenly woke up that the driver was Fred Parsons beckoning me on. I made all the speed I could to board it. At Kambrook road I had time to get level with the front and grin 'Thanks Fred'.

Sid romped with Diana on his bed to the detriment of the springs and the huge enjoyment of Diana who revelled in the surge of mattress beneath her. They tell me she put her first sentence together yesterday when the cat jumped down off the step.

‘Aah – pussy cat jump down’ and repeated it over and over. She prattled all the evening with an odd intelligible word darting in and out. She had a book ‘Claire and Circumstance’ which had neither beginning nor end, and made a great show of turning over the pictureless pages of her ‘boo’.

Sid beat me handsomely at crib. Then Merl and I introduced him to euchre – and cut-throat at that. He was beginning to use correct and cautious policy (good for beginners).

Daisy and Maurice were due down on this morning’s train. Merl thinks they’ll be staying with her – roughing it as to beds.

Tuesday January 22

Tom and Maurice came over at 11.15 on Sunday when we all, late risers all, were having breakfast. They came to say Daisy was taking the boys and Noel Carlisle, who is staying with an aunt at Carnegie, to the Zoo in the afternoon.

[Lester is invited to go too but cannot as he hasn’t had his bath! Only appears to have one a week. Goes over to Merl’s]. The Roughies came in a while after six, when we had had our tea. During the evening Sid beat Maurice and me at crib, then beat me and lost handsomely to me at euchre. As Daisy and the boys are going back on Friday night, Feb 1, I will probably be going with them. I arranged to go with her and the boys to the matinee next Saturday at the Comedy – ‘Dear Ruth’. We knew it would be dear as the kids could not get in half price on Saturdays.

However, I will not be presenting the bill to her, as if it had been Daisy who went to Allan’s she would very likely have shied at the circle we agreed on, and taken either back circle or similarly ‘cheap’ seats downstairs. However I without turning a hair, took 5 seats in the front row of the circle - £1 18s 4s. My only regret, apart from the fact that I’m not terrifically keen to see the show, is that we’ll look silly damn fools taking three children to 7s 8d seats. Daisy told me the other day she has

left the £10 I lent her with Val, and as she wouldn't take anything for the mat and other articles which saved me an outlay at Christmas, I'll be able to brush her off when she goes to pay. Bill is now out of the army. She drew her last regular pay the other week, but has £44 coming on account of his long service leave and £15 is on the way from Mr Roughsedge for the bike she has already provided Sid. Beyond that the future is dubious.

My latest wild dream is black and white art, for which I am by temperament (though not execution) more fitted than for short story writing. Anyway there will be Indian ink and cartridge paper in the expenditure column of the cash book, but all the receipts side will see will be my wages – if those.

I knocked the stuffing out of my wallet yesterday. On top of the tickets, £1 12s went on that sound investment, war savings certificates, then 5 6d on a more – evanescent? 'investment', books. (Eh ma, Gawd, why did I buy those certificates? I've just remembered Val's Reader's Union subscription. I'll have to let the money home go by the board this week, not that they'll be short, but I like to keep up with the payments.)

Sunday January 27

I decided to watch the march from Mr Ingram's (the Meat Control accountant's) window. He was out so I had an uninterrupted view from 3 storeys up. It was an attractive march, with little straggling (I noticed an occasional man a step behind his companions) but I got much more enjoyment watching a girl in a pink dress standing on the bonnet of a car on the other side of the street in front of the Orient Line. A Margaret Rose she seemed without that slight tinge of sullenness.

Today Grandma's where I have the onus of saying the Roughies (who obviously do not intend to visit Grandmas) are visiting the aircraft carriers (as they are) without

committing myself about their next week's movements. I was wrong there – she didn't want to go with three kids in tow but would have if she had known of Belle's phone call.

Wednesday March 6

If I don't start this it will never get started. I just scraped through to pay day when I collected £24 9s 2d.

On this Saturday I had an uneventful trip home to spend 3 uneventful weeks, contented amid exceptionally variable weather. I made two trips to Daisy's the first time staying the night, when I watched her play bowls. (I haven't my mind on what I'm writing. I should be reading with my fingers in my ears, as Christy's Radio Auditions is on. Leslie went to Sydney for at least a month's holiday today, so the wireless won't always be so pestersome for a few weeks.

Tonight a big burst of rain made everybody but a cautious cripple scuttle along the streets. Though I was rain coatless I trudged stolidly over the swimming footpath, and very gingerly under verandas.

Monday March 11

I went over to the Mann's yesterday and spent 7 hours by their fire. Tom's brother, Charlie, his wife, nine year old daughter and 14 month old son came down the previous night, and with the exception of the girl, were going back this morning.

Sunday March 17

Yesterday afternoon I shaved and washed and changed into my suit. Ticket and wallet had to be changed over and I decided to insure against haste after tea by having my tram fare extracted from the wallet. Whisht – two five pound notes amid the coins, nothing more. That meant two fivers had gone – where? I realised what a sock £10 was – why hadn't I forced it on Daisy, why hadn't I decided by now between the bank, bonds, war savings certificates and overdue clothing? All the

time I was grieving disgruntledly philosophical, and more and more determined never to breathe one word about my loss.

After tea I was cleaning my teeth when Tom came in. He chatted with the others while I swilled my mouth, my heart suddenly light. He walked with me to my room. 'Did you miss anything after you came home last night?' [Tom said Diana had found the money in the armchair in which Lester had been sitting].

We walked up to the corner and I wondered if I should have taken my hated coat. Tom caught a smart new tram with the awkwardly overhung steps off which my unwary foot slipped getting out at South Caulfield Junction some months ago. (I usually leave those accounts out. Probably because they put me out so much).

Monday March 18

After the news of the startling Western district floods this morning's lowering skies threatened inundation. But though the streets were a little wet going to work they dried and remained dry under clouds almost uniformly depressing.

Tuesday March 19

Today was a beautiful day. After staying in lunch hour yesterday I was glad to venture out. I bought two war savings certificates at the Elizabeth Street P.O. I wandered then to Myer's Bookstall and was fortunately not tempted. Coming back I bought a London Opinion at the magazine stall, and so back to work – hot. When will I walk some little way without perspiring? – light coat, light shirt, light singlet, open tieless neck, and still those confounded crutches heat me up.

Saturday March 23

Went to Merl's as usual last night, a warm beautiful evening. Tom on duty, home for tea about ¼ to 9. Diana woebegone in bed, so eventually Merl brought her out in her nighty. To make sure the reprieve was complete Diana made three trips back to bring out her woolly dog and two dolls, singing all the while with a chirping sound.

Eventually near ten Merl trotted her off again and after a little weeping all was silence. (She's not a bit afraid of the dark, but fights sleep inch by inch.)

Last night Merl gave me three small excellent snaps of Ulva, taken apparently at Victor Harbour.

Monday April 1

Five years today since I sat for the first night of my Intermediate Accounting Exam; and since Val biked down to Melbourne. Daisy and the kids were at Park Street then, Merl at Lexton and Ulva on the channels.

Tuesday April 2

Saturday was dampened by something more enduring than clouds. Mrs Niddrie told me at lunch that Ian would after his discharge be sleeping in my room. He would not shift any of his things in, using it for sleeping only. Just the same, he's quite unwelcome. It will mean two people going to bed at different hours – Ian coming in after me, or, if he's working and getting an early night in, Ian trying to sleep in the lighted room while I read or write till maybe 11 o'clock. Besides the diminished privacy. Knowing I was not pleased she resumed the subject at tea time very gently and disarmingly. She pointed out again that he complained of hearing every sound and getting every cooking smell in his little hutch. ...*[Mrs Niddrie said]* 'Don't think I'm trying to get rid of you. I regard you as one of the family. There isn't anyone I'd sooner have that I know or don't know. In fact I'd be hurt if you left on account of it.' So my notions of suggesting to Tom and Merl a remove after their return, chancing how I fared after they transferred to the country, went quietly out. Still I'm not looking forward to his discharge, which will probably follow closely on his current 8 days leave. He's sleeping home, but in his room.

Wednesday April 3

Last night I was on Tom's tram, but he kept away from me to avoid taking my fare.

Today I lodged 23 more war savings certificates, making 72 now in safe custody.

Sunday April 7

When I got over to Flowers Street the light was on, wood was in the grate, and a note from Merl said she and Diana had gone to visit Lesley,ⁱ and would be back about eight. Till then I sat, read the Herald, Sun and Australian Journal, munched a couple of chocolate marshmallows I had taken over, and fanned smoke out the fire that didn't want to burn for me but had to. Merl and the Little Girl Blue came in about ¼ past eight, glad to see the fire. She suddenly woke up, when I asked her, that she didn't know the name of Lesley's baby. They'll [*Merl and Tom*] will be in Ballarat now, and I suppose Lexton tomorrow or Tuesday.

Yesterday morning at Myer's, I bought a pair of dark blue trousers, my first in years. Now I'll have to buy a coat to wear with them.

Tuesday April 9

Turning over my Argus – which I seldom look at again after work – a little while ago, I saw on the racing page 'W.Foley's Condition Critical'. I took up my Herald then, and after a patient search found the heading 'Jockey Dies from Fall Injuries'. It was Bill all right – Waverley Road, East Malvern. That is all the address I have to contact Mrs Foley, but I'll send her a card and hope it reaches her. I wouldn't like her to think I'd forgotten her so easily – she may have thought I snubbed her that day, which I suppose I unintentionally did. I liked Bill, waster and bad-egg as he was. I found silly tears moistening my eyes, which suggests the regret is sentimental rather than otherwise.

Wednesday April 10

At lunch time today I rang the funeral parlor in the hope of finding Mrs Foley's address. They had only Bill's brother's address, and I didn't feel certain a letter addressed c/ that quarter would reach her. So I simply addressed it 'Waverley Road, East Malvern' and put my address on the card in case it became a dead letter. His

death notice said ‘dearly beloved husband of Josephine (which reassured me they were still together) and loving father of Vincent and Mavis Foley, aged 42 years.’ I hadn’t known he had any children, or had been previously married; there is of course the first possibility they are twins born to Mrs Foley since 1943, but it seems very faint. I felt depressed all day, and kept thinking of Bill and Mrs Foley. A cynical doctor might have said my heavy depression was indigestion or a cold coming on.

Friday April 12

The Meat Control Accounts Section is shifting tomorrow to the 7th floor of 401 (the Trustees Executors Building). We have a decent room with windows, we are informed.

A horde of open packing cases came in this afternoon. In one we packed our mats and the contents of our drawers. The ink bottle problem had to be solved by emptying all the wells. Someone who Bill swore was not Bill (I wonder) dropped ink on the stairs and all over the lavatory floor. So, farewell after two years to 339, and except for passing grins, to the nice little baldheaded lift man, Mr Patton.

Monday April 15

Today reached the new Meat Control at five to nine to find it in the grip of the carpenters still, with all the staff standing about talking. Our room is not a front one as I hoped, but a light-well one, well lit however. I went back to Food Control and spent all day there. The day was fine but the room so cold Mr Pearce scrounged us a radiator though they are not supposed to be issued till May 1. As he was out most of the day I had it close up to my leg, and for once came away from work with a warm left leg and foot.

Thursday April 25

It has been misting and drizzling all day, a lovely day for aging diggers to march.

Wednesday night last week I caught a cold as I carefully packed, which saved me catching one at Ballarat. I lightened the weight of my box on Thursday morning by coiling the end of the suitcase strap (keeping it shut) round the handle of my right crutch, which took most of the weight most of the time. I obtained a corridor seat in an old fashioned first class carriage, one with doors that on one side opened directly into compartments and on the other onto the outside corridor.

Merl warned me that the trip was the most uninteresting and unnecessarily protracted she knew. Sure enough, we twice had long waits, to let past the Overlander and the train from Mildura. Every five minutes we seemed to run into another station – it must have been oftener. The peevish thing was that nearly all the stations were on my blind side, the woman opposite me having shut the door at Sunshine. There was only one stream – before Bacchus Marsh – that even looked like a river, but there were plenty of creeks. As for time, used as I was to my 5 hour journeys, and peeved though I was by the two long waits, I was agreeably surprised when we puffed into Ballarat's quaint old roofed over station at 11.25.

I made my way down the street till pumps told me I was at the service station. I paid for my ticket there and found that my bus went at 3.30. I was then waiting at the luggage counter to check my box in when Merl's voice said 'Lester'. I turned and found her with the Little Girl Blue who was in her pusher. She had come in to meet me, and had stayed too long at her sister-in-law's.

We then went down the town. Ballarat, straggling down hill under a dull sky, was not very imposing. It was mostly dowdy, like its comical little trams.

[*Much shopping*]. We then went up to the service station, where we had a long wait, awaiting the turn of the Lexton luggage, principally Diana's pusher, which would enforce waking her – till we were at last in the bus. It was several minutes late in getting away. Jim Mann's wife [*Grace*] came up to the service station before we got on and stayed till we pulled out.

I had been looking forward to the drive, but my headache-eyecache detracted from its charms. A picture of miles of conifer flanked highway, then open country, the hills drawing towards us then passing by on either side, leisurely slopes up and down, endless winding of the highway, the 'great divide' at 1375 feet, Learmonth and its lake and more conifers, straggling Waubra amid bare slopes, a welcome plunge into timber, and at length emerging on Lexton, 30 miles on from Ballarat.

There was a house across the road, dim glimpses through dim trees in late daylight of parts of buildings, this was the scattered town Merl had told me of, only I was unprepared for the prolific shrouding of trees. 'There's our house. Look at the skeleton,' she said laughing, as she pointed. But not till we were getting towards the top of the rise (still unaware, the path amid grass we followed was one of Lexton's many 'streets'; that all dawned on me next day) did I make out the skeletal structure and behind it the remains of the house.

Round timber uprights and rafters, as good as when first put up fifty years ago, were all that remained of the front rooms. Merl had wondered at Tom not being at the road to meet us. Now she knew he had not got home from the cemetery (where he had been bricking up his parents' grave). She got the keys out of the low spouting (it's a very low set house, I could touch the ceiling without stretching my arm, and I'm short) and soon showed me that the inside was snug.

There was a back shed, a lavatory (of course) and a small shed in which Maurice milked his cow at the end of 1939 when the Roughies went there after their 3 months stay with us (beginning with the outbreak of war.)

What terrible paper, and this little table (!) I am writing on it beside my first fire at 9 pm on Saturday. It's too small and it won't keep still. If I go on stretching this narrative out it will be like Tristram Shandy taking years to write of days. Our baby had grown rather spoilt during her bad-cold days, on their first arrival, and at any

check, inside or outside, would bawl broken-heartedly. Her heart broke and mended two score times a day, chiefly indoors where she was into everything, especially when it was time to lay the table. Merl was far too inclined to give in to her and Tom too inclined to nag Merl about it and bounce Diana, who would invariably cry to Merl for comfort and sometimes succeed. It is a pity to see dispute over a baby and will be more of a pity if entertained later on, when she understands even quicker.

We were bound for a short walk up the Beaufort Road with Tom that afternoon. He was going to see a councillor about the shire-driving job which he had failed to get before and which is now open again.

[*Next day*] we made a long tour of the cemetery. Diana followed up at a distance, lingering at every built up grave, fascinated and content. She had brought a little bottle and oddly enough left it on her grandparent's grave. It was my first visit to a cemetery, and unadmiring of the polished stone modern graves, and pitiful of the decrepit wooden and iron railings, and defaced headstones, I tried instead, but with little success, to grasp that once living breathing people lay below.

[*Lester returns to Melbourne*]. Merl and Tom are coming back on Monday, April 29, and going up on Tuesday to Daisy's for about a week.

I have been working part of this week in our room at 401 which is an improvement, but cold. Heat doesn't come on till May 1.

Instead of filming my novels now I televise them, though without bothering to decide at what point to chop them up into their quarter or half hour instalments. Television enables me to do more justice to the book and be more literal. I am now re-reading *Great Expectations*, though wondering a little how to preserve Miss Havisham's modesty after she catches alight.

Saturday May 4

Letters from Merl yesterday and Val today tell me that Val was to come back with the Manns today for probably a week. Merl suggested, if I wasn't going to Brunswick, that I might like to come over. So when I was in town this morning I rang and said I'd be coming out tomorrow week instead of tomorrow.

Tuesday May 7

Went over to Mann's on Sunday and Val was with them. Tom was to return to work today. Diana was in good form. Had Fred Parsons for my driver, and as I sat next to the cab, he had a little yap with me at Balaclava Junction.

Received 'A Citizen Goes Home' back from the Argus today. One more knock. I wish they'd put them in the basket instead of sending them back.

Tuesday May 21

Retrospect.

Sunday May 12, Grandma's. Auntie Daisy and Evelyn there for a while. Met and talked with Pauline's steady, Ray Leach, after they came home from church.

Wednesday May 18, Val's birthday, at Camden with Val. Val had booked the seats; when I wanted to pay hers she told me Diana had shouted her.

Merl's Friday night and again Sunday. Now there is the problem of a present for Merl for Saturday.

Monday at breakfast, with cold in sway of me, head dull, stomach queasy, appetite insufficient, I decided reluctantly to stay home. (I never like going to work, but whenever I have to stay home, tot up the reasons and cannot find them sufficient. If I'd been sitting at my desk, throat, nose, head and tummy would soon have proved their sufficiency).

Wednesday May 29

At lunch on Saturday (I seem broken in to that lunch-word now, no more breakfast, dinner and tea, but breakfast, lunch, and dinner – bah!).

Saturday June 15

Thursday June 6 – Meat Control till 4.30. Train at 4.45. Moved off 5. Seymour before 7. Tally station 9.30. Home 9.40.

Fri, Sat, Sun, Mon: variable weather, some sunshine to sit in. The boys down Sat afternoon to watch a scratch match. Down with Daisy on Sunday – my 25th birthday. Daisy is divorcing Bill. [*A note in Lester's handwriting says 'Still hasn't. 1950'*]

Friday night: visited Flowers Street. Diana gave me (with her little hands) a framed photograph of Dud, whom she called 'Ung Uv' as I uncovered it. It's an enlargement (of himself alone) of the excellent street photo taken in Sydney with Val. I put it on my dressing table and felt it was an in memorium. I thought (with surprise at the obviousness of the thought) 'I'll always have that with me'.

Val is working at Nilsen-Kromo's ten minutes from Merl's along Glenhuntly Road. Doesn't like it and isn't sure she'll stay.

Monday June 14

On King's Birthday I finished 'A Lion is in the Streets'.

On Thursday I bought two Penguins – now bloody 1s 8d – 'Wuthering Heights' and New Writing No 26 and 1s Australasian Shakespeare 'Henry V'.

On Friday I received my assessment £81 15s 4d less 11s rebate on £366 P.E. Total £81 10s. My group certificate totals £74 16s. Deficit £6 14s. Fuck the people who worked out the tables. – If I had earned a straight £370 (which was my rate) a

straight deduction of £1 9s a week (£2 18s a fortnight) would have amounted to £75 8s. That group certificate would have been inadequate to cover even the lower P.E. I returned.

As if that wasn't enough cold water – again no firewood. I'm under the eiderdown again. However Carlton beat Footscray and Geelong beat Essendon.

Saturday June 29

Visited Grandma's last Sunday. Played three games of checkers (first since 1941) with Pauline and Ray (her boy) and won each.

On Wednesday night as Les's punisher was coming (I was surprised on coming home to find the house in bed, though the embers said not long) I decided to go out.

On Thursday afternoon when I was in with Mr Kerr on the subject of a file, he told me he had 'taken the liberty' of suggesting me as an acquisition to Mr Hewson, the Chief Finance Officer, who is in process of transferring himself to the Wood Board, and only comes in to Food Control in mornings now. Mr Kerr remarked to me that this (audit) job would in all probability go on another two years at least, though my guess was as good as his, and though I would be one of the last to go, that day must eventually come. So he had expressed his good opinion of me to Mr Hewson, should any opportunity arise. I thanked him, and said I was definitely interested, confessing I had been watching the Professional Engagements for 18 months (but not speaking of my 4 unanswered enquiries).

As I turned away from the Registration Counter at the Elizabeth Street Post Office, Frank Dummet was coming up, and we walked for a minute, but without touching on the subject (almost as distant as the last time I saw him to speak to) of his wife and daughter's death, or of Bill Foley's.

When I got home there was an OHMS letter stamped with the name of the Kit Repository Store, West Melbourne. It told me, briefly, that as my brother's registered next-of-kin, the Department of Air, which was closing down the stores due to demobilisation, would release to me my brother's personal effects. The letter concluded 'It is desired to point out, however, that the release of your brother's personal effects should not be interpreted as a decision that his death has been established or presumed'.

An inventory was attached, and an application in the form of an indemnity against claims by or for Dud, his executors, administrators, or assigns as a result of the action taken by the Commonwealth. The inventory comprised his wood suitcase containing – 2 pilot's badges, 1 set of carpentering plans, 2 F/O epaulettes, 1 pyjama coat, 1 wallet, 2 prs khaki shorts, 1 New Testament, 1 clothes brush, 2 photographs and frames, 1 shoe polisher, 1 nail file, 1 writing tablet, 1 pr cuff links, 1 Golden Platignum fountain pen, 1 tie pin, 2 studs, 1 box containing 1 tin talc powder, 1 bottle Mitcham Lavender, 1 writing wallet.

The letter had been readressed to me by Mum, so before I went over to Flowers Street, I wrote them a letter apprising them of its contents, forgetful that Val was going up anyway today to pick up some of her things. We were most concerned that the bracelet he had been fashioning for Cynthia out of shillings (or guilders) was not listed, especially as she had known of it.

Tuesday July 2

Today, once more, I journeyed to the Farmers' Debts Adjustment Board, curse it. The fifth audit now.

Monday July 15

18 years ago tonight I took sick.

(Ulva's case was delivered by the RAAF last Monday. I didn't think about the contents till I went to open it, then I found I didn't want to open it. I left it for 20

minutes, till everybody was out of the house. Then I slit the green tapes between the seals, cut the twine, undid the catch, and removed the brown-paper, naphthalene-scented packing till the small brown parcel was revealed containing his effects. I carefully checked them with the inventory and receipted one copy, then replaced everything as it was. The wallet I gave him hadn't weathered the climate well – I wished again I had given him the dearer one. His money wallet was in better condition. The photos were both of Cynthia, one holding a little baby. A letter from Mum on Thursday night mentioned how sorry she and Dad were that they had not been the first to unpack and touch Ulva's things.

Thursday July 25

Nothing happened to me this week. Does anything – good?

Monday August 5

Sunday week I went to Grandma's 87th birthday party, but it's now too late to record anything about it. All 5 sons [*Henry, Robert, Albert, Jack, and Charles Canet*] turned up, as well as Auntie Daisy and Evelyn, and after tea there were Uncle Jack Hoarey, Eddie Arrowsmith, Stan and Eilen, Alf and Honorine, Pauline's boy friend Ray Leach, and lastly 'Madame' Sawers and her son Joe. 'Madam' speaking with a Scots accent, being the convenor of the religious gatherings to which Belle and Jessie take turns to go.

Yesterday I visited the Manns and we had chook for tea. Tom bought the chook a couple of days before, and killed it. Diana didn't see it killed, but she knew what the plucked corpse was, and refused all but a bone or so to nibble.

On Wednesday afternoon I rang to tell Belle of my new extension 217, as I had made my 8th shift at Food Control. I am within a few yards of where I first started in, was it March 1944?

Anyway when I rang , she said she had been going to ring me as Uncle Charlie had been in touch with them, saying that Auntie Kitty was pretty low and he didn't think she'd pull through. I decided I'd call in on my way home, and accordingly went on to Bambra Road. Her sister was there, and Auntie Daisy in the kitchen was pouring jam into some delicious looking little tarts and apparently baking in a big way. Darrell, Montie, Beverley and Uncle Charlie were home. I only stayed a couple of minutes, making the point that I was on my way home from work. Uncle Charlie walked out to the gate with me, and said, as he had to, that she hadn't rallied at all after coming out of hospital, and that he didn't think she'd pull through. However, Belle rang me again on Thursday morning to say that Auntie Kitty had known her when she called Wednesday evening, and Uncle Charlie had rung during the morning to say she seemed better. So perhaps she will come round after all.

On Friday I posted (2 ½ d postage – NOTE) my latest forlorn hope, 'The Unknown Yank' a 4000 worder to the 'Australasian Post'. I hope they don't kindly send it back. The sight of a package on my bedroom table is worse than slowly dwindling hopes.

Friday August 13

'The Unknown Yank' awaited me when I arrived home last night. With Eliza Doolittle I cry, 'What's to become of me?' As I had been in a mood of depression all day, it only needed that. I'm okay today, except that suddenly I have nothing to dream about. I'm eschewing women – till fantasy born of longing conquers me.

Thursday August 15

Not so unforgettable – but less depressing than August 15, 1945.

Saturday August 18

Last night Val came over and got Dud's case to take up today. We walked back with it. I extracted one F/O epaulette to send to Cynthia, who when I asked her if

she would like anything, since the bracelet was not forthcoming, expressed a wish for an epaulette.

This morning's mail contained a largish envelope with only a Box number return address. Inside was a signed circular letter (addressed to me) which at first glance was a pure course sales drive by the Australian School of Journalism, and I felt quite unamused with 'Post'. However the pill is sugared. There is a chance of 6 full scholarships 'valued at 23 guineas each', 6 three-quarter scholarships, 8 half scholarships and 10 quarter scholarships. Entries close Sept 2. I'll probably weaken. But it would be insupportable, if I won anything, to win a quarter scholarship and wonder whether to pay the balance, as I've never had any enthusiasm for sinking money in a journalistic course.

Tuesday August 20

Went out to grandma's on Sunday. Uncle Jack Canet and Auntie Daisy called. Uncle Jack reminisced about the Tally football days. Ray, Pauline and I played seven games of checkers. Ray won 4, Pauline 2, me – the rest. Pull up your socks, Lester.

Tomorrow I promise to go up Lonsdale Street and think about new crutches. I bet I don't. Saturday, after my visit to the dentist and delivery of my current boot to the boot repairer, I may start once again prospecting coats and trousers. I bet I don't.

Wednesday August 21

Another very depressing day. Back in 1942 I burst into 7 sonnets about Marj Killeen. Fortunately that can't happen any longer.

Tuesday August 27

Val entertained me. She had brought home the parts of one of the push-buttons she assembles at a bonus of 1d for each one over 220. Though hampered by using a nail file instead of a screw driver, and by a taped up thumb, she put the intricate little

jigger together for me. I'll never see a push button again without thinking of her. [A note by Lester, dated June 17 1948 says 'BLOODY LIAR']

On Saturday I went to J S Gibson for a once over my teeth and a clean. None needing filling, but I go to him for an impression for a skeleton set (I have 8 gaps). He claims the skeleton sets do not wear the other teeth (as an ordinary part plate does). They will cost at least 30 guineas. I'll sell my First Victory Loan bonds.

Tuesday September 3

[In brackets after the date Lester has written 'Seven years']

Yesterday morning Belle rang me to say Auntie Kitty had died at 5.30 am. As the trams were awry, I walked down from the station the back way. Auntie Daisy was scrubbing the front veranda, Mrs Turner in the kitchen. Uncle Charlie was lying down, but Monty was there. The thought in everyone's mind was that it was a happy release, and secondly, what a blessing it was the war was over and both boys home. She was cremated today. After tea, having written to Mum (Auntie Daisy told me she had wired Daisy, with whom Winnie and Lorraine are staying) I went over to tell Val and Merl, who were going to get a wreath from the Dudley family. Val said, 'Whenever you see Lester other than a Friday night, you know there's something'. Last time, just over a year ago, it was Mr Humphreys.

Monday September 16

On Friday at Flowers Street, I found Tom was in Heidelberg with his functional dyspepsia. He was home over Saturday till Sunday evening. During his stay he painted Diana's dolls pram, which now only lacks the wheels. A big, handsome pram it is too.

Today was August 13 over again – not unconnected with the return of Rita Moira Anderson – from a week of 'flu' or laryngitis – to the switchboard the other side of the partition.

On Friday I found my Australian School of Journalism entry on the dressing table. It was a half-scholarship, available till October 14. I'll probably dally till then, wondering whether to hazard the £12. Of course I haven't told anybody. The criticism lauded chiefly my child psychology characterisation, and dialogue; blackmarked the somewhat leisurely opening and the paucity or simplicity of plot; interlarded and wound up with a sales talk. I wonder, I wonder, I wonder. The question is: can I afford not to take the plunge, in the welter of my uneconomic uncertainty? I wish I wasn't so wary of being sold.

Sunday September 22

Yesterday Gibson fitted the shining metal bands which, to my unexpressed disappointment, clip to the teeth at either end, though thereafter they dodge them. He'll have them ready (ie teeth attached) next Saturday at 11 o'clock.

The other night I listed my visits to cinemas since I started the cash book in July 1944. I had been 111 times. I tried a rating for each feature picture based on (1) the frame of mind or expectations in which I approached the film (2) the reaction, (3) a sloping or horizontal line to show whether the film was up to, above or below expectations.

Monday September 23

My throat's been dry today. Tonight I bought a packet of horrible throat lollies labelled 'Red Antiseptic'. One while I waited for the tram and one a few minutes ago have just about put me where colds cannot pursue.

I worked at Food Control today again, as Friday, a welcome break from withinsound of the seductive kittenish voice of herself.

Friday September 27

On Tuesday night there was a vicious downpour. Among the huddle at the tramstop was Auntie Renee. She was going down to Uncle Charlie's. Darrell is being married tomorrow.

Mum wrote the other day saying she feared Lois and Alan were on the verge of acquiring Fish's paddock, and asking if Val or I would write or call on him to see what was the position. I had a letter written yesterday morning asking for first refusal, when a letter from Mum cancelled all – saying the wire netting Lois had pulled down was going back on the dividing fence. Val suggested I still send it, which I will when I remember near a post box.

Wednesday October 2

I received an invitation from Diana on Monday to her birthday party next Sunday.

Last night, as I was finishing my apple pie and thinking my second cup of tea looked very inviting, there was a catchy metallic feeling in the left side of my swallow. With visions of a chip of metal or broken prong finding its way down my windpipe, I tested the feeling with a succession of gulps. I was by then nearly reaching and went outside. Les had a look and she sighted the metal. As she had little chance of getting it out we decided the best thing was for me to go to old Dr Orchard on the corner of Waverley Road and Bates Street. I put on my rain coat and went down to the tram stop. As the tram drew near I realised I had on an old house-coat with (more important) no money in it.

When I had realised this, I decided to walk. I didn't notice the surgery entrance down the street, but went in the corner gate to the wrong door, as he told me when he answered it. He made two attempts to get the piece of metal with forceps. At the second attempt he dislodged it and it apparently went down the hatch.

Saturday October 5

No further trouble since, though sometimes a hot drink finds the place.

For Diana, on Thursday I picked up in Coles' a 2s 6d brightly illustrated picture book featuring monkeys. I went through Edments and for 2s 11d bought a bright green 'kiddy's' handbag. I took them over last night but as she was in bed I'll give them to her tomorrow.

They told me in great amusement that when Tom presented her with the large handsome, properly sprung, wheeled, unholstered and hooded pram he made her, her eyes lit up and she beamed. However they soon heard her moaning and talking in aggrieved tones. It went on so long they asked her what was the matter. 'No mudguards,' she said. Having got it off her chest, she was satisfied. However, when Val came home she said 'Vo, dook (look),' and patted the naked wheel. She must have gone over it point by point seeing how it sized up with her own pram.

Sunday October 13

On Thursday, after cashing five savings certificates, I sent £12 to the Australian School of Journalism. On Saturday morning I wished I hadn't when the first two lessons of general and story writing came. They are coverless, lightly stapled texts, not very attractively printed by some duplicating or typewriter-stereo process. However, their advice on layout of stories was almost worth the £12. It showed how hopeless is the task of sending handwritten, foolscap-size manuscript without top and bottom extra sheets. I feel quite unenthusiastic towards the course.

Monday October 28

Last Monday (the 21st) was the first day of this protracted strike. (Picked up by car each day).

Car travel's all very well, but I've had this truncated working day. It just won't work. And the front-gate to front-door transport, with almost no venturing out at lunch times, had its effect on my gait when I walked over to Merl's and back on Friday night.

Monday November 4

Last Tuesday was the last day of joyriding.

On Wednesday night Val came over and we went up to the Crystal. (The Niddries commented next night on her nice hair-do, invariably her weakest point with me, and how sweet she looked. 'Put her in a white dinner gown and give her an Edwardian, and she'd knock them all,' declared Les.)

Wednesday, with trams and trains running again, seemed like a Monday, and Thursday like a Tuesday.

Tuesday November 20

On Friday night I found the two ladies with Diana – a very animated Diana – spread on a sheet on the living room table. They were anointing big sore looking blotches that covered her body and limbs and extended to her throat. One chemist had suggested hives, and another ringworm. Diana was whisked off to bed – in spite of her animation she took it meekly, though a little hurt at the lack of kisses. I ended up kissing her on the forehead anyway, and would have kissed the mouth if it had been presented. All and sundry then spent an evening of unpleasant itches.

Val, Merl, and Diana are due to go home next Tuesday,. I don't know how Mum will welcome Val, after her remarks last time I was home.

Thursday January 2 1947

Nearly a month has gone since the last entry, and this one will only be a token.

a) Presents

b) Dad and Mum's illness: Between five and six on Saturday, December 7, Uncle Charlie came to see me. Though there was a fleeting puzzled speculation whether it concerned the presumption of Dud's death, and why they should employ him on such an occasion, there was no inkling as to the actual trouble till he said that Dad had been taken to hospital and the doctor said he thought the family should come, as his condition was serious and the way he was anything could happen. 'You'll be looking at me as a bringer of bad news,' he said rather apologetically before he went and I thought of Val's remark that if they saw me any night other than Friday they could know there was something wrong. It was too late of course for the catching of a train, so I left my trip to Chloris Crescent (sic) till after tea. I hadn't thought to ask Uncle Charlie what the matter was, and though Val rang Belle later in the evening, and I was speaking to her twice on Sunday, it wasn't till Monday I thought to ask her and found it was pneumonia. I intended to ring Belle for further particulars before I reached Flowers Street, but a woman at the South Caulfield junction phone was still talking when the next tram from Darling Road arrived when I left, being so angry I was afraid I would abuse her. Val rang Belle later in the evening as I remarked above, and we got the further news that Daisy had visited him in the morning and he seemed somewhat improved. We decided we would all go up on the Monday morning train and that I should sleep at Flowers Street Sunday night. On Sunday, just as Tom and I were leaving Kambrook Road with my case, Beverley came with a note that Belle had rung the hospital and that Dad's condition seemed much better. I had mentioned our considering a taxi to Mooroopna, and Belle suggested this expense did not now seem necessary.

Merl was now inclined to stay unless worse news came. Val and I decided we would still go. However, when I spoke to Belle that night, she had again spoken to Daisy who said that he was now so much better that, though Val would do well to

go home, there seemed no longer any need to dash to Dad's bedside, and Merl and I should remain where we were. So Val on Monday morning went home, only four days after returning with Merl – having been rebuffed by Mum. Mum now has need of her, as not only is Dad weak – he came home Friday night, Dec 27; I visited him, with Val and Doug Carnegie, Monday night Dec 23 – but when I got home on Friday Dec 20, after a hot five hour trip, I found that Mum had had the doctor that day, she's having severe headaches due to her high blood pressure. He prescribed tablets and a couple of days in bed. She was lying down or sitting most of the week I was home, and was not in a condition to do any work.

Belle rang the hospital for me both on the Monday and Tuesday.

c) Pauline's Engagement. When I visited Burnell Street on Sunday December 15, Pauline showed me her engagement ring, which she was not then officially wearing. It was to be announced to Honorine and Stanley etc. on Christmas Eve. I saw the notice in Boxing Day Argus.

(In Tally over xmas) Hot weather, over 100 almost every day (we had Daisy's thermometer). Daisy and the kids stayed there part of the time including Christmas Day. The day I left they were going out to Beryl and Col, their future plans, now they've left the condemned house in Wunghnu, uncertain.

Monday January 6

We put a Death Notice under On Active Service in Saturday's Argus. I worded it, and now I see it in print against the others a defect stands out. I ended it 'loved son of Mr and Mrs WC Dudley, Tallygaroopna, and brother of etc.' All the other notices repeat the adjective or change it to 'loving'. A semi-colon, too, was placed after Tallygaroopna.

I went to Burnell Street yesterday. The Canets and Auntie Renee regaled me with the Christmas Day party, at which they had 17 guests including Uncle Charlie and

family. They had had a Christmas tree, which had been decorated with red cellophane, cotton wool, and odments and was largely hung with a trumpet for each guest. Each trumpet was stuffed with a piece of fancy christmas paper, with the idea – not in all cases successful – of rendering it momentarily unblowable. Examination then revealed the paper – in the case of Grandma £5 no less – in the case of Pauline, Honorine, Stanley, £1, in the case of the others 10s. What an expensive Christmas they had. Before they told me this they had brought me the trumpet hung for an absent Lester, and I had gaily blown it They then discovered they had left the paper outside and stuffed it into the trumpet just to show me. Then they commented what pretty paper it was, and I took it out of the trumpet and smoothed it out, and whisht, there was 10s.

Saturday February 1

Daisy has been down for the past three weeks or so (she returned briefly to Tally last night). At Dave Anderson's instigation she has determined to go into the apartment house racket and Merl has decided to go with her. To join is out of the question for me, though if Dud's estate had been wound up, I could have put something in on behalf of Dad and Mum, and between the three of us it might have been a purchase deposit instead of a costly 'goodwill' payment of £400 or £500 to the previous lessee or the owner. Auntie Renee, who was also very enthusiastic, even offered to raise a mortgage as the way of obtaining the loan Daisy must get, and at least will stand her guarantor. Daisy's ideal is a bayside house like Dave's, herself living in and going to work (poor boys, Melbournites again if it comes to fruition), a bed and breakfast or two, and only temporary lodgers at high casual rates in order to have a living over the meagre initial clearance and her maintenance money. I hope they succeed, and wish I could have joined in. That interest burden will be heavy.

Daisy was also responsible for the suggestion that I go to Tasmania with Merl and Tom. With some heartburning, I decided I was willing, and applied for 10

(working) days' leave from Monday, February 17, on which date we sail on the Taroona for 'Launceston or Beauty Point, at Ship's Option'.

Last Saturday morning I made a tedious journey to Tally arriving about 25 to 2. Auntie Daisy went up the previous night, for the first time in 33 years. The weekend was hot, over the century, but apparently no hotter than down here. The boys were staying at home, and we played our tennis ball cricket. Auntie Daisy and I came back on Monday night, getting a welcome lift to the station by Doug Carnegie.

Wednesday February 5

This has been the most wretchedly steamy unpleasant week of the summer. I arrive at 401 Collins Street in a bath of perspiration and wish I could lift the roof off.

Thursday March 13

This is simply to break the book open again. Maybe at the week-end I'll get going with my chronicle of the past (expensive) month.

Saturday March 15 Beware the Ides

There I found the train I had expected to miss only half into the platform. A policeman swinging out of a compartment asked 'Did anybody see it happen?' seemingly without much result. I then learnt from my neighbour that a man had gone under the train. I didn't join the craning necks. Presently the rear carriages were backed a few yards while the body was taken out the other side. Then the rear carriages were re-coupled, the train was drawn in, and we went on our living way. The Herald said nothing, Monday's Sun said nothing, and just as I fancied I'd dreamt it, I found a little paragraph in the Argus about a 45 year old schoolmaster from Bairnsdale.

Monday March 17

Tom came over on the Sunday afternoon for my case and I spent the night at Mann's. The weather deteriorated and it was raining steadily when we got into town

where we took a taxi to No 1 North Wharf, where the Taroma thrust up its funnel close by the Spencer Street bridge.

I was having my very first glimpse of down river, and I wanted eyes both sides of my head. Fascinating it was in its grime and ugliness, gasworks and collier, and small rusty ships and lesser vessels.

I made a good meal, I forget what of, except that the tea was vile. It was immaterial, as I lost it, before bed time. I felt small as neither Tom nor Merl was sick, and neither of our two cabin mates was sick. However, maybe it purchased me a better night's sleep than they had. We rose early, washed and shaved, and by half past six were again on the starboard promenade. Tasmania was coming up ahead, blue hazed woodland trying to break out of the blue hazed coastline that undulated mile after mile to the west. We were thrilled for several minutes by a school of porpoises.

While Tom was seeing about checking the big case through, we inspected our train and our number 1 carriage over the railings, Diana continually squirming through and having to be hauled back. It was a pleasing looking train. At 10.50 or close to, the train pulled out, away from the houses, out into the yellow countryside that looked like Victoria with undulation fever.

We soon found that even the Boat Train is not express.

Diana on the whole travelled well; there was ample space, though the carriage was narrow, to kick her heels up at our end of it, though of course she always wanted that extra inch. On the whole she came through Tasmania a fairly respectable baby, though there were a number of times she was overtired and grizzly, and at mealtimes she was apt to be a bit of a trial to poor mum.

Thursday April 10

Hobart. [*Lester spends many pages describing the trip to Tasmania then there is a gap and the diary is taken up more than a year later.*]

Monday May 24 1948

[*Brief recollections of the rest of the Tasmanian trip and then....*]

June 16

This diary gets up to date no faster. My fingers are just about too cold to write
ABANDONED TO THE UNDERWRITERS

[*There is a gap from June 16 1948 until Lester begins again on January 30 1949*]

1949

Sunday January 30

This means virtual abandonment of my attempt (of a half a year ago) to bridge the gap between the 1947 Tasmanian trip and the ever-vanishing present, though I have left the other exercise book in case I ever get round to summarising what I remember and deem worth recording.

This narrative can start with Friday night, when I paid my usual visit to 4 Flowers Street with half a pound of scorched almonds, The Herald, and a letter from Mum in the bag Val presented me back in 1946. I gave Tom the 14s and 6d for the placing. Vic Giacometti came round soon after and we had three rounds of 500, of which Tom and I won the first two. Tom and Merl were going up to Clematis for further work on the hut, over this long week-end which is why I'm spending my third successive Sunday at home.

Yesterday provided still more heat, and still more humidity. The pity is they weren't enough to keep me home. Getting there in good time for the hurdle, and influenced by Ian's parting remarks (he's up Gippsland with the Collinses this week end) I

preferred Bell Tower to Promise You, though I still had to recoup my losses on the latter due to its third last in the 2 mile flat race a fortnight ago.

I passed my race book to Tom, and slowly sweltered towards the exit, with one long pause in which the desire to regain my losses fought the longing for cold water within and without, and the fear of spoiling my evening. Then, slowly slowly down Bond Street, home, my tale of woe told to Mrs Niddrie.

Then in the City I dawdled to the Regent and as I stood there pretty girls went past with other men, or with other girls, or with older women, but always without me, and I thought of that naked body I gazed on in the wardrobe mirror on Friday night after I had taken everything off to cool down before going to bed – and didn't blame them. And said to myself not to come in again of a Saturday night. There are few pretty girls on 'the flat' thank God.

Tuesday February 1

I bade a melancholy farewell to January and will not be prolix about it.

Still on the Sick and Rec Leave cards. Sometimes I think I'll never get free of them, yet I must bring them to a (query-raising) finish and get on with overtime accounts. And to think I enjoy salaries at the Meat Board.

Wednesday February 2

Still nice, if somewhat cloudy weather.

Still on sick and rec leave records.

Still sicker.

Saturday February 5

Left three bets at Tom's last night.

Went out to Burnell Street yesterday ('Grandma's' no more). Belle, as I had expected, had remained at Camberwell with Pauline and Ray. Stanley and Eileen, with baby Lynn were there for a while after I got there. Lynn is quite a bonny baby, but not fond of visiting.

Tuesday February 8

Today the morning grew dull, and towards one was spitting very lightly, enough to wet the street and make me watch it all the way.

Wednesday February 9

Glad came in some time after 12 to say goodbye – for the time at least – to Mr Dunbar and me and it was 5 to 1 before our party broke up. She's a nice child – 19 next Monday – and pretty, in spite of a skin through which blemishes try to peep. Her eyes are a rich deep grey, her hair a warm brown, and she has – what few people have – an attractive laugh. She told us all about her strange broken romance, and evidently, now anyway, finds it easy to talk about it and got it off her chest. Of course Glad has been very constantly in my mind since I played J.P. McGillicuddy at the beginning of the month – December – in which her engagement was broken towards which the certificate was more intended than for Christmas. I'm afraid – in spite of little 'confession' scenes I often act over to myself – she'd be a disappointed girl if she knew I was the one. I almost hope she doesn't come back to the Board as it would be too easy to become infatuated with her. Even if Savings Certificates were still on sale and she were in Melbourne instead of Mildura – I'd have to look up the Box number from that letter she wrote Mr Sexton – I don't think I'd dare repeat the performance for her birthday. Though I'd like to. Wonder if she wonders will it happen again.

Thursday February 10

I badly need a new sports coat, but the prices I saw in Wardrops shocked me into designs for patching again my discarded Donegal, from which I have taken valuable pocket material as patching, for my current sports coat, with its damaged left lapel

of which I am most conscious. I bought my usual pound of dry biscuits and two cakes of the dark small's chocolate, knowing I'd find an excuse to eat one and replace it with a different chocolate tomorrow. (Such are the only occasions on which I buy chocolate to eat solo, and my motive is never at the time confessed to myself.)

Must write home now. Wish I was writing to Glad.

Saturday February 12

At Mann's last night found them glum. The bank had granted them a loan, but not quite as much as they had asked. They were short – depending on expenses of £50 to £100, and Tom had intimated to the agent that morning that he could not raise the money. As his option is in writing and lasts till the 16th his verbal intimation should not be sufficient to cancel it. He had wanted a week ago to approach me, but Merl had said no. Now she had swung round and they were both worrying what the agent might have done following Tom's visit to him. However, in view of the option, I don't see that he can legally do anything. Still it's a pity they didn't speak a week ago.

O God, why can't I win a packet at the races?

Daisy's birthday Tuesday. Holding £14. If I can lend £100 to Merl and Tom, daresay I can give her £5. In spite of the increase of savings this last couple of years, the sense of insecurity persists.

Monday February 14

Went over to Flowers Street yesterday afternoon with my cold growing on me in the midst of glorious sunshine. Today I took seven hankies to work and used six. When I was buying Daisy's Money Order at Commerce House the clerk said 'You're pretty consistent.' So it looks as though I go back to the Elizabeth Street PO when I send my three quid home Friday, I haven't been there – I was going to

say for years – but I went in there in December to get Glad's 'letter' weighed, to make sure I put correct postage on it.

Saturday February 19

Mann's will apparently be OK for their house, chance when they gain vacant possession. I learnt that last night Tom was on night shift, but I met him opposite Chloris Crescent and yarned for 10 minutes. Merl and I – with Diana's ever[resem]t assistance – spent part of the evening looking through her numerous unsorted snaps.

My nose is again a rich red – it was a fine day. Not for me. Even in the tram I stood half the journey till a man in later middle life, or perhaps I should say an elderly man, gave me his seat. Heard him say to his neighbour standing that he had been waiting for somebody younger to do so.

In consequence of today, I priced out my bets since Boxing Day at a flat 4s, including both horses on the eight foolish occasions when I have backed two in a race. And in consequence of all this I vow (s'elp me):-

- a) till I am winning £10 net, not to have more or less than 4s on any horse in any race
- b) when – if, let's hope – I have lost a further £5 all in, to drop my bet to 2s and stay away except at Caulfield – position to be reviewed in light of later developments –
- c) when I have lost 20s in bets on a day, to leave off for that day;
- d) if the following Saturday is in the same pay period to stay away that Saturday, and be content with not more than two 4s bets, which may be not more than 4s up any horse, and the second not to be increased;
- e) not under circumstances while I remain a 4s punter, and preferably not after, to back two horses in one race, even if it contains two I've been tipped and two that own me money and two I fancy and one that has won me a packet. Resolve it in favour of one only;

- f) not to back a horse each way, - the 4s either to be straight out or for a place only;
- g) not to badd 1s and back on the tote;
- h) not to be afraid of a good two year old at less than four to one and better than odds on

Monday February 21

Received four shirts on Saturday the collars of which had been turned by Daisy. That will stall off a buy in that line for a few months. The trousers position is all right, the coat position desperate and likely to remain so while there's nothing worth looking at under £5 10s.

Wednesday February 23

Yesterday morning we finished up at McKillop Street (working on sick and rec leave cards and attendance books) and at ¼ to 1 I picked a very careful way over the greasy pavement to Reliance House. When I reached home Tom was talking to Mrs Niddrie. He went with me into my room, where Blackie retreated out the window, and said they were concluding the deal on Friday. Merl will meet me at one on Friday at the Commonwealth Bank and I'll draw out the hundred.

Saturday February 26

A new bottle of ink to continue the sorry tale of a gambler. Yesterday midday Merl and Diana were waiting for me outside the Trustees Building and in a few minutes I had withdrawn the £100 and passed it over. They went to find a place to eat. I bought some chocolate almonds and this ink. Last night Vic and Merl won 4 games of 500 to our two.

[*To the races*] got home and had the satisfaction to find that Ian, too broke to get into the flat to borrow money off me to back his hot tip Commend, went home after the 7th race and phoned an S.P. £2 the win, £1 the place, at 7 to 1 which won him £15 15s. He's gone to the Trots.

Tuesday March 1

Ulva would have been 30 today.

A letter from Daisy today said the electricians descended in force last Friday – to get the unlicensed ones out of an inspector's way, otherwise they might never have come – and did the job in the day. Five lights and three points, £16 16s. I wish there had been two extra points. The SEC were to come today to make the connection. I'll draw out at least £20 tomorrow and send. The old bank account is beginning to lose its lustre. Hope she screws up courage to collect from Arthur Humphreys for the cow, or there'll be more pay-out for the plumbing.

Tuesday March 3

A sticky day and I'm tired still. Belle rang me this morning to say Lil Rennick was coming over there tonight and bringing Uncle Ted Dudley and Auntie Annie. And if I liked I could come to tea. I said I'd ring Les at Central or Ian at Sulex to let Mrs Niddrie know I wouldn't be home for tea. However, didn't know whether Les was Plug Lines, Automatics, or what, and my efforts came to nothing. Sulex would take a message but wouldn't let me speak to Ian, and suddenly realising I didn't really want to renew old acquaintances and spend a spring evening out with a shave to have after coming home, I hung up, and soon after let Belle know. It would have cut too far into the evening to have come home first.

Saturday March 5

Last night Ian and I boarded the same tram at 10 past 7, and a few seconds later I realised I had left home the bag, containing chocolate and Herald. (The Herald serves in case they haven't got one – if they have one 'Unc' gets a Herald passed on to him early instead of late.) However, the chocolates should eat better tomorrow, when I visit them.

Monday March 7

Yesterday in windy weather I visited the Manns. Tom got home from Clematis about 25 to 8. He repaid me £40 of the money and I banked £45 today. I left 10s in bets for next Saturday, with various provisos.

There was steady rain today. Between 4 and 5 Mr Dunbar offered as a question the rumour of a rail stoppage which I verified at 5. The automatic lift also had stopped, so though I signed off at 7 to 5, on account of the wet streets it was nearly 5 when I turned round the corner into Elizabeth Street. The crowd outside the ticket gates – which were not all closed – and the number of people dashing back to the tram shunt, confirmed the rumours.

Tuesday March 8

20 years today since I came down to the Childrens' [*Hospital*]

It rained slowly, soakingly all night, and until after 12. When I got down to Reliance House at one I found the second lift also was not working. Mr Aird suggested the goods lift and presently I was on the third floor. The second lift was functioning tonight, but the automatic lift is still out of order, a nice state of affairs in a building that probably still contains a couple of hundred people.

Tuesday March 15

On Friday night visited the Mann's. Tom as up at Clematis. Merl had had the stitches out of her hand, which was still bandaged, but says there appears to be matter left in the wrist.

Thursday March 17

Last night I found my membership card awaiting me – membership of the Australian Dramatic Art and Education Guild. Costs 2s 6d per annum – supposing its life remains to be measured in years, which I doubt. The plays at the Princess are by no means gaining the public support they deserve and which too many writers, crying out about the city's lack of theatre and alleging public hunger for theatre,

have claimed such plays would get. The public's appetite is for the Oklahoma kind of production (not but that I'd like to see that too, though, Mrs Niddrie, Les and Bill, who went last night were only mildly enthusiastic – when Mrs Niddrie is disappointed in something, she continually repeats that it is very nice and just as continually adds a 'but'). When it goes for a bit of 'colcher' it's because of the presence of glamorised Oliviers in the cast.

Saturday March 19

Notice I didn't record that 11 am Thursday I visited JS Gibson, at a cost of 30s for several fillings. He had backed Russia against 'my' Carbon Copy. Wonder did he back him today, when he won at the remarkably good (Herald) price of two to one.

Last night I found the Mann's living room crowded with a table, chairs and other stuff which was to be taken today to Clematis. Tom's holidays begin today and I am to visit them next Saturday and Sunday.

So instead of placing my bets with Tom I asked Ian this morning to put 5s on the tote (what a trap that machine is for me) on Flemish.

Monday March 28

On Saturday morning I caught a train early enough to go round to Spencer Street, where before getting my ticket home, I bought a month return to Upper Ferntree Gully.

At Ferntree Gully I found a Clematis bus with seats left. It soon picked up far too many people for me to look out the left hand side for the Clematis signboard. When we passed the level crossing memory clicked, and after waiting a short while I got up and made my way forward while the bus rolled to a stop at the guest house, where Merl in a green woollen dress and Diana in blue overalls awaited me.

They were still not in occupation, as the house was still to be lined, windows and doors to be fitted, the floor to be nailed, the concrete chimney to be put up etc.

The only previous time I had visited the property had been one wet Saturday in 1947 – the day Fitzroy thrashed Essendon, and Richmond thrashed Collingwood – when Tom was still engaged in chopping up the trees. That time they were staying in Dixon's tiny shack, which Tom will soon help Ted pull down. This time they were in George Withers' roomier packing-case hut, one black nearer their own.

As the weather both days was beautiful, I sunned myself like the little lizards Bruce (Dixon) – with Diana's ever-present assistance – was continually stalking. The slopes were no trouble this time, as the earth was dry, and not until I was on the verge of going home did I notice one crutch had shed a rubber, which had been badly split. On Saturday I slept – when I did sleep, for my foot again played up – in the enclosed back verandah. During the evening we played cards and sneaked down some chocolates – sneaked, in case Diana noticed from her bed, as she already suffers from toothache.

Mr Aird today pointed out a passage in the Auditor-General's report in which it was stated that while acknowledging their excellent services, it was considered undesirable to retain temporary employees in permanent positions and that it was the A G's policy, particularly when the duties were of a permanent nature, to replace them wherever possible with permanent officers. The axe is not far off.

Wednesday March 30

Posted a letter an hour and a half ago to John Thompson (Australia) Pty Ltd., 312 Flinders Lane. Enclosed a stamped addressed envelope, but like Red Skelton's garters that's the last I'll see of that. Must keep trying.

Friday April 1

Don't think I've recorded that the other week Mr Kerr returned me War and Peace with a genial admission that he had taken seven league boots over the last half and contented himself with the Epilogue (wonder did that include the free will versus predetermination chapter, something I've read once only). But I can forgive no one but a teenage girl for putting aside War and Peace half read.

Today I ate my lunch between 12 and 1 and caught a West Preston tram out to Getrude Street, along which I strolled in the sunshine to the Exhibition Building. As I approached this I saw a large red cross and found for the first time that the proceeds of the Australian Industrial Fair were for the Red Cross. So I reluctantly decided not to use my pass – which alone took me out there – and bought myself a ticket – 1s 6d. Once through the turnstile I was soon pounced on and sold a 1s souvenir guide (proceeds to ditto) in which some of the pages are out of sequence. Wish I'd looked at it before I began my tour, or I might have displayed a more intelligent interest, or at least more systematic interest, than I was able to do in the bare half hour I devoted to strolling round it.

Saturday April 2

Today dealt the crowning blow in my inept betting career. I felt like weeping, and I impotently invoked the Holy Trinity over and over (there were no women near).

Thursday April 7

Tom dropped in last Sunday afternoon to see if I wanted my case taken to the station tonight – he duly took it and has just left.

Daisy rang me Monday and visited me Tuesday night, looking very well, having lost weight off face and hips. She and Mrs Nelson came down by bus last Sunday to 347 Beaconsfield Parade, St Kilda and are having a fortnight. She will be back in time for Maurice's first game, which is between Tally and Wunghnu at Tally, April 23.

Plunged heavily today, first on books 10s 10d and then entrusted £2 to Ian (for bets)

Thursday April 21

The trip home Friday April 8 was fair. Greeted by Merl and Diana at the station I was home about 10. The lights were a welcome improvement – but the ceilings look terribly smoky. Arthur Humphreys had paid Dad an open bearer cheque for £10 10s for the cow, and I cashed it on the following Thursday in Shepparton.

Maurice and Sid visited us on the Sunday, and again the following Sunday.

I went into Val's on the Wednesday night and came out with them and Merl and Diana on Thursday afternoon. Diana had toothache the first several days, so Merl decided not to wait till her return but took her to three dentists on Tuesday morning. None could touch her then, but two were against having the tooth out, so on Thursday morning Merl took Diana to Reuss – who did my first fillings – and Diana was soon chewing happily. That night in bed she started crying, and had a restless night. Except for a few blessed intervals – chiefly after a couple of Aspro which Merl was loth to give her – this continued all Good Friday, and again on the Saturday. Late in the morning, down between cheek and gum, she found a deep cut, probably caused at the dentists, and quickly found that it was the trouble. A little peroxide, borrowed from Mrs Humphreys, soon fixed diana up.

Dad seemed much the same as at Christmas. He walks very slowly, and mostly has to be helped up out of the chair. He seemed not too good – relatively – on Easter Monday, though he was interested enough when I told him Carbon Copy's win at four to one (for an outlay of £1 10s for a win and 10s a place) would get me £6 10s.

Saturday April 23

Tom and Daisy visited me on Tuesday night, or rather Daisy visited me and Tom visited Bill. Daisy did Tom's washing Tuesday and slept there that night. She was going up to Wunghnu on Wednesday night.

The weather this week has been dull, cold and showery. Provided it is not that tomorrow, Tom and I will go over here to Caulfield races.

Saturday April 23

It was that, but we still went, which took 4s and 6d off the winnings £7 15s I collected from Ian this morning.

Tuesday April 26

Visited Burnell Street on Sunday, where, as I had learnt from Belle over the phone (when asking for some tea, which I delivered to the audits club today) Mrs Highsted was also visiting. ('Auntie Lil' as I now call her.) We all enjoyed a good yap. She is going down soon to Cobb Cottage, something's Hill, Frankston, to be companion to the companion of Miss Clapp, Sir Harold's sister.

Did not go out yesterday. I began again on 'War and Peace' taking up again where I left off – the retreat over the mill pond following the battle of Austerlitz. It's worth having lived, to read this book.

Wednesday April 27

As Bill at breakfast reported favourably of the Tivoli programme (Ivor Moreton and Dave Kaye) I bought two aisle seats for the matinee on Saturday, the last day. A matinee suits Mrs Niddrie better than a night trip.

Saturday July 9

This morning after breakfast I went back to the bed undecided whether to read or try to catch up on a little of the rest my foot last night took from me, as it has done so many times in the past two years. A bilious eyeache soon decided me. I went down after midday to tell Mrs Niddrie not to dish me up any dinner, then shot by a minute later to lose my breakfast. Have been taking a daily dose of Kruschen the past couple of weeks to try and help clear up whatever it is brought about such a

state of being as to harbour a cyst in my lip, a very tender (sub-maxillary?) gland and festery skin eruptions. Yesterday's clearance had seemed all right though done on the instalment (lack-of-) system. However, there was my breakfast issuing from the wrong end.

It's bitterly cold tonight, like the weather we had in June by comparison with last months'. Yesterday morning there were so many showers, and the wind brought so many changes between sun and rain, I doubted whether it would be safe to set out for Merl's. However in mainly sunny weather, I set out at 5 past 3, and with the wind against me arrived at Merl's about half an hour afterwards. Tom came back with me in the moonlight as far as Glen Eira Road, putting Queensland Gold Casket forms in letterboxes and hoping one of them would win first prize and bring him £200 commission. Pious hope.

Thursday July 14

Last night I finished 'Barchester Towers', my first Trollope, and decided it should not be the last. I like his sense of humour, and a man who could spin a good yarn out of a pack of parsons is no uncommon writer.

Wednesday September 7

Yesterday morning I woke about five, and reaching for my watch to see the time found my head swimming, and was at once obliged to drop it and close my eyes. That was no good, I thought – however I dozed off till getting up time. As I put my underpants, socks and trousers on I began to feel more and more queasy and suddenly my stomach started trying to turn handsprings. Wasting no more time I hurried – staggered giddily is nearer the mark – down to the lavatory, scarcely mumbling a reply to Bill's 'Good morning'.

Mrs Niddrie said I looked 'frightfully yellow' and had better put aside all thoughts of going to work. For the rest of the day I dozed, turned and dry-retched, now and then managing a little watery mess which was apparently my swallowed saliva.

Tom arrived in the middle afternoon with the news that Diana's tonsillitis and suspected measles was tonsillitis and acute bronchitis and has to spend the week in bed.

I passed a fairly peaceful night with no further eruptions, and decided that if I felt hungry in the morning after the first daylong starve I ever remember suffering, I should be fit for work. However, when I sat up at 5 to 7, I felt weak and unhungry and promptly lay down again. Each year, up till this year I've had one sick day off. This year I hoped I was going to dodge it completely. But instead I've now had two days.

Saturday September 10

Must make my betting record tabular, giving a cover of each phrase and reconciling with the cash book columns.

Sunday September 11

Tram fares (barring tuppennies) go up a penny today, so next time I catch a tram to the Waverley I'll walk (at least one way anyway). I'll still have to catch a tram to see the Manns – except when I have to walk.

Monday September 12

Fell (deliberately) among Penguins at lunch time – and was badly pecked. 'The Life of William Hazlitt' P P Howe, 'Early victorian Novelists' Lord David Cecil, and 'Penguin New Writing No 38', the first costing 4s, the others 2s each.

Tuesday September 20

Sunday afternoon in weather which fined up following the morning's rains, I went across to the Manns', carrying in my bag an unnecessary raincoat and my 'Hazlitt'. Tom and Diana were out at the side, and Merl in the kitchen baking. 'Hazlitt' did not get opened till late in the afternoon, and for most of the evening we played three handed euchre, following with a duel at crib between Tom and me.

Last night I decided – well over two years after I should have – that I would have to consult a doctor about the unhealed chillblain sore on my left instep. Thoughts of cancer go through my mind every time I think of it – which is many times a day, as every time I sit down I untie the boot to ease the pressure, and even then have often to massage the surrounding skin surfaces and sinews as a soothing – or exhausting may be the fact – effort to the continual smarting. When I am standing about or walking I am at its mercy, and it's just too bad if it happens to be hurting. The foot, too, has no static temperature between overheated and very cold. It's always on the way from one to the other and of the two – in spite of the discomfort – otherwise – very cold suits the sore best. If I should say when the foot heats up after I go to bed, it gives me larry dooley for anything up to an hour – some bad nights it is hours, and it seems to me on relection a remarkable thing that I could so turn my mind from the torment between its onslaughts as to keep deciding again a visit to a doctor, and hoping to heal it up with peroxide or some ointment. So last night in the cramped little side-verdah-waiting room at Dr L Marshalls in 5 Newington Grove, I I waited a long hour while the half dozen people who were waiting before me were gradually worked off. He prescribed a penicillin ointment – which is in the ice chest, which is cool though iceless – to apply twice daily, and sulphadizine tablets to take at 4 hour intervals. Since the accounts of germ adaption these new drugs don't appeal to me, but if this first use of them clears up this longstanding ailment I'll be happy.

[Another gap and then some brief notes during December 1949]

December 23 *[At Tallygaroopna]*

This Biro Minor was Maurie's Christmas present to me last year. There were none in stock then in Numurkah and Daisy bought it at a later date – I collected it yesterday.

On Wednesday afternoon on my way to the bathroom after work I gave the first – and almost last bought – of my christmas boxes, to Mrs Niddrie. It was a gold patterned cup and saucer, bought on Monday. I had intended to leave it on departing Thursday morning, before she rose. I said to her – earnest behind the jest – ‘to give you a chance to break it if you didn’t like it, accidentally sort of.’ She had caused me to advance the presentation by giving me a gift of hankies and a block of chocolate, (Snack, oddly enough, which of all blocks I like least). She professed herself (and seemed to be) delighted with it.

I gave Merl two pairs of silk stockings, Prestige and Kayser (I had sought Lustre, claimed by Ian, who works there, and Les, who wears them, to be best. However the shades at the size didn’t appeal).

It was raining before we pulled out, but as the train crossed the Divide the morning grew bright and at Tally was a pleasant sunny day with a fresh breeze but plenty of flies.

Daisy met me at the station. My case was carried down on the back of a farmer’s truck.

Mum lay down till about ¼ past 4, then started on the subject of her sore mouth, which nothing this side of the grave will convince her is not some ghastly infection (it was VD at one stage, due to a rash Dad had, and poor Dad suffered countless infuriating harangues before he went to hospital in June. At least there he has some peace, in spite of the monotony.) The doctor says its anaemia. Anyway, after a dozen false starts (almost literally) during which she several times asked me for money to pay the doctor if Uncle Robert took her to see one and was freshly hurt every time by my insistence that whoever the doctor might be, he could send me the account, she set out for Montgomerie’s unwashed, with ancient shoes on, a nighty in a newspaper parcel in case she was admitted to hospital, and a purse with some money in it, ultimately leaving behind the coat she at first carried.

It was too late for the train, if she switched purposes (or forgot her complaint) and set off for Mooroopna. However, we were not surprised when soon after the night train had gone, she landed in, but she was carrying two tins of fruit which some strange man had forced upon her, and which 'Myra and Mag' had told her was 'quite all right, as they do that at this time of year.' Some man had tried to get fresh ('forward') also. Myra told Daisy this morning that the 'forward man' had been Paddy O'Keefe, concerned probably, to see her on Shep station. She had bought the fruit at Tally Post Office and at Shep left it on a seat, and the man who ultimately forced it on her was a porter. God knows whether she got to Mooroopna, or if she was given a lift any part of the journey.

Sunday December 25 1949

Val and Doug came to dinner, and we all got suitably filled. They gave me Madam Curie (Eve's biography of her). I had read it, but was pleased to own it. I left soon after dinner with them in the car, but before going to Annerley Avenue, we visited Dad in the hospital and spent nearly two hours with him. He did not look well, he needed a shave, his eyes were mattery and weeping and he was far from talkative. He had been included in the 3SR Christmas messages – from patients (recorded Friday, somebody spoke for him, due to his extreme difficulty in talking) and making himself understood) but when we turned them on Sunday morning we were too late for his message.

So far this week Mum has not set off to see him (she went in by train Saturday night – Christmas Eve). Probably the increased heat has told on her. For the first time latterly I have found myself conceding (though still non-committal if anyone says it aloud) that it would be a terrible thing if they passed many more years like this, even if they didn't grow worse, which it is certain they would, Dad physically and Mum mentally, with her combination of memory failure and stubbornness which are between them in some respects at least a kind of insanity. And with the thought – still rejecting the crude and cruel phrase 'better dead' – is the vain bitter regret that

as I grow at least more (financially) able to do things for them, they have got past being made happier by material well doing. In fact, it often makes Mum disturbed and still more confused to do anything for her which involves a departure from the things to which she is accustomed. One would think her chests of drawers etc would not hold all the garments (to say nothing of the pair of towels I gave her the other day) which have vanished into their wildernesses.

Between Sunday and Tuesday visits to Dad I loafed around at 'Thornton', reading RU books, listening now and then to the wireless and often lying down resting my eyes as much as my carcase.

Daisy caught the midday train to Numurkah to have her hair permed for New Year's Eve.

I caught the diesel home from Shepparton last night, which was a good thing, as the steam train was late. The diesel's division into first and second class amused me – the seating looked exactly the same in each section.

Ball points don't suit my slanty hand.

[No regular diaries were found from this period until 197, however a 'bird' diary was found and the following excerpts are taken from this]

Bird diary excerpts – July 12 1951 to 10 January 1958

1951

June 12

At Wunghnu Friday and Saturday were both fine and much of the time I spent lounging outside (where Mum was usually seated) straining my weak eyes for

identification glimpses of birds, simple enjoyment of those with which I am more or less familiar.

With my much-loved mudlarks, I was able to satisfy myself I was viewing the female, (by the white forehead and throat). These birds largely figured under the 'simple enjoyment of familiar birds' heading. They constantly call at Wunghnu (as at Caulfield) and though I no longer can claim their call is musical (it is rather strident) no other familiar call except those of the grey-crowned babbler gives me such constant pleasure.

Saturday August 18

Due to various disappointments, the latest being that set out below, I have decided to (try and) keep a running record of counts against the dictionary (Concise Oxford (3rd edition)) that I acquired with such satisfaction a year ago. I recognise that many scientific and medical words, for instance, cannot conveniently be included except in a full scale dictionary, and an article in The Age recently on chambers 20th Century indicated some of the restrictions in the aims of the compilers of the Concise. However 'pastoralist' is not yet another 'ist' word (if any are) and even though it may possibly have originated here in Australia, it is no mere jargon word. One of these days I shall probably review my list and attempt a graduated scale of 'counts'.

November 5

Saturday afternoon, partly to take my cold and my misbehaving eyes out into the sunshine, I spent much of the afternoon in Caulfield gardens. As there was often a thin haze, and the wind was strong, I didn't enjoy it as much as I hoped. So Sunday, before I went out to burnell Street, I again visited the park and basked for an hour and a half in unstinted sunshine.

Each day I tried to see what I could of the bird life, but of course the predominant life is that of the blackbirds. A willi wagtail I had been watching and listening to from my seat, had an exciting spiral chase after a butterfly or moth.

Monday November 12

I reached 4 Flowers Street before 3 yesterday, and as Tom was sawing old pieces of timber to make a chook-pen, I sat out the back on the lawn near him. As usual I kept my eyes on the passings of familiar birds, hoping to detect and identify one less familiar.

After tea, when Diana and I were looking at a nest which faintly showed in a plum tree – an affair of grass, mainly, by the look of it – I heard the wrens seemingly all around in the approaching dusk. Shifting a little, I glimpsed first one then another, flitting through the plum, or the neighbouring apple or the foliage of the adjoining garden which thrust over the fence.

Sunday November 18

To record the sad fact that my mudlark's nest has vanished. There is no mistake as to the tree, and the nests being so strong I suppose the wind blew the branch down and the wreckage has been removed, smashed eggs (or dead nestlings) and all.

Went to the Botanical Gardens after 3.15 and did too much walking, to the detriment of toes and toenails (I bunch them up in the boot) and after entering at the Park Street (north east) corner I at length almost circumnavigated the gardens and came out near the Shrine, which left me with a long walk to the city.

[This diary is in an exercise book and is interspersed throughout a novel and followed by numerous verses.]

1952

January 7

Orinthologically, this visit to the house where Daisy is now living (on Les Graham's farm, about a mile out of Wunghnu) was the most successful holiday I've had .

My scanty list of species identified was swelled by the white-plumed honeyeater; the scissors-grinder, who gaily hunted his flies a couple of yards above my head; the red-backed or grass parrot, with its sweet and ceaseless tweeting; the spur winged plover, whose constant anxiety I once described as elation – transferring my feeling to the bird, and the yellow-billed spoonbill.

One day, also early, I stared and stared at an ibis perched on a dead tree about two or three chain away. The colour scheme proclaimed it to be a straw-necked, but because my eyes stubbornly refused to discern the straw I as stubbornly refuse to list the straw-necked ibis.

February 12

Royalty – or the loyalty thereto – is one of those things outside the domain of logic. There is really no logical basis for it in a modern democracy, and one cannot help wondering, on the accession of a new sovereign, whether her son will live to be king of the people in whose hearts the monarchy seems more than ever permanently enthroned. The hard light of reason has no soft beams to shed on this ancient institution, and in the future, as man grows more and more rational and unsentimental, the end of monarchy would seem to be certain. At present rational man, compiling statistics of the continuing effects of Hiroshima, is still achieving refinements of the atom bomb, though it has not yet apparently produced his first practicable hydrogen bomb. Perhaps the latter is the way in which he will end monarchy – and everything else. Perhaps in some sweeter saner way, the succession of sovereigns will be done with. It will be done with sweetly and sanely if we have previously done with hydrogen bombs, dictatorships and the other darknesses of our minds.

Wednesday April 23

The latest sojourn at Wunghnu – interspersed with days at Tally – produced only one definite identification – the white necked heron I before suspected.

Tuesday May 27

On Sunday afternoon I sought warmth for a while in the Caulfield gardens.. The time was made more pleasant for a couple of minutes by a willie wagtail which fluttered and twistered and alit near me. Two or three times he halted on the seat I was occupying, once engaged in swallowing an insect I had no hope of identifying.

Soon after I set off in an East Brighton to perform what I had often contemplated – a visit to the Australian birds section of the Museum. At Lonsdale Street, where I chose to alight instead of Latrobe, the tram started off when I was on the step, but I made the ground safely. The tram paused momentarily five yards further on but traffic noises drowned my remarks to the driver.

I entered the Museum from russell Street (next time I'll remember the entrance at the other end, by which I left) after a gap of nearly five years. I last visited it with Maurice and Sid in probably July 1947, and at that date had too little grasp (ie none at all) of the bird nomenclature to be stayed by it but passed on to the thylacine and wombat and other mammals.

This time I was disgusted to find the stairs barred with notices that renovations were proceeding. I hope to return in about five or six weeks, though the section still be probably be shut; however there are plenty of things to see even though some – such as china and silverware – are too multifarious for me to try and appreciate them.

The cases devoted to the lizards and snakes are beautifully set out, but bearing in mind the extensive colour ranges of some snakes, I thought as I gazed at their scale patterns that I'd have slight chance of identifying the snake that bit me.

Flanking Phar Lap was an excellent case of snails and slugs, including the infamous giant. After browsing on them I paid my usual tribute to the mighty gelding who, whatever criticisms may be levelled against the interest he attracts is, considered as a type of his species, one of the most beautiful animals represented.

1955

Tuesday February 1

This should be a diary item, but I can't be bothered digging the diary from under my cathedral books in the wardrobe. Friday night I had escaped from most of the cars while the rain occasionally drizzled and lightning continually flashed. At the Bendigo turnoff past Kilmore I picked up a naval trainee named Gale, the second time in, who sang in the Shepparton Methodist performance of the Messiah. At Tallarook the gates were closed. I was first there, and as they opened to let me onto the hill the sky opened. I chugged uphill in a thunderous deluge which left me little but the white line to see by, while the other headlights faded behind me and I began to wonder if I was rash going on. I wondered still more when we were over the several rises and on the descending part of the straight stretch to the bends near Puckapunyal turn off. But thought the road was so blurred and water was leaking in behind the right hand glove box and as I was thinking of flex perishing and shorting, I kept on, because the rain water was streaming so fast across the road that I had visions of a flood. It was this principally that kept me going each of the several times thereafter that I wondered whether to stop now and wait. I can't remember just where they all were, as the rain lightened and intensified again and again. I do remember that past Seymour on the switchback straight road I passed a car and floundered horribly in a sheet of water that had gathered in the right hand half of the road. That near Nagambie we crawled miserably behind a Humber Hawk and something else, till the Humber pulled up in the town. Now I decided I should pull up when we reached the last 'hill' before the straight to Wahring, but again kept going, possibly because it had 'lightened' to heavy rain. I said to the boy 'If I get to Murchison East alive I'm pulling up.'

November 26

[The following comes after the fatal accident when Lily Dudley died on 8 July 1955]

Withheld – Good

Lost – Yes

Only roads of unreturningness

Only a grave by which I have not stood

Only the same regret I knew before

Confronts my thoughts and dares them to advance.

No hope for evermore

To still with kindness, gentleness, our lives' mischance.

1956

December 26

Five days ago, as I lay on the sofa at Daisy's front veranda, I was surprised to see a small black and white bird alight on the brick path ten feet away.

Two mornings later in the back yard, I heard a sweet, rich, rapid trilling from the pepper tree that overhangs the la-law. At the onset I momentarily thought of goldfinches, but I straightway threw out that association, though by coincidence in looking up I saw a couple in the tree.

1958

January 10

I failed to see any trillers in Wunghnu this year, but out on the Broken Creek miles past Nathalia I heard on various occasions what may have been a triller.

[A pictorial diary with sparse notes covers the period 29 December 1975 to December 1976]

This Australian pictorial diary includes odd notes which show us Lester was 'up bush' over Xmas, staying with Daisy, seeing her family, and visiting his sister, Val

and her husband Doug. He took numerous colour photographs, one of his nephew, Maurice, reaping barley. While Lester was at Wunghnu his sister Merl and her family visited from Melbourne. He returned to Melbourne on January 11 with Betty (who was married to Maurice) and her sister, Nancy, brother in law, Don and Chris.

On January 27 his brother-in-law Tom gave Lester his new record bookcase. Lester had an excellent collection of records. The earliest ones were kept at Merl and Tom's place where he also kept his prize radiogram, a large French polished object. The first three records Lester bought were 'My Fair Lady', Julie Andrews singing a variety of songs, odd choices for a man mostly interested in classical music, and Joseph Schmidt. One of the Schmidt songs was the Simplicious Waltz, a favourite of mine – probably the first opera I had ever really been aware of and forever more to be linked with thoughts of Lester.

He continues his support of Amnesty by attending the AGM on Monday March 22 in Fitzroy. There are many notes about visits to concerts and operas.

On Tuesday, April 13 Lester travels by train to Numurkah where he is met by Sid and family, and visits Maurice and Bet on the farm, which they now own. Very dry. And an afternoon with the Carnegies. Returns to Melbourne on Wednesday 21 April. Visited there every Easter.

Sunday 25 April

Caught by the Anzac March. Reading 'Max' outside St Paul's while waiting for the trams to resume. Shift hurriedly to avoid being pissed on by a drunk behind the tree just upwind from me.

Friday 30 April

Snack after work. 5 PM internal auditors. 7 PM Rosenkavalier. Home after 12. Ate grapes. No sign of Smog [*Lester's ten year old part Persian cat*]. A stone

thrower shattered the window of the door alongside me between Tooronga and Gardiner.

Saturday 1 May

Smog? Smog! Smog? I find him in the garage - locked in since Ollie's departure for San Remo. Curiosity could certainly kill a cat.

Sunday 2 May

I visit Tom (in Heidelberg hospital) with Merl and Dale. Dale drives me home later. Watched May Day procession in the afternoon until the tram came. Very large muster - one white-haired spry looking woman cycling parallel to the Palestinians, smiling broadly and crying Israel as they shouted their slogan.

Tuesday 4 May

All sections are locked out by the new security conscious cleaners until someone fetches Robert Winther. (And locked out again on May 31)

On 15 May Diana, Cliff, Nicolas and Suzanne (2 months old) arrive in Melbourne from Darwin for a visit. Lester meets Cliff and Suzanne on the 16th.

29 April to 18 May – Tom in Heidelberg. But Dad doesn't start playing cards again until 19 August, so must have been very sick and going to bed early all those months.

On June 9 both Val and Doug are in hospital Doug first sick on 3 May with Vic A flu. He is 87 and frail. They stay in hospital until 15 June.

Auntie Renee has a stroke.

On June 11 Lester goes by train to Wunghnu. Sees all family members and Sid and Dot take him to hospital to see Val and Doug who are also being visited by John and Carol. Returns to Melbourne 14 June.

Saturday 19 June

New suit at last.

Lester hated buying clothes and would put off doing it until his belongings were falling to pieces. In later years Merl and Lesley often bought items for him at his request.

On 26 June Lester visits David in Royal Melbourne, Peggy there. On 4 July he meets Joy at David's bedside. And 11 July. And 18. And 25.

Diary entry for 1 August. 'I *don't* visit David' But on 3 August, Tuesday, after work, he does. John and Peggy there.

Mavis Canet (Thomas) dies. Nina's grandmother.

Saturday 7 August

John's wedding at St Augustine's. Reception at Amber Court. Visit Doug in bed.

During winter Lester often attends AFL matches with Lesley.

28 September, Bluey being filmed around his work building. ??Gavin in it and me at school?

Saturday 2 October

to Auntie Daisy. The petrol station fire in Sydney Road. Laurie drives me to the train which I miss and catch a tram. Auntie Daisy gives me four Dudley photographs including Ulva, Mum and dad's wedding, Mum, and Merl's wedding.

On Tuesday October 5, Lester makes a cryptic comment in his diary re clouds gathering. The following day he writes clouds lifting. This is to do with a serious

problem at work and Lester maintains confidentiality to such a degree he doesn't even go into details in his private diary.

On Sunday 10 October Lester attends an opening by Amnesty of prisoners of conscience week.

On Thursday 14 October Lester writes, I see a man on walking sticks are much worst-case than myself. On Saturday 23 October Lester writes, overcast for the eclipse, I experience it out of doors, only half gloom then rapid lightening. Smog very calm about it.

One of on Sunday November 7 Lester writes, Smog helps me to weed behind the garage. We watched the butcher bird eating and insect in the tree above us.

On Saturday 20 November Lester Buys sports coach and trousers and comments, long overdue as usual.

On Sunday 28 November Lester visits the Mary Martin bookshop and buys a book called English pronounced, with which I have many disagreements, and to which I bow here and there.

On 19 December Lester goes to mum and dad's for Christmas present giving. On the 21st he goes up bush to stay with Daisy.

This diary was probably given to him by his great niece Kay as her name and telephone number are printed in a different hand at the end of the book.

ⁱ Lesley Young had given birth to her second daughter, Carol