

My Life Story

The First Forty Years

**Ireland
to NZ
1953 - 1993**



**by
Mary Morrison**

GROWING UP IN IRELAND

Westport, Co. Mayo

By Mary Morrison

1953 - 1972

I was born and raised in Ireland, a place you all know well, brought up by honest parents, the truth to you I tell, brought up by honest parents and raised so very pristine, until I left my native shores, at the tender age of eighteen. I was born in a remote place called Knappabeg, Westport, County Mayo, Republic of Ireland, July 1953.

I was one of four children, with an older sister called Bridie, an older brother called Michael and a younger sister called Kathleen. Knappah was a magical place, we had a lot of land and plenty of places to explore. We did not have many toys but we had a swing in the barn which gave us endless pleasure.

We lived in a little thatched cottage with the absolute basics, no running water, no electricity. All the cooking was done in pots, which were hung over the fireplace. We had a table, a few chairs, some stools in the living area and some oil lamps for lights, it was a simple and happy life.

My grandmother (my Father's Mother) lived with us, there were three small bedrooms, and the four of us kids shared one.

My Mother worked in the fields with my Dad most of the time and our grandmother looked after us. I can remember my grandmother putting me to sleep in the cot with my bottle, which was a small Guinness bottle with a teat on it. We were all home births, but my mother lost her first child.

Our closest neighbours and my parents best friends lived, as we termed it, a few fields away, they also had four children, three boys and a girl. We went back and forward to their house all the time. Whenever we went there we received a royal welcome, May always had jelly for us, different colours, stacked in jars, it was always a treat. We have remained life long friends.

We walked across the fields to a little primary school, a tiny little building, we could dawdle as much as we liked, we went in bare feet, and we always took a bottle of milk for lunch.

We picked wild sloes and bilberries from the trees and ate them on our way.

My Mother's uncle came to live with us in his later years, he loved birds and went around whistling all the time, he had some birds in cages but I cannot remember what type. We were a little scared of him, for some odd reason he used to pull our hair. I used to feed him his eggs in the morning. He died when I was around five, he was the first dead person I ever saw.



Patrick and Margaret at Knappah

We had a horse and trap as transport, which was rather grand. My uncle, one of my Mother's brothers, built it, it still exists today in very good condition.

When I was around six years old my Mum & Dad would take off, on what seemed like a daily basis, in the horse and trap and were gone all day. They took our older sister Bridie with them. They said they had a big surprise for us but we would have to wait, well we were lost in our own little world and never asked much about this surprise. We finally got to hear that we had a new house and eventually we were all taken there, well, we ran around that house with so much excitement, in and out of all the rooms, it was a bare skeleton at the time, just concrete floors, a toilet, but no bathroom, the water we pumped from a septic tank but it did have what my Dad called electric light. We had a sitting room, three bedrooms, a kitchen and a back kitchen. We never had a telephone. We had moved there to Carrabawn, around a mile from the town of Westport. It was more a house than a home, so to speak. We never did give it the finishing touches it required.



*Pat & Margaret Quinn
(Mary's Parents)*

I was seven when we moved, I continued to go the same school for a while, we were then enrolled in the convent school in Westport town, it was run entirely by nuns. I felt the building was very oppressive, very dark rooms and the nuns were very strict, you certainly would not even consider answering back or giving any cheek whatsoever. There were a number of orphans living at the convent, unfortunately they incurred the wrath of the nuns on a frequent basis, for what I can remember was very little, then they got the cane without any mercy. However the nuns were very good to me and I liked them all very much. They entered me in a poetry competition at the Feis, (Gaelic for Festival) and spent a lot of time preparing me for it. I was a bit blasé about it, come the day, I was out feeding the calves on the farm and thought what a hassle getting ready and going in to town. I did not get away with it, they sent someone out to get me, so off I went, up before a panel, one of whom was my headmaster from the primary school I went to. I recited a Gaelic version of Stradivarius and another poem, with a lot of passion I must admit. I won two medals, the only medals I every won. When I got home, I did not say much and put them away. My Dad said, you are a good girl Mary, it is good not to boast about things.



*Mary's Holy Communion
at 8 yrs old*

My Mother was always very busy, she worked on the land with my Father, looked after elderly people including her own Mother, she had to cycle around three miles to get to where she lived. She was a very sociable person and made a lot of friends and she kept good contact with the rest of the family. There were always people visiting or coming to stay, people who camped in our fields to whom my Mother would make friends with, they would always come back to see us, she was very energetic.

We always looked forward to the times she cooked our meals, she used to make a lovely sauce, none of us can remember how to make it. She was very strict with us, she used to say "An order is an order and must be obeyed".

We had plenty of places to explore, we knew a lot of children in the neighbourhood, we had certain chores to do, collecting eggs, getting water from the well, feeding the chickens, bringing in turf for the fire, lots of little things. As a treat my Mother would buy us a lucky bag.

On Saturday mornings my Mother always cleaned the range, this was a messy job and she got us all out of the house, this was when my brother and I had to take bags of hay to the cattle that were a long distance from the house, this was winter time and very cold, we would set off, with a long way to go, across fields, stumbling over walls, our hands freezing, it was a mission we did not enjoy but one we had to repeat often.

My Mother looked after a woman in our neighbourhood, she lived off the main road about a mile down a long lonely road, there were no other houses around there at the time. I had to go and keep her company, she never said very much to me. I would go in and sit on a form (a long stool), the house was very dark, all I can remember seeing in the house were piles of newspapers. I was around eight years old at the time.



Bridie Kay and Mary & Michael Behind Centre

I was very clumsy as a child and tended to drop a lot of things, my Mother was very patient and never scolded me, I once brought in all the eggs I collected, in my normal rushed manner, didn't quite get the basket onto the table, so they fell and all broke. Another time I was bringing a big bowl of prunes for desert from the sitting room into the kitchen, and dropped the lot, another time it was a jar of jam. I was a lot like road runner, ran like mad everywhere.

My Mother helped us with our homework every night, she had a great sense of humour, she was always joking with us, one she always repeated was, we were all going back to live in the old house, we never knew if this was true or not. We went out for some lovely walks with her, she did not take much nonsense from us. We were all very happy.

We were a very religious family, my Mother went to morning mass a few times a week, we all went to church on Sunday, there were always the Saturday night preparations for mass on Sunday, we all polished our shoes and got our clothes ready, we all walked to mass together. There were a lot of rules you had to abide by then, we had to have our heads covered but were not allowed to wear coloured scarves in church, just in case we distracted any one.

I embraced the Catholic religion, going to confession, we had to confess our sins, the problem is we had not sinned, so you ended up making things up, like I said swear words etc, a bit counter productive. You went into the confessional box, kneeled down, the priest was on the other side with netting between us, it was dark, so you could not see him and vice versa. The priest then gave you penance, like twenty Hail Marys. You had to go to confession before you received Holy Communion. I did the stations of the cross on a frequent basis, climbed Croagh Patrick to atone for my sins and I did a pilgrimage to Knock once, you stayed up and prayed all night. My Aunt was staying with us at this time. They let me sleep in, I awoke to a lovely sunny day, she said I was furious with them for letting me sleep when I could have been outside. I still feel like this today.

We children, when we became older, as instructed by the nuns at school, had to attend the service at 9.00am on Sunday. When we got to school on Monday, we were lined up and asked did we attend this service, anyone that did not, got caned. I never saw the sense in that. We would all kneel down and say the rosary together at night, we never objected to that, my Mother would say. "the family that prays together stays together". We were not allowed to eat meat on Friday, so we had haddock, cooked in milk. We were encouraged to observe lent. One year I gave up having sugar in tea and never went back to it, another year I stopped eating sweets. I collected them all in a box, at the end of lent I had a full box of various candy, I looked forward in immense anticipation to it.



From left: Mary, Kay and Bridie on the steps of the new house in Carrabaun

We rarely celebrated our birthdays, if at all. Some of our overseas relations would send us nice toys, which my Mother wisely put away for us. We received very little of anything, sweets or otherwise, during the year. I remember one time I received two oranges, a great luxury at the time, getting one was very rare, on this occasion I wanted to hold on to them and refused to share, which was unusual for me, my Mother had to slap me eventually and pries them out of my hands.

We all looked forward to Christmas with so much anticipation, we all believed in Father Christmas. We started decorating the house early in December, and we picked the holly with berries and put it around all the doors inside. We always had a Christmas tree, we had some unusual decorations, we all got together and decorated the tree. My Father would buy barm bracks and at Christmas time they had a ring inside, we all wanted to get the ring.

My Mother baked several Christmas cakes in advance, mostly to send overseas and give to neighbours. We had everything at Christmas time that we never had during the year, lots of biscuits, sweets, the lot. It was a very joyous time in every way; a lot of people came to visit us, always bringing us gifts of some kind.

Christmas morning we nearly killed each other trying to get out to see what Father Christmas brought us. One of the gifts I got was a pram with big wooden wheels, very sturdy, later I found a carpenter in the village who made it for me, it made a hell of a racket when I wheeled it along, we did have the tendency to wreck things however.

We all walked to church on Christmas morning, in the ice or snow, we went to early mass, came home and had breakfast, and then we all got together for the traditional meal, always turkey in our house. My parents were very happy, their intention was to get all the things we needed in the house, as they could afford it, we had no bath, only the basic amenities. We were all starting to grow up so things were getting better.

Then everything changed for ever when my Mother fell ill, I was nine at the time, she ended up in hospital, my younger sister and I visited her once, this was a new experience because we never went anywhere, she came home but was bedridden, we never understood what was wrong with her, we continued being as boisterous as ever, she said to Kay and I, look after your Father, that must have been very hard for her, we never saw her upset, a lot of people came to visit at the time, including nuns and priests, in the end she could not hold any food or drink down, she died when I was ten, we certainly did not comprehend at the time the effect that was to have on our lives, our Father was devastated, he loved and admired her so much, she left the instruction that my younger sister and I were not to attend the graveyard, only the older two.

We had no idea that she was going to die; no one ever discussed her illness with us. I just had this feeling, when I walked to school every day, I passed this particular spot, something told me my Mother would never pass this way again. It upset me in later years that my Father had not told us she was going to die; he told me he did not accept it himself at the time. It was only when we were much older that I found out she died of cancer of the oesophagus

We had the traditional wake; all the curtains were closed in the house. Almost instantly people started arriving, the house was full in a short time, my Father had to go into town and buy some beer and food.

We then had to struggle on without her, our Father never did get over her, he spent a number of years very depressed, he had four children to bring up, and despite offers from family members to look after us, luckily he decided to keep us together. I got jaundice shortly after my Mother died. I was so ill. I had to stay in bed for weeks, my Dad had to take me to the doctor for check ups. I remember getting up out of bed, feeling really sick and weak, then having to sit on the back of my Fathers bicycle, in the freezing cold, while he took me to see the doctor in town.

We got all the childhood diseases, there were no inoculations apart from two we got at school for polio and TB. We got measles (three varieties) mumps, whooping cough and chicken pox. Kay got shingles. We had to simply stay in bed, all three of us in the same bed for weeks on end, no medicines, we just had to see it through. I got a very bad case of tonsillitis when I was around eight. I spent all day in bed and as I felt worse I started to groan. My mother sent for the doctor, he finally arrived at 10.30 at night, he said, if he had arrived a half an hour later I would not be here. I continued to suffer from tonsillitis all my childhood. Feeling lousy when I got it, I walked over a mile to the doctors, got an injection, it worked instantly. I felt better by the time I got home.



Pat with Margaret just before she contracted cancer

Everybody was very community minded, it was one of the lovely things about living in a small village. People would not hesitate to help a neighbour out. I saw many examples of this growing up and it never failed to move me. Our neighbours were very kind to us and tried to help us in lots of ways when our mother died, giving us advice etc, one neighbour gave us a Christmas Cake every year. The majority of us were what I would term poor, there were a few people in the village who were well off, nobody resented them, in fact they applauded them. One such neighbour who lived fairly close to us, had two lovely children, I remember stopping on the way home from school to talk to them.

One day their father took them on a visit to a client, he left them in the car, unfortunately they got hold of some matches, set the interior alight, the plastic on the ceiling melted down on top of them. He drove them in to the doctors close to our school. I could hear the screams but did not realise at the time it was the children. They were very badly burnt, they survived for a few weeks, then died. It was tragic, the father found it very hard to come to terms with, we were sympathising with him, just kids ourselves. It was his wife who came to my rescue one day when I was walking home from school, the weather turned really bad. I was struggling to walk home, she turned up in the car and picked me up, how she knew I was in such a bad situation I will never know, but to this day it brings tears to my eyes.

One of our many Aunt's, Lizzy, lived in a caravan, in a really lovely area called Thurlough. Her husband came from a wealthy family, he was a protestant and she was a Catholic, not a good mix back in those days. I am sure it caused problems with both families. He was going to be my godfather but when the priest found out he was a protestant, he would not allow it, telling him to get out of the Church, much to my father's embarrassment. When he passed away, Liz asked Dad if Kay could come and stay with her, we smelt a rat. I think they had in mind Kay staying there for some time, so I decided to go to make sure this did not happen. Well we had the time of our lives, we must have spent the whole time laughing. Lizzy had a little dog she called Bo Bo, the name really amused us. We went to Jack's funeral, we could not contact home and we did not know how long we were expected to stay there for.

Then I got a bad case of tonsillitis again, we were sleeping in the same room as Lizzy, she was sitting up in bed reading. Kay was trying to get across to her that I was really sick, Lizzy was ignoring us, Kay gave her a piece of her mind and said we had to go home but she said, stop reading and put the lights out. We did go home the next day, I am not sure how we got there.

We would visit our Aunt Maisie and husband Joe on a fairly regular basis, they had lots of money but were reluctant to spend any, the cupboards were bare, they did however give us money for an ice cream, which was always appreciated.

My father's sister was a nun, she resided in a convent in Drumcondra, Dublin. She had joined a closed order when she was very young, a closed order meant she was never allowed out of the convent so she could never come home. I am not sure what changed but after forty years she was allowed to come and visit us. I remember that day, it was a great occasion for all of us. Out of all of our relatives, and we had a lot, she was the only one that tried to help us, she used to send us books, clothes and other things. We used to write to her all the time, she would then send the letter back to us, underlining in red any mistakes we made in spelling or grammar, a little irritating, but she was only trying to help us. She would also correct the way we spoke, we had very countrified accents.



From Left: Kay, Sister Maureen, Grandma and Bridie

We were self-sufficient, not of course because it was a fad, but rather that was the only way we could survive. We lived solely off the land. We did not have a big number of livestock, we had a few milking cows, a few other head of cattle, which we sold on market day, thus giving us some cash flow. We grew a variety of vegetables, lots of potatoes, we also had apples, and gooseberries, blackcurrants, wild cherries and rhubarb, and we used the latter to make jam and pies. We had our own chickens, lots of them. My grand Mother looked after the hens and saw to it that we had a new batch of chickens every year, those lovely soft, bright yellow coloured chicks were lovely to hold, hence we had all our own eggs and we also had the chicken meat.

We made all our own butter, we had a churn to make this, the cream was skimmed of the milk, the churn resembled a barrel, it was wooden and of slender shape, it was one task I did not enjoy, mainly because I had to stand still for up to two hours, pushing this stick up and down, it was such a relief when butter appeared on the top, later we got another churn, we turned the handle on this one, it was a lot easier and you could sit down, however, it took just as long. We could make a few pounds at a time; it had a very strong taste and was fine when we had nothing else to compare it with.

We had no drinking water in the house, we got this from a spring well, which was at the bottom of our field, this was another chore, making sure we always had enough drinking water, mainly for making tea. The only items we bought in those early days were, flour, sugar, cheese, and possibly sausages.

We bought flour in big bags, which my grand Mother used to make sheets from (the flour bags that is) for us, they were a bit on the coarse side and the seams were always irritating, complaining was not an option, we were simply happy with what we got.

We baked all our own bread, and if visitors were there when it was baked, my grand Mother offered them some. I used to think, why would they want that, of course it was a treat for someone who did not get freshly baked bread. We three girls, when we became of age, took it in turns to bake the bread, it had to be done, as we relied on that for our meals, we all did it as a matter of course and baked many an apple and rhubarb pie. We had to help with all the chores, they never seemed to end but I learned one thing very quickly, there was no peace until they were all finished. Apart from the little everyday chores, we had the seasonal chores, planting the potatoes, we had to spread the manure in the ridges, then lay the potatoes down, my Father ploughed the fields with a horse and plough, I had a go at this, one time, my Father was of course an expert, then there was the frequent spraying of the potatoes against blight, the mixture was made up in a big barrel, then we filled up the sprayer, it strapped onto your back and there was a pump action sprayer, my Father dug up all the potatoes, with a fork, huge fields of them, then we helped pick them, this was hard on your back, they were then covered in clay and left in a pit until we bagged them and brought them in.

Milking the cows was another chore; this had to be done every evening. I enjoyed milking, once you got the rhythm you were away, I do remember times when I was not happy doing it, just getting ready to go out on a date on a Saturday night and having to go into a smelly barn prior, was not appealing, especially when your date was waiting for you.

We helped feed the calves and move the cattle a few miles along the main road, avoiding any traffic.

Hay making was a big chore, we had several fields of hay, we hired someone with a tractor to cut the grass (in my Father's time he had to cut it all with a scythe) it was left for a day then all hands on deck, we had to shake it all out, very tiring until you got used to it, as you had big long clumps of grass to deal with, heavy as it was and still wet, it was left to dry, then you had to turn it over, you formed ridges as you did this, if it rained in between, then you had to turn it again and leave it to dry, then weather permitting you gathered enough to make a haystack, someone had to rake up the loose hay behind you and my Father forked it onto the stack in the correct shape so as to allow the rain to fall off it.



Mary, with Kay and Bridie and friend outside at Carrabaun

I have some of my best memories hay making because it was such a team effort, the more help you got the better and people would turn up to help you and you would do likewise for them, you worked very hard, despite your age, we had many a laugh, you were frequently doing it under the threat of rain and then the pressure was on, no mucking around, as a treat we always had cidona, it came in dark black bottles, how we loved that, we would sit under the haystacks, enjoying having a much needed break, then relief when we got to the last haystack, when the field was cleanly raked, it was a joyous feeling.

When each haystack was up, we had to twist some hay into sugons, four over each one and tied down into the hay itself. My Father looked forward to our school holidays more than we did, he needed our help to get everything done, we never went on holidays, or away for a day, nothing like that, there was always too much to be done at home.



Mary and Kay (Kathleen) on the farm at Carrabaun

The next stage of this was bringing all the haystacks in, to what we called reek it, we hired a tractor with a forklift on it, all the haystacks were brought to the corner of the field, we always had a number of men helping on this day, some forking it up, others on top spreading it out, until it formed one huge haystack, we were not directly involved with this, but were always there providing food and drink for the men or just enjoying the atmosphere. When we eventually got a hay barn built, we brought the hay in directly to this.

Peat making was another big and essential chore, we relied on this for our heating and cooking. The bogs as we called them were about six miles from where we lived; our only transport there was by bicycle or donkey and float. I used to cycle there mostly but sometimes took the donkey and float. There were a few miles of tarmacked road, then onto a stony rough road.

We rented bogs from the council for a low rent. My Father cut the turf/peat with a slade, it was like a spade but shaped to cut a sod of turf, it was then laid out on the bank to dry, the sods were big and heavy initially but as they dried they became lighter, we would first go out and turn them over, leave them to dry for a week or more, then we would go out and foot it, meaning to stack it up six to eight sods standing on an angle to let the wind through to dry them out, this was back breaking work, you worked alongside someone and just had to keep at it, you looked ahead to a big long bank, but just had to keep your head down, if it started to rain, you sat it out, my Dad hoping it would stop, us thinking we can go home, only when it persisted and we were drenched did we get to go home, once again, we worked alongside people we knew and had so much fun joking and telling stories, we had to take our food with us, it was lovely to stop, my Father would light a fire, put the kettle on, we had our bread and cheese, biscuits or cake as a treat and the taste of the tea made there was like no other.

The turf was left to dry and then if it rained in between, which it frequently did, we would have to go out and re foot it, when it finally dried, we had to bring it in, onto the bank by the road edge, this in itself was a tiring job, endless trips with a wheelbarrow, or donkey, loading and unloading until it was all stacked on the roadside.

The final stage of this was bringing the turf/peat in from the bog, we hired a tractor and trailer for this, we would go out and fill the trailer up a number of times, then my Father would stack it up, some in the barn and some in a stack outside, this was a team effort and a number of men would help, as we did in turn for them. We also grew oats, which was feed for the horse and the hens.

We had all the household chores to do as well. We had carpet in the sitting room, linoleum on the bedroom floors but nothing on the kitchen floor, that was still a concrete floor, there was a lot of traffic, by the way of muddy boots coming in from the farm all the time, the mud would get ingrained in it, it was hard work scrubbing that floor. We washed all the clothes and sheets by hand, scrubbing them on the washboard. We did some of the house painting, choosing some garish colours at times. We finally got our heads together and decided to tile the kitchen floor; we ended up with black and white tiles, which admittedly looked good but once again not ideal in that situation.

One thing that always irritated me was, the house always seemed full of buckets, full with, peat, milk, water and buttermilk. Dad always seemed to bring in another bucket of something. We were always cleaning up and Dad's lament was, why don't you leave things where I can find them. We used to think if the house burned down, Dad would still be sitting there smoking his pipe. I did think when I was growing up I am not going to marry a farmer, not with this bucket scenario.

A lot of our relations lived overseas, mainly in England; we had a few in America as well. They would come over on holidays frequently, uncles, aunts, cousins the lot, and mostly stay with us. We really did look forward to them coming and enjoyed their company and had enormous fun with them, however, we were expected to look after them entirely, cook all the meals, look after the children, once again that's what was expected of us and we simply had to do it. I never heard the word bored until my own kids mentioned it, many years later, and then to be fair that was very rare for them.

My grand Mother looked after us as best she could, four boisterous children., she was warm, kind, and affectionate towards us, she cooked our food, she had dinner ready every day when we got home from school, bacon and cabbage mainly, I could smell the cabbage as I came up the driveway, sometimes we would have bacon and turnips. My grandmother had five children of her own, she also suffered a number of miscarriages, she went on to foster some more children, she also looked after her son's two young children, my Uncle Joe and his wife were both in infirmaries with TB. He survived but lost his wife and young baby. So it seems unfair at this stage in her life ending up with another four children to look after.

I never met either of my grandfathers, they both died before I was born. My grandfather on my fathers side looked like a real gent, from the photos I have seen, he had soft looking hands which indicated to me he did not do much of the farming work. I gather this fell on my grandmother. My grandfather on my mothers side looked rather handsome, he was a boat builder by trade. My grandmother on my mother's side, was a small woman, she gave birth to twenty two children, five of whom went to live with her brother, in a house in Carrabawn, for some reason unknown all five of them died young, of cancer and other killer diseases, including my mother.

I can only remember meeting my grandmother once, she came to see us some time after my mother died. I can remember thinking how unfair it was she was still alive and our mother had died.

Dad used to say when we have cabbage you want turnips and vice versa, we had enough cabbage and turnips to last a lifetime hence I have rarely cooked either in my lifetime since. Our favourite food was champ, when we first dug up the new potatoes, my grandmother cooked up a big pot of them, mashed them up with butter and chopped spring onions, we could eat as much as we liked of it, it was yummy.

Granny would make us potato cakes, like no other, hot from the stove, covered with butter. We picked wild mushrooms from the fields, they grew in abundance, we cooked them on the range with a little butter, they were delicious.

Whenever we came into the house my grandmother was singing away, all the lovely old Irish songs, which she would patiently teach us. She instilled manners into us, if someone came to the house, visitors were frequent, we had to stop whatever we were doing and talk to them. On Sundays when Kay and I were going to church we would try and sneak out without my grandmother seeing us, never worked, "come back here, where do you think you are going with such short skirts, you will bring disgrace on the family, shame on you." She would read any book of ours she found, when finished she would always say "that was a pack of lies" we got wise to this and made sure we had read it first. We were very lucky in the respect we had lots of books, one of my Aunts, left behind two cupboards full of books, we got endless enjoyment out of them. We also had a little library in the town, we took out books every week. We all gained a never ending love of books.

As a way of getting some cash and paying for the few groceries we purchased each week, we sold some of our produce, we had a few customers in town, my grand Mother would prepare some butter and eggs and I would take off on my bicycle to sell them, my brother and I would also take milk into town on the donkey and float. I felt rather embarrassed having to do this, once again we had no choice. Saturdays were often miserable days, when none of us felt motivated to go into town and get the shopping.

We would have chicken on some Sundays, so Saturday was when all the preparations were made. I can still remember the smell of the feathers The chicken, when killed, was put into a small bath with boiling water poured over it which made it easier to pluck the feathers off, that was a job in itself, luckily we did not have to participate in this.

We had endless energy, enormous space to run around, we had virtually every other child in the neighbourhood around playing with us, we had endless fun, we ran wild, there were no restrictions on us. When the chores were finished, we were off to play. We played with marbles, skipping, hopscotch, tag, Simon said, skating on the lake when it was all frozen over in the winter, not that safe when I look back on it. We went on cycle rides and long walks. Kay and I used to take off in the evenings and climb way up the hills, walk back through the river and come home covered in scratches.

We endured very cold Winter's, we packed up all our Summer clothes in boxes and put them away, there was no chance of wearing them. Dad used to say, "Do not change your clout until May is out".

I loved waking up in the morning, when it had snowed the night before, the whole village had changed, everything covered in white, it was like magic. It also provided us with entertainment, with Kay and I going to Church, first us falling over, then some guys on their bicycles merrily greeting us, only to fall over. Kay and I trying our hardest not to laugh but ending up in hysterics.



The Quinn Family visiting Sister Maureen in Dublin circa 1968



Mary with her Sisters and Friend at Westport Beach (A rare occasion)

It was lovely coming out of the cold cold Winter and coming into Summer. It was bright up until eleven o'clock at night, we had lovely long evenings. Michael and I tanned to a dark brown, probably the best tan I ever had, not that I was intentionally getting a tan, it was just all the working outside.

We made so much noise, a neighbour told me she could hear me laughing, way down in the village. My grandmother used to lament, "Why are you not like the Flanagan boy's" This used to amuse us even more, as we thought they were sissies and they were the last people we wanted to be like.

When we were confined indoors, we played shop, just the three girls, we cut things out of magazines, mainly foodstuffs, set them out on the table, then went shopping with our handbags. We played cards, draughts and snakes and ladders.

We had very little in the way of entertainment, we had a wireless, which was well out of our reach, and we were never allowed to touch it.

The best entertainment we had was sitting around listening to ghost stories, my Father's friends had us enraptured for hours telling us of spirits they saw, (they did not think of them as ghost stories) they could all tell you of times going home in the dark, in their horse and carts, of a spirit coming out in front of the horse, halting him. The only thing I wanted as a child was a pair of roller skates, but as that was out of the question, you did not complain.

I was around twelve when we got our first black and white television, my Father felt it would ruin our lives, prior to this, people would go visiting each other of a night, or play cards. I used to go visiting with Dad every Friday night to the Moane's family. We used to watch Alfred Hitchcock movies and have tea and cake with them. The only thing I saw Dad watch at the time was the news, keeping us quiet was another matter. If someone came to visit, we had to switch it off regardless of what we were watching.

Dad really enjoyed dancing. In later years, when we all grew up, he got out a lot more, he enjoyed a drink and was a very sociable person. He was always helping out people in the neighbourhood. He was very well liked. You ended up going to every wedding and funeral, you always invited your neighbours as well as your family. An Irish wedding is a great affair. Another social come community event was what we called The Stations. This was basically when the priest came around and said mass in your home. Every house in the village took it in turns. One thing which was not simple was the trouble people went to preparing for it.

You painted, cleaned, scrubbed, took out all your finest crockery, set up an altar for the priest. You provided tea, cakes and I am sure, alcohol.

People in Ireland used to brew putcheen, it was made from potatoes, it was illegal, pure alcohol. The authorities were always tipping barrels of it out. It is like moonshine in the US, probably came from the Irish who emigrated there. We always seemed to have a bottle or two. I tried it once and found it super strong.

Sex education was non-existent, we were never told anything, it was never mentioned at school either, we never got any books on it, and so in this area I was totally ignorant. When I came on my period I had no idea what was happening, my older sister had to come to my rescue. I felt a bit peeved with my relatives later on, thinking that they must have known about our predicament and could have helped in some way.

We were all good at school, I really enjoyed it, the nuns did their best to encourage us, they tried very hard with me, encouraging me to go to secondary school, they encouraged me to learn shorthand, which I did, very time consuming and I never got to use it. We had to learn our native language, Gaelic, it was compulsory. I really liked it but none of my friends took to it, it was not spoken at home, except for some words mixed with English. I got a silver pin for speaking and writing it well. I can only remember a few sentences now which is sad. It is still compulsory today. My Father did not show any interest in our education, very different to our Mother, he did not understand the importance of it, probably because he was given no opportunities and had to leave school at an early age to look after the farm.

I went to a vocational school, my choice or my stubborn nature, my older sister, my brother and myself left school when we were around sixteen, with minimal qualifications, my younger sister went on to the sacred heart school and did much better. That is probably one of my biggest regrets that I have, I did not continue with my education. I also wish I had learnt Irish dancing but we had no one taking us to any activity. We did not learn to swim, skate, dance, simply nothing, mainly because there was so much farm work to do.

A story which comes to mind, which became a family joke. Dad took Kay and I in to the shoe shop to buy some shoes, he had no idea what type of shoes we should wear, we were mostly in gum boots on the farm and plastic jelly shoes in Summer, so he let us choose, neither of us had any idea, so I chose a red pair of boots, looked like army boots. Kay picked a black pair of boots a bit like football shoes, hers were OK but mine stood out like nothing else.

When I went to school the next day, the nuns felt really sorry for me, surprisingly the children were very kind to me, they knew we did not have a mother and instead gave me sweets.

I lacked confidence resulting in low self esteem. I think it was due to not having anyone there to back us up, it felt like we were on our own. We had no one to discuss any problems with. I can remember thinking, despite loving the farm, there were other places to see out there.

A friend from school said to me many years later, Mary you were always talking of going travelling. I have no memory of this.

Our choices of drinks were limited; it was water, buttermilk, Guinness and milk for nourishment, lucozade when we were sick and whiskey and hot water for all other ailments. Well one day this all changed. Coco Cola did a promotion under the pretext of showing us a road safety video at school. I was around eleven at the time, I will never forget that taste sensation, it was unreal, I had never tasted anything quite like it at the time, luckily I never became an addict as I have always loved to drink water.

I met one of my best friends at school, her name was Mary Moore, she came from a family of thirteen and we went to all the dances together. I would walk into town every Saturday night, over a mile on a pitch black road, after my grand Mother having read me some hair raising stories about horrendous events on dark roads from English newspapers like News of the World. We would hitch hike to any dance held out of town, we never had any alcohol and drugs were unheard of at the time. We had a good time regardless. We also went to what was called The Starlight Ballroom, this was close to Westport town. I loved this place, it was a far cry from the old halls



Mary Moore in San Francisco USA

we went to, this was really posh and newly built, the ceiling was blue like the sky, covered in stars, the bathrooms were beautifully decorated and it had a revolving stage. I had never seen such grandeur. I did have some nice boyfriends but I never took them seriously.

Mary Moore went to San Francisco, California when I was around seventeen. I felt like a piece of me went with her, it was never the same without her.

When I did leave school I got a job in an office, bookkeeping, it was the office of a factory, which manufactured underwear. I would walk home from work, often on freezing cold nights, thinking I don't like this very much. When I got home, my grand Mother was always so kind and considerate to me, making a place by the fire for me, when I got paid I always bought her some oranges, which she loved. I liked to spend money on nice clothes. I had to save to buy a watch. We learned to appreciate everything we got which was a great lesson in life. I worked with a lovely girl called Evelyn, we were always in fits of laughter over something. I said to her one day, Evelyn if you meet a red haired person in the morning it will bring you bad luck for the rest of the day. Evelyn said, thank you very much Mary, my mother has red hair. You never called anybody by their Christian name, it was surname only, they called me Ms Quinn. I worked there for about a year when I got to know a girl who worked in the factory, we became friends and I would go and stay with her, she had been to London once and thought it would be a great place to live. We got talking and finally decided that we would go there, not knowing anybody, we wrote to an employment agency, they wrote back and said there was no problem getting a job, just call on them when we arrived.



Mary sitting on the front gate contemplating leaving home

LEAVING IRELAND

1972 - 1974

I announced to everyone at home that I was going to London with Marion, they barely knew her, as far as I can remember no one objected, no ceremony, I just took off, the only thing they asked of me was not to drink any alcohol, the most I had to drink at home back then was an occasional vodka and orange. Marion and I took off in a haze, our letter from the agency clutched in our hands, nowhere to stay, we got a train to Dublin then went across on the Ferry to Hollyhead, then took a train to London. I remember when the train stopped at some station and when I looked out there were all these black people. I had only ever seen one black person in my life and then only glimpsed him, he was walking down our road, we saw him in the distance and we all hid, so this was a big surprise. We met an Irish girl on the way over, told her we had nowhere to stay, we arrived there early morning, she said we could stay with her and her sister for one night as they had a packed house already. The next day we had to take off and not having anywhere to stay that night we went to a convent, explained our situation, they put us up in a small room for the night, gave us some food and were very kind, next day we went to the agency, which we pinned all our hopes on, it was a small grotty office, run by one man, he told us where to look for accommodation and that day we moved into a small grotty flat. We were surviving on very little money, eating as little as possible, we both got jobs fairly quickly but just as quickly we both left our jobs, because neither of us were happy where we worked. This left us very short of money so I wrote home and asked my Dad to help, which he did straight away, luckily we both found other jobs and I repaid the money.



Mary and Kay (on the left)
in Soho London 1972

I had a big awakening when I got to London, when I looked back at Ireland it felt like it had a big wall surrounding it. I was of course very naive, and led a very sheltered life. Living with someone and not being married was unheard of or having a baby and not being married, sex was taboo. Two Irish guys lived in the same house, we became friendly with them, when one of them explained to me, very gently, that his girlfriend was coming to live with them and she was pregnant. I thought that is fine, once I had this awakening I never looked back. The flat we were staying in was very dirty. I got scabies, which unfortunately took a long time for doctors to diagnose; it was very far-gone before I got the cure for it. One night Marion and I were chatting, late into the night as usual, we both slept in the same bed, when we heard some guys come in the gate at the side of the flat, it was more of a worry because one of the windows was broken. I got up and called the Irish guys, who quickly donned their knives and went to sort it out. They really looked after us, those two guys.

The landlords' son was always trying to help us out and it was through him I met an English guy called Tom, who became very possessive of me and nearly drove me crazy in the end. He was very generous always buying me things. He went away up north one time on a job and Marion rang and told him that I wanted him to come back, so he did, that was a joke according to Marion. I went to an Irish dance one night with him; I didn't want him to come in the first place. A guy I fancied for so long asked me out and I thought what the hell and I took off with him, he walked me home and then Tom comes out of the house and attacks this guy and they end up having a big fight in the middle of the street, with everyone looking out their windows. I was trying to break it off with Tom for months but he would not listen, so one day I laid it on the line and said I am going out and when I come back I do not want to see you, he took out this big knife and said if you leave me I am going to kill myself, so he sat on the chair with the knife dangling in his hand and when I came back he was still in the same position, so we finished up.

We moved flat after this and rented a little bed sit in Iverson Rd. Kilburn, we had some great times, always going out to Irish dances, never had much to drink initially but then started in earnest, went to a lot of the Irish pubs, there were some wild scenes there.

I saw a lot of fights, sometimes the guys would wreck the pub, come out covered in blood, and unfortunately get taken away by the police, which always upset me as there were rumours then that the police would beat them up. The Irish worked hard and played hard, we mostly lived in small packed places.

The landlords were very strict then and rarely allowed people to have children in the flat, it was not unusual for a couple to have a baby and have to keep it in a home until they found a place you could take your baby.

I worked with a merchant banking company in Pall Mall; they were a Jewish company and had very posh offices, beautiful carpet everywhere, chandeliers, lovely offices, very strict on work clothes. I must have stood out like a sore thumb, strong Irish accent, which everybody teased me about. It was there I met five of the nicest people imaginable. Two lovely English girls, they invited me to their homes, we compared all our dreams and wondered what the future held for all of us. I met a Romanian guy called Michael Danes, he used to take me out to some very posh bars, always buy me drinks, brandy and Babycham was my drink back then, we did this frequently, he always asked me to have sex with him, as I thought that was so out of the question, he never persisted but always mentioned it, he continued to be a very good friend to me all the time I was there. The most wonderful person I met was an Indian girl called Laxmi, she was the most beautiful person I had ever met, she dressed in the most amazing Saris, was young, very good looking and we became the closest of friends. Laxmi told me in her culture they celebrated Christmas early December so I suggested we go out for a drink at lunchtime, she had never been into a bar before but decided she would come with me, We had two Brandy's and Babycham, when we got back to work, Laxmi, not been used to drinking, got very giggly so they had to send her home. I always hope her husband was not mad at her.



Mary and Kay beside the Thames, London

It was around this time that Marion introduced me to Tony, an Irish guy, I liked him a lot and we got on very well. I had gone out with other guys but not taken any seriously, then Marion's boyfriend came over from Ireland and he got a flat with Tony, so we were a jolly foursome. Tony & I went out a lot, walking, to all the parks, then the inevitable happened, Marion moved in with her boyfriend and Tony moved in with me. He seemed happy in his job and I was still working with Cedar Holdings, the only difference being, they had moved me to their offices into the centre of the city. I missed Laxmi dreadfully and cried myself to sleep at the thought of been parted from her, she felt the same about me and tried everything to get me back. It was here I met a lovely Chinese girl called Mui Ding Wong, we also formed a good relationship, went out to lunch together and talked a lot, unfortunately, she had to go back home for family reasons, she wrote to me once, then I lost contact, which was my shame.

How this ever came about I may never know but I am pretty sure it was Tony's idea, he must have read it somewhere, that people could migrate to Australia for only £10.00, we talked about it, it seemed like a good idea. We forged ahead with it, it was a long procedure but as I remember rightly it was handled very efficiently. We had to have a full health check, interviews with panels of people asking us why we wanted to migrate, would we stay, it was at that interview that I asked if my friend Laxmi could come, he said well, I will put it like this you have a great chance, she has none, that finished that. We had to have a number of shots, I had a very bad reaction to the smallpox injection, my whole arm swelled, it looked like it was full of pus, then a red line started to move up my arm. I had to go to the Hospital several times, I had my arm in a sling, was taking antibiotics, a team of doctors looked at it and could not understand the reaction, one of them asked me if I was pregnant. I said no I was not, eventually it healed. We finally got the telegram to say we were accepted.

We went back home for a few weeks, Tony came with me, explained what we were going to do, I can not remember any reaction from anyone, it was the last time I saw my grand Mother, she died shortly after I arrived in Australia.

We came back to London and worked for a while more. I started to feel ill in the morning, only then did it hit me that I was pregnant, being pregnant and going away, it was a lot to face. The trip to Australia was a nightmare for me. I was sick, like throwing up the whole way, nothing helped. We stopped in Bahrain, we all got out, I got into the Airport lounge, and armed guards surrounded it. I wanted to be sick, no one understood so I was sick there in front of them all.

LIFE IN AUSTRALIA 1974 - 1976

We finally arrived in Australia, I was completely exhausted and white as a sheet, we were met by a lovely Australian lady I had met in England, she was tanned and the picture of health and I felt so miserable, then to make matters a lot worse, the guys were separated from the girls, not of course, if you were married. We were taken to a concrete building, put into rooms with bunk beds. I shared the room with an English and Scottish girl; it was lucky I had them, as we stuck together. It was a very basic place, with no amenities that I remember to make tea or coffee, the girls could not understand what was wrong with me, as I always felt ill, and I was too shy to tell them. We received food vouchers for the first week for three meals a day, which we could use at a café a little walk down the road from us. I did not hear from Tony for a few days, then he came to see me and we decided we had to move out, it was such a long week, and there were a number of families in our building, none too happy as far as I can remember.

We found a flat fairly quickly, it was in Camperdown, it had two bedrooms, a lounge etc. we were so excited having so much space in comparison to our bedsit in London, what we did not know then was, it was infested with cockroaches.

We both got jobs fairly quickly. I worked with a trucking company in Glebe and Tony worked for Goodyear Tyres. The people I worked for were marvellous to me. I met a lovely Maori woman, she was the one who took me out to lunch one day and said Mary is there something you are not telling us, so then I told her I was pregnant. When everyone else found out, they were so good to me, they made every concession for me, saying I need not come in until late every day, the managers wife made several things for the baby, when I was leaving, they had a big party for me, Managing Directors the lot, they insisted I had to drink a whiskey, they presented me with so many gifts for the baby, it was truly amazing.

We continued to have problems with the cockroaches at home, we could not get rid of them. I knew nothing about having a baby, it was similar to how much I knew about getting pregnant, nothing. I got to know a girl next door to us, she had a baby girl, she could not help at all, my main concern was how would I know when to go to hospital. I was going to the Hospital for regular check ups, that was the loneliest and depressing time I can ever remember in my life, never did I feel so much alone, all the other women had their husbands with them. I suppose back then that was mainly the case. I was always on my own, why Tony did not come with me I do not know; maybe he could not get away from work. I often cried the whole way to work.

On one of these visits, where we were weighed etc. I was supposed to have taken a urine sample with me, but forgot, the matron said sternly, "well you should have brought it", this started me off sobbing uncontrollably, she kept saying you are not a baby, you are having a baby, which made me worse, that was an even more horrible day than all the others. I told June what happened when I got back to work, she said Mary you are not the only one having a baby. When I was getting close to having the baby, they got one of their salesmen to pick me up every morning and drop me home at night, so very generous, that company, prior to that I went by bus, meeting the same people each morning, where we chatted and kept up to date with what was happening in each of our lives.

I was keeping in good contact with home, I wrote a lot but never did I dare mention that I was pregnant, that was not acceptable back then so I had virtually no one I could discuss it with. I kept healthy throughout the pregnancy, when my waters finally broke, overnight. I went to tell the girl next door, she said just stay here with me and sit on a towel, which I did for the whole day, when Tony came home, it was our shopping night, but we thought we would go by the hospital and just ask them why this was happening, they almost grabbed we around the throat, saying you should have come in straight away when that happened, in case of infection. I was there to stay. As it was nearly forty years ago now, the whole procedure was so different, first they shaved all my pubic hairs, then I had an anaemia, people often said this was the worst part, the stories people told me were very unpleasant.



*Mary pregnant with
Debbie in Camperdown
Sydney Australia*

I was then put into an open ward, three people gave birth while I was waiting there, with nothing much happening for me, a woman sat with me, talking and knitting, she must have been a community worker.

I was very glad of her company, one woman screamed so loud, I thought if I had been in there for anything else, I would have walked out.

I listened for what seemed like ages to her agonizing screams, they told me she was Italian and they scream a lot during birth, then in comes another woman and she talks to the doctors, all the way through, well I want to know how come, they told me she had a epidural, which I subsequently, begged them for, not knowing a thing about it. Meantime they had hoisted up my legs into stirrups, I was told in no uncertain terms that this had to be done, in the early stages of birth because of the risk of infection caused by my negligence in not coming in on time hence I had my legs up in stirrups for hours, very uncomfortable, not to mention vulnerable position to be in. They finally conceded and agreed to me having the epidural, I was in for twelve hours before giving birth, and then when I did I felt nothing as I was paralysed and by the time the baby came I was completely exhausted.



*Mary Leaving the
Maternity Hospital with
Debbie*

It was a beautiful baby girl, we called her Debbie, why not an Irish name, I will never know. The next morning I woke up thinking how strange it was that nobody in my family knew that I had a baby. We told them some months later.

When they came and asked me to breast feed I just seized up. I unfortunately could not do it, the nurses were not unkind but not warm either. Luckily there was one Australian girl next to me, her baby had to stay in an incubator, she was very upset about it, so when I collected Debbie for feeding I would give her the baby to hold, which always cheered her up, we were the only two white people in the ward, when it came to visiting time the others would have several visitors, I only had one, that did not upset me. My breasts were rock hard because of the milk, which oozed out, they gave me nothing for it and I did not express the milk either.

I finally went home, with no one there to help me at all, I had problems feeding the baby, I am not sure if the formula I was giving her was to blame, instead of being up for one hour at night, it was normally two or three. I took the baby to Plunkett for weighing etc. they suggested I try different formulas, none of them were any better. I struggled on and things

got a little easier.

It was around this time I met Robert, via the couple next door, I knew Bernie and as it happened Frank knew Robert, they wanted to go out with Robert for an evening, but Bernie would not go unless I went. I mentioned this to Tony and said could you say Mary can not go out, as I did not want to, he said, go ahead I don't mind, so that's where it all started with Robert.



*Robert with Debbie in a
forest north of Sydney*

Robert and I started to see each other frequently, he would come around during the day when Tony was at work. Tony was very preoccupied at the time, paid me little to no attention, he had a habit of watching a lot of TV, he would come home from work, turn on the T.V. and continue to watch it into the early hours of the morning, sometimes I went visiting other people in the flats, come back, Tony did not even realize I had gone out. He was not unkind to me.

Tony and I had a few friends, I kept in contact with the girls I came to Australia with, we bought a car and made a few nice trips out into the country, it was during one of those trips that I foolishly sunbathed all day naked in this nice spot by a river, in the searing sun. I ended up with sunstroke, my breasts and stomach had blisters, I was sick for three days.

Tony eventually found out that I was seeing Robert, he thought if we move away this will solve the problem, so he took me to a number of remote places, all of them horrible. The friends that knew thought it was outrageous, one such friend said to me, Mary you are like a child with a toy

when you get sick of one you play with another.

Robert and I went out together and formed a strong bond, this went on for a number of weeks, then Robert gave me an ultimatum, stay with Tony or move in with him, so I made the decision, strange as this may sound, it felt right, so I moved in with Robert, I did not give the consequences of my actions much consideration, just packed my things, took the baby, all this happened when Tony was at work. I had told Tony that was my intention, I can remember we went for our last walk together, it was a strange encounter as there was nothing to say.

I enjoyed living in the house at Bondi Beach, there were a number of New Zealanders living there, all very friendly and helpful to us. We shared the flat with a lovely couple. We went out bowling, to the pubs, always a group of us, sometimes I would come home and Debbie was not in her cot, one of the people in the flat would pick her up and take her with them, it was like communal living. We did not drink very much at the time, some wine mainly. Robert worked in a Hi-Fi shop, we had a great sound system and so did the other flats, thanks to him, all on temporary loan. The guy who lived next door to Tony and I was still helping Robert, he used to man the shop when Robert was seeing me. Robert gave him the odd taxi chit to get home, then of course he started to abuse it and the company started to look into things, hence it all came to a head, Robert lost his job, they came and took away all the stereo gear in the flats, it was a very sad day for Robert. I was not working at the time so we had little to no money.



Robert at Bondi Beach, Sydney, Australia

It was around this time in Bondi that I first met Robert's sister Barbara, she came around with what looked to me back then as some sort of heavy guy (years later we discovered this was not the case) she was in a very abusive mood and reigned all sorts of insults on Robert regarding some money she alleged he owed her, luckily, we had some money stashed away, he gave her what amounted to three hundred dollars at the time. Robert left the room at one stage and Barbara said to me you are wasting your time with that guy, do you realize what he is like, I remained curled up on the couch, having not encountered anyone like this before. Everyone we knew or that knew us back then predicted that we would not last together, comments like he is only using you, and so on, similar comments to Robert from the other side.

We decided to move to Perth, I can not remember what motivated this decision at the time, we had a baby, no money, we sold our few belongings, got enough money for the train fare, people from the flat came to see us off. We got the train from Sydney to Adelaide, we stopped off there briefly, then got the train across the Nullabor Plains to Perth, this was an experience in itself, we travelled for three nights and four days, non-stop, the train was very comfortable, we had a self contained apartment, shower and toilet, the guard would wake us in the morning with a cup of tea and would heat the bottle for the baby, who slept in a bassinet under the bunks, peaceful as can be. We were given a few mandrax by friends as a going away gift, we took them on the train. I can remember trying to walk along the train, having lots of laughs as we went. We were thoroughly enjoying our time on the train, hoping it would not end, as we had nowhere to stay when we arrived there, people on the train looked after Debbie, they enjoyed having her. The total extent of what we saw on that trip was a kangaroo, the odd rabbit, some Aborigine people getting off the train and disappearing off the face of the horizon. We met an Australian couple on the train, explained our predicament, they said we could stay with them, until we found a place, we finally arrived in Perth.



Sydney Railway Station, with friends seeing us off to Perth

They had a flat in a square concrete block of flats. I can not remember any redeeming features about it, it was close to a swamp, barren and desolate around the place, we were very low on cash. Robert started looking for a job, we would wake up early in the morning, get the paper, then Robert would take off for the day, no luck, he called on all the shops he could, asking for work, he went for a job at a freezing works, there were a hundred people lined up for the job.

We did not know that a major recession had hit Perth at this time caused mainly by Cyclone Tracy hitting Darwin, the only food we had to eat were potatoes, we managed to scrape up enough money each day to buy carnation milk for Debbie, that was like a miracle as we always managed to find enough to buy her milk.

We had no money for anything, we could not go out, we played cards at home and in the evening, having to leave the baby asleep on her own, we would go out for the occasional walk. We were starting to get desperate, why we did not ask for help from social services, or some such organization I do not know. In the end we decided I should look for a live in job, at least that way we could feed the baby.

I applied for a job I saw advertised for a live in person to look after a two year old child, got the job straight away, then moved in taking Debbie with me, it was hard separating from Robert, but we had to do it as we had ran out of food and money. It was very close to Christmas then, when I opened their fridge I could not believe my eyes seeing so much food, turkey, ham and all sorts. There was a real Christmas feeling, they had the tree all lit up, decorations, a warm and happy feeling, which I did not feel in myself, having not seen Robert for a few days. Come Christmas day, Marie said we will all gather around the Christmas tree as I said nothing, she said, you and Debbie too. I had nothing what so ever to give them but they had presents wrapped for us both, it was so moving, they made us feel so welcome, it upsets me even now as I write this. Robert sent me a card, which read, I hope my love will compensate for the gift I can not afford. I will always remember this.

They lived in a nice house, lovely suburbs, all well cared for. I had my own room downstairs, which was self contained, T.V etc. I fitted in and got on with them from the very first day. Marie worked as a journalist, she was a Maori, she was married to a Dutch man who ran his own business, a very hard worker, hence. he expected the same off everyone else. He had a huge number of pigeons in cages out the back, that was his hobby and I helped him clean it out and look after the pigeons.

Robert went on the dole after this, I did not see him often, when he did come around Martin was unpleasant to him, thinking he was a bum because he was not working, a lot of the businesses suffered including Martin's, a lot of people lost their jobs. Robert continued to look for work but to no avail, he started to get down and out, having a strong work ethic, he was not used to this, he was also on his own all day. He came to see me one evening, we went to a very sad movie, then he told me he had decided to go back to New Zealand and find work there. I was so upset, I cried for days, he said when I get a job and a place to live I will send for you.



Mary with Debbie in Perth having a party

One of the conditions of us migrating to Australia, was we had to stay for a minimum of two years, if we left prior to that, we had to pay back the government a portion of the whole fare. I settled into life there, so lucky to have such a good friend as Maria, whom I could talk to. I got one letter from Tony at the time. Maria was encouraging me to write home and send pictures of Debbie, acquaint them with her. I did do that eventually. They went out a lot and entertained a lot. I stayed at home by myself at night, all the windows and doors open, writing letters. They had a huge collection of wine, alcohol everywhere, even a fully stocked bar downstairs. I did not drink at the time, which was just as well.

Marie was involved with a Maori dancing group, Martin managed the group, they had lots of engagements all over the place, every Sunday we went along to rehearsals, this was my first encounter with Maori people, I found them to be so kind and warm hearted. I loved all the get together's we had, hangis, where the extended family would gather, or going to someone's house for Puha and Pork. The majority of the Maori women were married to Pakeha men, all had nice houses and were doing well.

Robert and I kept in constant contact, writing letters, on the phone. He got himself a job with the NZ Broadcasting Corporation, and found a flat in the centre of the city, he was getting some money together and was probably happy to be home. He did miss us and visa versa.

We moved to a much nicer house close by to the old one, this one was more modern, it had a dark green carpet in the lounge, which looked out onto the lawn, it was a lovely effect. Maria was the most organized person I ever lived with, everything had a place, because of this there was never much to do. I helped with some chores, hung out the washing in the morning, it was dry an hour later. Maria would look after Debbie for me if I wanted to go out. I would semi prepare dinner, feed and bath the children before Maria came home, she would then finish preparing dinner, and we put the children to bed.

Every night we sat down to a nice meal together, Maria was an excellent cook, there was always wine served, discussion was encouraged, unfortunately I was a little on the shy side to participate.

I would take the children out for walks every day, it was very hot, we always had to wear hats, sunglasses and shoes, sometimes Maria would come home early from work and take us all to Freemantle beach, people would remark at how well Maria and I got on, she was such a lovely person. The Maori group were asked to do a tour of Australia, all the major centres, a six week tour and Martin went with them, as their manager.

I stayed behind and looked after the house and children, it was a lonely time as I only knew a handful of people, luckily I had one good friend, a Maori girl called Zoe, we talked for hours at a time, every night of the week. I knew a few guys and I went out with them once or twice. Robert and I were still writing and ringing, he was wondering when I was coming over at that time. When they came back I followed Maria from room to room, constantly talking, experiencing that loneliness while they were away, helped me to make the decision to leave and join Robert in New Zealand. I really wanted to see out the two years as I did not want to pay back the portion of the fare for the remaining months, which was two as far as I remember. I was really looking forward to seeing Robert so that won over.

Everyone was sad to see me leave, they did not think it was a good idea, me going to New Zealand, once again thinking it would not work out with Robert. Maria said if it did not work out she would pay for my airfare back. They had a party for me before I left, a great group of people I was very fortunate to know.

LIFE IN NEW ZEALAND

1976 - 1997

I arrived in New Zealand on a cold Winter's day, Robert picked me up at the Airport, the time apart had created a distance between us, we were not sure how to take each other, he took me to the flat he lived at in Willis Street, Wellington. I remember looking down the street and thinking what a dark and dingy place this is, it was very cold in comparison to Perth. There was a bus stop outside the front door, a long along dark hallway, up some stairs, when we entered the flat it was a different story, it was very cosy and well organized. It had three bedrooms at the time. A guy called Paul flatmated with us. Robert had written telling me about Paul, saying he was gay, meaning he was not interested in women, this I could not understand as I had never encountered it before, and thought when I get there I will have a good talk with him, well, he had a good talk with me and explained all about being gay.

Robert was still working at Broadcasting and enjoying it, he had made a lot of friends and was very sociable. Paul was working at the library at Parliament and was very active in fighting for gay rights, which were almost non-existent at the time. I stayed at home looking after Debbie who was one at the time. I took in another child the same age as Debbie, plus a three year old and after school a five year old boy, I would put them all into the one pushchair and walk them through town to the beach, amidst many looks from passers by.

I got myself a cleaning job in the evening, when Robert came home I went to work from five until eight, it was really hard work, it was there I met my lifetime friend Glenys, she was sixteen at the time. I had to give this up eventually as I got severe bronchitis from the dust. At the same time I got a job on weekends, as a housemaid at one of the Hotels. With three jobs I was absolutely exhausted, it's probably the hardest I have ever worked.

Robert's Father was a singing teacher, he had a studio out the back, opposite to where we lived, he was great company for me, having him there, he would pop over to see us or come and have a cup of tea with us and if any little emergency arrived he was always at hand to help out. On one such occasion I was changing Debbie's nappy, I was taking her temperature at the same time, she had the thermometer in her mouth, she bit into it and cracked the glass. I was worried about the mercury, called out for Robbie's Dad, he came straight away, rang the doctor, he said no harm done, it would pass through the system.

Robert started playing in bands at this time, which he did for extra money and because he enjoyed it, it took him away a lot, especially on the weekend nights. Living where we did we had no end of visitors, and with Paul's set of friends, it was instant parties. Well, of course being in a band leads to other distractions as well, this led to some changes for us.



Robert and Mary at the 149 Willis Street flat

When we first started out we had no modern appliances whatsoever, no cooker, just a gas ring. I washed all the nappies by hand, then we got a ringer, a dangerous thing, my long hair got caught in it one day, so we committed ourselves to various household appliances, some stereo gear, we were also paying back Robert's Mum for the return airfare she paid for Robert to return from Perth, by way of a carpet we bought for her on hire purchase, like we had done with everything else we bought, it was becoming a tight squeeze money wise, so I decided to get a full time job. I applied for one at the Arts Council, went to the interview, he said the job is yours, just as long as you are not pregnant or such like. One month into the job and I discovered I was pregnant, everyone was fine about it so I continued to work.

We did not have a car at the time and did not need one as we were both in walking distance of work, every Sunday Robert's Dad picked us up in his Holden and we all went for dinner at Robert's parents house, they were very kind to me, especially Robert's Dad. We went on numerous outings with them and went away on a few holidays with them too. I always enjoyed being with them.

Robert's sister Barbara came back into our life at this time, we gradually started to see more of her, she would often come around with one of her boyfriends, it was tumultuous days for her with all sorts of happenings in her life.

I got three months leave from work to have the baby. I was fit and healthy and simply took it in my stride. Robert and Barbara took me to Hospital and while I was in labour, Robert had an argument with the Doctor of having the child circumcised, if it was a boy, the doctor was not in agreement, but Robert would not tolerate it otherwise.



Mary, Pregnant with Leon

The Father was the only one allowed to attend the birth at the time, unfortunately Barbara had to wait outside, it was an easy birth and Robert watched in dismay as I gave birth to a lovely baby boy, we called Leon, Robert & Barbara chose the name. Robert was very emotional, it is truly amazing to watch a birth, especially when it is your own child. The sad part for me was when they both left and I had to return to a room, feeling fine, all by myself, it felt very lonely.

At that time you were expected to stay in Hospital for at least ten days. I did not want to be there at all, I did not feel the need to and I missed seeing Robert and Debbie, so after a few tearful encounters the doctor allowed me to leave early. Robert picked me up. I got home to a very clean, cosy and organized place, a little nervous with a new baby. I put him to bed, Robert rolled me a joint and it was plain sailing from there on, the best smoke I ever had.

Barbara was very helpful to me at the time, she was very encouraging when she was around, I always felt very much at ease, we became very good friends and we saw a lot of Barbara then.

We had made some renovations to the flat at the time, knocking down some walls, creating a bigger lounge, leaving us with two bedrooms, Paul had one and the four of us ended up in one room, which actually worked fine. Debbie in the cot and Leon in his bassinet. We decided to modernize the flat and went for all Chrome fittings, with glass topped tables, white shag pile carpet and bean bags, it looked great, even more of a party place now.



Robert and Mary in our newly renovated flat

We were not married at this stage, which caused some embarrassment for Robert's Mum, only because whenever she introduced us, to her friends or family, she would say, this is my son Robert and then pause when it came to me, Robert's grand Father, who was now living with Robert's parents, found it very difficult to understand why we were not married, when we all went there on a Sunday, he would get upset, and cry, asking why are you not married. Robert's Mum also started mentioning, shouldn't you get married darling. We were not really bothered, everything was going along fine as it was.

When Leon was three months old Robert came up with an idea, he worked it out, if we got married he could ask Mum and Dad to look after the children while we went on our honeymoon. We planned a very basic wedding, one that cost as little as possible. I had now gone back to work, taking Leon with me, and setting up a cot in my office, everyone at work thought it was marvellous, Robert came in every day and brought me lunch.

We wanted to get married outside in a garden but the minister would not agree, as far as he was concerned we were living in sin so the sooner we got married the better, Robert gave him very short notice, he was happy to fit in, he totally ignored the fact that we were living together, he was trying to subtly ask us why we wanted to get married in such a hurry, assuming I was pregnant, when Robert said we have two children already, his face dropped.

We made all the preparations without any fuss. Robert wanted us to organize it all ourselves, which we mostly did. Robert's Mum organized the cake and some flowers. Robert came with me to choose the dress, we chose a lovely green tiered dress, which looked lovely on me, as far as I can remember I was not allowed to wear white, it had coloured sequins, round glass beads and it fitted perfectly.

We decided on a buffet, we got all the food from a local delicatessen and arranged it all ourselves. Paul was our best man, himself and Robert wore long sleeved, frilly shirts. Linda, a beautiful Irish girl we met in Sydney was my bridesmaid. Robert's Father gave me away. We invited close friends and relatives.

Mum was looking after Debbie in the church, she was as quiet as a mouse, until we started walking down the aisle, then she screamed out Mummy and Daddy, which gave the whole thing away. We all went back to Willis St. which was all set up to party, we used Robert's Dad's studio as well, this was where all the music was, the relatives stayed in the other room, it was a real joyous occasion. Debbie had the most wonderful time, she was a very sociable child and was used to being around adults, who adored her. Leon was looked after by one of Vanetta, Dad's friend.

We then took off on our Honeymoon, which was three weeks, biking around the South Island, we



Robert and Mary's Wedding

mirror and nearly fainted.

We crossed over on the Ferry, arrived in Picton at 11.00am in the morning, took off straight away, heading for Nelson, totally unprepared, we were not carrying food or water, not used to long trips, we struggled, having to stop cars to ask for drinks, getting weak from lack of food, we could see the lights in the distance, seemed close, yet far away. as we approached Nelson I started to get bad cramps and had to keep calling at houses to get water. We arrived in Nelson at 11.00pm, twelve hours on the road, we got food at a local pie cart and a lovely Maori man drove us to a camp-site. We stayed a few days, caught up with some friends and continued on our journey, although it was not entirely plain sailing from then on, nothing could be worse than our first day cycling, we were in our early twenties at the time, so nothing was an obstacle, we covered a lot of miles on that trip and enjoyed it immensely, we got perfect weather, it was really hot. Little did we know at the time that this trip would be a turning point in our lives.

We went out to a favourite night club of ours every Saturday night, it was the only private night club in town at the time so it was membership only, it was a great place, the music was good, it had a range of age groups, you could buy a Rum and coke only, I am not sure if that was legal, most people brought their own. We would dance away there until the club closed.

We decided it was time to move, it was getting a little cramped. We bought a house in Hataitai, about a mile from the centre of town, it was a very basic three bedroom house. Paul bought the house with us. Robert started working with AWA, manufacturing car stereos, he ran a factory and had a number of staff to supervise, he enjoyed the challenge. I was still working at the Arts Council, we both enjoyed a very active social life, not together but with people from work. Robert got a social club going at work, set up a bar and created a very nice atmosphere. I was involved at doing a similar thing where I worked. I loved working at the Arts Council, never stopped talking about it. I got on well with all the people I worked with, we had many a good night together partying away. Robert used to say we were very incestuous. I had a lovely older friend at the Arts Council called Joyce. I was into philosophy and had a lot to say about everything. Joyce used to say "Mary is on her soap box again". When her husband died I was comforting her. I said without thinking, it took me thirty years to get over the death of my mother. Joyce said, thanks a lot Mary. We got on really well so we could always get away with saying anything to each other.



Cycling over the Rai Saddle near Nelson

While we worked we had the children looked after, that was a constant problem for us, finding the right situation, first we took Debbie to someone's house, then we got a number of people to come in and look after them at home, we never found the perfect situation, day care centres were in their infancy, there were a few but none of them were satisfactory.

When Debbie started school this was a few doors up from our house, Robert had gone to school there, a lovely primary school, we put Leon into a playcentre, he was not happy there. I had to drop him off on my way to work, Robert's Dad would give me a lift there whenever he could, it used to upset me and Dad would say, Mary it's a lot better for them starting out early being with other kids because it's much harder for children to adapt when they have spent their time at home with their Mother.

A good friend of mine at work, knowing I was upset with the playcentre Leon was at, volunteered to take the day off and drive me around to all the Playcentres, we finally got to one, run by the sisters of compassion, which was perfect. I had my mind set on that one, they told me at the time they gave priority to single Mothers and low income families. When they rang me and told me they would accept him I was over the moon. Leon stayed there until he started school at five.

Paul was going out with a guy called Gary, a young good looking guy, with long curly hair, he decided to move in with Paul, which was fine with us, it was only a short time after that Gary decided he wanted to live his life as a woman, he explained to me he felt like this as child, he would dress in woman's clothes much to his Father's dismay. The whole process was interesting.



Paul in his nicely decorated room

The doctor told him he had to live as a woman for two years before he could have the operation, he worked at a hairdressers and wanted to go to work dressed as a woman, they did not consent to this, although they knew how he felt, mainly because they did not know if their clients would approve. He had started on the hormone treatment, and the noticeable effects of this were he started to grow breasts and it stopped hair growing on his arms and legs. Gary changed his name to Cathy and god help you if you made a mistake. The first time Cathy went out dressed as a woman, she wanted me to go with her, a girl's night out, so Cathy dressed up beautifully and we headed off to a popular local bar, it started fine, we were socialising away, then before we knew it a group were gathering around us, that's when we thought we have to get out of here fast, so out we got out and ran all the way home.

Cathy was involved in the whole process of becoming a woman, she was reading all the books on how women dressed and made up, she was practising how to walk and talk like a woman, I can remember her vacuuming away, with the music playing loudly and reading as she went, what I termed, how to become a woman. She was such a lovely person and we all liked her such a lot, when she dressed up to go out, she looked better than any woman I knew. Robert's Father could not understand why Paul, who was gay, was living with a woman, so to speak. It was a very rough road for Cathy as the red neck element in our society is not very tolerant of this, I worked their behaviour out as, you always fear what you don't understand. The children had no problem with the name change, they never reverted back to Gary.

We both adored the children, we loved having them around, never wanted a break from them, not being with them during the day, we made the most of the time when we were home. We were working very hard. Robert had a job after work testing zip zap machines, a few hours every night, as well as playing in a pub at the weekends and playing at a night club after that. We then went on to making soldering irons at night, Robert got this job via his work at the factory, this was messy and really hard, after working all day, organising the kids after work, cooking and cleaning up, then off to work again for another few hours. Robert then got a few small sound systems and started to hire them out, we rented a garage across the road and kept the gear in there, it was always miserable in the garage, it was cold and water leaked through. Robert went on to make a lot more soldering irons in that garage, by himself.



Debbie & Leon making breakfast

I got myself a part time job as well as everything else, two nights a week, cooking for an Sri Lankan man called Sri, he was a doctor but was now the assistant director of health. I think he liked the idea of me being in the kitchen while he was reading the newspaper. He would always serve me food, he would never eat with me. I assume that was because he ate with his fingers and did not feel comfortable doing that in front of me. We became very good friends, he took us out to some very good restaurants. He was divorced, his wife and daughter lived in Australia, he had a son called Michael who was handicapped. Michael suffered from severe epileptic fits, he had to wear a helmet all the time. I looked after him a few times, I took him and a number of children to the Zoo one time. I mentioned to Michael we would go on the bus but we got a lift there, all day long all Michael kept asking was, when are we going on the bus. Sri went in to hospital some time back, he had a shadow on his lung and they were checking it out, they removed one of his lungs by mistake, it was only when he read his chart he found out.

I was on the school committee at the children's primary school and also at Debbie's College. I was on the fund raising committee, it involved going to a meeting every month. We then worked on ways to raise money. We were very successful, it took some time and energy but I enjoyed the fact I was making a contribution.

I also volunteered to do some community work. I went to the hospital and asked them how I could help out. They asked me what I was doing job wise, when I told them all the things I was involved with, they said, no, you are doing far too much. I insisted, they called me a few weeks later and asked me if I could go and sit with a terminally ill person to give her son a chance to go out. I agreed but as it happens she passed away, so I did not get the chance to help. They never contacted me after that, probably thought I was a bad omen.

We made some good friends in the neighbourhood, it was a lovely little community, we knew a number of people or their children, in the vicinity, the children had a lot of houses they could play at and we had open home as far as other children were concerned, being so close to the school was excellent as all the local children gathered there to play, they had a swimming pool which was open for parents to take their children, we spent many a day there, the children loved it. I walked our dog Bingo every day, mainly up Mount Victoria, it was across the road from where we lived, it was a very dangerous road to cross. I always took a number of children with me, there were lovely places to walk up there.

Some of the people we met there are lifetime friends, considering we have all moved away we have managed to stay in contact.



Mary at Sweetwaters circa 1980

there and had such a wonderful time.

Four of our best friends to this day lived across the road from us, we spent a lot of time with them or we all went places together. Back then in N.Z. there were a lot of outdoor concerts, we went to a lot of them. We took the children along to one, this one was on a small scale, it was held on someone's farm, there was a great atmosphere, the place was surrounded by trees, lovely little walkways to everywhere, the children had a great time. We spent a week at another festival it was like a mini city, all day and all night bands were playing, we met up with other friends

One of our favourite festivals of all times was called Mu Mu land. It was set up by a guy called Reece. It was held in a forest, mainly set up for all the musicians and people in the business who had to entertain people at nights and at weekends. It was held every year with a countdown to the year 2000. You got a special pendant with the year and Mu Mu written on it. It was very well organised. Everyone contributed to it, like Robert provided all the sound, for a discounted fee and others contributed their time and talents. There were so many things happening like helicopter rides, side stages, we had a famous poet one time called Sam Hunt. When it got dark the cannons were let off, this was a signal the party was about to start, then everyone marched into the forest, it was all light up, all sorts of things amidst the trees, bands playing and other entertainment all night, we had a great opera singer one time. We had great lighting and sound, it was absolutely magical.

One of our favourite pastimes was lying outside on our deck, sunbathing, I did that for hours at a time, friends would come and join us, we would have a few drinks and spend the whole day out there, moving to catch the last bit of sun, although this is now deemed as dangerous, which it probably is, that was the most relaxing time I ever had.

I kept constant contact with home, writing letters and ringing from time to time. I would dream of



Mary and Debbie go off to Ireland

going home and seeing everybody. I made my first trip home to Ireland after ten years of being away. I wanted us all to go but Robert decided he could not come and he did not want me to take both children with me, this was very disappointing for me and I was very upset at the time as I really wanted to take both children with me. We went via San Francisco and stayed with Mary Moore's family, she was in Mexico at the time, they took us all over the place and looked after us like royalty, we flew from there to London and spent one night there. When we

finally got to Ireland I was so excited, we spent three months there. Debbie loved it and they all loved Debbie, she had the freedom to wander around the neighbourhood, she would take off and visit people, it was summertime so we spent a lot of the time outside. My Dad would look after Debbie sometimes when we went out, it was then they formed a bond that lasted his lifetime, although it was the only time she ever spent with him, my children were the only grandchildren he had at the time, unfortunately we lived so far away. How I realised my absence from home was from the photographs they showed me, it was rather sad in a way, as I was not in any of them.

It was during this visit on one particular day I was standing on a chair on top of a table, looking for some old books of mine, my younger sister was sitting at the table talking to me, when she said, Mary do you realise you have brought such shame on our family, it came as a surprise. I got down off the chair and all I could say was, does Dad think the same, she said he does, so I said I will ask him when he comes in, this really hurt my feelings and I was thinking to myself. I had to go through all that by myself. I never asked for help or even bothered them in any way with the problems I was having. When my Dad came in I asked him and he said it's true you have wrought shame on the family.

Well in all fairness that was how it was back then, having a child out of wedlock was not acceptable. I can remember the headlines in the English newspapers when I was growing up, saying so many Irish girls were going to London to have abortions, the annoying thing was the teachings in our religion were very hypocritical, and it is not that the people involved necessarily wanted to oust their daughter when she got pregnant, they were more scared of what their neighbours would think if they did not. A lot of unmarried pregnant girls ended up in convents. They stayed there until they had their baby, they had to work very hard to pay for their keep, the nuns treated them very badly, made life as hard as possible for them, in the nun's eyes they had to atone for their sins. When they had the baby, they were only allowed to keep it for a short time, then the nun's sold the baby to rich people, I gather a lot were Americans. Many a girl was left completely heart broken as they watched their baby been taken away. This of course all changed over time.



The Quinn Family after Pat's Funeral

I had also changed dramatically in the time I had been away. I was living in a very liberated country with no restrictions, we had the freedom to do as we wished and we were not hurting anyone as no one took any notice, this was a far cry from my home town, where people knew everybody and made it their business to know all about them. I did create problems when I was at home that time. I wanted to go out as much as possible, meet up with all the people I once knew. I was back in my own familiar surroundings and wanted to have fun.

Of course having Cathy and Trevor living with us, being rather different in many ways, not that we ever noticed, as we accepted it totally, the neighbours saw it differently, it was around this time that Paul was fighting for gay rights, so it wasn't exactly out in the open then.

A friend in the neighbourhood, I got to know at a later stage, said to me, we were always wondering what outfit Cathy would appear in next. It reminds me of something a boyfriend I had in Ireland said. "Love is blind but my neighbours ain't".

Cathy left us after a while and Trevor moved in with Paul, he was someone I did not get on with it was a mutual dislike. He was a very flamboyant gay and did a lot of wrist flapping and was into any sort of drama, at the time, considering what we had on, I was not in any frame of mind for his antics, eventually he moved on. Paul then decided to get a place of his own, so he moved out and then we were on our own, the first time in years. Barbara was living in Auckland at the time and she decided to come back to Wellington and asked if she could live with us. I had a think about it and decided yes of course, well it was the best decision I made.

Barbara was excellent to live with, never interfered with the discipline of the children, as one might be tempted to do, we got on really well, prior to this she had met an American guy who was touring with a Jazz band and rather liked him, he had asked her to go to the States with him which she eventually did and came back to get married in N.Z not so long after.

We kept Sunday as family day and we all went out for the day, often with Robert's Mum and Dad, we went to all sorts of places, the beach, parks, different places all the time, we took the children away on holidays and went camping occasionally, the children were doing well at school, they both went from primary to the same Intermediate, then Debbie went to St Mary's college and Leon went on to St. Patrick's college.



The family plus grandparents

For ourselves, we made a customary visit to their house when we first got there, and were met with a not so friendly an encounter, we liked to party and continued to do so when we moved there, loud music never seemed very loud to us, he said to me one time, your house is like one big speaker box, when we had a party he would retaliate by banging on his down pipe, making a hell of a racket, he would call the police when our gate banged out the back, all this agro went on for years, until our dog Bingo changed it all, he was a lovable rogue, we let him wander around the streets at will, he used to open their gate, then go around and open their back door, they thought he was marvellous and this brought around a change in their attitude towards us, when they went away on holiday one time they asked me to look after the house, that was a far cry from how it previously was.

Robert had worked at AWA for around six years now and felt it was time for a change, so he got himself a job with a company called Leathams, selling, he enjoyed it to start with but got very restless after a while, the ground floor of the building he worked at became vacant and it was then he decided to start his own business installing car audio.

He did up the whole building with the help of a friend and started from scratch all by himself, he called around to all the car businesses and started to get cars in, it was a whole learning process as he had not done this before, it started to work out, he bought a lot of his stereos from AWA and also The Car Stereo company in Wellington, as they were doing more and more business. With a lot of bookwork involved, they decided to join forces, have the retail side of it out front and the installation bay in the back. It worked perfectly they were now partners.



The first Company in Kent Tce Wellington

Robert was still hiring out sound equipment, this was all at work, people would come and collect it there, most of the hires were over the weekend, so he was flat out organising this, it was a bone of contention with his partner.

Robert was gradually upgrading the equipment and buying more, which meant having to get more hires to pay for it and taking more of his time to operate it, he decided to hire a place to keep the equipment and went on to move it to a number of places, none of them entirely satisfactory.

We have a funny story from working at The Car Stereo company. People booked their car in early morning. This guy dropped off his Ford Laser. He rang up in the afternoon and said I am ringing about my laser and I said automatically They are all hired out, he went berserk, saying, what do you mean you hired out my car, he was raving on at me non stop, until I worked out he was talking about his car.

The misunderstanding arose because Robert hired out Laser discs but we referred to them as Lasers as he did his car. Robert had told me that day he had hired out all the lasers. The guys in the workshop thought this was hilarious, we laughed so much over it, every time it came up, we were back in fits of laughter.

We always had a dream of owning our a night club, we talked about it a few times. Robert had the sound equipment, he knew the band scene and some DJ's. He was at this time hiring a Dutch guy to do some DJ work at some clubs and he became friends with him and his partner, this idea of having a club appealed to him also, so hence the idea started to become reality, we found a place on the first floor, it was a cabaret for a number of years, it had potential but needed a lot of work done on it, like completely stripping and renovating it. We were all very enthusiastic, we spent virtually most evenings and every weekend for three months doing the place up, it was a lot of hard work, especially holding down full time jobs. I had at this stage left the Arts Council and started working with Robert. We did a brilliant job, we got the place looking exactly as we had planned, we had a fully equipped commercial kitchen with all amenities for cooking, we decided on a Dutch theme for food, that was a great success. The opening night was so exciting, everyone we invited came. Nick and Dianne were going to run the place, we helped with the cleaning and did the bookwork. It went surprisingly well for at least a year. At some stage Nick decided to do away with the Dutch food idea, this was a big mistake as it was very popular, he started to let in a heavy element of society, it started to go down hill from there, we were losing money.

In the meantime we had set up another branch of The Car Stereo Co in Christchurch, a former salesman became the manager. We also set up a company called Portable Paradise, selling all portable stereo gear. We then took a lease on a building to store the sound equipment and joined forces with two other guys who ran a repair business of all audio equipment, then we decided we needed a promotional person, we knew of someone who was in that field, so all five of us became partners and moved into the third floor of the building. Robert was still downstairs running the Car Stereo Company. When things were going well it could not have been better, but when things starting going wrong it was a nightmare, virtually all the business got into some trouble or another, all the legal problems surrounding all of this was horrendous, that was probably the most stressful time of my life.



The Car Stereo Company Showrooms

The Car Stereo had a very high profile, we had one of the most popular jingles, which was played a lot on the radio. Robert's partner believed in advertising a lot, we always had an advert in one of the papers. We installed some of the best sound systems, then every year we would have what we called the sound off's, every company would enter a few of their best installations and we all gathered for a day of checking out and listening to different systems, people had all sorts of effects, then at the end of the day they were judged and trophies were given for the best all around sound.

We were also promoting by way of advertising, Greg Brinck, a Racing driver, to compete in the Nissan 500, which was the annual car race, which was held in Wellington. There was a lot of money and work involved in this, all sorts of expenses to meet.

For the weekend of the race we hired out a lovely old building, it was in a prime spot, it was an empty shell and Robert transformed it into something spectacular, he hired tables with coloured umbrellas, potted palms, we set up a fully stocked bar, got barbecues in to cook the food, we provided all the food and alcohol and invited all the people we dealt with in the business, everybody came, the place was packed, we kept the food going the whole weekend, then Greg won the first race, we were all ecstatic.



The Car Stereo Company Kent Tce Wellington with the race car

I remember when he came in after the race and everybody was there to greet him, he was very proud of the team. We organised the band, we had just started to promote to play that night, they were a tremendous success, everyone stayed and danced and had a really good night, next day we were into it again we all worked so well as a team that weekend we were very proud of what we had achieved.



Impact Productions Premises and Shows

We got the sound business back on track, hired a building at the back of The Car Stereo Company, it was perfect, close to work, it had a dock way and plenty of room, and a few offices.

Robert hired a young guy called Nick to look after the business, bought in lots more gear, they got lots of work, at one stage they were doing sound for a lot of the big events and at all sorts of venues. Juliana who worked with us at the Sound Company brought some international acts over, we all got involved helping out and provided the sound for all the shows.

Robert got interested in two young musicians and decided to manage and promote them, he found them a venue to practice, got all their stage clothes and did all their promotional work, and found them the venues to play at, they sounded really good, they were called Sara, they played at Paisley Park and other places, they had lots of potential but not the drive required to become successful, eventually they decided to go overseas.

I moved over there and then set up my own admin, business, the idea being to sort out peoples offices and books. Robert designed my business cards and promotional leaflet, they were perfect.

I got some calls and went out to people's places. I had some success but I did not have the accounting backup, so I got stuck at times, maybe also a lack of confidence did not help.

Robert and Nick got another band together, once again organising all the promotional work, finding venues for them to play, providing the sound equipment. Nick managed them and we bought a van, which Nick had for taking them to venues and dropping off sound equipment. They were very successful and quite popular but needed a lot of work, most of which Nick did with utter patience. He was very dedicated to the job and did it extremely well.

We had been toying with the idea of replacing our kitchen, as it was pretty decrepit, we talked about it a number of times, worked out the cost, got disillusioned and left it, then as we started to earn more money, having a high profile with the businesses, we decided to start looking for a new house, we set a figure, looked around for what seemed a long time, no place was exactly what we were looking for, the main purpose for us moving was to find a place with a good kitchen, so when we found this house with many steps to climb, with this great view, we were captured, we had to have this, to spite being well over our budget.



The new house on the hill

When we moved in there we were overjoyed with the house, we thought it was beautiful, we all loved it, it was on three levels, beautifully decorated, awesome view, all Rimu wood, and the kitchen was perfect. It had brand new carpet throughout, upstairs there was a big room which had decking out the back and an even better view than downstairs.



From left: Dennis, Leon, Jenny, Richard, Christine and Robert at Rakau Road

There was a huge piece of land out the back which you climbed up, it was a little steep, but the air up there was the clearest I have ever encountered, no smog up there.

I really enjoyed cooking, being in New Zealand I could access the best food, fresh meat, fish etc. I cooked a wide variety of dishes. When we had a party, we always had lovely food, like vol-au-vents, filled with mushrooms etc. meatballs and sate sauce, deep fried fish pieces and lots more.

We also went out to restaurants, one of our all time favourites was an Indian restaurant called The Bengal Tiger, their food was superb, every dish they cooked, I have never come across anything like it. We also went to really good Thai and Chinese restaurants, one of the children's favourite was a place called Crystal Palace, they did a yummy hot pork sandwich with herbs, delicious. you could purchase the most unusual and delicious food all over town.

We took the children for a three week holiday to Rarotonga, Leon was ten at the time and Debbie was thirteen, it was the perfect place, we stayed at a lovely hotel, right by the beach, we arrived on a beautiful morning, they greeted us with leis and music, the children went straight into the swimming pool, we hired a Jeep and went all around the Island several times, we took in all the cultural events on offer and we all went to church one morning to hear the choir, we arrived in the Jeep, we were welcomed there, the harmonies were incredible. Debbie missed her friends a lot so it was not the happiest time for her. Leon on the other hand enjoyed it all.



Debbie Mary and Leon horse riding in Rarotonga

We thought it was time for a holiday ourselves, so we took off for three months, we visited a N.Z friend in Los Angelus, this was just after the riots, evidence of that was all around us, a lot of the buildings that were not touched looked pretty dilapidated anyhow, we saw a lot of burned out buildings, it was great being there, we went to Hollywood, climbed up to the Hollywood sign and got a great view of L.A., it went as far as the eye could see and as far as the smog would allow, Phil had a convertible and he drove us around, we went out to Beverley Hills, the contrast from what we came from to the wealth and the size of the properties was overwhelming.



Two of the Moore family with Mary in San Francisco

We went to San Francisco from there to visit Mary Moore, my Irish friend. I had not seen her for years, we spent a week with her, visiting all the attractions available. We visited Alcatraz, it was very interesting.

We then went to Chicago and spent some time with Barbara, this was our first visit to see her and Tom. They arranged for us to spend a weekend in the City, we went out to some great venues, we had a really memorable time. We went from there to Britain, stayed with a friend for a few days and went to Ireland for three weeks after

that. We got a Euro rail ticket and spent two months travelling around Europe by train, we visited a lot of countries in that time, sleeping on the train overnight and ending up in a different country the next day, we made the most of every day, we arrived in a country, got our money changed, bought a map, planned what we wanted to see and went for it, the most interesting countries we visited then was Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia, this being my favourite. We came back to Britain and flew from there to New York, we spent a few days exploring all the sites there, we went up the Empire State building and got a great view of the city, walked through Central Park, it seemed strange to me at the time to see everybody out sunbathing, far from water to cool off. We went to see "Cats" in a lovely little theatre in Times Square, which was awash with lights. After the play that night we decided to get something to eat, so went for a walk about two blocks from there, well that was an eye opener, gone were the lights, rubbish stacked high along the streets, very isolated, it made me very nervous, not so Robert who never holds such fears. I was glad to get back to our hotel.

We flew from there to Las Vegas, we had pre-booked a room in The Golden Nugget Hotel, the room we got was enormous. I was exhausted and went to sleep, not so Robert who went out on the town and had all sorts of adventures, coming back in the early hours of the morning. There was a big swimming pool downstairs and a Casino, it was very tempting to spend lots of money, we decided the maximum we would spend was a hundred dollars, that went in no time but there was a big temptation to spend more. We went to see Liza Minnelli in concert, it was a very professional show, we enjoyed it. I liked the feeling of being there it was like an adults playground.

Our final destination before heading home was Hawaii, our funds were virtually exhausted by then, luckily we had a pre-booked room in a hotel, which was right on the beach, you waked out the door and you were on the beach. I found it a little pretentious.

We hired a car and drove all around the Island, visited Pearl Harbour and read all about the history, we stopped off at different beaches along the way, it was much quieter away from the tourist part of things. We walked along the promenade at night, the water was so warm. It was a very upmarket place, all the latest and most expensive clothes, not to mention the most amazing jewellery.



The Hire car in Hawaii

Robert had a child when he was sixteen, which he had told me about, it was with his first love and someone he had strong feelings for, we talked about it a few times. Andrew was his name, he found Robert after many years and rang him up, it was very emotional for Robert, he told me about it and asked if I would mind if Andrew came to visit us, I was more than happy to see him, Robert explained this to Debbie and Leon and they felt the same. Andrew flew down from Auckland, Robert was playing that night, so I collected Andrew from the Airport and took him to the venue, it was not the ideal situation. Andrew stayed with us for a few weeks, he got on very well with Leon. The most remarkable thing about meeting Andrew for me, was how much he behaved like Robert, he looked very much like him also, it brought home to me it is all in the genes, he had never spent a day with Robert and yet he was identical to him. Andrew is a strict vegetarian, knows a lot about nutrition, he cooked us some great vegetarian meals, things I had never tasted before, he once said to me Mary do you realise when you eat meat, it has to rot in your stomach before you can get rid of it, it put me off eating red meat for two years, he also told me that vegetarian farts do not smell. When we next went to Auckland we went to visit Andrew's adopted parents, they were truly wonderful people, it was great for us all to get together, we have remained friends ever since. They came to visit us in London and we keep in contact with them all the time.



Andrew and Leon at Rakau Road

When Leon was sixteen I took him to Ireland, my Dad had never met him. It was very sad to think no one in my family had met him before this. Debbie and Leon were the only grandchildren my Dad had for many a year, he had only seen Debbie when she was ten. I know the rest of my family felt rather heartbroken not seeing the children growing up. This is the penalty I and many people like me have suffered from moving as far away as New Zealand and Australia. Leon was a massive hit with everybody, he has a brilliant sense of humour and very good with people of all ages.

My Dad could not believe how independent he was. Everyone enjoyed his company, he was joyous to be around. He took my Dad for a spin in Kay's car, round and around their house, going fairly fast. I was watching and I thought my Dad would come out with the hair standing on his head but quite the opposite, he enjoyed it all. We went out lots, stayed at everyone's house for periods of time.



Debbie around 16 yrs old

One of the most memorable times on this trip was the time we all went away on a weeks holiday down South. Bridie, Tom, Kay, Leon and I. We went to Cork and Waterford. We had so much fun, we laughed so much all the way. When we stopped for the night, Bridie would check out a number of Bed and Breakfast's, while Tom waited patiently and in all fairness, Bridie always found us a really nice place. We would have a few drinks and then go out.

So much more to say but I am stopping at this point as I am sure everyone has a good memory of what happened after this.

Robert and I have been together for almost forty years now. We are very happy. What contributes to a good relationship, is respect for each other, a good sense of humour, letting things go, not holding grudges, good communication, not taking each other for granted, enjoying an activity together, in our case cycling. We always thank each other for things we do. We are good friends and look out for and take care of each other. I am still just as happy to see Robert when he comes home today as I did forty years ago. He is multi-talented and has the confidence to turn his hand to anything. We never celebrated our anniversary. Robert said he did not see his time with me as an endurance test that needed rewarding.

We are very proud of Debbie and Leon, they have both turned out to be amazing people. We could not ask for better. They have always shown us a lot of respect.

25 October 2013