

About Edgar

Edgar George Deacon was born on St Crispin's Day (25 October, 1897) in Plymouth, England. His father, Matthias George Deacon (born 1870) was the youngest of 13 children. The family were butchers, but for some reason Matthias was sent to London to become a hairdresser. On returning to Plymouth, at the age of 26, he married Emily Jane Williams, who was a year younger. She was a sweet, gentle soul; a good wife and mother. They had one other younger child, Robert Harold. George and Robert were family names, but Emily liked Edgar and Harold.

Except for his ruddy complexion, rusty-coloured hair and beautiful hands, Edgar was not a Deacon, either in looks or character. He had his mother's beautiful large brown eyes and large nose. He was quiet and gentle and loved all beauty. He soaked up history like a sponge and no one could understand where he inherited his love and understanding of horses.

He wanted to become a reporter but, in true Victorian style, his parents had decided his future for him; he was to be a civil servant! The very word 'examination' terrified and petrified him; he failed again and again and was threatened that he would end up in the workhouse! After several attempts, he managed to make them understand that he wanted to go on a newspaper and they got him a job – in the printing office! In those days, men died of consumption caused by the dye, etc, and they would spit all over the floors. He hated all that.

When the 1914 war came, Edgar looked so young that he had to take his father and birth certificate with him so that he could join up at the age of seventeen and a half. This meant that when he was 18 he would be able to choose where he would serve; naturally he chose the cavalry. However, as soon as he was 18 he was thrust into the infantry and marched and marched for miles, with his weight (in his pack) on his slight back!

By the end of 1915 he was in the trenches: he was made a runner. Three would be sent with the same message to ensure that one would reach its destination. Some time in 1917, he was sent home on leave – a photo taken of him then showed him looking about 12 years old. In late 1918 he got some shrapnel in his leg. Along with several others, he spent all day, until dark, in a wet shell-hole: by the time he reached England he was very ill with pneumonia. He asked the Red Cross to send his mother a card saying that he had a 'bilious attack', but he nearly died. The nurses used to call him 'the rusty-haired little boy' – that is how he came by the nickname 'Rusty'. Armistice Day came as he was recovering. His mother saved another delightful card from him asking for some cash, as never would they have such a time in their lives again!

In 1924, now 27 with the 20s itch for change, hating the old way of life and full of the problems of the world, Edgar persuaded his parents to give him some money to get to Western Australia so that he could take up farming.

He travelled about the State gaining experience, trying to decide where to settle. Everyone called each other by their Christian names and he was very amused when told that never had they heard of anyone called 'Edgar' working for their living: they were happier to call him 'George'! By early 1926, he had taken up 5000 acres of virgin land, west of Bunjil Siding in the northern wheat-belt, some 200 miles north of Perth. It was just opening up at that time.

He took a middle-aged mare, Dollie, and a two-wheeled cart with all his goods and supplies. Sharing a 100-gallon tank of water with Dollie, he built a shack and cleared his first 200 acres by hand!

A letter from Sister Kate

Parkerville Home
St Andrew's Day
30 November 1926

Mr dearest little Wendy

What must you think of me? I never opened your budget until today, 3pm Tuesday. The day you left, I quite thought they were poems of your mother's and, having a busy week,

I put them aside until I had a nice, quiet half-hour to enjoy them. Then I found that the budget was yours.

Oh, how sweet of you to write and how I wish I had opened it before so that we could have talked it all over. Thank you again for your confidence in me: I do appreciate your trust in me. Indeed, Wendy, I think your Pirate [Edgar] is just what our Wendy should have - a man after Kipling's heart. 'And so hold on, when there is nothing in you except the will which says "hold on".' I am so glad that you have a man without reproach, who looks to your honour, your true self first and himself last. I think he is very fortunate to get our Wendy - one who has gone through life's troubles with a smile, one who can sympathise with the old and be a child with the young. You have done a great deal for Parkerville, far more than you can possibly know, with your bright, happy, moral atmosphere. We shall miss you dreadfully.

I suppose yours is the real, true, natural 'call to vocation'. 'Jesus calls you o'er the tumult' to follow Him in life as wife and mother. He calls in many ways. Until that call, as you say, comes with its personal note, changing all life up to its high ideals and personal love of Christ, He is always behind every joy, every sorrow. Your call has come in service to Him in the world, mine and Lalla's [Sister Sarah] here...

Dearest Wendy, forgive my seeming neglect of your dear budget and many, many thanks for the sidelights which show me your future life.

Your loving Sister Kate

Note: Sister Kate's writing has to be seen to be believed - she only put a stop at the end!

The Children's Home, Parkerville, Western Australia. Christmas morning - 1928

4am - the chilly dawn of a hot day; children's voices whispering in excitement. Oh yes! It is Christmas morning, of course. About half an hour later: 'Roy, wake up and see what you have got.' 'Look, look!' Five minutes or so later, between losing consciousness, I hear various things, rather like this - 'Oh, what lovely things - look, Kitty, aren't they lovely? Aren't I lucky? You haven't got anything, have you, Kitty?'

Round about 5am I crawl out of bed and tell Winnie it's time to get up to be ready for church. Then I make a tour of the beds, laughing over the toys, praising this and looking at that, examining the works of one toy and playing with another. Frankie confided in me that he ate some glitter wax earlier in the morning - he thought it was a lolly!

I dress myself in Perth clothes in honour of Christmas Day and don a hat in honour of the parson. At 6am exactly, a car drives up and the church bell rings. Footsteps are heard rushing from every cottage, while the trumpets from every cottage still hold their 'cats' concert'. The cool, fresh chapel full of evergreens and the young, fresh faces of the older children... Through the plain glass rose window over the altar we could see the sun shining among the trees, with the early morning breeze making the leaves wave and rustle like the distant murmur of the ocean.

In the middle of the Confession, the kookaburra suddenly decided our sins were too funny for words and burst into loud, lusty, hearty laughter. At last their giggling died away in the distance.

Western Australia 9 January 1929

Dear Mrs Waite [Mum]

Yesterday, Tuesday, 8 January 1929 at 3.30pm, Wendy and Rusty were married by the Reverend Webb, Rector of Midland Junction, in the beautiful chapel of the Parkerville Children's Home. Frances Mary Waite was given away by Sister Kate when she married Edgar George Deacon.

I have promised Wendy to tell you everything that happened from the beginning of the day: in fact, she impressed upon me that I am the reporter and that it is a Toc H job.

On Monday, a card came from Wendy asking me if I would care to see her married ... so I caught that frightfully early, 'only' train to Parkerville on the Tuesday morning and

arrived at that station (for the first time in my life) just after 8am. Luckily, the sulky was there to meet the train. Mrs Smith had come up for the day: she is a helper up there, but had been staying at the cottage at Cottesloe Beach. I made myself known to her, jumped in the sulky and had a ride up the hill. Several boys were hanging on behind and dogs yelping underneath!

Wendy came tearing out of Claremont to meet me, flung her arms around my neck and said, 'Oh Middy! Isn't it perfectly thrilling. We can't find a *parson*!!' I leave you to imagine how I felt! Wendy went on to explain that 'Dingdong', who had promised to marry them, was told to stay at Moora another two weeks. He had sent a wire to Wendy on the Saturday, but being in the country she didn't get it until Monday, giving them the rest of that day and half of Tuesday to find a parson. Rusty and Alan had been trying all over Perth. (I believe they are awfully scarce at this time of the year. Where do they go?)

Hoping the best, we went in to have some breakfast. Miss Lefroy (Friend) was there and two others – Marjorie and Doris. During the meal, Sister Kate wanted Wendy on the phone. Sister Kate, on hearing that Rusty couldn't find anyone to come to Parkerville, wanted them to get married in Perth and then come. Neither of them would hear of that, so she told Rusty to get a car and go to Midland and get a parson of any denomination. With those marching orders, they set off again.

In the meantime, Wendy decided to show me the home. We visited the cottages and everyone asked about the wedding and the whereabouts of the bridegroom – Wendy didn't know! Returning to Claremont cottage about noon, we found that something had gone wrong with the fruit salad. There we were, *three hours* before the wedding with no parson, no bridegroom, and *no fruit salad*!

We were called for lunch when a cry went up, 'Wendy wanted on the phone'. Off tore Wendy and came back with a smiling face. (It had been smiling all the morning as she thought things a great joke!)

A parson had rung through from Midland to say that he would marry them, providing their papers were in order, at 3.15pm. Wendy didn't bother to find out what denomination he was. As there was no train until night-time, she supposed they were bringing him up in the truck.

After lunch, Wendy began to dress. She looked a picture in her beautiful dress and veil, with that lovely ivory cross and two roses tucked into her veil – white and pink. In the middle of dressing we heard a commotion – lots of kiddies were tearing through the house, pounding on the door, shouting 'Wendy, Wendy! The car is here!' It was now only 2.30pm: Wendy and I tiptoed to see and discovered that it wasn't the car but the sulky, which had been decorated by the children to take the bride to church. The horse had got red and blue streamers all around his body and neck and the sulky was covered in streamers, even around the spokes of the wheels.

As they were an hour too soon, with much pushing and shouting the horse was backed into the shade. Wendy went to look for her little bridesmaid, Peanut, to get her dressed. During this period, a message came from Sister Kate that, as the party would be hot and dusty after their journey, they would have a cup of tea and wash and the service would not be until 3.30pm. I was walking around with the 'papers' for the parson.

The bridal party arrived on time in a large taxi – not the truck. The parson was Reverend Webb, Rector of Midland and, strangely enough, he had just returned from the church congress in *Cheltenham*. Wendy and he discovered that, only a couple of months before, they had both been standing on opposite corners in the Prom. He was waiting for his wife, and Wendy for you!!

Rusty told me how very relieved they were on reaching Midland Junction and ringing the Church of England parson to find he could come to Parkerville. Sister Kate took the man off and I took Wilky up to Wendy. Wilky and Wendy both tried to tell each other everything at once. Miss Lefroy went off to the church and asked me to see that the others

came. As we didn't hear the bell ringing, we went outside for me to take some snaps. Mrs Smith was with some boys by the sulky and she asked us if Wendy was ready: we explained that we were waiting for the bell, to which she replied that it had rung about ten minutes ago. With that there was a scrummage: Wendy went inside to get her bouquet of pale pink carnations and pale blue delphiniums and was then bundled quickly into the sulky. Wilky and I began to run down the hill to the church with Wendy in the sulky close behind: all onlookers were screaming with laughter as Wendy kept shouting to us to hurry in case the horse knocked us down.

Within a couple of minutes we were in the porch where the choir and much-sought-after parson were waiting. Wilky and I were shown into the front on the left. Rusty and Alan were standing at the chancel under a pretty arch. The chapel had been most beautifully decorated. Every seat had fern on the side, as did several arches going up the centre aisle. All the lamps were decorated with fern and on the altar were pale blue lilies and pale pink carnations. Flowers were everywhere possible, pale blue and pale pink. There were lighted candles on the altar with little blue sanctuary lights overhead. Everything was as beautiful as the sisters and children could make it, and through the round window and the bush beyond, the afternoon sun was shining.

The chapel was full, all the children from the cottages and the 'grown-ups' being there. Everyone sang lustily 'How Welcome was the Call' as the procession came in. First their lovely gold cross, then about six little choir boys in cassocks and surplices. Their beautiful banner was next followed by about ten little girls dressed all in white, with little white caps on their heads and white capes. Then came the Reverend Webb and lastly Sister Kate and the bride.

I have been to many weddings at different times, but never to a wedding like this. The service was so simple and yet so beautiful: every word spoken by the bride and groom could be heard by all. All the responses were sung and I must comment on how well the children had been trained, they finished with a threefold amen. They had one more hymn, 'Thine Forever God of Love'. Reverend Webb gave a beautiful address. He said he seldom, if ever, gave an address at weddings but he must say a few words. I do wish I could remember my shorthand and my memory is not so good, but it was an inspiring address.

After the blessing, the bridal party went into the vestry to sign the papers. We all went outside and were arranged in two rows – each child was given a handful of confetti. We didn't have long to wait and in those few minutes we had some fun.

Once more the sulky was drawn up to receive the bridal pair, when along came Sister Kate who said they were to use the car. The horse didn't like this at all, being pushed out of the way once more, but the car was at the gate and decorated by the time Mr and Mrs Deacon appeared at the church door.

When Mrs Deacon realized that they had to run the gauntlet she grabbed her husband by the hand and the pair of them raced down the path, jumped in the car and were off! In spite of their haste, they were well pelted with confetti and given three rousing cheers by the children. They drove off to the school hall where a beautiful wedding breakfast had been prepared. Wilky, two other ladies and myself were driven up in the sulky. When we arrived, the bride and bridegroom were hanging out of the windows shouting at us to hurry up.

The bridal table was in the centre of the hall and over it hung a ball of pale blue hydrangeas. Reverend Webb, Wendy, Rusty, Alan, and Sister Kate were on one side; Sister Madeleine, Wilky, Miss Lefroy and myself on the other. The rest of the guests were seated at small tables around the hall. Opposite Wendy was the wedding cake. Reverend Webb proposed the toast to the bride and bridegroom. He said that, although he had only just had the pleasure of meeting them, he thought they were a splendid couple and could see that the bride had a sense of humour. After singing 'They are Jolly Good Fellows', Reverend Webb proposed a toast to the absent parents, to which Alan replied on your behalf. Reverend Webb thanked the sisters and Rusty, coming alive, seconded that very beautifully. Then

Wilky woke up to take a photo of the bride cutting the cake. Just as this happened, a wire came from Annie, Elsie and Mrs Wray. Later Wendy, Wilky and I retired to Claremont, for Wendy to change and pack a few things.

First of all, it was suggested that the bride and bridegroom and Reverend Webb should go in the car but, as it seated eight, it seemed silly for us all not to go to Midland in it. We all fitted in beautifully – Wilky and I in the front, Wendy, Reverend Webb and Rusty in the back seat, and Alan on a separate lift-up seat, with cases and coats, etc, all around us.

Of course, the car was well decorated by the children, streamers all round, a Christmas stocking on the radiator, two shoes and an old boot and tins hanging on the back and over the hood they had chalked 'Good luck Wendy and Peter Pan', 'Goodbye Wendy' and 'We Are Just Married'. After saying goodbye all round, we started our lovely journey through the bush to Midland Junction.

Mr and Mrs Deacon put up for the night at the Midland Junction Hotel; Wilky, Alan and I went by train to Perth. The last we saw of your daughter and son-in-law, they were walking into the hotel, well loaded with their cases, hat box, sunshade and sundry parcels.

Yours ever, Middy (Olive Middleton) [Being a copy of her account.]

Note

I have never been able to understand *why* we stayed that night in such an unromantic place as Midland Junction (as it was then called). There were twin beds, no fly screens, and we were kept awake all night by mosquitoes. We could easily have gone straight to Perth to the Marlborough Hotel. We were so pleased to be married, we just did as we were told, I suppose! Midland Junction and Parkerville were very much 'country' in the late 1920s and most of the roads were not sealed.

Names

About 1925 Toc H came to WA in a big way. My father had belonged in England so he became a foundation member in WA. In fact, the whole family became involved. It was through Toc H that we came to know Wilky and Alan Le Couter. When Edgar went to visit my people, he became involved too. To encourage this new, classless society, people were known by nicknames, or their Christian names. When Edgar was wounded in the First World War and looked about 12, the nurses called him 'that rusty-haired boy' so he chose 'Rusty'. I, of course, was Wendy from Parkerville. I always used that name when acting with drama societies in both countries.

In 1929, Wilky and Alan came up to Bunjil with us from the January to November, until their baby was a few months old. Wilky had to give up her job when she was expecting the baby and they felt it would be rather a good experience as they intended to go back to Victoria one day to take up farming.

When we went up, the other two always called Edgar 'Rusty', and I adopted the same habit. I felt sorry about this after a while and tried to revert back to calling him Edgar, but he refused to answer. Consequently, all through our married life, except to our families, we were known as Rusty and Wendy. When I became a widow and friends who had known Rusty disappeared over the years, I thought it more becoming to return to my given name of Frances.

One of the set books I took in 'the Oxford' was Kinglake's 'Eōthen'. I fell in love with this travelogue. Eōthen means 'from the east' or 'dawn'. I asked Rusty whether we could call our farm Eōthen: the dawns over the sand-plain were so beautiful, and was it not the dawn of our married life? The second house we owned, in Cambridge, England, was a corner house and had been named 'Two Ways'. We kept the name. Rusty was in two minds, as they say, whether to return to WA when he retired. Our third and last home together was on at a crossroads in Kalamunda, WA, so we called it 'Waysmeet'. We felt our ways *had* met. Now Flat 7 is my home and on the verandah is a little girl, peeping through flowers, telling everyone 'This is Frances's place'.