Chapter III: The 'Ajana'; Perth; Cottesloe Beach

The Ajana was, I think, fitted out as a tramp steamer, coal of course and no watertight doors yet. Only the Titanic had those, and she was on her maiden voyage that year too. But, on this first trip, the shipping firm had fixed in so many cabins so that she could take so many people to Australia, all paying passengers all one class. A kind of steerage class, I should think.

The men were quartered separately. Mother, Geoffrey and I were in a small two-berth cabin with a cot for Geoffrey. We were lucky to have one with a porthole as there was no such thing as air conditioning. Apart from the bunks there was a small toilet affair for washing with cold water. There was not even a camp stool to sit on, and nowhere to hang clothes. Lights were turned off and on from the main at certain times only. The cabins were around the outside of the ship, as it were; the holds in the centre had been closed over, and the iron bars removed, where passengers could sit when not on deck. No seats were provided on deck so if you did not bring your own deckchairs with you, you had to sit on the hatches. My father had brought deckchairs. There must have been toilets somewhere, but no bathrooms. To get hot water to bath Geoffrey in the cabin basin, Mother had to use her sex appeal and bribery to get hot water from the kitchen, having first got a jug from somewhere. Somehow she got disinfectant squares hung in the cabins. She had to almost fight her way to the Captain himself, to get a few small lights left on all night in the gangways, for mothers like herself with babies and young children that needed attention in the night. We had our meals in small sort of mess rooms which held about 20 people. The food was not very good, in fact the ship's doctor told Mother not to let her children eat the porridge! A little girl with a harelip used to sit opposite me at mealtimes. I had never seen a harelip before and in a way was fascinated by it. Mother told me not to be unkind and stare, but she was seated opposite me! On the few occasions when I have seen a harelip since, I can smell that porridge!

In the Bay of Biscay it was a bit rough, for a small boat. People who began to be afraid were soon comforted when Mother told them there was a caul on board. On one side the waves were lashing over the deck, which was roped off. I did not know this of course. It was Sunday and very rough and cold, and Mother felt very seasick and she could hardly stand in the cabin and find me some warm clothes. At last I was dressed, and she told me to take my father out on deck to make more room in the cabin. So I went trotting after him quite happily. Long before we reached the deck he had forgotten I was behind him. When he came to the roped-off part of the deck he simply stepped over it to talk to one of the crew. I went under the rope and the next second a wave that had just washed over the deck knocked me off my feet and began to roll me over and over towards the edge of the deck, and my body was so small it would easily go under the bottom rail into the sea. My father had his back to me but the sailor let out one yell. My father turned and ran and grabbed me just as I reached the edge. Imagine his feelings as he carried me dripping wet back down to the cabin. Again imagine my mother so ill looking for more fresh clothes and realizing that she had nearly lost not only me but her husband, because he would have dived over after me and, strong swimmer that he was, he could not have stood the pull of the ship.

After the bay it was smooth seas and sunshine all the way, with flying fish, sometimes darling dolphins, and once the water spout of a whale. Occasionally we met or passed other ships, and once or twice islands off the coast of Africa in the distance.

The passengers made their own fun, held concerts, etc. The only thing laid on by the crew was crossing the line. Passengers – the men – rather dreaded this because very few people could swim in those days. Probably my father was the only one equally at home in the water. A canvas pool was fixed up on deck. Most of the passengers entered into the spirit and some even dressed up.

My father thought he would go as one of Neptune's daughters. Although he was rather a large man, he made up beautifully as a female. He borrowed one of Mother's prettiest nightgowns, which she never saw again. She made him a bonnet. A man who had had some 'romps' with Raddy was not likely to take his ducking quietly, and Mother's nightgown was torn to pieces. Later she saw a large piece hanging in the place of honour in one of the officer's cabins! We became quite friendly with several of the officers, one we were to meet several times in the next six years in different parts of the world.

At last one day we came to Capetown, where we were to stay two days, taking on enough stores to last us until Fremantle, and to re-coal. So early one morning we found a smear of land on the horizon which gradually grew larger as it came nearer, and faint buildings in the distance took proper shapes as mountains, and Table Mountain, with its gossamer tablecloth of cloud floating around it, came into view. The buildings became warehouses and sheds, a harbour and ships. While we were looking at all this we had not noticed small boats on the other side of the ship bringing a handful of the forerunners of the coaling Africans. They were opening up the coal hatches for when we would be alongside.

It was fascinating to watch how beautifully and slowly and carefully we pulled alongside. My father explained every detail to me. Then two sets of zigzag planks were arranged up the side of the ship, one gently running up and the other one running down.

The task of coaling began: quite 100 brown bodies in various states of clothing or unclothing, each with a small basket of coal on his head, began to trot up the zigzag, tip his coal in the hold and trot down the other zigzag and then repeat the performance: and so they would go on all day for two days just like ants and all the time other dark, smiling Africans stood or squatted by the hold, chanting away all the time. My father said it made the workers happy and they kept time with the music, it set up a rhythm. Although coaling a ship was a well paid job compared with other jobs, in Africa and India and other Asian countries it didn't pay to use machines.

At last down our gangway we walked ashore, Geoffrey in his pushchair. There were some passengers off the ship, grumbling because they couldn't buy eggs and bacon! Even at six years old I thought this a rather silly way to start a new life, grumbling because you couldn't get eggs and bacon.

My parents were always people to explore rather than city gaze or shop. So leaving Table Mountain, which didn't have a railway up it then anyway, and turning left we walked towards the high land. There was an unprotected railway running beside the road which rather interested us. We came to the entrance of a rather large park. It was known then as 'Cecil Rhodes Estate'. Again, like William Shakespeare, it was impressed upon me to remember the name. There was so much to see in this park, but I never forgot Cecil Rhodes Estate because in the bird sanctuary was a stork with a bamboo leg! It appeared he had lost his leg and, when he tried to stand on one leg, as storks often do, his balance was upset, so someone had the great idea of fixing a bamboo one, and so he could stand on his good one with the bamboo one stretched across his body in the usual way. So years later, thanks to the stork, I read everything I could about Cecil Rhodes.

Sometimes between Capetown and Fremantle, some of the passengers were invited to be shown over the ship. Needless to say they were all men. Just as a father would ask if he could take his young son with him, so my father asked to be able to take me. By keeping my hands behind my back, I was able to keep them and my skirts from getting in the way of anything. My father carried me up and down the ladders, otherwise I walked behind him. Probably because I didn't speak or get out of position the crew didn't bat an eyelid, as though they were quite used to dainty six-year-old girls touring the ship. Of course I saw the ship being stoked with coal, and the tour ended with

going on the Captain's bridge, and he showed me where the distress rockets were kept.

I think the voyage took between five and six weeks. At last we sighted the snow-white sandy frilled coastline of Western Australia, and then we crept into harbour and we pulled alongside miles of wharf covered with railway lines and sand. There was a very long footbridge over the railway lines to the station and Fremantle town beyond.

The 12 miles to Perth by rail were punctuated with nearly a dozen small stations, and with a short row of shops near it, except for the one called Karrakatta – native word for a burial place – which was the cemetery. At each station the train could hardly bring itself to stop long enough for the passengers to get off and on. In between the railway lines were ragged, yellow, rather evil-smelling flowers locally called dandelions. Except for the colour of the flowers no part of the plant remotely resembled the English dandelion. At first, after we had passed over the bridge at the mouth of the Swan River, there was the blue ocean and snow-white sand on our left, until it was hidden by the hilly scrub, with here and there a tin-roofed weatherboard house and one or two windmills. On the right there was more scrub, a few trees and the same rather pathetic little houses.

Uncle Jack, a small, mischievous, dark-eyed little man, took us to his modern 1912 home north of Perth, and his wife Amy and son Yeoman. Mother was absolutely amazed at the wonderful labour-saving gadgets in the house. She didn't realize she had come to a prectically servantless society.

The garden was my chief puzzlement. It was *all* sand, which I always associated with the seashore. Uncle Jack proudly showed my father and me all the plants growing so beautifully. It appeared that all they needed was plenty of water.

We stayed the first night in an hotel nearby. It had a first-floor verandah all round it, which of course I had never seen before. In the morning I had two bright red marks, one on my cheek and the other on my leg. They were *bug bites*! Mother hit the roof. But the manager was used to such things and din't raise an eyelid. What was a bug bite here or there in this country!

Long before nightfall Mother found clean lodgings with a widow called Mrs Bull and her son John. The next day John Bull took me to his school. Actually, it was the first kindergarten section of Perth College, and was held in a rented hall. I didn't realize but that was the first contact I had – be it ever so brief – with the Kilburn Sisters, who were to influence my life as they popped into it every few years, until the death of Sister Kate in 1946 at the age of 86.

Mother took Geoffrey and me to Perth Cathedral to say thank you for being brought safely across the world. Mother, with memories of Gloucester Cathedral, was very disappointed in Perth Cathedral. She still could not realize what a new country she had come to, to make her home. First it was so small, little bigger than All Saints Church, Cheltenham, and then it was built in the year 1881. In 1912 there were few stained-glass windows in it – and the building was red brick – I don't think Mother had ever seen a red brick church before. It was about midday, and I couldn't find my shadow. My shadow was always very important to me for years. Mother wrote in her black book that Fairy quarreled with her shadow, and Geoffrey kept pulling her hair, and that she felt the heat.

My father got a job, and within a few weeks we had rented a house – in what was then called Cottesloe Beach, and now Mosman Park – and in the same street as St Luke's Church. It was one of the same 'modern' houses of the period. Weatherboard, iron roof curved over the half front verandah. There was garden all around with, in the back garden, the three-sided laundry complete with copper and troughs, and the toilet next door. The latter emptied every week by 'Dan, Dan, the sanitary man'. The hall opened, as it were (no door), into the living room complete with wood

store. The back verandah had a tap and sink and that was that, the bathroom and shower had not yet arrived. Being summer Mother cooked on a methylated primus. I liked the smell of it, but not the noise which always worried me, and I could never use one myself in later life.

About a hundred yards down the road across the bottom was the primary school, which I attended. There seemed lots of verandahs to the school, and large shade houses in the playground, with tables and benches where children who brought their lunch could sit and eat it. When it was very hot we were told to take our hankies and after thoroughly wetting them under the tap, damp around our wrists, behind our ears and the backs of our necks. All the girls wore wide straw hats with green veils to keep off the heat, glare and flies. The boys all wore cotton floppy hats, and there was a strict law that no one was to come to school in bare feet. Thongs were unheard of and unknown for another 40 years.

I began to learn the games children played the world over, at the same time of the year, and the puzzle has always been how did they know *when* to change the games. Another strange fact that in the last 40 years when radio and TV and planes have all brought the world so close together and we know what is happening on the other side of the world at the same moment, often seeing it, these games are no longer played! One day, say, the whole school was playing hopscotch, and nothing else. Next day every child in every school was playing marbles. Somehow, somewhere, it was decided that the marble season was in. Then there were skipping seasons, certain ball games played against the school walls, with very strict rules. Then there were the country games, many of which had come to Australia. These were all founded on some historical event maybe hundreds of years ago. Those to come to WA which were played in 1912 were:

Gathering nuts in May
Oranges and lemons
In and out the windows
Cat and mouse
Sheep, sheep, come home

While we were at Cottesloe Beach, my father thought he would like to try a mile or so swim in the Swan River. Neither of my parents had seen a river like the Swan, and certainly did not realize that it had currents and tides. Most of the distance between Perth and Fremantle the Swan River broadens into large lake-like bays sometimes three or more miles wide and it is very blue, much more blue than the Mediterranean Sea and, when the white-sailed yachts are almost motionless on its smooth blue waters, it is one of the most beautiful sights in the world.

My father hired a boat, and the idea was that my mother should row across the bay, while my father would swim behind. If he couldn't make it he could always get into the boat, and anyway we would have a picnic on the other side, and all row back.

We had barely gone a few hundred yards when we struck one of the deepest and widest and strongest currents in the river. Mother could make no headway at all. After a few minutes, in great disgust, my father scrambled into the boat and began rowing and then he realized what the trouble was. The only thing he could do was to drift with the current until he could get back to shore. The boatman grinned all over his face at these stupid pommies, and jeered at us about getting caught in the tide, knowing very well that we were strangers and that he had not told us about the currents.

Through ship-made friends we were invited to a tea-party at a house in Osborne (now Swanbourne) and there my father became friendly with an Australian dairy farmer called Jim Delemare. My father didn't often make friends with people but when he did it was for life.

Jim had a really lovely old farmhouse and garden with a deep grass lawn, almost opposite the station, and beside it a very 'modern' milking shed, in which he wanted to install this new electric light. Needless to say my father did this for him at the weekends. Being always fond of cows, he suggested that sometimes on a Sunday he should help with the milking, when the men were off duty, and so the pattern formed. We would go there for the day or half-day, and after milking it would turn into a musical evening. Mrs Delemare played the piano as well as singing, and all four of them could sing and they had great times.

Except for the Scotch College and a row or two of houses it was mostly scrub and bushland from the railway to the sea. Delemare's cattle – steers, and cows not in milk – roamed the bushland feeding themselves.

There was a primary school on the hill above Scotch College, and almost opposite the College an orchard ran down to a bushy swamp, hidden by many paper-bark trees. A small stretch of white stone wall separated a little of the orchard from the swamp and near it was the remains of a white stone building, shaded by a large mulberry tree, and a tin shack.

The orchard belonged to the Delemares, but at the moment it was condemned because of the fruit fly, and in those days there did not seem to be any way of getting rid of the fly. He was being worried by what we would today call 'vandals'. Down by the mulberry tree was a tin, one-roomed house or hut. He told my father that if he cared to buy a large tent and live down there, he would provide us with a cow for milk, and we could have as much of the fruit as we liked. My father thought this was a good idea, as he could then save rent to buy a piece of land and build, and also we would be much nearer the Delemares. He decided to cycle to work. At that time he was working at the Swan Brewery. He used to cycle to King's Park and, leaving his bike at the top, almost slid down the hill into the brewery.

My father bought a beautiful high tent for us to use as a bedroom, and roofed it and put sides around to serve two uses, one to keep the tent cool in summer, and the other to save it from storms in winter. He also covered over the space between the tent and hut to use as a washing-up spot, and so the hut became a living room.

We acquired two dogs (Laddie was a collie, he had a sort of saddle mark of fur on his back and I used to ride him), two kittens (who followed my father from the well one day), two goats, a calf, two ducks, and some fowls. Then there was of course the cow, old Bluey, whom I loved very much. Her skin was nearly blue-grey, and as soft as silk, she had very large straight horns, and the kindest eyes in the world. She loved to feed on large bunches of grapes, which I would pick for her. Mother said (in later years) that she used to be afraid that I would get caught on Bluey's horns, but I knew that I was small enough to be able to stand between the horns and anyway most animals are very careful of children who love them.

The first Sunday we were there, Jim Delemare came down and introduced Mother to one of his brothers. The next Sunday he did the same thing, and when this happened the third Sunday, Mother began to think he was pulling her leg, but he assured her he had six brothers, and he wanted them all to meet her.

The orchard had rows and rows of all kinds of grapes. We had, of course, only seen one kind of purple, hothouse ones in England. Here and there were piles of dead branches from last year's pruning, and Mother told me not to go near them for fear of snakes. I did not like the dried figs we used to have in England, and I had never tasted fresh ones; I thought them delicious, and the trees were a lovely shape for climbing and pretending you were in a ship. Then there were a number of plums, apples and apricots, and those queer things called pomegranates, with their

hundreds of red fruity seeds inside. I always remember the love and delight on my father's face as he presented my mother with the first peach. They both had hardly seen such a thing and never tasted one. Last of all was the mulberry tree. When Geoffrey could talk and people asked him where he lived he would say 'by the mulberry tree'! There was also a herb garden, with every kind of herb, and numbers of disused wells, with trees stuck in their tops to call one's attention to them. Mother, of course, warned me of those.

Being 'pommies' my parents thought all well water was good water, they did not realize that, in that low-lying part, rainwater would have been much better.

Mother would strain the well water through a felt hat, and then boil it, but it still tasted frightful, and when people came to see us they used to bring their own water for tea!

When we first went to live there, there were the last of the natives living nearby. Just before they were moved, one of Delemare's men was going to see them, and asked me if I would like to go with him. Of course I was very interested to do so. They were rather a pathetic lot. They were dressed in cast-off European clothes. A few rags thrown over some bushes were their only shelter. There were fowls perched on branches under the shelter of these rags. I presumed they chased them out at night or there would be some unpleasant accidents. A very old, wrinkled, rather ugly black girl was trying to get a double-gee out of her foot.

Brownie told me she was the granny of the tribe, and he offered her a cigarette and, to my horror, she took it and began to smoke it. I had never seen a woman smoke before.

Mother would say she felt a bit like Mrs Noah when she set off along the track to the front gate. She was followed by two children, two cats, two dogs, two goats, two ducks, a calf and several hens! The goats were really an elderly nanny (who hated children and never missed a chance to butt us), and her kid. My father thought goat's milk would do Mother some good. The heat, the loneliness and the new way of life were making her listless, and she was losing weight. Nanny was also a woman's goat (they get these ideas, goats). One day my mother was too ill to milk her so my father said he would. Nanny objected, my father tied all her legs up; he wasn't going to be beaten by a goat: she had the last word, though, she just refused to let down her milk. So Mother went out and she took one look at her and let Mother milk her! I think goats and donkeys must be related, anyway you cannot make either of them do what they don't want to do.

Soon after we moved into the orchard it was Christmas. My parents cut a branch off the Australian Christmas tree and decorated it and hung presents on it. This tree is like mistletoe in that it has to grow at least on the roots of another tree, and therefore has unhealthy looking leaves which droop down not very prettily, but at Christmas time it has beautiful, bright yellow, almost orange-coloured flowers which grow in huge bunches and transform the tree for a few weeks. My parents didn't realize what a great mistake they made by doing this at Christmas time. To me the Christmas tree was like Father Christmas, the same the world over. So when they told me this was the Australian Christmas tree I hated it on sight as a usurper. Even now, over 60 years later, every year when these trees burst into beautiful orange flowers shining in odd spots on the hills, I have to tell myself how very beautiful they are, and try to forget that moment of sadness all those years ago.

After Christmas I went to the school on the hill, and this time I took my lunch and stayed all day. It was the only time in my school years when I did not like school, because I was so unhappy. After a little while I found a short cut up through this bush but I always came back down the road home, because each day I brought the bread from the gate. At first the baker used to leave it in a tin on the gate, but the horse discovered this, and would push the lid off and get at the bread, and so it was left in a house nearby. The loaf became very heavy by the time I got home. A little girl in my

class lived in the house where the bread was left. She would tell me a lot of stories and I would believe them all because I didn't think people told lies unless they were wicked. All the greengrocers and market gardeners were Chinese then, the Italians hadn't arrived to take over. Greeks were beginning to run restaurants and, of course, the Chinese and the laundries. Fremantle was full of Chinese. A Chinese greengrocer called at this little girl's house. He was round and fat and jolly, and smiled broadly at any children. This little girl told me Chinese were far worse than gypsies at stealing little girls, so the more the Chinese boy grinned at me, the more sure I was he would kidnap me.

In spite of the lovely weaving we did at school with special coloured paper, and other crafts, I was not at all happy at school. The two main reasons were firstly, we were given a certain number of words to learn to spell every day, their meaning was not explained to us. Try as much as I could I couldn't get them all right. To make matters worse we were caned for *every word* we got wrong. Not only did this make matters worse for me, but I was terribly ashamed because I thought you only got the cane for being naughty. So I was very ashamed at being, as I thought, so wicked. Matters grew to such a state that I was becoming ill, after a while Mother managed to discover what it was all about. She wrote a note to the teacher, which didn't improve matters, because before the caning stopped I was given a last caning for telling tales out of school!

Secondly, a number of children, especially boys, set on me because I was English. They called after me 'red, white and blue, dirty cockatoo'. They pulled my hair and pinched me and threw stones after me.

Empire Day was really celebrated in those days, after all there had as yet been no ANZAC Day to celebrate. The following I wrote in 1956 for the *Daily News* (Cambridge, England). Readers were invited to write of their childhood memories: a few of them were printed, including mine.

> The Empire Flag
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> It was in 1913 in Western Australia, when trudging slowly through the scrub up the hill to school, that I almost hated the raw edged flag on the rough wooden stick and the three horrid little tacks holding it there. We had been told to take a flag for Empire Day. Mother would not buy me one of the lovely silky looking ones on smooth white sticks. I was so frightened mine would be wrong, and different, and that all the children would laugh at me. At seven years old I had been to four different schools, three in this strange new country, and I *so* hated being different. The boys often threw stones at me and pulled my hair because I was English, and the girls called me names and told me frightening stories about the Chinese. I didn't cry, but I felt that if they laughed at me because of my awful little flag I would not be able to keep from crying.
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> We assembled in the playground around the flag pole, and to my horror *all* the other children near me had those lovely silky flags. We were all ordered to hold our flags up. The headmaster's voice boomed across as he shouted, pointing straight at me. 'That little girl, come here!' Trembling with fear I stumbled through the dusty sand towards him, conscious of the sneers at my flag as I did so. He took my mean, ragged-edged cotton flag and held it aloft. 'You children have all brought the wrong flag,' he said. 'You have brought the Australian flag, this is *not* Australia Day, it is *Empire* Day. This little girl is the only one with the *right* flag, the Union Jack.'

The Barretts – from the Ajana – that is, Mr and Mrs Barrett and their three daughters, May aged 12 years, Marie my age and Muriel, Geoffrey's age, lived in the wilds near the coast somewhere

between Cottesloe and North Beach, I should think. Once or twice while we were at Osborne we went across for the day. Mr Barrett was having difficulty in finding suitable work. I think both he and Mr Diable had rather romantic ideas of what they would do in Western Australia. I fancy they thought it would be rather like the wild west of America.

All the families decided to go to the sea for the day. The ladies had brought bathing costumes from England, a garment they had never owned before, not that anyone except my father could swim. Mother's was very daring. It was navy blue cotton, a two piece, the bottoms were rather like pyjama trousers finishing just below the knee with a red-edged frill. Red-bound at neck and down the front, and there was a little red and blue cotton mob-cap to keep her hair tidy. After undressing behind rocks, while we children kept away, they paddled on the edge of the ocean breakers.

There was one frightening time when Mrs Barrett had been persuaded by my father to venture a few steps further into the water. Holding hands, they stood for a moment with their backs to the waves, and Mother – realizing they would be knocked off their feet - shouted a warning but they could not hear, and the next moment my father was diving through the waves to rescue Mrs Barrett. I don't think she ever bathed again!

Once my father nearly set the whole place on fire. He lit an English-type bonfire, not realizing the grass around would also catch fire.

Then in the winter we had a hurricane. Tress were uprooted, just as though a giant had walked the earth deciding the trees were weeds and pulling them up by the roots and tossing them down. Houses were smashed, verandahs ripped off and taken several miles. The next day a number of people came to see what had happened to our tent. *Nothing*! The cover my father had put over the roof and the sides was so closed in that the wind had not been able to get underneath.

More to make Mother go out than anything, my father would read of blocks of land for sale in the paper, and get her to go and look at the most likely ones. One experience ended these trips.

The advertisement said that trams went out to the road the block was in, and so they decided it was worth looking at. After a train to Perth, Mother with Geoffrey took a tram to this district. As she got out she asked the driver when the next tram back to Perth ran, and he replied late afternoon when the men would be going back. There was one tram up and down a day! Mother was horrified, she didn't bother to look at the block, but began to walk slowly back along the dusty road with no house or anything in sight. She had no idea how far they might have to walk, and her only hope was that someone would come along and give them a lift. Again Geoffrey was only a fat little two-and-a-half-year-old. He began to tire and asked Mother to carry him. She said she was tired too, and jokingly suggested he carry her. He at once bent his chubby little body and told her to 'jump on'.

Mother was thinking about me coming home from school and finding no one there, especially as I did not even know she had gone out. At last two horses came in sight with two men sitting in front of a queer-looking van. Mother stopped them and asked if they would give her a lift. They looked a bit surprised but readily agreed and one of them took Geoffrey on his knee. After a while he asked Geoffrey if he knew what sort of van he was in. Geoffrey was of course too young to understand, but said 'Mother, what is it?' 'The Black Maria' (prisoners' van) was the astonishing reply, and they were policemen. Mother giggled a bit and she said she didn't mind what it was as long as she got to Perth. Then of course she needed to get the train to Osborne, then walk up the hill past Scotch College, then down through the orchard to the humpy. So she was still a little late.

In the meantime, I had reached home and was very surprised to find it all shut up. Laddie and I sat on the doorstep and, while considering what to do, saw her arriving.

Beyond the swamp, among the paperbark trees, we found an old hut, with a very old man living there, taken care of by a half-caste. Nearby were rows and rows of bulbs in flower. Someone had begun a kind of nursery or market garden. Perhaps they were Dutch and thought this low-lying land was like the soil of Holland.

Mother used to lie all day, quite listless and thin, and would faint – for a pastime as it were. The doctor told my father that he thought Mother should not be so isolated, so he managed to rent a house in Cottesloe Beach in the same road that we had lived in before. He also bought a small incubator which held about 50 eggs. This was quite a modern invention, and my father thought he would like to experiment.

Mr Delamare lent my father a horse and milk cart to fetch the incubator from the house where my father had bought it to the one in Cottesloe Beach where we were going to live. Mother told Father he could take me with him. For the ride (she said) but we both knew it was so he would take more care.

We picked up the incubator, and it just fitted into the small cart. My father sat me in a little space in the middle back, and told me not to move. He sat on the right-hand front of the cart with his feet dangling over the front side.

Except for a very pale glow over the sky, promising the early rise of the moon, there was no light. The road beside the railway line between Perth and Fremantle had no street lights, and there were few houses except those dozen or so around each station to keep the handful of shops company. As there was nothing to see and being past my bedtime I was dozing, when suddenly the horse and cart shot swiftly at right-angles along a road to our left, and my father shot off on to the hard road on our right side.

The horse was a milk horse and he knew his round, and so took this road to his left as he always did, even though the reins didn't tell him to do so. The reins were dangling just out of my reach, my father had been caught so by surprise that they had luckily slipped from his hands, or he might have been dragged along. I had been told not to move, but I felt if only I could reach the reins I might be able to stop the horse. While this was going on in my mind my father had picked himself up and was tearing after us along the road. Fortunately two men appeared walking towards us. My father shouted to them, and they threw themselves either side of the horse and stopped him.

When we got to Cottesloe Beach, my father was telling our future neighbour all about it and was laughing that the men thought he was drunk to fall off the cart (my father didn't drink). On the way home my father managed to impress on me that it would be a good idea if I didn't say anything to Mother about our adventure.

When we were going to bed my father, as usual, pulled his shirt over his head and there was a long black bruise all down one side! Then of course my father had to tell her the whole story. Poor Father – more trouble! He never could seem to take care of his little daughter!

I think I should mention here an adventure my father had with a runaway horse some years later, in the 1920s. It was in Cheltenham, England, and the town centre was full of motor-driven vehicles of all kinds, but the milk floats were still pulled by horses. A frightened runaway horse pulling a milk float was tearing towards the crowded High Street. My father quietly got off his bike and, parking it on the kerb, waited for the float to come alongside him, and at once jumped on the

long step and, grabbing the reins, pulled the horse up just in time. The poor milkman came tearing up. He couldn't thank my father enough, not only had he saved what could have been some very nasty accidents, but the poor man's job as well.

I think we moved to Cottesloe about the time of the Perth Annual Show at Claremont. Until after the 1914 war the Show was only two or three days and businesses and shops closed down on one of those days so that everyone could go. As the population of WA was so small, a good attendance was needed. On the Children's Day, children were all allowed in free, and had *free* show bags.

Apart from the show ring, there were only a few large wooden sheds for exhibition halls. There were one or two beer bars, and some toilets, but no real organised tearooms or rest centres. There were no paths, just soft sand to trudge through. Everywhere was hot and dusty. In one corner were a few amusements. There was one which interested my father, who after all was not yet 30 years old. This was a very large kind of round table upside down. The idea was that men sat on it, and then it would spin round faster and faster and they would fall off. Anyone who stayed on could have his money back. My father stood watching this for some time and with a logical and scientific mind. The next time it stopped he paid his money and scrambled to the very centre of the large plate affair, the other men sat on the edge. By sitting in the centre not only did my father not go round so often, but of course as the circle was smaller it was slower. So for some minutes it was spinning with only my father on it. In the end they stopped it altogether and, giving my father his money back, begged him to go away or they would lose trade! So we all went off while he chuckled to himself, and Mother told him he would never grow up!

Sometimes Mother would take Geoffrey and I down a quiet road, and suddenly the river would be ahead. At that point the water was shallow, with gentle little waves lap-lapping on to the edge of the yellow sandy shore. The bottom was so clear that you could plainly see any small shells, sticks or pebbles or a swift team of baby sardines go racing by. As the water became a little deeper than a foot and warmer, transparent, mushroom-like jellyfish trembled just under the surface of the water, their long 'legs' dangling like sticks.

My father had become a Freemason while we were in WA and one weekend there was a big event happening in the distant town of Midland, or Midland Junction as it was always called then. We all went by train for the day. Mother was very proud that Father still had his top hat, as there were few of them about, and I was interested in a tree laden with small limes in the garden of a house we visited.

The incubator hatched out dear little chickens, which, after their yellow fluffiness had gone, became white, and were the especial delight of all the children in the street. The back gardens were not fenced right up to the houses so the children, like their parents, called on each other.

One morning we woke to tragedy. Some animal had got in to the closed pen and had sucked all the chickens' necks and killed them. While adults held a post mortem, we, the children, decided we must have grand funeral. While the girls went to find a large box and line it with flowers, the boys found a suitable site and dug a large grave. Although I was one of the youngest they all seemed to think I was an expert on funerals!

The bodies were placed tenderly in the box, then the box was covered with flowers, and we all marched off, each with one hand on the box. As the 'coffin' was lowered – primed by me – one of the boys took the service, and the grave was covered over and the flowers placed on top. Then we all retired to one of the wash-houses for a tea-party. One of the girls had a large dolls' tea set, and the mothers provided the food and a good time was had by all!

A few weeks later we all celebrated 5 November around one bonfire, which the fathers all watched carefully. I remember one boy running barefoot through the flames to impress me!

Alas we had a real child's funeral. A little 8-year-old boy swallowed a fishbone and died. All the boys in his class dressed in white and walked beside his coffin.

Then one hot midday a sulky [two-wheeled carriage] full of a giant cotton reel of hose piping, pulled by a galloping horse, shot across the bottom of the road to a house on fire. Of course the house burnt down before it even got there. Communications were so bad, and the transport so slow, water hard to come by, and houses made of wood, so that they didn't really stand much chance of being saved.

The doctor was still worried about Mother, and he suggested that every morning before school she took us over to the ocean – about one mile – for a swim. So with a neighbour we did this for a while. At the point where we reached the sea was a little changing hut and fresh water shower. In 1913, quite a novel idea.

In those days there was a great deal more sandy shore with many kinds of beautiful seashells lying about, and beautiful armchair rocks, and crab pools, and pinky seaweed. Children could play for hours in a world of their own...it's amazing how the coastline has changed over the years.

But Mother lost weight and was listless. 1912-1913 summer had been very hot, and 1913-1914 promised to be just as bad. The doctor told my father he didn't think my mother would last another summer in WA. My father didn't tell Mother this for many years, which was a pity because she thought he didn't want her any more.

(Incidentally, at the time of my writing this, Mother is 94 years old, having survived over 25 years in WA!)