



'Dear Dolly',

By Florence Leclerc Statham

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To my family and friends, with love:
F.L.S.



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From top: Jean Charles Leclerc, Dolly, Lucien Maugat, Minon and friend.

Introduction

My brother and I often called our mother *Mathouse*, or *P'tite Mere* when we were growing up in our native France. Overtime, she became 'Dear Dolly' for her friends and our extended family and this is how I like to think of her now.

Seven years ago, Dolly lost her husband: our stepfather, and for some times she lived alone in their little house, surrounded by vineyards and olive trees. 'Mais', as we called him, died in this beautiful 'Land of Oz' that he was so fond of on the 15th April 2007, two days short of his 87th birthday. We all miss him naturally, but my mother particularly, as he was the reason she got up every morning, finding fulfilment in the daily task of caring for him.

A few months after the funeral she felt more lonely than ever, disoriented and anxious, and to compound the situation her short term memory was also letting her down. She had lost her life long companion, her soul mate in fact, but she could hardly remember the circumstances of his death and she kept asking me, time and time again, to describe his last moments to her. To help with the grieving process, I started to look for photographs and found nearly a century of her precious memories catalogued 'her way' in faded envelopes and cigar boxes of the forties and fifties: old wedding invitations with dinner menus, death notices, pictures of First Communions, little hair locks as well as ancient postcards of family and friends and many photos.

This could be a good project for both of us, I thought, and spreading the little containers on the dining table I offered to put the photos in 'proper' albums and sort them in order. My mother tried to oblige, but I soon realised that I was confusing her. So I left the memos in the cigar boxes and we talked about what they all meant to her instead.

The questions I was asking now about her childhood and family put a broad smile on her face and a twinkle in her eye that seemed to linger on all

day. I was delighted, and the idea of writing her story, our family story, was born right then. She spoke of the many years of her long and adventurous life, remembering what it was like to grow up in France between the two World Wars, then losing her mother prematurely. Marrying my father. In spite of the stressful war time she lived her life to the full and, as it appears, with no regrets.

From then on I was on a mission, so to speak, and the french words started to flow from my keyboard but after a couple of pages I stopped, and for the benefit of future generations in Australia, I turned to English to tell this story. Writing in my adopted language was a challenge for me, at least on that scale, but through trial and error I learnt a great deal about the beautiful rhythm and poetry of the English, and I kept writing - *tant bien que mal*-. Some sentence structures are still 'not quite right', no doubt, and at one time I even thought of having the text reworked and professionally edited so to get a cleaner writing style. But I soon dismissed the idea as I felt that something of the spontaneity and true character of the story would be lost this way.

It will become apparent as the events of our family lives unfold, that my mother's journey through life and my own are closely linked together. Just as one life is born of the other, my story will be following hers tightly and, *'pas a pas'*, will take us both to this country of wide horizons and natural beauty that is ours now. On the way, I am strolling through the past and historic sites but I do not claim to be a historian. My 'history notes' are merely an exploration through our family backgrounds and my thoughts and curiosity when meeting different cultures as I travel. I expect that those notes will seem a little daunting to our grandchildren but, in my view, they are important to the overall story telling process.

The 'journal' addition to the narrative was an experimental approach, which I enjoyed as I feel it gives the story some breathing space as well as a valuable perspective on my mother's character through her present life. Like the brightest of stars, the way she was is still shining through the way she is today in spite of the hazy clouds of lost memories.

I am thankful to my family and in particular to my husband, Richard, for giving me valuable feedback on the project. Also to our oldest son, Sam, always encouraging me and giving me excellent advice on text design as well

as many other technical tips for self publishing. Both, he and Richard also proof read the chapters of this story for me. I wrote two drafts: the earlier one, I presented to family members and one dear friend for appraisal, and then I worked on the second draft with a few changes and many additions. So I can safely say now that any remaining inadequacies in this final text are entirely my own.

Florence Leclerc Statham



Dolly, left, with her brother and sister, 1926.

Chapter I: Dolly's parents

Dolly, Marie, Elisabeth



Dolly' is my mother's first name but she was called Elisabeth during her twelve years of schooling, as the good Sisters of the French convent didn't know of a 'Saint Dolly' who could possibly serve as a role model for the little girl. Her name displeased the Reverend Mother no doubt but Dolly was, in fact, quite proud of her parents' eccentric taste for such an unsaintly (and ungallie) name. Every afternoon, as soon as she walked out of the school grounds, Elisabeth was no more and Dolly reappeared for the rest of the day. It was like shedding her skin on a daily basis she used to say. She had been very fond of her school but when she eventually left this safe haven to face the big world, Elisabeth took her leave for the last time and Dolly settled in permanently and most happily.

The invisible enemy.

A world away in time and space, on a cool autumn day of the year 2007, I started to collect my mother's memories. She is now well prepared to relive the past and ready to pass on those bits of information that might not have been ever mentioned before. Some of the stories she is about to share with me date from WWI, before she was even of this world, nearly a century ago. She talks of the pain and turmoil that this war brought about, described to her by her uncles and particularly her own father. When WWI was declared in 1914 her father was just thirty-one years old. Alberic Francois Dulong de

Rosnay, the oldest son of Marguerite de Saint Phalle and Hermand Dulong de Rosnay came from this little town in France called Ormes in the *Saone et Loire*. He was a man in his prime, fit and healthy, and was called to fight right from the beginning of the war. Like many soldiers then he went off with great patriotism and the expectation of a quick victory but, as it turned out, this war was going to be long and bloody. Only a year into it, my grandfather nearly lost his life as he fell gravely wounded on the battlefield.

That day was not an ‘ordinary’ day in battle, far from it. The enemy was invisible and only a thick and brownish cloud caused Alberic to stumble onto the ground. His breathing had become laboured and faint and his mind was slowly shutting down. Before loosing consciousness, he still managed to rest his eyes once more on the battered field around him, and watched his companions falling like flies, their throats horribly burnt and their eyes opened wide in the vain effort to catch their breath.

They had all inhaled the poisonous fumes released by the Germans as the latest deadly weapon against the enemy. Canisters of chlorine were slowly spreading the gasses that would kill about five thousand French soldiers and injure hundreds more at the battle of Hypres alone. But this was only a beginning for, as the pages of our history tell us, chemical weapons would take the lives of more than ninety thousand Allied soldiers by the end of the war. Like many others that day, Alberic woke up in the military medical compound and soon after was transferred to the general hospital in Lyon, his hometown.

Dolly recalls this particular story very well but what was I told as a little girl of his ordeal? Perhaps more than I can remember. Many tragic but sometimes incredibly uplifting stories come out of history and as far as I was concerned *grandpere* was one of their heroes: I saw him brave and strong but also gentle, caring and funny (he let me decorate his hair with tiny piggy tails and played horsy with my brother). He was perfect in my eyes, and even though today I don’t see him quite in the same light as I did then, he is still securely tucked in my heart as he always will be.

We know that he had been at Verdun and most probably Hypres but the lack of details about his four years away is disappointing. Like many war veterans of the time my grandfather spoke rarely of the war and Dolly gets confused now, in her advanced age, with what she regards as those ‘details’. (Details, of any degree of importance, are usually the things that have

dropped out of her memory). But all is not always lost, as some stories deleted from her mind, often reappear like by magic and sometimes complete with elaborate ‘details’. She talks of the leather bags for instance (pictured page 4), which became the soldiers’ lungs in a gas attack. They saved many lives, but not nearly enough I’m afraid, as spreading gasses had been the most deadly and cruel means of warfare during that war. My mother’s words take me into a world of violence but also of love and courage. They evoke the painful recovery of the many men brought on the same day to that hospital in Lyon. Her own father had hung on to life by a thread but, as it turned out, he was one of the lucky ones as his throat and lungs slowly healed, and he eventually found the strength to eat, smile and joke again. His strength came in big part from the supportive nurse who took care of him, the stranger he would fall in love with and eventually marry: Marcelle Charrat, my grandmother. “A silver lining to his ordeal” I add. Dolly smiles.

Marcelle Charrat

She now starts describing her mother to me as she had done so often in the past...Every time a little more information is added, which helps form in my mind a better picture of the woman I had not known. I had heard of her beauty: ‘her most striking attribute’ Mum insists, but this is subjective and does not mean much to me. I want to picture the ‘real’ Marcelle Charrat whom I know is part of me, my children and their children, and try to understand her struggle and her dreams as a young and passionate woman in a world so very different to mine. I also want to feel her courage and compassion in front of the unimaginable pain and slow premature death of so many young men in her care. As it turned out this courage will still be with her at the time of her own untimely end.

The precious family photographs, which are scattered around me as I write, help me ‘see’ her. They show an intelligent woman, serious with a soft smile. As I am looking at those tiny pictures more closely today it’s like seeing my grandmother through the keyhole of an ancient door, locked many years ago. She seems so real and close but sadly I never had the chance to touch this frail figure or hear the sound of her voice. Thoughts like dreams don’t have shape and substance, but they are powerful transmitters and I like to think that mine are somehow reaching her world as I write.



Alberic Dulong de Rosnay and Marcelle Charrat



My grandmother nursed back to health many men along the way and her dedication to the wounded won her a decoration for ‘services to the war effort’. I keep preciously the engraved gold medal, which she was given then: a cherished token of recognition by the French government for the part she played in this senseless war. Her portrait is not complete in my mind yet but, for now, I’m content with collecting those bits and pieces of information, slowly putting them together like a big jigsaw puzzle.

After leaving the hospital and spending some time convalescing at ‘Poiseuil’, his parents’ *domus*, my grandfather returned to the front. Dolly talks of Marcelle’s wait from then on, her anxious reading of newspapers with news of the battles and list of casualties, the lost letters and parcels.

Then a year later, when on leave from the trenches, Alberic decides not to wait any longer and asks Marcelle to marry him right then. Would she be willing to take a chance on his eventual safe return? She had expected the question and happily agreed. They were married on the 8th of June 1917.

Like him, his three brothers were called to fight (Charles, Hippolyte and Joseph-Bruno) and by a stroke of luck, after 4 years away, all brothers came back: wounded, but in one piece. Hyppolyte had lost one eye and the others suffered different kinds of injuries, but they all escaped with their life which was an extraordinary fate, as at the time death struck most families with men at war.

La Marquise de ‘Bonnechose’

His brother, Charles, married a woman called Aimee de Lamothe and Mum smiles again as she remembers their daughter’s engagement, Helene (or ‘*Miquette*’), to Pierre Bertrand de Bonnechose... ‘What’s the origin of the name?’ I ask. She looks slightly embarrassed but welcomes this lighter turn to the conversation: “It’s not a secret, far from it, as everybody in the family (including Pierre Bertrand) used to joke about it” she says.

She tells me the story once again, choosing her words carefully and this is how it translates: “One of Pierre Bertrand’s ancestors had been called le ‘Marquis de Bonnes Couilles’ (or ‘good testicles’ -to put it politely-). When he and his wife happened to be received at the king’s court, the guard who was to introduce them couldn’t bring himself to sing out such a crude name. So he introduced them as *de Bonne... chose*, (good ‘thing’) instead”. The king

eventually allowed the poor man to keep this name and his wife was happy, no doubt. I guess Posterity will forget how his previous name had ever come about: “it’s for the best” my mother adds. She will not elaborate, and that’s all today for the ‘little story’. My grandfather also had three sisters: Marie who married Jean Meric de Bellefon, Albane (single) and Alix who married the Count Ramon de la Cerda, then Chilean consul in France. There is a sad story relating to this last family, in the style of a cruel fairy tale as I saw it as a child. The couple had two daughters, Simone and Raymonde. Simone was tall, slim, very pretty and was her mother’s favourite. Naturally Raymonde suffered for being the underdog in the family, my mother says, but thankfully Simone had a heart of gold and compensated as much as she could, always making a fuss of her little sister.

Raymonde married happily but lost her only daughter, Nadine, at the age of twelve. I met Nadine when I was around 9 years old. We were walking the two of us in a public park, most likely the *Parc de La Tete d’Or* (the Golden Head) in Lyon as I can still see the backdrop of majestic trees and many squirrels, even a few rats crawling around where water was lying. Nadine touched me by her gentle ways, she must have known she had a terminal illness but she did not let on...I wished then that I had guessed...Perhaps I would have acted differently with her but I doubt she would have wanted that. She was a proud girl and I cried when, a year or so later, I heard she had died.

For the first time in my life the notion of death took a real meaning for me, and the new questions that sprang to my mind on the ‘after life’ never stopped to confuse our most knowledgeable nuns at school. They apparently thought that the subject of ever lasting life had been covered often enough in the past, explained, understood, and “dealt with”. As far as they were concerned it was simple really: all men and women, from the beginning of time, would eventually be resurrected on this earth on the Last Judgement Day. ‘Nice’ people would line up on the right side of our Creator and live happily ever after. It was hard to imagine such future world but I liked the story. I thought it was lovely: I would see Nadine again, no doubt.

Raymonde’s sister, Simone de la Cerda (Mum’s first cousin), married Henri Duchez and they had three children: Marie Alix, Jean Philippe and Roland. Jean Philippe died recently at the age of 68 of lung cancer as he had been a chain smoker most of his life. He left quietly, without a fuss, and only a short

time after being diagnosed. He had been the best cousin for me: eight years older, he used to indulge me with all sorts of treats, like teaching me to ski or ride a horse.

He even invited me on occasions to ride on his powerful 750cc motorbike and I can still feel his anxious grip on my shoulders, as he once allowed me to drive his big machine, at night, on the boulevard surrounding Lyon (*Boulevard de ceinture*). The speed was quite intoxicating but fortunately Jean Philippe's gentle words to "slow down Flo" registered eventually in my mind with the intended effect. In spite of the age difference he treated me as an equal. A few years later Jean Philippe married a super girl: Marie Helene. They had four children together: Pierre-Henri, Anne-Emanuelle, Florence and Fabrice. The little Florence looked just like her grandmother: Simone. She grew up to be a talented stage actress (and an optometrist).

The Charrats

Dolly's mother, Marcelle, was the daughter of Charles Charrat, a solicitor, and Elisabeth Perouse. Both came from old Lyonesse families and at the time, quite a few of Marcelle's relatives practiced in the legal profession (still a remaining tradition today) except for two brothers: Lucien and Louis Charrat. Lucien had a clothing business and thanks to the Internet I have now frequent email contacts with his son and daughter in law, Herve and Marie Claude Charrat.

Louis (or *Oncle Loulou* for us) was Marcelle's youngest brother (too young for the war, thank God) Unmarried, he lived with his father, Charles, and cared for him all his life. He was an accomplished painter, well quoted then and even more so today. My mother says he won some prestigious prizes in his day; one in particular was the 'Prize of Rome'. He had a good sense of humour and a high pitch laugh, resounding in my ears like communion bells (my great uncle must be very close to God, I used to think). I also loved the twinkle in his eyes, which was always a sign of some quirky story to come. My grandparents were very supportive of his art and collected a good number of his works.

Rene, my grandmother's oldest brother, went to war as a matter of course, but the Germans took him prisoner very early on. He spent three years in prison camps. When he returned home his family gathered together to give

him a welcoming reception and, my mother says, no one would ever forget his words then. He stood up and described his experiences in a round about way: he had been tortured and witnessed the most inhuman treatment of others. He said this was the last time he would ever talk of the subject or that he would want to hear about it. The family and friends respected his wish.

A couple of years later, Rene married my Aunt Yvonne: a woman very much loved by all. I have no doubt that she would have tended to Rene's emotional wounds as they had a very happy life together. She and my grandmother were best friends. This particular tale, at least, ends well on all fronts. One of their daughters, Danielle Gormand, and her husband (a mining engineer) moved to New Caledonia and it was the wish to visit Danielle that gave me the incentive, years later, to travel across the oceans (and an excuse to see the world, if ever I needed one). My grandmother had also one sister: Gabrielle (*'tante Poucette'*) she married a man called Louis Cabaud. They had two daughters: Denise and Chantal (Nouvel).

Dolly talks now of her siblings: Jean Hermant, seven years younger and Minon, (Carmen) two years younger. She has missed them for years. Minon is still alive but where is she now? The pain of not knowing shows on my mother's face. And Jean...Her expression relaxes a little as she describes her brother to me, the way he was as a child. He took after their father, she says: funny and clever with his hands. The pictures still with us show the face of a cherub with blue eyes (inherited from his grandmother, Elisabeth Perouse) and blond hair. As he grew up he read all he could put his hands on (I remember some of George Simenon's paperbacks on his shelves) and became a literary type, particularly interested in writing on the little historical secrets and unusual bits and pieces of the city he loved most: Lyon.

Minon had fine dark hair, a fair skin and black eyes; she had delicate features and an introspective nature, very secretive and unpredictable at times. I always thought of my aunt as being outside the square, strong in her convictions but quietly so, and interested in spirituality. She seemed to be floating around us as a free spirit and as a little girl I sometimes pictured her as a missionary or a nurse. Perhaps I was not too far off the truth as she ended up spending the last five years of her working life caring for Alzheimer affected people, in Switzerland.

As for my mother, she was regarded as the strongest sibling of the three, very much in charge and proud. She was also pretty sure of being always right

(my own affectionate assessment!) and in fact, she just about was. She took care of Jean and Minon during their mother's very long illness, and she feels now that they might have resented her 'bossiness' in getting them to do their homework, for instance (particularly Jean who was only ten years old when his mother was already sick.). But it was hard for Dolly too as she had always so much homework to do herself in the strict French school system of the time. Their days were very full and she recalls falling asleep after dinner, practicing the piano. Her head would slowly drift down and eventually crash onto the piano keys, giving her a terrible fright.

She seemed to like the excitement of driving her father's car far better than playing the piano and, before she reached her sixteens birthday, she had been granted a special driving licence to take her mother to the hospital for treatment when my grandfather was unavailable. Driving was a thrill for her and perhaps an escape from the harsh reality of her mother's illness. She also took part of cross- country car races, with her friends (As she often reminds us with great pleasure). Dolly worked hard, played hard and, although a lot was expected of her, she had little time for self-pity.

Her mother died in October 1942 from a stomach cancer at the age of 47. She had put up a courageous fight, helped by her husband's tireless search for a cure. A couple of major operations were attempted which, as it turned out, only prolonged her agony. The pain had been intense and although a nurse was hired for much of the time, her two daughters would also take shifts at her bedside. They had morphine injections on hand, which they gave their mother when needed.

The three children were forced to grow up fast, and I feel that part of Dolly's mind is often back then when she faced stoically her mother's suffering: hearing still her calls for help. Morphine helped...*Just a little more...* but not *too much* of course... It's like I can read my mother's thoughts right now. When the pain lost its grip for a little while, my grandmother would gather all the family around her bedside, and they talked. The topic of conversation shouldn't be her health, she insisted. She valued this precious time of reprieve given to her and asked her children many questions, looking deeply into each one's life and heart. Somehow my grandmother's portrait comes together more completely for me, as Mum and I talk today.

Marcelle Charrat's parents and her younger brother, Louis.



Charles Charrat,, oil painting by his son, Louis Charrat.. Right: etching of Charles.



Self portrait: by Louis Charrat



Elisabeth Perouse Charrat, Dolly's beautiful grandmother

Rosnay...-'Stoekli'

We are at the "Stoekli", the house that Dolly and Mais shared and loved for more than a decade now (see 'introduction'). Looking at the breathtaking views across Rosnay my mother comments on the vines that are shooting at the moment, her beautiful roses in the foreground, the green of the "Noojee Lee" hills across the river. Rosellas and grass parrots feel at home in this peaceful environment she remarks.

The story of their house goes back to the fifties. It was built for some army personnel in Canberra and by 1995 was begging for a new life. We bought it at an auction sale, had it cut in two and put on trucks (a common practice in this land of the 'moving houses'.) The two halved timber house made the trip to Cowra at snail pace and eventually reached Rosnay: the land bearing part of my mother's maiden name. She and Mais were still in France then, awaiting eagerly news of their 'pre loved' home's safe journey. They had spent the previous three years in Montpellier, in the South of France, close to my brother Bernard, and his family. Although well settled in their own apartment they were by then keen to get back to Australia as a big part of Mais' professional life was still stored in our shearing shed. Archives of all sorts representing years of his work were piled up, including an imposing library of specialised books as well as the furniture and paintings that had always meant a great deal to both of them (I think they could safely be described as 'hoarders').

This little house in its original context looked rather ordinary but when placed on a 'prime' spot in the middle of the property she quickly acquired a brand new personality and charm. The 'Stoekli' fitted there so well and stood proud in superb isolation.

To condition the soil before establishing the 'Mataro Stoekli vineyard', our family planted a couple of mustard crops and the house in those early stages of development appeared as floating in a sea of yellow flowers. The seeds got processed for beautiful organic mustard seed oil, which I used to infuse with orange peel and curry leaves. The oil was then bottled with the Rosnay label and sealed with green wax.

My mother now moves on to her early childhood. Some people use a tape recorder for this exercise, but this would be inhibiting and intimidating for her, as well as for me, so our daily conversations are very informal. Sometimes they end with laughter and this is what I am after: bring a sense of fun in my mother's life as well as establish some order in my thoughts - and hers. But also importantly, our aim is to pass on those precious memories to the future generations, remaining as faithful to the truth as we possibly can.



Dolly and Minon

Chapter II: Holidays.

Cicadas and pins parasols.

In spite of the constant underlying sadness in the children's lives caused by their mother's long illness, there were also happy days in the Dulong de Rosnay's household, and Dolly smiles again, as she remembers.

My grandfather was an amateur engineer and inventor. Before losing his wife, he had built one of the first electric washing machines and a *passé plat*, lift for the meals to be taken from downstairs to upstairs, particularly to my grandmother's bedroom. He also built a wooden caravan and fitted it out himself.

Every year, the whole family went down 'South' to Cavalaire in the Var coastal region and camped right on the beach. The land belonged to a Belgian couple, very good friends of theirs. They had children of the same age and, as the school holidays lasted three months, one month was spent at the beach (my grandfather's holiday). On some occasions they would go to Switzerland, Spain or other "exotic" destination but Cavalaire was always their favourite hide out.

They had two large canvas tents which, with the caravan, formed a comprehensive condominium. Folding tables were set together under the stars with checked cotton table clothes, and a myriad of small candles scattered all over them. This naturally delighted the children, including those from the 'big house' who loved to join in, playing endless games in the dark. This set up under the moon light reminds me now of a scene of "Out of Africa", as my grandmother and her friend were apparently great story tellers and, sitting around the campfire they would entertain their little group with tales and fables late into the night.

Their camp was bordered with tall pine trees, and songs of the cicadas and birds (no shortage of them then) would fill the air. The extraordinary

scent of the pines has always been a trigger to relaxation for Dolly, as she recalls, and now after all those years is still a powerful reminder of those good times (better than snap shots she says). In my view, our sense of smell is often underestimated as a memory trigger in old age: it seems to stir emotions deeply buried in our subconscious.

Cavalaire's most obvious attraction was naturally its glorious beach: a magnificent 3km stretch of sand framed by Cap Cavalaire to the West and Cap Landier to the East, but the inland consisting of the Pradels mountains behind presented also the most beautiful back drop for this little paradise (during the war, my mother recalls, this was also the site for the allied landing when the 3rd divisions of the American Infantry disembarked in the summer of 1944.)

In this month long holiday, her father had his own ways to unwind. He was a fisherman and loved to talk about his catches. One day, he fished out a little shark and won a prize for the heaviest catch of the season. But my mother has been known to exaggerate a little. She says, there is a photo to prove it, and I won't argue. His son, little Jean, would join in and sometimes Dolly and Minon but the girls often preferred running through the backcountry.

Wandering off beyond the beach, a coastal footpath would take them to the hidden treasures of this scented landscape: it led to Cap Camarat through a very diverse nature reserve of Mediterranean vegetation (also the odd eucalyptus trees could be spotted here and there). When my grandmother became too ill to camp, she still came along staying at the Cavalaire Hotel. This part of France seems to have had a great appeal for my Uncle Jean as later on he settled near by, in the little fishing town of St Tropez.

For the rest of the school holidays, after my grandfather went back to work, the children would spend some times at their grandparents': 'Curis' (Charrat side) and 'Poiseuil' (Dulong de Rosnay side). Then they'd come and go to 'Cogny': my grandparents' own little vineyard in the Beaujolais, only thirty km North West of Lyon.

With the vineyard, there was also a winery attached to the house, and it worked well as the family had an arrangement with the neighbour who helped with the care of grapes and, together with my grandfather, made the wine (mostly from the Gamay variety). They tried to keep up with the reputation of this "third river of Lyon" as the Beaujolais wine was sometimes referred to.





My grandfather's shark



Other vigneronns in the neighbourhood grew varieties like Moulin-a-vent, Villie-Morgon, Fleurie, Julienas, and Brouilly to mention only a few. The family also kept a couple of beehives, a vegetable garden and baked their bread outside in the bread oven. The house itself was built of golden stone and had very open views over the hills and village, only a few km from *Villefranche sur Saone*. As there was a hard climb up the hill to get to the house the family would put a flag up to notify that “they were in” and save possible visitors the trouble of climbing up for nothing (no phone). The drawback to this idea was that it invited burglars to break in when the flag was down. And it happened once apparently.

A painter friend of theirs, Luc Barbier, had a rather quirky sense of humour: he imagined the scene and gave it life in a charming watercolour (four robbers going up and down the stairs in the bluish moon light and carrying family silver and pictures.) At least this painting is still in the family.

Poiseuil, the paternal house

Marguerite Dulong de Rosnay, Dolly’s grandmother, enjoyed having big family gatherings. She often kept an open house at ‘Poiseuil’ in Burgundy (her husband had died years earlier) and there were jokes running amongst family and friends about this very hospitable woman who was also a ‘straight shooter’, I believe. When guests used to arrive at the door, the first thing she would ask them was “when are you leaving?” A funny way to welcome them, they thought, but her question was practical as the guests in question would often linger on... enjoying great human warmth and excellent food.

Marguerite was the daughter of the Marquis Edgar de Saint- Phalle and Alice de Leullion de Thorigny and was born in Carcassonne, Languedoc. She moved to Trevoux, Ain, to marry Hermand Dulong de Rosnay. The family was quite conventional, no doubt, but still very accepting of its “*enfants terribles*” like Mum’s little cousin, Niki de St Phalle, and her brother for instance. (The young man had a passion for speed sports and met a sad end in Africa, competing in the Sahara desert with his sand sailor). Over the years, the family talked of Niki’s achievements in the contemporary art world of the time. A painter and a sculptor, she was an experimental artist and a real eccentric as far as the old aunts were concerned. Her parents moved from Paris to New York after falling on hard times, following the Depression of

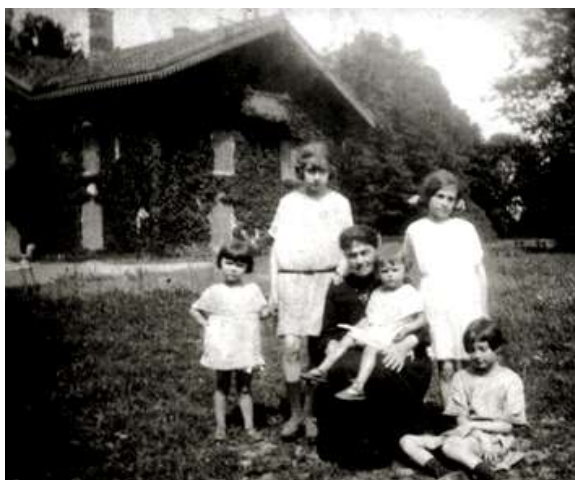
the thirties (the St Phalle bank went bankrupt). But the two children never lost contact with their roots as they spent most of their school holidays at their grandparents' castle near Paris, before eventually making the move back to France for good.

I can remember how intrigued I was as a child, looking at the pictures in the newspapers of those fabulously huge assemblages in plaster- mostly women-. And her 'shooting paintings', also made of plaster with containers of red paint beneath the surface which would explode when shot with a pistol (I thought it was blood). Niki soon moved on from this experimental art form to sculptural assemblages and to her 'Nanas', large and brightly painted women figures, as big as a house, symbolising power and generosity.

Mum's cousin was indeed a liberated feminist, and her art reflects it, but I think there was also another side to her personality, quite spiritual in fact. She married the Swiss sculptor Jean Tinguely and together they created the beautiful assemblage called "The wheel of fortune". She also spent twenty years of her life in the creation of a garden in Tuscany (on donated land) which is now open to the public. She and her husband worked on the sculptures scattered through the garden: some of them are Tarot figures covered with coloured and mirrored mosaics. Her influences might have come in part from Antonio Gaudi, which she admired greatly. I have never met her and I probably never will unfortunately. She would be nearly eighty years old at this time of writing. As for my great grand mother, she died at Maisons Laffitte in February 1930. She was always remembered fondly.

The 'Point du Jour'

Dolly's thoughts are now back to the outskirts of Lyon, a place called *Le Point du Jour* (The Break of Dawn), where the family lived the rest of the year. She recalls how she and Minon had imaginary friends who took residence at the back of the garden. They were called "*Les Mames*". Those friends were 'seen' by the two girls, particularly by Minon I suspect, as my aunt had an imagination stretching far beyond anyone else's in the family. There were also a couple of less well- intentioned individuals who always hid in the same spot, a cavity in the wall, and being sent was to be avoided at all costs. The two sisters were close then and best friends.



As the years moved on, they were talks of war with Germany, again, but it did not stop the girls from living their lives to the full. There were parties amongst their friends and lots of laughter, Mum says, perhaps as a surviving device to help them hang on to a kind of normality, when the world was being turned upside down...

When the food rations came about, fresh produce became rare. The three young adults would then ride their pushbikes to Cogny (30km each way) to pick the potatoes, *topinanbours* and other root vegetables that they had sown earlier on and shared them around. Their mother was still alive then and before she died the two sisters had met their future husbands which, naturally, they hoped to keep for their entire lives. Divorce was uncommon amongst French people of that generation and the easy option of parting before having explored all other avenues, definitely not 'on'. So, marriage was possibly the most important decision one would ever make in one's life.

It appears that my grandmother approved whole heartily of Dolly's choice of husband but she had great reservations about Minon's: she and my grandfather were concerned about the family situation their younger daughter was getting into. If she had lived longer, her advice and moral support would have been no doubt invaluable for Dolly's sister.

Previous page, top: Dolly's grandmother, Marguerite St Phalle Dulong de Rosnay at Poiseuil with her five grand daughters. (Dolly left) Middle pictures: Niki St Phalle shooting a painting and next to a work called "The weight of Justice." Door: two meters high..Below: 'Cogny being burglered. Gouache by Luc Barbier.

Close family ties

Minon was the first to tie the knot: she married Henri de Chevron-Villette five months after her mother died. Everyone, on the wedding day wore black...Everyone, except for the bride and the two little bridesmaids, that is. The wedding party was very stylish, and the guests looked smart in their beautifully cut black clothes. The hats the women wore were all very different and showed the distinct personality of the individual. Dolly wore the most flamboyant headgear that one could imagine. It was like a big black bird, ready to take off.

As for my aunt, she looked radiant and rather shy on the wedding photos and the groom had a gentle air. He became my Godfather. His family had owned estates for a very long time and their farms and timber plantation were

situated in the South East of France, only 20 km from the Mediterranean Coast. The Chevron-Villettes had been very close to our family through past alliances.

Soon after their honeymoon, Henri and Minon made their way to the '*Domaine de la La Rouviere*' as the property was called. Mum tells me, and I vaguely remember that the grounds of their property were magnificent and no doubt my aunt, who loved nature, would have been enchanted by this magical environment. But if she had any hope of bringing her own personal touch to the house and grounds, she would have been, indeed, disappointed as Henri's father was entirely in charge of his son's household. On the positive side, his wife, Genevieve Nodler, (her mother, Gabrielle, nee Dulong de Rosnay, was my grandfather's first cousin) was a kind and quiet person and she and Minon became good friends I believe.

Henri worked very hard on the property but had little say on the running of the place and my aunt had to "fit in" as quietly as possible: a situation that they both found difficult to live with, my mother says. She remembers how Minon and Henri tried to make a life for themselves away from the property for while but they eventually returned to *La Rouviere*.

A year or so later, Minon gave birth to a little girl, Guylaine, which she adored. Her husband was at war and she looked after the baby the best she could. My mother says all men had gone to fight, but what about the women folk? Mum tries to get her thoughts together but she cannot say...All she knows is, her sister was alone when tragedy struck. The baby became sick and Minon wrapped her warmly in a blanket, and walked away for help...She walked five kilometres to the next village: Flassans- sur- Issole. Tragically the little girl died and it seems that my aunt never completely recovered from the loss of her first child.

Soon, she had another daughter and then two more: Roseline, Chouky (Gabrielle) and Patricia... I have photographs of Bernard and myself playing with our little cousins at La Rouviere... The big house was the kind that you see in picture books and we, children, fantasized that fairies and goblins had taken residence on the grounds. Running through the corridors and countless stairs, we would look up at the attic with a shiver along the spine. We were scared and delighted at the same time...

When Minon's youngest daughter, Patricia, was around two years old, Minon left La Rouviere. She did so on two occasions. The first time, she tried

to keep her daughters with her. She and the little girls came to live with us for a while and I can still picture in my mind my aunt and my three cousins, kneeling at the bottom of my mother's big bed, Place Bellecour, deeply absorbed in their evening prayers: a daily ritual. I was only five years old then but I could sense the tragedy that was to unfold: it was obvious that mother and children were in the middle of a crisis far beyond anything that I could possibly understand. Naively, I was hoping that they would live with us for good but this was obviously an impossible wish.

The circumstances of my aunt's final departure from La Rouviere are unclear, but Mum has always insisted that through the difficult family situation at home, deep depression and ill health, her sister was far from being herself at the time.

I never saw my cousins again or heard from them, but lately Mum and I had the greatest pleasure of receiving a condolence letter from Patricia. I had asked members of the family in Lyon (Herve and Marie Claude Charrat) to send a death notice to whoever, they thought, would want to be informed of my stepfather passing away, and they gave me Patricia's address...

Twenty- five years later Henri married again. His new wife was a cousin of Minon: Marie Alix Duchez, (sister of my dear cousin: Jean Philippe). It seems the connection between our two families had not died off after all. They had a son together, Sebastien.

Uncle Jean (Hermand), a gentle man.

As children, Dolly and Jean rarely played together mainly because of the age difference and also, as I mentioned before, Dolly's role in her little brother's education. It seems to her like yesterday when he was ten years old... nearly eighty years ago. Jean didn't have a good health to start with, and his time at war certainly didn't improve it.

He was hardly 18 years old when he was conscripted for WW2. His mother had died two years previously...When away, he stoically endured the physical and mental hardship inflicted to most young men sent to the front then. Soon he was plagued with painful skin ulcers that kept worrying him long after his return, in fact for the rest of his life.



Minon Dulong de Rosnay and Henri de Villette. Gabrielle, Roseline, Patricia de Villette, Bernard and myself.



Roseline and Gabrielle (Chouki) Cherron de Villette



'La Rouviere'



Jean Dulong de Rosnay



Playing the guitare.



At Minon's wedding.

He married very young a woman called Nicole Cinquin. They had three children together but his wife left him very soon after their 3rd child was born. Dolly always felt responsible for her brother and although she was a little bit 'bossy' with him (as she says herself), I know that he appreciated and loved her in his own reserved way. *Oncle Jean* started to smoke at a pretty young age, as they all did then, and soon after his return from the war, tuberculosis took hold of him. His health only improved marginally when he lived in the warmer climates of the South of France: on two occasions, he worked at St Tropez for a few years each time. But he still eventually lost one lung and then a big part of the other.

His breathing had become much laboured, obviously, and as time went on he hardly had the strength to get up and walk. (As a child, watching him struggling for every breath, I never took free and easy breathing for granted) As he was not very mobile and often confined to his room or within the walls of the City Library, he would be writing and researching the history of all the places he loved, particularly the Old *quartier St Jean*.

He also dug deeply into the life and time of our ancestor, Louis Etienne Dulong de Rosnay, and generally into the family's past. He wrote for example a thorough genealogy of this side of our family with extensive research (page 346). For recreation, he enjoyed playing the guitar, building model ships and, from his bed in hospitals, he designed and executed interesting embroideries. No gender prejudice here!

But sadly in our youth, as with Minon's children, we didn't see much of Jean's children, our cousins, as their parents' divorce had cut us out too. His only son, Alberic (Eric) is now married with three children and still lives in Lyon. I knew him better than his little sisters and I was very fond of him. I saw Jean's youngest daughter, Annick, years ago. She had a tiny and very stylish jewellery shop in Lyon and, although this was just a fleeting visit, she was happy to meet me.

Jean died twenty years ago after a long stay in hospital and I will always remember him fondly. Everyone who knew him said that he was a gentle soul and a pacifist. The war (and the cigarettes) got the better of him, but he rarely spoke of his ailments and didn't let people feel sorry for him.

Rosnay...

Today, we interred Maïs's ashes at 'All Saints Anglican Church' in Canowindra, in the middle of a well cared for garden of roses. This is a welcome closure for all of us but particularly trying for my mother who still can't quite figure out how and why her husband died.

I have described in the last chapter how the "Stoekli" took on a new life at Rosnay after having been moved from Canberra in 1995... Not long after settling in, Maïs's health deteriorated further and it became obvious that he wasn't going to be able to travel anywhere from then on. He suffered in the past from bladder and prostate cancers and had been operated on both, in France and Australia. He also had diabetes and experienced great difficulty walking (using a frame). So his time out of the house was only to visit doctors or hospitals, and having the occasional meal with our family, just across the 'hundred trees grove', the first experimental olive grove.

From then on Rosnay became their home on a full time basis. But this was not a bad position to be in, they reassured us, and from their cosy house they enjoyed watching the rebirth of the country spreading in front of them. The first couple of years had been beautifully wet in that region and the wine industry was still healthy.

My mother gardened, painted furniture, built bookshelves, and often cooked for the entire family very delicious meals. Although she knew her mind was starting to play tricks on her, she managed to gloss it over and she exercised her memory the best she could. She would spend hours doing the cross words that Bernard kept sending regularly from France. This helped

no doubt, but the high level of difficulty that had been her starting point slowly decreased over time.

As for Mais his mind was still as sharp as ever and for the following decade or so he was able to keep up with his professional life as an historian and journalist. He had mustered the use of a computer but not quite the internet, so he relied on his 'good old fax machine' to send his work away (his latest works has been on the 'Chaco war' and a very impressive autobiography). Although at this stage of his life his income was irregular, they both enjoyed a comfortable third age thanks to their pensions and various comprehensive health insurances wisely taken in Australia.

But one fateful morning, in March 2007, Mais didn't get out of bed. He said he was paralysed and his legs couldn't support him anymore. We then called an ambulance to take him to the Canowindra hospital. Sadly, he never regained the use of his legs and with his diabetes out of control; he died a few weeks later in great pain. Mais and Dolly had spent the previous three weeks, sharing a room in a medicated aged care facility, in Cowra, where Mais passed away. Thankfully, my brother was with us at the time.



Molly, our first grandchild, in the rose garden of the Canowindra Anglican church: 15.04.2007



Chapter III: The Leclercs

Jean-Charles Leclerc

Dolly had been close to being engaged a couple of times before meeting my father. The first time was to Jean Davout: the brother of a good friend of hers from school, Marie Jose Davout. Marie Jose was a boarder at the 'Sacred Heart' as her family lived a long way, in the Jura region.

Mum recalls visiting them during the holidays. the children there were care free and their parents very accessible and friendly. They had tennis games, played croquet on the lawn and danced at night. Not only Dolly had her best friend for company but she also soon enjoyed the friendship of Marie Jose's apparently very attractive brother, Jean.

My mother says that they went on dates, 'but all this was very innocent' she quickly adds with a smile (of course I had no doubt). Back in Lyon, they kept seeing each other and even talked of engagement. Jean visited her house more and more frequently but my grandparents soon put an end to the romance as Dolly was still doing her last year at school. The pressure of homework was intense and no time should be spared for the distractions of love.

When she was a little older, she got involved with a distant cousin: Charles Dulong de Rosnay. They wanted to marry but my grandparents were not too keen on the idea either, as having the same name had connotations of inbreeding. Still, the two considered themselves engaged but her parents kept asking them to wait, hoping they would eventually loose interest... And they did... They stayed good friends though. Charles later married and practiced as a surgeon in Lyon. His daughter, Genevieve, lives today in Montpellier in a small apartment and an army of faithful cats. My brother and his wife, Regine, still visit her dutifully in spite of the angry menagerie unwelcoming them at the door.

Dolly's life had often been subjected to family pressures but when she fell in love with Jean Charles Leclerc, my father, she says no one would have been able to dissuade her this time. They met through an association called the 'Cercle Mermoz' which Jean Charles and another fellow student, Yvette Perbin (my mother and Yvette Perbin had been childhood friends), founded in 1937 in memory of the aviator, Mermoz(1), who was so well considered and admired in France. There, they would talk of literature, adventure and very importantly, politics. They were mostly students and often organized amateur plays. My parents enjoyed drama, which they practiced a lot together. They both could play the piano as my mother "had to" learn as a child, but Jean Charles loved playing and was particularly proficient at it, I am told. The Cercle Mermoz was located just above a couple of trendy café restaurants, on Place Bellecour, and was a very popular meeting place..

In that year of 1937 Jean Charles graduated in History and Geography. He was an 'all rounder' and Mum enjoys adding, 'very popular with the girls'. Particularly interested in youth groups, he gave a lot of his time as Scout's leader, "Chef de la IXeme de Lyon". Here is translated quote from professor Allix, head of the geography faculty in Lyon : "Jean Charles Leclerc was inspired by noble examples like the one of Jean Mermoz and it is through this remarkable man that he possibly had been attracted to "Aviation - that conquers the skies - and Geography - that opens the doors to the world." ¹

My father's aviation activities were linked to the first phase of the war from 1938, in the 35th squadron. As an officer in the French Air Force, he served

¹*Mermoz was viewed as a hero by many in both Argentina and France. A poetry lover and an artist, he concentrated on becoming a pilot, his first passion. He was assigned as a pilot of the Air Force 11th regiment, to duty in Syria. After crashing in the Sahara desert, he was taken hostage by a group of rebel Touaregs but later was found alive. He, and Antoine de St Exupery (author of The Little Prince) flew many daring flights in Africa and South America for commercial aviation. In 1936, Mermoz flew for his last mail delivery and neither his Late 300 "Croix du Sud" nor the crew were ever recovered. Mermoz died aged 35, leaving a powerful legacy behind him.*

as an “Observer”. His plane was shot down in 1940 but he escaped in parachute and eventually was decorated with the *Croix de Guerre*.

He had a happy disposition but when alone with my mother his serious side surfaced. He talked of his aspirations, dreams and ideals with a great deal of soul searching. Dolly was still very young when they first met, with heavy responsibilities at home. No doubt her views on life were simpler at the time, but she admired and encouraged his sense of adventure and idealism.

They had a long engagement as my father’s professional commitments and the war took priority, but this suited my mother too and allowed her more time to care for her mother. Of course, their backgrounds were very different but this didn’t phase out anyone on either side of their family. Jean Charles was not a ‘typical’ academic and his passions could take him in many different directions but history and social issues became subjects of conversation that linked the two families somehow.

Before the war Jean Charles had been a “Routier” which translates as “Roader” (in a different context it also means Truckie). Those grown up Scouts were the leaders and organizers of a great number of excursions into mountainous France and sometimes Belgium and Switzerland. He had been ‘Chef de groupe de Lyon Duplessis de Grenedand et Commissaire de district de la Federation des Scouts de France’. At that time, many children were not given the opportunity to explore the country side and those trips brought them into a world of discoveries and initiations. The Scouts had to master bush disciplines and be in close contact with nature. They were also offered an opportunity to reinforce their social ethics, as ‘serving others’ had always been a primary concern amongst the Scouts in any country. Often a chaplain would travel with them, celebrating mass in the snow or on lake sides, amongst tall trees soaring up to the sky.

A Norman heritage

Our Leclerc branch of the family came in the XVIIth century from Dieppe (Normandy) and settled in Alsace with the Francisation of the administration initiated by the king Louis XIV. We had apparently a ‘famous’ ancestor who witnessed the Revolution of 1789: Charles Louis Leclerc, born in 1776 in Paris. He became a soldier and was often quoted to my brother and me when

we were growing up. In fact we thought of him as a kind of a 'legend' but still not knowing a great deal about his campaigns (we do now).

At the time we only knew that his services must have been valued by Napoleon and the king Louis XVIII as the documents still with us today show that he had been made an Officer of the Legion d'Honneur in May 1813. The following year he became Officer of the Order of the Lys and a Knight of the military Order of St Louis in 1818. He had a very long career of military service and died in his own bed at the ripe old age of over 90 years old. Charles Louis Leclerc married Marie Eugenie Huder and their son Charles, with his wife Henriette Leingre produced five sons; the youngest, Eugene, being my grandfather. They were all born in Alsace and it makes me feel ancient to think that my own grandfather was born in 1856... (148 years ago!).

When he and his brothers were still children, German armies invaded the province from the North and Strasbourg capitulated after having been bombarded. Alsace had been French for the past three hundred years.

As a result of the occupation, an important part of the population who had opted to remain French immigrated to France and Eugene and his four brothers did just that. There was no time to pack and people crossing the border were not allowed to take anything of value anyway. The five boys fled to France on horseback, determined to fight for a French Alsace in the future. My grandfather was only 11 years old.

It's hard to imagine what their lives must have been like and their feelings in that desperate escape. Anyone so young would have suffered greatly being subjected to such a brutal invasion and having to leave mother and father this way. Or perhaps the boys managed to enjoy the excitement of the long journey across, riding on their beloved horses. Who knows? But what is certain is that during that journey the five brothers swore to do what they could to regain their land, and in good time they all became career officers with the dream of going "home" some day. But they never did.

My grandfather's mother, Henriette, had a sister called Florence (not married) and I like to think that I was named after her. She is worth a mention as she was like a second mother to the boys, her sister being often sick. When Henriette died, Florence supported the boys as much as she could... I have here a bundle of letters which she wrote to Eugene after he left

for Burgundy. I am determined to “decode” her handwriting and get more insight into this interesting woman’s life.

Eugene and his brothers eventually saw Alsace returned to France in 1918, but only forty-eight years after they had left! Out of the five brothers only my grandfather has surviving posterity it seems. The remaining members of the Leclerc family, had been living at “La Petite Pierre”, a fortress near Pfahlsbourg and Saverne where Henriette and Florence’s grandfather Florent Leingre served as Guardian of the Fortress and “*Entrepreneur de Fortification*”.

From Alsace to Burgundy

It is a blessing in a way that Eugene did not see his beloved Alsace return once more to Germany in 1940, as he died three years previously. My father was then twenty-three years old². After his long and adventurous trip, we lost track of my grandfather’s whereabouts for some years, but we know that he eventually settled in Burgundy where he met his future wife, Emma Poullien.

H.N.2- The next four years would be horrific for the people of Alsace who wanted to stay French. As early as the end of 1940, Resistance efforts developed there in view to liberate the Province. Sadly, a hundred and thirty thousand men were going to be forced to fight in the German Army, but on the Russian front only as the Germans did not trust them on the West front (with good cause no doubt). Those men were called the “Malgre Nous” (against our wishes).

From 1941, the worst type of concentration camp had been created. It was called “Extermination through work”, the Struthof Camp, near Natzwiller. “Undesirable” individuals were sent there including many Alsacians to extract a particular type of pink granite discovered nearthe village. Many men escaped to the France Libre and eventually participated in the liberation of the province with the 2d division led by General Leclerc in 1944. (A pseudonym; his real name was Philippe de Hautecloque).

The Alsacians had suffered immensely since the young Leclercs left the province in the year of 1870 as Alsace had often been used as a political pawn and those long suffering people showed great courage and loyalty towards France over the years.



Engene Leclerc, Emma Poullien Leclerc... Below : my grandparents' wedding in Virey (Saone et Loire).



Bottom: Henriette and Simone leclerc at their engagements. Right: Jean- Charles Lclerc (5 year old)





My grandmother, 'Bonnemma' and 'Tante Rirette. Bonnemma.

Below: "at the cercle Mermoz". Dolly and friends.





Jean Charles during the war as an 'observer'.



Right: a break



She was the daughter of Joseph Poullien and Melanie Saunier. The couple lived in the little village of Virey le Grand (par Sassenay), near Chalon sur Saone, where my father and his sisters grew up. Only thirty six years after the third Republic was formed, their first daughter, Henriette Leclerc was born and her sister, Simone, followed two years later. A late comer, sixteen years on, my father made his way into the world (in 1914).

My grandfather, Eugene, made a career in the Army as an Infantry Colonel and was fifty five years old at the time of my father's birth. Dolly has letters that he sent to his son on different occasions: he calls him his "Jeannot" and the words are always very affectionate. Most of what I know of Eugene Leclerc comes from those letters and postcards. We have old photos, of course: he and my grandmother, Bonnemme had fair complexion and blue eyes, carasteristics which they passed on to their children (not to me, although I was always told that I took after my father and grandmother in other ways, like the curly hair...). When the children had grown up, the family moved to Lyon where Henriette and Simone married and settled. From then on Virey was used as a holiday house where Bernard and I spent some time during the long school breaks.

Henriette's daughter, Monique, and her four daughters: (the Poudroux girls) were often there on holidays from Paris or Libreville (Gabon). My favourite cousin was Claire and four years ago for the first time in more than forty years we have been in touch again. We now have regular email contacts, on "The Life Line" (or the Internet).

Claire has two children: Cedric and Gwenaelle (Gwena is in Australia at the moment) and is looking after the family property in the South of France which belongs to her and her three sisters. It's a lot of work for a woman alone as she has to take care of the vineyards, the olive trees (helped by a couple) and the fields of lavender. Claire has a great sense of family and is completely in charge of the upkeeping of this big property, which has been in their family for more than five hundred years.

I was shocked to hear that her mother, Monique, (my Godmother and first cousin) fell down the stairs in the tower of the house and was killed, 10 years ago. Monique's husband had died in a car accident years earlier. Apparently the spirit of my cousin Monique is still felt right through the building. A complete floor, which was Monique's apartment, has been left just as it was, nothing touched: shutters closed, furniture covered. Claire tells me that it still

feels painful for her to walk through the place and she hardly goes there except recently, when she was looking for some documents regarding the Leclerc family, which she recovered and posted out to us.

The story of my grandfather, leaving his family and country at the age of eleven years old makes me feel quite close to him in a way. I imagine the five riders travelling through troubled France and starting their lives all over again. But it's a different matter for Charles Louis Leclerc, (my great great grandfather, or 'the Legend' as I still see him) as we have very little information regarding his private life and personality. Sadly, no letters, (that we know of) which would describe his feelings, have survived the passing of time.

At least we know more about his public life as our stepfather made valuable and extensive research regarding our ancestor's campaigns under Napoleon, and then the king Louis XVIII .We owe 'Mais' a lot as he left no stone unturned to find out every detail regarding Charles Louis Leclerc's long commitment to the country he loved.

"Le Colonel Charles Louis Leclerc s'est toujours comporte avec bonneur et probite" (Colonel C.L. Leclerc has always behaved with honour and probity) was the statement on his military death certificate. My grandfather was around ten years old when his own grandfather, Charles Louis, died and possibly the old war veteran would have passed on to the five boys the little stories behind the official accounts relating to those Napoleonic days and Eugene in turn to his son, my father. But circumstances didn't allow us to find out.

Charles Louis Leclerc's campaigns.

H.N. Following is a list of his many campaigns (twenty one to be exact) which I have translated for the records.

From 1792 to 1794 Charles Louis was with the Armee du Nord, taking Saint Amand. He fought at Gemappe, besieged Maastrich, took Courtray and Menis, besieged B... in 1795 he was with the Armee d'Italie at the "passage du Tagliamento", took Gradisca, defended Trieste. In 1796-1799, he was with the expedition of Egypt, and the taking of Malta and, Alexandria. The battle of the Pyramids, Sedimen, Zamout and the operations in Upper Egypt the retaking of Cairo, the battle of Lac Boulae. Battles of Helionolis and Alexandria and defense of this town.

Then with the Armee des Cotes de L'Ocean, and from 1806 at the "Grande Armee" in the campaign of Austria as "adjoin a l'equipage des Ponts". In 1807-1808 he was again with the Grande Armee in Prussia and in Pologne. Sieged Danzig, Graudenz and Stralsund. In 1809, in Austria, passage of the Danube just before the battle of Wagram. Then in Spain. In 1812 in Prussia with the "2eme corps d'armee", again in 1813-1814.

He was made prisoner at the capitulation of Thorgau in January 1814. Returned to France in June of that year. In 1820 he joined the 1st regiment of artillery at Douay. He later joined the "Royale Armee" as a Lieutenant Colonel Commandant du bataillon des Pontonniers at Strasbourg, then officer of Artillerie at Clermont in 1816, then at Port- Louis in 1831.

And finally at Givès and Charlemont. In 1832, Directeur of Artillerie and Adjutant du Tribunal Militaire at Perpignan. References: "Militarishes-Worterbuch, Fritz Eberhart, 1940" "Uniform in Farben, Preben Kannik, 1967" "Aux Armes Citoyens!", Henri Lachouque, 1969" "Der Schweister Kavallerist, April 1950.



Rosnay...

Mum and I just spent the afternoon joining in a game of 'petanque' with anyone of the family, who was keen to play. We made teams and after playing a couple of games on the road near the flow form, the 'cochonnet' led us back along the Mataro vineyard towards her house. We then all relaxed on the deck

with a cool glass of Chardonnay, and listened to Mum talking of the Alsacian wine and her trip to 'La Petite Pierre' where she took the above pictures. I think it was her first and only trip there and she was delighted at the charm of the place. She also recalled Mais's researches into the Leclerc's military past at the time that my brother's son, Patrick, was called to his national service in France.

The Mataro vineyard (also called Mourvedre) is spreading lushly right in front of us and is proving very hardy and resistant to droughts. Other varieties have been planted according to soil types and water requirements. To the East and North of the little cottage we have now some Shiraz, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Chardonnay and Semillon.

The creation of this diversified landscape is the result of a great teamwork as the vineyards, olive and fig groves are a family affair: my husband Richard and our oldest son, Sam, are totally immersed in every aspect of production and marketing. Sam is supported by his wife, Simone, and together with their little girl, Molly Jade, they present the face of tomorrow's organic farming (in my eyes).

For me personally, the challenge is to paint a picture for each new wine label. Of course the traditional French style is simplicity itself but Mum agrees with me, the 'terroir' here in Canowindra calls for a unique interpretation of the area. A lively representation of the varied landscapes around us, the wild life too and perhaps also the arts that are flourishing at the moment in this remote part of N.S.W. In France we would probably follow tradition. In this Country of Oz the rules are not laid out and it's fun to experiment. We choose our varieties, our yield, the trellising height, the number of cordons supporting the vines and feel totally free in marketing with little red tape to go through.

Although Mais couldn't be 'hands on' in the vineyards, he used to cut out for us articles relating to the growing of vines, marketing and 'how to make money'. He also made an effort to understand our organic principles and was hopeful to see his three first 'step' great grandchildren: Leonie, Laurene and Molly, thrive on this renewed approach to agriculture.

My mother is not totally convinced yet except that never in her long life did she make citrus preserves with chemically treated fruit. That means something, but the 'untidy' look of organic vineyards, she doesn't like much. Sam remembers how she used to chop weeds in the rows of vines with her own garden implements, until she realized this was a battle she couldn't possibly win! He reassures her that tap rooted weeds are "nature's little crowbars" and she thinks it's funny. Why not? She says with a smile.

In the winter we keep sheep in the rows of vines for short periods of time to "cell graze" the grass and fertilise the soil. Mum watches their activity with sceptical interest particularly when they rub their wool against the trunks or sniff her roses, stretching their necks from across the fence as they often do. We don't own the sheep; they are on adjustment or 'borrowed'. This arrangement with our neighbour/partner is proving to be very beneficial to both parties. In the spring and summer, we slash the vineyards and spread straw mulch.



EN ALSACE
par Christian BÉGIN



Chapter IV: Louis Etienne and Esther Dulong de Rosnay

The Napoleonic wars

My mother and I are pondering on how certain circumstances, lucky or unlucky events seem to have shaped our minds and souls, starting way back on the bloodline. How can we not be intrigued and sometimes alarmed by man's heavily charged past and its consequences? In our family's case, history presents us with an unusual set of coincidences: Dolly's great great grandfather: General Louis Etienne Dulong de Rosnay had been a contemporary of Charles Louis Leclerc and the two men were still children when the king Louis XVI lost his head on the '*echaffaud*'. They later both served under Napoleon and Louis XVIII and for our story those facts are an important starting point.

As it is well known, the events of 1789 represent a huge milestone in French history. The next H.N. will summarise the circumstances of the Revolution: the stage set of those two children who watched an entire society being turned upside down (gutted even) and a new set of values slowly emerge from the chaos.

Those children witnessed their country's rebirth through excruciating pain and watched 'the People' appear as main actors on that stage set - a process initiated in great part through the thinking and works of the philosophers of the previous generation-. Wars had always been part of everyday life in the Europe of those days but the political and social circumstances of 1789 would call more men to fight than ever before.

I revisited my history books for the following history notes, endeavouring to pass on my own views of those troubled but also very exciting times. My Uncle Jean's writings and those of his cousin, Gabriel Giraud de L'Ain (in the "Dulong book") are also providing me with some direct and useful

information. I would have never been able to “dig out” so many stories and anecdotes myself and I’m very grateful for their effort.

H.N.1) The stage set of 1789

Those events of 1789, didn’t come out of the blue as then and at least during the previous 10 years, France had sunk into an economic black hole. “France’s financial disaster was not the cause of the troubles as such but one of the symptoms of the ill” wrote Andre Maurois of the ‘Academie Francaise’ in his very sensitively written and beautifully illustrated book on French history. Three important factors contributing to that “ill”.

- The king, Louis XVI although a decent man with good intentions was weak, easily manipulated by the privileged classes and also by his frivolous, self-centred Austrian wife, queen Marie Antoinette.

-There was huge unemployment due to government debts and a shortage of wheat: a situation that came about through many failed harvests but most importantly through the deregulation of grain by Turgot. Of course this hardly touched the royal family. (‘No more bread? Give them cakes!’ had cried Queen Marie Antoinette in the middle of dinner).

-More wars, (particularly with England) and we couldn’t possibly let down a brave ‘New World’ such as America in need of assistance in its endeavour to sever the link with its parent (our archenemy). Naturally, Glory and new friendships followed after the American war of independence but little money was left in the king’s coffers to bring justice and a decent life standard for the people of France.

The king was an ‘absolute’ monarch but with a nature inclined to compromise and listen to his financial advisers. Sadly though, this proved an impossible task for such a simple monarch as the privileged classes (embodied in the Parliament of Paris) run the country. Rich aristocrats and clergy were dispensed from many tax burdens and they defended fiercely their privileges. The people suffered. On the 14th of July 1789 this situation came to a head and in order for the people to gain supplies of arms, the fortress of the Bastille was attacked and taken. This action, this ‘Revolution’, marked the collapse of the old regime and the entry of ‘the people’ of France into history- Strangely, on that 14th of July the king writes a single word in his diary: “Rien” (nothing)

A great number of liberals also supported the move, like General Nicholas Davout for instance (my mother’s school friend ancestor) despite his noble

origins and best military training. Also the middle class consisting of lawyers, merchants, doctors and other professionals had read the writings of the “Enlightenment” by philosophers like Jean Jacques Rousseau, Voltaire and Montesquieu. They naturally ran with the ideas of equality and social justice and were ready to support strong action for a change (but not at any cost I suspect).

Two youths: a Parisian and a country boy

In 1789, Charles Louis Leclerc would have been fourteen years old and Louis Etienne Dulong, nine years old only...Did those children take to the streets? How did the past events influence their formative years? Did they suffer from the shortage of food? Did their families read the works of the philosophers? Charles Louis would have been old enough to do so. And the last questions in my mind: what did they think of the revolutionary document called “The Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen” issued by the French Assembly shortly after the storming of the Bastille? Were those young boys “royalists”? Perhaps they thought the Revolution was over by then and the monarchy saved as the next two years brought a period of great reforms economically and fiscally and hope reappeared for a peaceful resolution. In fact the year of 1790 was described as “*l’annee heureuse*” (the happy year).

But it was not to last. A new Constitution was devised still keeping the king as the head figure. The king was to govern with an elected Assembly and was generously allowed a right of veto. In other words it offered him a chance of survival and it appears that Louis XVI, reluctantly, accepted the rules for a limited monarchy but, sadly for him and his family, he didn’t stick by them. The new Constitution was complicated and it required good will to make it work. This was now absent from the king but most importantly from his entourage and particularly from his politically foolish queen.

Charles Louis Leclerc’s family lived in Paris then and the young boy was at the time seventeen years old. He would have possibly been attracted into the streets and witness the King of France final demise: his execution as a measure of ‘public safety’. This second set of history notes is a summary of the next political developments which were to affect directly both young men and their families.

H.N.2) Louis XVI was the first victim of the 'guillotine' a new killing device designed to replace the traditional hanging. It was supposed to be a quicker death therefore more 'human' but serial executions would become this way an easy daily routine.

Predictably, the king's unhappy ending upset European monarchs (particularly Austria) and led them to another war with France. To make matters worse a "Reign of Terror" was now in place right through the country. It was led by a revolutionary called Maximilien Robespierre, head of the 'Jacobins', who hunted down and guillotined countless counter revolutionists and aristocrats until he was himself executed. As a paradox Robespierre was apparently a virtuous man and believed in Christian ethics. "His soul was too ardent to content itself with the reality of life" reports kindly his biographer, Max Gallo.

Robespierre's portraits shows gentleness so what could have driven this shy provincial solicitor to act as a merciless executioner? By 1794, the Republic was no longer in immediate danger and certainly there was no need for such extreme measure of repression. According to Max Gallo, paranoia and other psychosis might have been responsible for his behaviour.

So, with this trouble at home as well as abroad it was not surprising that France turned for help to a particularly bright soldier (first noticed when fighting on the side of the revolutionaries at Toulon), to restore internal peace. A soldier who consequently proved himself an outstanding commander and administrator in the campaign of Italy: Napoleon Bonaparte.

This little man had the strength and determination that the previous king and following politicians certainly lacked but to the view of many (mine included), he missed out on more human qualities like integrity and empathy. (He restored slavery in Guadeloupe and St Domingue: a crime against humanity acknowledged by the Archbishop of Paris when locking the doors of 'Notre Dame' on the anniversary of the Emperor's coronation in 2004)

Still, Napoleon looked quite promising to start with. He didn't altogether abandon the principles of the Revolution and, as a First Consul, he made French society more equitable by reforming the tax system. He instituted a new Legal Code, promised all male citizens equality before the law and also established public education. Universal suffrage was put in place for every male citizen (for a time).

But...women seem to have come second best with the new laws: they were now kept at home with no financial independence and the literary salons which they used to preside over disappeared rapidly. Napoleon also dispensed with

some of the democratic ideas developed so far, like freedom of expression, representative government and... he restored the monarchy. He is reported to have said: "I found the crown of France on the ground and I picked it up with my sword". He was an opportunist no doubt and a megalomaniac perhaps (as it turned out) but France was threatened by war then and the nation eventually voted him in as their Emperor with a majority of three million against two thousand and five hundred votes.

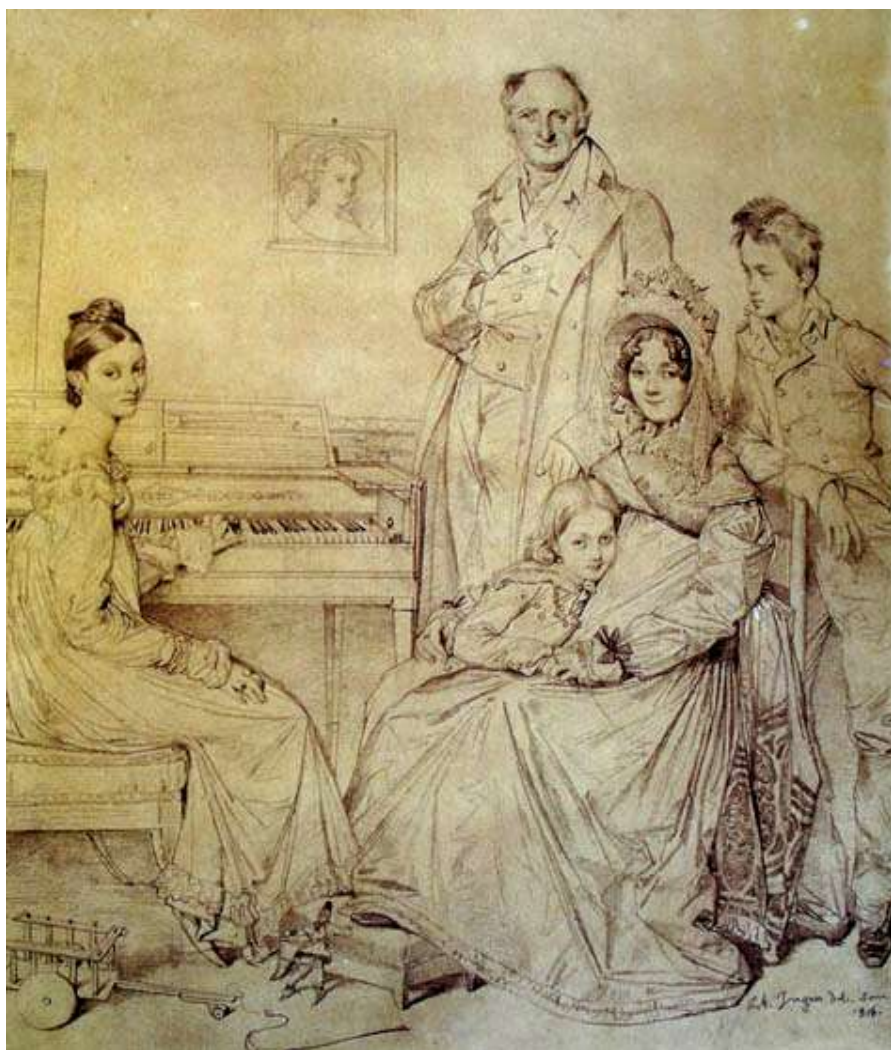
An attempt at diplomacy

The young Louis Etienne Dulong (de Rosnay later) was a country boy. He heard it all happen from his native Champagne where he was born in 1780: the execution of the king, and the scenes of atrocities spreading right through his deeply divided country. He would have very likely known this incredibly energetic and quietly ambitious little Corsican who had learnt spelling and maths at the 'Ecole Royale Militaire de Brienne' only a few km from the Dulong's house.

Perhaps Napoleon had even won his heart as his hero. But we know that Louis Etienne was not always destined to become a general of Napoleon. His father had died when the little boy was still in infancy and his stepfather, Noel Surdun, favoured a career as a diplomat rather than a soldier for his stepson. He was a man of words and advised Louis Etienne to take the path of reason and debate rather than the one of the sword.

So at the age of eighteen years old Louis Etienne Dulong followed his stepfather's advice and made his way to Paris with a diplomat who had married his stepsister: Nanine Stamaty (pictured page 49). He was attached to the foreign office for a year before being sent on a diplomatic mission as the secretary of an agent of the French government in Italy. Dulong, then, went on to Florence for negotiations with Italy but never got to achieve his goal as the little delegation was embushed at Pisaro.

Rebels encircled the town and fought the emissaries with all their might. It is recorded that the young Dulong showed a great deal of courage during that attack and proved himself a clever tactician. When back at Ancome, he asked to be attached to General Cambray as "*aide de camp*". And so ended Louis Etienne Dulong's fledgling career as a diplomat.



Family portrait of the French vice-consul in Civitavecchia, Constantin Stamaty, who married Louis Etienne Dulong's stepsister: Nanine. Pencil on paper, 1818, 46x37 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris. By Jean Auguste Ingres.



Thinkers of the Enlightenment: Voltaire, D'Alembert, Diderot are pictured here .

Right:: the clergy and the nobility look alarmed at the Third Sstate's -the people- awakening and removing his chains.



Dulong leaving Pisaro. Right: a portrait as a young man. Below: Austerlitz, the night of the battle, 2d December 1805



From the ‘Dulong’s book’, we know that he fought at the Austerlitz campaign, which started on the 2nd of December 1805. As a young lieutenant he served under generals Nicholas Davout and Friandt, and when his major was mortally wounded on the battle field his initiatives were so described:

“Lieutenant Dulong took command of the regiment and fought with great bravery. His division of only seven thousands infantry faced thirty five thousand Russians, and won the battle”.

Saving his brother on the battle field.

His brother, Edme, happened to be on the same battle field (as a sergeant major) and was about to be killed when Louis Etienne saved his life. Here is how Louis Etienne described the event in a letter to his wife, Esther, written on the 2nd December, the night of the battle.

“...Edme is wounded and, be the judge of my happiness his brother, your Louis, was able to save his life.... Imagine my brother taken down by two Russian grenadiers wanting to revenge a third one whom Edme had just killed: he is on the ground and ready to take their bayonets full on. I recognise my brother, I see his danger. I rush towards him right then, my useless sword twisting on the chest of the first Russian and refusing to pierce the “*buffleterie*” (leather equipment). The Russian hits me on the head and runs away. The other had just lifted his bayonet on Edme lying at his feet, when I fired at him. The unhappy man went falling on top of his companion...”

Those many letters Louis Etienne wrote to his wife are very revealing to us now; they were sometimes quite touching and romantic as he had been married not long before the decisive battle and his wife had just given birth to their first child. So much emotion and longing for peaceful resolutions were contained in his written words. Killing was part of his every day life and yet he was a sensitive man: If his horse got wounded from under him (this happened on a few occasions) he would take care of him and write about him with the emotions and feelings inspired by the suffering of a best friend (hardly ever mentioning his own debilitating wounds).

As a little diversion from the sad effects of war here is a description of Louis Etienne’s world at ‘Rosnay’, the Dulong’s village, which gives us an interesting insight on his social environment (another translation from the Dulong book).

‘In those days, more so than today, all men had roots in some *‘terroir’* and the Dulonges had been for a few generations vigneron or artisans. Louis Etienne’s father, Claude Louis, was referred to either as a doctor or a surgeon. He had been trained at medical school in Paris and was himself qualified but more than often medical titles were given very loosely. In villages (like in the Moliere’s plays) it was sufficient to utter a few Latin words, hold syringes and sharp instruments and apply “*sangsues*” (leeches) with different degrees of skill to be all together an apothecary, veterinary, amputator, doctor and surgeon after having started in life as a barber. Studies at school were reduced to their most simple expression (reading, writing and counting) and were not compulsory yet. The son of a vigneron could take an apprenticeship with an artisan or a functionary or a doctor. Marriages played a big role in the choice of a career and rarely did anyone go further away from home than a distance of ten *‘lieues’* (miles) which could be walked during one day.’

Esther de Sagey

Aristocrats feared for their lives during ‘The Terror’ but the Dulonges could sleep in peace since, as we know, they were traditionally ‘just’ vigneron, artisans or surgeons. It was a different matter for Louis Etienne’s wife, Esther de Sagey, who carried a dangerous heritage going back to Robert Le Fort killed in 866. But in spite of being marked this way, the Sagey’s family didn’t queue up to their death as so many of the nobility did and thankfully most escaped Robespierre’s claws (except for Esther’s grandfather, Charles de Chaffoy, who, as the Patriarch of his branch died on the guillotine).

Louis Etienne met his wife in Besancon in 1805 in the church of St Maurice. It was apparently love at first sight during that short encounter when the young woman was collecting for the poor.

Fifteen years later, going through the town where they met, L.E. wrote to his wife the following words: “I went to pray God, dear friend, in this little church where I saw you *‘si jolie et si fraiche’* asking me for the poor and I didn’t forget them then. Be the judge of my emotions (*attendrissement*) when standing there I saw again the Saint Place that received our words of commitment to each other. I often pictured in my mind that special moment in time when we stood together at the altar. You were smiling... If I loved you dearly then I believe I love you even more so today.”

This young girl, “*si jolie et si fraiche*”, who collected for the poor in the church of St Maurice was more exactly called Charlotte-Josephine-Esther., born in Ornans, twenty-five km from Besancon. She was eighteen years old at the time, and the fourth daughter of Jean-Hermand-Francois Xavier, baron de Sagey and Claudine-Veronique de Chaffoy.

They both belonged to old Francontese nobility but the couple, living apart and completely ruined by the revolution, was not about to squabble about the conspicuous absence of family ‘parchments’ in Louis Etienne Dulong’s coffers and his suitability (or lack of it) as their future son in law. In spite of his modest origins the Sageys saw him as a distinguished pretender, already pared with the aura of heroes. ‘*Chef de bataillon*’ at 24 years old, he was an excellent rider and the education given to him by the Chevalier Leuriot des Essards had made him an accomplished ‘*homme du monde*’.

The Dulong family lead a happy married life as long as it lasted, but the wars ruined Louis Etienne’s health. During his many campaigns he had been gravely wounded on a number of occasions. He lost permanently the use of his right arm at Austerlitz, a bullet had lodged at the top of his nose and partially disfigured him but, most importantly, the wound caused him excruciating pain most of his life.

It’s interesting to note that during the “hundred days” he didn’t come back to Napoleon (the same with General Nicolas Davout) but served later under the king Louis XVIII who had returned from exile and granted a Constitution.

At the end of his career Louis Etienne was named Governor of Corsica. He had worked hard to obtain this posting which he enjoyed at first but the work was taxing as it involved many horse back incursions through the island. This took a toll on his health...again.

A friend or a foe?

I don’t believe that anyone in their right mind ‘enjoys’ wars and those soldiers in the Napoleonic days wouldn’t have drawn any satisfaction in battles. In the case of L.E. Dulong there seems to be no private grudges against our traditional enemy, the people of Great Britain, as this little anecdote described in the Dulong’s book and translated here –again- will show.

“In 1802 the young Louis Etienne Dulong was 22 years old. He had stopped in some *auberge* and found himself sitting around the dining table with an Englishman³. They ate and drank together, talked and laughed together. After good-humoured jokes, they confided in each other and complained about their respective lots in life. By the end of the evening, and with the wine helping, they came to the conclusion that life was not worth living anymore. The English man then got up and declared emphatically “What’s stop us ending it?” “Nothing” replied Dulong and they both agreed to make the little trip to the next world “together”. But tomorrow of course.

The next day at 6am, Lieutenant Dulong was deeply asleep when he heard knocking repeatedly at his door: The English man was standing there, expectantly, and reminded him of the ‘little trip’ planned. “God bless my friend, replied Dulong, but I thought about it and decided to wait some more.” “In this case I will go alone” was the other man’s answer. Then he left the room. A few minutes later a shot gun was heard. Dulong rushed to his companion’s room and found that he’d shot himself”.

After a good night sleep Louis Etienne Dulong had regained his courageous optimism but despair and suicide was not uncommon amongst soldiers on any side of the fence. (Story witnessed and related by general Thiebault in his Memoirs⁴).

A short but extraordinary life

Twenty six years later, this optimism had faded away. The many wounds that had plagued his life (thirteen to be exact) never healed and were all source of permanent pain. In 1828, aged forty-eight years old, The General, by then Count Louis Etienne Dulong de Rosnay, was found dead on the floor of his apartment. Esther was out at the time and her husband’s last call was heard too late by Esther’s sister who lived with them. The painter Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres immortalized him with a full portrait (in private collection). Ingres was a friend of the family and he also painted Louis Etienne’s step

³ *The peace of Amiens inspired many Englishmen to visit France.*

⁴ *Memoires du général Baron Thiebault, Paris, Plon-Nourrit, 1895, tom IV, page 342, nota*

sister Nanine Stamaty and her family (in the collection of the Louvre). Our ancestor, Alberic, was the General's youngest son.

We know that Esther, as a strong and resilient woman, had been more than instrumental in helping to realise her children's ambitions after her husband death. She showed a particular interest in Alberic's carrier, her cadet. But it seems that Alberic didn't live up to his mother's high expectations. Born in Versailles in 1818, he graduated from the Ecole Militaire de St Cyr in 1837 (the year his mother died) and became sous-lieutenant in 1841 (*29e regiment de ligne*). A brilliant start in life.

Then, the 'unthinkable' happened: he resigned his commission to marry the woman he loved: Marie Ducret de Lange, born at Thoissey (Ain). She was the daughter of Baron Antoine Ducret de Lange, and Albane de L'Horme.

Would Esther's youngest son have left the army if his mother had lived to witness his change of heart? It is unlikely. Esther was a forceful woman and had already influenced her third son, Charles, to leave a carrier in the navy that he loved for one in the army (after completing his training at the "*College Royal de marine d'Angouleme*" in 1825, Charles served on the *corvette d'instruction La Bayadere*, then on the *goelette L'Etoile* (1827) and lastly on the brick *La Malouine*). Charles paid dearly for this decision and regretted it for the rest of his life. Still, he never blamed his mother and the love and respect that he felt for her remained unchanged.



It looks like Alberic was the lucky one though. He led the life of his choice with a wife that always supported him and stood by his side. His nephew Hermand wrote: - "In giving his resignation my uncle has denied the country of an officer who was destined to go far. Remarkably talented, very intelligent and cultured he would have become a distinguished officer. But if he looked for happiness in leaving the army at least he was not mistaken: he found it as much as one can in this world, close to a wife as intelligent as he was, beautiful and devoted. He lived a satisfying life, content and fulfilled." (What more can one ask?)

The couple brought up their eight children in Lyon, spending the summers in Marie's ancestral home, the castle of Larvolo near Tournus (Burgundy). A

few years on they established themselves permanently at the castle of Ormes, 'on the other side of the Saone' which they extensively restored.

(Hermand Dulong de Rosnay participated in the campaign of 1870-1871 as "franc tireur et sous officier au corps franc du colonel Bourras"; He took part in the battle of Bruyeres, Brouvelieus in the Vosges, Nuits in the Cote d'Or, Creusenier, Vandoncourt and Abbeville in the Doub.)

Alberic died in 1897 at Ormes. His wife survived him by twenty one years and was buried with him in 1918. Their oldest son, also Hermand, was my mother's grandfather –married to Marguerite de Saint Phalle, as mentioned before-. Military life didn't fulfil him either and he eventually settled atTrevoux (Ain) where he opened a practice as a solicitor. He and his wife, Marguerite de Saint Phalle, had seven children. One of them Alberic Francois, being my own grandfather. The family's last move was to 'Poiseuil' in Burgundy: the house that my mother had been so fond of as a child (pictured page 19).



Concluding history notes: Napoleon exiled to St Helena.

It's a pity that Napoleon didn't quit the wars when he was ahead. Austerlitz had been a great victory for France but the regime had become fragile and dependant on continued military victories. By 1810 Napoleon controlled most of Western Europe including all of Italy and a great part of Germany but he antagonised European nations by forbidding them to trade with Britain. When the Tsar of Russia defied the ban, Napoleon's ultimate mistake was to invade that country.

Tragically in marching on Moscow (and back) he brought death upon most of his army of six hundred thousand men-

Those wars had become extremely unpopular in France and there was anger at conscription and heavy taxation (what's new?), a high rate of desertion from the army and many conspiracies against the Emperor. Napoleon abdicated in 1814. He still made a dashing but brief come back to government (the 'hundred days') until his defeat at Waterloo caused his final misadventure to end with an exile at St Helena Island.

For the next 60 odd years after Napoleon's demise, three kings followed and one emperor but through the legacy of the revolution, France had become a Constitutional Monarchy, despite many efforts to revive autocratic rules. The

white flag of the Capetian kings had been replaced by the tricolour's of the new regime, symbolising the very desirable but often elusive principles of "Liberte, Egalite, Fraternite". When this legacy became threatened again with 'The Battle of the flag' involving the new proposed king: Comte de Chambord, the wind changed direction at the Assembly and consequently the elections of 1876 produced a clear republican majority. The monarchy in France was abolished for good.

Rosnay...

From my desk, I can hear our cheeky cockatoos shrieking around in furry. They make me smile and bring me back into this century, into this new country, which adopted me many years ago. My blood is foreign and yet my connection to this land embraces fully its beauty: like the incredible bright stars in the night skies, and the dry orange outback so unique to Australia. But very importantly, the precious next generation which is already exercising such a strong hold on my heart and making the call to this land so powerful: this 'down under' little girl so fair and fragile.

Molly Jade, our first grandchild, appears at the door. I take her tiny hand in mine and we walk towards the geese outside; a pair with their goslings. The parents are still very protective of their young, but today we are able to get very near. An ibis hangs around as he has adopted us a long time ago. Ibises are migratory and gregarious so we are surprised to see this lonely one make his home with us. I love the geese with their slow and clumsy walk, but also the ibis with his primeval air and long curved beak. A couple of "Superb" parrots are on the ground nearby. They arrived a few weeks ago and will stay around for a few months. I painted a wine label around this colourful parrot.



As we watch this peaceful heaven, my thoughts drift back again to the troubled times when France emerged into a new world of social awareness and self-discovery. A generation before, the philosophers had attacked the superstitions and injustices on which its society was based. In doing so, they stirred in people's consciousness a sense of collective responsibility. Those great minds thought of the community as a whole, perhaps a first step for mankind to think of the universe as a whole. They opened the way to the works of people like Rudolf Steiner in the fields of education, farming, science and spirituality and no doubt many others will follow their path.

Molly and I are sitting near the 'flow form' now, and the lively figure eight formed by the water running down the bowls into the little dam seems to reflect the passing of time and its holistic message for the future. Molly is still chatting away. We speak of the good fairies that live in this part of the garden, for sure, and my mind is soon happily cleared of past political conflicts and human tragedies. For a time we watch the fish swirling in the pond until our eyes are drawn to a red dot in the distance. It's my mother walking from the Stoekli towards us. Her little house is less than hundred metres away, but she appears like a tiny and fleeting figure in this expansive landscape. As she comes closer, I prepare to ask her a few more questions about The African Saga. I must tread carefully there as I know that the tragic events which were to unfold have never entirely left her mind.



Geese



Flowform at Rosnay



Superb parrot's label: the 'Newcomer'

Chapter V: The African Saga

Jean Charles Leclerc in Africa.

In 1941, my father was missioned to Africa by the ministry of colonies under the initiative of the French Institute of Black Africa, (through its director: Theodore Monod) and sent on a cartographic and ethnic exploration to French Guinea and Ivory Coast. This part of Africa was in big part uncharted and still virgin territory. He left by boat from the port of Marseille, with a group of other scientists each with their own area of expertise.

They were:

- R. Porteres, head of the Agriculture Department, in High Guinea.
- Raymond Schnell, graduated in vegetal biology and tropical botany.
- Maxime Lamotte, graduated es sciences naturelles: zoology.
- Richard Mollard, Geographer.
- A. Obermuller, Geologist.

J. C. Leclerc Professeur agrege de geographie, student of professor Allix attaché a l' Institut de geographie de la faculte des lettres de l'Universite de Lyon and specializing in physical and human geography.

“Anthropophagous is rare now in Africa but still practiced in some parts of Guinea as religious means. The climate is hot and humid during the day and sometimes very cold at night, with insects little known from the simple mosquito to the tse tse fly, unusual spiders, elephants, leopards, lions and reptiles” As I am writing, I am actually translating an article written in the Lyon local press (*Le Progres*) just before my father and his colleagues left. In fact there were not many elephants and lions left in this part of Africa and it seemed the reporter had omitted to mention some other important wild life in the area: the panthers and the chimpanzees. Those chimps apparently use stone as a tool. They are now in danger of extinction with deforestation and the arrival of refugees from Liberia.



The five men were looking forward to their work: creating charts, tracing the way that would be followed later by further topographic expeditions and studying the plant and animal world, particularly in the mount Nimba region and the Fouta-Djalon, a narrow stretch of land that spread on a few hundreds of kilometres to Liberia and the Cote de l'Or..

As part of his work, Jean Charles took an important amount of black and white photographs, some very artistic. (A lot still need to be printed). He also collected a considerable amount of scientific information, geographic, climatic, and ethnic data during this first voyage all together leaving a detailed body of work which allows us to retrace his footsteps and for me, translate some of his experiences.

On that first trip (one year) Jean Charles travelled nine thousand km of which three thousand were on foot. The other scientists of the team were often scattered on different itineraries but occasionally they'd regroup to compare and discuss their findings. The mission's point of departure for this first exploration was Tambacouda, in the centre of Senegal: the beginning of the road to Guinea through the Fouta Djalon.

As he needed a great deal of equipment with him many local porters carried the loads. Here is a description of this colourful convoy. Ahead was the team of "*debroussaillers*" armed with sharp machetes, they actively designed rough tracks on their way up through the savannas or forest. Further down followed the long string of porters balancing on their heads a charge of roughly 25 kg for each man.

Depending on the particular expedition, there would be at least twenty of them and sometimes fifty, one hundred and on one special occasion a hundred and fifty! They moved up slowly in a sinuous line, their voices filling the air with melodious chants and laughter. Those were often punctuated by strident shrieks triggered by the occasional argument or the sight of wild life. Then climbed the "*manoeuvres*" in varying numbers carrying the tools, different work instruments and all the necessary equipment to perform digs, build shelters and scientific check stations.

And finally appeared my father with his three most important companions, his guard: the powerful Meli-Bougara, wearing a kaki uniform and a red chechia (a hat), this man was also in charge of a gun held by his own porter (the ammunition was safely tucked away in my father's pockets). It appears that the major threats in some areas were the 'panthers men' on one hand and

on the other the numerous snakes which would slyly balance from the long “*lianes*” in search of a meal. Meli- Bougara was firmly in charge of the complete convoy, which he controlled with an iron fist. My father’s two other companions were the cook, Bala, and the general manager (for a lack of more appropriate title) also ‘medicine man’: Akoi.

When reaching their destination, the men would very swiftly organise the camp; building one or two long huts for the porters and manoeuvres, and a smaller one for my father. Akoi would line this last round hut with mats, unfold the bed with the mosquito net and the water filter, bring out fresh clothes, set the table and prepare the shower. Bala was in charge of the daily three meals and never understood why the menus had to be varied as he and his friends would rather have the same favourite meal, time and time again.

The next day they would start working; everyone was assigned a job, the “*manoeuvres*” would dig... The interpreters translate... Observations would be committed to paper, as well as sketches, and measures of meteorology and soil samples collected. In spite of the interpreters, chaos often reigned and the same questions asked time and time again often gave confusing answers as the natives wanting to be polite or cautious always answered “*oui*”. Valuable time could be lost in search of a particular site in the wrong places as some areas were considered ‘off limit’ and not disclosed (reserved for secret rituals or initiation sites.)

But, as my father’s letters to his family show, learning to understand the local population was part of his mission and over the following months he took great pleasure in observing the different tribes’ languages, their customs and rituals, eventually establishing valuable friendships amongst them. Many had never seen white men before and Jean Charles noted that especially the Guineans from the forests were proud people with a sense of loyalty towards those who they had learnt to trust and apart from the odd communication hic ups, mutual respect proved to be the key to their successful association.

My father often wrote of France’s responsibility towards those populations in bringing them choices through knowledge and education. He also talked of the incredible and often dangerous work undertaken by the many doctors who tried to eradicate the diseases that plight the population, particularly the “sleeping decease” propagated by the tse tse fly.

Back at the camp, as we retrace Jean Charles’ steps through the Fouta Djalon, the heat and humidity were extreme and hard to bear during the day.

But the really difficult time for him was at night, after a rejuvenating shower and a good meal in his hut: having to go back to his desk, classifying samples, and reviewing notes was the norm for a few more hours. After walking all day through rough terrain and heat, sleepiness soon took over.

Outside the hut and as the night unfolded it was another world: this savannah country was home to the 'Foula people', a fine and tall race: the women wore gold earrings, elegant dresses with elaborate hairstyles (*cimiers*) and showed beautifully executed tattoos. On that first day at the camp, the visitors' arrival was the excuse for ritual dancing and from his hut my father could hear the powerful native chanting and the sound of a thousand drums filling the air. One could imagine how a strong connection with nature and the heartbeat of this magical country would be felt right through the camp.

After having gone through this spectacular region of the Fouta Djallon, twice (from North to South and West to East) the expedition went on to the port of Conakry. From Dabola they reached the plains of the Niger to Kankan on the Milo and from there to the South of Guinea accessing the difficult mountainous regions of "*Haute Guinee*" which was my father's special area of interest, his "mission". Mount Nimba is at 1850 m of altitude, right at the south tip of the country on the border between the Ivory Coast and Liberia. On the East, lies the Massif of Man, north of the road joining Danane to Man. Those mountainous massifs are not nearly as high as the Kilimanjaro but are still quite spectacular with beautiful waterfalls. They are the birth site of all the great rivers of West Africa.

This was February 1942 and Jean Charles made his way to the top of the Mount Nimba expecting to spend there the next six months. He took with him all the food and scientific materials to last him and his companions the distance. The climb was hard as the weather proved wild: windy and stormy but his porters stuck faithfully by him (150 men this time!).

They apparently encountered numerous panthers' traps (not nearly as dangerous as the 'panther men' in the forests) and learnt to dodge them as they went...Cheeky and incredibly noisy chimps and big black and yellow birds (called "*gendarmes*") became routine sights and entertainment as the men progressed. A little before reaching the top, the *manoeuvres* would build a very long hut, a couple of smaller ones and install the weather station. This was camp no 1 from where the scientists were to radiate in different directions for the months to come. As well as some dry technical details of his trip, Jean

Charles's work is full of marvellous description of this diverse country and I will translate all the writings we have (cleverly collected and put together by my brother, Bernard) in a different manuscript some day.

Through isolation and diversified type of terrains (forests or savannas) the people of Guinea were and still are very different from one another... In the forests like the massif of Man for instance they practiced animism and were still among the most mysterious and secretive people on earth, only showing part of their customs to strangers (cannibalism being still practiced). There was a "men's" language and women or lesser ranking men wore masks and performed black magic. Elevated on stilts they practiced intricate dance rituals.

Jean Charles had a special affection for those forest people (particularly the Guerze tribe) and appreciated some of their culture but he knew that through deep seeded superstition the population lived in constant fear of the supernatural. A situation nurtured and often exploited to their advantage by high ranking local chiefs and sorcerers.

In the savannas a great part of the population had turned to Islam, and Christian missions were more often seen amongst the forest people. Converts still retained some of their traditions (like polygamy in the case of Islam) and connecting with them was difficult as they sometimes felt the need to hide their true feelings in order to comply with their newly acquired set of beliefs and values. In other words lying, in some cases, provided an easy way out.

My father enjoyed a very close friendship with a couple of missionaries like R. P. Lassort, Bouvsoit, Castelay, Polit and Mother Joseph Marie from the dispensary of Goueke. These people dedicated their life, energy and health offering the most vulnerable members of the forest tribes' spiritual empowerment and hands on support against their fears and traditional ailments. Although bringing religion was not my father's mission, he collaborated very closely with father Lassort in some other areas including languages. As a linguist father Lassort compiled the first dictionary and grammar manual of the Guerze language, one of the most complex in Africa.

As well as the Guerzes, Jean Charles' other favourite tribes were the N'Zerekore circle and their cousins the Manons, the Konos and the Tomas, (circle of Macenta). He describes them as fierce, secretive, and proud, sometimes cruel. Those tribes kept good relations with the missionaries and the French in general, as their presence represented some guarantee of

security in the face of neighbouring tribes with whom they were traditionally at war, particularly the Muslim Malinkes who hated the forest people, despised them and in the past enslaved them or sold them as slaves.

As a geographer, my father made two charts of the Nimba Mountains alone. He felt that physical and human geography were intrinsically linked and needed to be looked at as a whole. He also studied the effects that the human impact had on those wonderful primary forests which sadly were already then threatened through the slash and burn practice, possibly climate change, the advancement of some pastoral population and grazing animals. He also considered the impact of the French involvement regarding plantations and mines and feasibility studies were prepared through a very knowledgeable agro engineer, his colleague Roland Porteres.

Jean- Charles gave his heart to Africa but he was a man of his time of course, often talking of the importance of the 'French Colonial Empire', of which he was proud to be part of. Apart from the political aspect, he was primarily a scientist and I have no doubt that he could have called himself an 'environmentalist' as we would say today, through the depth of his knowledge in relation to land preservation, his genuine love and respect for this African continent and the different indigenous groups which he knew so well. In fact his views were astonishingly modern in some ways.

When he left Guinea on this first trip he had two thoughts in mind: Marrying my mother pretty much straight away...And hopefully coming back to Africa to finish his work.

Shortly after Jean- Charles' returned to France, in the month of March 1943, my parents were married as planned. The wedding was a "big" wedding if we judge by the number of bridesmaids: nine of them! Their dresses were nearly as glamorous as the bride's. I think they were all on my father's side. He was very fond and proud of his nearly adult nieces, and I must admit the girls formed a lovely tableau all bunched together on the back stairs of the *Point du Jour* House.

After their wedding my parents rented an apartment at "Rue Bugeaud" and on that same year Jean Charles completed his thesis. He taught at the *Lycee Ampere* for a while and then lectured at the Faculty of Geography at the University of Lyon. After the Liberation, he took the post of Assistant in Colonial Geography, a newly formed position at the Arts faculty. He also accepted the position of General Secretary to the *Societe de Geographie de Lyon*.





J.C. Leclerc's burial in Kissidougou.

Above; sketch by J.C. Leclerc (Guinea)

“His talent for writing and for public speaking as well as in administration assured the success of the Society” (statement from Professor Allix).

On the 29th of January 1944 Bernard was born and a little more than two years later on the 14th of March 1946, I followed him into the world.

Second trip to Guinea

During the year of 1946 my father left for Africa for his second trip. His aim in this mission was to explore and map the sources of the Niger and the region of Faranah. So, in November he made his way to the town of Kissidougou where he had been invited to stay for a few days.

That's when tragedy took the form of a sudden storm. It is strange that nothing dramatic happened when he was on mission. He had faced danger and risked his life everyday but then I guess he and his colleagues were always on the alert. In town and feeling safe, he went off guard for a split second.

The storm came very quickly, the way it often does in the wet season, and Jean Charles stepped outside for a quick dash to retrieve some effects drying on the clothesline (the official version mentioned that he was “sitting at his desk”. It is true that he had been writing at his desk on the veranda just seconds before the blow). As he was stepping out in the open, he got struck by lightning: the camp took fire and quickly burnt down. The blow must have been full on as the two doctors staying with him who had tried to revive him after taking his body away from the blaze, could not breathe life back into him.

Amazingly, his daily work note book was spared by the fire. In it he noted hour by hour the details of his activities, his whereabouts, and comments on the people that he saw in the streets or officially, data of temperatures and weather: On that Friday 29th November 1946, he wrote:

Kissidougou. 8h00. Pas de nuages, ciel bleu, rosee, brume $T=20,9$ (no cloud, blue sky, dew)

.... 14h00: *tonnerre* (thunder), *gros nuages a l'Ouest noyes dans la brume* (clouds in the West, mist)

.....15h00 $T=26,5$ $T'=23,1$

.....15h20, *pluie moderee* (moderate rain)

.....And then nothing more

The lightening fell at 15h30.

I have here a letter from one of the doctors, Dr. P. Brun-Buisson, who says that he was sleeping just a meter away from Jean- Charles and was himself projected by the blow to a distance of three meters. When he saw my father, laying on the ground his face was blue already. He and his colleague transported him to the dispensary where they practiced artificial reanimation and also gave him different injections, one of them intra-cardiac. They stayed with him all night and did everything they could 'knowing that it was hopeless'.

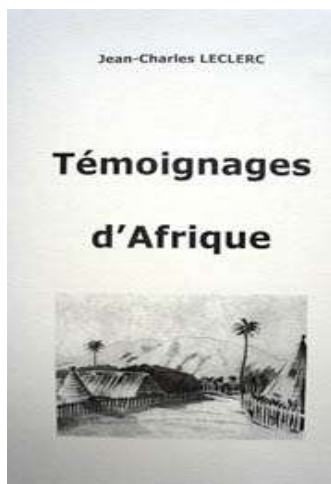
The father of the St. Esprit mission near by, joined in and Jean-Charles was buried the next day with his friends and colleagues present, also some young children bearing crowns of flowers. Mass and the "*absoute*" were performed in the chapel of Kissidougou. The Administrator and a couple of my father's colleagues pronounced some simple words regretting the parting of this remarkable man who had made friends so readily in this foreign land and was loved by all (these last two paragraphs are a translated quote from Dr. Brun-Buisson). When Jean-Charles died on the 29th of November 1946, he was 32 years old.

His mother and my mother's father were contacted first. Then my grandfather had to break the news to my mother the best he could. The whole year when he was away on his first trip and they were engaged to be married she had feared the worse, but on this second trip she felt more confident that all would go well. After giving her the tragic news my grandfather held her, cried with her and gently comforted her.

Sam, together with his friend Sophie Powrie, travelled to Africa in 1996. Sam made his way to Guinea but the political climate, fighting at the borders and an ear infection stopped him before crossing the border. Still he had been very close and he did walk part of the way where his grandfather had been also walking, on the mysterious and difficult Mount of Man. This gave him, I think, great satisfaction. When I heard that Sam had been able to retrace my father's footsteps, I became very emotional and felt that the spirit of his grandfather had been with him, perhaps guiding his steps away from the troubled border.

Jean Charles was buried in Kissidougou on the advice of Professor Andre Allix. It might not have been the best decision and possibly a technicality stopped the procedure of body repatriation. The strict political regime in place now in Guinea makes it very difficult to visit his grave. Bernard sent me

an email lately to tell me that he met someone, by chance, just back from Guinea who saw our father's headstone just the way it was...as it was described to us. For many years we did not know whether it would have been displaced or destroyed. The second highest mountain in Guinea had been named after him and the name is apparently unchanged –which is surprising-.



Bernard Leclerc's book.



An etching by Sam after his trip to the 'Mount of Man'

Changes in Guinea

H.N. This account is a translation of my brother's introduction to his book: 'Temoignages d'Afrique'. In this book, written before the latest political events in Guinea, Jean Bernard Leclerc puts together a comprehensive collection of our father's writings and observations in Africa.

"Since that fatal day in November 1946, many changes have taken place in Guinea. 1958 marks the independence of Guinea ex French and the rising to power of Sekou Toure, grandson of the Alamny Samory Toure, warier/trader, slaves merchant and who from 1882 to 1898 kept a great part of that region under terror before being stopped by Captain Gouraud and exiled to Gabon. Amongst the many victims of Samory figured the forest peoples and more particularly the Guerzes.

The 'cultural revolution' in Guinea began in 1960 with massive destruction of books, newspapers, administrative and legal documents. Archives were burnt, importation of foreign books forbidden, local press silenced. The 'revolution' also brought a radical reform in schools. French teaching

disappeared to be replaced by eight official languages: malinke, sousou, peul, kissi, basari, lorna, koniagi and kpelle. At the time this was an unfortunate situation as those languages had never served as written communications. Schoolteachers couldn't function as all school manuals had been put aside or destroyed.

The regime of Sekou Toure became dictatorial and led to a mass exile of one quarter of the Guinean population (more than 500.000). Then came in power Lansana Conte. Lansana Conte moved towards France and his own neighbours. Academic teaching was again in French and the economy improved thanks to the IMF and the World Bank. Liberties were restored somewhat.

But this politic stability would be precarious. The Malinkes, the Sousous and the Peuls would tear each other apart during an attempt at a coup d'etat of 1996. The regime hardened and in spite of huge natural richness, (Guinea holds 30% of the world bauxite) the economy still stagnates today. After this attempt at democracy the country faces an unknown future and despite rising mining revenue some observers (like the International Crisis Group) say that Guinea is in danger of becoming a failed state with unemployment recently estimated at 70%.

Jean Charles couldn't possibly foresee those developments in Guinea. He only knew the country in peace time, the excitement of research and discovery, the fascination inspired by those forest people with secular and mysterious traditions. He would be today terribly disappointed since the region of the Monts Nimba, the "Reserve Naturelle Integrale" that he loved so much is now listed as 'patrimoine mondial en peril' and this because of two factors: the arrival of refugees from Liberia and the mining exploitation by big multinational corporations. Unfortunately this situation is also present in the parts of Africa that are subjected to dictators, with ramping corruption, ethnic hatred, pandemic diseases, including the ravages of Aids, greed of multinationals. The list goes on." -End of quote-

We know through experience now that the world should offer help of course but would be wise to do so in a humanitarian or diplomatic way only. Perhaps the influence of a truly democratic and less greedy world around Africa could make a difference. This very slow process of global justice is possibly the only hope this beautiful people have for such a world of their own

J. C. Leclerc's work is defined in the essay: "La reserve Integrale du Mont Nimba. Chaine du Nimba: Essai géographique (memoire de L'Institut Francais d'Afrique)

Rosnay

My father dying in Africa had been a great tragedy and after nearly sixty five years, it is still a painful subject for Dolly to reflect on. She has 'moved on' a long time ago of course, but not forgotten.

Summer is nearly with us and the place is still green so much so that we tend to forget about the drought that has affected us for the last three years at least. It is not uncommon to get up to forty- two degrees in the shade in the central west of N.S.W.

Strong winds will lift the dry top soil and form sulphur-coloured clouds travelling horizontally in a narrow band, occasionally uplifting roofs and trees as well as empty water tanks (as it happened once here, narrowly missing the office). The grapes and figs hate it. They are boiling hot to the touch but as long as we keep their roots moist, they will survive even produce good wine and sweet fruit. Fifty degrees is the threshold, as at that temperature the leaves will fall and the vines perish. There is no doubt in my mind that climate change is already affecting this part of the world and we need to be prepared and adapt our crops accordingly.



Chapter VI: Dolly facing her future

For a while Dolly was well surrounded and supported by the academic community as well as all the members of her family. Jean Charles' friends were many at the university and her own friends flocked in to offer help. Kind letters were sent to her, but this could not last for ever. At the end of the day, she had to face the fact that she was now alone. She was 27 years old. We, children kept her busy and, she says now, stopped the depressive thoughts taking a grip on her mental state.

She remembers, for instance, visiting the bank to check on my father's financial situation, and get some money out, if possible. She saw Victor Chavanel there, Henriette Leclerc's husband, (my father's brother in law). He quickly took her by the arm and led her out. Under no circumstances should she "interfere" with her husband's estate! This was the solicitor's job he said. Mum was shocked, confused and went home empty handed. She tried not to take it too personally as everyone in the Leclerc's family was starting to discover what kind of unsavoury character this addition to the family was, anyway. Dolly was very fond of Henriette (tante Rirette) who was an excellent person and certainly deserved better in life.

I was then only eight months old, and my brother not quite three years old. Dolly had no insurance and the government pension was only a token gesture, so she had to make some tough decisions. My grandfather's brother, who lived in Cannes, offered to help and suggested a business deal presented by a friend of his in Nice. It was a little clothing shop for sale near the beach, and he talked to my mother about it. Would she want to run it? One problem was the distance: she would be away from her family and friends but her sister, Minon, was still at "*La Rouvière*" not far from Nice. Her uncle from Cannes (known later as the uncle from Madagascar) was very fond of her and

could lend a hand if necessary. She had no business experience, but she thought she could make a go of it, and seriously considered the offer.

She would take Bernard with her as he was old enough to attend a pre – school or just play at the back of the shop when she was busy, but what about an eight months old baby? My grandfather offered to take me for a while as he was remarried by now and had a housekeeper (Tine, short for Celestine) who was a gem and could be a Nanny for me. The offer was good and my mother accepted. She thought, if everything went well, she would soon fetch me. Mum had lived a fairly sheltered life so far, cocooned in very strong family ties and this move to Nice, as a single mother, was a step into the unknown. Nevertheless she saw an opportunity there and was determined to make it work.

Nice is a reasonably big city on the Mediterranean Coast, the Capital of the French Riviera in fact. The back country is stunning with great character and the climate warm most of the year. It was then, and still is now, a holiday destination and a pleasant place for retirement but also an important working city. Dolly had two shops: the first one did not see many customers, so she moved on to a better location, closer to the beach and business picked up. She also bought rolls of silk and fine cotton fabrics and, as she was waiting for the customers, she would sew fine articles of clothing to sell.

A quality that helped Dolly a lot was a certain self-confidence and a way to treat every customer as an old friend. She had no doubt that people liked her and, indeed, they did. Still, I imagine there must have been lonely times at the beginning, when she was new to the city with a little child and no family support. The shop went reasonably well for some time but it got ran sacked twice. The second time her rolls of fabric were stolen as well as the cash register's money and some precious keep sakes. An ex employee had been suspected of the theft (as she had a key) but was never found.

This second robbery was the last straw for Dolly, and she decided to quit the business. She sold the '*pas de porte*' and returned to Lyon. In any case this period in Nice had not been a complete waste of time. She certainly learnt to fend for herself and, apart from gaining confidence and business skills, she also made good friends particularly in the film industry (as we will see later). She also met an interesting man who paid her a lot of attention. He lived and worked in Nice.

But her priorities, then, were to get her family together and try something else, this time in her hometown. Also she was not in a hurry to replace so soon my father, or the memory of him, in her heart. She was lucky to have good health and a great deal of energy and was now looking forward to proving herself on her own patch.

At my grandfather's

My grandfather had remarried a woman who was the opposite in character to his first wife. She was "*Tante*" Jeanette (for Bernard and me) or La Jeanne and also Jeanette. She was twenty years younger than her husband and I'm sure she kept him on his toes! Her voice was as loud as his was soft and she wore thick make up. In any case she did not have much to do with me as Celestine took care of me, but still, a baby in the house must not have been too easy for either of them.

I had a close relationship with *Grand-pere*, as he had been the father figure in my life from the time I could talk and walk. He never raised his voice with me and I think I was a little spoilt. Naturally (in my view) I addressed him with the informal 'tu', a rare privilege in our family, I was told.

As for Tine, she was the sun and moon together for me: a heavily built woman with a milky complexion, a heart of gold and strong points of view. Everyone said that she did not get on well with women in general, but she certainly made an exception for me!

She also adored my Uncle Jean, and I can remember how rough he could get with her: boxing her playfully. I could swear I saw some bruises on her arms from time to time, but as far as Tine was concerned, Jean couldn't do anything wrong. Now, with *tante Jeanette*, this was a different story. Tine didn't like her. The poor woman couldn't get away with anything. Tine would never disguise her displeasure when she thought my grandfather's wife was too loud with him or wasteful. I loved Tine's honesty and I loved her.

Before my grandfather remarried the family was still living at the *Point du Jour* just on the outside of town in that house where my mother grew up. It had a big garden and a country feel. After the death of his wife, my

grandfather decided to live closer to town. He swapped the house for a large and sunny apartment at *Place Bellecour*, in the heart of Lyon⁵. This move brought him closer to his work too. (He worked all his life as a legal representative for an insurance company and was often on accident sites and attending tribunals). Tine had been working for him at the *Point du Jour* and

⁵ *On Place Bellecour. The facades of the buildings around the square had been designed by Louis XIV's first architect, Robert de Cotte but the soul of the Place goes back to Roman and Gallic times. Romans built stone barracks until they left in the third century, as the invasions from barbaric tribes could not be contained anymore. Only ruins survived the passing of time.*

Then for centuries the square was merely a big swamp as it is situated between two large rivers: the Saone and the Rhone and flooding occurred regularly. In the XIth century the Place was drained and cleaned up and it was transformed into gardens and vineyards owned by the Church and called: "Bella Curtis" in Latin or "beautiful garden" from which the name 'Bellecour' derives. Time passed and to complete Robert de Cotte's work, in the middle of the square was then placed a statue of Louis XIV on his horse, the 'cheval de bronze', a familiar sight for me and always intimidating.

The square was then, like now, a place for people to meet, stroll along the alleys to see the world pass by and most importantly being seen. It had also secrets kept underground: at the end of World War II, unemployed men were pedalling long hours to activate dynamos and generate electricity. We can imagine their discomfort in those unhealthy depths! Since then the underground has been transformed into huge parking areas and a state of the art metro station.

But a soft touch comes from the Western side of the square as two people now emerge from a block of stone: one sits and the other stands. They are the Writer and Aviator Antoine de St Exupery and his creation the "Petit Prince". Both are watching for ever the sunrise from that same Place, which saw the author play as a young boy. As part of the sculpture, on a high column in white marble I noted a quote of his on love, which I particularly liked and will translate: "Love is not gazing at each other, but looking outward together in the same direction". So true. I hear that now a canal is being planed to join the two rivers: Saone and Rhone through the Place.

she followed him to *Place Bellecour*. The flat was on the fourth floor of a classic building, right on the square, and the view from the large windows was stunning as *Place Bellecour* was virtually our front garden. I loved it. There was no lift but I liked the stairs. The steps were of stone, shiny and a little uneven by the wear and tear of their constant use over time.

Place Bellecour is known for being the largest pedestrian square in Europe making it safe for children. It has a section of woods, (mostly chestnuts trees which replaced the '*tilleuls*' of earlier times) water features with fountains, gardens and big expanse of ochre colour gravel to ride bikes on, fly kites and most importantly for me, roller skate.

The bus stop

My earliest memories are mostly of my grandfather and Tine. They are disconnected flash backs but I just 'know' that I was happy at this very young age, surrounded by plenty of love. Perhaps I thought I was as happy as I could ever be. And yet... I didn't know at the time, that something very big was about to enter my life and fill my heart completely.

My mother visited me as much as she could from Nice and I have pictures of her with Bernard and me at the age of four, two, and as a baby. Still, there must have been a critical period of time between her last visit to see me and the time I was told of her coming back for good, because I have no memory of her until then. All I know is that I was to meet her at a bus station. I did not know what she would look like or what she was exactly meant to be for me.

I can still see myself as a tiny three and half or four year old, standing just next to the bus sign. No doubt Tine or *Grandpere* was with me, but I don't remember. The bus stop was right in the middle of the road with traffic on both sides. I have the picture in my mind of a black and white scene. It was a misty day. I think it had been raining and the smell of rain was in the air. Even now I can still smell the rain that fell that day, so many years ago.

The wait seemed to last for ages. No one came out of the first bus or the second...Then I saw this tall, slim and beautiful woman cross the road from the footpath. The light was behind her and her features were soft and not well defined. She had a big smile and bent down to talk to me. She held me tight and the memory fades away...

What happened some time later is much clearer in my mind. I was in the kitchen talking to Celestine and *Grandpere* about this wonderful person which was my mother. She was going to collect me and I would have to take all my things and say good- bye, but of course I should visit Tine and *Grandpere* as often as I liked. I was not losing them but just gaining a full time mother and brother they said. I kept repeating the word '*Maman*' time and time again; it had a wonderfully emotional ring to it.

Tine's bedroom was close to the stairs and, lying on her bed, I could put my ear against the wall and hear who was coming up. All my things were ready and my mother was expected sometimes during the morning. I got up very early that day and I took residence in Tine's bedroom. The excitement and anticipation I felt were overwhelming and every five minutes I would glue my ear against the wall until at last I heard something...

There were four flights of stairs to our apartment, but with a loud echo in the stairwell, it was not hard to pick up the sound of high heels from about half way up. The "click clack" of the heels on the stone steps was very faint to start with but soon I knew that my wait had ended, or nearly. The sound became louder and louder and the tempo faster too (like my heartbeat). She was obviously as anxious to get there as I was to see her appear in the doorway. My life was going to change completely but, instead of being frightened, I was on a high cloud. My mother was still a mystery to me but somehow the bond was there, and I was now ready to follow her into her world. Anywhere in fact.

En famille, rue de Seze

Dolly had rented a studio in the *rue de Seze*. It was a one room flat with the toilets downstairs, common to other rooms. A far cry from my grandfather's place of course... I soon got to know the neighbours and one particular couple next door was very warm and welcoming. Mum said they were wonderful at minding us at short notice, especially when Bernard would get back from school before her return. It was my first taste of a kind of community life: meeting the neighbours on the way to the loo! I was not allowed to go on my own of course.

Years back, when she was still at her parents' house, my mother had learnt to sew thanks to a young woman called Maria (and Madame Dechandon at a

later stage). Maria came regularly to their house to mend clothes and sew for the family. She was particularly good at sewing under garments and nightdresses. She would be using the finest linen and silk and her embroideries were beautifully intricate. Maria was Spanish and like many Spanish young girls she came to France to escape a harsh life down South. Many were engaged as maids and perhaps Maria was one as well when she first arrived but she had a great talent for sewing, and an artistic nature. With my grandparents' encouragement she was now doing what she was best at. It happened that Dolly had a flair for fashion design and she was a quick learner. So, when she got back to Lyon and lived rue de Seze, a friend asked her to sew her dress as a favour, and she jumped at the opportunity. That day, she had found her first client, the first of many. Bernard was at school and sometimes she took me with her to work at her friends' place. Other times she would drop me off at Tine's or at my father's older sister, tante Rirette, who was always ready to help.

Bernard and Mum had been very close over the years: he was helpful and responsible like a much older child and the two took care of each other. I was told that in Nice he would come home from school, start dinner and make sure the flat was cosy and warm for when our mother returned.

Naturally, when I fitted back into the family, Bernard and I went through a period of adaptation involving a fair amount of pecking order, but all in all we were delighted to be reunited at last (*en cuchon* - or snugly- as Mum used to say).

Back to the best place (and view) in Lyon

Soon Dolly realised that she could actually make a reasonably good living sewing for her friends. They complimented her on her work and she felt confident enough to think of taking on a bigger rent and move out of the studio. Then, my grandfather came up with a brilliant idea which seemed to suit everyone. He and his wife would take another apartment (Rue de la Republique) more modern, smaller and very bright. So my brother, my mother and I could move to place Bellecour, the home that I had always known and loved. But this was not the best news yet: We were over the moon when it was decided that Tine was staying with us! Tine herself had requested to stay.



On Place bellecour, starting school.



Self aged 5, Bernard aged 7, Dolly

My grandfather's new apartment was perfect for them, except that it was on the fifth floor with no lift. Still I think he enjoyed the climb, as he was always saying the stairs kept him fit and healthy. This was his best exercise until he stopped working at the age of 80! For the last few years of his life he had strategically placed a comfortable chair half way up the stairs to allow him to get his breath back.

The move was planned and the excitement indescribable. A lot of the furniture that I was used to see was still there when we moved in, and it was like old times. Tine's room was still Tine's room, no change there at all. Mum took the front bedroom with the view over Louis XIV and the chestnut trees. The living room was beside it with the same view. Next, there was a sort of "alcove" or dining area that my mother used as her work space. Then, another big room further at the back, with windows onto the courtyard which Bernard and I shared...further still, the kitchen and an extra toilet. The big bathroom was next to my mother's room. Nearly half the flat consisted of corridors plus the big entrance hall.

The rent was not over the top but still a fair bit more than Mum was used to. So to help out, Tine offered to wait for her wages until business picked up. She was a very thrifty lady and I'm sure she saved us a lot of money with clever house keeping. When we were sick, she would use home remedies, which often worked. I remember the little bottles of homeopathic drops on my grandfather's desk and those mustard poultices stacked on my chest; they felt so beautifully warm and soothing. Only if none of this worked would Mum take us to the doctor.

Fittings and tea with patisserie

Dolly had good friends and then there were all the friends and family of those friends. She gathered that if she played her cards right she would not need advertising to get work and it would be much nicer to deal with people she knew, or knew of (and excluding the tax man). Her business slowly took off. She had the advantage of working from home and her clients came to the fittings with the anticipation of being treated to a cup of tea and patisseries from the shop just downstairs. Sometimes they would bring the patisseries themselves if they were good friends.

It was a social occasion that they were looking forward to, and so did Mum. It started that way perhaps until the clients realised that at 'Place Bellecour number 4', they were getting more than a little bit of entertainment and chat: they loved her work. She would design the dress or whatever it was on the woman's body, not needing ever a template of any kind. Each garment was unique. Very soon she had all the work she could cope with and more...During that year she completed a C.A.P. (certificate of aptitude) in dress making. This helped her getting the extra skills and the professional credibility that she needed.

Maria was happy to see Dolly come back from Nice as they had been very good friends. She was a small woman and had great style. Mum used to pluck her eyebrows, as it was the fashion then, but not Maria. Maria had thick, shiny black eyebrows, which were her best features as well as her perfect sparkling teeth. Her Spanish accent and rather husky voice gave her an air of strength and self-assurance. In some ways, she had been Dolly's mentor in the past, but now the two were forming a kind of partnership, on equal footing.

Maria had her own clients and also worked from her house, but progressively she spent more time with Mum and the two women eventually decided, once again, to work together like in the olden days. One was good at design, cutting and sewing, the other was good at also sewing, finishing the garments and embellishments (Maria).

A year passed, and when Bernard's last day of school arrived, my mother spoke of going 'down south' for the holidays. Tine would take her holidays with her own family in the country. It was July 1951; I was five years old (and three months). Bernard knew very well what was '*dans le midi*' but I had been too young to remember my visits there, so the idea of seeing the place where they had spent the last few years excited me. Mum had described her past life to me, perhaps to make me feel a little bit part of it, and I was very curious and always asking questions.

She felt fully in charge of her life now, and thanks to Tine, she was able to work full time. In fact it was a great deal more than full time as she often got back to her sewing machine after dinner, working late into the night. Bernard and I still had our regular rumbles, but we didn't feel cooped up any more and we soon became good playmates. (I remember our games, running through those long corridors with our dear and long suffering Tine trying to catch us -or corner us- so that we'd do our chores.)

When the weather warmed up, we enjoyed taking a walk on the Place, in the balmy air of night fall with Tine and our mother. Occasionally a few other people would join us like my grandfather, tante Jeanette and (real) tante Rirette.

A city made of nougat

My memories of those days are still a little vague but one thing is sure: I remember well my first trip to Nice. Nice was an all day trip by coach from Lyon. We prepared quite a while before the big day as we were going to close the house for two months or more.

Mum liked to travel light, but this time she took an extra suitcase for ornaments and pictures as she planed to rent a house behind Nice, in the backcountry. She said a ‘special friend’ would be picking us up at the bus station. This mystery friend was very intriguing, but the main thing for me was, in one day we would be at the sea side. Bernard described his adventures in the *Midi*, and I listened, mouth wide open.

In good time we boarded the coach (a ‘fosse un’) It was an old Citroen, smelly and looked worse for wear, but I didn’t care. I was car sick a big part of the trip and had to sit near the open window with a paper bag in my hands. There were two major stops for travellers to stretch their legs and also have lunch. The first one was at Montelimar, the “Nougat Capital” (where nougats was confectioned for the entire world or just about). I had pictured in my mind a city with houses made of nougat and I felt disappointed to see that in fact it was not the case. There were tons of nougat, that’s true, but only displayed in boring shops...every second shop sold the sticky sweet, which was nice no doubt, but what was wrong with chocolate?

The second stop was Avignon. This was the major stop: we were given an hour and a quarter for some serious lunching. The smell of the Midi was in the air... It was hotter too. We sat comfortably at a café restaurant near the Popes’ palace. No time to look around of course, as lunch was on its way. At that time, Avignon had a big colony of gypsies and there were a lot of little children running around, bare feet, and begging for a few *sous* at the bus station. If you gave money to one you had to give to the whole colony, as we very quickly learnt. The bus driver had warned us, but we had not listened and we became very popular with the kids until we ran out of coins.

Rosnay...

I make a point of writing a little every day but today was particularly hard as my mother had a very bad night and therefore I did too. She said she thought she was dying and she was very confused and disoriented in the morning. This little episode is making me think about her life at Rosnay.

She speaks French with me of course and when I see her with others, struggling to express her thoughts and not being able to understand much of what is being said I wonder how she really feels. If she regrets her life in France, we will never know. She made Rosnay her home and has always been positive about the decision. Bernard advised for her to stay in Australia after Mais' death and we agreed. This was probably a wise decision, considering her age and health.

She forgets important things on the phone when talking to him and Régine, and gets mixed up about who is who but, from what Régine says, she has the knack of always falling back onto her feet, with a clever pirouette (summersault).

There are no big waves or storms to face now for her, only a gentle breeze which offers to lead her to an uneventful, but safe harbour. A fair offer I think. But day after day, I watch her struggle to stay at the helm, so determined and brave and although I admire her fighting spirit, I know that her cognitive functions are slowly letting her down and this struggle is bringing anxieties and fears from deep in her soul. She is bravely fighting the odds.

For now, I keep her mind busy with our story.



Drawings by Louis Charrat. Top left : Dolly in Lyon, 1942. Below: bridge on the Saone. Right a corner of the Cogny house in the Beaulieu. All pictures digitally contrasted for this printing.

Chapter VII: George at L'Abadie

We arrived in Nice, late afternoon...The weather was perfect. My mother's friend was there waiting for us. Naturally I felt intimidated, as he was very tall and important looking. His thick fair hair was brushed back, and his features were like cut out of stone. He had piercing blue eyes. Bernard talked to him as if he knew him well, but I think I was quite shy and I looked away. My mother called him George. I was not calling him anything yet.

George had a very funny car, an old Darmon. It was dark green and looked sporty in the olden days fashion. It had three wheels only with a direct steering and a convertible roof and I liked that. As we climbed in I must have been still a little confused about who George was because I told my mother that she had booked a "funny taxi". I was sitting on her lap, with one hand on my head, holding my hat. Bernard was squeezed in the open boot. If I thought we were going straight to the beach, I was mistaken.

The old vintage car took us to the backcountry through a steep mountain. We then followed a hairpin road and crossed narrow escarpments only a car wide at times. Looking down on either side was quite scary and if a vehicle came the other way, God helped us! My mother explained the reason for the thick round mirrors on the road corners. George kept honking and I thought that was really cool. Still, just in case, I took Mum's hand and closed my eyes...

The trip seemed to go on for ever; at last we saw a few houses on the side of the road, olive trees, vegetable gardens and eventually the big village square appeared with the church and the bar (just outside the church).

We were in 'L'Abadie'. On the next bend up we got to a smaller square and George said- 'Here comes Alex'. Great, I thought, he has a little boy for us to play with. But it was not a little boy and as we stopped at last I didn't dare come out of the car! I saw a big calf or a small horse, but strangely it jumped on George and licked his face! Then Alex leaped into the car as he obviously

was used to doing. He barked like a dog. I didn't want to look scared but I quickly crawled over the car door and hid. George owned a Great Dane.

As we soon learnt, George was renting a house up the hill; it had beautiful views but no car access. We called this house '*la maison d'en haut*' (the high house.) He had secured for Mum and us children another house down hill, with car access, and we naturally called it '*la maison d'en bas*' (the low house). It had a view over the little 'place' where casual *boules* tournaments were sometimes taking place. The big square down near the church, apparently hosted the more serious competitions.

Our house was cute and very basic. If we dared we could share the ground floor with rabbits, neatly kept in big cages, as the owners were breeding them for trading. I was fascinated and soon forgot about the beach. I wanted to hold them all! The ground floor will be for me I thought.

Then the owners of the house gave us a grand tour of our new abode. They were sisters, three old spinsters called *les demoiselles Bolier*. All bunched up together and with a strong local accent (they spoke "*Nicois*" between themselves) they explained that there was no running water in the house but it was ok, they said, as the village fountain was only a few meters below the stone wall bordering the 'Place'. 'The children should really wash at the fountain to save carting the water', they added. Wash outside...at the fountain...Great! This house was going to be all right I thought. I believe my mother felt the same, as she says now the rent fitted her budget perfectly.

Brocs (tall enamelled jugs with narrow necks) were lined up on the balcony near the loo, and the sisters looked at us children to make sure we understood that fetching the water would be our job. I suppose, today, we would think of putting a water tank to collect the rain, but that would mean missing out on all the fun of meeting the other kids at the fountain (providing they were not bullies).

We were all tired, and after eating some pasta that George cooked for us (although "cooking was not his thing" he said) we went to sleep on the floor in our sleeping bags. This trip had been full of excitement, nearly too much for one day, and the feeling of exhilaration was amazing. I woke up the next day with the sounds of birds, cicadas, and roosters (what was that?) After breakfast we decided to go exploring and we climbed the windy gravel track to the 'High House'.



At the 'high house' on the terrace:



The 'low house' with Dolly's car and Mme Claude.



George walking with Alex in the back mountain.

The back of the high house.

The "Nini"

We saw a little horse in the distance, the very one apparently that pulled up the cart with George's belongings a couple of years before, as no car could make it to the top. Walking up, I breathed deeply the unusual and pungent smell of the 'Garrigue' and as the lonely house appeared, I started to run to the top. George showed us around.

At the back of the house was a big terraced garden with wild herbs and lots of fruit trees at the front. This was a hidden garden, isolated and a little hard to find from the road. But George was a writer and felt completely at ease in this environment. He loved the view, extending to the sea as L'Abadie was quite elevated. He said he found this little gem in his travels and couldn't resist settling in, he and Alex. I was still eyeing Alex suspiciously but I soon relaxed when Mum guided my hand to stroke his head. I think Alex accepted me...Just.

The king of the castle

Tucked up the hill in his retreat, I saw George as the king of the castle and his dog, a kind of protective dragon. The strong bond between man and dog was very obvious. He talked a little bit about himself; he had been married about six years before. We all looked up at the picture of his wife on the wall; she had a serious face with thoughtful eyes and strong features. Her hands were delicate and long and she seemed to have natural curls, like me. Her name was Renee. She died of an incurable illness only three years after they were married, George explained.

He talked on but I was not listening anymore as I was dying to explore the grounds. I raced Bernard to the top terrace and we decided that this would be the site for our future camp. Perhaps we could build an Indian tent there, but not today of course. I climbed through the fruit trees and I wished that Tine was with us. Why wasn't she? The excitement was nearly too much to bear.

As we soon found out, the three sisters lived a life of total self-sufficiency. They had "roles". One was the washing lady, with her "*lavoir*" (stone washing pool) at the back of the house; she washed for the villagers (this explained the big expanse of white sheets, flapping in the wind near the olive trees) and she got paid for her services. The second sister looked after the rabbits and a couple of goats. She went off all day to collect feed for them. She also took care of the orchard. The third sister grew the vegetables, looked after the

chooks and most importantly, she cooked. She was the oldest and the wisest. She did most of the talking with us and was a superb cook, as we found out later. The sisters never exchanged roles and lived in total harmony with the seasons and moon cycles. They had copper and leather bands around their wrists and ankles, and this fascinated me. Their skin was sun tanned, deeply marked and leathery too. Their house, on the other side of the little *place* was beautifully cocooned in pergolas and wind breaks, you could hardly see it. I never saw their furniture, as the rooms were so dark and cool and the shutters most of the time closed. The smell inside was a mix of lavender and garlic.

The next week was spent in getting to know the villagers or at least some of them. At first they were a little reserved: we came from the city, so we were outsiders, but they had talked to Mum's friend: that tall stranger up the hill who wrote all day on his type writer and took his big dog for a walk, every evening at sunset. Apparently, the two companions were often seen heading towards the Old Fort, an abandoned stone building (a ruin mostly) perched on the back mountain...

Although the villagers reserved their judgement of the newcomer, they had accepted him and his dog. He was always very polite with everyone and perhaps they thought they had a kind of Ernest Hemingway amongst them. There was an aura of mystery about him. What was he working on? And most importantly what was his relationship with this young family from Lyon? No one knew really... I didn't know either... but it didn't matter. As far as we, children were concerned if Mum was content with her new life with who ever she chose, then...so were we.

The place of “meeting”

A couple of weeks later, we boarded the Darmon again for a trip to Nice. I was going to see my mother's shop, her old flat or at least the building it was in, the little café and restaurant where she and George had met and, very importantly, I would be at the sea side! I wanted to learn to swim and run on the beach with Bernard. Driving down with the old Darmon was much easier than driving up. In fact I think we went down free wheeling, like a cart. It was like being at Luna Park. I don't believe George started the engine once and for a while, he was my hero...Then we got to the flat road and the engine engaged...coughing a little.

The blue Med. came in and out of sight for a few more kilometres and then we slowly drove through the suburbs of Nice. Nice is known as the city of flowers and I understood why: there were flowers everywhere along the *Promenade des Anglais*, as at that time of the year the flower festival was in preparation. From the Promenade we then turned off to the old part of town.

We must have been looking a little strange as people were staring at us in this odd three wheeler vehicle but George didn't pay any attention to that. Then the grown ups decided to have lunch, as lunch was always of primary importance with all the grown ups I knew.

First we headed to the café, the 'place of meeting': a little building where people took their strong coffee before work. Not far from there, stood the tiny and very famous Russian restaurant called "*Chez Magna*". Magna and Igor, the Russian proprietors welcomed Mum and George as old friends. They hugged Bernard. Then, they looked at me with a knowing look, like if they had heard everything about me. Magna bent down to my height, gave me a wet kiss and asked me how I was with the deepest voice and the broadest accent I had ever heard (broader than Maria's). She smelled of stale tobacco and I felt kind of sick. Igor took my hand in his two hands - I liked that better. Then Bernard and I went to the single table and he told me that he and Mum were used to come there and have dinner sometimes, as her shop stayed open late and was just a stroll away. Sitting at the big table, everybody talked to each other... I looked around, to take it all in.

As for the shop it was still there. My mother went to say hello to the neighbours who knew her well. They wanted to see Bernard and meet me. On the way to the seaside, we looked at the Avenue Massena, my mother's old address. This completed in my mind the picture of how and where Mum and Bernard had lived. I was satisfied.

Now, to the beach... We were dying to have a swim. 'Not quite yet' said George as he had a little surprise for me. The others already knew all about it, but they had kept the secret. We drove to the old port, looked at the boats and then George picked one and they all boarded. I was not too keen to follow. They insisted, in fact they 'forced' me to go on board. This was the surprise. Not only George owned a Great Dane and a three wheeler car but he also owned a boat with a little cabin. It was called "*le Nini*". I was overwhelmed. You could eat and sleep on it. It was a little bit like camping except that it bounced in the waves.

We did get to the beach, eventually. Bernard could swim, and I was going to learn. The water was magic, so clear and very salty. The famous ‘Coco Beach’ was covered with lovely rounded, soft pebbles. They were so warm to the touch; they tickled your skin and felt very soothing. Of course my feet were still too soft to run properly on them, but Mum said they would soon get tougher. I needed to walk bare feet a little more, that’s all. We spent the night at one of George’s friend called *Madame Claude*. I liked her; she smelled of eau de cologne and looked like a model. I learnt, in good time, than she and George had been an ‘item’ in the past.

The next day, we visited the boat again as George had some ‘work’ to do on it (probably reading, waiting for a mechanic). He loved his boat nearly as much as he loved his dog I think. Bernard stayed with him, fishing, and my mother and I went to the market. She wanted to buy some fabric to make curtains, bed spreads, lamp shades, sheets. There was no shop at L’Abadie; we bought all the fresh produce from the three sisters and for the rest a van came twice a week straight to our door with the basics, like crusty bread. The driver would blow his horn to call us. So, we never had to go shopping.

We returned home at sun set. The Darmon struggled on its way up this time and George asked all of us to get off at the steepest hill, but the old car still wouldn’t go, so we all pushed and she started again...We jumped back in when reaching the top and got home in one go. It felt like the ‘Low House’ was a home away from home now and we were happy to be back.

Nice had been a complete success and in the evening my mother talked of the friends that she made there. They were not the closest kind like old school friends of course as she was an outsider. As such she met other outsiders like The Russians, and some artists who did not belong to the old Nice establishment or George, a free thinker.

Together, they befriended a film director called Pierre Merat, who was afflicted by a strange disease -I thought-. He was a ‘kleptomaniac’ but so charming that it was hard to get angry with him when things ‘disappeared’, Mum said. Pierre became an important part of our lives as time went by. The ‘uncle from Madagascar’ had also been part of her world. At the time he was still in Cannes and we visited him at some stage.

L’Abadie was going to be our holiday base for many years to come. The rent at the Low House was virtually non-existent in the winter, and it was clear that the *Demoiselles* Bolier enjoyed having us around, spoiling us a little.

The oldest sister sometimes prepared meals for us as a treat. And what a treat that was... Mum used to cook with butter and/or vegetable oil like most people further north did, so the pungent olive oil used by the locals in this part of France was new flavour to me. Instead of a plain sandwich we were sometimes given a '*pain bagna*': specialty of the region. A very crusty *baguette* as long as my arm was filled with goodies like locally cured meat, olives, fresh cheese, tomatoes straight from the vine, basil of course and that olive oil, which soaking through the bread dripped slightly. I always managed to catch the droplets with my tongue so not to waist any of that precious flavour.

The olive oil had been a successful experiment for my taste buds but when I was asked to eat flowers, I balked a little: The yellow shapes presented on my plate took the features of sweet little people with tufts of curly orange hair...But I managed to enjoy the succulent taste of goat cheese, garlic, basil and pine nuts wrapped up in the long petals of the courgette's flowers and fried with breadcrumbs in this new pungent oil. We often sat under the cool pergola of our neighbours and the meals lasted a big part of the afternoon; they were varied and incredibly flavoursome.

Distractions for us children in this outback hamlet were few but we were not often bored. We played *boules* or *billes* (marbles) or created roadways in the gravel, driving our model cars until dark. We also walked with Alex, letting him guide us. The holidays went on quietly, and sometimes to give the old Darmon a rest (and George) we would take the bus to the beach. The trip lasted for hours of course but it was well worth it. Once or twice when we were older we walked to St Andre, a village nearly half way to Nice in the hope of catching a bus that wouldn't take all day to make its way down.

Before returning to Lyon we spent some time at *La Rouviere* as our Aunt Minon was still there. I think it was one of the last times we saw our three little cousins, Roseline, Chouky, and Patricia. (We would see them once more, *Place Bellecour*, after my aunt left *la Rouviere* the first time.) Our house was very cosy now with my mother's efforts to create an atmosphere and decorated with these beautiful provencal fabrics. So before even leaving L'Abadie we were already looking forward to being back, next year possibly.

As for George, he considered the 'high house' as his home base since he travelled the world a great deal of the year for his work. We said good buy and I felt a little teary: we shared our mother with him for a time and it had been well worth it for me. But the unspoken reality was that they both had

their particular mission in life, and when the three of us returned to Lyon, everything went back to 'normal' (as it should be I gathered). Tine was already home waiting for us. I had so much to tell her.

Rosnay

My mother's long term memory is thankfully not affected, and I collect any little pearl of information with gratitude since my memories of those times are somewhat fragmented.

The feelings are still there though. The smells, tactile sensations like stroking Alex for instance and my feet on the warm pebbles or the salt on my body after a swim. Licking my skin and loving that salt. The taste of new food. The pleasure and wonderment of having my mother and brother close to me everyday. The freedom of running to the village 'all by myself' and talking to anyone who would listen to my chatter. Sometimes they'd ask about my father and I would feel very important and special describing that lightening bolt which took his life...in Africa! I think I missed him more in my teens than I did then. I read some of his writings over the years including letters, his thesis, and some of his prepared lectures and I formed an intuitive opinion on how his mind worked. Reflecting on his life, I still sometimes sense him right with me.

I just had water trickling on my hands, washing off the persistent paint residue from an exercise at representing on paper a young galah, right outside my window. This fluffy ball of feathers is balancing on the tallest branch of our skimpy lemon scented gum and oblivious to my stare, he cries for his parents. They are around, of course, and unknowingly have joined their hungry chick into my little painting. We have learnt to treat water with respect thanks to the droughts: a trickle is all we dare use, but of course it is summer after all and, like anyone engaged in this high risk life of farming in

Australia, I am thinking that autumn is bound to bring this well needed, blissful, priceless rain...We couldn't not live on the land without a little optimism. Sam has just arrived on his motorbike with Molly, I take a glimpse at their fun from my high vantage point, ready to join in.



Sam, Richard and Molly



Chapter VIII: Our rituals

At school

Dolly's school (and Minon's) had been the 'Sacred Heart' at the *Point du jour*. She loved her school and after getting a primary school teaching certificate, she taught the small classes there. On the strength of that and also of my mother being a widow, I was given a scholarship to attend the S.H. principal school, rue Boissac, in a little street just across *Place Bellecour*.

This was a perfect location, so close to home. I loved walking through the little wood four times a day, passing the big horse and this strange looking French king dressed as a Roman Emperor...Tine used to take me over and pick me up until I was old enough to do the little trip alone. Bernard was already going to the 'Lycee Ampere', where my father had been teaching. School started at 8 AM, breaking for lunch from 12 till 2PM and finished at 6PM. We always had homework after dinner: '*devoirs*' (written work) and '*lecons*' (oral work).

A few weeks after we returned from Nice, Mum and Maria decided to take a trip to Paris as the major fashion houses were having shows for the new season (*defiles de Haute Couture*, none less). The two women thought they should be up to date with the new fashion trends and as a lot of the new fabrics had not reached Lyon yet, they would bring back samples to show their clients. This was their second business trip to the capital and I believe they thoroughly enjoyed this time away, fancy free and on a mission so to speak.

Autumn is a pretty sight in Lyon, particularly in the *Parc de la Tete d'Or*, (the Golden Head) with its majestic deciduous trees. It's a botanical and zoological park. Bernard and I would play boats on the big lake, and it was fun watching our paper structures find their way to the little river which lead us to the thick woods, and the rose gardens. (I learnt since then that the main international rose garden includes more than 30.000 plants and two other smaller gardens

describe the history of the rose.) I remember puppets for us children and a theatre being built around this very local character called the '*Guignol*'. Those funny little men were always hitting each others with sticks, to the kids' delight of course. As for the zoo I really hated it. It was still the old fashioned type where wild animals were locked up in small cages. The birds, monkeys and bears were particularly tragic to watch. No matter how beautiful the surroundings, those cages were the most depressing sight. (There is now an African reserve created in 2006 for the protection of some endangered wild species to be returned to their home land in good time: a huge improvement.)

Proud of being a girl

When winter arrived we started to think of the 8th of December. This is a very important Festival in Lyon. The "Festival of Light's" tradition dates from 1852. It is a celebration of Mary, the mother of Christ. Mary was my favourite character amongst God's entourage; she made me proud of being a girl when the 'wicked Eve', held responsible for the fall of mankind, had brought shame on women since the beginning of time. 'In Christ there is neither male nor female', this passage in the bible warmed the hearts of the 'all female' residents at my school: students and teachers alike.

When I got a little older, I would cringe in my pew if reminded at chapel that St Paul had taken upon himself to stand in the way of this long awaited elevation of the female gender with his notorious verse: 'I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep silent.' My friends and I were definitely on Jesus' side here (and Mary's and the Saint Women and all our learned teachers). We admired St Paul for bringing Christianity to the world at large, no doubt, but not for his personal and highly debatable views on genders (by today's standard at least).

Mary was our sister and she was looking after us. From Mum's bedroom window, I just had to look up towards the *Fourviere* hill to see her statue standing proud on the Basilica: a symbol of protection for the City. Each year, everyone would light a myriad of candles and ritually place those flickers of light on their window sill. Originally the population strolled through the city with lanterns and chestnuts were being roasted on the side of the road. Now people just look at the beautiful window shops decorated with fantastic or

religious scenes. One year, a particular radio station was broadcasting a choir singing 'Ave Maria'; many households turned the radio on and with all the windows open, the city resounded with the deeply moving voices. This was an emotional moment, and as children we felt very special belonging to this community and under such powerful protection. Lyon, perhaps more than any city in France, seemed to attract huge passions and loyalty from its inhabitants. On that day, everyone would take part of the festivities whether they believed in Mary's Holy Status or not.

Christmas was not quite as dramatic as that. We would try to get to midnight Mass on Christmas Eve. If not, we'd go on Christmas morning after opening our presents. Like in most families in the world, Christmas was centred around the fireplace and, as children, we believed that little Jesus was coming down the chimney in the middle of the night. Everyone's most loved shoes were lined up close to the still burning coal and a present would appear on Christmas morning, beside them. There were always fresh mandarins too but no Christmas tree as my grandfather considered this, a pagan ritual. The custom of leaving a 'whip' in the naughty children shoes had been discontinued over the years, only the threat remained as Bernard and I knew perfectly well.

The *creche* or 'nativity' was also an important part of the celebrations with many little clay figurines (santons) scattered around a cave, patiently expecting their Messiah. Every year a little bit more rock paper would be added (by us children) and the cave at first small and discreet eventually ended up as a monstrous grotto. On Christmas Eve, in the middle of all that brown 'fairy floss' baby Jesus would appear, nicely tucked in his crib. Eventually my mother got rid of the painted cardboard and tissue paper replacing it with a little wooden shelter that she built herself.

On Christmas day we had lunch at my grandfather's house, with the ritual chestnut stuffed turkey and delicious chocolate shaped log as the highlights of the meal.

The cigar

For New Year Eve, there was a big Leclerc family gathering. We met at Tante Simone's as usual (the younger of my father's two sisters). She and her husband, Oncle Gaston, (whom we adored) prepared the '*reveillon*'. The fare

included the most exquisite food we would have eaten all year. Feeling vaguely like some poor relation in this magnificent apartment, I used to think of myself (with delight) as a tragic fairy tale character, standing at the door of this warm cocoon- still on the outside, too shy to rush in- just watching the glittering and warm lights of this seemingly untenable piece of heaven.

My aunt had two women working in the kitchen and everyone was there on this side of the family (no other children). The big living room was beautifully cosy and enveloped in plush ‘wall to wall’ carpet (*moquette*): a very special luxury then, with Persian rugs scattered here and there. At the end of the meal my mother was ritually offered a cigar by my uncle Gaston, and Bernard and I would watch her, fascinated, drawing on that huge cigar. This was her once a year madness. I can’t imagine how she would not have been disgusted by it; perhaps it was a symbolic act of some sort as she was definitely a non- smoker. At the end of the evening we’d take home some delicious ‘*marrons glaces*’ and a present or two.

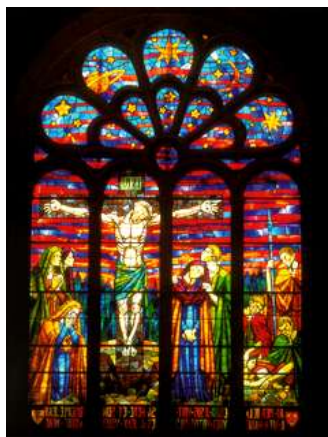
At that time of the year it often snowed in Lyon, and the sky was still black (few stars) when Tine or Mum got me ready for school. Place Bellecour was covered with a huge, crunchy white carpet and looking still so clean when early mornings we crossed to the woods. The trees were depleted of leaves of course and dripped with white threads as soon as the sun came up. I always had fairy tales characters woven into my life and those woods were just the perfect residential site for the witches and fairies that were part of my world. My dreams followed me to school and stayed in my head a little too long, I was often told by the nuns.

‘High tea’ at Bonnemma’s

Every Sunday our mother would take us children for a ritual trip, visiting our grandmother Leclerc: ‘Bonnemma’. Even snow would not stop us. If we winged about it she’d say that we may as well make the most of it and even enjoy the visit as there was no way out. That’s when a child’s imagination becomes handy: finding its own escape in a restricted space. As usual the gatherings were with adults only. Black tea with lemon would be served with delicious *pâtisserie*. This part was good. Then Bernard and I would go to the next room, playing cards or some board game.

And at last when we got sick of that, we'd open a big *armoire* to find the precious children's books dating, as it appeared to me, from the Revolution times! Each little picture was captioned at the bottom with two or three lines of text. Those books had been in the family for a couple of generations, and our father was the last one to have enjoyed them. I couldn't read too well yet but the pictures were awesome! The books were thick and it seemed that we would need a life time of Sundays to get through them.

Occasionally, our one-and-only-cousin-child (on the Leclerc side): Jean Marc Chavanel, would drop in. He was about fifteen years old and had lots more important things to do than hanging around Bonnemamma's stuffy dark rooms, even for the sake of the *pâtisserie*. He was the most dashing fifteen years old that I had ever met, and I wished he would stay and read the captions under the pictures with us but the old apartment was obviously not 'his scene'. Still he would blow in for a while, to the delights and ahs- oohs of his relatives, then blow out again after a quick: "*Ca va les cousins?*" directed to Bernard and me. I tried to picture who could possibly be waiting for him downstairs. Our father's loud cousin, Marie- Therese Smit, together with her twin adult sons and the old aunts had plenty to say on the subject!



Late in the afternoon, we would leave Bonnemamma's apartment to catch the 6PM Mass in the old church of St Nizier or sometimes St Bonaventure. In the summer when the lights were still shining through, my eyes would be drawn to the superb stained glass windows, which had been completely rebuilt by Mum's uncle, Louis Charrat. The Franciscan church (St Bonaventure) had suffered great damage during the last war and repeated explosions had shattered the windows. My great uncle chose to restore the previously dull stained glass with his rich pallet of colours and during the whole service I would follow those stories so simply and beautifully described. In the middle Ages, stained glasses were referred to as "*La Bible des Ignorants*" and it was very appropriate term for me as I couldn't read yet. The

service lasted one hour on the dot and then we'd walk home, sometimes after nightfall.

I guess Mum was a dutiful daughter in law, but if I told her that now, she would be quite surprised as she did not see a duty there but more a fulfilling ritual that brought her closer to my father's memory. She would say the ritual was in great part for Bernard's and my sake. So far our lives had been more involved with Mum's side of the family where she found the support that she needed after my father died.

When I got older, my mother often sent me (and Bernard for a while) on Sunday mornings to visit a priest who had been an old friend of my father: *L'Abbe Laurent*. This was a chore for me as he lived quite a long way from home and, really, I didn't want to go. But he talked about my father and on rare occasions (to encourage my visits) he would take me to a little amusement park around the corner from the presbytery. I told him all my little secrets, except those involving George. Better not confuse my father's best friend, I thought.

Mum never mentioned George to anyone on the Leclerc's side of the family either, not out of deceit but more of concern for their feelings I guess, and perhaps she was unsure of how they would react. Still, the big mystery around his very existence was always puzzling to me.

George was ringing up occasionally from all sort of exotic places and it was exciting to hear his voice on the phone. All the same, the picture of his face had become fainter in my mind as time passed. It's like the summer holidays had been only a dream.

The big doll

Birthdays were low key events in our household: I don't remember cakes and candles or kids parties but Mum would have our favourite sweets brought up from downstairs (generally little *choux* for me) and would treat us to a film or a visit to that dreadful zoo which I only started to hate when I realised how unhappy the poor creatures in it were.

We loved the *Guignol* of course and could watch his mischievous behaviour for hours. Their compulsive fighting wouldn't be considered a very educational entertainment in today's standards but there was usually a good moral to the stories, as my mother kept pointing out, hopeful.

I was going to be 6 years old and this meant a lot to me. I had to change some of my ways of course (the nuns insisted) as in a few months time I would prepare for my 'First Communion' and at this point in time I was far too imperfect to be a good candidate. But there was plenty of time for that I thought, in fact a whole year or an eternity as it felt like then.

My birthday came and I was given amongst other 'minor' presents, a little pair of roller skates by my mother and a huge doll by my grandfather. The doll was more than half my size and could walk alone if you just hold her hand. She also said "*maman*". Tine watched me anxiously with her and then she decided that I was far too young for such responsibility, so she put the doll away in the highest cupboard, and that was that. Still today I cannot remember what ever happened to the doll. Perhaps she eventually came down from the cupboard after I'd lost interest in dolls. As for the roller skates, they changed my life...

I would drag Mum or Tine down to the *Place* to practice. The skates were the old fashioned type; they fitted snugly around my shoes to which they were attached with leather straps and were extendable. I carried them with me all the time, just in case. Roller skating was going to be my favourite way to have fun and exercise for years to come as we were lucky to have long uninterrupted quays along the Saone and Rhone rivers (which served as market place every Sunday mornings) and also a big network of narrow cement paths on *Place Bellecour*.

I have a particularly vivid memory, practicing with my roller skates. One day I was knocked down, pushed by a much older boy and fell flat on my back. Bernard, playing with marbles near by, took off after him and sprinted all around the place, eventually catching the bully. I was delighted and proud not so much that my brother taught the boy a lesson but more that he cared enough to do so for 'my sake'.

A few weeks after my birthday, just when the picture of George had nearly faded away in my mind, he turned up! There he was, standing at the front door with Alex...I was happy to see him, I was happy to see Alex. We all were. George had not been at the apartment before, and we couldn't wait to show him around.

We walked over to Tine's in the kitchen and I think she got the shock of her life! I don't know who she was most suspicious of: the dog or his master.

But Alex behaved and George won her over with many heartfelt compliments on the beautiful cooking smells fleeting around in the kitchen. He was just passing through this first time and he left the next day, as he was due in Nice to meet with his editor. He had sold the three wheeler English vintage car, the Darmon, and owned now a little Rosengar, a German car I believe, short and high (now I think of it as a kind of Noddy's car)

Virey-le- Grand (one shop)

Soon after George's visit, my mother started to make plans for the holidays (summer 1952.) Bonnemme, had invited Bernard and me to spend some time at Virey-le-Grand, in Burgundy. It would be a good way to get to know my grandmother "properly" my mother said, as the Sunday teas at her apartment had not achieved much for me in that regard. I had heard all about my father and was curious to know the house where he grew up. My adult cousins Monique and Nicole also spent time in the Leclerc's house with their husbands and helped my grandmother look after us on that occasion.

Monique had her two first daughters by then, Christine and Claire. Over the years I formed a great attachment to Virey. The little village was totally different from l'Abadie in regard to human and physical geography and general atmosphere. The church bells woke us up in the morning, horses and carts were still seen on the gravel roads. This was real country with strong smells of manure and rich agriculture.

The city of Chalon sur Saone is 15 km from the village on a good flat road and most people would travel there by push bikes, *mobilettes* or the bus. The village had only one general store. The house itself was big and I never managed to explore all the rooms, nooks and crannies spreading over three floors. But the best thing about the property was the park like garden, around 5 acres with a wide and tall cast iron gate to get in from the village main road, fruit trees and box hedges. Morelos and bitter cherries grew well there I recall.

My grandmother told me there were quite a lot of my father's personal effects and paintings still in the house -like scary African masks- as he was storing them there before he died. So it felt like my father was still living within those walls, and his spirit was sensed right through. Even with the years passing by it never left the place for me.

The regional accent in Virey was so broad (rolling the “rs”) that at first we could not understand the paysans. Eventually Bernard and I got to know them well and sometimes we’d spend the all day helping move the cows from home to pastures, and pastures to home at sunset. We’d share a lunch of smoked bacon and bread, but no wine for us...yet. I don’t think I have tasted a better bacon ever since.

We also had fun with our little cousins from Paris. We’d often disappear in the bushes with the farm children to play games. I would borrow a neighbour’s push bike and we’d spend hours exploring the village and the multitude of dirt roads around, which seemed to go nowhere... and everywhere.

Bonnemma and I went for long walks regularly as we used to visit a cousin of hers who lived near by. Those walks are the best memories I have of my grandmother. I would snugg my head in the small of her arm, and take her hand. We talked at last and got to know each other a great deal better. I’m sure I also behaved in a more pleasant manner with her in those one-to-one talks. No cars to distract us, just a few cows on the road and the odd bicycle passing by.

She answered many questions I asked about my father and her face would light up at just mentioning his name. She was such a composed and controlled lady that people might have underestimated the effect that losing her only son had on her life.

I was too young to understand all the family politics, but after my father died she seems to have directed most of her attention towards her daughters who were part of her everyday life. She also had a special affection for Bernard who often dropped in at her apartment in Lyon after school (close by) bringing her shopping and keeping her company. My mother never spent any holidays in Virey. She would just pass through and over the years, I sometimes wondered how different our lives would have been if my father had lived. Mum never complained but I felt for her on those occasions. I knew instinctively that something was not quite the way it should be.

For me the holidays in Virey became a yearly ritual. Bernard soon joined the Scouts and went camping with his group part of the time.



Self with Bernard and Bonnemme in Virey.



At the old fort with Alex

After leaving our grandmother on that summer of 1952, Bernard and I spent the rest of the holidays at L'Abadie. Mum and George had taken a trip just the two of them, to the Island of Djerba, off the Tunisian coast. When they returned we all moved to the High House as they had invited friends from Lyon to stay at the Low House.

Those friends were Chou and Zizon Bernard with their two children: Jacques and Dominique nicknamed Bicottin and La Pougne (Catherine was born later) and I couldn't be happier as the children were our age and we all got on well.

Taking Alex with us we went for long walks. The Old Fort was our main destination: the ruins of a castle that we loved exploring. We imagined all sort of past activities, possibly fighting invaders as the area had often changed hands in the old days. There were steep cliffs and sitting on a piece of cardboard we'd slide all the way down. The terrain was very rough with few farms, and the area was wild, natural and unexploited, except for one abandoned stone quarry (to build the old Fort and walls?) where we loved to play as well.

Over the years we got to know this back country like the inside of our pockets. We would also bring home heaps of pine cones in a big back pack to burn in the wood fire which Mum occasionally used to cook on. We ate blackberries along the road side with our packed picnic (a *pain bagna* if we were lucky) as the trip took all day.

Those two weeks with our friends went incredibly fast and we were sorry to see them leave (tragically, years later, La Pougne died in a road accident: she was only 16 years old). After our friends left, we wanted to play with the neighbouring farm children but for the first two years at least, for some obscure reasons of his own, George wouldn't let us. So for company we had to rely on friends visiting for the day from Nice or staying at the Low House.

The neighbours we liked the most had a chicken farm and when the ban about seeing them was eventually lifted, we would go over and pluck chickens for pocket money. The smell of death was horrific and they had a couple of threatening and very vicious dogs guarding the chooks but we had great fun with the kids: Jacques, Christiane and Gerard Andre.



Village life, a picture by Luc Barbier

They had a tough life working most of the school holidays, and enjoyed the distraction of having us around.

A few village bullies also roamed the area, and I remember being dragged by my hair over several meters at the old fountain. I was determined not to cry and the bullies were disappointed (I never told George and Mum, as I didn't want to lose my well earned freedom).

At the big bottom square, where the church stood, there was an open air cinema and each Saturday, we'd see films like 'Anthony and Cleopatra' 'Sissi Imperatrice' or 'Bonjour Tristesse'. Everyone in the village was there. When I saw 'Cinema Paradiso' years later, the memories of the cinema at L'Abadie came flooding back.

Adjusting

By the end of that summer, I started to realise that George had his own failings like the rest of us. I saw him more as an ordinary man now and the 'king of the castle' image had disappeared in my mind. But that's life. Closeness comes with a price. He obviously was not used to living with children and his dog was his whole world. So, this summer, everyone had to adjust...to Alex. When George lived alone Alex shared his bed, but that wouldn't do anymore my mother said, George was part of a human family now, at least for a time. So Alex would have to sleep in the spare room. To this George conceded, but not to anything else as in every other respect, Alex was the boss.

We, children were ok with that as we thought Alex was a great companion on our walks, but for Mum it was a different matter. Alex had cleverly identified who the real threat to his world was and he bit her on two occasions. There were just scratches but still. The dog was sending her warnings as he was not prepared to take second place in his master's affection without putting on a good fight! He was obviously jealous of her so my mother needed to be patient and keep out of his way, slowly taming him. It worked. They were civil with each other now but nothing more as Mum was definitely not a 'doggy person' and Alex never took to her entirely.

George had a short temper... He would get very angry at times and had unrealistic expectations of children's behaviour. On one occasion -that I can remember- his extraordinary outburst (about a trivial matter) caused the three

of us to leave him and immigrate to the Low House. My mother prized dearly the independence and freedom of movement that her own house provided. She was completely in charge of her life -and ours- but also fair and forgiving in any negotiations that would follow such situation of cold war (mostly short lived).

But, under his tough exterior George was really a 'softy' as we would soon find out. It is clear to me now that, at the time, he was trying to cope the best he could with his share of emotional wounds and we only learnt later of the sad circumstances of the break up with his family (through no fault of his own). Then when he thought he had found his companion for life, he lost her in the most tragic circumstances. His emotional connection to Alex was not hard to understand either when we knew that he and his wife, Renee, had chosen him as a puppy. Alex represented an important part of George's past to which he, perhaps unconsciously, still hung on to.

But he and my mother had found each other now. At first they were like two ships crossing in the night with very different backgrounds and life baggage. When they made the decision to travel life together it was with love no doubt but also good humour, fun and laughter as foundation, my mother tells me today. They both loved Nice and had exciting friends there. Now, in this isolated village and small living space, with two young children and a jealous Great Dane in tow, the challenge was to maintain the level of excitement that had attracted them to each other in the first place. We let time do its work, and we all learnt to adjust a little.

When George drove us around to a nice restaurant or a movie or invited us on his boat, it was easy to love him. But my mother showed us how to love him when we were bored, frustrated or angry as well. When he had his occasional fit of anger, Mum always stood up for us if she thought we were unfairly or irrationally treated. We knew her priorities were hundred per cent with us, children. I feel now that this knowledge gave me strength and emotional stability throughout my entire childhood.

Being isolated the way we were, we learnt to appreciate the little pleasures of reading or playing a game of cards or chess, at night after dinner. George taught us. My hands were so small that I couldn't hold all the cards, so I displayed them on the table and everybody pretended not to see them. They both stimulated our minds with highly animated, sometimes volatile discussions on whatever controversial topic of the time. Mum had strong

views and would argue no end, as far as I was concerned she was always right. The day I didn't think so anymore, I had grown up.

George shares our lives

George started to share our lives when we came back to Lyon that year. He was a charmer with Tine and she accepted both the dog and his master. Of course he was with us only part time, as he still travelled a lot, but his toothbrush hung in the bathroom now.

A writer and a journalist for the Zurich newspaper (*the "Neue Zürcherzeitung"*), he was also a freelancer with other newspapers. Occasionally, he would be sent as Foreign Correspondent in troubled spots like Algeria or Israel, mostly to gather background information regarding the different conflicts. His main topics were politics, current affairs and Naval History of most of the world, starting from WWI, or before when it came to South American politics for instance. He did some remarkable work on the Russian and Chinese Navies amongst others, regarded now as important text books in academic circles, even in Russia (in the fifties he was considered the enemy of Russia and not allowed in the country. Now his work is treated with the utmost respect in Moscow).

We guessed that he had some involvement with Intelligence work over the years, but we never knew much about it and we still don't (I found lately a lovely tribute from some Israeli source hanging on his wall: it represents a little park of hundred trees created and named after him in appreciation for his good work in helping many Jews during WWII).

In Lyon, Mum introduced him to most of her friends and members of the Dulong de Rosnay's clan. I can't remember if she asked us to keep his existence as our secret or if we did it instinctively but I never mentioned him at school. This made things very awkward with my friends, their parents and the nuns. In fact, I would not ask my friends to visit when he was around.

There was still the old stigma of a woman 'living with a man' then and also George had a German accent, as he was a Swiss from the German part. His accent was enough to label him I'm afraid. The war was still fresh in everybody's mind and most people had lost somebody, a friend or a member of their family to the Germans...(The Leclercs particularly).Of course with time, the old wounds healed up somewhat and prejudice faded away, but it

was not this way then. The words “*les Boches*” were still on many lips, referring to the Germans in derogatory terms needless to say.

‘Let the little children come to me’

The year of 1953 was meant to mark my ‘First Communion’ It was a very important event at the age of seven, and the class had to prepare and behave in a manner that would be agreeable to the nuns, the priest and therefore to God (or maybe it was supposed to be the other way around). This is when I had the first ‘reality check’ of my short life.

I wanted so badly to be eligible and it seems that it was not to be. The nuns had given me a fair warning a few months earlier but I had not taken it on board. In fact, not listening properly at chapel or in the classroom had been, apparently, my downfall and I was not presentable to God, not quite yet anyway. Three weeks before the ceremony this is basically what I was being told. I didn’t really understand this reasoning as, I thought, I was always the picture of attentiveness... of course. Condemned without a fair trial, I grumbled to myself.

The ‘Reverend Mother’ (our Headmistress) took me aside and explained that I should really wait another year to qualify more fully. Did I understand the importance of the matter? It was not an order but a recommendation for my soul's sake...The words were firm but kind, and there was no excuse for what followed. She had entrusted me with a letter containing her ‘recommendation’ to give my mother. I buried the letter under my books in my school bag, knowing very well that my mother or Tine wouldn’t see it for a long time and I forgot all about it.

My mother read it eventually and I received a severe talk to from her (and George!) but it was too late: by then I had gone through the important day with flying colours and I had absolutely no doubt that God, from up there, had smiled at me and approved. This was not to be the end of the matter of course, and the school priest told me at confession time that I should repent. But no matter how hard I tried, I could not even *regret* my action, let alone repent.

Then *Mère de Virgile*, our religion teacher, called me to her office. She talked of Satan’s work with graphic words and attempted to introduce fear into my little mind. With no result there either. In fact I thought she looked quite

funny with her arms waving around and her head shaking strangely (now I think that perhaps she was acting out her own fears). Her pointed darts didn't affect me much as I had already learnt during my last two years of schooling that the words of God could take an entirely different meaning, according to the human mouth they came from. Depending on whom we talked to, -wearing the black robe or not- we children would feel uplifted or defeated in our daily lives.

Eventually, I remembered our kind Headmistress. She looked stern and disappointed but never mentioned a word to me. This made me think and reflect...I was surprised at her leniency and a tinge of remorse started to point through in my head. I should apologize to *her* I thought to myself and try harder at *really* listen in the future, so to regain her trust. This story had a happy ending after all and taught me something about honesty: a lesson learnt, no doubt, for my move into the 'Age of Reason'.

A tear of ice

In 1955, an important event took place as we were staying at L'Abadie during the school holiday, as usual. It was an event that would actually change our lives drastically: Alex died. He had to be put down as he was experiencing a lot of pain and we all watched him, helplessly slipping slowly away, until George took the plunge and called the vet to give him the lethal injection.

Bernard and I had grown very fond of Alex and in Lyon I was sometimes given the responsibility of walking him on the Place, even at nightfall. Of course he was the one that was walking *me*. I would try to hang on tight to his leash and often had to run behind him, still holding on the best I could.

One day, I couldn't help but let go and Alex disappeared to the dark woods of the chestnut trees. I thought I had lost him for ever and I felt terrible. The night had fallen and I ran all around *Place Bellecour* calling his name until, feeling exhausted and defeated, I made my way home. I climbed slowly the four flights to the apartment with tears streaming down my face and found Alex right there at the door, his big goofy eyes looking at me like saying "what kept you so long?" and waiting for me to ring the bell. In spite of my frustration I had to hug him in relief.

When Alex reached his prime, George decided that his beautiful, highly bred companion should sire pups. He chose a gorgeous partner for him,

Margot. She was as tall and proud as Alex and the two flirted. But nothing happened. I guess poor Alex had lost the procreation instinct or the know how through too much inbreeding. So, Margot left l' Abadie and we never talked to Alex about fatherhood again.

Some time later, Alex disappeared for days and we had the whole village frantically looking for him until we eventually found him, protecting and licking clean a litter of beautiful pups that he had stolen from their Mum. He would have carried them, one by one, to his hiding place and it took a huge amount of cajoling to eventually persuade him to let go of them! One thing we knew: he certainly was not the father! (Although when I saw the pups again, I thought they had grown to unexpected proportions...or perhaps this was just my vivid imagination).

I had resented the fact that, for the first few years of knowing George, he had been- in my view of course- unreasonably hard with us children. But Alex's death was to be very significant in that regard. George showed a sensitive side to his personality that had been well hidden before.

The next scene is one of those that a child of my age would never forget: sitting on the steps of the High House this tall, imposing man, was in tears. We had just buried Alex in the garden, on the top terrace, and the sorrow of loosing him had crushed George. He looked suddenly so vulnerable and distressed: for me, it was an extraordinary sight. His faithful companion, the last attachment to his past life had just died. I put my arms around his shoulders and he hugged me. Right then, I felt a bond between us that had not existed before.

I pictured in my mind the hero of a fairy tale that I had just read (from Christian Andersen). A little boy had been the object of a magic spell for years and then one day, a tear of ice fell from one of his eyes and his heart warmed up like by magic. George was that little boy...or was it me? From that moment, our lives did change. George moved into my personal world that day. Not really as a father figure, as my grandfather was still my number one, but I understood him better now. And strangely, I don't think he used his disciplinary strap on us ever again.

Rosnay

My brother, Bernard, and I shared the same life experiences as we grew up but did we see them the same way? I don't want to speak for him here and I can only hope that whatever I say about us, as a family, will be also as he remembers. Those early memories in a child's mind are priceless. With old age they fizzle away and I want to catch them when they are still there, tucked away somewhere in my mind. It is hard to relive those early years of our life, sometimes painful.. Dreams help as they can be so incredibly significant: they suggest feelings, sensations, even smells and taste. Perhaps our children (and theirs in turn) will also want to tell their story, one day, in their own way through digital medias, film clips, songs or just the old fashion way as I do.

We are at the beach at the moment, enjoying our holiday shack at Umina on the Central Coast. It's one big room; perfect for two people even four with the recently added extra room in the courtyard where I'm writing now. I'm looking over tall gum trees and jacarandas which are habitat to many coastal parrots, including the bossy cockatoos: a wonderful familiar 'noise' anywhere in Australia.

November 24, 2007: it is Election Day in Australia. We have had John Howard as a conservative Liberal Prime Minister for the last eleven years. I'm looking forward to voting "Greens" today for the first time in my life.

November 25, The 'Sydney Morning Herald' says: "Labor triumph. The verdict of the Australian people has been emphatic; John Howard should have gone last year and made way for Peter

Costello. Work choices were his fatal obsession and climate change his historic oversight”...

It's great to have the elections behind us. The weather is beautiful, the ocean warm and the wild flowers just magnificent. My mother stayed at Rosnay, but we are only a phone call away.



Flora and shack at Umina. Bottom right: Dolly with Angella Raymond at Rosnay

Chapter IX: Growing up in the fifties

Climbach in Alsace



A couple of years later were to bring another important change in my life. At school we had regular medical check ups and we were given amongst others a set of tests or “BCG” to establish our receptivity to lung disease in general and tuberculosis in particular. The medical bus would station outside the school and we, girls, lined up in the street for what seemed hours. Over two years I had tested positive to the BCG and in 1956 (I was ten years old) the school doctor recommended that I should spend some time in healthier climates. At that time Lyon was still surrounded by swamps; with fog and industrial pollution hanging on to the city, particularly in the wintertime (the swamps got cleaned up eventually with great results).

My mother was very troubled at the news, as she had seen her brother suffer from chronic lung disease. She took the doctor’s advice very seriously but how to move the whole family away? This couldn’t be done and she had to agree to let me go. My doctor arranged that for a few months I would go to a “Preventorium” in Alsace. The news came to me as a huge shock as I was not coughing and did not feel sick at all. And the worst part was that I would have to repeat my year at school and therefore loose my friends. Still, on the other hand, this time away could be viewed as a holiday...my mother said. A real adventure... Tine and Bernard said.

The Preventorium was near the town of Colmar. I was so happy not to be sent to a ‘Sanatorium’ as this would have meant that I was, in fact, sick. A Preventorium was acceptable, I was not “diseased”, and I just needed some

fresh air in my lungs. The nuns said I could take this opportunity to write an essay about my experiences and what I saw around me, particularly since Alsace had been returned to France only eleven years before, following German occupation.

Mum had always told me that my father's preferred names for me were Florence or Odile. I loved my name and was so pleased to have escaped the terrible fate of being called 'Odile'...Until I read her story...When I got to Alsace, St Odile's aura was just about everywhere in that province. Her story is perhaps more like a legend. She lived in the VIth century on the shores of the Rhine and was made the Patron Saint of Alsace by the Pope Pius VII a millennium later.

The little girl was born blind and was rejected by her father, the Duke of Alsace. A rough character, the cruel father threatened to kill her but his wife managed to hide the baby which was then sent to an Abbey in Burgundy, run by her mother's sister. Miraculously, Odile recovered her sight at the age of twelve and returned to her father's palace with her brother's help. The Duke, Etichon, was incensed and, in a fit of rage, killed his son. Etichon regretted bitterly his action and Odile feeling compassion for her father, performed her first miracle, which was to bring her brother back to life.

The Duke then recognized his daughter for who she really was: an 'angel of God', and founded the monastic Community of St Odile where she became Abbess and devoted her life to helping the poor. She died in the year 720, but came back to life through her sisters insistent prayers. She then described the beauties of the afterlife and after taking communion, she died again. For good. I loved the story and cried reading it. Perhaps this was a good omen for my stay in Alsace I thought.

The train trip was lonely. I was travelling with a little group of girls whom I had never met before and it felt like I was being sent into exile to a place where, I was told, people might not even speak French, although on French territory.

The other girls didn't understand Alsatian either and whether we liked it or not this fact bonded us together. Why on earth did we have to go to Alsace when so many other nice places in 'real France' would have helped us just as well? To occupy my mind, I thought of Odile and I reread in my mind her beautiful story, three times, four times... until I had extracted every possible emotion out of it.

Then I thought of that tiny village perched high in the heart of the Vosges Mountains where my grandfather was born: "*La Petite Pierre*". I imagined the horse that was to take him away and his courageous escape when he was only about my age! What was the colour of his horse, I wondered? How could I find out? Perhaps there was a purpose to my trip that was not to do with my health only, and as the train was taking me closer to this family connection, to my grandfather's country, I looked up and started to feel a little better.... Alsace had to be 'real' France surely and even if it was not, something at least as good would welcome me, no doubt.

The train took us first to Besancon, in Franche Comte, then Belfort and further north still, to Colmar. From Colmar we were driven to the little village of Climbach. Some women were still wearing the regional costumes with the distinctive huge black bow in their hair. I was puzzled as I could swear I had seen the black bows elsewhere...Then it occurred to me that this funny headgear had been in my grandmother's books! The books must have been relating Alsatian stories, and this made sense considering our history.

The houses passing in front of me were different from what I had ever seen (except in the books). They were white walled with latticed wood, and hams were suspended from the beams. We had heard of the storks on the chimneys but seeing geese on the highway was quite something! Geraniums and carnations grew on every window sill. Flags and ribbons hung on walls and bell-towers, gables, balconies, made the whole place look like a fairy world. Were they real people living there, I wondered? But of course, they had to be when you look at the tragic history of this ill fated land. As my grandfather had been very well aware, those Eastern Territories lived in constant fear of invasion and were often used as the meat in the sandwich between Germany and France.

As for the language, I shouldn't have worried: the Alsatian dialect was only used by members of the staff at the Preventorium, between themselves. As soon as we girls appeared, they spoke in good French to us...A relief.

As it turned out I settled in reasonably well, especially when the staff at the "Prevent" started to take us out for walks into the countryside. A few times during my stay we went to the magnificent "Parc Naturel des Vosges" which stretches towards the Rhine River and the Champagne region. As I look at the map today, I think we would have been very close to '*La Petite Pierre*', 20km from the town of Saverne in the "Bas Rhin" (the fortress where my

ancestor Florent Leingre lived and worked is still there as well as some Leingre and Leclerc's headstones in the nearby cemetery (page 405).



La 'Petite Pierre' in Alsace



Cogny: my grandfather's place in the 'Beaujolais'



L'Abadie, family in front the 'Low house' with my mother's car: the Renault Primaquatre.

The walks we took were disciplined. Highly so in fact. We, children, would form ranks and sing whole heartily marching in rhythm for what seemed to be hours...Was it really me there? I have never forgotten one particular song; the first verse went like this: *“La peinture a l’huile, c’est plus difficile mais c’est bien plus beau que la peinture a l’eau...”* which translates as “Oil painting is more difficult but much more beautiful than watercolour” As I was marching, I thought that I should try one day.

Every afternoon, we were made to have a sleep. I hated that. I could never sleep and got punished for tossing and turning in my bed. Once I was told to take all my sheets and blankets in the freezing corridor, sit on the heap and wait there until the other girls got up, got dressed and passed in front of me, looking very superior. Then I went back into the dormitory and made my bed up again, rushing to catch up with the others. That day I wished that I could just disappear from the face of the earth.

As I learned more about the Alsatian people, I didn’t think they were so very different from anyone in the parts of France that I knew (like Virey) except perhaps in their taste for food and their clothing. At the ‘prevent’ we were served some delicious pates, and very filling tarts. I was introduced to the taste of cinnamon for the first time and it took me a while to get used to it. The smell, even today, brings me always back to Alsace. This was so different from the Lyonnaise cuisine! But I liked it. I thought the food was very earthy especially that beautiful sauerkraut that I loved, piled up high with its display of sausages, bacon and ham.

In the afternoon, we would be served the “kuglof”, or Alsatian tea cake. But one thing I hated was the horrible smell of institution crockery and I can still picture in my mind those stinking plates. This was a very distinctive, sickening smell found in a lot of institutions anywhere in the world as I discovered later.

I spent nearly four months in this little village near Colmar and became friendly with a couple of girls but I particularly liked one member of the staff, Martha. She was young and funny and took me under her wing, so to speak. The girls sharing my compartment in the train back were the same ones as on the way over. But what a difference! We chatted and made fun of everything. We felt much worldlier perhaps and very importantly, we were going home! I did some writing at the ‘prevent’ about my impressions of Alsace. This was the only homework I had to do apart from some reading. I had missed Mum

and Bernard as well as the school routine (strangely) and I really looked forward to being back in my comfort zone.

Cogny is lost

When I got home, some bad news awaited me. My grandfather had asked his children if they would agree to sign off their rights to their property in Cogny as his wife, Jeanette, needed funds to start a business of her own. My mother, Minon and Jean had a meeting about it and decided to abandon their share (which had been their mother's) and do as their father asked. Everything was sold: the house with its dependences, the land, vineyards, winery and all the furniture as well. It was understood that when the new business would be up and running, some share of the profit (if any) would get back to them, in good time. But this was, unfortunately a very bad business decision. Jeanette overcapitalized in her "*Institut de beaute*" as she was very confident that she had bought a gold mine.

I remember the fun I had running into the corridors full of light at the big "*Institut*", with lots of little rooms and specialized staff but... not many clients. There was also a gym, flooded by the light of huge windows. Jeanette didn't have any serious business skills and lost the whole lot, only a couple of years later. Loosing Cogny was a big blow for the family who was very attached to the place especially during my grandmother's life time. My grandfather's new wife had gambled everything he and his family ever possessed (with his blessing of course) and didn't seem to be too concerned. My mother hardly ever talked about this sad state of affairs, and life went on as if nothing happened (as it looked to me of course).

I had to repeat my year at school as anticipated but on the good side, I tested negative to the BCG at the next medical examination. My *redaction* had been well received by my teachers which gave me some credit, but not quite enough to make up for what I had missed. At the end of each year we always had an exam to move up to the next year (quite stressing at this young age).

By now my mother's business was thriving and when I was away she had acquired two new employees. I thought she worked too hard though. Sometimes at the end of the day she was close to complete exhaustion and on one occasion that I can remember, her nerves took over and her whole body

started to shake out of control. I always felt guilty not to be of more help to her or just keep her company after dinner when George was away. So the summer holidays were awaited with anticipation by all, as she then got a well deserved rest. George would take us under his wing for that time, financially anyway. He was very generous and enjoyed making our lives comfortable. He loved his food and treated us to some excellent restaurants.

It was strange, as we could see Mum count every franc during the year but for those holidays, George would spend in one meal the food budget of an entire week in Lyon. Still, we had no complaints. In my teens, I went through a phase of ordering only salads in smart restaurants, and for this *'bon vivant'* it was beyond his comprehension. I think I embarrassed him slightly.

Apart from the food, George started to talk to us a lot about travelling and his work. We were eleven and thirteen years old and were able to have 'proper' conversations with him and measure up (in small ways) to his highly academic mind. There was also a marked difference in his behaviour since Alex died. He was now much more connected to us somehow. Still, I felt more relaxed with him when on holidays, as his living with us in a conservative city such as Lyon was not an open situation, recognized and accepted by all.

In my childhood certain issues were, more often than not, swept under the carpet. Perhaps if I had asked my mother a straight question, I would have got a straight answer but nothing is as simple as that in a child's mind (especially of the fifties). I remember a school friend who had turned against me for some reason referring to George as my mother's "*Boche* boy friend". She did not appear to know about him when we were in good terms, but now she said that she 'had always known', and her parents did too. I was upset but did not tell anyone at home.

As far as I was concerned George was a 'friend of my mother' and I didn't think of him as my 'mother's boy friend'. One day my close friend, Françoise Paquier, pointed this possibility out to me. Well...Perhaps I replied. But what is the difference anyway?

Françoise was the only school friend with whom I talked about George and shared my concerns with, as she was much more 'worldly' than me and I trusted her implicitly. She was one of eight children and had older brothers and sisters, so she knew a thing or two when it came to the affairs of the heart. She told me that, no matter what anyone else said, it was quite natural

for a young woman like my mother to need a companion in life and the two to rely on each other, as partners. He was indeed her partner, even if only on a part time basis, and he loved her and cared for her whether they were married or not. Francoise was a convent girl like me but she didn't let conformity in social or religious matters distract her from what her pragmatic mind (and good heart) was suggesting to her. I felt relieved to be able to talk so openly with her on this issue.

The 'Corsair', the 'Ascona' and the Studio Victorine

Around that time, George had to let go of the High House in l'Abadie, (the owners requested the house back for their own use) and bought a bigger boat which he could use as his personal base. The boat was called "The Corsair", it was thirteen meters long, was made of wood and had a big dark red sail as well as a reasonably powerful motor. A lot of those old wooden boats (often English) were for sale at the time and they were not expensive as they needed constant maintenance and the owners got sick of the work. The "high flyers" in the Riviera society wouldn't touch them as they preferred modern, high tech vessels, hugely expensive too needless to say. George, on the other hand, had always a sentimental attraction for old or even vantage modes of transport, especially boats.

He never wanted anything flash for himself, hardly ever bought clothes or anything fancy but as a paradox, he could be impressed by some demonstration of wealth by others as we noticed a few times and teased him about. One of his friends was a 'millionaire' called Horten and George would quote him for this or that and would feel much honoured to have his company requested when Horten travelled on his huge, vulgar, and extremely expensive vessel. Well, nobody is perfect...We still kept the Low House and shared those three summer months between The Corsair, l'Abadie and Virey (for me). Bernard was often away, camping with the scouts.

In Nice, George and Mum had made friends with a film director: Pierre Merat who hired The Corsair (and the Ascona later) for some of his films.

One particular film that comes to mind included Pascale Petit and Jean Michel Leclair as main actors (*'Une fille pour l'ete'*). He also had George acting minor roles occasionally. I remember once or twice sleeping all night in our newly acquired old Renault, for them to finish their film session at the '*Studio*

de la Victorine’ in Antibes. I think they saw this involvement as a way of making a little money but also reconnect with their old friends.

The Renault was a “Primaquatre”. It was heavy with a convertible roof and belonged to my mother. The roof was kept down in the summer and coming over from Lyon that year had been an exhilarating experience: the wind in my hair was magic. But soon the ‘Corsair’ proved to be too small for all of us plus friends as well as George’s business contacts so he jumped on a good deal that was offered to him and bought 1”Ascona’. The boat was twenty meters long and big enough to be considered as a real home base for him, with plenty of space for a ‘decent’ library.

Celestine moves out

A year later, I was twelve then, we were told by the owner of our apartment Place Bellecour, to vacate the place, as they needed it themselves. They said there was an apartment at the back of the courtyard, which we could have for next to nothing. We didn’t want to leave the district so we went to have a look. The place had been empty for ages and was in very bad repairs. The stairs leading to it were miserable looking and dark but Mum decided to take the apartment on the advice of my grandfather who was ready to do the handiwork himself. It certainly was a challenge but we just loved our *Place Bellecour* and couldn’t bear to move away.

We knew the owners well as they lived in the same front building and I was friendly with their youngest daughter: Christianne Delore. They told us we could stay in this new place as long as we liked with fixed rent, so we moved in. My mother and grandfather got right into it and Bernard and I joined in. We painted and decorated the stairs for a start. My grandfather demolished a big wall between a long corridor and the living room. My mother sanded and waxed the beautiful floor boards through the place and two months later, the apartment was unrecognizable: very homely and warm but of course, small. That, we couldn’t change. Bernard and I had to share a small bedroom now and Tine’s bedroom was not half as good as her old one. She was getting old and felt the cold in that little back room where the central heating (wood and coal) hardly got to.



The 'Corsair' and Dolly on the island of Djerba



On the Corsair with my cousin Pierre Dulong de Rosnay

One day, Tine became very sick and I remember bringing her soups and oranges in her little room, next to the kitchen. Her hair was now snow white, short with soft curls but her face was hardly wrinkled. She was pale though and didn't look her cheerful self at all. I wanted to look after her. When she got back on her feet, she announced that we were old enough Bernard and I to look after ourselves and that she had applied for another position. This was very sad news but not that unexpected under the circumstances.

She went to work for a doctor just across the Saone, not too far from us. We were all in tears when she left, including herself. She had lived a big part of her life looking after our family (17 years all together!), in particular looking after me since I was a baby and I was so disappointed that we couldn't provide her with better living quarters. Still, she was right in a way, at our age we didn't need her as much but gosh, I would miss her...Her leaving was going to be an important turning point in my life and I was more than a little anxious about the changes. Loosing Tine was hard for all of us of course but for Mum, it meant more time cleaning and cooking. She needed our full support and I guess, like many children of my age, I was wrapped up in my little world with my little problems, so Tine's departure had probably the right effect on me. Bernard and I started to do more chores in the house; I think our quarrels about jobs allocation gave my mother more aggravation than it was worth! Still, she tried to be patient and I think it paid off.

At the end, we worked out a reasonably good system of cooperation, not perfect of course. I remember one particular episode where I had put my new skills into cooking a dish of "*endives aux gratin*". Bernard was not too fond of endives and only ate the little 'cheezy bits' at the top so... the dish ended up all over his clothes! I had a short fuse I have to admit (still do).

I had reached puberty as well which can, and often does, create problems for the unaware. A couple of months before Tine left, she had warned me of a GREAT danger... involving boys. From then on, I would have to "stay away" from boys. I didn't quite get her drift and thought that, when going to school, I had to make sure all boys were a fair distance from me, which of course meant a great deal of walking about and around the *Place*...

Girls of my age were not briefed then on what could go wrong at puberty, except having babies...which would happen totally miraculously (that goes without saying.) And of course no one said anything as this sort of talks was taboo at school and pride often stopped the girls talking to anyone at home.

In my case, something was wrong. I felt it but I was not really sure of how much of it was “normal”, so I soldiered on.

One year later... when unusual fatigue started to slow me down, my mother took me to see a specialist who was very understanding if not terribly helpful. All I had to do, he said, was to wait patiently until I had a first baby (Ten years? Fifteen years?) Then I would be cured. So simple. There was only one minute detail, which he seemed to have overlooked: what if I wanted to be a nun, or stay single or not have a child? And, more importantly what if I'd rather not wait that long to feel better? I think that it was too much to ask of the poor man, so we turned again to some homeopathic treatment recommended by my grandfather. No immediate results, but I like to think that it helped in the long term.

Uncle Jean moves in

A few months after Tine left my mother invited her brother, Jean, to stay with us. Jean was very sick and just out of hospital as the doctors thought they could'nt do more for him. Mum, as usual, rose to the occasion. She felt that all he needed was some proper home cooking and a family who'd love him and pamper him. We, children, were delighted to have him with us, as we loved our uncle. He took Tine's ex bedroom and ended up staying with us nearly two years.

Until then Jean had lived across the Saone, in the old part of the City, but he had lost his little flat which was right on the river and had inspired him to write poetically on the history of the area. Sadly, he also had to part from his faithful dog, as he could no longer look after him and take him for the long walks that he needed. The dog, a greyhound, was sent to a family in the country. We also saw a fair bit of my aunt Minon during that time as she was living in Lyon now, after having spent a few years in Paris. She was remarried to a Russian named Constantin whose family had left Russia after the revolution of 1917. The 'White Russians' were in big part aristocrats and a good number settled in France. (Like Igor and Magna in Nice). They were cultured and artistic and spoke a variety of foreign languages. They also were often gamblers. Constantin came out of that mould, but he was a real charmer and had the most interesting conversation, my mother says now.

By then, my aunt was very much taken by the Russian Orthodox Church. I remember lively debates in our household about this ancient religion that was reaching us, unexpectedly, through the back door. Before even hearing of my aunt's new (or altered) beliefs, I had been told that the Orthodoxes were 'our brothers and sisters in faith' as their Church didn't split away from the Roman Catholic's (or was not excommunicated from). Standing in an unbroken connection with the original apostles they regarded themselves as the preservers of the most pure and ancient form of Christianity. (A feature of the Orthodox Church -which appealed to me- was a special emphasis on all human beings 'sharing in the nature of God')

I don't know if Minon ever officially converted to that faith, but she used to spend a great deal of time in Constantin's church who, years earlier had wanted to become a priest himself (until he met my aunt). Minon and Constantin had a son, Pierre. He was a dear boy and, once or twice, he spent some holidays with us on the '*Corsair*'.

Around that time Minon was working in market research (*gallup*) and Dolly would sometimes team up with her for extra income. Together, they took to the road and visited households to present them with questionnaires. Minon was also artistic and used to design and paint cards for the different seasons of the year and mail them out to friends and relatives. This was a period when my mother and her brother and sister became close again.

George was still visiting us, as before, but the little apartment felt overcrowded at times with my uncle there. Fortunately, Jean was such a quiet and gentle man; he didn't take much room at all. But a subject of disagreement with the family and often of conflict was his (perceived?) excessive drinking of red wine (he would have enjoyed our medal winner, Cabernet Sauvignon!) and persistent smoking which, my mother said, was madness in his condition (suicide would be a better word). Tobacco was still not understood as the main villain in respiratory problems (by some). Or perhaps smokers wore blinkers and doctors didn't help much as they often smoked themselves even in the surgery itself.

George had helped my uncle financially in improving his flat on the Saone and although Jean had been grateful, the two men were far too different to become friends. George was extremely protective of my mother and he could be quite harsh with her two siblings. Thankfully, he never stayed around long enough for too much friction to arise. I admired Jean's talent for writing, his

style was flowing and full of poetry, but his physical handicap and his lack of forcefulness deriving a lot from it, stopped him from realizing his dreams in the literary world. I saw a pile of his articles once; I wonder if his children have kept them.

When my aunt eventually left for Paris with Pierre, she simply ‘disappeared’, leaving no forwarding address or phone number. My mother’s protective and sisterly concerns were frustrated but there was not much she could do. Months passed, and she thought the worse until, not able to stand the suspense anymore, she left for Paris and simply waited in Minon’s Church- with no success at first-. Not giving up, she kept coming back, standing at the door and watching people coming in and out, until eventually, her sister turned up! Minon was fine, although a little surprised to see Mum who, relieved, quickly headed back to Lyon.

Minon had a hard life. Constantin, by then, was not to be seen around and she was bringing up our little cousin mostly on her own, the best she could. She drove many hours each day for her work and was prone to car accidents, spending prolonged stays in hospitals. When back on deck, she would help settle her husband’s gambling debts, it seems. No wonder Mum was concerned! But Minon was head strong and independent: she preferred to be left alone in her journey through life.

A new school: ‘La Roseraie’

My mother was also concerned with another health problem of mine: at regular intervals I would get tonsillitis and fever. In that year, I spent a lot of time at home, sick, and I failed the exams to move on to the next class. I didn’t want to repeat my year and my mother suggested that I should sit for the exams at “*La Roseraie*”: the Sacred Heart at the *Point du Jour*, her old school. So we visited the school and I loved it instantly!

It was a country school. The grounds were extensive and beautifully kept. My mother was still remembered, and a couple of old nuns that she had known were still there. I went through the exams and passed easily this time. So at the age of thirteen, I became a weekly boarder. Home was a thirty five minutes bus ride.

I also had to pass some ‘new girl’ acceptance tests, a slow process of social adaptation for me: two paces forward, one backward. But things went

smoothly after I made my first close friend. The academic level in that school was a notch down from 'Rue Boissac' but *La Roseraie* was an 'all round' school, friendly and casual and the nuns very country like. (No one like the legendary *Mère de Virgile* there, thank God!) Out of town there was a peace and tranquillity that reminded me of Climbach, the little village near Colmar.

We spent a lot of time outdoors and the change of air did me a great deal of good for a time. I soon became a 'runner' and was so thrilled to represent my school in state competitions on my second and third year there. Apart from running and gymnastics, inside the high stone walls of *La Roseraie* we usually played basket ball, volley ball or '*ballon prisonnier*' with the nuns. It was a sight to watch them, catching the ball and spiralling above the ground, with their robes blown like black sails and their fluted white headgear twisting - sweat running through it and down their temples!- They looked like they enjoyed themselves and so did we.

My 'first close friend' was called Annie Junick. She and I created a book club, which consisted of writing and illustrating stories. Everything was hush hush, for some reason. The girls in the group would be passing each other countless little secret notes with new ideas for the stories. We all took turns in choosing the characters and illustrations for each book..

Jean XXIII had been elected Pope and we all saw him as a hero! This is when the Catholic Church opened up its gates, cautiously, to the rest of the Christian world, and as a result the school started a program of taking in girls from different denominations and countries (as *stagiaires*). Occasionally, Mass was performed with the appropriate denomination rituals of the student staying at *La Roseraie* then.

This unexpected expression of good will motivated some girls to envisage a career as nun, including me for a while! (George called me '*ma soeur*' until I asked him to leave me alone) It was a romantic notion of course and, if we ever did take the robe, it would be to work in exotic countries, as missionaries for instance, and wearing white from head to toe.

Mass was 'on' every day and, we boarders, were expected to attend each time. It was often still night when we got to the chapel early morning, and of course we had an empty stomach, as this was a prerequisite for taking communion. The smell of incense and the chanting had a sort of bewitching

effect on us (strangely pleasing). We felt weak and dizzy and hallucinated slightly as our stomach rumbled. ‘Spiritual experiences’, some said...

The “*Salut*” (evening song) was on at 5PM, a half hour ritual which came after the lessons and before homework. The last prayers for the day were performed in the dormitory, just before turning off the lights.

We didn't often complain about the food. In fact we were very happy to be served a three-course meal, twice a day. Meals were, are, and always will be an important ritual in France and, sitting around those big refectory tables, food was the highlight of the day for us. The worst dish would have to be the ‘*soupe a l'oseille*’ a very bitter green vegetable and the favourite was always ‘*frites*’ or chips. Around the table, we could speak to each other softly as being loud was quite out of the question. Often the supervisor would read to us and we enjoyed that as we had a say about the choice of books.

At night, after all the lights were turned off, (too early) Annie and I used to love sneaking out to the garden and run along the dark alleys until well out of sight. Once we climbed up the high stone wall to the street, and walked to the ‘*Point du Jour*’. I had told my friend that this village had been my mother’s patch and we wanted to explore a little, find her house even, but the streets were deserted and quite spooky in the dark. We looked at each other: what now? There was nothing to do except walk back to school. We didn’t bother trying again.

Apart from the intentional night excursions I also sleep walked occasionally: I would get up, put my socks on and walk around in a haze until the supervising nun spotted me eventually. She wouldn't wake me up but just guided me back to bed. This happened on the Ascona once; George saw two legs passing in front of his port hole, long after everyone had gone to bed. A sleep walker can negotiate difficult itineraries without a problem as long as he does not wake up suddenly. George and Mum knew that and they just poked their heads out of the skylight to watch me for a while until the pair of legs passed again. I got back to my berth the same way as I had left it.

The Retreat

Once a year, we had ‘the Retreat’. This was a week of silent walks, silent meals and listening to Saints’ stories and lectures about salvation, charity and purity (boys!)... I loved the paraphrasing of the speakers! Nothing was said “matter

of fact” in that last subject. We had to decode the meaning of their words and if things were still unclear, before the next walk, we could interrogate the speaker privately (if we dared). We didn’t mind the Retreat. Well... not too much. It was like diving into icy waters: a shock to the system to start with but surprisingly invigorating at the end. Those few days of spiritual training were compulsory and in spite of our mumbling and complaining, most of us ended up getting something out of it (this is where I learnt to hold mental debates with my ‘other self’).

My favourite subjects were humanities: French, English, and History also Geography and Latin to some extent. I struggled with maths, Spanish and all the science subjects although in primary school, arithmetic was ok. I used to like drawing, reading painters’ biographies and looking at pictures in art books but art was not taught at the school unfortunately.

Religion as a subject interested me too. I saw it as a form of history relating to the evolution of spirituality and the philosophical concepts behind it. Jesus Christ’s life, with such love for humanity was inspiring to say the least, particularly in his time when revenge and retribution were the norm of the day and accepted by the old Law. I also enjoyed reading the life stories of Saints, attempting to understand how their minds ticked. I was puzzled, amazed, and sometimes horrified at their often heroic and painful exit to the next world. One in particular was the Patron Saint of Lyon: St Blandine, martyred for her faith during Roman occupation, she had been sacrificed to wild beasts, and died with great courage in the same amphitheatre where now the Gallo Roman museum stands.

Also, the question of other spiritual beliefs was in my mind. Were we, Roman Catholics, part of an exclusive clan, entitling us only to salvation and eternal fulfilment? Jean XXIII was sending a message that *perhaps* there was a chance for Christians of other denominations as well: “The Kingdom of God has many Mansions”. Indeed. And possibly beyond the Christian world also, I would speculate. This last proposition was a little far fetched in the eyes of the ladies of the convent, and never put me in a good position for the coveted ‘head girl’ status in my class, I’m afraid. “Your mother had filled the position so perfectly in her days”, I was often told. I admired everything that made

Mum remembered so fondly by all, but for me I retained freedom of speech, and that suited me..

From the next year on, I became a day girl again as my scholarship covered only the tuition fees, not the boarding fees which were a heavy burden for Mum. But, all in all, this year boarding proved invaluable for me and gave me an insight into a 'closed in' education system which, no doubt, would have been a lot stricter and harsher in my mother's days. It worked well for her, but for her sister, Minon? I often wondered. Mum said that I was lucky to be part of this wonderful school, which offered so much spare time (really?), and carefree use of its heavenly grounds, as well as some thoughtful counselling for one's mistakes (or 'sins' in the convent's language). She was right no doubt, but all the same, I was happy to be a child of my generation, not hers.

The education system of the fifties/sixties was not yet close to produce a totally happy and fulfilled upbringing of children in private or public schools, but it was slowly moving in the right direction. Women's education particularly had come a long way since Jean- Jacques Rousseau's description of 'Sophie': the ideal, submissive, and totally conditioned companion for his 'Emile' (described in his ground breaking essay on 'Education for Boys' published in 1762).

There is no doubt that women didn't have much of a chance to achieve their intellectual potentials in his days, but Rousseau had a gentle approach to education, (Steiner like perhaps) directed to both sexes. As it turned out, it was sadly wasted in his private life as, amazingly, he and his wife relinquished their five children to 'The Nation' (at birth) for fear of contaminating them with a privileged and elitist upbringing...

Rousseau had not assumed fatherhood and perhaps this was the real weak point in his argument, but I always felt amazed at the originality of his ideas, his honesty and his powerful mind and talents on every subject: as a philosopher of course but also a musician and scientist. I also admired his strength and resilience in face of the stuck up and highly conditioned society of the day. As a teacher and tutor, his education principles stemmed from the belief that a child is born *naturally good*: a concept that ruffled feathers in his Christian entourage, - refreshingly in my view-, as it contradicted the doctrine of an 'original sin'.



Jean



Celestine(Tine) Chapuis 1946



Minon



Oil painting of Charles Charrat by Louis Charrat. (91cm x 73cm) 1945.

Rosnay

Last night, we went to see "The Messiah" from Handel at the Music Conservatorium in Orange. My mother had a great night. Concerts and musical events are the best distractions for her: She can just sit there and not worry about her "poor English" as she puts it...We later talked of her mother's family again and her school days, the educational system of her time and the pressure and responsibilities she felt on her shoulders as the oldest child of the family. On her walls are a couple of paintings of Louis Charrat and some drawings and prints as well but there are many more for us to enjoy, displayed and put together in a beautiful book by Gabriel Perouse.

This link with the past is important to Mum as her friends and most of her relatives live on the other side of the world. Many have died of course but she says she only needs to look at the pictures around her to move back in time amongst those familiar faces. Some days, her mind is still like a book when it comes to the distant past. She closes her eyes and tries to fill the blanks as my questions prompt her to dig deeper.

On the previous page is a painting of her grandfather which I especially like as the colours and composition are just beautiful. Looking at it, I feel I am right there in the room with him. The aging patriarch is pictured with a book and globe: two important symbols for him as he travelled in his imagination only. But he kept a very scholastic and open-minded outlook towards the world around him, I was always told. I like to think that my love for books comes from him.

Chapter X: Bonnemamma dies

The blood basin

Apparently, I was to have my tonsils out anyway. A nightmare. Although my doctor had postponed the decision for an operation, it became clear that I was not growing out of the condition and ‘had to’ go through this ordeal. We didn’t have private medical cover, so I was booked in at the general public hospital and it was decided that I would get only a ‘local’ and was assured that it was no big deal, ‘similar to having a tooth pulled out’.

The doctor got me to hold the blood basin under the chin, (to take my mind of the procedure he said!) and off he ‘proceeded’, waving the torture instruments in front of my eyes. In shock and excruciating pain, I was then made to go down two flights of stairs to my ward. A children’s ward? No such luck. I was lumped up with women of all ages, a lot dying from terminal illnesses.

So, through the next week, I got entertained with descriptions of many possible ways to commit suicide...At the end of the week, I still had some fever due to a post operative infection, but I begged my doctor to let me go home...which he did. I must say that having my tonsils removed, (even in this stressful way) not only helped but got rid of the chronic infection all together. When I returned home, my mother had me comfortably tucked in, in her own bed, to recover completely, and I enjoyed greatly those few days of being pampered by her and her employees.

Her bedroom was the biggest room of the flat and that’s where they all worked. She had now three employees, (Christine, Marie Jeanne and Monique) each one with her own work table and at least two sewing machines; one big table was the “cutting” table.

I loved listening to them, chatting and laughing as their hands moved quickly on those pretty fabrics. The living room next door was where the fittings took place as it had been in our previous apartment. My uncle was still with us then. He left a couple of months later. He had lived in St Tropez

before and now decided to move there again as the South of France, with its warmer climate would do him good, he said. This time he was offered to stay at a Baroness' house –a friend from way back - to supervise the garden work on her estate. Some time later, Jean and a friend of his became partners in an antique business, still in the town of St Tropez.

In the summer of 1959, I spent my last holidays in Virey as my grandmother, Bonnemamma, died a few months later in the nursing home where she had been briefly admitted. She fell, broke her hip, and gently passed away. Her daughters were with her at the time and I wished I could have said goodbye. Perhaps my aunts didn't think the bedside of a dying grandmother was a place for someone of my age...

For me, the only thing I saw then was that Bonnemamma had left us and as a direct result I was not part of Virey anymore. An important slice of my childhood had just slipped away.

Bonnemamma and I had, at last, become close over the years and I knew that, strangely, I would miss the 'tea ceremony' at her apartment which, as a young child, I used to just tolerate. Most importantly, I would miss our long talks as we walked along Virey's dirt roads. But, apparently, things couldn't keep going as before and the family decided that my father's house had to be sold (to them). Nicole's husband who was a barrister/solicitor had arranged for a valuation of the property and its content by a friend of his.

As a result, we ended up being bought out by our clever cousin (in law), my Aunt Simone and cousin Monique. The transaction was 'walk in- walk out' and before we knew it, a little sum of money had been deposited in our piggybanks. No objections were expected from my mother who was struggling to make ends meet and had no money to object with anyway.

I don't know if it was just a coincidence but it felt like George took a much higher profile in our lives from then on. A door had been slammed shut and another was now opening wide.

On 'Ascona'

On the following holidays we visited my uncle Jean in St Tropez: he had a healthy tan and looked cheerful, it was a pleasure to see.



Left with Christine Ponderonx at Virey. Right: with my beautiful cousin, Monique, and her second daughter: Claire Ponderonx. Center: George, Bonnemama and Monique. Below: in L'Abadie and the 'Ascona' with Dolly



He thanked us many times for coming to see him; I think he did miss us. St Tropez harbour is known as one of the safest harbour in the area and this is why it was a favourite destination for George, to bring his boats to. As he was always extremely nervous when Bernard and I were on board, he would listen constantly to the weather forecast to find the perfect window of opportunity before moving on to the next harbour. (Still it is true that the Med. can me treacherous). Each day he would scrutinize the horizons and announce: "*Il y a trop de moutons aujourd'hui*" (too many white caps breaking like sheep's backs in the distance).

The arrangements with the harbour master were very loose and easy (a far cry from what it is today). George would often go and see him with a bottle of whisky or some cigarettes and this would pay for our stay. St Tropez used to be a quiet little fishing village and was discovered by boat people having to shelter from nasty weather, including the painter Paul Signac in the late 19th century.

Signac built a house there and had artists, writers and painters like Matisse visiting him. In the early 1900's the village became a centre for bohemian life style. I was ten years old when the film "And God created woman" with Brigitte Bardot in 1956 came out. (The actress eventually devoted her life to animal causes and became a kind of recluse as she said she preferred the company of animals to that of humans).

I have fond memories of St Tropez with its interesting mix of artists but it didn't take long for the not so artistic 'Rich and Beautiful' to discover and invade this little place from all over Europe, in hordes. We have to hope that the grass will grow again, if they ever leave. George's favourite harbours to keep his boat in during the winter were Antibes or Golfe Juan and since he didn't have a house of his own, he reported all his homely care to his floating vessel.

He had a big library on board and when one year he found that rats had chewed on most of his books through the winter, he decided to ask a local man (homeless at the time) to live on board: Monsieur Montorsier. This man was quite a character, full of stories, and although we knew he drank like a fish we were told we could trust him.

One day, from L'Abadie, we saw a little picture of the Ascona in the local papers and we anxiously read the news: "Getting home at midnight Monsieur Montorsier fell from the *passerelle* of the "Ascona" into very cold water; he

made a huge fuss and was taken to hospital. He did hit his head but came out of it ok”. Of course the tongues wagged about why he couldn’t walk straight across to the boat in the first place. Montorsier was watching the boat but who would watch Montorsier?

As it turned out he had learnt his lesson. He was good company and put us to work Bernard and me: sanding and varnishing the woodwork. My mother cooked simple meals in the galley, and they were always very much appreciated by Montorsier, who said he never had such ‘gourmet’ food in his whole life. When alone all he ate was over ripe cheese, which he insisted had to be walking on its own before being consumed!

George had ‘work contacts’ that visited him regularly, sometimes just dropping in unexpectedly. One day, Montorsier announced the arrival of an American General who George and my mother entertained, and when he was just leaving, in came an ex General of the Japanese army (interesting timing...). The two men ended up conversing in a civilised manner, a little confused at first. They talked about the war where they were of course on opposite sides. I think Montorsier couldn’t quite figure us out.

‘The man of the Iron Mask’: Louis XIV’s twin brother?

There was one destination that we were particularly fond of, not far from Cannes: the two Islands of Lerins⁶. Every year, we’d go there, on the Island

⁶ . *The other Lerins Island was called St Honorat. There was a ferry from Cannes to Ste Marguerite and people would come for picnics but at night they had all gone as the two places were (still are I believe) strictly National Parks (foret dominicale)*

Those islands are full of history and legends, starting as a Roman town in the first century BC. In more recent times the unlucky character “The man of the Iron mask” was imprisoned on the site and later immortalised on paper by the writer Alexandre Dumas. The identity of the man behind the mask has never been discovered but it was thought to be Louis XIV’s twin brother. St Honoratius founded a monastery in the year 410. The story goes that he performed many miracles, some to please his sister Ste Marguerite on the near by island.(a cherry tree would blossom every month of the year to assure her of

of Ste Marguerite, and tie up the boat at the jetty for days. One year a custom boat spotted us and performed a routine check of the boat (this seemed to worry George as he had been known trafficking tobacco in his youth). The five “*douaniers*” (custom officers) were a little embarrassed to board the vessel but at the end they proved to be very nice guys.

As my mother had mentioned that she loved ‘*bouillabaisse*’ (fish dish) the officers then offered to go fishing for us with their fast boat. They not only caught the fish but they also cooked it in their own galley, then brought the dishes to the Ascona! As they were about to leave, Mum insisted on having them join us and take part in the feast. They were so thankful to eat the fish they caught and cooked! It seems they had never been asked to share a meal on any yacht they visited before.

We loved walking through the island early mornings as we had the whole place to ourselves! There were nearly two hundred hectares of wooded park on Ste Marguerite alone with Mediterranean vegetation and fauna but also different types of tall eucalyptus producing beautifully scented flowers. The water around the islands was emerald colour and crystal clear, and a swim after walking through Ste Marguerite was our morning ritual.

The old Fort there is now used as a youth centre whose members, when they are not sailing or diving, are dedicated to its restoration. The ‘Museum of the Sea’, installed in the arched rooms of Roman origin, contains archaeological vestiges: Greek, Arabic and Roman: all found on the islands.

There was something special about this place situated at the cross road of very different worlds. History and mysticism seemed to come out of the ground itself.

Honoratius well being as the tree could be seen across the channe. Over time, the islands were the object of killings and pillages by Saracens and pirates; their soils made precious by the blood of Christian martyrs. The Castle Fort was built in the 11th century and became the monastery, now occupied by a Cistercian order with thirty monks. The monks still make their own wine and liqueurs (very special brews I’m told). They also produce an excellent honey based on the flowers of Eucalytus trees.

Corsica

We also visited Corsica⁷ and I have to admire George for the courage he showed in taking us there considering that he was always terrified that we might fall overboard or be the victims of a terrible storm, which could possibly take us to Africa. Or being stranded in some awful place with no food or water. Not mentioning the risk of pirate attacks! So Corsica was quite an achievement and I am sure he wouldn't have slept for nights before the trip: soul searching about the wisdom of taking such huge risks with our innocent lives.

In retrospect I think he was suffering from a lack of confidence stemming from the fact that he knew too well how very impractical he was and, if something went wrong, he couldn't fix it! His books and his writings were his

²*How Corsica became French.*

This beautiful island has not always been French. When under Genoan rules the Corsican, Pascal Paoli, worked on a constitution (with English support) for an independent Corsica, in 1755. It was a beautiful dream but Genoa, then, ceded the Island to France "as a loan" at the treaty of Versailles. France contributed twenty thousand 'livres' (pounds) in compensation for 'expenses'.

According to the treaty, Genoa kept the right to reimburse the king of France at any time and regain ownership of the island, but it never did. In other words Genoa wanted to keep sovereignty over Corsica but was not in a position to maintain it. In 1789, an act of "annexation" from France was declared and Corsica remained French until today (apart from a brief period from 1794 to 1796 when St Gilbert Elliot ruled an Anglo Corsican kingdom as viceroy).

The Island was the birthplace of Napoleon Bonaparte: this ambitious Corsican was born into small nobility. At that time, Corsican nobles were offered the ability to gain French titles if they could prove their genealogy. In an attempt to do so Napoleon's parents travelled to court in France and like many other Corsican nobles then, sent their son to school there. Obtaining a government bursary, Napoleon was accepted into Brienne School (a few kms from the village of Rosnay)

world; he loved the sea in a romantic way with his heart, and with his mind as a passionate of naval history. He was very fond of his boat as it was his home but he didn't call himself a sailor or a mechanic, not even a handy man, in fact quite the opposite...He was always full of praise and admiration for the lucky people who could "fix" things.

So, when the weather forecast was just perfect we undertook the trip and very luckily the forecast, for once, was just right! We took turns at the helm throughout the night and had the most beautiful trip across. This was my first visit to the island, but Bernard knew it from a previous excursion with the Scouts. We passed l'Île Rousse, early morning as the sun projected the loveliest light on the pink rocks. One hour later we reached Calvi. Seen from the water this town was a beautiful sight, with its three immense bastions topped by a crest of ochre buildings, sharply defined against a hazy backdrop of mountains.

The town started off as a fishing village below the Citadelle built by a Corsican noble and became a stronghold overlooking the port. It is said that a fleet commanded by Nelson had launched an attack on the town in which he lost an eye. Nelson left saying he wished never to see the place again.

Setting foot on the island we started to explore. The first thing we did was to climb up to a vault of the Madonna de Assera perched on the heights of the town. From that beautiful view point we could see Calvi's bay and the mountains of Balagna, with its olive groves. We then followed the coastline to Porto and reached the site of the Calanches, pink rock masses of a beautiful orange colour with high cliffs crumbling into the dark blue sea. The town of Calvi itself is now slightly kitsch with the souvenir shops and glamorous marina.

The trip back to Antibes was as easy as the trip over. This has had been our best adventure so far and I have no doubt that George gained confidence with this trip, as he started to entertain us with the weirdest dreams of "sailing" around the world: Australia, Antarctica and South America were mentioned more than once!

A touch of vanity

My mother and George often had friends from Lyon spending time on board and I was thrilled when a year or two later it was agreed that my friend

Francoise Paquier would come and stay. She could be described as an extrovert and as I was rather the opposite, we seemed to complement each other. We talked endlessly about our dreams, plans and expectations from life... We both were fifteen years old but she looked older, wearing make up and dyeing her hair which, in those days, was daring to say the least for a convent girl of that age! I guess it was not much different for me: I had curly hair and used to 'waste time' (Mother dixit) ironing out the curls, evidently to get the sleek Francoise Hardy or Joan Baez' look.

Francoise (Paquier) had a boy friend back in Lyon and she was ready to take on the whole world... Her life was obviously exciting to her but I didn't feel quite ready to follow. In fact I was simply reluctant to grow up. For me, my childhood was still an unfinished business and great to hang on to. I had seen the struggle of adulthood and difficult relationships through my uncle and aunt's lives, and wanted to keep my world just as it was for as long as possible.

That year, our friend Bicotin joined us as well from Lyon and we formed a little group with a couple of people of similar ages from Cannes, including two gorgeous sisters, nieces of a solicitor friend of George called Raphaelis. Bernard started to date the younger sister. Another friend that comes to mind was a Parisian called Florence Palmieri. Her parents had a boat stationed next to ours and she and I stayed friends for years to come. Jacques and Christiane Andre from L'Abadie also came to stay. So much had happened since the time, as very young children, we were not allowed to play with them! It seems they had plans for the future that, as we soon learned, didn't include working on the chicken farm anymore.

It was 1961 and family, friendships, jazz, and cinema were all that mattered to me that summer. Jazz festivals around Cannes were plenty and the most famous one was in Juan Les Pins. Internationally known jazz musicians would play for free as charity concerts and I think the festival is still operating these days, every summer. We would try to get there through the back gates (crashing). It was not very different from what people would do today. If we could get through, it was really cool.

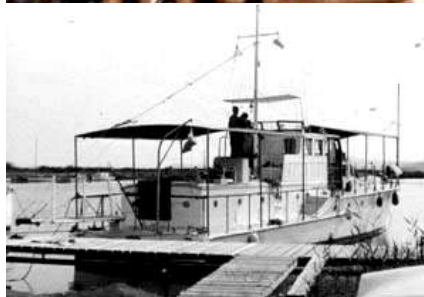
Bernard was only seventeen years old but already a good musician himself. Starting of in primary school, he learnt the '*pipo*' (recorder) and moved on to the clarinet, piano, guitar and saxophone, his major instrument. His world

was jazz and through him and his friends, I learned to appreciate this style of music.

Any '*variete*' music was frowned upon by his group and rightly so in my view (then). Bernard was practicing a lot and as we shared the same room, I remember his way of learning: he would put a 33 cm vinyl of a musician he liked and stopped it to play every now then. Improvisation was the big thing and he enjoyed it. I really liked it when occasionally he would ask me for some feed back or my opinion on his playing (*right: self with my mother: 1964*).

George never undertook long cruises with kids other than Bernard and me on board, for fear of the responsibility (even Corsica had been the only one so far) but we still had fun hopping from one little harbor to another, swimming and diving around the Islands, (like the Porquerolles or Lerins Islands) always playing cards or chess at night, or fishing at sunset (a very unrewarding activity for me). My mother was wonderful in the galley and even when sea sick, she never complained. We, kids were programmed to wash up, help with the shopping and of course hose the boat in the evenings with soft water if we had been out.

Three months break from school was a long time. It was like living two lives for us. In October, George would disappear doing 'his thing' and Mum went back to sewing. The same old routine. I guess this huge summer holiday suited the tourist industry and the teachers but I think it was a bad idea as we had to cram an awful lot of study during the rest of the year, and the final exams were putting everyone in a pressure cooker.



*On 'Ascona' with Francoise Paquier, Jacques Bernard (Bicottin) and my cousin Jean Philippe Duchez.
Below with Bernard and Dolly.*



Christmas is approaching and the Matriarch of the family (dear Dolly) has her nativity scene out, and so have I. Years ago, she made all the figurines herself out of white clay and dressed them in the fashion of the bible period; it presides always in the same place... close to the glittering tree, which is perhaps a 'pagan prop' as my grandfather would say, but fun for kids.

Over the years I have got used to Christmas in the heat, even in the company of snakes as this is brown snakes territory in this part of Australia. We don't mind them at all in the bush as they are 'at home' but around the house, it's a different story. They have the venom to kill an adult particularly if the snakes are nesting or startled in which case they could easily strike repeatedly. Don't panic they say...Take your time to get help! Easier said than done... We set a trap at the back door of our house where the water tank stands, near the clothes line, and there is one caught every second day. I do not have a snake phobia (anymore) but the following story shook us all, even Richard who always had a soft spot for reptiles: the new year brought my poor mother this unwelcome visitor.

A beautiful brown snake had taken residence in her kitchen, nicely coiled around the toaster...She rang us in panic and we quickly made our way to her house: Richard armed with a spade and a garden weedier. The snake was still there, oblivious to the danger it was in. Soon it was cornered, and taken cautiously outside.

My mother, although agitated, seemed to be alright until an hour later, when she rang to say that she was hurting 'all over'. We thought maybe we missed the puncture marks on her hands as before we arrived she had sprayed the poor creature with a can of Mortein, and perhaps she'd been bitten after all.

I rushed over but it was only a delayed shock which kind of paralysed her, poor woman. I supported her to the car and drove back home. During dinner that night she soon forgot her ordeal, or so we thought... She wouldn't come back to her house without a thorough check for a possible mate coiled up in some other less obvious place. Fair enough. We proceeded to check every nook and cranny but she was still too anxious to settle down and she slept the night with us, in the guest room.

This intrusion was a chance in a million as her house must be the most snake proof that I know. We think she left the door open when she came out to pick flowers. The next day she was OK to resume our story.



Chapter XI: George and Dolly

Meister in Zurich

A cautious man

1962 was a full year for me and, as I enjoyed being with kids, I had decided to fit as much baby sitting as I possibly could to earn my own money. I was able to buy books, coffees, go to see films and save a little. Bernard made his pocket money in playing gigs. He was a member of the Hot Club of Lyon, a very well regarded venue for jazz players and listeners; I would join him there sometimes although we didn't always share the same friends.

The following year, my brother started a three year commerce degree in Lyon and by then, George and my mother were making 'engagement' noises. But as a very cautious man, George didn't want to leap without looking...The 'looking' had lasted eleven years already! The question now was how long would the leaping go for? We can't rush those things of course...

He had old fashioned views on marriage: The day they would be walking down the aisle, he George, would have to be in a 'stable' job: preferably a 9 till 5 position. My mother would stop working naturally and they'd be together every day and night. What a change of life style! All very scary. A boat as a 'family home' wouldn't do at all of course, and his 9 till 5 job couldn't possibly be in France as he never had a work permit in this country. He didn't need it as he was always being paid in foreign currency, working for worldly masters or for himself.

He thought of himself as 'a Citizen of the World', but he was a Swiss National, so the stable job would have to be in Switzerland. The obstacles were serious...No doubt. In the meantime, his work commitments were still very absorbing and Mum, who cherished her independence, was not ready to commit to 'retirement' in Switzerland or elsewhere...Not just yet anyway...

Another half year passed, and I met my first boy friend at one of Francoise's parties. His name was Gerard Prud'homme but everyone called him 'Sacha'. We often met at the library of the 'American Club', which was a great place for me to spend a couple of hours studying with a friendly helper. It was cosy and warm when winter was raging outside. Occasionally, we would have lunch next door at the 'Self', meeting Bernard and Mum there. We also enjoyed two other budget restaurants; '*Le coq hardi*' and '*La poule timide*'. Those places were facing each other fiercely across the road and we'd alternate our patronage to be fair.

On the weekend, Sacha and I walked up and down the '*Rue de La Re*', stopping occasionally for a cup of coffee with a friend or two. Our relationship was uncomplicated and quite innocent by today's standard. We both had a love of the cinema and would see every new movie that came out. (I particularly recall the obscure Avant Garde film that we both loved: '*L'annee derniere a Marienbad*' -Last year at Marienbad-.) Sacha was studying commerce and had plans to make a career in 'high finance', -what ever that meant- (Could high finance be a goal in its own? I still had to learn...).

For me, I enjoyed art and writing. I often thought that creating fictional characters, and following them in their day to day lives within the accepted facts and figures of history, would be a creative way of presenting dry history to children. But I didn't think of either those subjects as a career path mainly because, as I saw it, there was no money in it and I felt the need to support myself financially sooner than later. Another interest of mine was in the field of the Law as I saw many people (women like my mother and aunt) face inequality before the law, particularly if they had little money to fight for their rights.

My friend Sacha and I parted after a year and a half. The break up had been an impulsive whim from my part, which I regretted later or at least the way it happened. Sacha had a very charismatic and popular personality and didn't expect such an abrupt exit to a relationship which, he thought, had been comfortable on both sides. I was slowly learning the politics of the heart, as this break up didn't quite follow the dating (or undating) protocol, I will admit. Eventually, we did have a heart to heart talk and we both agreed that our feelings for each other didn't quite extend to ever lasting love. We gave it another try for a while then broke up *properly*. Still our friendship remained.

In the next couple of months I started to date someone from another group: Jean Denis, a cousin of my old school friend, Perrine Bois. Both her parents and Jean's had a property in the Beaujolais not far from Cogny, and our Sundays were often spent there with Perrine's boy friend, also a friend of Jean. We rode push bikes and had picnics in the bush. I crashed my bike once in a very spectacular fashion and nearly passed under the wheels of a vehicle coming from the other side. Jean carried me back to the house. I certainly learnt my lesson that day, as I had been riding with my hands behind my head the way I used to do in Virey-le-Grand, except the roads there were flat and virtually deserted!

As it turned out, Perrine's grandparents knew mine and we went to see the old house in Cogny which had been sold. I discovered that I also knew the new owners, as their daughter had been at school with Perrine and me, rue Boissac, a few years back. She was a little mouse of a girl, quite witty and called Regine Kanatchizie. She joined our group.

Jean was tall and good-looking and I was proud to be seen with him but, as I soon found out during our long walks in the country side, we had very little to say to each other. We spaced out the walks. Eventually Perrine, Regine and I decided to get more serious with our studies and stopped the country escapades all together.

A discreet wedding.

The course I had enrolled for was called "*Capacite en Droit*", a two year foundation course in Law, with the aim of working in Legal Aid and giving me the option to move on to a Law degree, if I so wanted. The lecture theatres, at the Law faculty in Lyon, were terribly overcrowded and the lectures hard to follow as we often had to stand outside.

A common friend of Francoise and I did the course with me which helped, as we could exchange notes, but at the end of the first year a great majority of the class failed (eighty per cent) including my friend and me. I had failed the commercial subjects and, at this stage, I was not prepared to repeat this first year. I started to look around for other course options.

But through that year, when I had my head in books, things had started to move on the home front: George and my mother took the plunge and got married. George had found a 'proper' job as publicity officer in a big firm, in

Zurich. He also rented an apartment there and when Mum was still in Lyon, he started to look around for possible friends for her in Zurich (Nothing should be left to chance, as George was a highly organised man!) He was quite selective: they had to be speaking French of course, and be outgoing, as he knew how important my mother's social life was for her and he wanted to put all the odds on his side.

Bernard and I were very happy to see them move closer together on a full time basis but the question was: would the relationship survive this huge change in life style for both of them? The chances were not good in that respect.

Renee, George's first wife

When George was twenty two years old, he had a major breakup with his family. His father, Oscar Meister, had a woollen mill/factory in Zurich and insisted that his only son should follow in his footsteps. George started at the bottom of the ladder (like sweeping floors) and painfully, moved up little by little. He never liked the type of work.

All he really wanted was to follow his passion for academic pursuits, and he spent all his spare time in libraries, cramming in knowledge on his favourite topics. He had a remarkable memory and a great talent for processing the information on hand. The day he couldn't take the factory work anymore, he announced his resignation from the firm, to his parents' dismay.

Shortly after he left the factory, a large sum of money went missing from their house and George was questioned. He denied having anything to do with this sad state of affairs but the cloud of suspicion (perceived or real I don't know) still remained. This was the last straw; George left his parents' house and left Zurich. Sadly, the damage was never repaired during his father's lifetime.

Then he met Renee, they fell in love and were married in 1946. The couple moved on to the town of Ascona in South Switzerland (*Ticino*) where Renee's family lived. George, one day, took me into his confidence and talked about his first wife and his life then.

Apparently Renee's family was well regarded in their hometown and enjoyed a very comfortable lifestyle. Her mother was an interesting woman. She had been a disciple of Carl Jung. She believed in significance of dreams

and their interpretation, which she seemed to be very good at doing herself. They had spiritual séances at her parents' house as Renee was, like her mother, very much involved in parapsychology and spiritualism. George was still very young and quite intrigued by the all scene. As a mere spectator, he tried to keep an open mind and enjoyed the challenge to his rational mind with this 'unproven' science.

Rene's family was good to him, they embraced him totally as one of their own and I'm sure, they would have supported him in the start of his career. But tragically, two years later, Renee was diagnosed with a degenerative muscle disease. She slowly wasted away and George told me of his pain and sense of helplessness at seeing her losing weight and strength every day a little more. He recalled their constant visits to doctors in search of a cure. She was so slight that he would take her out of her wheelchair and just carry her up the stairs to visit the specialists. She confided in him about her dream to one day give birth to a daughter if only she could beat the crippling advance of the illness. George was always there for her but the good will and positive attitude didn't seem enough to save her. Rene died a year after being diagnosed.

She had expressed the wish to have George as the main beneficiary of her will, as she was well off in her own right. George declined the offer and shortly after the funerals, moved to Nice with the only thing he wanted to take with him: their young dog, Alex. He wanted to make a clean break and he joined a friend in a business venture to establish himself financially. He still kept on with his writings as a free lance journalist, and eventually built up a reputation for accuracy and honesty in his assessment of political and historical events.

His father, Oscar Meister, died fairly young of a heart attack, he was 65 years old. He had been a strong figure in his family and George still spoke of him with admiration and respect in spite of everything that happened. Oscar Meister loved music and played the piano with determination and discipline. In practicing Chopin, George recalled, every time his father made the slightest mistake the piece was started again from the beginning...time and time over... Eventually the exercise ended up in a crescendo of impatience and frustration. He was a perfectionist not only in the way he played the piano but also as he run the family firm, and I believe his son took after him in the

pursuit of 'exactitude' in his own field: when it came to finding the right facts and figures in his work.

After his father died, his mother went through cupboards, boxes of papers etc... And found the misplaced bundle of bank notes! More than twenty years after the event took place...! She approached George to apologise but the damage was done and George could not bring himself to pretend that all was fine. Not yet anyway.

Now, he and Dolly were planning to move onto Mrs Meister's territory. They asked me to join them there and I agreed as I was happy at the opportunity to learn a new language, and help Mum settling in. We were to leave for Zurich during the month of October 1964 and my mother started to pack and say her good byes to family and friends. It was understood that we would keep the Place Bellecour flat as long as needed for Bernard as he was still doing his commerce degree.

I knew that the transition to this new life would be hard for my mother. She would have to find a purpose to her life, in a new country and without speaking the local language...She was forty five years old. But as I soon found out, she had thought everything through. She was to embark on a worthy mission: her plan was to bring George and his mother back together.

"The Ramblas"

George had generously offered me a Spanish course in Barcelona for the month of July. It was a Swiss organised course by the firm "Migros". The students were billeted in families and the lectures went for 5 or 6 hours each day. I quite liked the Spanish language, but at school I had great difficulties with the pronunciation so I jumped on the opportunity.

Knowing how well organized George was, I have to wonder now whether this course had not been a "scheme" for me to make some Swiss friends before my move to Zurich! This possibility didn't occur to me then but if it was a scheme, it certainly worked...

I got to know a couple of Swiss Nationals, particularly a law student from Zurich called Frederic Winter (*pictured here with me at a history tour*). He had a little Beatle car and on week ends, with a couple of others, we would go exploring the coast and back country. "His" family was far more interesting than mine and it was not hard as I was left alone most of the time with a

housekeeper who brought me meals in my small dark room and spoke only a few words to me... So much for the 'Spanish family experience' advertised in the Migros brochure!



At the beginning of the course, we were given a sketchy account of the history of Barcelona, from the time of the Muslim Moore occupation. The Moors had been pushed back from France by Charles Martel in 732 down to Catalonia: North and North West of Barcelona. An interesting fact was that Catalan's closest linguistic relative today is the langue d'Oc, the old language of the South of France. In closer times to us now, Barcelona became the last stronghold of the Republicans who fought Franco's forces in Spain. The city eventually fell as well and the Spanish civil war ended a few months later.

This last part was of special interest to me as George had mentioned to us that, as an adolescent of 16 or 17 years old, he volunteered to go over to Spain and fight on Franco's side...opposing the 'extreme communist ideology', as he saw it. It's amazing that his parents let him go, but they did. Of course George was not a man (or a boy then) good at taking no for an answer, even at this early age.

The dictatorial policies of General Franco would impose isolation on Spain for two decades but, at the time that I was there, partly due to the internal stability in place, a major progress in term of social welfare and economical growth was taking place. From then, Barcelona kept on developing. (By the end of the 20th century, it had become one of the most dynamic and attractive cities of Europe, in my view)

We loved walking the *Ramblas*, large avenues lined up with markets of all kinds, until late at night as it was the coolest time to walk around. That July month was in a heat wave and after 'school' we only thought of going to the beach for a quick dip. Dinner was never before ten pm. and, occasionally, I was invited to share a family meal at one of the students' with the benefit of some Spanish conversation. After dinner there was a choice of Flamenco clubs or we'd go back to the Ramblas, for more free entertainment. In August, Fred and some other students went on to Madrid to start the second

month of the course and I took the train back to Golfe Juan where the “Ascona” was based.

Then, the real holidays started for me. Golfe Juan was only two km from Juan Les Pins and Bernard and I would walk at night to a jazz club as my brother knew the band playing: the ‘Jean Christian Michel band’. Their style was very much of the 1923 era. The Trombonist of the group called Charlie Llorens became a friend that I fondly remember still today, together with a female vocalist who had the most beautiful soul voice. Charlie lived in Marseilles where he studied dentistry. (He was a “pied noir”. Not referring to the colour of his feet but to the black boots of French Nationals back from Algeria after the war). He later came to visit me in Lyon, before my big move to Zurich.

My old friend Sacha also knew I was leaving the country and came to say good bye. Although we had broken up a few months before, the good buys were very emotional. I had good friends and although I didn't realize it then, Lyon would always have a big place in my psyche. Still I never questioned my decision to move to Zurich as I saw the move as an opportunity not to be missed.

Switzerland

The apartment in Zurich was at Toblerstrasse, and the first thing my mother and I did was to repaint every room, dark green for the living areas, to tone down the glare. The change would favour the settling of our own Karma, we felt. It was on the first floor of a four storey building. The apartment had only one bedroom so I was given the little independent ‘maid's quarter’, downstairs. I painted it also and felt lucky.

Mrs. Meister's house was fairly close by and I sensed that my mother was going to enjoy the challenge of winning her over and bring mother and son back together. George had lived with the psychological scars of his ordeal for more than twenty years and there was still a blockage in his mind and heart but I think deep down, in spite of everything, he was keen to find a way back into his mother's life. With just a push in the right direction, this would be achievable, my mother thought. She was right but it took a little time and patience.

Flora Meister was a very dignified woman and she reminded me of Bonnemamma, my grandmother Leclerc. In fact they even looked alike! She adored Mum, spoke French and moved into our lives discreetly but totally. George had let go of the resentment and all that was left now was a kind of sadness for lost times. He became the attentive son that I am sure he had always been and Mrs Meister got at last her boy back (hardly a boy anymore...)

As for me, I immediately enrolled for a German course at the Goethe Institute and looked for a job. I was 19 years old. I had a fascination for beautiful hand made books (still do) and thick, roughly made paper so I also enrolled in a book binding course. I learned a fair bit but was disappointed about the way they were restoring old books, using the guillotine to chop the edges off some precious old pages!

I had not seen my Swiss friend, Fred Winter, since the Barcelona times and one day, out of the blue, he appeared at our front door and asked me to be his date for a student ball (his graduation ball I believe). As usual, my mother sewed a very appropriate evening dress for the occasion. That night, Fred introduced me to his student friends; all spoke French and were very welcoming. We danced until morning and had the best time. Before driving me home, he led me to some favourite sites of his; we walked towards the sun rise and finally took breakfast on the Limmat Quay along the River. What a great introduction to this beautiful city I thought.

Fred asked me to join him on regular lectures at his university, on philosophy in general, with talks on French modern Philosophers, in particular. He was twenty five years old and an excellent student, even with a course given in French. The age difference between us was not that huge really, but at the time it seemed a lot to me. I found Fred very mature and eager to start his professional life, which promised to be straight forward and bright, and no doubt, I was impressed by his intellectual abilities and good looks. As far as I could see, he had his future all mapped out in front of him. Mine was still a blur. We were seeing a lot of each other, but I think he knew that I felt vulnerable, and we both agreed to space out the dates. Fred said that every Wednesday night he kept an open house at his parents' cellar with fondue and dancing and left it to me to drop in or not. No pressure. I thought he had a great depth of feelings and I was so lucky to know him, as a friend.

A search for meaning

I used to feel a little uneasy in reading and analysing authors like Jean Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir or even Albert Camus, considering their ‘negative’ outlook on life, as I perceived it. But in this Zurich lecture theatre, I felt somehow more motivated than ever before in getting a little deeper into those people’s views in life. After spending all my formative years in a convent school, I enjoyed this new search for meaning in a totally secular environment.

The key words in Sartre’s philosophy are ‘atheistic Existentialism’: Man will be what he makes of himself. He is not only responsible for himself, but for all men and therefore the planet (I liked that). “Atheistic” means of course that there is no room for God in Sartre’s philosophy, as the concept of God would mean self-contradiction: “Nothing can save Man from himself”. For me, I didn’t see contradiction here as I always believed that “God is in all and all is in God.”

I reflected on a touching episode that happened to me in my early childhood. I had two fishes in an aquarium. I loved them to bits and I watched them, my nose pushed flat against the glass. I watched their every move and funny behaviour. One day, one got sick and I cried seeing the poor creature struggling for survival. Then I witnessed the most amazing rescue mission. The healthy fish helped his mate to rise to the surface, propelling him from behind, and then gently holding him up not just once but again and again. ‘Nothing can save Man from himself’...Except Man that is.

My reading on Existentialism opened another window for me and brought me back in a round about way to the works of the French Jesuit Philosopher and Scientist: Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. I always had a great deal of respect and empathy for what I saw as his struggle to reconcile the Christian dogma with his academic and inquisitive mind (particularly in regard to evolution theories). In his search for answers, he became fascinated with the possibilities for humankind, which he saw as- I quote- “Heading for an exiting convergence of systems, an Omega Point where the consciousness of it will lead mankind to a new state of peace and planetary unit. The age of Nations is passed. The task before us now, if we would not perish, is to build the Earth.”

Those theories were paving the way for the “Gaea hypothesis”, by James Lovelock which opened further possibilities “For just our human body is composed of billions of cells working together as a single living being, so are the billions of life forms on Earth working together as a super organism” and: “When working together for the benefit of the ecosystem as a whole, we blend in, to co create and become dynamically one at the heart and mind of Gaea (the earth) and beyond”. ‘ The belief in God had been well anchored in my consciousness during my entire childhood and it was still holding firm for me through keeping an open mind on the way this creative energy had evolved amongst other cultures, and spiritual beliefs also on how mankind should use it today for the good of all and the universe.

‘La Boutique Orientale’

When the course came to an end, I concentrated on finding some work and I soon did. The work offered was in a shop called “La Boutique Orientale” owned by two Swiss French women; they were dealing in antique Oriental carpets, pottery, furniture and jewellery. I enjoyed learning about those hand made everyday objects particularly the beautifully crafted furniture.

I tried to practice my few words of German on the customers, but they wanted to be nice and spoke back to me in French! I was making no progress at all in the local dialect and High German was not used in everyday conversation. Given the choice, Zurich people would prefer to practice their French.

Socially I started to know a few more people, thanks to Fred’s fondue parties, and I made one girl friend: Arianne Lacoste, a Swiss French. She had short cropped black hair and a fringe that reminded me of the singer Mireille Matthieu. Ariane was studying natural medicine and was aiming at opening a health shop. Through her I also met another Swiss Roman: Alain Roulier. A good friend (and aspiring engineer), he called himself a “*monsieur de compagnie*”, and became a favourite in our family during his time in Zurich.

In the meantime my mother found herself a job as well in interior decorating: orders came to her through a decorating house within the “Jelmoli” (a department store) and she started sewing again, things like lampshades, cushions and curtains but at a much slower pace. It was a lonely work, as she sewed at home, alone. She missed the warmth and

companionship that she had enjoyed with her little group of employees and clients (more like friends) in Lyon.

She had been a lot on her own lately, as George and I were working through the day. I remember our heart to heart talks then. She spoke of her difficulties to adapt to her new life...Did she do the right thing? She wondered. Although her work was lonely she was glad to have it for her own financial independence. As for George, I don't think he was very happy at all in this new job as a publicity officer! (One day he came home outraged about the new slogan: "put a tiger in your fuel tank!") I'm not sure how long he kept this utterly boring position, but it was not very long.

Eventually, he and my mother decided to let go of L'Abadie (which we had kept for fifteen years), as they bought an old stone house to restore in Vira, not far from Ascona, (their boat had been called after this town). It was on the Lago Maggiore and only six km from the Italian border.

Vira: a micro climate

Vira was the first house they ever owned. It was small, like a doll's house, and they added one floor, which from the terrace upstairs gave them the most beautiful views over the lake and mountains behind. The trip down to Vira was short so they (we) commuted often. Lago Maggiore was then (probably still today) a beautiful lake to swim in with very clean water and small pebble beaches. This region of the Ticino had a great micro climate, creating a kind of tropical world, the colour of nature so deep. It rained a lot.

When George cracked... (That is the day he couldn't stand his job anymore) he returned to his old routine: writing books and articles, travelling, plus the other non official activities, which filled his professional life again. He came back to life, so to speak, and Mum enjoyed having him at home again and in the best of mood.

She liked George's friends and they all quickly took to her. I recollect a few names now: Jean and Gisele Constantin, Jimmy and Marlise Kade, Yo and Ruddy Burnett, The Blums, Nelly and Ernst Beyerler, Georges' cousin: Ricky Brown, his wife and two old school friends: Freddy Weber and his wife, Suzy and Freddy Ott. This was the core.



Views from the house in Vira and the town of Ascona



The women would meet in town for a leisurely cup of coffee and a little window shopping (*leche vitrine*) during the week: a new concept for my mother who never used to go shopping, except for absolute necessities.

After the initial angst caused by the move, she was better able to control her life, balancing out the leisure time with the amount of work that she was prepared to take. Vira was also a project that she and George enjoyed tackling together. By then, I knew that their relationship was meant to last.

Toblerstrasse

In the garden of the Toblerstrasse building, we often met a very friendly woman who didn't seem quite like the other residents. We soon learnt that she had lost her husband nine years previously and was bringing up her two sons on her own: Peter and Arthur.

I think they were all a little intrigued by us moving in, and one day, Arthur called in and asked me to help with some French homework. He was nearly one year younger than me and just finishing school. I don't believe he had ever been to France but his accent in French was soft, and his turn of phrase well thought through.

Peter was two years older; he had a love of the theatre and quite an extravert personality. Like me, he enjoyed reading. Arthur was a little bit more reserved but not shy at all, and I thought for someone so young, he seemed very sure of himself. Well in his skin *"bien dans sa peau"* as my mother always said of people who appeared strong mentally and comfortable with their own make up. They both had a great love for life and big dreams. As I was settling in and needed to establish a sense of belonging, their friendship meant a great deal to me. George and my mother enjoyed their company too.

The other women at Toblerstrasse were from a different mould and very enthusiastic "House Fraus". As they could hear the vacuum cleaners going in the building, my mother made sure hers would go each day at the length of time required by convention, and she read a book if there was no need for vacuuming. Peter and Arthur laughed at that story. Of course for someone like Jean Paul Sartre this would probably be considered a distasteful display of "bad faith" or 'pretend behaviour' from my mother's part: not assuming responsibility for being different...It probably was, but no one cared: fitting in was her aim (and mine) in this new city.



Bernard and Karin's wedding in Frankfurt, in the Gursbing's garden.



With George and Mum Dinner at my brother's place with Karin, Arthur, Bernard, Mum



Apart from being obsessive cleaners and busy bodies, the ladies we met on the stairs were good people and always very charming with us, also eager to speak French, if they could. Of course we soon realized that we, newcomers, provided them with endless subjects of gossip (we expected that).

In Lyon, Bernard kept going with his commerce degree and by then, he had fallen in love with his future wife: Karin Gurshing. Karin was teaching French at the Lyon University (as teacher in residence). She was from Frankfurt and spoke French fluently as her grandmother was French, born near Agen, and had married her German husband before the war. Bernard tells me now that Karin had a very positive influence over him (card games with dubious characters at Place Bellecour 4, ceased, I believe).

He had completed his degree by then, and soon they were expecting their first baby. My mother made Karin's wedding dress: a very beautiful and simple design. I was very fond of my sister-in-law, she had great style and the sweetest nature (still has).

But in Zurich, I still felt like a fish out of water, battling to learn German. The Swiss dialect sounded very different and harsh and as it was "non written", I could not make much sense of it. Perhaps I was just too old to learn phonetically only. Arthur helped me to fit in and we started dating, often heading to that little jazz club in town, as we both enjoyed the same type of music. This was to be the beginning of a close relationship between us that went on and off (when apart) for years to come. Arthur eventually embarked on a course in Lausanne at the 'Ecole Hoteliere'. We were still very young, and both had plans for the future which involved travels and study, but it was invariably great to get back together, when we did.

Arthur taught me to love his city, taking me to all the spots that he enjoyed as a child. Sometimes we'd make a foursome with Peter and, his then girl friend, Doris. At the next holidays, Arthur came to stay on George's boat in the South of France. We enjoyed the occasional game of *petanque* and the beautiful little restaurants on the Med. as Arthur, like George, loved good food. We visited St Tropez, Gassin, Golfe Juan. At about that time, Peter started drama studies in Vienne, aiming at becoming a stage actor.

At the end 1965, my grandfather fell sick and was diagnosed with a cancer of the colon. He had been active and working until the day of his 80th birthday. An operation was recommended and when he came out of the anaesthetic, we thought he would be fine but a couple of days later he died in

hospital, on the 23d of January 1966. The church was packed on the day of his funerals and although I knew he had enjoyed a good and long life, I couldn't stop the tears streaming down my face. I looked at Jeanette, his wife, she was only sixty years old and I had to feel sorry for her right then. She went on to live in Paris, where she came from originally and soon remarried. We never saw her again.

Rosnay

Lately our lives have got busier with the farm. In other words, I haven't written in this book for months, but I am not too concerned about the delay as I have a great deal of Mum's memories now committed to paper.

Dolly had enjoyed the process of searching her mind, and I, of writing down her thoughts, but I have noticed lately that some events and names of the past, which have been clear to her before, are now getting muddled in her mind. They are only little things but other signs are obvious too: I have requested from the 'community care' centre to lend us a DVD related to 'vascular dementia'.

Naming a disease is the first step in organizing against it. Of course the age criteria has fuzzy margins but if the mini strokes that she suffers from persist, we will see a progressive degeneration and loss of nerve cells in those portions of the brain cortex that are associated with memory, learning and judgement and also a decrease in 'acetylcholine' (the chemical used by those cells to transmit messages).

We will cross this road when we get to it and 'if' we get to it.

On the next page, I included a little gallery of Mum's olden days' street shots as I found in George's cigar boxes quite a few pictures of her walking in the city. Taking good photos then was a lot more complicated than today, in the digital age. So,

professional photographers would catch people in the streets, sometimes quite unaware.



Street shots of Dolly (right: with Bonnemme in Lyon and below with George)

Chapter XII. 1968: Paris

A year or so after moving to Zurich, I enrolled at the University of Frankfurt for a course in German language and literature. I had a little nephew by then: Jean Charles. He was a sweet boy, about one year old. Bernard was doing his military service in Angoulême and Karin was teaching. So it was agreed that Jean Charles would stay in Zurich and Frankfurt with his respective grandparents for a while. George and I arranged to travel one way with him. George had of course never changed a nappy in his entire life, and I wasn't that much more experienced, but together we managed.

I will always remember his pride in showing off his step grandson during this trip. We stopped in restaurants and everyone was admiring this little boy with blond curls sitting very straight on his high chair. As far as George was concerned, 'Carli boy' couldn't do anything wrong (not that he did of course). What a change from the severe man that I first encountered 14 years earlier!

Karin's father, Johannes Gurshing was dying, suffering from the effects of a stroke but luckily, he was able to see Jean Charles before he died. I think holding his first grand child would have meant a lot to him. He had been a well-respected surgeon during the war and what I saw of him gave me the strong feeling that he was a kind man, very distinguished. He still practiced medicine not long before he died.

I was then staying outside Frankfurt, as an 'au pair' with a young family, looking after two little children during the day and travelling to the University in the afternoon. On weekends I saw Jean Charles at the Gurshings and I got to know a couple of their friends like Karl Peter Hanser Strecker (I loved the name) and Michael Gross. I particularly liked Karl Peter who was studying Law, specializing in music plagiarism.



Karin, with Jean Charles,



Bernard, with Patrick



Self In Frankfurt: photo experim



'The tree of man' by K.P.H.S.

He and Michael met regularly with Karin's two sisters: Feli, and Claudia in a jazz club in the City where I sometimes joined them. The club was filled with people, music and smoke. It was not the dialect (mild in Frankfurt) that stopped me understand the language now, but more the length of the words! People there didn't usually talk about the weather like the English, or the food and politics like the French... In Germany the conversations were mostly on the meaning of life, psychology and philosophy. Not that I found anything wrong with those topics, quite the contrary. Karl Peter particularly was good company; he was a photographer and often looked for inspiration in the country. He liked tricky superimposition of subjects which he accompanied with clever poetry, in German.

I also associated with some French people from the German course as I started to feel a little stressed with the intensity of my relationships both in the family I was living with and even with my new friends. The French group was quite mad compared to the German's. I guess they were younger too, more bohemian and care free. One of the students was driving us in an old 500 Fiat that constantly needed a push to get anywhere. Quite often, I would hitch hike back to 'my family' as they lived across a thick woods with no bus connections, late at night. Scary stuff when I think back.

Overall, the whole experience in Frankfurt had been exciting: getting to know my nephew better, experiencing new food, the German culture, nature (awesome around Frankfurt), and the people in general, which after a few months spent amongst them, I would no longer associate (only) with the last war horror stories (described particularly by my father's family, who of course, originated from the long suffering and torn apart province of Alsace).

Back in Zurich, the following year, I was again working at the *Boutique Orientale* and I found the job easier. The two women running the shop were real characters, both divorced; they enjoyed greatly their buying trips all over Asia. They talked to me about a possible partnership some day, perhaps it was a pie in the sky, but it got me thinking. They said English was the most commonly spoken language in the business world, particularly in Asia.

I had focused so intensely on German and even Spanish previously that I had nearly forgotten any English I had learned at school. Arthur spoke the language fluently. He also spoke Italian as his mother's family was from the north of Italy. His talent for languages, added to a candid nature and engaging

mannerism, made me think that he would make a great ambassador for Switzerland! As it turned out he became one, in a way, but through the hospitality industry.

Going across the channel was of course just a hop and I planned to pack my suitcase again and pay our friends, the English, a visit. In the meantime I would evaluate the language skills that I had already acquired and try to make good use of them, finding a suitable job and saving money for my time in England.

I couldn't speak the Zurich dialect and interpreted the words I heard in High German, but I found that those Regional dialects (although rarely 'pretty') have great historical value and reflect the popular culture and tradition of the area in a strict territorial boundary. Switzerland has also three official languages (or four, if one includes *'the Grison'*) and to top it all, an international language: English, -as it is relatively simple grammatically and to the point with modern business terms-. All those means of communication in a *pot pourri* of cultures most amazingly work in Switzerland and do not appear to interfere with 'National identity'.

To practice my newly acquired knowledge of written German I took a break from the *Orientale boutique* and worked as a clerk in a pharmaceutical company called "Comprapharm AG". It involved type writing letters and general office work and gave me some administrative experience, but it was uninspiring work. I stayed there for a few months, all along planning my move to England.

Across the channel

After investigating a suitable English course in London and writing to the faculty for details of enrolment, I eventually took myself over and advertised in the newspaper for an 'au pair' job.

I was twenty and half years old. English had been a good written subject for me at school and I felt quite disappointed when realising that, in fact, I really didn't speak or understand it at all! My aim was to sit for 'The Lower Cambridge Examinations' so, I had a fair bit of work ahead of me to get to standard. George and my mother came to visit me very early on and even met the family I was going to work for, who lived in Finchley road, Hampstead Heath. I thought I was too old to be chaperoned in England but

Mum and George only stayed long enough to treat me to a couple of special nights, particularly to a ballet: we saw Margot Fountain and Nureyev dance at Convent Garden. I enjoyed it of course but my mother was particularly enthralled by the remarkable performance of the two. I didn't realize then that this would be the last time I would be able to watch perform "in flesh" those amazing dancers.

The family I was staying with were a little bohemian in their life style. They had no children but two beautiful hunting dogs. The husband, James, had a separate life of his own and slept on the coach in the office, I soon realised. His Hungarian wife, Anna, was the business manager of an artist Illusionist, as he called himself, who had 'graduated' in magic: I never knew you could actually *learn* to read people's minds... I imagined it was more like a sixth sense that some people possessed or that they were just clever at lucky guesses. He assured me that it was neither but a totally legitimate science, related to psychology and the art of suggestion. His name was Simon.

My job was simple really: I was asked to walk the dogs in the beautiful Hampstead Park, twice a day. A dream job... Anna was a very pleasant woman aged about thirty, blond and delicate. She had a sophistication that her husband, James, seemed to be lacking. He enjoyed going to football games and drinking with the boys at the pub for hours on end afterwards. Even with my untrained ears I could detect, his broad cockney accent.

Anna spoke with a slight Hungarian accent and great poise. I wished I had known James better but we never talked much. He kept away from Anna and also from me as, with time, I became his wife's friend and confidante. The reasons they were together escaped me, but this was none of my business of course. At first I thought Anna had an affair with the young and charismatic Simon. But no, she appeared amused at the sight of all the girls flocking around him and didn't seem to care. On the week end, she often took me to watch Simon's shows, sometimes until early morning. This 'illusionist' never tired of his tricks and after a long night performing on stage we'd have breakfast in a café down town, where he would start again...He entertained the staff by reading their minds and often, as a result, the boss would tear off the breakfast bill.

I watched, a little intrigued, but I couldn't help feeling uneasy if I happened to be sitting next to him. His stare was persistent and he seemed to be looking right through me. I tried to block out every thought but, of course,

the more I did the more they crowded in. Simon would smile as if he could read my mind like an open book and seemed to be amused. Why was he smiling? Perhaps I suffered from a touch of paranoia.

I didn't make many friends at the English course. The foreign students were in no way as entertaining as those in Frankfurt, and I started to be a little slack at attending lectures. The only English friend I had was a youth next door called Nigel, but even then, the communication between us was very poor. One person I could understand and feel close to was Anna. She spoke slowly, never impatient and soon after I settled in, she started to accompany me and the dogs to the park. I loved those long walks in the misty light of the early mornings and also at sunset. We would go, whether rain or shine.

I arrived in London, slim, wearing mini skirts and high boots in the fashion of the day, but soon this wouldn't do anymore as I started to blow out like a balloon! The food didn't agree with me or the air...or something. I starved myself with little result. This situation can lead to a lonely feeling as I also thought people didn't understand me "on purpose". Then, one day, I got a phone call from my friend in Marseilles, Charlie Llorens: he and his jazz group had just arrived in London, planning to give gigs all over the city. What great timing I thought.

Their arrival marked a critical turning point in my mental state. I also realised, at last, that starving myself was the wrong approach to solving my weight problem, and I asked Anna to help me source out fresh and seasonal fruit and vegetables in London (not an easy task in those days). I never touched anything deep fried in pig fat anymore (hard to avoid if you ate out) and stopped drinking alcohol... I was also happier knowing that Charlie and his group lived near by, and that I could see them whenever I liked. They played in all those interesting jazz venues that I had been too shy to go to. In any case those factors helped greatly with getting my shape back (and confidence) and London's gates opened up a little wider for me at last.

Glimpses of the 'real' city reached me, now and then, through a thick fog of culture and language barrier. It was like cutting through the rough skin of an unfamiliar piece of fruit, getting a whiff of the tantalizing smell and then being delighted with the unexpected and satisfying taste, gently released. I fell in love all over again with the language of Shakespeare, and was beginning to see and appreciate the funny and eccentric side of the Londoners that I was

meeting now. Occasionally, their quirky sense of humour would come through to me, with some meaning.

Also, I became more discerning in choosing people to associate with, and better able to handle the ‘knockers’ who with a few well chosen and ‘funny’ words would demolish anyone perceived to be in a weaker position. I could hold Simon’s stare now and his smile was not mocking anymore. Perhaps it never was. I was not super talented for languages like my Swiss friends, but I nevertheless began to even enjoy the intriguing “*faux amis*” (words that sound like French but have a different meaning) Also, I was understood now and then and I didn’t want to miss my lectures anymore.

One day, Anna took me to a market garden outside London, and we went on a grand tour of a couple of National Trust properties with exquisite landscaped gardens. I thought of my grandmother’s property in Virey-le Grand. It had beautiful big trees established a very long time ago and surrounded by extensive grounds, but the actual garden was minimalist. I never saw anyone “planting” there or getting their hands dirty. The farmers around had ‘*potagers*’ for their own use but no time or money was spared for garden embellishments...So, the notion of creating a garden for the pleasure of the eyes only was totally foreign to me.

In L’Abadie, our garden was the “*garrigue*”: big expense of herbs and shrubs terraced and belonging to all. It had a wild, scented and dry appeal. I loved it of course, and took it for granted. No one “worked” the garrigue. It had always been there, or so it seemed. The Bolier sisters grew outstanding vegetables too, in small parcels and without the aid of chemicals. Those parcels were often hidden here and there like precious treasures to be discovered but with little overall visual impact. They had a rugged beauty but what was around me now was a lush, wet, thriving growth of scented plants scattered cleverly in park like grounds and allowed to spread as they felt like (or so it seemed).

From then on I looked at anything green with a different eye. Why did I wait so long to travel out of London? The gardens I just saw in this northern, wet, cold country were vibrant and freely designed. I wanted to travel all over the country now but time was short and my exams were approaching fast. Still I knew I would come back some day. After a last effort I passed the exams and planned my return to Zurich.

The summer holidays were going to revolve around Vira this year as there was still a lot to do in the house. The top floor was finally built and we finished painting it. There is no doubt Vira is a beautiful place but also very wet. It can rain weeks on end and this summer was no different. People spoke an Italian dialect in this part of Switzerland, and at my return, I was surprised to see my mother making herself understood, not only with her usual hand gestures, but also with some excellent words.

Vira was for me a very relaxing place to paint, not just walls but pictures too. I enjoyed my hobby and read a lot... Also Arthur came down from Zurich and we occasionally took the ferry to Luino in Italy (to buy wine, salami or shoes) or Ascona, Renee's country, across the lake.

After the holidays, I spent the rest of the year in Zurich, filling in at the *Boutique*. Arthur was doing his course in Lausanne and I visited him sometimes, or he would come to Zurich. He enjoyed his course and had no doubt about his chosen field of studies. His aim, already then, was to step on the corporate ladder of the hospitality industry and travel across the world.

After Christmas, I headed for Paris. I had never been to our capital.

Paris, January 1968

Before leaving Zurich I had put a couple of ads in the Marseilles' and Paris' newspapers, getting nine replies from Paris and not one from Marseilles. I had applied for jobs in art galleries and antique shops. The best one came from Bd Hausmann, and as the letter I got from them was very warm and friendly that's where I would work I thought. The second best offer was from a firm called "La maison Dugrenot", Faubourg St Honore, and the third one from an art gallery, on the left bank dealing in reproductions. I was still giving the final touches to my CV and by the time I arrived in Paris the owners of the antique shop at Bd Hausmann had found somebody else. So I considered the second best option and got interviewed by the Dugrenot establishment, a high profile decorating house dealing also in antique furniture.

They gave me the job and I started immediately. The work was interesting and varied with possibilities of moving up if I wanted, they said. Soon I became friendly with two work colleagues: a German girl, Ursula and a Parisian, Dominique. The last one was still living at home and therefore could manage her life financially but Ursula was soon going back to Germany; she

said she had been struggling to make a living with her salary even adding the commissions on the furniture sold.

Accommodation expenses were killing me and I found myself surviving on the smell of the proverbial oil rag. I could have rented a room in a family but I didn't want that in Paris. This time I was aiming at complete independence. I spent all my spare time visiting real estate agents in search of a room with at least a shower and kitchenette, and I became friendly with one agent: Jacques Hubert Gassin. His firm like many others used to put attractive fake ads in newspapers to lure in customers and as soon as they got there, the place was taken! So the agents said.

I would get up early morning, rush down to buy the newspapers fresh from the press, tick a few ads, ring up to make sure the room was still available, get the address of the real estate agents and jump in a taxi for speed so to arrive there before someone else beat me to it. But every time the place was gone, they said, and the next one also and so on. One day, I lost my temper in total frustration, and accused the agent of deceit and worse... The young man, Jacques Hubert, and his mother copped it for themselves and for every other agent that I had visited! Surprisingly, they didn't send me away in indignation; on the contrary, Jacques said he wanted to talk to me privately over a cup of coffee, downstairs.

Of course that was admitting that I was right. He couldn't say much in his defence except that they all did it and putting 'fake ads' with ridiculous rent was practiced by every agent dealing in renting. The bastards, I thought. Still, he could have arrogantly dismissed my concerns but he didn't; he played guilty and apologized for wasting my time and money in taxi fares. And since I needed friends rather than enemies, I accepted his apology gracefully. He asked for my phone number at work and promised that I would get the next "bargain", (but real this time) and he kept his word.

I settled eventually in a single room with a free standing bath in it! It was *Avenue Montaigne*, close to work. The room was dark and I made it even darker by painting it indigo blue, but it felt peaceful and since I was only there at night time, it didn't matter so much about the light. In a corner of the room just below the window was a kitchenette.

I think Jacques felt genuinely sorry about the way I had been pushed around, and as we got to know each other better I suggested a change of practice in the way they advertised. I added that I should talk to his mother of

course, as I assumed she was the boss; then he told me that the firm was his and his mother worked for him! He was putting himself through university and provided a job for his mother and two other employees in the process. Not bad, I thought, as he had told me he was only 22 years old, my own age, and still living with his parents, Avenue de Neuilly.

Winter was moving out and the days warmed up a little, stretching on in the evenings. The air was still cold but the sun shone everyday and I walked everywhere, wearing out all my shoes. As the true chauvinistic Lyonnaise that I was I had assumed that Paris was just a bigger version of Lyon, but less friendly of course. I quickly had to adjust my thinking, and like most people who visited this city for the first time, I was blown away by the culture and history of the place. But my second assumption was right...So far.

I couldn't afford to do much else than walk and look at parks, buildings, quays and those museums stating "free entry" and I became very familiar with the geography of the place and some of its history. I knew that a couple of our family names were listed under the *Arc De Triomphe* and, as I had promised my mother, I went over to spot them, dragging my feet a little. But in fact I felt quite moved finding those names on the list in front of me and this was a totally unexpected feeling.

Changing job

Jacques Gassin kept his agency open six days a week, and when one of his employees left he asked me to fill in on Saturdays. On one condition I said: if he had to keep going with the fake ads, would he let me tell the unsuspecting victims on the phone, that the room had been taken rather than tell them only when they got to the office? As they had to ring up to find out the address of the agency, I would take the opportunity also to offer them a real bargain instead.

He agreed. We didn't see those people straight away of course but later during the day, after they'd been to the other agencies and wasted their money in taxi fares, they would turn up. And it was very satisfying to see them stay, put their feet up so to speak, and let us open our book of listings rather than look at the newspaper, cross off our fake ad and frustrated, rush elsewhere. It was a win.

But I was still struggling to make ends meet with my job at Dugrenot. My plans had been to work for a couple of years in Paris and save enough money to travel to New Caledonia where my cousin Danielle Gormand and her family lived. Also earn the extra cash to live on in between jobs as I progressed westward.

This time away would give me, I hoped, a first hand view of the world on which to build some understanding of cultures, ways of lives and political situations. I was vividly aware of my limitations in that regard as my upbringing had always been somewhat sheltered. Throughout my school years I had looked forward to living for ever through '*my*' God, knowing very little of any other religious beliefs. I admired my mother's strong views on every issue and I made them mine. I also accepted George's outlook on politics and history, as his intellect was quite extraordinary and his judgement fair -although a little black and white on some issues-. But as good as those views may be, I was now keen to move on beyond 'passed on' opinions (also from academic systems).

I had hoped to go by boat with a cargo company: '*Les Messageries Maritimes*' also taking paying passengers and the Saturday's work gave me an indication that this goal could be achievable if I worked at the agency, Boulevard Sebastopol, on a full time basis. So I talked to my boss, and he agreed to take me on full time. This new job gave me a good perk too; I had now the pick of the accommodation book for visiting friends and family, which proved very useful.

I felt no difficult job transition. Jacques Hubert was in and out of the office as he spent now more time at his faculty (in 3rd year pharmacy) at the University of Nanterre. The atmosphere at the agency was very informal and friendly. I liked his mother, Yvette, who was just like 'one of us'. We worked late every night and often ended up in a restaurant and sometimes we saw a film, a play or a concert...All the things that are a 'must do' in Paris but that I couldn't afford on the Dugrenot's salary.

I never regretted quitting the firm, although it had been a scary decision to make as, according to the newspapers, unemployment was at the time at half million in France, in a period which was considered a post war boom. From my personnel experience and considering the number of replies to my advertisement for work, I found hard to believe the situation was as dramatic as that. Still, the figures were there. Trade union membership had dropped

dramatically in the past few years. I read for instance that ‘Michelin’ boasted only talking to trade unions three times in thirty year. Salaries were a pittance and that I could easily believe. The academic learning system was also breaking down.

The students’ anger

The previous year, in the month of November, Jacques had already taken part of a student strike as a protest against overcrowding at campus and he and his friends were ready to start again. I read that during the previous ten years in Paris the student population had tripled. Although the government had provided some funding for that increase, this was not nearly enough to cater for all students.⁸

⁸ *A window to the streets of Paris in May 1968.*

Only a little group of students was involved in that May protests to start with: they were called the “Nanterre eight”. Those eight young people wanted to get their message across by occupying the university. They did for a short time and then, predictably, had to face the Sorbonne disciplinary committee, triggerering an unplanned chain of event: a crowd gathered around the Sorbonne to discuss the case of those students...The crowd swelled and the college authorities panicked. Police and ‘CRS’ made arrests on the only ground that some students’ were wearing motorcycle helmets’ (from the press of the time). The Sorbonne closed. Barricades were formed and police pumped Tear Gas into the air and called for reinforcements. As a result the boulevard St Germain became a bloody battleground, and this day was to go into the records of ’68 as “Bloody Monday”. The week continued with similar scenes and the streets became alive with talks of politics. By then, the middle classes and a large section of the working class, angry at the brutality displayed by the police started to show their support for the students.

On the 10th of May, thirty thousand students, including high school children, marched towards the Sorbonne. A reporter then wrote that fifty barricades were erected by the demonstrators in preparation for an attack by the police: “thousands help build barricades women, workers, people in pyjamas, human chains carrying rocks, wood, and iron. The barricades were attacked by the police and fighting continued throughout the night. At the end

Facilities were desperately inadequate but, as I experienced myself in the Law faculty in Lyon, overcrowding was the most serious problem there and everywhere. The University of Nanterre, where Jacques was studying, had been created to cater for the student overflow. This helped but it is interesting to note that the following March protest started in the sociology and psychology faculties of that same university. It was believed that the teaching of some subjects (like sociology and psychology) was used as a way of controlling society rather than understand it in order to improve the way it worked.

Students felt conditioned by *professeurs* described as ‘feudal’ in their attitude (Only speak to us when you are spoken to...) and didn’t feel prepared for job opportunities even in the areas of medicine and law (old fashioned procedures and institutions). The students (and some lecturers) not only opposed the teaching methods but also the Government’s manipulated media, and the corporate society in general.

In hindsight, I often wondered if the underlying forces for the 68’ demonstrations had its foundations in communist ideologies (Old left as it was called). It might have been, but there was a difference there as some students wanting reforms, the ‘New left’, came from a different set of values. They cared about the alienation of the individuals. The ‘Old Left’ didn’t worry so much about this side of things as they were mostly looking at the

of the battle, hundreds of people had been injured and many arrested”. The students had demanded the release of those arrested but the Government refused and the fight went on with more police brutalities.

The ‘Nanterre eight’ were eventually released but by then it was too late: the spark had already started the bush fire. On the 14th of May, the ‘Ecole des Beaux Art’s was occupied. Every morning there were meetings at which’ themes’ were chosen and posters produced via a silk screen production basis, with slogans. Paris was plastered with those posters, (-which were highly artistic, by the way, and ironically, those items eventually became collector’s items exhibited by that same society, criticized by the students, twenty years on or so.)

exploitation of the workers by the wealthy. And although those two ideologies called protesters to join in the fight, they couldn't entirely be lumped together in my view.

Consequences of the manifestations

So, following the student demonstrations, the trade unions called for a one day strike and a march was organised. Over two hundred thousand people turned up, and a wall of protesters walked up the Boulevard Sebastopol to the Gare de l'Est.

From the office on the first floor, Jacques' mother and I witnessed the move of this human tide and we walked down, feeling the importance of the occasion, but also hoping to somehow contact Jacques and his young brother, who had disappeared for the past forty eight hours. Someone stayed in the office to take their calls if necessary. In the street, people were arguing, joking, laughing... There was an atmosphere of hope and expectations that was strangely contagious. At the time it was said that around 80% of the French population supported the student protest.

Similar protests were held all over France and Europe in general, as well as Japan, the USA, and Poland. From mid May a strike wave swept France and within a fortnight nine million workers were out on strike. The workers union demands were for better minimum wages and for the government to stay out of any involvement in the television stations. By the end of May, De Gaulle had guaranteed an increase of 35% in the industrial minimum wage.

The students and workers movement had aspired for a classless society based on workers councils, but the working process of those ideas remained vague. De Gaulle called a general election and was re-elected with an increased majority as the voters turned back to the certainty of "what they knew".

But the fight for better education methods and awareness of social malfunction had not been for nothing. People's intellectual and moral consciousness seems to have been stirred into action and the university systems certainly profited from this situation. Society in general had reached a major cross road through that year.

Back to 'normal'

Paris had been shaken to its foundations and yet life went on as usual and the streets got cleaned up. The city didn't take long to look like her old self again but the dream kept on amongst students and, with the holidays coming on, the question was: what real changes would the next university year bring?

The holidays for me were just for three weeks this year, as the agency closed in August. I thought it was enough as I was still securing my job. I went to Lyon then Zurich and Vira where Arthur came to join us for a while as he was getting prepared to take his first job in Canada. We parted again, but this time it was likely to be for a long time, perhaps for good.

In September, the agency reopened and back came the students in search of accommodation. I really enjoyed my work; our clients were mostly our age and I related to them far better than to the well established clientele which frequented the Dugrenot establishments. We made a few changes at the agency, like, for instance, putting more chairs around the room, a little paint and posters on the walls as people stayed around longer and met each other's in the office. The café downstairs helped too, offering to bring refreshments when needed for a reasonable charge.

It was also important to establish a climate of trust in the business as real estate agents had such a bad reputation. Our agency was a little different I think, maybe because Jacques was himself a student and such a "nice" guy. He had an incredible amount of energy and the office was filled with it when he was around. His mother had feared for his life during the May events as he and his brother gave themselves fully to the student cause, but they had been cautious enough to escape injury. Now he was at work full time at least for another month.

For me I got to know Paris pretty well. Only Jacques had a car to go back and forth to his campus, and the rest of us would take the metro to visit properties; it worked well. I was only on commissions but I worked long hours and made a good living. Somehow the days went flying by... I was still seeing my ex colleague Dominique from Dugrenot; she was coping well with the pressure of work, building up her career and still living with her family. I also made contact with Florence Palmieri, my old friend from Golfe Juan, and she and I 'hung out' together.

Brittany and Normandy being an easy drive from Paris, we went there for the occasional breaks and loved the food. Norman food is sumptuous; particularly fish: sole, herring, crab, oysters and mussels. Mediterranean mussels were usually grilled in herbs and garlic which made my mouth water but those in Trouville had a distinctive Nordic flavour of wine, cream and tarragon. The local Salzmarsch lamb made a succulent meal also, so did the blood sausage, so nice with a butter apple sauce (I remembered my London experience and tried to watch the calories, as hard as it was).

I recall Bayeux; the famous *tapisserie* looked fresh like yesterday. It was like looking through a window into the past with this first hand Norman account of history, so naively stitched. And the little fishing village of Honfleur, I wonder if it's still today as beautiful and unspoiled as it was then.

In mid 1969, I moved one last time to an old but well appointed 2- room apartment, Rue de Reaumur, just around the corner from Boulevard Sebastopol. The street was in the middle of what had been formerly the "Halles" food market, by then vacated. At some stage George was staying with me as he had some business to attend to in Paris. He was quite horrified when one night a gun shot was fired in the street just below our windows. I had to explain that this was not unusual as the old Halles district was still in a transition period and quite rough. In other words the developers had not moved in yet. I don't think this explanation gave him much reassurance somehow.

When I was studying German in Zurich, my teacher and friend: Peter In der Mauer, tried to get a little group together to travel to Israel and work in a kibbutz. I got very tempted to join in as I had a lot of admiration for the pioneering work that had been started by the Israelis, in a place which I knew was very dry and inhospitable. It would have been for 3 months, mostly picking fruit. No money exchanged but food, accommodation and a busy community life were assured. Except there was also fighting at the borders as my mother and George kept pointing out. They did everything they could to discourage me to join and I finally gave in- for the time being, I thought-.

I asked Jacques if he had ever been tempted to visit Israel as he was Jewish. His answer startled me; he didn't believe in the concept of the newly created state of Israel and the occupation of the territory by the Jews. He didn't think it had been right to evacuate the Palestinians and felt that Jews should integrate in the world at large. He was anti- Zionist. I guess my

thinking was different; after the last war atrocities against the Jews, I felt they deserved to settle in the land that had been theirs such a long time ago. As I met more of Jacques' friends I realised that many shared his views, they were Jewish but French first and certainly not Zionists.

Although not a Jew himself, I knew that George had worked very closely with the Israelis after the formation of the State of Israel and it didn't occur to me that there could be a different way of thinking amongst the Jewish community. As it turned out, those young people showed an amazing foresight in predicting the miseries and mutual atrocities that would occur as a result of this relocation. It was a well meaning European initiative perhaps, led by Britain, but with tragic consequences.

Over time I got to know Jacques' friends and family quite well, their thinking and ways of life and understood better their struggle and hopes for the future. Although I didn't always share their views, I was a good listener. Some of his friends practiced "Reform Judaism". This brand of Judaism intrigued me somehow: its modern overtone was refreshing and unexpected. Jacques was happy to point out that Judaism could show some degree of dogma flexibility and an adaptation to the modern world. He was at a stage of his life where he felt he could think for himself in matters of religion and take stock of who he was as an individual. There is no doubt that the 68' events had an impact on him, politically, socially and philosophically.

I don't remember him ever heading for the synagogue in those days but his parents were practicing Jews and their brand of Judaism, although liberal in some ways was very traditional in others. Once, I foolishly used the word 'adore' in relation to some trivial matter (food I think) and Jacques' father corrected me sharply as he said God only deserves to be adored. Jacques smiled when he heard of this "light-hearted" reprimand but I didn't believe the remark was as light hearted as that...A passing cloud...

When the time came to plan my trip, I felt like a pinch in the heart...I was leaving behind people that had taught me a lot. Over the two and half years that I spent working at the agency not once did we have a reason for conflict (except for the huge confrontation, on the first day we met!). The agency had become my world and a place where like minded people got together. It was originally run by young people for young people but moved on to accommodate the old and the needy who, by then, felt somewhat confident that they wouldn't be ripped off.

My views had always been that things happened for a reason in life but when I heard that the "*Messageries Maritimes*" had stopped taking passengers since the previous year, I felt hugely disappointed. It was a big blow to my plans and the best other option for me at that point, was to buy a plane ticket around the world with unlimited stops over. I didn't know how long I would be away and wanted to let the events guide me, live in my cousin's world for a time.

Jacques had passed his exams and offered to accompany me on the first leg of my trip, which was Spain. We both had worked very hard and we looked forward to this trip together, a farewell trip.

Rosnay

We have not seen the ibis for a long time, but it seems that a couple of hares have now taken residence on the front lawn; they are huge and obviously well fed. They remind me of Spain somehow.

My mother had told me early on that she could picture her own father sometimes walking up and down the rows of vines, as he used to do many years ago at "Cognys", in the Beaujolais region of France. The heat would bother him terribly, no doubt, but I can imagine how astonished and delighted he would be watching, the wild life in this peaceful corner of the world. Like those hares and the wallabies, one in particular that we always recognise with her joey hanging out of the pouch, stretching his neck to get a nibble at the clovers... The snakes, not so confident and rather coy and of course, crossing the sky, the magnificent parrots of all sizes and colours. Hawks and eagles fly around as well as butcherbirds, - the lovely sounding birds that killed the last of our fan tailed pigeons-

As for the starlings we scare them away, or 'pepper' them - a biodynamic method-, using the ashes of the pest to deter the colony from taking over the vineyard.

Photos taken in 2008 at Rosnay by a French visitor: Jackie Gallois, a 'bouquiniste' on the Seine quays (They are all his except for Laurene with the green frog)



Black shouldered kite



small goanna



Australian Hobby



dancing fox



Hare



sacred kingfisher



Souther Boobook



superb fairy wren



Superb parrot ,



Australian wood duck,



Eastern rosella,



Rufus whistler,



Rozario,



zebra finch,



green frog with Laurene,



Lily our dog,



Golden head Cisticola,



double barred finch,



galah,



white plumed honey eater



Chapter XIII: Travel diaries

July 1970, Spain

My cousin's husband: Freddy Gormand, a mining engineer, had assured me that I could possibly get an administrative job, at the "Societe Le Nickel" where he was working in Nepoui, North of New Caledonia. This was the only 'anchorage' planned for my trip. George had hoped otherwise and he sent me a long list of people to see and places to go to. Just in case. After graduating from the Ecole Hoteliere in Lausanne, Arthur had just spent a year working in Canada and was now posted in New York, so I would meet him on my way through.

From Madrid, Jacques and I hired a car. We practiced our Spanish, visited Seville, Cordoba and drove back through Toledo to Madrid. We seemed to connect on a different level through that trip; feeling relaxed and care free without the pressures of work or family.

Jacques had known all along my travelling plans and when the time came to say good bye, he simply wished for me to find what I was looking for.

New York, Chicago

Now I was on my own. But not really as the questions on where I was going (and why) kept coming from curious passengers during my trip over the Atlantic. Those questions distracted me and forced a few English words out of my mouth. I was going to New Caledonia, but the journey was far more important than the destination. This, I didn't explain.

In down town New York, I headed straight to the "American Express" office to get my mail (I was already a little home sick, I hate to admit). From now on those offices around the world were going to be my all important link to home. I didn't stay long in New York as the city was horribly hot and polluted that particular year. I was used to public transport in Paris, so I took the city trains a couple of times and I thought I would perish in those

claustrophobic and narrow corridors, hundreds of meters underground leading straight to the bowels of the earth. The drafts were incredibly powerful and the smells and heat, sickening. I imagined this setting just perfect for a murder to take place in complete anonymity, and the feeling of alienation was overpowering...

Still, New York was not just about underground trains and, after walking around the city to soak in the atmosphere (literally), and admire the Statue of Liberty and the sky scrapers from the safety of a ferry boat, I decided to move on.

At the airport, I had met up with Arthur. We had parted a long time ago but our friendship was still there, as it had been strong right from the start of our relationship. Now, we were meeting in this anonymous city, and it was great to catch up. Arthur had been immersed in his work, so he decided to take a break from it and fly with me to Chicago.

I always pictured Chicago as the city of gangsters, blues and jazz (Benny Goodman was a Chicagoan) and it seems that the August month was the perfect time for free concerts on Grand Park. This park stretched like a green ribbon along the Lake Michigan shores, giving an open and airy feel to the city from the South to the North suburbs. Apparently, the park had been built on landfill and debris dumped after the devastating 1871 fire which killed hundreds of people and destroyed most of the buildings in the centre of Chicago.(a cow had started the fire, kicking a bucket full of fuel in her wooden shed.)

Finding Grand Park and this magnificent lake virtually downtown surprised me, and so did the 'French Renaissance' style gardens surrounding it. They were deceptively simple with symmetrical layout. I had never been keen on formal gardens but those seem to fit the area beautifully. Pathways lead to large rectangular 'rooms' with regular tree planting, many sculptures and an interesting looking pink marble fountain, with sculpted seahorses, six meters high... In the same area, we visited the Field Museum, one of the world's greatest natural history museums with very impressive displays including animal, plant and ecosystems exhibits, which emphasized the interconnection of all life on earth.

I didn't give New York much time because of the heat and terrible pollution then, but I felt Chicago was definitely worth a more careful look. This city is world famous as a centre of architectural innovation, and it was

obvious why. After the tragic fire, architects like Frank Lloyd Wright took the challenge to rebuild it. They embraced the new concept of “form follows function”, a very organic style of ornamentation.

Arthur and I had long talks walking along the lake. He had spent an interesting year in Calgary and Vancouver, a cold year with temperatures well below freezing. My English was far from being fluent and I appreciated Arthur’s help in that regard. We learnt that Chicago had been a destination for Africans in America looking for a refuge from the South in the 1830’s and later for the Great Migration of freed slaves looking for factory work, creating the so called ‘Black Belt’. At the time when we were walking down town, thankfully some middle class African American communities were starting to emerge in mixed areas. We didn’t see many Indians as they had been pushed out of the area and relocated to reserves.

Foodwise, we made do. I was not used to those huge steaks in eating houses or the sweet dressings for salads (like the thousand island brew) so we bought our own fresh food and made sandwiches sitting on the green belt, then we relaxed in the grass, like a lot of people did. Those were the hippie times with sounds of guitars and songs by people like Bob Dylan and Joan Baez. No one was out of place, no matter how eccentric the clothes, hair or composure and in fact, no one seemed to care.

Arthur felt at ease in the US. He was very focused on his work and put in long hours, but he didn’t mind that. When we parted, as usual, we promised to keep writing.

Across the U.S.

St Louis (named after the French King: *Saint Louis* or *Louis IX*) had the reputation of being one of the roughest cities in the US, if not the roughest, but I didn’t get that impression once I got there. I read in my history books the saga of the “Louisiana Purchase” from Napoleon and was curious to get the feeling of the city that had been French not that long ago. The explorers Louis Joliet and Jacques Marquette had travelled through the Mississippi river valley followed by another explorer called ‘La Salle’ who claimed the entire valley for France and called it “Louisiana” after King Louis XIV.

In 1803, St Louis was bought from France by the United States as part of the ‘Louisiana Purchase’. Napoleon didn’t get much in selling this huge

territory, but it seems he needed all the money he could put his hands on for his ongoing European wars and other extravaganzas.

The Mississippi was awesome and it felt quite special watching this 'mighty' river gently find its way down. I decided to take a trip South and was directed to a newish boat with all the mod cons, no doubt, but I passed by and instead boarded on a huge old steamboat, a little further down. Soon after we left, a Dixie band started to play and filled the air with its sounds, recreating the old times feel. The skipper had a broad and welcoming smile when I stepped on board, so I felt encouraged to sit near him, and we talked. I didn't have anyone to prop me up this time but, thankfully, he did most of the talking.

Apparently steamboats had brought significant progress in river trade, as steam power allowed much more efficient river transportation, unlike the hand propelled barges and keel boats of the previous era. I understood that this improvement helped putting St Louis on the map as an inland port.

I didn't carry a sketch book and only owned a very ordinary instamatic camera, so I tried to rely on my memory to make pictures in my mind and take in the smells and sounds around me. This was helped by the little historic clips that came flooding back to my mind. It would have been easy to let the boat take me all the way down to New Orleans, but I preferred not to stray too much from my itinerary, as San Francisco was to be my first 'refuelling' stop over. I hoped to work there for a time.

Before leaving St Louis, I went to have a close and critical look at 'The Gateway Arch' which five years before had replaced the bronze statue of Saint Louis, the good king on horseback, as a symbol of the city. I had mixed feeling about the swap but finally decided that I quite liked that huge steel arch symbolising the junction of West and East in the US. Good bye good king. I was eager to get to San Francisco, but still I stopped in Denver and Salt Lake City, and I didn't regret it.

'The mile high City' has a very open and green feel about it, with the largest city park system in the country. Mountain Parks and its musical history revolving around the unique Red Rocks Amphitheatre was an interesting site. I had only limited time, as my budget was getting stretched, but I'm glad I went to Red Rocks, even though there was no concert at the time. The city of Denver is a 'street gridded city' and orientated to the four cardinal points; a very inorganic design but practical, I guess, if one worries about getting lost.

From every street, I noticed mountain views, as the base of the Rocky Mountains was only a short distance from the City. It was summer but I could imagine the amazing sight in winter from those otherwise plain road ways.

The feel of Salt Lake City was understandingly different, but it also had that moonscape like quality through sharp, vertical, relief surrounding the city and caused by massive ancient earthquakes. The Wasatch fault goes through the region and this is serious earthquake territory. I wouldn't live there, I thought... I saw the Mormon Church headquarters, and heard stories of polygamy, still in practice apparently.

Seeing the 'Grand Canyon' from the aircraft was a good way to appreciate this incredible work of nature. Two billions years of the earth history have been exposed there as the Colorado River cut channels through layer after layer of rock. They created colourful and steep sided gorges, while the plateau was being lifted at the same time. The passengers sitting next to me told me stories of ancient Indian dwellings within the gorges.

San Francisco

San Francisco had been Spanish settled with a fort at golden Gate, and a mission named after Francis of Assisi. This was the first thought that came to my mind (my 'convent girl' background). I saw San Francisco as a big village, bohemian and arty. Although I never considered myself a hippie, I had nevertheless welcomed the move towards a new society, freer, eager for peace, and keen on social changes. It had been a logical development in my thought process since the 68' events in Paris and San Francisco, two years later, was the best time and place to witness this renaissance of the human spirit, which manifested itself at every corner of the city (It had its downside of course, like drugs).

I didn't do much sight seeing to start with as I was set on finding work as soon as possible. I was hoping to work casually on my tourist visa, a big mistake I soon learnt. A doctor had replied to my advertisement in the local paper, asking for short term employment. He was in urgent need of a receptionist but couldn't get around the bureaucratic hassle required (or didn't have the time for it). He tried though and I appreciated his effort.

Doctor Harris, as he was called, and his family lived in the old colonial suburb of S.F. in a three storey timber property, painted in white: Presidio Terrace. He offered me a room on their third floor (beautiful views over the City) in exchange for lending a hand in the household and speaking French to his five children. Those “children” were about my age by the way! The youngest girls were 16 and 18 years old. The older boys were rarely around, except for meals which they seemed to be very good at cooking themselves anyway. The girls: Caroline and Mary had learnt French at school; they liked me and were willing to practice.

But I still needed an illegal day job and for a time I cooked for a lonely, elderly woman. She appeared to be well off and not only did she pay for the time I spent with her but she also insisted that I should dine with her. We talked. There was a reciprocal benefit there: my English improved and she enjoyed the company she was craving for.

Christiane Piercourt

I had some free time in the afternoons, so I enrolled in an American history course which the ‘Harris boys’ had recommended. As we were drinking coffee at the student cafeteria, I met there the young woman who was to share my life on and off for the months to come: Christiane Piercourt. She had flowing long hair, the best sense of humour and great style. We headed off straight away. She was carrying a pile of art books so I asked her if she was an artist. ‘Not exactly’ she replied. Apparently she and a friend of hers owned an art gallery in Paris and Christiane was on a buying trip. She was engaged to a Parisian but had decided to travel for a few months to plan exhibitions and stock up the gallery.

From then on the friendships seem to be snowballing, as Christiane had diverse work and personnel contacts. Through her, I met an engineer, specialising in laser beam technology. Interestingly enough, he had completed his masters in physics and numerical Mathematics at the University of Zurich (of all places) in 1965. He asked me if I would be willing to do some translations from English to French for his company, and I accepted as I gathered a work permit was not necessary in this case.

Anyway I didn't want any money to start with, as I wasn't sure how good (or bad) I'll be. I spent hours with the dictionary and it paid off as the firm was happy with my efforts. I felt encouraged in taking more work of the kind.

Christiane's friend, William, was perhaps an atypical American as his grandfather had been an Austrian physician and also a politician in Austria. He was concerned about his only sister, Annie, who was not well. She and I eventually became friends and in the autumn and again in the winter we all travelled to Lake Tahoe and the Yosemite. The happy shots that I have of the occasions only mask superficially the tragic ordeal and pain that Annie was going through at that time.

She had met her boy friend, Peter, at the hospital where William was regularly bringing her back and, for a time, the couple helped each other...(Peter was a patient too) There was a ray of hope then...William relaxed and we saw a different side of him: happy and carefree. We did normal things like sailing under the Golden Gate Bridge with Christiane and a couple of other friends or strolling along "Fisher man's Wharf". Also hopping on the fun cable cars was special as they often overlooked the beautiful bay and the sunset reflections were glorious.

San Francisco was buzzing with life and staged, nearly daily, street manifestations relating to human rights, spiritual beliefs, anti war and some other social issues like homosexuality. We were particularly intrigued by the world of "Hare Krishna": the saffron robes and the chanting that filled the university campus, in Berkeley.

One day, Christiane and I decided to find their head quarters, the place where Krishna as the incarnation of the God Vishnu was being worshiped. It took us half a day by bus to find it, but we got then a glimpse of their colourful and peaceful world, as well as their set of beliefs. For me, this was the first time I got some personal insight into Hinduism.

Notes on the day: 'From Brahman everything comes, to Brahman everything will return'. This sounded familiar to me except that Brahman is not seen as a 'punishing' entity like the Christian or Jewish God. The responsibility for being saved rests fairly on one own shoulders. Christians have the fear of eternal damnation to help them stay on the straight and narrow but Hindus respond to a different incentive: by worshiping Krishna (or some other of their many gods) and perform unselfish deeds, they hope to be

progressively delivered from the effects of karma and eventually freed from more reincarnations.

I was still staying at the Harris's then, except on week ends which I spent at Christiane's apartment down town. The young Mary was to travel to Europe with a friend and both stay for a while at Mum's in Zurich. They slept in my quarters downstairs, and apparently had the best time. Before leaving, they wrote little notes folded in the bookshelves and all over the flat...to tell Mum and George how much they loved staying with them. I was glad the visit went well because they were soon to get another visitor from San Francisco! William had gone for a couple of weeks to Russia for his work and stopped in Zurich on his way back. I don't know which George liked best: the sweet notes from the girls or the authentic Russian vodka from William. Mum was also delighted to meet him as he spoke some French (and German).

I found the city of San Francisco quite insular in a way, locked behind the Golden Gate and guarded by its many hills... It felt provincial too, and old fashioned, with its beautifully restored Victorian and Edwardian buildings. The house I was living in was a good example of colonial Victorian style. The best part of it for me was a huge terrace on the roof top which provided great views of the city and a place to sunbake. John Harris was an enigma in a way: He lived a sedentary life, worked long hours and was entirely devoted to his children. I don't remember how long he had been a single father but he couldn't have done a better job with them: the children were outgoing and well adjusted. They adored him.

A last letter from Paris

My life in Paris was now a blur in my mind and I think, my friend Jacques felt that I would never return. He had written regularly so far, urging me to move on, but I couldn't agree. I was therefore not that surprised when, eventually, he said he wouldn't write anymore... Neither of us had been clear about the nature of our feelings for each other and, for me at least, this time away had been a test. In Paris, we used to talk freely about our different upbringings and particularly the family pressures concerning them. I always thought that I received a strict religious education but, in fact, I grew up much freer in that regard than a lot of my friends did, including Jacques. I could now look at

other spiritual beliefs with an open mind and I doubted that Jacques, in his family context, would ever get that chance for longer than a passing phase of youth. But perhaps this was in the order of things. I sent my last letter too, with a feeling of sadness.

As much as I liked S.F. the trips to the Yosemite National Park would have been the highlight of my stay in the U.S. Yosemite Valley is edged with cliffs, pinnacles and domes...The forests are beautiful. Our walks through the National Park, and stops over in little cabins bordering waterfalls, were fun even for me, a NPW (non passionate walker). Annie loved nature and managed to keep her black dogs at bay most of the time but it was a hard battle. We were surrounded by the beauty of nature and her suffering didn't seem fair.

On two occasions we drove through the Nevada desert. This high plateau had a desolate feeling enhanced by numerous ghost towns which had been abandoned since the gold rush. We also went to Lake Tahoe. As this incredibly clear lake deepens from the shore to a maximum of six hundred meters its hue changes from aquamarine to rich lapis lazuli. (Sadly, I read now that the land is being cleared around the area for development, and the legendary clarity of the lake is threatened by sediments washed in.)

Christiane and I visited more art galleries in San Francisco and together with William, we planned one last trip to Baja California. We flew to La Paz, rented a car from there and travelled the narrow stretch of land, reaching a most beautiful village called Cabo San Lucas. The road right at the tip of the peninsula had just been created. We crossed arid and very thirsty looking country all the way down, with mostly cactus and succulents as scattered vegetation. The beaches, backed up by high and rugged cliffs, were deserted and wild and could only be reached on foot. We occasionally stopped and talked to the locals. They appeared weary, suffering from the drought that seemed to be more or less a permanent feature in this part of the country.

The next leg of my trip was Mexico City. Christiane had relatives in Tahiti and she hoped to meet me there, after completing her business in Paris, and spending time with her boyfriend. I had the feeling that I wouldn't see my friends for a long time, perhaps never: William, Annie and Peter, John Harris, Caroline and Mary and the 'Harris boys' even the old lady I had been cooking for, but at least I was going to see Christiane again reasonably soon.

Mexico

Mexico City is very high in altitude and stepping out of the plane I found I had difficulties catching my breath! I planned to stay in the country for a couple of months. William had given me a contact there but his friend had just left for Zurich unfortunately. I met his parents and they introduced me to an ex girl friend of their son: Kristin Yasutake. She was half Japanese and showed me the ropes around Mexico. Kristin's new boy friend, Gustavo de la Cena, was Mexican and they both invited me to join their group...

Mexican youth seemed to be always hanging around in groups of eight or ten, sometimes more. They had meeting places, and often cars followed each other around the city. It was strange for me as I liked to travel with a friend or two but not with a complete clan! (And somewhat dangerous, although I didn't think so at the time).

I thought Mexican Spanish was easy enough to understand, and the words flooded back to my mind. But I couldn't see myself working in Mexico as jobs were scarce for the locals in the first place. Luckily, I was spending very little money as the guest house I was staying in was cheap, and I gathered my American dollars would last me a fair while yet.

Soon, Gustavo's parents invited us for dinner and we met their entire family: the parents, their eight children and one housekeeper! (More like a family friend) At least six of the children were still living at home and we had a great time. As I understood that night, Mexicans love good music, making jokes and generally having a good time. They told me of the special bond between France and Mexico; the beautiful city 'metro' had actually been French sponsored...Also the murals decorating the University library. I couldn't wait to go and have a look.

There was a paradox about how casual the household was, with no formalities whatsoever, and the way the young girls looked after themselves. They would happily 'over' dress, (in my view) wear a great deal of make up and visit the hairdressers once or twice a week, the way older women would do in France (except for actresses or models). We became instantly friendly with Gustavo's oldest sister: Consuelo (Chelo) and her boyfriend, Joaquin Andronius. So much so that a few weeks later, they asked us to be bridesmaids at their wedding and we were very happy to agree.



Arthur In Chicago,



Christiane Piercourt, San Francisco.



At the snow with Annie and sailing under the Golden Gate bridge with her brother, William.

Mexico



Kristin Yasutake



Consuelo's sisters



Jochin and Consuelo



Self.

When the press gathered around the church that day, I realised that the Andronius' or the de la Cenas (or both) must have been quite high profile families to be given such space in a capital's daily paper.

We were living with the family by that stage, as the parents thought a guest house was not an appropriate place to stay for me, and Kirstin was in between flats. The family's hospitality was incredibly warm and we felt it would have been rude to refuse! Kristin made fun of the situation and called me her "chaperone". So I assured her that I would keep an eye on her, as we shared the same bedroom...No hanky-panky with Gustavo under the de la Cena's roof was the rule! They were strict Catholics but, as I found out later, the father, Angel, kept another household in a different town and had two more children with his mistress. This situation seemed to be tolerated by all, although not often mentioned. (It must have been a tough one at confession time!)

Right at the beginning of my stay, we visited the Ciudad Universitaria and were not disappointed. It was, in fact, an easy way to get a grasp on Mexican history as it is described on the exterior library walls 10 stories high, covered with mosaics. The whole history of the country was displayed proudly for everyone to see. On one side, two prominent zodiac wheels record colonial times while the North facade deals with Aztec culture. The East side shows the creation of modern Mexico and the more abstract west wall is dedicated to Latin American culture as a whole.

I was quite intrigued by the huge feathered serpent, a deity dating from the Olmec civilisation around 1200 BC and the awesome "Olmec heads", stone sculptures up to 3 meters high with grim pug nosed faces and curious helmets. It was obvious that the people I was meeting now, including Gustavo's family, had a double and very complex heritage, amazingly rich. They looked Spanish no doubt, but with a difference....⁹

⁹H.N. *On a remarkable civilisation.*

We know that The Theotihuacans engaged in religious practices that were bloodthirsty in the extreme but for what purpose? The people believed in predestination and to win the gods favours they carried out elaborate rituals including human sacrifices on a big scale. They saw the earth as the back of a

We explored around the City. From Mexico, an easy drive out of the city took us to Teotihuacan, the 'City of the Gods', where the awe inspiring pyramids of the Sun and the Moon stood proud. Those imposing structures had controlled a huge empire in the valley only 50 km from Mexico City and were spreading around not far from where I was standing now, right at the top. It felt like I was sitting on top of the world and I could nearly reach out to the sun. The ruins of the main temple and a large scale model of the old city are displayed in one of the most beautiful museum that I have ever seen: the Museo nacional de Anthropologia in Mexico. I learnt a lot that day.

Food of the streets and other substances.

I enjoyed the food... spicy and varied and got into the habit of eating off little street stalls some delicious fruit salads and meat wrapped up in tacos with beautiful fresh herbs. I tasted coriander for the first time then, but never

giant reptile floating on a pond and the current world as just one of a succession of worlds destined to end in cataclysm and be succeeded by another. This cyclical nature of things enabled the future to be predicted by looking at the past. Apart from a number of gods, dead ancestors were worshiped, particularly rulers who were believed to be descended from the gods. And it seems Cortes had been mistaken as being a returning ruler.

The Aztecs believe that they lived in the fifth world; the four preceding worlds have been destroyed by the death of the sun and humanity. Aztecs human sacrifices (sometimes self sacrifice) were designed to keep the sun alive: a necessary evil for their survival and performed with no anger or intended cruelty. But with the new invaders, the end of the Aztecs 'humanity' was to come sooner than they thought. The city of Tenochtitlan was razed building after building and renamed Mexico. This was the worse ending of a proud culture and race, the beginning of a sixth world perhaps but a world created not through the death of the sun but through human greed. The last Aztec king, Cuauhtémoc had been kept alive as a hostage by the newcomers, undergoing occasionally foot burning as the conquerors tried to make him reveal the location of Aztec treasures.

knew the name of this very pungent herb until years later. Beans of all kinds and chilli were also everyday fare. Marijuana was in possession of all young people and was freely available, but Kristin and I had no inclination to try it out. We could see that Gustavo and a couple of his friends had a serious problem with the habit, which slowed them down in their everyday activities. Gustavo was particularly affected and I was not surprised to see his parents quite stressed about his addiction. They blamed Kristin in their desperation to find an outside culprit (after finding little tissue papers on her dressing table, used to dry her make up) and sadly, this unfounded suspicion drew a wedge between the relationships of all concerned (for a time).

Kristin had a job modelling for fashion shows, but she also had contacts in television and she introduced me to a producer of commercials. He offered me a couple of jobs, asking me to get my hair bleached blond. This wouldn't be just a light 'rinse' for highlights but proper bleach. I hated the idea but I agreed to go through with it as I needed the work. A 'burning' experience but at least the job was fun and very well paid. I was also happy to be able to repay the 'la Cenas', with gifts for their hospitality. Occasionally I surprised them with a dish of my own. The food was never fiery, but they seem to enjoy it all the same.

After visiting the site of the City of the Gods, we took a couple of excursions to Taxco, and Cuernavaca. The first being the most picturesque and quaintest town, bright with flowers on every window sill. I loved the hand made textiles and embroideries, pottery, and silverware and I mailed some to my friends and family, together with a huge pile of books that George had asked me to trace for his work. They got there safely, surprisingly. Not long before flying to Tahiti I fell ill with high fever and excruciating headaches. Consuelo's mother called a doctor, but I never really knew what got into me, and eventually, even though I had not completely recovered, I decided to fly to Tahiti as planned. Kristin and Gustavo's friends took me to the airport and it felt a little awkward but nice, having three cars following each other, Mexican style, to give me a farewell.

Rosnay, Early 2009.

At the moment this is the fruit season at Rosnay: so, processing is in full swing and my mother helps me. The major crop is figs and to a lesser degree peaches, nectarines and plums. For next year we hope to acquire a preserve making machine, and some day it could be a very lucrative side line of the business. Grape harvest is due soon as well, and everyday we check the "Baume".

Again, I stopped writing for a while. I guess the heart was not in it as Mum has been quite ill lately. It's hard to know what causes her anxiety attacks. She had three on a row, and was admitted to the hospital at the second alarm. The doctor kept her sedated and she came home the next day as they couldn't do more for her.

She then had another attack, in the middle of the night, at 2am. It took two hours to stop her painful involuntary shaking. I was in contact by phone with the hospital and they directed me as what to do. We keep her blood pressure under control with medication but some other factor comes into play. This morning, she does not remember what happened and the pain is gone. All that is left is a feeling of vertigo, head heaviness and a slightly slurred speech. Another 'mini' stroke her doctor tells me. It's hard to watch such a talented and strong woman being affected this way.

A couple of days later she had regained her good spirit. She says she remembers people like Christiane Piercourt, William or Mary Harris....I wonder if she really does or if it's just 'wishful thinking'. For her benefit, I have started to translate in French a resume of our story.



Bird's nest in the vineyards

Chapter XIV: New Caledonia

Tahiti, Fiji islands

I slept in the plane and crashed (no pun intended) in a beautiful little bungalow at the Tahiti Hotel, in Papeete...Then, slept further for two full days (at the modest cost of eight dollars a night). Staying around Papeete for a few days, I particularly enjoyed looking at the Island the way Gauguin might have done. All around, there was an atmosphere of *“joie de vivre”*, very tangible and uplifting. Young Tahitians were driving on Vespas and looked relaxed and carefree.

If I had felt better I would have looked most probably for a job and lived on the island for a while, making contact with Christiane’s relatives (husband and wife). But as I was still sick with throbbing headaches, I became anxious to get to my cousins’ in New Caledonia... With a quick stop over in Fiji...or so I thought.

Fiji had a completely different atmosphere to Tahiti. Looking down in the streets from the window of my hotel room in Nandi, I felt kind of uneasy...In culture shock perhaps. I could have been in India, I thought, as Indians were walking up and down the street, in bigger numbers than Islanders, or so it seemed. I was told they had been brought over from India by the British to work on sugar plantations. I thought the women looked beautiful and I was intrigued by the colourful length of silk they were wearing, so elegantly. Saris were not quite what I had expected from the inhabitants of a Pacific Island. But the policemen’s uniforms made an interesting contrast, definitely a typically Fijian sight...

For the first time since I left Paris, I felt down. It could be that the heat and humidity were getting to me. Still, I was not far off from my destination now: “the Antipodes”. I always loved that word...Poetic and mysterious...As a child I created worlds in my mind around it. So far, I had been able to live

off the work I found along the way, but I got a little worried when told in Nandi that UTA airline was on strike indefinitely. Although I could have flown directly to Australia with another airline, skipping New Caledonia was totally out of the question. I just hoped my money would last me the distance. Down town, I was able to pick up letters from my parents and from a couple of friends including Christiane which cheered me up no end. Just under the little pile, a thick envelope was from my friend, Arthur.

It was a very newsy letter. He had just moved to work at the Hilton (or perhaps the Hyatt, as he made the switch around that time) in Bogota, Columbia. He asked: Would I join him there? With this invitation, I thought about fate. If he had asked me when I was in Mexico, I would have most probably agreed, as South America was 'just around the corner' from Central America. But now I was too far off course.

When I first met Arthur, he had still been at school and over the years we moved in different directions through study, work and travels. Yet, in spite of those differences in lifestyles, we had shared together some of the happiest time in my life so far. My reply was a little emotional I think: I told Arthur that I would complete my trip as planned although, right then, I was not totally convinced myself... I was stranded on a Pacific island- beautiful no doubt- with little money and no work prospect or contacts. Staying more than a few days at the 'Nandi Hotel' was not an option and I felt stuck in an impasse.

I had become quite friendly with one UTA agent as I often dropped in at the office to enquire about the strike. After a week or so, and no change with the situation, he very generously offered me a room in his house and I accepted as his wife, Ann, had just given birth to a baby girl, and I gathered I could perhaps help with the other children. This was a Fijian family with many Indian friends, and staying with them gave me the opportunity of experiencing the warmest Island hospitality!

Soon, the daily rain didn't bother me anymore, it was fun walking in the puddles and getting wet as it only took a few rays of sun to dry again. I kept hopping on and off buses and explored the island. In the evenings, guitar music and singing seemed to come out of household like ours. Our gatherings were shared with Indian guests, not always included in other Fijian houses, as each ethnic group kept generally to themselves. I guessed that a certain

inequality in land ownership laws was responsible for the uneasiness between the two different ethnic groups.

I loved seeing children and adults alike packed up in the back of open trucks and singing to their hearts' content. Their beautiful voices and enthusiasm to sing, whether at church or in any gathering, were what I found the most endearing qualities of the Fijians. George had asked me to take a couple of photos of ships in Tonga if I had a chance to get there...

One day, in my eagerness to oblige, I nearly boarded the commuting boat (or ferry) but at the last minute decided against the trip, as I didn't want to take a chance at being stranded in the islands when the strike would come to an end.

I had met an Australian girl right at the beginning of my stay at the Nandi Hotel and we became friends. Her name was Penny Carr. Penny and I travelled through the islands and I remember her taking part of our sing songs at Ann's house. It's amazing how everything eventually fell into place and thanks to a strike, which I cursed at first, I discovered a beautiful way of life and the friendliest people. After another ten days or so, the strike ended, and I finally boarded the plane to Noumea.

New Caledonia

It was remarkable how different again my first impression of New Caledonia was. I cannot say that I was disappointed, as the ocean and sunsets were just beautiful and quite striking in colour and light. I also had the comforting feeling of being surrounded by familiar territory regarding language and food, but Noumea was like any coastal French provincial town, I thought.

I rang my cousin Danielle as she had asked me, and she said the roads up north were impassable at the moment, even in a four-wheel drive. This was due to lots of rain lately; therefore I would be picked up by a "Le Nickel" company aeroplane. I looked forward to the trip as I had never flown in a small aircraft before.

The weather was foul that day and the trip to Nepoui, at the top end of the island, extremely erratic. The tiny aeroplane was bouncing about and I felt quite sick. But I could only blame myself as the pilot had asked me if I was game enough to fly in this type of weather and, in my eagerness to get there, I

had said yes- as long as he was confident himself naturally- At the arrival we circled the little airport time and time again and eventually we landed safely.

There, the entire family was waiting: Danielle with Freddy and their four children...I think I cried and laughed at the same time. I can't describe the emotions that this reunion triggered in my whole being. As a child I had looked up to Danielle. She had an adventurous nature mixed with an "old France" charm and gentleness, just like her mother, *tante Yvonne* (for the second part at least).

Danielle was just as I remembered her. She was about ten years older than me and not a first cousin, but I think there was a family air that linked us somehow. She always looked genuinely content with her life, and nothing was ever too much trouble for her. Freddy was a small blond man, very quiet and passionate about his work as an engineer. The children were still in primary school and, as I usually did in those circumstances, I tried to make myself useful, particularly with their last little girl of two years old.

I enjoyed my ten days with the family but soon realised that this little place, the subject of so much expectation and childhood dreams, was in no way the paradise that I had imagined. I learnt more about mining and the French footprint on the Island. I realised that all Europeans and particularly the English in this part of the world had exploited land and people as they saw fit, but on a small, vulnerable, and so beautiful piece of land, like a pacific Island, this fate seemed particularly tragic.

My cousins' house was a comfortable wooden bungalow, sitting on that amazingly deep red earth. It stood in the middle of a little village made up of the same natural wooden houses which, as I learnt later, were symbols of rank in the 'Society'. Depending on the importance of your position at 'Le Nickel', the house would have one or two bathrooms, an extra veranda perhaps or more bedrooms and gardens for the top executives (perhaps the number of children was considered as well, I didn't ask).

We had picnics, swam and fished in the surrounding little islands with 'everyone', as the community was a very active little group, but amongst it, there was a subtle segregation of like-minded people according to background and race. This distinction felt uncomfortable and the conversations were more than often centred on the "helps" or housekeepers which of course were the "Canaks". I believe this term is correct, but for an outsider like me, it had a very unpleasant ring to it.

It seemed to me that Danielle dealt very well with a less than ideal situation, placed on the rugged tip of this island, with little outside contact, and no family support. Their main concern was now for their children's education, and the whole family was to move to Paris a couple of years later.

I had changed my mind about working in Nepoui and decided to find a job in Noumea. In any case, Christiane was to arrive in New Caledonia from Paris in a few days. After telling them of my change of heart, my cousins and their friends put themselves out to help me, always ready to pull together. They gave me great contacts for possible jobs and accommodation in Noumea and offered me transport to get there. By then, the road through the bush had dried out somewhat and I travelled in a four wheel drive with a couple of enthusiastic geologists: husband and wife with their little boy still in his baby seat.

We had a rough journey but this experience was even more thrilling for me than the trip over, in the bouncy aircraft. The bush was thick and lush with unfamiliar vegetation and birds' songs filled the air. I was told that the environment there was not unlike the Australian bush at similar latitudes.

Before the day ended, the couple drove me to the place where it was arranged that Christiane and I would stay for the next eight weeks or so. We would share an apartment with two other young geologists: Francois Le Brun and Xavier Vartan who came from Paris and had a contract to work in the Islands for a period of three years. Danielle and Freddy knew them personally and assessed them as being "*des garçons charmants*". My protective cousins assured me that we would be in 'good hands' and even my mother couldn't object to the arrangement (and I thought I had grown up...).

After settling in, I went to get my mail and received the terrible news from William of his sister, Annie, having taken her life. I was stunned and terribly sad at this waste of life. I remembered our times together and I thought of William; I knew how helpless he would have felt then, and now very much alone, as I don't believe he had any other close family. At least, I knew he had good friends. I don't think I ever rang up anyone overseas during my trip so far but this time, I walked to the post office and tried to put my phone call through. The tragic end of Annie put a damper on my enthusiasm, to say the least.

I tried to block those thoughts out of my mind and started to look for a job as nothing was cheap in Noumea, I was finding out. Fortunately

Christiane was soon to arrive and this thought cheered me up considerably. When the day came, I took the bus over to the airport and eagerly watched her plane land. She was as beautiful, stylishly dressed and bubbling with life as ever and that night we all had fake Champagne at the flat to celebrate..

In town, I was now selling clothes in a place called 'Ballande'. As I was working full time, Christiane was alone during the day, but she found plenty to do. She often picked me up at Ballande's and, as there were still lots of daylight ahead of us, we explored this part of the island together, swam and cooked some fish that we shared with 'the boys', back at the apartment. After getting my first pay cheque we all had a meal out, which tasted absolutely beautiful. Francois and Xavier were good company and could cook too. They loved their work, which took them often away in the bush (*en brousse*).

At the end of my stay, I felt tempted to go back to Nepoui, as I thought a second look might leave me with a better impression, but on the other hand...perhaps not. I was not sure whether I got to see the real 'soul' of the Island and hoped I would get another chance some day. I wrote a long letter to Danielle. Strangely enough I didn't feel the age difference as much as I used to. I shared her world, experienced her life, and although some degree of disappointment had filtered through, I felt now better informed of her environment and richer for it.

Australia

Christiane and I landed in Sydney sometimes during the month of May 1971. I had not read much about Australia but intended to learn along the way. Years before, George had talked about our family 'sailing down under' to work on a sheep station. This was just one of his dreams as indeed he had many. I'm sure there were a number of places he would have liked to be, and things he would have been good at doing, but being a farmer in the Australian outback was not likely to be one of them...we kept telling him.

As usual, the first thing I did was to pick up my mail. Mum was giving me news of the family: My second nephew, Patrick, was age two now. He was born in March 1969 and was my Godson. After the christening we had all gone to Vira for a holiday. Patrick looked like an angel and was so easy apparently, I missed him, I missed them all. Mum had included a picture of

the boys in her letter: two little blond heads...Bernard and Karin had by now moved to St Etienne, not far from Lyon.

I also received a long letter from Kristin. She announced that she and Gustavo had split up and she felt much more relaxed and happy with her life now. She was still good friend with Consuelo, who wrote also a few words in Spanish. She and Joachim were expecting their first child.

Penny Carr, whom I met in Nandi, had offered us to share her flat at her grandmother's in Neutral Bay. We gladly agreed and soon moved in. It was good to see Penny again in her own environment. She always talked very honestly and candidly, and she introduced us to her many friends coming in and out of the apartment.

After settling in, we decided to explore Sydney before having to commit to a job (for me). We wanted to find out where the 'student quarter' was: the heart and soul of any city, as we thought. So we took a bus to the City, hoping to get to an Australian '*Boulevard St Michel*' but found only the business centre and the big shops...We walked all the way down to the harbour and the Rocks area...Took a ferry... Walked through the Botanical Garden and the Art Gallery and definitely forgot about the *Boul Mich* or its equivalent. The harbour was the soul of Sydney as we found out. We also learnt to enjoy the novelty of eating 'fish and chips' wrapped up in butcher paper, our eyes fixed on the evening sun that was reflected across the water.

I had noticed the big hospital in Macquarie Street, and the next day, I walked straight in to see if I could get a job there. To my delight, they just needed someone and asked me to start in a week, on a casual basis. So, we had a week to spare and we decided to go "north", hitchhiking. Christiane was not too keen on this mode of transport as she had enough money to travel comfortably anywhere but, for me, I needed to save every cent until my first pay cheque.

As it turned out, we met this way some very friendly people, particularly 'truckies'. We stopped on road houses for meals and had picnics in rest areas designated for truck drivers. The drivers were a little intrigued by us, as we were not their typical hitchhikers, apparently. In fact they recommended being extra careful as catching a lift this way was not in the Australian custom, and both the hitchhikers and the drivers could put themselves at great risk (in other words, they thought we were mad). We took their advice at heart and

asked to be dropped off at service stations. There, we talked to the manager, as it was a good way to enquire about our next possible 'safe' lift.

It worked well: we followed the coast as far as Brisbane and returned to Sydney the same way. Christiane had a great sense of humour and made people laugh, even with her broken English (or perhaps because of it). We had been lucky with our lifts, as all the truckies we met were friendly, 'fair dinkum Ozies' as we learnt to say. From the point of view of relative scale from maps to roads, this trip gave us an idea of the vast distances in this country.

The job at the hospital was a shock to the system for me, and quite an eye opener, as I never worked as a 'domestic' in an institution before. Apparently Dr Gurshing had his three daughters work in his hospital in Frankfurt for a while to give them that same experience. The women working with me would go home at night, and start the cleaning and cooking routine all over again for their husband and children. But I was lucky to have a job. After a week, I moved 'up' and brought meals into the wards. I enjoyed that as I got some human contacts and could talk to the patients. Christiane had teased me about my 'downstairs' job but I could handle it. She herself, kept very busy visiting art galleries and meeting artists at exhibition openings. I knew that she was to leave soon and we talked of meeting up again in Bangkok where she planned to stay with friends. From there we would travel the rest of the trip back home together. (She was particularly keen on the idea of visiting Nepal).

My original plan before meeting Christiane had been to go back to Europe through Africa as George had given me some interesting contacts right through that continent. I also had relations in Madagascar and in Morocco and, of course, my father had loved Africa and this was good reason enough to look at the place perhaps the way he would have done. But Christiane preferred to go through Asia so I would go to Africa another time, as this continent was cheaply reached from Paris.

For a few nights I tried my luck as a waitress at the 'Texas Tavern' in Kings Cross. Quite an experience! Christiane came with me to give me support and she always ended up talking with American militaries (this was towards the end of the Vietnam War). They were young men about my age or younger and some described their time at war in such terms that we felt they were not sorry to be out. In the taxi home, I kept wondering how long I would be able

to stand the job (a week as it turned out) while Christiane was counting my incredibly generous tips for the evening.

We hardly noticed the Aboriginals and wondered if there were any left at all? Penny said they lived mostly in remote areas and she showed me on the map. The way I saw it, this continent was another case of ‘move over and let us take control’ by the white fellows, and if we did have more time (for Christiane) and money (for me) we would have loved to venture to the north of Australia and meet some Aboriginals in their own environment.

Staying with Penny was great. We had a big room for ourselves and shared the flat with her and a couple of her friends. Sometimes I found it hard to keep up with Christiane’s incredible energy: she needed to go out most nights and, when I was seeing Penny, knitting chunky socks with beautiful hand spun wool, sitting on the floor with her legs crossed, and looking so relaxed and content, I felt like doing just the same myself. After Christiane left, I spent more time with Penny. One day she announced her plan to have a birthday party at her mother’s house in Paddington and I was invited (with a Portugese friend).

Her mother’s terrace house had great charm like most of those lovely and often beautifully restored little jewels that made Paddington so picturesque and arty. I was happy to meet more of Penny’s friends, and just have a good time with her before ending my stay in Australia. When we got there, we found the little house full of people upstairs and downstairs. I knew some of Penny’s friends but a lot I had not seen before. It was the “grass” era of course, and I was not surprised to see joints being passed around later in the evening as most people slumped comfortably on sofas...or just sat on the carpet, cross legged.

I can remember standing near the big table and nibbling at some food left over when across the table, I saw this tall guy looking slightly out of place (like me probably). We started to talk and we clicked right away. He had just returned from military service in Papua New Guinea and somehow, I could tell, he felt still a little strange being back in his own country. I wanted to know about New Guinea and his service there and we talked for a long time. I often had to ask him to repeat his words as he spoke very quickly and the music was loud, but we managed somehow. He was with two friends: John and Sally Sweetapple. His name was Richard Statham but, through a mix up in the introductions, I came home thinking I had met Richard Sweetapple.

He had asked Penny for my phone number at work so, the next day, when Richard rang me at the hospital I was a little puzzled as to the identity of the caller to say the least. He still spoke too fast for me but eventually I managed to put the right name on the right face and we agreed to meet in the city over a cup of coffee. He asked about my family in New Caledonia and my work at the hospital. His eyes were inquisitive, still ‘placing’ me I guess as regard to my background and situation in Australia. I was not quite a backpacker or a hippie (I still travelled with a suitcase...) neither a ‘would be’ immigrant to his country. We had one thing in common though: our friend, Penny.

He spoke of New Guinea again and explained to me the Australian ballot system for conscription. His year was picked and he had no choice, apparently, but to spend two years of his life in military service (but he didn’t mind that at all, he said). As an army officer he had spent the last year training native troops in Port Moresby. I had difficulties picturing him in that role for some reason: he didn’t seem the type that would shout and order others about. But perhaps he didn’t have to.

My friends and I didn’t believe in the kind of war that was going on in Vietnam, but I knew little of the situation in New Guinea. I didn’t know whether Richard had faced danger or not, but somehow I was pleased that he was now back safely in his country, as if this man, a stranger only two days earlier, had in fact sprang up from a familiar world.

We got to know each other a little better over the next few days and when he asked me if I’d like to visit Canberra and meet some of his friends and family, I was more than happy to agree. He had told me that he was a farmer at heart and I was very curious to see his world and explore the environment that he, obviously, was so fond of. My knowledge of the real Australia was of course very limited and I was thrilled to get the opportunity to see this part of the country through the eyes of such a friendly “fifth generation Australian”. I had enough money to go on by now and the hospital let me go as I was ‘casual’ staff anyway.

‘Arnold Grove’

The Stathams lived on a little farm outside Canberra called “Arnold Grove”, and they welcomed me very warmly. Richard’s mother was a beautiful woman with bright blue eyes and a great smile. She was a keen gardener, as I soon

found out, and I very much liked the grounds surrounding their house. The design included sprawling shrubs like old roses in the fashion of an English garden, but it was also Mediterranean in style, with a blend of vibrant colours and pungent herbs so familiar to me. The grounds complemented the house beautifully as it was designed by an Australian architect of repute, I was told, keen on bringing a touch of Italian influence to his work: Professor Lesley Wilkinson.

Richard's father was a skin specialist practicing in Canberra. He was tall and looked Greek or Spanish, I thought. Not far from the pool, Dr Statham had created a special area in the garden devoted to native species of trees and shrubs that I found at first a little scruffy. But when I half closed my eyes, I discovered that they blended perfectly with the tall gum trees in the background, all planted by the Stathams over the years.

We were in the driest continent on earth, and I marvelled at the relative small amount of water the native flora seems to require. Those shrubs provided habitat and food for some extraordinary birds typical of the Australian bush: parrots and other small nectar birds flew freely around us. One day the water froze on the pool and, in the early morning, it was covered with a delicate layer of ice. I had noticed the cypress trees: two foreboding dark masses at the water edge, but in that first light of the day they came to life, sparkling with sculptural icicles like two huge Christmas trees.

We drove to some of their friends and neighbours owning sheep farms. One in particular called "Lambrigg", with an interesting two storey homestead and expansive grounds, was owned by Jo and Ruth Gullett and Jo (as I was asked to call him) gave me a blind tasting with French and Australian wines, challenging me to pick the difference...This was my first experience with well selected Australian wines and, although not a great expert in the matter, I was surprised and delighted by their freshness and flavours. After lunch we all strolled outside, and I was able to hand feed a friendly kangaroo which the family kept as a pet. A real treat for me.

We also visited "Michelago", a historic property. The main homestead had an old fashioned charm of early colonialism and the garden, planted only with English vegetation, had 'rooms', green lawns and water pieces bordered by tall European trees. The colonial history was all around us.



Self with relatives of my Nandi's family,



Fiji Islands

On a trip North with Penny Carr.



Arnold Grove, Australia, winter and summer with Richard's father and 'Bijou'

That night, we had dinner around a huge cedar table, with high chandeliers and family portraits on the walls. Mrs Ryrie cooked some superb meat...or was it Mr Ryrie or perhaps their son David? (An old friend of Richard) Apparently, although in a cold winter night, the beautiful meat grown on the place had been cooked outside on the barbecue, the men's kitchen.

After the main course we were offered a lovely apple crumble, rounding up beautifully this simple but delicious meal. David's very stylish younger sister, Polly, joined us later on after an evening in Canberra, and we all sat around the fireplace, listening to Polly's stories as she described her recent visit to Italy.

At first I didn't like Canberra that much: a cold city, nicely designed with beautiful trees but lacking of soul, I thought. When I got to the war memorial my mind made a complete turn around. This beautifully placed and imposing monument was in fact the soul and heart of Canberra, the way I saw it. I was quite taken back in reading the endless list of Australian casualties during the last wars. I also thought of my grandfather: he could have fought along side any of those soldiers during his battles. I knew about the Anzacs, but their sacrifices felt more real now. They fought in France from such a far land; paying the price of European freedom with their young lives...I needed to be standing there to appreciate the full meaning of their sacrifice. A very emotional moment for me

With this visit to the War Memorial, my stay at Arnold Grove was coming to an end. It had been short but rich in discoveries as well as friendships, and I knew I wouldn't forget any of it.

The “Achille Lauro”

Richard was to travel to London the following week and since I had quitted my job in Sydney, I was also planning in leaving Australia as soon as possible. We discussed the possibility of travelling together, and decided to try if we could. As it turned out I had no trouble replacing my flight to Singapore with a sea voyage on the “Achille Lauro”, an Italian passenger boat, and was delighted at the chance of skipping at least two airports. Richard was already booked on that journey, and helped me organise the transfer. Perhaps it was all meant to happen, as everything fell into place so easily. I threw away my well loved but awkward suitcase and bought a sausage canvas bag instead.

The trip lasted ten days. We were scheduled to stop in Melbourne where Richard was keen to visit his grandmother and two aunts living there but, to his great disappointment, the stop over was cancelled at the last minute. The next port of call was Perth. We loved the relaxed and Mediterranean atmosphere of the city and especially the port of Fremantle. The people on board of the “Achille Lauro” were of varied backgrounds: Richard shared his cabin with a couple of Australian army officers, who were going back to Viet-Nam to attend to some “unfinished business”...and I shared mine with a very talkative English woman.

The food on board was reasonably good and there was even a cinema. We played chess a lot, raided the little library, listened to some music and talked...This was definitely the best way to travel and I started to think: wouldn't that be nice if I didn't have to see another airport during that return trip at least.

As soon as we arrived at the Singapore harbour, we enquired about a possible passage to Indonesia as we wanted to back track a little, and visit the Islands for a month or so before returning to Singapore and parting company. Richard would then fly to London directly and myself to Bangkok, where I hoped to meet my friend Christiane (if still there).

We were told of a cargo boat ready to embark to Djakarta and willing to take passengers camping on deck, but we had to hurry as she was ready to sail ‘any minute’. The trip was to last around three days. We knew it would be rough camping and very hot, with little or no shade on deck, but there was only drinking water on board and, that, we didn't know. Even then, it was rationed and definitely not offered to wash bodies or clothes (and no flushing toilets). All the same, this was a good chance to go across cheaply. So we boarded, and installed our little camp where ever we could find room. We were fed twice a day and lined up to get two lovely little sardines each and a bowl of rice...I thought of Christiane ...She had agreed to some rough travelling in the past but this would have been just too much, I am sure. (although we never went as far as that to find out).

Some French travellers talked to us on deck. They had interesting stories to tell as they had come from Europe, overland, right through Asia. They were well seasoned to these sorts of travels and gave us a lot of useful tips and addresses of cheap places to stay... Just in case we decided to do the same, but in reverse. This was food for thought.

Before we reached Singapore, Richard and I had seen each other under the best light, getting to know the other in a very sedate environment, like on the Achille Lauro, or in gentile countries such as Arnold Grove's or Michelago. In fact we knew very little of each other at this early stage. This voyage to Djakarta forced us to open up more fully and honestly as the scorching heat, the crawling insects, the lack of water and fresh food and the sooty dirt deposited on board and sticking to our bodies contributed to push us (me) into an uneasy corner. At least this is how I felt, and I started to wonder whether I had what it takes to keep going on this sort of journey through the whole of Indonesia... and back.

I shared with Richard some of my thoughts. Our situation didn't seem to bother him at all and, as far as he was concerned, any kind of adventure with or without rough travelling was worth getting into. There was no point kidding myself on that score: my trip so far had not been 'adventurous'. Soon after leaving Paris I had been spoilt by fate: I met the right people at the right time, slept in a comfortable bed every night, ate just as I liked and enjoyed the luxury of picking and choosing my life experiences and jobs. In other words, I had followed a safe path, so far, and here was a chance to side track a little from this pattern, with a very supportive companion, of course.

On that cargo ship the deck was dirty and the sun scorching. Food and water were scarce but as our crossing came to an end this *unbearable* situation had already started to turn into a worthwhile and exciting journey for me.

Rosnay,

Mum has kept all the letters which I had sent her during my world trip; they are neatly put together in a folder, fat with photos and other memos. We read them, study them even. I can see how bits of recollection are flooding back to her mind on and off. She tells me about her worries when, for a while, she just didn't know where I was...

Chapter XV: Indonesia to Europe: overland travels

As Djakarta's profile appeared, we quickly packed our camp, said good bye to our companions and the crew, then jumped on shore and headed to the nearest guest house to scrub up. The headaches that I had started to experience in Mexico were never very far away, and being able to have a cool shower and lie under a fan was instant relief... Drinking water had to be boiled of course but we had no trouble getting into that routine, at least we had water.

Djakarta was and still is, I believe, an incredibly busy and very hot city with not much green space to escape to, and we felt the need to be in altitude for a while, so we took a train to the mountains on the South side, reaching Bandung. From there we spent a couple of days exploring the hills.

It was also nice to get reacquainted with each other in relative comfort for a while, and from our guesthouse we planned our trip through Java. We had a visa for one month and decided to take buses and trains through the island in order to reach Bali. Spending the odd night on the beach was much easier than I had anticipated; the sand was cool and soft and we were not asked to move on. It was the dry season and, waking up with the sunrise, we could watch friendly fishermen hoping in and out of their multicoloured wooden catamarans, bringing on shore their bounty.

Half way through Java, we visited the Buddhist temple at Borobudur consisting of hundreds giant and ancient stone bells that covered acres of land. It was a cheerful and refreshing contrast to the rather severe culture surrounding it. The buses were always packed as people would take chickens and other small livestock to the markets. I thought we were a conspicuous pair, but nobody seems to pay much attention to us. As we mixed with the locals in their everyday life, we witnessed silent suffering on a scale that we had never seen or even imagined before, particularly sick children (lepers) begging on road sides and in trains.

General Suharto had been in power since 1968 supported by the US government and the question in our minds was: What now? How would the country develop? With a population of more than two hundred million and so much poverty, the question of illegal deforestation would soon come to the world's attention as an important environmental issue.

At the tip end of Java, we boarded a commuting boat and crossed to Bali. Instantly, we fell under the spell of this most beautiful and still unspoiled Island. The people from the Hindu religion were very friendly and open to foreigners. As I understood it, Hinduism had mixed over the years with the local customs, beliefs and superstitions, creating its own unique brand. There were strict rules and rituals and countless gods' offerings were being prepared, four times a day. Those rituals were very costly and time consuming to follow but still always respected by everyone (out of true conviction or just superstition as black and white magic were both simultaneously practiced.)

Cheap accommodation was easy to find on the island, and we decided to rent a house right on Kuta Beach. It had been arranged that we would meet up with Richard's sister, Virginia (Ginny), and share the house with her at the extravagant cost of 50 cents each a day... There was no running water but the house came with a well in the garden and a young boy had been assigned by the owner to bring up the water for us.

I loved the wash house consisting of a big polished cement square bath and a 'Turkish' loo. Our young companion had a tiny radio, and in the evenings he would dance to the sounds of the Balinese music that came out of it. He was a dancer in the island's many festivals and dancing for him was second nature.

The Australian painter, Donald Friend, had a house built even closer to the water than ours, at Sanur. It was designed in the local style with half of the house opened to the sea breezes. As it happened, friends of both Richard and Virginia were staying there at the time: Katie and Ian Reid. Richard had been a Jackaroo on Ian Reid's farm, "Clare" at Captains' Flat close to the ACT: a very cold place apparently, wild and beautiful. (I heard stories of satin doonas turning to ice under the jackaroos' breath, when early morning they woke up in a heavy frost.)

I enjoyed meeting the Reids, sharing meals with them as well as the odd grass joint which, for me, was a new experiment- We had treats like tropical fruit salads offered along the road from little kiosks; they were the best I had

ever tasted... Virginia and Richard had an easy going attitude to life, very relaxed I thought. As I was starting to discover, those characteristics were shared by the few Australians that I had met so far, with a blend of British coolness and down under generous openness. This was of course a vague character generalisation as personalities are made of many layers of complexity, of which one's country of birth only plays a small part. But we were young and enthusiastic, and we enjoyed our closeness, delighting in discovering what we did have in common rather than identifying our differences.

We hired motorbikes and went everywhere, walked through temples and nature reserves, swam. After Richard and I left the Island, Virginia spent a couple of days at the Reids as, when alone in the house, she felt uneasy with the presence of soldiers around the house. She then flew to London and Italy. From Bali, Richard and I made our way back to Djakarta (again overland) and then, we flew to Singapore just on the day that our visas expired.

It had been easy. In fact much easier than I thought it would be. We both enjoyed this trip so much, as well as each other company that we still couldn't bring ourselves to part. In Richard's diary were all the precious addresses collected so far from travellers who crossed half the world overland. They inspired us to do the same...if we could.

But looking at our finances, we knew that we wouldn't be able to travel for months overland and the only option now was to get a refund on our plane tickets. It proved reasonably easy for Richard but a little harder for me, as my ticket was not the conventional kind. But after a call to 'Kuoni', my travel agent in Zurich, the airline agreed to refund the rest of my trip.

Thailand and Burma

Now we had six hundred Australian dollars each, which we hoped would last us the next few months travelling, and judging by what we spent in Indonesia this budget seemed realistic.

I had told Christiane about Richard and she urged me not to rush on her account. She was keen to get to Kathmandu and said if I still wanted to we could meet there, but only if it suited my plans. She had been and still was a great friend.



Getting to Jakarta



Richard playing the harmonica near Bandung



Htay and Whee Whee: Mandalay



Coconut drinks offered by children at the train station



From the beginning of my travels I had written to my mother and George regularly, so they knew about my new travelling companion. I must have given them a fair bit of angst, I'm afraid, and their letters back were full of wise advice.

From then on, we seemed to spend a lot of time queuing at consulates to obtain visas along the way. We also acquired student cards for cheaper travelling. From Singapore we took a bus through Malaysia, a ferry to Penang, where we saw for the first time monkeys living in temples, and then hitchhiked our way to Bangkok through the heaviest rain that I we had seen so far. Thailand was (is) one of the few countries in the region that had never been occupied by Western powers. They are lucky.

Bangkok

We found Bangkok a mix of old culture and modern comforts and the city interspersed with a network of canals ("clongs") was alive with wooden boats used as taxis and equipped with powerful motors. Temples were plenty and adorned with intricately carved Buddha statues that we studied in minute details. As for the food it was the best we had so far: the smells from the crowded pavements stalls were pungent and spicy and the flavours so varied, we wanted to try everything and we just about did. We then flew to Rangoon as there was no legal road access in and out of Burma.

Burma was very different from Thailand: quieter, poorer and certainly not touristic at all. The people, very friendly and proud and I didn't notice any begging. The country had been open to foreigners for three days only which meant no one could reach the North in that time, so we were lucky to be allowed a few more days (a week) and we took the train to Mandalay. When we got there, two students (Htay and Whee Whee) seem to have been waiting for us amongst a crowd of onlookers.

They took us under their wings, so to speak, and drove us around in their jeep, showing us with pride some sights and magnificent temples in and out of the city. We became friends. Htay's family had lost a substantial timber milling business through the communist regime. He said, even as he spoke to us, he felt watched by the military and asked us to be discreet if we were ever asked questions concerning them. Still, we could see the strict political regime was not about to break their spirits. On the first night, they directed us to a

guest house with tiny bedrooms, partially boxed into a big dormitory. Music played all night but it was not too loud and rather nice.

I wanted to buy some aspirin, so we went to the market where medicine was lined up on the pavement, and I bought a single tablet. All medications were sold this way, it appeared, and were hard to come by.

Refugees to India

The week over, we travelled back to Rangoon. Watching the countryside from our compartment we didn't know then that it was possibly the last time we would visit Burma and our friends as the political situation there was to worsen to a critical point.

From Rangoon, we kept going to Calcutta but we both had caught a stomach bug (eating 'off' meat in Rangoon) which made us very sick, especially Rick, and the bus trip from the airport to the city turned out to be a journey through inferno. Feeling ill, we could hardly keep our heads up and eyes open but every time we did, we would look down again in horror and disbelief.

The road to Calcutta was packed with refugees, children and adults alike living in makeshift shelters such as big water pipes, and often wearing no clothes at all. The children just stood there, looking lost in the middle of a constant stream of exhausted people who were walking slowly towards the city. As it appeared, the political conflict with Pakistan was crippling the social make up of this part of the country.

I am not too sure how we got to our destination, but we spent the next few days in the empty dormitory of the Salvation Army's "Red shield Inn", which was ran by an Anglo Indian with baby blue eyes who wouldn't or couldn't talk. He appeared to be dumb at first but only from seven pm on, as not talking at night was part of his religious ritual.

As soon as we were back on our feet we inquired about the refugees. The "political conflict" was actually a full on war with Pakistan. East Pakistan had been neglected economically and socially by the bigger West Pakistan (sixteen hundred km away...), a situation that led to this actual war of independence. It had started a few months earlier, resulting in many civilian deaths, with targets including intellectuals and particularly Indus. What we saw on that road to Calcutta was only a small part of the ten million refugees who, by the

end of the war, would have fled to India. The Pakistanis Awami leaders had already left East Pakistan and set up government in Calcutta, helped by India's Armed forces.

Eight weeks after we went through, in December 1971, they achieved Independence and the country of Bangladesh was born. The Awami league gained majority and a Parliamentary Democracy was established with Islam as State Religion in Bangladesh¹⁰.

In Calcutta itself, life appeared to go on undisturbed, but the children refugees were imprinted in our minds. As we walked around, we caught alternatively glimpses of hell and paradise, our moods swinging from helplessness to fascination. In contrast with the shanty towns and refugees camps, there was a thriving side of the city that came through in street stalls, and the prosperous quarters of the privileged like in the commercial centre. It became obvious to us that the cast system, well established in India, helped to foster those huge social inequalities.

We started to eat cautiously again and adopted a vegetarian diet consisting mostly of rice, vegetable curries and safe fruit. The city's well known indoor market attracted us: a huge place, very dark and foreboding and often represented as such in adventure movies. We walked in, and immediately were taken aside by traders to inspect their goods in some dubious backrooms. As we asked to be left alone to explore, they would nod-sideways- and resolve to simply follow us at a safe distance. We bought some fruit but nothing else that could have made their day, I'm afraid.

Back in the streets, contrast was everywhere: cattle mixing with the traffic and yet surviving as highly respected, well loaded animals and also people; naked or beautifully and picturesquely clothed. One of Calcutta's surprises for us was the craft and street arts with many shops open to the street with sculptures of Hindus subjects. Men (or Gods) of straw, life size or bigger

¹⁰ (H.N.) *A couple of years after we passed through, India was to create a huge dam on the Ganges River, 18km from the border and diverting much needed waters from Bangladesh. This proved to be another man made disaster for one of the poorest countries in the world already plagued by terrible natural disasters.*

were modelled and bound with strings, a clay finish was added and then brightly painted.

Another surprise, quirky this time, was to see a patch of ground near the city enclosed with railings as the exclusive territory of a respected colony of rats, their holes hidden behind arched entrances. Was this a tribute to the last of the 'wild life' as India does not have much of it anymore, apart from squirrels, bats and monkeys? All the camels and elephants we saw were domesticated. But birds were plentiful we were told, much tamer than in Europe.

Calcutta left us with a better understanding of Indian values and philosophies and a bitter/sweet taste in the mouth. We saw the realities of people's lives coming through straight and honest: emotions, love and even death accepted as they really were. The weak and helpless, not tucked away out of sight like in Europe for instance. Even facial expressions seemed natural: people don't 'put on a good face' in India. Gentleness comes through but harshness too (like tough looking police and soldiers roaming around official buildings). We also noticed certain candour in picturing sexual activities like at the great Suraya temple in Konarak, dedicated to the God Sun and not far from Calcutta. The purpose of those embracing figures, in a holy temple- instruction or celebration- is still not clear to me.

The journey from Calcutta to Delhi took three days on an ancient steam engine train. For such long journeys the locals are highly organised: they take food, water, cushions and camp in corridors. But we were not so well prepared (again) and had to endure a very rough journey.

There were strict rules for one's ablutions in this train: water was provided but no toilets, so stops over were planned along the way for the passengers to visit the loo. With only a few minutes to spare, all women would crouch together on the cement floor of the 'wash house' and eventually pressure hose it all down the single Turkish loo. On my first visit there, I was unaware of the procedure and locked the door behind me for privacy...When I heard the banging at the door I realised my *faux pas* and apologised profusely. I opened the door, and the women rushed in,- hardly taking any notice of me- did their business and then rushed out again after a well synchronized 'clean up' of the floor. The system worked well.

Arriving in Delhi and covered with black soot, we searched for a three wheeler (a habit by now) to take us to a modest but very clean guest house.

Of course, like in Djakarta, getting to our destination was paradise and sleeping under the fan and mosquito net more than made up for the past three sleepless nights for me. (Richard could sleep like a baby just anywhere and in any position).

After a good night's rest, we both agreed that an overland trip was in fact the best way to travel. In our third class carriages we were meeting people with unexpected opinions and lifestyles, surrounded by many layers of Indian society (not only the rich who can afford to fly); buying vegetarian food wrapped up in banana leaves and handed on quickly through the window as the train moved on; drinking beautiful milk straight from the coconut, and playing chess, reading.

Our chess playing was always watched with great interest by everyone around us as the rules of the game were understood by all. Chess appeared to be a kind of national (and international) game right through our journey, even little children participated and playing with rich or poor, locals or westerners was a great social leveller. I had adapted so well to the rawness of this mode of travel that I could only regret having got into it so late in my journey. But I did, and I have Richard to thank for that.

As we started to explore the city, we found several distinct Delhis. The Old Delhi was the interesting one: a multitude of narrow streets and lanes and bazaars were teeming with life: street traders, money changers, shoe cleaning boys and beggars. Two great monuments amongst many others come to mind now. The Red Fort was one of them (where we rode an elephant and bought a very special chess set,) and the Friday Mosque, the largest Mosque in India, which we visited (at least I think I was allowed to).

To the South was New Delhi, the diplomatic and commercial sector with embassies, government buildings, modern shops, and Wimpy bars. A quick look around this part of the city in a three wheeler put the picture of the many thriving eucalyptus trees in our minds, quite a surprise discovery in this part of the world.

Kashmir

The more we got to know India and the more we wanted to know. It was frustrating to realise that travelling through, we could only skim the surface of the many facets of this country.

We both had lost a lot of weight through sickness and felt hot and weary, so we decided to slow down, or at least concentrate on one part of the country and linger on a little before leaving India for good. We chose Kashmir. The long trip by bus to Srinagar took over three days. We stopped every night and slept in little guest houses, as usual. The Himalayas are a boundary for India, which is very difficult to cross. So Srinagar, the capital of Kashmir, has something remote, isolated and frontier like about it and even the people looked different, more like central Asians. But as we were going to find out, Kashmir was a little too frontier like for comfort.

On the first night, all went well but on the second night as we were trying to 'unwind' with some grass left over from Delhi, we swore this would be the last time for us. In that little hotel room, Richard became very ill and for what seemed to be hours, had great difficulties breathing. He said his all body was 'drying out' and he thought he was dying... Where to find a doctor in this isolated outpost and in the middle of the night? This was the longest night we both had to go through so far in our lives. But thankfully, Richard managed to control his breathing, eventually. This little episode had been a big scare for both of us but brought us closer together I felt. And we kept our promise: the green stuff was definitely not worth the trouble.

At the end of the third day, our bus driver refused to stop and, as he kept driving well into the night, he got himself a real mutiny on board. It had been a long day for him and the road being extremely dangerous and narrow; the passengers forced his hand to stop. Eventually he had to agree to take some sleep for a few hours.

We drove again at day break and enjoyed this very early start, as the sky was perfectly clear and the sun rising behind the hills threw a kind of mystical light around. We were the only Westerners in the bus amongst mostly Indian passengers who were taking a holiday or visiting relatives in Kashmir. The conversations had been flowing and we got told about the uneasy political situation with Pakistan, again... (It explained the military jeeps and trucks that we met along the way). Still we didn't want to worry unduly, as we knew the distribution of territory in those parts of India had been 'settled' a few years earlier and a treaty signed. The Himalayas appeared and withdrew in passing haze and Srinagar, at the base of those majestic mountains, simply charmed us. It was mid October and nature's colours were just stunning. The air was cool but not too cold yet and the adjoining colourful "Dal Lake" with its

beautiful lotus, water lily flowers and limpid waters attracted us like a magnet. No guest house this time for us, we would move into a houseboat instead. Those boats called 'chicaras' were of all sizes and colours: some extremely elaborate like floating palaces for wealthy visitors and others like the one we chose, small and charming.

We had a friendly skipper, Mahmad, who stayed with us during the day, bringing in the mornings simple but tasty curries and water for tea and ablutions (cold). I particularly liked one of his specialties: boiled potatoes with some pungent spice. Forgetting our vegetarian diet for a while we had the famous 'Rogan josh', a lamb dish cooked in heavy spice with tomatoes and curd, also 'hakn' a type of solid cottage cheese. Kashmir's economy was (and still is I believe) in big part based on its agriculture and the organic fresh produce is exported mainly to the Middle East: rice, asparagus, artichokes, broad beans, beetroot, saffron...

As we walked through Srinagar we came to the river 'Jhelum' with a very old, imposing wooden bridge crossing it. And a little further, by the lake side, we walked through the colourful patterned gardens of the ancient Moguls Emperors. The deciduous trees were thriving in those altitudes: maple, birch, apple, cherry but also deodar, firs, pines and many more.

We decided to go on a 'safari' on horse back (with a guide) climbing up the legendary mountain Hari Parbat that forms the backdrop of the city. But we had to be totally trusting that those weary looking horses had sure feet, as they made their way through incredibly narrow passes. I doubt that the guides could have stopped a fall down the escarpments if one of them slipped, but like with our bus drivers, we put our lives in their hands and all went well. (Perhaps a little Hindu philosophy had rubbed off on us). Eventually, we reached the Sonamarg glacier and admired the stunning views of the valley.

It was kind of freezing at those altitudes and I found that the thick woollen shawl I had bought in Mexico was hardly enough for warmth now.

Getting back down to Srinagar, we bought a couple of coats. We had a leather/fox jacket made for Richard and a long sheep fur coat for me from one of the little floating shops on the lake. Textiles were also a major industry in Kashmir and knitting, weaving and rugging wool or silk very much an elaborate craft form (Cashmere wool was already then getting scarce through the decline in number of goats).

The clothes people wore around us were beautifully colourful and layered for warmth. Other crafts practiced in the region included silverware and woodcarving. Richard bought a traditional water pipe for his parents in well executed etched mix metals but it never reached Australia, to his disappointment (and his parents’).

On the houseboat, Dal Lake

Since we arrived in Kashmir we felt very relaxed in this peaceful environment. The houseboat was a perfect setting for romantic dinners under the incredibly bright stars, and we talked a lot about our respective families and friends, our dreams and ambitions... This way of travelling was not always easy but, as we came across small and then bigger obstacles, we seemed to ride them side by side more comfortably as time went on. We also shared the same excitement in discovering hidden beauty in the least expected places and in the very diverse people that we encountered along the way.

One night, Richard asked me what I thought of life in Australia...Could I live there some day? My reply was a little vague: ‘possibly... but you know...my family, my friends...’ Then it was my turn to ask: could he live in France? ‘The language barrier you know’ ...His reply was as vague as mine and nothing more was said on the subject but, that night, we had unknowingly crossed a barrier and we felt amazing. Of course we knew this life was not entirely ‘real’ but it was good to be in it together, right then.

Mahmad often came on board with his young son and, as we had our bags open, they would look for goods to exchange. I wished we had more things to trade but they seemed happy with what they found, and so were we with what they offered. This custom created a bond between the parties, as long as we could be firm about what should stay off the trading table of course (like Richard’s gold school cufflinks, which disappeared mysteriously).

The Kashmirians in general are gentle people: they live at a slow pace and in harmony with each other in spite of their different religions. Islam had established itself a long time ago and from the 13th century, it became the majority religion of Kashmir. The Sulfi Islamic way of life seemed to complement the Rishi tradition of Kashmir Pandits (Hindus) Overtime, Hindus and Muslims revered the same local saints and prayed at the same shrines.



India



On the way to Srinagar



Houseboats on Dal Lake





On the chicara: trying the tobacco water pipe



Chapati shop, Kabul



Dubrovnick, (top)

Lake Van: sunrise.

We stayed for a period of three weeks in Kashmir and when the time came to leave, we headed to the bus station. As we got there we sensed that something was very wrong. There was a huge crowd of people pushing and talking loudly. They looked worried and didn't queue up nicely, and patiently-as they would normally do- to get their tickets. We felt an atmosphere of urgency, even panic. The buses were filling up very quickly and we then learnt that no more buses would be in service until further notice, as the army was now requisitioning the tyres for their own vehicles. Thankfully, we secured two seats in the last bus and settled in, relieved to be on board to say the least. Again, there were border disputes in the region.

We were of course blissfully unaware of the magnitude of the struggle looming, but one thing is certain; when we came through Kashmir in the autumn of 1971, we were touched by this beautiful valley and felt a special bond with it. We can only hope now that sanity and a decent way of life for all will some day return to this very special place.

Leaving Srinagar we reached Peshawar in Pakistan. We were now used to the buses stopping at regular intervals, and the passengers getting off with little prayer rugs in their hands. This was a familiar ritual and we looked on as everyone knelt down facing the Mecca to pray aloud, five times a day.

As we visited Peshawar we had an uneasy encounter with an ex general of the Pakistani's army (as he had told us he was). He befriended us, took us to his house for tea, and as we were about to leave, he insisted that I, alone, should come and visit some other members of his family. He was very adamant that I'd board his vehicle (a horse and cart). Richard and I looked at each other quite bewildered as the man appeared decent, well dressed and certainly not the abducting type. I said thank you for the offer but, naturally, my companion would come too. His face hardened and for a fraction of a second we saw a predator's flicker in his eyes... What was this man up to? We certainly had no intention to stick around to find out.

Considering the number of warm and genuine people who shook hands with us in those last months, we felt we had been lucky. The only two things that ever went missing was a pen in New Delhi and it possibly fell out of Richard's pocket. The other thing was the cufflinks that might have been just lost anyway. We looked as poor as we were and that was an advantage (although, those new cosy fur coats might change our image from then on...)

HN. Since 1947, half of Kashmir had become Indian Territory, one third Pakistanis and the remaining Chinese. Pakistan's main interest in the Indo Kashmir territory has always been the four rivers flowing from the Indian parts and providing the main drainage system for Pakistan. Agriculture in Pakistan was and still is very much dependant on the waters of these rivers, in other words Kashmir had always provided the life line of Pakistan. In 1960 a treaty was signed between the two countries; it divided the distribution of the water coming from those four rivers. But Pakistan felt that in a major conflict India could shut the waters from the rivers and as well as other motives (religious, cultural) this kept providing a big incentive for Pakistan to try and fight India out of Kashmir.

Afghanistan

We crossed the border by bus to Afghanistan and reached the capital, Kabul, which was considered then as the major trading city between the East and the West, also the home of many artists and particularly musicians (before the Taliban's rule).

We had booked in at a youth hostel and shared the big dormitory with a group of Westerners (mostly Americans). As they were getting high on marijuana, the hostel management stormed in and ordered the smokers out of the establishment, in the middle of the night... A very cold night, I might add... Richard and I were playing chess in a corner of the room -with our eyes glued to the chess board- when the voice just behind us forced us to look up 'but you two can stay' we heard. The manager apologised for the interruption and left the room. It seems that our decision to quit the recreational drug had just paid off.

The next day, at the big sport ground, we watched a game of "Buzkaski", the national sport of Afghanistan. It is similar to polo and played by horsemen in two teams, each team trying to grab and hold a goat carcass. It must have been a holiday, as at a distance many colourful kites were also dancing and swirling around in the sky. (The memory of this place is still very vivid in my mind and over the next decades we followed from a long way away and with a heavy heart the sad political developments in that country with the Russian invasion, the US involvement followed by cultural and religious oppression by the Taleban's.)

At the time, what impressed us most was the rich rural life, (eighty per cent of the Afghan economy is agricultural land) people working in harmony, and the beauty of the rugged landscape and its inhabitants. They seemed to have a fierce loyalty to their own tribe or clan.

In spite of past wars and civil unrest, the country was still very rich in culture and history. The Bamiyan valley is a good example of it. Lined with cave dwellings and cut out of the cliffs by Buddhist monks, grottos with wall paintings in Greco Buddhist style, and ruins of ancient towers and fortresses had flourished until Gangis Khan in the thirteenth century¹¹.

We knew of the 'Silk Road' but never realized that there were actually different itineraries, which linked China to the Mediterranean Sea and India as early as the second century B.B.E. It was a network of footpaths and caravan trails across rugged mountains and barren lands, some of them just like this land we were crossing now. We could easily imagine the difficulties endured by the travellers then.

Apart from trading exquisite silks and other precious merchandise, religious ideas moved freely on those roads too: Buddhism flowed east from India in the sixth century, as the Buddhist art through this region shows. Those roads also opened the way for deadly diseases which, like the bubonic plague, originated in the vast farming area of China. By the fifteenth century, sea routes across the Indian Ocean began to replace the more dangerous overland passages. It occurred to us that the future of the Silk Road might now lie not in spices and silk, but instead in oil and gas.

¹¹ H.N. *Afghanistan had been a cross road between the East and the West for centuries and paid the price of its position through countless invaders. An important turning point in this troubled country would have been in the year 1947 when Britain withdrew from India and with the creation of Pakistan, carved out Indian and Afghan lands. This event resulted in the largest migration in human history: seventeen million people fled their country either way to escape violence and this process favoured the concentrated settlement of Islamic fundamentalism particularly in the North part of Pakistan. Tragically, a few years after we went through this part of the world Buddhist statues of great beauty and size had been destroyed by the Taliban)*

Lakes in high altitude have always attracted me and I was disappointed not to see the lakes of Bande Amir in mountainous Hazarat, three thousand meters high! We were told of the legendary beauty of those blue waters. Going through Kandahar, we noticed the skilful embroidery works produced in the region (I bought two coats made of sheep skin, and beautifully embroidered for my little nephews, Jean Charles and Patrick.).

Eventually, the Turkistan plains took us out of Afghanistan: this southern desert had impressed people from Alexander the Great to Marco Polo with its raw, unspoiled and natural beauty. Within the wall of Herat, we were again reminded of the passage of Alexander the Great.

Rosnay, Early, 2010.

Today my French friend, Dominique Matthieu came to visit as I was picking apples in the garden. She and her husband, Frederique, live only twenty km away, near Cargo, on a property called 'Checkers'. They run sheep and cattle and their three daughters, although grown up now, are still coming home for the different seasonal activities on the farm, -like lamb marking-. Dominique and Fred manage their farm following 'land care' principles, replanting many trees that had been cleared in the past. They arrived in Australia at the age of twenty, settled on 'Checkers', and never looked back (from what I can see). As for the apples which I collected, they are just ripe on the little tree given to us by our friend, Sally Sweetapple (no pun intended). Mint grows wild around the flowform and added to the apples, it makes a delicious complement to wooly's and Margie's sweet organic lamb. (*Deatail of' apples' by L. Charrat.*)



Chapter XVI: Closing the loop

As we got to the Iranian border, it felt a little strange. We were still in the desert. Two groups of tents housed the administration of each country with a 'no man's land' in the middle and we walked the few hundreds meters between them. On each side we passed through a tent and were thoroughly checked for drugs, visas etc...After some fast and loud talking, we were signed to move on. The whole operation looked more threatening than it was; in fact this crossing had been relatively easy.

Teheran was a city buzzing with life then, women looked relaxed and some wore black and hid their faces but a lot didn't. The younger ones carried books under their arms and walked freely, chatting to one another. I guess the city looked westernized and yet it retained an eastern identity that came through in the smells of pungent spice and strong coffee from the streets, the chanting of Islam prayers early mornings and evenings, the colourful mosques and the vibrant hues of autumn flowers in the parks. The traffic was mad of course but there were street lights at least.

We could have stayed on in Iran but the month of November was well on the way, and I had promised my mother that I'll do what I can to spend the New Year with the family. By that time I would have been away for a year and half. The news I had received from home were perplexing: George had taken a job as editor for a Swiss newspaper right up high in the mountains in a little town called Herisau. Apparently it snowed there eight months of the year... My mother would enjoy the challenge of fighting her way through the snow out of the house, no doubt! But George was happy: he could at last have the last say on what should be published, including his own articles, not carved out naturally. Well, I guessed that anyway.

They had kept their flat in Zurich and were spending time there regularly. George mentioned that his mother had to go to a nursing home as her health had deteriorated greatly with Parkinson's disease. She had lived with Mum

and George for a full year, but the medical side of her care eventually became impossible for Mum to handle. The flat being small, she had converted their living room into a bedroom and taken care of her mother-in-law entirely in those close quarters. I can't say that I was surprised; this is the kind of generous woman our mother had always been.

We still had a long way to go before parting, Richard and I, but we needed to get used to the idea. Richard had plans of his own which included visiting his sister Virginia in Perugia (where she was now studying Italian) and friends in Rome, but also importantly, he wanted to spend time in England where his family still had connections. Apart from the Pacific Islands and New Guinea, this overland trip had been his first introduction to the rest of the world and, like me, he enjoyed every minute of it so far. I think there is nothing more satisfying than slowly watch the countryside from a bus or train's window. It's a good way to observe the subtle architectural and geographical changes from one region to the next, learn of the history with a chat to the locals, and try to imagine their likely future.

HN. When did the revolution in Iran really start? Perhaps right at the time that we were there, in 1971, when the preparations for the Shah monster's party were in full swing. The people of Iran watched this lavish display of luxury and hardly felt involved in this special event (except to serve the foreign guests), which was the celebration of two thousand and five hundred years of continuous Iranian monarchy.

A report in 'Celebrations in Persepolis' at the time related that some sixty tents, the size of villas and designed by a Parisian firm, were erected for the Shah's special guests. One of those being Haile Selassie who brought with him a Chibuhua wearing a diamond studded collar... The 'vin d'honneur' was no less that a 'Chateau Lafitte Rothschild 1945'. This brand of wine might not have meant a lot to the mullabs, but seeing the Shah drinking alcohol -at the value of gold- with his foreign guests would have been seen as provocation... They were not impressed either, hearing of the bathing in pools of milk, practiced by the Shah's family.

The Shah was America's friend. Behind the scene, oil men, chemicals salesmen and other 'developers' had come to Iran to suggest to him ways of disposing of his massive oil revenues. He had wanted to move Iran into the western world and the twentieth century, particularly in relation to women's

rights, but he pushed too hard and too quickly. To the Shah's credit though, he also undertook land reforms in which the government bought properties from the wealthy and together, with some of his own land, were divided among tenant farmers. Most Iranians approved of the Shah's reforms in relation to sharing the land, but some didn't. The cleric Ayatollah declared that "any step limiting the size of landed estates would be contrary to Islam".

We had nearly four thousands km to get to Istanbul, mostly by train and we didn't plan many stops. In one particular trip, I sensed some uncomfortable vibes; men were travelling in groups for some reason and I felt uneasy about crossing a couple of wagons to reach the bathroom. I didn't want to ask Richard to walk with me and I regretted it later. As I tried to make my way over (covered from head to toe) I got cornered by a mob. This was the first time a situation like this ever happened to me, and I understood a little better, then, what it could mean to be a woman in this country. I was not harmed, just a little shaken.

From then on, I stuck to my compartment and watched through my window the beautiful little villages that were scattered along the country side as we travelled through. We wished- a little too late- that we could stop along the way as we'd heard of the friendliness of the people away from the big cities (and some trains). Turkey is far bigger than I had ever imagined: It has the length of France and England combined, with water on three sides.

So, coming from Iran, we moved through Asian Turkey (or Asia Minor) made up largely of Anatolia, the country from which it is believed the Indo European languages has originated. It was virtually impossible to escape the history of the region which had played such an important role in the development of our civilisation, as well as in the politics of Europe in more recent times. The Turks who were to become 'the Ottomans' were Sunni Muslim and came from the central Asian steppes in the 11th century, settling in that very region that Richard and I were crossing now. They spread rapidly and eventually squashed the 1100 year Christian Byzantine Empire by taking Constantinople (later Istanbul).

As we reached 'European Turkey' we felt the cold of this high plateau: a very rugged and mountainous area which contains Lake Van and Mt Ararat, the highest point at more than five thousand meters. Crossing Lake Van was an unreal experience for us as we felt at times that the train was riding on the

water. I still remember the bright sunsets and the hills surrounding the lake. After reaching Istanbul, we had one foot in Europe.

With an interesting blend of traditions and cultures, Istanbul was a delight to visit even in the rain. We spotted straight away the blue Mosque, originally built for Christian worship. It became a well known legacy of the 'Ottoman Empire', (which after years of decline made the fatal mistake of entering WWI through the Ottoman German Alliance.)

After Turkey we planned to visit Greece, which would lengthen our trip somewhat, but we thought we could still see Athens before the New Year. It is there that we lost our miniature chess set. It was like losing a best friend. We played chess waiting for trains and in trains, we played after dinner back at the guest houses, we played on the beaches and queuing for visas or getting our mail... We did visit the antique land marks of Greece and were suitably impressed by the meaning of it all, but what is now vivid in my memory relates mostly to the loss of that special chess set. Richard wrote here and there asking if it was found and incredibly, against all expectations, it turned up in the mail weeks later... in London.

From Athens we proceeded north again, and reached Yugoslavia, as the country was still called then. Dubrovnik was charming and the fortified city closed to traffic. We were relieved to experience such peace and tranquillity, after the buzzing and highly charged Asian cities we were used to visit. The city had been well protected in the past with huge stone walls encircling it and a drawbridge which accessed the imposing gate.

Smells of earthy food lingered on, as we passed small eating places. Our stomachs had got used to spicy and even fiery food along the way but we had been very cautious with eating meat. In Dubrovnik, we relaxed that rule and enjoyed incredibly beautiful meals of slow cooked stews and soups. Even the simple sausages were the best we ever had and with everything costing so little, we gathered our reminding funds would easily last us the distance.

One night, sitting in a little restaurant, and after having enjoyed a very tasty meal with a beautiful regional wine, the conversation moved on to how we both saw our respective future. After those few months travelling, we knew now that we wanted to be together 'for real', but how? Richard needed to be back in Sydney by the end of January as he had enrolled in a commerce degree. The Australian government had granted him a scholarship after his

two years of National Service, and he was to start his studies in March. So, the next three years were marked out for him.

For me, I had in mind to settle back in Zurich or Paris for a time as I had my furniture and personal effects stored in my friend Jacques' family attic. I had not heard from him for ages and I was keen to get in touch. I remembered his scepticism in seeing me travel this way: he had warned me in his letters of the risk of seeing so much, but at the end never feeling entirely satisfied and fulfilled. He might have been right to a point as I felt I had only scratched the surface of what could be learnt and understood about people, countries, and possibly myself...and yet the feeling was not at all negative. This journey opened doors for me, possibly to go through some day.

My friend, Christiane, had been back in Paris for at least one month and she had offered me to share her flat for a while. She was now planning a trip to Africa, but with her partner this time. In any case, Richard and I were not in a great hurry to rejoin the rat race. We felt that this time together travelling had been (still was) an exciting time in our lives, perhaps never to be repeated quite the same way.

The coast line of the Adriatic was now spreading in front of us and we boarded a boat that would take us to Trieste. Then after a short stay in Venice, we would be at the cross road where we were to part company.

We had left Sydney on a boat and were going to complete our journey with the same mode of transport...It was perfect. We passed many islands and enjoyed a couple of stops over on the way: I remember the towns of Split and Hvar, also full of charm and history. From Venice, Richard planned to take his train to Perugia, and I would take mine to Zurich.

As we were soon to part, I had looked forward to this quiet time on board to reflect over the past few months, starting from the day I put foot in Australia, walking through vibrant Sydney... Then meeting Richard, his close knit family, some of his friends...

I remembered this carefree country of contrasts and unexpected beauty, my visit to Canberra and the emotions I had felt in reading the names of the thousands of soldiers who, from this far land, volunteered to fight for a cause so remote from their lives. I remembered my friend, Penny, so honest and down to earth, arty and uninhibited who showed me a simpler way of life. I remembered the patients from the Macquarie Hospital, cheerful in spite of

their ailments and interested in who I was, looking outwards; also my dear friend, Christiane, joking through life.

And finally I remembered starting this long journey across the East with a travelling companion that I hardly knew but that, in time, I learnt to love and who loved me back. We were at a cross road it is true, but the cross road was more in our hearts, and this last trip was putting us through a test. When one night walking on deck, Richard asked me to marry him, it felt like the pieces of the puzzle were getting together all on their own. I said yes.

In Zurich

The train trip to Zurich, from Venice, was familiar to me except that it was strange being on my own again. Richard was now on his way to Perugia and we were engaged... Those last words moved in my head, pushing away any other thoughts. We had made a commitment to each other, and now we would find a way to go through with it.

Our carriage was approaching Zurich station and slowly made its way towards the platform where both, my mother and George, were standing, waiting for me. They looked a little anxious and George told me later that they had feared I would step onto the platform looking exhausted, skinny, perhaps scruffy or worse, as far as George was concerned: a *hippie*. I was wearing my warm, full length coat from Kashmir, a sheep skin head gear and leather boots from Afghanistan. They didn't need to look at me twice to feel reassured that I was healthy and warm, with my head apparently still placed squarely on my shoulders.

But of course they didn't know yet about the latest development in my life and, I thought, I would take my time to break the news to them, as gently as possible. Their opinion mattered a great deal to me and I felt a little apprehensive on how they would react. (They had found Paris a long way from Zurich so what about Sydney!) They both looked very well but George had put on weight... a little.

Mum was, as always, elegant and chatty. For me it felt good to be back in Zurich after four years away. At the apartment, I found my quarters downstairs, just as I had left them years before. Peter was home and we enjoyed catching up on each other's news. He had graduated in his drama

course and was looking forward to the start of his career. Arthur was also doing well, still in Bogota.

The next day, George drove us to their new place in Herisau, high up in the mountains. The little town was buried under half a meter of snow, but the spacious apartment was cosy and warm, full of reflected light from the snow. We visited George's editing house, it was very obvious that he enjoyed the work there and my mother said she didn't mind too much the isolation. For now. Richard rang up a few times and Mum and George wanted to know more about him. I showed them pictures of our trip and slowly introduced them to the idea that we were serious about each other. They told me they had guessed that much anyway, and were looking forward to meeting him -So far so good-.

Richard loved Italy and enjoyed seeing his sister in Perugia. He spent time in Rome with friends (Michael Cook) and then made his way to London. In the meantime in Zurich, I had a reunion with Bernard, Karin and the little boys: they looked like little oriental princes in their new embroidered coats.

Virginia, together with a friend, arrived in Zurich from Italy at the same time as Richard. I was happy seeing his sister again. She looked different as it was to be expected: in Bali we lived in sarongs and sandals all day, now in the cold Zurich weather we were all rugged up with fur coats and boots. If I had been a little anxious about a possible tense situation following the introductions, I soon relaxed. Mum and George took readily to Richard and Virginia and I could see it worked both way.

Now, we felt more confident about speaking openly of our wedding plans and it was a relief to see that both, Mum and George, looked happy for us. They offered some advice though, and this was to give each other a few months of 'cooling off' period in our respective countries, before tying the knot for good. A very wise advice indeed.

George tested Richard in a funny way: he always admired people who had adventurous tastes in general, but particularly for unusual foods. So, he took us one night to a 'snail restaurant' in the old city: snails of different sizes and breeds were offered with all sorts of sauces and Richard didn't flinch. He ate everything in front of him with great pleasure (he said) and passed that little test with flying colours.



Sailing past the medieval city of 'Hvar'



A little fun in Zurich



On the way to Herisau



The Saone River, with "Fourviere" on top of the hill in Lyon.

After Ginny and her friend returned to Perugia, the four of us took another trip to Herisau and then we decided to drive to England together. George had some work contact to meet there and Richard was to fly back to Sydney from London. Our first stop was Lyon naturally. We stayed in the old apartment, Place Bellecour, and took part of the christening of my favourite cousin, Jean Philippe's first son, Pierre-Henri. This was the ideal way for Richard to meet Bernard, Karin and most of our relations from the Dulong de Rosnay's side of the family.

We also walked through the Place, across the suspended bridge over the river Saone, to the old Lyon... and then we stopped at my Uncle Jean's little flat. I was so glad that Richard could meet him as Jean's health was deteriorating further. He tried to get a few English words together and the communication slowly got into gear... I translated a lot.

Then I showed Richard the *Parc de la Tete d'Or* and some famous "*Traboules*" (from Latin: to cross) around my uncle's apartment. Those crossings were built as internal passageways forming a maze through and under the old city. Two hundred and thirty of them to be exact are scattered this way as secret short cuts, used in the old days by silk manufacturers, workmen, and craftsmen to transport clothes and other textiles through the city, while being sheltered from bad weather.

My uncle, who loved talking about his neck of the wood, spoke of the silk tradition in Lyon. In the past, the city had become a major warehouse for foreign silks, at the receiving end of the Silk Road so to speak (until the silk's secret escaped from China through the indiscretion of a Chinese princess). A couple of centuries later, Lyon became the silk capital of the world of fashion when Jacquard perfected the method of producing figured fabrics, using perforated cards: a revolution in weaving techniques which established properly the silk industry in Lyon (and made the city very wealthy.)

I had known of the *Traboules* all my life and played many games through them as a child, but somehow their story meant a great deal more to me now that I had crossed Afghanistan and the Silk Road. Mum's brother added another interesting touch to the story, as he had been involved in the Resistance effort in WWII. He recalled that this network of secret passages served another purpose: people could hide there and it was one of the reasons why the Nazi occupation failed to take control of those areas during the war.

After leaving my uncle, we went on to Paris where Richard was keen to see a contact from Sydney: Robert Ashton. We had arranged to meet Christiane at her apartment, and Robert came with us. We tried to place Robert's particular sense of humour in a funny context, with no success at all. Eventually Robert had to go somewhere and the rest of us ended up spending a very nice night, driving around Paris and listening to each other's stories. I knew Christiane well enough to sense what she thought of Richard and the vibes were good.

She had gone to Kathmandu after Bangkok, and shared the lives of a Nepalese family, teaching French. We loved the beautiful photos of Nepalese children that she took then, and the art work that she collected along the way. Now, she was getting ready for her next venture, on the African continent. We didn't have much time in Paris but we wanted at least to see my dear cousin, Pierre: Minon's son. He was now a junior photographer with the magazine *L'Express* and was full of enthusiasm about his assignments. We had a meal together on the *Boulevard St Michel* (Richard ordered 'steak tartare,' this time, not knowing that the egg and meat would be offered raw. He said he loved it and George, again, approved...). Then we drove out of Paris.

With the car on the ferry, we crossed the channel and headed straight to London. There, we met friends of Richard: Christopher Hazel and his girl friend, Alice. They were great company, but this didn't surprise me as I already knew and liked Christopher's sister, Sally Sweetapple, whom I had met at Penny's birthday. A few other Australians were staying at the flat and they all looked like they were having the time of their lives. Next, we drove to Oxford where George met his contact (A retired admiral of the Royal Navy as it turned out) and in spite of getting lost a couple of times we had a good trip and enjoyed staying in cosy country pubs.

Leaving George and Mum to their business, Richard and I decided to explore the country a little further, and we hitchhiked to and through the region where his father's family came from originally, in Derbyshire. By an incredible coincidence, the driver who took us on board knew all about the Stathams of the area! I was impressed. He drove us to the little village of Morley, close to Derby, in the family church where Ralph de Stathum (as the name was spelt then) and his wife Goditha's head stones were (as well as some of their descendants'). *Pictured next page.*

Richard talked to the vicar and we were allowed to take rubbings of the beautiful stones, memorials and brasses. The chapel of the Parish church was apparently built by Ralph who died in 1380 and the remainder of the church including the steeple was rebuilt by Goditha who survived him by twenty three years. She and Ralph lived all their lives in the manor, (gone now) adjacent to the church. Apparently the Stathums had been directly related to the Lymme's and Saint Sauveur's families from Normandy (the 'Leclercs', on my father's side, were also first traced in Normandy).



Our helpful driver lived in the town of Belper, and was an engineer with The Rolls Royce aircraft factory near by. He suggested that we should stay in Belper, so we spent the night in a very friendly pub there. Sitting around a huge fire place and surrounded by the delicious smell of warm apple pies, Richard told me how his family came to immigrate to Australia.

If not an adventurer, certainly a risk taker, Edwin Henry Statham, had arrived in Australia on a whaling ship as a young man in the early 1830 and became a very successful wool grower. He and his wife, Elisabeth Cox, were both from Frome, Somerset and their oldest son, Edwin Joseph, became a civil engineer in the Public Works Dptm. of N.S.W. He was known as the 'Pioneer Road maker' of this state. He married Marie Ann Holden of Penthurst.

The couple's fourth child, Clive Meillon, married Evelyn Thorn from Brisbane, Richard grandmother. Their first born was Clive Lawrence, Richard's father, who served in the Royal Australian navy as a medical officer throughout WWII, then went to England as a doctor on the P&O ship

‘Oronsay’. Two daughters followed: Marjory and Cecily living then in Melbourne.

Richard said that his grandmother had given up a care free life and bright social life in Brisbane for the love of a dedicated, very intelligent and poor clergy man and she never regretted it. We had not been able to see her in Melbourne as the ‘Achille Lauro’ wouldn’t stop for some reason. I didn’t think much of it at the time but, as we talked in this cosy pub, I felt sorry to have missed the opportunity of knowing her and her daughters. (The sisters held life long careers: Marjory as an accountant and Cecily as a doctor anaesthetist, in England and Melbourne)

On Richard’s mother side, the first Wilkinson in Australia had emigrated from Yorkshire and, with his wife started a successful woollen mill. Their son, Arthur, continued on with the business, after spending two years in England to complete his training. He married Edna Challis and they had four children including Richard’s mother: Audrey, who married Clive Statham at the age of twenty. Virginia was their first child, followed by Nigel and the youngest: Richard.

HN. The ‘Statham’s book’ (see note page 409 in ‘note 1’) relates a piece of history which I find fascinating. It concerns Nigel III de Saint Sauveur, who, after a dispute with William the Conqueror, allied himself with Guy de Bourgogne in the endeavour to drive William -or Guillaume le Batard- from his ducal position. There was controversy about William’s entitlement to the duchy, as he was born out of wedlock. The rebellion was finally crushed at the battle of Val des Dunes, in 1047. This battle was one of the most decisive in European history: had Guy de Bourgogne and Nigel III been victorious against the Franco-Norman’s Alliance there would have been no William the Conqueror and the whole course of English and French history would have been changed. Years later, Nigel IV of St Saviour, son of the previous, is said to have made his peace with William and fought at his side at the battle of Senlac. He later received great rewards for his services.

As we talked late at night, I felt amazed at the last months’ chain of events that eventually brought us together in England. There we were, in the English country side, where I had wanted to return since my time in London a few years earlier. No doubt, I would have been very surprised, then, at the circumstances of this country revisiting.

Back in London, we started to prepare for those months away in our respective countries. We knew that we had to go through this time apart to think about all the issues involved, and work through them independently. I had no doubt that we both would be going through this little test with flying colours, but in the meantime, I still needed to evaluate with a cool head the consequences of such a big move for me. Before leaving, Richard thought of one more ‘detail’; we visited Gerard’s in London and bought a white gold band with three little diamonds for me to wear as a symbol of our commitment to each other. This engagement ring on my finger made the time of departure a little more bearable, when at the airport we finally said our good buys.

The trip back

The next day, the rest of us drove back to Paris, very quickly... and very quietly. George had to be back at work soon but we still had enough time to contact Jacques Gassin and his family, as I wanted to organise a way to discharge them of my personnel belongings, still in their attic. We met at the old café, below the office, and Jacques told me about his then girl friend and naturally I told him about Richard. Somehow I was not too surprised when, eventually, he cautioned me against the move to Australia (‘being uprooted... loosing who I was...’). In return for his advice I gave him mine, which was to travel the world sooner than later as he had, by now, completed his degree. We were indeed very different people, but still friends. After a quick visit to Christiane’s gallery and the Dugrenot House, Mum, George and I were on our way.

In Zurich, I was lucky to quickly find a job, two in fact. My ‘day job’ was in an old fashioned printing house, run by a husband and wife team (both Germans). The advantage of such a small scale operation was that it gave me some experience in different aspects of the business, and also opened my mind to the printed word and design lay out as an art form. I looked forward to the work every day and kept thinking that this could be my professional ‘niche’ in the future, no matter where I was.

I had never been a keen walker, but at that time I felt the need to fill my lungs with fresh air in the early hours of the day, before being confronted with the strong smells of ink and printing materials. So, instead of walking for

nothing, I got paid for it...delivering newspapers. It was still night time when I did the rounds, getting to the printing house at 8.30 am, and finishing there mid afternoon.

Living in Zurich was great as I had few expenses and with two jobs I was able to save well. I had, of course, some occasional moments of real panic at the prospect of leaving behind my family and all that I knew, but those passed quickly as my feelings for Richard remained strong. He was now studying at the University of N.S.W. and, as his scholarship covered a generous living allowance, he could study full time. He told me in his letters how well looked after he was by family and friends, particularly his cousin, Carole Roussel, and a neighbour of hers and her husband's, Suzy Huston who lived close by.

George was himself very busy, still working in Herisau, preparing to make his exit from the editing house and to return to Zurich for good. He and Mum commuted regularly until the final move.

I didn't have much social life as holding two jobs took most of my time and energy, but I managed to spend a couple of week ends in February with Peter and his mother in their family's chalet in Davoz, the Swiss Alps. We talked of Arthur, as he was expected to return to Zurich for two weeks leave from South America. I remembered when he first arrived in Bogota; I was in Fiji then, stranded on the Island and quite stressed about it. He knew about Richard and my project to move to Australia but we still needed to talk and I was so glad to be able to have that chance soon. (The following year, Arthur was to meet Gina, his future wife. They both worked in the same field and formed a great team through their entire professional life.)

Richard had written to his Embassy in Switzerland, stating our intentions to be married and for me to 'immigrate' to his country. It was easy, and I was soon granted a visa and free passage to Sydney for the 1st of July of that year of 1972. We were both 26 years old and looking forward to building a life together.

In Zurich, I kept working until the end of May and then spent part of the month of June in Lyon seeing my little nephews, whom I knew I would miss terribly, and Bernard and Karin of course.

I also organised the shipment to Sydney of a few pieces of furniture and other belongings including wedding presents. On my last night in Lyon, a few friends and family gathered at the old Place Bellecour apartment to say their good buys and wish me well. It was a parting with no fanfare...

The next two weeks were spent in Vira. There I felt inspired for some reason and started to draw and paint again...It rained everyday but I didn't mind at all. Mum was busy sewing my wedding outfit. I had wanted it very simple, strict even, and it was just perfect: a suit in beautiful white linen. The trousers were the part that worried Dolly: what if Richard's family took this outfit as a sign of me wanting "to wear the pants" in our marriage? But she kept on sewing regardless. She and George had always respected my choices. They trusted me, and I loved them the more for that.

Our parting at the airport was emotional to say the least. For me, it was a journey for life this time. My heart couldn't wait but my head was cool and during the long hours in the plane, I kept seeing myself in Richard's world. Would I find a job? Fit in his family? Make new friends? Those were the questions churning in my head through the whole trip.



Visite to Herisau, Switzerland before leaving to England.



Vira: interior.



Zurich airport with George

Rosnay,

Some time ago, my mother moved in with us in a three room flat at the back of the house with her own bathroom and kitchen. She enjoys seeing people coming in and out of the place: cellar door customers, friends and family. She 'receives' everyone with warmth even if she can't identify them anymore. Although she is now locked in her own world, she still knows my name and calls me '*ma p'tite fille*' or 'Floflo' as she has always done.

I might be still her 'little girl' but my age is well written on my face now. 2009 was not easy for me health wise as I had to have a couple of painful operations on my right hip (a complete hip replacement) and a shoulder reconstruction (torn tendon due to a spectacular fall on the tram line in Melbourne). So this story was put aside, again. The main thing is: In spite of the white hair and wrinkles, when I look in the mirror, I still see myself as I was nearly forty years ago, standing on the Zurich airport and ready to embark on this down under journey. Not only I see myself as I was, but I still feel as I did.



Mum enjoys seeing her maiden name on our bottles .

Her quarters at Rosnay





Chapter XVII: Back to Australia

When I got to Sydney airport and saw Richard in the distance, all the questions in my mind vanished, and I felt a little stunned that everything went according to plans. We both did I think, and being finally together was an awesome feeling.

We were soon married in Canberra, with the wedding ceremony taking place in that beautiful little Anglican Church of St John's in Reid, surrounded by most of Richard's family and a couple of their good friends. The catholic priest who was to take part of the service sent his apologies the day before the ceremony, as he had not been able to get permission from his bishop. Richard's mother was probably more upset than I was at the news, and she thought that I might want to postpone the wedding... It was a let down by a small minded bishop, no doubt, but I can't say that I was too surprised somehow.

The Stathams had prepared a very intimate reception at Arnold Grove with beautifully decorated tables scattered around the fireplace, as it was winter in this part of the world. With only around forty people there, I managed to talk to all the guests and got to know them a little. There was a French connection already with Richard's cousin, Carole, who had married a Parisian: Pierre Roussel (with very fair hair and complexion) Pierre had still his Gallic accent, was very entertaining and welcomed me to 'the club' (The French club or the Statham club? Perhaps both). Carole was fluent in French and, in Sydney, taught the language at the Macquarie University.

I particularly enjoyed Ginny's company whom I considered a friend by then. She was working as a secretary with the Attorney general of the time, Tom Hughes.



Top: wedding at St John's.

A couple of weeks later we rented this little flat in Waverley, Sydney.

Sadly, on our wedding day, she had to give us her good wishes from a hospital bed, as she had been admitted the day before, following a severe tooth infection. Richard's brother, Nigel, was best man and Anthony Vale, a common friend of Richard and Nigel took photos. Unfortunately, my friend Penny Carr was away at the time.

Since my parents could only come once in that year, they had taken my advice to travel to Australia at a later stage, when Richard and I would be settled in our own apartment (so that we could enjoy having them staying with us). I was pragmatic as always and, as far as I was concerned, the 'giving the bride away' ritual had taken place in the departure zone of the Zurich airport, when they both hugged me and talked to me from the bottom of their heart. After the wedding they spoke to us both over the phone: a very emotional moment for me, of course, but I think for Richard as well.

Driving in our spunky '1968 Toyota Corolla', (a wedding gift from Richard's mother) we then spent a few days on the South Coast before returning to Sydney. The city was as beautiful as I remembered and I delighted in discovering more of its hidden treasures; every suburb appeared to me as a village. It was fragmented, and with little classic town planning, Sydney offered some surprising sights, particularly around its harbour and along the pristine beaches.

It didn't take us more than a week or so to find an apartment, in Waverley near Bondi Junction, and we immediately started to paint the place (oriental gold and white) and visited the junk shops (Elley's) in search of furniture, keeping some blank spaces for the French items due to arrive soon.

And I got a job...! (a big relief for me). As Richard and I enjoyed 'hanging out' together in the university campus, I had applied (and was accepted) for the position of library assistant in the beautifully appointed library of the UNSW. I just loved the experience it provided me, and of course, working with books was a delight for me.

We ate peanut butter sandwiches at lunch, and took part of the university life as much as we could. I began to make friends at the library, but also enjoyed meeting Richard's old friends like Tony Pfeiffer and his wife Julie. They had met in New Guinea and also at the 'officer training' Unit at Scheyville and were both so warm and welcoming. Julie was (still is) an artist and Tony worked for CIG at the time. They introduced us to some of their friends like Bill and Liz Richards, Charles and Annie Crow, Rick and Judy

Welch, Andrew and Wayne Robertson and at a later stage Peter and Annette Dezanault. For me, Richard was just 'Rick' now and our friends called us 'Rick and Flo'. I liked that as, I thought, our shorten names hooked on well together.

There were a fair few French Nationals around, but I didn't particularly seek their company as I was quite content improving my English and, also, I preferred to try and understand the Australian psyche, first hand. I made an exception though for a French girl I met when setting up an inter library loan for her, Nelly Banoux: she was finishing a post graduate course in old English of all subjects (difficult). As a classic linguist, her command of the English language was just remarkable. We saw a lot of each other. Through the circulation desk, I met other diverse characters, and agreed to do the odd translations to round up my earnings (one particularly was relating to the metabolism of pigs!) I was also asked to do a couple of 'voice over' in French for some nature documentaries.

My parents came to visit us, as planned, in the heat of that summer (1972/73). Those high temperatures, together with the humidity, were a shock to their system but they loved Sydney, as I knew they would. The Stathams and our friends gave them an excellent reception: George's English was very good anyway and Mum got by with a lot of body language. They saw us well settled and went back home, happy. But they had missed me as much as I had missed them and I knew that they would want to find a way to be close to us, sooner than later.

'Suburbia'

At that time, Rick and I started to look at buying a house. We had saved one thousand dollars each at this stage, which was about enough for a deposit on a house, and we would borrow the rest from the bank. We eventually settled for a semi-detached cottage in Centennial Avenue, Randwick, costing twenty-four thousand dollars. It was in very poor repairs with a basic kitchen, a very rundown bathroom and three bedrooms. All the windows faced south and this was a major downside, but the house was in the eastern suburbs, the only place to be as far as Rick was concerned, handy to the university. He did the electrical work himself, knocked a wall down and I painted every room, thinking of ways to improve the very deep, narrow and totally bare back yard

as I was swinging the paint brush about. This was Suburbia; we got sucked into it and we didn't even notice...

But life was good. I started to paint pictures again with so many ideas cramming into my head that it was hard to process them. I tried simplifying and abstracting them through my paintings. A good way to keep a clear head was to stroll along the beaches. We never got enough of that beautiful sea air so relaxing and invigorating at the same time.

One day we acquired a dog, and there is a little story attached to it. The other half of our Semi was owned by a spinster who was a bus conductor: Shirley. Every morning, when she headed for her bus, Shirley was followed by a black stray dog who had adopted her. The dog was very plump and obviously expecting pups and one day she stopped following Shirley. When eventually she reappeared at the bus stop, a string of lovely pups was following her. Shirley waited until the pups were weaned and carried (in turn) each of the cute little creatures in her conductor's bag.

Of course no one in the bus could resist it, and she found a home for all pups. But it was a different story for the mother: she was not wanted... So we took her in and called her 'Ponga'. She became very jealous of her new status in life (she bit the postman!) and proved to be the most faithful companion.

"Happy people don't have a history" this saying is obviously not always true, but right then it felt quite real. The story of our lives started to become a little uneventful until one year later, in February 1974, we received the great news from my doctor that I was pregnant. We were delighted. By the time he or she would be born Rick would have nearly completed his second year at Uni. He intended to get a job then and finish his degree over the two following years, part time.

But, sadly in 1974 Georges' mother died. She had not suffered, she just 'fell asleep' quietly. As she was taking a cup of tea with some residents of the nursing home, in Zurich, her head fell gently on her chest. She had been on heavy medication for a few years now to control her Parkinson disease and perhaps her heart just gave up. It appeared the most peaceful way to leave this world.

Her death was the signal for a major reshuffling in my parents' lives. They had decided to leave Zurich since nothing kept them there any longer. They left their flat and sold Mrs Meister's big and empty house. Both had wanted

to go back and live in the South of France and they started to look for a house. A sad event which I fortunately didn't witness was also the parting from our old apartment in Lyon. So many memories were stored there...but no one used it anymore, not even Bernard and Karin, who had left Lyon for St Etienne.

My parents bought a big property in a village called Paulhan, near Montpellier, in partnership with George's cousin: Ricky Brown and his wife Doris. It was in very bad repairs but had beautiful stone structure and heavy beams. They transformed the three stories house into one flat for themselves (on two floors) and a second flat on the top floor for guests and family. It had a garden and a big courtyard surrounded by stone walls and at the back a second, smaller house, with a disused winery for Ricky and Doris.

As it turned out my mother did most of the renovations herself (with a builder for the structural work) as George was not a practical man to say the least and Ricky Brown was always fully engaged elsewhere.

I was kept informed of all the developments through long letters from George and short ones from Mum who was too busy to write much. One thing she kept saying though: she wanted to come to Australia and share with us the excitement of the birth of our first born.

As for me, I felt quite fit and kept working until two weeks before the baby was due.

Sam

Sam, (Samuel George) was born on the 11th October 1974 at 9am. He didn't give us much warning and nearly arrived in the elevator of the small and homely Waverley hospital! My doctor, Dr Killen, couldn't believe such haste and missed the birth. But all went well; Richard was with me and helped me every step of the way, (with a couple of competent nurses, I should add).

Sam had fair hair and fair skin with big dark eyes, very intense and serious at times: they could hold our gazes for ages. He was never too far from a smile and a giggle either and we felt lucky.

At that time, Rick's parents were touring South America and Audrey wrote to us very warmly but also I got a personal letter from Rick's father, very heart felt and feeling so proud of his first grandson.

Soon after I left the hospital, my mother arrived and helped us for a couple of weeks with the care of Sam. For the first time in our lives, she and I had clashes. Perhaps it was natural enough: I was in my own house and aspired to do things ‘my way’ (like deciding how many coats of paint to put on the walls or what kind of nappies to buy...). The lovely thing was that, as soon as we leaned over the cot where her little grandson was tucked in, all disagreements seems to vanish like by magic.

‘Christ Church St Lawrence’

Before going home, Dolly still attended Sam’s christening at Christ Church St Lawrence in the City: “Richard’s grandfather’s church”¹². Mum and I loved the Minister’s flamboyant robes, the smell of incense, the bells of the Sanctus and the chanting of the choir, which filled the church. This ritual brought us back in time to our respective school days at ‘La Roseraie’.

Sam wore Mum’s family’s christening gown and was presented by Father Austin Day in a very theatrical manner to the mixed congregation: ‘wealthy and poor, gays and straights, drunks and sobers’ (like in Rick’s grandfather’s days, I was told). In contrast with its rather elitist Low Church diocese, Christ Church had been traditionally a church for ‘the people’, and focussed strongly on social issues. I didn’t think that everyone in Rick’s family agreed with the Anglo Catholic tradition promoted by his grandfather, but apart from the - one time controversial- flowery rituals and glamorous vestments displayed, it seems that the deeper meaning of the occasion touched every one on that particular day.

The occasion also marked an important moment for me: I was ‘leaving Rome’. This was my own decision on Sam’s behalf (and future children’s) and I felt comfortable with it. It is well known in Australia, where Protestants and Catholics live side by side (happily now), that the Pope allows mixed marriages, but requires the children to be christened and brought up following the Roman way. As I was standing in this church that Rick’s grandfather helped keep alive spiritually, I felt glad that our little boy was now

part of it. Richard was too, and this, of course, had been an important consideration for me.

Not everyone can be entirely happy in those situations and, sitting next to me, my mother was deep in her thoughts, prayers perhaps. I couldn't really tell how she felt and if she had any misgivings about this decision, she kindly didn't let anyone know. Of course, Protestantism had made its way into her life quite early on: her first taste of it came through George, as his parents had been 'Zwinglists'. Like Luther and later on, Jean Calvin, H. Zwingli had followed the steps of scholars like the Humanist Lefebvre d'Étaples who, in the XVth century had scrutinized the ancient texts (his works lead to a type of 'Pre Reformation' in France, tolerated a short time by the king Francis I).

George was not religious, far from it, but still very supportive of Mum's faith. He used to drive her regularly to church and would wait in the car, reading the newspaper, until the end of Mass. He'd be very disappointed if she missed a service...I believe there was a spiritual side to him that was not always obvious to all (not even to himself) but I, for one, knew it was there. 'The Truth will be revealed to me on my death bed' he used to say pragmatically. Although proud and assertive in his professional life he was surprisingly humble and unassuming in spiritual matters. Then my brother married Karin, who came from a practicing family of Lutherans. Bernard made the same decision as I did, and my little nephews were christened in the Lutheran faith. I often thought that if I had lived through those dark days of religious excesses, intolerance and corruption, I would have no doubt admired Martin Luther and his followers, and supported them whole heartily in their endeavour to reform the Mother Church.

But what about Anglicanism? This question was a new interest for me and one that I took at heart: England entered the 'Reformation' for less noble reasons, as it is well known. In hindsight, one could argue that the pope of the day shot himself in the foot by excommunicating King Henry the VIII for a civil matter and then in turn, Queen Elizabeth I. This was followed by many years of infamous religious wars across Europe until, finally, the Roman Church had to 'let go' of total power and reform the worst of its abuses. A little late for many people.

¹ H.N. *Following are a couple of segments of the foreword to "The Archbishops of Railway Square" A history of Christchurch, St Lawrence,*

written by Revd. John Spooner, in 2002. This book describes the 'Virulent conflicts between High church and Evangelical Anglicans which has influenced church and secular history since the Reformation. But it also represents beautifully 'the history of inner Sydney, its people and urban upheavals, fires and diseases and tenacious faith'. (John Spooner)

Richard's grandfather, Reverend Clive Meillon Statham was one of the 'archbishops of railway square' and rector of the church from 1911 till 1925. During those years his ministry went through the difficult times of WWI, the general strike of 1917 and the Spanish influenza. Concluding on Revd Statham's ministry, John Spooner wrote: "Statham achieved more in his stewardship of the people of Christchurch that he acknowledges himself. The present day parish owes much to him. His primary contribution to his catholic tradition lay, not in his many innovations in secondary matters such as incense, the High mass, sung solemn requiems, children Eucharistic, the English Hymnal, the celebration of the Feast of Corpus Christi, the 'Cheero' providing thousands of meals and hospitality in war time, not the establishment of St Laurence college offering education based on Christian principles affordable to everyone.

Commendable as those achievements are, it lay, rather in the leadership which galvanised the will of his flock and strengthened the hand of his successors."

A new friendship

Rick had now a job with the firm 'Dalgety' in their Wine Department located in the city and, luckily, he was given a great deal of time off to study. He worked later in their Farm Management Department, with the job of looking after pastoral companies' accounts (amongst others). His lunches were often spent in the park, sharing sandwiches with his friend Bill Ogilvie (an economist also at Dalgety). Bill was a little older and had just left the 'King school' when Richard started boarding there. He was now married to an English woman, Fiona, and the couple soon asked us over at their house in Neutral Bay. From then on we would enjoy a solid friendship with them both, (still going on today). Our philosophy in life was similar and we seemed to choose the same pathways through life. Richard took the work at Dalgety as good experience but was moderately happy with it.



House in Randwick with Sam, Ponga and Minouche.



Nigel and Melenaite's wedding



Melenaite in Tonga



Mum with Sam



Sam with his grandfather, Norfolk Is .



Randwick

At least he had more free time now, with his degree behind him, and he could share and enjoy with me, this important time of nurturing and caring for Sam. He also took up photography as a hobby and produced beautiful prints during this time.

In 1969, Richard's brother had gone to Tonga to work for the Free Wesleyan Church- Methodist- as a high school teacher, where he met Melenaita who was also teaching at the FWCT Women's college. In 1974, they were married at the "Nuku'alofa Centenary Church of the FWCT."-

I was still on maternity leave when Nigel, Melenaita, and her sister Toetu'u ('Resurrection' in Tongan), came to stay with us as they were on 'Furlough'. This arrangement allowed me to go back to work for three months (often with evening shifts) leaving Sam in Melenaita's excellent care while Nigel and his typist, Tuhu, worked on children's books, and also a biography. It worked well. When the family returned to Tonga, I quit the library and enjoyed being a full time mother again.

Having Centennial Park just around the corner was wonderful: there was a big lake and ducks, people riding horses and bicycles and very few cars. Rick jogged every day in this park or Queens Park (adjoining). For me, I particularly appreciated it when eight months pregnant with Sam I had learnt to drive through its quiet roads.

We often had an extra dog at the time: Bijou, a little white poodle belonging to Rick's parents whom we looked after when they were away, particularly during their South American trip at the time of Sam's birth. Since Richard's father retired from his medical practice, he and his wife had spent a lot of time on the road. Bijou just tolerated Ponga and was very protective of Sam (no one was allowed to come near 'her baby' in the park).

Not long after Richard's parents' return, their beautiful property in Canberra, 'Arnold Grove' was resumed as a road was planned to cross near by. They could have fought to stay on and lease the place back but preferred not to, and eventually, they left for Sydney and started travelling to places like Norway, France, Switzerland, (they stayed in Vira) Spain, Egypt.

They settled in Bondi and Norfolk Island, then in a terrace house at Fletcher Street, Woollahra. I was still seeing ex colleagues from the library: Particularly my friend Nelly and a New Zealander called Sandy Campbell (we took a weaving course together). A librarian called Joyce Zammit from Malta, shared our house for a few months after Nigel, Melenaita and Toetu'u left.

But during this time I enjoyed the most seeing our good friend, Sally Sweetapple, with her toddlers: adorable twins: Katy and Simon...

Norfolk Island

When Sam was fourteen months old, we visited Rick's parents in Norfolk Island together with Virginia. We found the island just beautiful. Our evenings were spent quietly at home and Clive lent me a couple of books on 'the Pitcairners'. From then on I was hooked, fascinated by their history and transported through time.

As I soon realised, Norfolk Island was full of the ghosts of people who set foot on its shores. The beautiful stone buildings told tragic stories as the place had been the harshest penal settlement for Britain. Visiting the cemetery, it was heart breaking to read the names on the head stones of those people who died so young, punished, tortured really, for such trivial offences at times.

After the last convict was eventually removed from the Island, the Pitcairners (or Bounty mutineers), moved in from the overcrowded Pitcairn Island. Most of the people we met were their descendants, like the Christian's families, the Nodds and Quintals. But one woman, who didn't belong to the Mutineers dynasty, fascinated us at the time: the writer Mary Patchett. She was an outstanding figure on Norfolk and wrote the 'Thorn Bird' as well as many other historical novels.

Richard's parents enjoyed living there for a time but they ended up feeling lonely and isolated. They soon sold their house and moved back to Sydney. The planes to and from the Island were irregular and expensive and the political status of the place uncertain. Many islanders still wanted self government, independently from Australia, as the island had been, allegedly, gifted to them by Queen Victoria.

On the French front there had been again a few changes: Bernard and Karin had bought out George's cousin share of Paulhan as my brother planned to work with IBM in Nimes, sixty km from the village. So the family was now reunited in the compound. Rick had switched jobs again and was working for the French Bank (BNP) in a small department run by our French cousin- in- law: Pierre Roussel. He and Pierre got on very well; they had their

own office and discussed foreign investments in Australia over long lunches, the French way...

Discovering the 'Languedoc'

Sam was nearly twenty two months old by then and, as Rick couldn't take much time off work at this early stage, we agreed that I would bring our little boy to France on my own and introduce him to his French relatives. The trip over was easy and we had an emotional family reunion.

My nephews were going to the local school and had grown up amazingly since I last saw them! Jean Charles had learned to play the piano with my mother on the 'Baby Grand', downstairs. As he was showing great talent, he soon received more serious lessons with a 'proper' teacher. As for Patrick, he couldn't be happier playing footy with his mates. They both got me into cycling around Paulhan.

Bernard and Karin looked as ever and being together was wholesome as Karin had always been a real friend for me. Sam and I slept on the top flat in the main house but we had our meals downstairs all together. There was a heat wave raging on at the time and we often ate very late at night in the garden under a huge fig tree.

We spent three months in France travelling around but mostly we loved just being in Paulhan. I was so thrilled when Sam started to speak a few words in French.

George had sold the Ascona in 1970 and he had now put a syndicate together to invest in an imposing vessel, basic but solid called "The Akut". She was berthed in Sete, very close to Paulhan. My parents had been allocated a couple of cabins in the ship and so, one day, we all embarked for a cruise. There was a professional skipper and a cook on board, a new luxury for us, as we always used to cook and clean on George's personal boats. We had fun in spite of the incredible heavy seas at the time which the children enjoyed. We also got to Vira, visiting the valley Verzasca and some other beautiful mountain sites.

The Swiss government had commissioned artists to paint murals right through the village which was staging a sculpture exhibition at the time, through its quaint streets and little plazas on the Lake Major.



Vallee Versasca: self and Sam with Karin and Patrick...Sam and Jean Charles at Paulban



Rick and Sam in Hazelbrook



On the deck in Thorn Street, Edgelyff

Before driving back to Paulhan we also visited the Bolier sisters in L'Abadie and had one of their best meals, sitting under the shady pergola. They were thrilled to hold Sambo!

Richard had three weeks holiday. He thought it was too short to join us in France, but we certainly missed sharing with him those wonderful family moments. For his own adventure, he took a trip to New Guinea with four others including an old friend: Tony Vale. He and his companions enjoyed (in various degrees) the challenge of climbing high and far in the most difficult conditions. They took many rolls of artistic photos along the way and some of Richard's were eventually printed in his dark room: the bathroom.

For Sam and I, the return trip to Sydney didn't go as smoothly as the trip over, far from it. Sam had an asthma attack once in Sydney and a similar one came on again in the plane. Approaching Bangkok, his breathing became laboured and he turned very pale, unable to use an inhaler. Before we even touched ground in Bangkok I had requested an ambulance from 'Air France' to pick us up and take us to the main hospital in the city.

As the ambulance driver was leaving the hospital, I begged him to wait for us during the treatment and I was so grateful when he agreed. The next few hours were excruciating: Children, with possibly infectious diseases, were sharing the same ward. A couple of cockroaches crawled on the walls and my imagination ran wild. Eventually a young doctor, looking self assured, came to me with a broad smile and said it was all right for us to continue our flight... He also gave me a detailed written report on the treatment given to Sam.

The driver was wonderful; he drove us back through thirty cm of rain on the road as there was flooding in the area. We reached the airport and were helped getting in the next Air France flight to Australia. Sam was still listless and pale but his breathing was freer by then. As we were getting closer to Sydney, I saw with great relief, the most remarkable recovery take place: my little boy got up, looked at me with a broad smile and gave me a hug, then asked for something to eat and drink and proceeded to visit all the neighbours, very cheekily.

When we got to Sydney airport Richard was waiting for us, looking anxious as I had rang him from Bangkok. Sam, with now rosy cheeks, ran out to him holding his arms up as if nothing unusual had ever happened, and we had just left yesterday! Small children possess an amazing resilience, I learnt that day.

As we walked into the house in Randwick, a great surprise was awaiting us: Richard had not wasted his week -ends when we were away. He, and a Mauritius builder called Dash Daniel, had completely transformed our kitchen and bathroom. Both rooms were just beautiful, and we couldn't have hoped for a better home coming.

I showed my father-in-law the report on the treatment given to Sam: he kept reading, nodding approvingly and said "They have done just the right thing". This was a relief.

It was good to be back and that little welcoming dinner at Audrey and Clive's in Bondi is still present in my mind: Audrey had the knack for creating a warm atmosphere.

Nick and the move to Edgecliff

When we heard that I was pregnant a second time, we felt this was perfect timing again. The house in Randwick was now renovated and we thought we'll move on to another challenge, so we sold it well and, with a much reduced mortgage, we bought a terrace house in Thorn street, Edgecliff with views over Trumper Park and the harbour behind. The house was flooded with sunlight and we added one room opening to a balcony upstairs and another downstairs onto the neat little garden.

Soon after moving in, on the 21st of July 1977 at 3pm, Nick (Nicholas Clive) was born at the Camperdown children hospital. Richard was encouraging me in the delivery room and as it happened when Sam was born, the bond created between parents and new born was nearly tangible and a precious gift of nature. Nick had been overdue for a period of ten days but the induced birth turned out to be very easy and straight forward.

On day one, he had a little jaundice and...a cold! Both quickly cleared up. I was able to feed Nick longer this time. He and Sam looked very different but both were gorgeous in their own way (no doubt in my eyes). Nick had my olive skin; his eyes were a bright hazel colour reflecting a happy and gentle soul, and his brown curls had golden tips.

When he reached 6 months old we had him christened in our little parish church around the corner, 'All Saints Woollahra'.



Christmas 1977 at Fletcher street: Audrey and Clive Statham, Dolly and George Meister, Virginia and Gavin Casey, Gavin's mother, myself and Sam, (Nick was 5 months old, in bed.)

An intimate church, 'All Saints' catered for young families like ours, some of them we had met at Centennial Park or in the corner store across the road. After the christening, our friends and family gathered at Thorn Street, in the tiny garden which offered the best views of Sydney...

But sadly at about that time we lost our dog, Ponga. Some people in Thorn Street were cat lovers and hated dogs. In their minds, it was one versus the other, and one day we found our little dog, dead, poisoned with some strychnine bait wrapped up in a piece of meat and dropped at our door step. (What if a child had picked it up?)

Sam and Nick were very distraught, as all of us really, including Virginia who was then working as a medical secretary in Macquarie Street. She had the idea of typing lots of notes which we dropped in the neighbourhood letter boxes to warn everyone of the presence of a killer in our midst. But we never found out who this hiatus of nature was.

My parents came over again but this time with Bernard and his family. Mum and George had bought a block of land at Hazelbrook in the Blue Mountains, and we had commissioned a builder, friend of a friend (Rick Welsh), to build a very simple little cottage for them as they wanted to spend more time in Australia.

I remember a couple of good friends helping us paint the house, but we left a lot to do for my mother, as she would have been disappointed not to be involved. We started a garden for them on the one acre block and put many trees in, but just before they were due to arrive in Australia -looking forward to see their property for the first time- a massive bush fire swept through the whole district: it came from the top, passed over their house and burnt everything in its way...except the house.Below: *Nick in Edgediff*.

Nigel and Melenaité were living in it at the time, and they were advised to evacuate in a hurry. 'It is like a napalm bomb has exploded' was George first comment when he saw the place! So much for our hard work in the garden! But he was right; the place looked like a moonscape.

Bernard, Karin, Jean Charles and Patrick enjoyed their few weeks in Australia and seeing Nick for the first time. We did a lot together in Sydney, and through the Blue Mountains; I think my brother saw this part of the world under the best light possible. My nephews and Karin couldn't get

enough of the beaches but also loved trekking in the Mountains, swimming in the pools down from the numerous waterfalls, like the Wentworth Falls and their English improved greatly in those weeks.

Hunter's Hill

At the end of 1978 we made another house move: this time to Hunter's Hill, a beautiful suburb North of Sydney Harbour, on a peninsula between the Lane Cove and Parramatta River.

The district was named after John Hunter, the second Governor of NSW, and recognised as the oldest garden suburb in Sydney with many houses built from local sandstone. Surrounded by water, it had the village like atmosphere that I prized so much, with a French feel somehow.

Our street was called 'Joubert Street', named after a French architect who had been responsible for the construction of many local properties. Apart from the great heritage value of the village, through its stone buildings, three quarter of the area was conservation land, including the Great North Walk, winding its way through the large waterfront park land, The Boronia Park, and containing aboriginal drawings from way back. Our house was of the 1950's era with big picture windows and expansive land at the front and back.

From the front garden, we could see the Lane Cove River (and also hear the planes flying low, little annoyance which took some getting used to). Richard didn't have far to go to catch a ferry, which was a great way to commute to and from work. He joined the club of the newspaper readers on board, as the harbour spray filled the air on deck, every morning. We also kept a trailer sailor in the garage and sailed with the boys on week ends.

A friend of mine, Margaret Swinburne, lived down the same street; she was a Librarian who had worked with me (my boss) at the UNSW. She and her husband had two children of Sam and Nick's age and we took turns driving the children to the Balmain pre school (through the Gladesville Bridge) as the little school in Hunter's Hill was in great demand and always full. Margaret and I, also talked of going back to work when the children would be old enough for school, helping each other with child minding; but this was still a fair way off.



Just a couple of streets away: Bob and Angela Raymond

There was also a cousin of Richard living just around the corner: Angela Raymond, Carole Roussel's sister, and the oldest daughter of Rex and Noppy Money (Audrey's sister). She and her husband, Bob Raymond, became part of our lives from the moment we made the move to the peninsula. Her son, Francis, (with ex husband, Clyde Packer) was seventeen years old at the time; he came to visit a couple of times and impressed us with his obvious talent for photography. He now lives in the U.S.

Angela was a social worker, if I recall. She also enjoyed accompanying her husband in some of his frequent trips to the outback, helping him find material for his film documentaries.

I met Bob for the first time at a party given in honour of a French musician, a modern jazz violinist, called Jean Luc Ponti. This talented artist had been brought over by Bob's son, Robert, to perform in Sydney (Robert brought to Australia some of the legendary jazz performers of the U.S and Europe. Duke Ellington was one of them).

The fact that Bob was a passionate environmentalist only vaguely crossed my mind that day, as the spunky Jean Luc Ponti was getting most jazz lovers attention (like mine). Eventually, Richard and I went to see him perform at the Footbridge theatre in Broadway. We were not disappointed.

In some ways, I saw Angela's husband as a cross between my father and George: he had spent four years, during his early career, making films in West Africa (Ghana) and after his return to Sydney, he turned back to journalism. The Australian flora and fauna were greatly unappreciated and misunderstood in those days, and Bob was bringing an awareness of the eco systems to the public. He created regular documentary series, first on the ABC (Four Corners) and then on channel nine. At the time that we knew him, he had already written a few books, the latest: 'Discover Australia's National Parks', and made wide ranging films on Australian wild life.

As Joubert Street was a safe road and more or less a cul de sac, the boys had fun riding their little scooters all the way down the steep street, passing the Swinburne's house and up again around to Angela's.

Our Street turned out to be more colourful than we first thought: we had a couple of very strange neighbours, particularly one wild woman, living in the

block of flats behind us. She was often seen bending out of the window, with her wavy white hair flowing down to her waist, bare breasted and shouting.

The first time we heard her, we thought that she needed help, since the distressed calls were moving into a crescendo mode. But no: she was just calling her 'babies' as she was feeding, every day, an impressive number of stray and vicious looking cats. Sadly, one of them managed to scratch out the left eye of our new young Kelpie dog, Ned. Richard was away on that Sunday.

I drove around, searching desperately for an open veterinary clinic, all the time monitoring our poor Neddy's eye situation. He was still bleeding and looked distraught on the passenger's seat. Of course Sam and Nick comforted him the best way they could, and learnt that day the benefit of keeping away from unfriendly wild cats. I found a clinic but sadly Ned's eye couldn't be saved.

Being further away from the polluted city with so much open space and nature around us, we had hoped that Sam's breathing would become easier. But sadly, this was not to be and the number of regular visits to hospitals, for using their equipment, didn't seem to reduce. A reassuring factor though, was that somehow our little boy always bounced back in an incredibly quick manner, after treatment



A gallery of photos printed by Richard Statham. Left: Self with Sam, Kathy and Simon Sweetapple. Ginny with Ponga. Fun at the beach. Sam and Nick at Edgedcliff. Richard with Carole Rousselin Pearl Beach.

Rosnay, Easter 2011

When my mother reached the age of 86, she faced the prospect of losing her driving license: not a good situation to be in for someone living in the country, eight km from town, with no public transport. Until then, her car had been her independence and life line to the world. She had been a 'queen of the road' (racing in cross country rallies in her youth) and felt very proud of having received 'only one' traffic fine through her entire life. But her driving days were soon to come to an end.

In 2005, she passed the old people's test on a first go but the following year, she was not so lucky and after being rejected a first time, she trembled through the stringent test a second and then a third time. Failing miserably at each attempt took its toll on her mental state and self confidence.

So, I am driving Dolly everywhere now, but she worries that I take her to church for her benefit only. She knows that I believe in God, but she also guesses that I have less faith in some of its representatives on earth. She is right in a way, but those visits to church are proving to be a welcome pause in my 'busy' life anyway. Absorbing the familiar rituals, I would follow with my eyes or mentally the road to the cross, the way I had done so many times as a child. I'd also wonder about the significance of Christ's resurrection amongst us: an extraordinary story, or simply a metaphor, that started a religion.

Overtime, understanding the true nature of Christ has become for me a lot less important than the enlightened words and humble example he passed on to the world, on God's behalf. The Church has lost its way in the past and even today, we still see it failing, spectacularly in fact, in its duty of care to children. But I like to believe that Christ's message has taken a

life of its own over the centuries and can now stand proud in face of the shortcomings of all churches and religious institutions. Richard and I were brought up with this message and we wanted our own children to have that chance too, when growing up. As adults now, and with this strong foundation, they will make up their own minds on which spiritual path to follow, if they have not done so already.



Dolly preparing to 'rally' in the thirties.

Chapter XVIII: Barraba,

A powerful call



Rick's work for the BNP was good at first but nearly four years of dealing with foreign investors and conducting business, often over long lunches, started to take its toll. This was not really Rick's scene, I could see that. He started to get a little anxious about the futility of it all and caught scary glimpses of himself decades on, fat from over drinking and eating, and generally frustrated by the demands of the corporate world, and the nine till five (or seven) work routine... cooped up in an office day in and day out... scratching out reports over and over again...For what...? I didn't really know the world Rick was longing for, but it was obvious that his present situation was not fulfilling his dreams in life.

When he was still at his parents' 'hundred acre' farm, he had enjoyed taking care of the sheep that the family kept. Most of their friends were 'on the land', making a living from farming or grazing and Rick always felt part of their world.

After leaving school, he completed a two year agriculture course in Geelong, Victoria, with the hope of establishing himself as a farmer some day. But then he was not in a position to buy a farm, of course. He gained some farming experience by working as a Jackeroo in different parts of Australia, like the Ord River region, Captain's Flat..... Then, the army took him by surprise, made him change tack, so to speak, and after taking two years of his life ('not wasted', he said) gave him the opportunity to further his education and branch out in the business world. And so he did. But now it looked like the land was drawing him back like a magnet. It was a powerful

call. To be honest, 'going bush' was the last thing in my mind at this stage, as we had already moved four times in seven years and were just settled happily in Hunter's Hill. So, a little bit of soul searching was in order for me. I had been attracted to Richard for a number of reasons. One of them was the prospect of leading a somewhat 'purposeful' life with hopefully a little adventure woven into it and perhaps this was our chance to lead such life, I convinced myself. Somewhere 'out there' we would find our real place in the sun. We nearly owned this last house by now, but we knew that selling it wouldn't give us enough equity to buy a property that could support a family of four (today in 2010/11 the situation would be reversed as city prices have skyrocketed since then). So, to get out of the rat race - as this was the aim-, we needed to engage in some creative thinking.

With the map of NSW spread out on the table, we drew a circle at four hours drive from Sydney, and we visited properties within the circle: "Red Hill" near Orange was one of them: two thousand acres with a lovely homestead and great soil type. It was perfect, but doing our sums we realised that we couldn't even own a quarter of it, as we also had to factor in buying the stock and living on capital for a year.

George tried to help us by looking for an investor in Europe. The first one was a friend of his in Switzerland, Guido, who wanted to invest in a big holding in Australia, and he suggested our involvement as managers and small shareholders in his company. Well, this was a possibility and Richard took him everywhere to inspect properties... but it was at the beginning of the 80's drought (which everyone believed would be over in no time) and all the places they visited were dusty, dry and stinking hot, isolated and definitely not Guido's cup of tea! (No cinemas or restaurants in charming little villages around green paddocks? This world was definitely not Switzerland). Another friend of George: Freddy Ott also travelled to Australia as a possible investor, and reacted the same way as Guido. So we ticked off those propositions as a 'no go' and kept studying the 'Land Magazine' for inspiration.

When nothing came of it, George and Mum offered to step in themselves and form a partnership with us. But this would possibly mean selling their houses in Paulhan and Vira. A drastic step in any case. What helped them make the decision was Bernard and Karin's wish to leave Paulhan and start a new life in Australia.

Moving to the country

Now we were forced to look ‘outside the circle’ for the affordable land that we couldn’t find within the circle. The Barraba district would have been the cheapest in the range, and we visited a property called ‘the Ranch’. At sixty dollars an acre with my parents’ involvement, a bank loan and another investor, (local this time) we could just scrape it.

We had advertised in the Financial Review for a ‘silent’ investor to buy half of the holding, and our family would buy the other half... We got eight replies! We chose a Restaurateur (Black Stump restaurants) called Robert Parsonage and we couldn’t have chosen better as Robert and Richard got on beautifully (our two families did in fact). Selling Hunter’s Hill was easy and we got a good price for our house.

For my parents, selling their house in Vira had been on the cards for some time anyway but Paulhan...This beautiful place was being sold first. I remembered the great time Sam and I had there, and our wonderful memories, never to be repeated with Richard and Nick now.

There was no turning back now: we would leave this beautiful ‘sort of’ French enclave without regrets and try to make our own mark on the Australian landscape.

There was still a lot of optimism in the future of the land in those days. In spite of the drought that was just starting to show its ugly head, most people had still faith in wool, cattle and other farming enterprises. Naturally, this world was new to me, and we didn’t have a crystal ball as regard to commodity prices and weather but, nonetheless, we all felt excited at the prospect of starting a new venture in the country. As I soon learned, farming was a gamble on three fronts: weather, market of produce and land preservation.

We took our chances with ‘The Ranch’. A property of five thousand acres, it was located twenty five km from Barraba in the North West of NSW, and seven hours drive from Sydney. When Bernard came to visit for the first time, after passing through Manilla, he said it felt like stepping into some wild ‘Far West’. That’s about right.

He, Karin, Jean Charles and Patrick immigrated to Sydney on that same year. My brother, who had a passion for precious and semi precious stones, endeavoured to fulfil his dream, which was to import gem stones and artistic

jewellery. He started a business with an artisan partner, a Swiss National, and together they made beautiful silver work at the back of their very stylish shop in Cross Street, Double Bay. The family lived in Waverley at first and Jean Charles and Patrick were sent to the French school in Randwick. Karin got a job at the same school, supervising and helping the students with their courses, which were conducted by correspondence. This was a time of great expectations, dreams and togetherness...

For us, the big day of the move out West came quickly. Friends of ours: Derek Thomasetti and his partner Chrissie Mackentyre helped with the move. Chrissie had been a neighbour in Randwick and Derek was a pilot at Qantas. He drove the removal truck as he had a truckies' license... and we followed in our little Volkswagen Golf with the boys and Neddy, our one eyed dog, in the back. I had felt sick as we packed and moving out North West, I was burning with fever and became so ill that we had to stop at the Scone Hospital. The diagnostic was, I had what looked like glandular fever. Still, there was no time to hang around: we took the medication from the doctor and kept going.

When we got to the farm, in the middle of the night, the place appeared to me incredibly sinister. I felt helpless and the next day, I let Chrissie take over with the boys. I never valued friendship before as much as I did then! I stayed in bed for the next few days, feverish and staring at the walls of this strange bedroom: every wall was painted a different pastel colour... I was dreaming perhaps, or delirious (but no, the next morning the colours hadn't improved a bit). I could only eat dry bread, as I was sick with anything else, and I lost a great deal of weight.

The kitchen was very basic and the bathroom had no window or hot water...It was only May (1980) and the mornings were already frosty. When Chrissie and Derek had to leave, I got up with wobbly knees and feeling quite drained. Richard helped me back to bed and took charge of the children for a little longer.

‘The Ranch’

There were three houses on the farm, plus dependences: our house was a rough timber bungalow, typical of country Australia, with big verandas and very run down. It was right on the creek. Then, there was a smallish, more modern house close to the road and occupied by the farm manager, Ken

Moss, his wife Helen, and their five children. And a few km away from the river stood proud up the hill, a charming pink weatherboard cottage with very high pressed metal ceilings, and great views. This house was also ancient and small, (one bedroom), but solid with a lot of early 1900's character. Every single building on the farm had been built of local cypress pine, resistant to white ants we were told. Further up the hill, with a view dominating the whole district and extending as far as Mount Kaputar, stood the four stand timber/iron shearing shed: a beautiful old building with great historical value and in very good working order, the heart of the place, no doubt.

A little down hill from the shearing shed was an original dunny, or long drop, and further still the Shearers Quarters, comprising of six buildings all made of untreated timber from the farm and in much better order than any of the houses. There was a huge fire place in one room and the biggest black cast iron stove and triple oven that I had ever seen in the 'kitchen'; it looked like this stove could tell us a few stories ... The refectory table and the benches were classics as well as the cooking implements still there, with kero lamps and candle stick holders. We were transported through time.

In a separate building was the cook's bedroom, and further still, the living quarters. Close to it and in another two separate cabins were the sharers' bunks. The wash house was next, lined of corrugated iron and including a few showers fed by a gravity tank, with cold water only, of course, as there was no electricity on that hill.

All those buildings were attractively perched on a plateau, hanging together in a hamlet formation. Walking down towards the 'Pink House', through a round about way, we came across a tiny 2 room cottage which had been the original homestead of a pioneering family, about one hundred and fifty years ago. Apparently, for the first time in 1838 white men had crossed the Manilla River to this region.

I was back on deck by then and felt as excited as Richard and the boys exploring this huge country: we particularly loved our back mountain! It was virgin country and covered with dense eucalyptus and kurrajongs forest on seven hundred acres: white box, stringy bark, some iron bark, and wattles were the tree species thriving there that comes to mind. The mountain was right behind the pink house and provided a glowing backdrop of dense bush at sunset. Soon we met the neighbours, kilometres away, who said the Kamilaroi Aboriginal people, had been living there a long time ago, and the

previous owners had found interesting tools and simple weapons, in the ground. My mind wandered...We were leasing some extra Crown land on the other side of 'Top mountain' and perhaps people or remains of this community were still scattered there. I was fantasizing of course. I had learnt about the 'dream time' and heard many stories of Aborigines, but had never met any yet, in their own environment.

Seeing Sam and Nick happy, running around and loving the place was a great feeling and a real buzz. Richard was back in his element and soon looked and talked like a local. We started to draw business plans for the next few years. We also made our house liveable and cleaned up the pink house, which my parents intended to furnish for their own use.

Robert Parsonage and his wife, Sandy, didn't want to occupy a house and preferred to stay with us when visiting. They always brought a couple of horses for the children to ride on and sometimes tents to go camping. They had three sons; the youngest, Chris, was Sam's age and soon after we moved to the property their daughter, Sami, was born. She was a gorgeous baby but sadly suffered from spina bifida and eventually had to be confined to a wheel chair. This was heartbreaking for the family, but she was a happy child all the same and very much loved and doted on by her three big brothers.

By next spring the drought was still on. We had bought some of the stock which was already there, but not all, and we didn't keep many cattle as we knew we needed to be conservative with stock numbers... Those limitations would have an impact on the return that we could expect from the farm naturally, so we lived frugally to say the least.

After a few months, Richard felt confident enough to save money on management and run the place on his own, so a casual farm hand replaced Ken Moss, the manager. (Ken got a super job in a horse stud near Tamworth).

Impulse buying

Not long after we arrived, I found myself together with a group of women of the district at a local clearing sale (the men were bidding for machinery) and we were actively involved in inspecting some old linen offered, as well as ancient teapots and the likes. In the background, the professionally groomed voices of the auctioneers resounded like weird Ozie chants, in a rather

staccato mode that kept my attention and made me feel like getting into the action. The pitch of their voices was mesmerising and kind of inductive to take part, so I grabbed that little set of tea towels and made my bid...What is it called? Impulse buying... I was soon introduced to everyone and made a mental note of the people I thought we could be friends with. Rick did the same from his side and sometime later, we invited them for dinner. It's interesting how this particular group that came that night became the core of our friends for the next fifteen years. They also had children the same ages as ours.

When on the day of the invitation our guests left after midnight, they saw my little feeding bottles for the poddy lambs and a couple of baby pet kangaroos lined up in the kitchen for that 2am feed, and they smiled: I wouldn't be doing this for long they reckoned. But one thing I needed to get used to more urgently than the 2am poddy's feed was the distances between towns and properties: they were all big holdings and we had eight neighbours, countries apart as it felt like.

Sam had hardly experienced any breathing difficulties since we arrived. As it turned out, the dry climate was exactly what he needed, and this unexpected realisation made our move to the outback the more justified! He had started kindergarden in Barraba, a little town of seventeen hundred people and luckily, the bus passed only a couple of hundreds meters from our house. Nick also attended Pre School, and in no time we got to know most families on our road. We missed Sydney naturally (at least I did) and over the years our family would often stay at Virginia and Gavin Casey's in Woollahra or at their beach block in Bundeena, at the edge of the Royal National Park, South of Sydney.

Virginia and Gavin had been married three years earlier, in 1977, at the church of St James in Sydney. Gavin was the father of five children from a previous marriage and as his youngest daughter, Camilla, was only twelve years old then, Virginia took the very active and sometimes difficult role of dedicated stepmother. She was still a medical secretary in Macquarie Street and Gavin worked for the company 'Ostiran' at the time. After selling their house at Glenmore Road, Paddington, they were to buy the senior Statham's house in Fletcher Street, Woollahra. From then on they kindly kept an open house for all of us, including cousins and friends of the boys.



Virginia Statham and Gavin Casey's wedding with Georgia, Caroline, Tim, Michael and Camilla Casey.



Shearing shed



Virginia's colourful garden at Fletcher Street was not very big, but she always made it look worthy of winning prizes (and it did). She had training in agriculture and a particularly good idea of hers was to change the neglected footpath strip into an attractive and well cared for mini market garden, inviting passers-by to help themselves to her beautiful scented produce (like herbs and tomatoes). They did so, but discreetly. Making good use of the footpath was a very innovative idea then, and adopted by other councils as time went by. Soon after we settled in at the Ranch, Virginia and Gavin came to visit. Gavin had been a farmer years before in Victoria and we were particularly interested to get his feed back on our purchase. (Like 'I'm glad I don't have to fix those fences!')

The Stathams' and the Leclercs' were to visit as well. There was plenty of room for everyone at the Ranch, as we had a tiny cottage of two rooms and a shower, thirty meters from our house (Virginia saw its potential as a fabulous cubby house for guests and got it ship shaped in no time). And up the hill, the Pink House was now furnished. My mother started to feel at home there and was incredibly busy "fixing" everything. She was very adaptable as long as she could be surrounded by her loved ones.

And George...I smiled when I saw him for the first time, standing on the wide veranda of the Pink house, resting his palms on the rails, and scrutinizing the horizons with an expression of sheer awe. What was he thinking right then? I pictured him in this exact position on board the 'Ascona', watching the limitless world around him.

Their stay at the Pink house was generally of two weeks at a time as Hazelbrook, in the Blue Mountains, was their main home in Australia. They were still going through that time of adaptation at the Pink house when one day, we received a phone call from Bernard who was staying with them for a while. Opening the bathroom door, they saw this huge brown snake comfortably coiled up in the bath! Richard rushed over but when he got there, George and Bernard had, by then, managed to direct the snake out of the window with an open umbrella. It was not unusual to have snakes nesting under deserted houses and, as in our case the plumbing was simply a hole in the bath, the snake had got in this way.

Another time, they heard a tapping on the bay window and watched with amazement this big male grey kangaroo peering at them, very inquisitively, through the glass and, satisfied apparently, he quietly hoped away. There was

also a two meter long goanna who lived in a tree just across the fence, blending in like a branch and not too concerned about all the fuss around him.

Soon after we settled in at the Ranch, Virginia and Gavin came to visit. Gavin had been a farmer years before in Victoria and we were particularly interested to get his feed back on our purchase. (Like 'I'm glad I don't have to fix those fences!')

Through the summer of 80-81 and towards the winter, the drought worsened considerably. Our creek started to look like a dried up aubergine. When I read the following humoristic comment on drought affected farming families, I felt that it was a fair description of our situation and I wrote the quote in my scrap book.

"Living in a drought means showering every third day for ten seconds with the plug in, bathing the children in the same water, then siphoning down to the kitchen to use for cooking the vegetables, then drain that water into the sink, wash up in it, rinse out the tea towels, then ladle it back into a saucepan for some other imaginative use. Bore water needs to be used at all times, and after being rinsed in it, all your glasses come out Lalique. When you wash your hair and combed it into position it would stay that way for a week even in the strongest winds". So, it went on... This description was close enough to spot on. I was thankful to the author, as it felt so good to know that my plight was not just stemming out of my (French) city upbringing, but also experienced by a number of true blue country Ozies, who had enough sense of humour to make light of a difficult situation. I would get used to bore water after all

We started to hand feed the sheep, as The Ranch was now a dust bowl, and I had the comfortable job of driving the truck at snail speed with Nicko on my lap, holding the steering wheel, when Sam was helping Richard, throwing feed over the side of the ute. One day a neighbour gave us a "good work dog" to help. Help himself more likely. The dog had a wild look and we were horrified to realise that, in fact, we had a killer on our hands. We couldn't leave him with a sheep or two at the back of the ute for fear of a blood shed, and we couldn't let him walk behind the stock either as he would act like a lion with a mob of gazelles, ready to pounce for the kill. We soon learnt to be more discerning about whom to trust in this matter, and from then on Rick trained his dogs himself.



At the old homestead (the museum): Rick with Ned the dog, Derek, Chrissie, Sam and Nick.





Our gorgeous 'Jack' the dog, and 'Minon' the cat.



Next page: Jean Charles, Patrick, Dolly, George, Rambo., Sam on the tractor, Pierre Roussel, Carole, Jean Francois laplace, with son, Nick and ,Richard at the Pink house. Nick at a rodeo in the Horton Valley



Droving the sheep

At long last, we decided to put the sheep on the road for three months; Richard was droving them on different stock routes. A couple of times we all went together and camped, other times he'd go with a Jackaroo. - I recall the names of Andrew Selous (Gavin Casey's nephew visiting from England) and a Parisian's relation, Francis de Chambure-. Once or twice Rick took Jean-Charles and Patrick with him when they were with us on holidays. Their job was to walk on each end of the mob of sheep and wave the traffic to slow down.

We had combined our sheep with a neighbour's, (Jeff Gedddes) and were sharing the attendance and responsibility, as with 2000 sheep on the road there was a fair bit of organization involved. Driving back and forth, they made sure that water was available along the way and fences able to hold such a big mob at night. Those were the main issues.

We had now five faithful work dogs with us: the best one, 'Dog', was very docile and bright and would respond to a quiet whistle a long way down the 'route'. He was "Top dog", patiently helping train the younger ones. Poor Neddy didn't have *any* status on the Long Paddock (or the 'Wool route') and was looked down on by Dog and the others. But at home, it was a different matter; the house and garden were Neddy's territory. There, he held his head high and commanded respect.

The slow pace of walking with the sheep on the road gave us a great opportunity to absorb the true character of this new and expansive country... What amazed me the most was the variety of birds we encountered: if camping, we would wake up on the sound of the kookaburras communicating their modulated calls to their mates just at day break, followed by some enchanting chit chats of magpies, themselves replaced by the cheeky and incredibly noisy squawking of the cockatoos, descending on us in huge mobs...

A great diversity of other parrots of all colours would cross the sky as we moved onto their territories. We also encountered smaller birds like the bright blue kingfishers near the rare waterholes, honeyeaters, robins, finches and particularly around sheds, the spirited and always busy wily wagtails.

And those skies...Stubbornly, they never became heavy or threatening, with colours of haunting blue turning to apricot at dusk, deep turquoise in

the twilight to pitch black at night. They provided a dramatic backdrop for the myriad of the brightest stars. I always felt that the night skies were the best feature of the Australian bush, as their sharpness came from that unpolluted air and the absence of earthy wasteful electric lights.

Through the summer/ autumn period it was not too hard to locate the Milky Way and the legendary Southern Cross. At sunset, kangaroos and sometimes emus with chicks moved around freely. We also learnt to recognise native trees as we were progressing further West of Gunnedah and Malalloy. Life was unhurried in those parts.

But we were not the only drovers on the road; young men and women, often on horse back and wearing their well worn bush hats with the brim inclined 'just so', would criss cross the Routes and evaluate the feed and water for their own stock.

A little negotiation was in order and always a good opportunity for an exchange of local gossip and tips. Richard was chatty as always, and soon he knew everything about everybody's lives in the district better than a teacher through the very revealing "Show and Tell" reports required from school children, and describing the highlights of their day (like Mum bogged the ute in the creek paddock and walked for km to get help or worse even... she spoke *French* to me in front of the cashier person at the supermarket!).

I used to think that asking strangers (particularly men) personal questions was considered bad form in Australia, but on the stock route it was a different world: drovers opened up freely, and entertained each other with stories of all kinds: epic tales of bush rangers, bush poetry and songs. They also enjoyed drinking together cups of tea boiled from the billy can or order a schooner at the nearby pub, and play a game of darts (I had my first try there and loved it from then on).

In April 1981, eleven months after we had settled in, I found out that I was pregnant again. Richard and I were delighted: this baby was going to be our bush baby. I didn't have morning sickness but more like *all day* sickness for most of the pregnancy...Of course, there was nothing too unusual about that, except the daily chores became harder for me and the isolation more an issue as my parents were away for months at a time and Richard's parents lived in Mittagong, nearly as far as Sydney.

The drought was still on but having moved the stock away helped give the water stressed paddocks a well deserved rest. This search for feed and water had connected us directly to the land and opened our minds to the plight of this spectacular but deeply *needy* country. It was offering us a warning right from the beginning of our journey as farmers: the earth was all giving as long as we wouldn't demand what it needed in order to sustain itself. We started to look at the soil as a complex living organism: our life support and partner to tune to. The Aborigines had done so for thousands of years, and so could we. We kept hoping and one day the rain came.

It came down steadily and was soaking.

It was here at last. I had never wished so hard for rain before, as the skies opened up nearly every day where I came from. The new sound on the tin roof, this water trickling in the tanks, dams and river acted on our morale like magic. Now we wanted things to keep going as *we knew* they always had in the past and, looking at the book of statistics and average rain fall for the past fifty or hundred years, we reckoned this rain had been on the cards *anyway*... We still had a lot to learn... The rain helped us hang on, but the follow up failed to materialise and the drought was still on. Our sheep were healthy though and when we got our first wool clip, it was cause for celebration.

We had swapped the Volkswagen Golf for a 'decent size' station wagon... We had bought the tractors and the ute, even an old truck and lots of different type of metal implements at clearing sales and, as farmers, we were happily settled. Now was the time to look at the non essential but comforting items that would, for sure, satisfy the family in a domestic sense (me) and I turned my attention to the house without a feeling of guilt whatsoever. It needed work. We had gone through the last summer with a very hot and basic kitchen (wood stove only for cooking) so we enlarged and modernized the kitchen. We kept the bathroom as it was (it had hot water now) but took a couple of walls down to open up the living space. The baby was soon due and there was no bedroom for him/her. We only had two bedrooms in the house, so we thought of bringing a shearer's building down from the hill.

This proved to be quite an epic operation: the building was placed on huge logs and dragged down with our two tractors over 2 km... It went well for a

while but as the timber mass got closer, it slid down the logs and threatened total collapse. Eventually we managed to line it up with the house.

Richard built a little passage to join the living area to the office, fixed a couple of windows and a wall which had suffered during the transfer, and we ended up with an extra big bedroom (for us) and connecting: a baby's room and an office. I was in awe: I thought that *mon mari bricoleur* could do just about anything he put his mind to.... The shearer's quarters benefited as well. They acquired a new soul as they had not been used for ages, and with their beautiful natural timber lining, they became the best part of our house.

Oli

Oli (Oliver Richard) was born on the 11th of December 1981 at 5am at the Tamworth base hospital. He had been right on time. Again Richard was helping me in the delivery room and our little Oli was brought to the world with speed and loving care. Sam and Nick were delighted and Mum was with us at the time: she had come down from the Pink house in the middle of the night (by car...) to stay with the boys. We were in the middle of a heat wave and Oli and I felt the heat terribly in this hospital room (the air conditioning was only allowed on the first day. We didn't stay long.

Tamworth, nearly an hour and half drive from The Ranch, was our main commercial and entertainment centre. It had a good hospital, library, art gallery (with particularly great exhibitions of textile work) a cinema and all those indispensable farm businesses. It also attracted countless musicians and would be musicians that gathered there from all over the country to take part of the country music festival in January each year. The atmosphere was 'American Far West', even the brims of hats were turned the American way, and the singing slang didn't sound Australian either. But the town came alive for a week, and for that time, Tamworth was put on the map. The rain was scarce in general but never on those occasions: floods would occur invariably and wash away campers along the Namoi River and in parks. Floods, also, became part of the folklore.

Oli was an easy baby. At times I could see glimpses of Jean Charles in his smile and the well pronounced Leclerc's eyelids. But just like Sam and Nick, he soon acquired a very distinct personality, all of his own.



Oli and Audrey (picture from Barraba Pre School) below, Peter Holliger. A visit from Zurich

I had put off an operation recommended by my gynaecologist, Dr Solomon in Sydney, and now was the right time to go through with it. It was an ordeal at the time (not cancer) but my life changed for the better as a result.

When Oli turned eighteen months old, Nigel and Melenaité with their little daughter, Audrey, came to live with us for three months. They fitted very well with our way of life and shared their time between our guest quarters and the road house, when it became available.

Audrey enjoyed the country, going for walks with the boys and creating cubby houses (gunyahs) was great fun. Sam and Nick had the normal brotherly rumbles between themselves but were very good with Oli and Audrey: playing with them on the trampoline or in the swimming hole near the creek and later in the above ground pool (dug in the ground) at the house, as the water hole was drying out regularly. Audrey started Pre School in Barraba.

Interacting with the neighbour's children was not as easy as in Sydney needless to say, and I remember a little friend of Sam, called Daniel, who would walk four km to come and play. He and his sister were commuting that far every day to catch the school bus even during the frequent heat waves, carrying their mother's groceries on the way back (no family car)...And on Sundays, Daniel would come again to play with Sam. At some stage, he and his sister, rode horses to the bus stop but this didn't work for very long (uniforms got dusty, hairy and smelly). If I could, I would just run them back home in the afternoons.

I used to spend a great deal of time in my studio, inspired to draw and paint by this raw and striking environment, and the boys would join me there at times as they had good artistic ability and enjoyed drawing and painting for Christmas gifts, to treat family members at birthdays, or for their school projects. Sam particularly used to take interest in my work (perhaps because he was older), encouraging me and offering good constructive criticism.

Building cannons...

As well as the Parsonages, we seemed to have many visitors staying with us or at the Pink House: friends from Sydney, jackeroos, family from both sides. The boys had also their friends from school spending the night, sometimes camping and inventing daring games (encouraged by their father). I always

suspected Richard of being a closet pyromaniac; one day he got some gun powder from the local Chemist, and built a canon to propel balls or heavy objects, with the boys cheering and taking turns at the fun. Richard thought that it was fine, as he had his dynamite license and “great experience blowing up dead trees, boulders and the like”..I took his word for it.

Our pharmacist, Brian Coote was quite a character. A friend of mine had sent me some lavender essence from Grace in Provence, the perfume capital of France, so I decided to bottle some *eau de lavande* for Christmas gifts. For that, I needed pure alcohol and I went to see our friendly pharmacist. I explained my reasons for wanting this illegal product... Brian, then, gave me a knowing look, and taking me to the back of his shop, asked me to taste some of his home made liqueurs: apricot, peach, cherry...They all tasted great. Then he kindly let me have the ‘medicinal’ alcohol. As I was about to leave, he asked me with a twinkle in his eye if, in good time, I would let him taste my “*eau de lavande*”! I don’t think he had believed my story somehow...

The boys loved music and Sam started to learn the piano (Nick a little later) with a rather strict teacher, Mrs Piggot. She was a bit of a caricature of the proverbial dragon teacher, but Sam didn’t mind too much (I think).

Barraba School at the time was also very lucky to have a band master living close by: Mr Austin, and all kind of music instruments were made available for everyone who wished to play (bought through fund raising at the school). The boys had a go at many.

When Nick was on the waiting list for a trumpet, he was temporarily given a euphonium to practice, but his hands were so small and the instrument so big that he had to play lying down on the bed, his lips struggling to get a grip on the huge mouthpiece! The trumpet, saxophone and clarinet were their favourite instruments and Nick particularly took part of music camps.

I used to attend the band commitees (as you do) and at the AGM I found that I had been gently directed to the President’s job... I was always uneasy speaking in public so I rushed to a couple of ‘toast mistress’ meetings with our nearest neighbour, Di Vivers (from Burindi), so that I could address our little group of parents, without making a fool of myself (I thought). The main issues in the band commitee were rehearsing schedules, fund raising for instruments, allocation of instruments, concerts and music camps.

Food, friends and pets.

Richard killed and butchered our own sheep (for a time), and we grew vegetables with the “no dig” method: spreading sheep manure from under the shed, and laying newspaper with thick Lucerne hay around the plants. This idea came to me through our friend, Sandy Pratten, who had the greenest fingers and also a great sense for garden design. Having ‘big gardens’ was the norm on most properties around us, and women in particular took great pride in producing aesthetically pleasing grounds with the house often taking second priority.

Our own vegetables grew reasonably well, but there was not much else around, in fact bare dirt mostly. This big empty space was crying out to be filled with our creations: trees, shrubs flowers and lawns within a lay out of stone walls in the style of Edna Walling (I wished). Watching Sandy in her garden, we felt inspired. We planted many native as well as introduced species of trees and chased up a number of heritage roses to start with. It was of course a slow process... And stone walls never eventuated.

Sandy and Robert Pratten had asked us over to their property ‘Pira’, near Manilla, very soon after we settled at the Ranch, to introduce us to some neighbours and friends (I remember meeting Margaret and David Spencer there for the first time. David was a cattle breeder and quite a practical joker, we were told). That day, Robert and Richard renewed their friendship which dated from their childhood as boarders at The King’s School in Parramatta. Sandy was a great hostess and became a good friend to both of us.

The Prattens had their daughter by then: Harriet. She was a little younger than Nick and she would soon be followed by a brother, Jack. She and Jack became good play mates for our boys over the years, but as described before, there were dangerous games going on at The Ranch. A little too dangerous, I think, for Robert and Sandy’s peace of mind, when their children had the occasional sleep over at our house. But it looked like they resigned to it somehow, very graciously in fact.

We acquired different pets for the boys, particularly a good tempered goat, called Jenny, whom I milked for making cheese. Bernard, who loved goat cheese, gave me comprehensive books on how to make soft and hard cheeses and I was reasonably successful with the art, until I got concerned about the experts’ warnings regarding hygiene and wrong bacteria getting into the

process of making cheese...and, with a new baby, I became a little slack at milking Jenny anyway... When her milk ran out, I gave up cheese making and turned to the art of concocting ginger beer instead! I collected ideas from the neighbours for home brewing and had hundreds of little bottles of ginger beer lined up in the pantry, popping off their lids at regular intervals.

In the kitchen, I cooked some of my family's dishes naturally, but I also learnt local recipes, particularly for cakes. Baking cakes was a new experience for me as when I was growing up, apart from fruit tarts and crèmes caramel, we got the more complicated *pâtisserie* from that great shop, just downstairs, on place Bellecour. At the time I didn't know I was so lucky to live above the best *pâtissier/confiseur* in Lyon!

As our goat Jenny was retired now, she got asked to pull the boys Billy cart (home made) but she couldn't be bothered, so they just took the cart up the hill at the shearing shed and with their friends drove it down 'flat out' standing on it, all bunched up together... invariably crashing in a spectacular fashion in the dam, hundred of meters below...I'd watch, ready to jump into action with the first aid kit handy. Jenny ended up hanging around with the boys' horses that the Parsonages had left with us: Enid and Wally joined later by Oli's own horse, Ned, and a very stubborn and bad tempered white pony called Kelly (also a gift from the Parsonages). He used to kick poor Jenny, but she didn't hold a grudge and kept clinging to her new found clan all the same.

Increasingly as the years went by, Sam and Nick helped Richard in the shed and together they produced interesting creations out of wood or even steel using a welder. They also collected the fruit in season for me as I had jumped right into the pioneering way of life and self sufficiency spirit of the place. After my cheese and ginger beer phases, I bought a collection of dusty Fowler preserving jars and a Vacola set, together with some weird apparatus of the bygone era at one of those irresistible and entertaining clearing sales. With my mother, Karin, Virginia or Melenaite, we jarred countless apricots and peaches which grew in the garden.

My old friend Peter Holliger came over regularly from Zurich to stay with us and took very artistic photos of the property, which he was very fond of. He was a breath of fresh air from my old world and a pleasure to have around.



Picnic on Nick's birthday.



Pat Pfeiffer with sons Robert and Matthew, Susan Bowman. Patrick on, Wallie

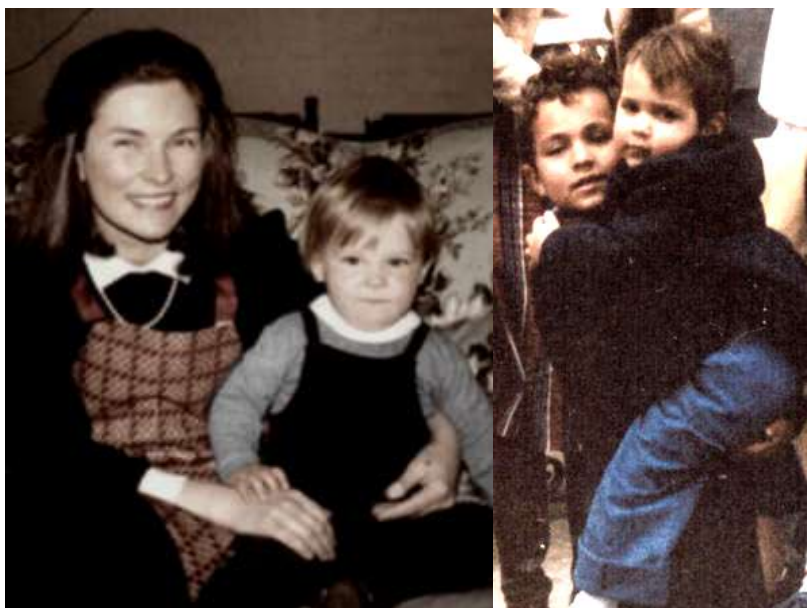


He and Richard became good friends. In Switzerland, Peter was now producing plays and doing stage acting as well as films for television. This didn't surprise me as he and his brother, Arthur, had already a couple of talented relatives in the field: one also an actor and the other a musician, both cousins; the later Heinz Holliger became a well quoted conductor and oboist in the music world. Seeing Peter and talking about his life in Zurich, reconnected me for a while to the person I was then. But life at The Ranch was full and busy and the nostalgic feelings never lingered on. My nephews particularly felt quite at home with us, riding horses or mototbikes, mustering sheep, camping on "Top Mountain" and on week ends sailing our catamaran on the huge Split Rock dam, forty minutes away, or water skiing with our friends the Bowmans and the Smiths.

When Oli turned two years old, we had him christened at St James Church in Sydney. Julie and Tony Pfeiffer had parted a few years back and remarried: Tony to Pat and Julie to Godfrey Smith. They had now a little boy: Andrew just a little younger than Oli. The two were baptised at the same occasion; Julie organised a joint reception at their house in Lindfield and friends and family attended from both sides. They were soon to buy a property in Manilla (between Tamworth and Barraba) called 'Glamorgan', so we saw a lot more of them in the years to come. We also stayed very close to Tony and Pat: they had two little boys by then, Robert and Mathieu. Pat loved horses and the family occasionally came riding on the Ranch.

On a couple of occasions, together with my parents and the Leclercs, we spent our holidays on a rented "Halvorsen" boat in Pitt's water. Those cruises reminded us all of the 'Ascona' but they were connected to a very different environment! It was not open sea here and I think the safety of countless little creeks along the way (and the oysters) was heaven for George, It certainly was for us... Refuge Bay was a magic place to anchor and clean up under the 'heavy' waterfall (we seemed to attract rain on those occasions). We also spent time in Hazelbrook, Bundeena, or with Richard's parents in Mittagong. After the devastating fire that went through Hazelbrook/ Woodford in 1977, Mum had patiently rebuilt their garden, in Riches Ave. To start with, she simply 'designed' a forest on the western wall of her house (paint): a *trompe l'oeuil* quite effective in the eyes of the passers by (she hoped).

She grew roses and geraniums but also replaced the native shrubs that had been habitat to the smaller birds of the area.



Oli's christening: Julie and Andrew Smith, Nick and Oli. Audrey and Dolly

Oli's christening: Julie and Andrew Smith, Nick and Oli. Audrey and Dolly

Apart from the planted garden, the land extended to one acre of natural bush that sloped all the way down to a wild creek, twisting and cascading swiftly through the middle of the valley. The bush regeneration after the fire was just miraculous in Mum's eyes, as she was not accustomed to this cycle of vegetation rebirth. But the wild life had suffered. Some had returned: the ones that were fast enough to escape a fire of that category that is. Sadly, none of the vast world of small creatures that lived under leaves and barks or the smaller moving animals, like the blue tongue lizards, had been so lucky. After the fire it became obvious to all of us, when walking through the blackened hill, that no creatures trying to shelter under, below or inside logs or trees could have survived, not even wombats in their burrows. But the bigger birds like the yellow tailed black Cockatoos, the kookaburras or King Parrots had returned.

When the beautiful Labrador, Daisy, became his faithful canine companion, George's life style changed drastically for the better. Daisy didn't let him just 'think about it' but dragged him out on the road the way his Geat Dane, 'Alex', used to do in L'Abadie. Riches Av. was still a dirt road along the house and went for kays through the valley.

My parents' house was the last dwelling before getting to the bush, so they felt 'in the country' without the isolation factor. They got to know the road or more exactly the 'fire track' very well and Mum took us on long walks amongst eucalypts, wallabies and other animals such as possums and gliders. George had a great view of this bush regeneration from his office window and worked on his typewriter about ten hours a day. He didn't walk along the fire track but liked to contemplate the possibilities of doing so from the comfort of his office chair. Along the way through the valley, old abandoned cars like a FB Holden sprang occasionally out of the landscape as a surrealist reminder of white men's footprints on those sandy banks. This environment, so beautifully nurtured by the Aborigines in the past, had been drastically modified and redesigned by the, 'Europeans', starting with the first explorers and then the town planners of local governments of modern time. The Blue Mountains were part of a fragile ecosystem and from what I could read about it, it still needed careful control in the areas of fire managements and possible (renewed) mining interrests

Dolly and George made friends with the neighbours in Hazelbrook, mostly young families but also an English chap called Eric. Eric had stayed on, fighting the fire when it came through the valley and he, as well as his house, amazingly survived the blaze. He said he didn't have a house insurance and simply couldn't afford to lose all he worked for through his entire life. My parents were very impressed and invited him to Barraba a couple of times for a change of air.

'The Ranch' was five or six hours drive but that didn't stop them taking the road to spend their regular fortnights with us, at the Pink House. Apart from Eric, they would occasionally bring some visitors from Europe, like Jean and Gisele Constantin. Jean particularly loved the farm and was a strong walker: he said he needed to walk all along the boundaries of the property to get a 'real feeling' of the place...Only five thousand acres! A couple of years after moving to Sydney, Bernard and Karin parted but they stayed excellent friends. Bernard was by then working for the IT Company 'Wang' and at a later stage with an engineer friend of his: Michel Lefevre, (involved in water filtration). My nephews were doing well at school and it was decided that Jean Charles would go through his French Baccalaureate in Canberra.



Back in time: Sam and Simon Sweetapple: a walk after the fire.

A few years on.....>>>>>



George at his desk, Hazelbrook



Sam and Nick, Patrick and Jean Charles (Dolly with Daisy at the top), on the track.



Rosnay

Mum and I were busy today looking through Mais' shed where his impressive library is now packed up in countless boxes. He would have kept every article that he wrote through his long life. The sorting out is a big undertaking and two Wwoofers: Tessa and Sabine did some of the cataloguing at Sam's suggestion and under his direction.

Mais died before he could publish his very impressive autobiography; the printed and electronic drafts are with us and they include a huge amount of documents right through the book. History lovers who have been his correspondents are urging us to "do something" about it but the draft has hand written corrections: it would be a difficult task for us to edit and do justice to his work, in German.

I talk to Dolly about Mais' past achievements and hers of course, but it is getting increasingly difficult to reach her, I'm afraid. I can just imagine what a frightening experience it must be to try so hard at responding to us, but not quite succeeding. Lonely too.

Since my mother moved in with us, we restored her little cottage. It had been cut in half to make the trip from Canberra, reassembled and a deck was added but the cladding was now falling apart as well as the deck. Nick took the restoration work on hand. He rebuilt the kitchen and opened it to the beautiful view. When we walk through, Mum looks around, a little puzzled. She does not remember how it was before but 'knows' it is changed now. I feel that she does not really like the new Stoekli.

Chapter XIX: ‘Tumlong’

‘Snow on the Ranch’ and stronger wool prices

The drought never completely disappeared and it was a juggle with selling and buying stock just at the right time, to join... or not to join ewes. We had merino sheep for wool, and cross bred for meat, and also just the right number of Hereford X Angus cattle now to feel reasonably confident of not overstocking.

An amazing event took place on that winter of 84: snow fell on the Ranch! It was a thick carpet of the most beautiful snow: everything was covered! The first snow in thirty years, they said...As I watched from my bedroom window, I feared for the new born lambs, but the fall didn’t last long enough for them to suffer. Richard built a little sled and dragged the boys through the paddocks at the back of his motorbike. Snow ball fights and hysteria followed.

By the end of the year, the rain came more regularly and started to establish a reassuring pattern: the feed grew, the dams filled up, our creek ran and water holes over flowed. The golden era for wool started a little later.

There was at the time a great deal of optimism about the continuing demand for wool all over the world, particularly from China, Italy, France, Taiwan and the floor price for fleece at auction was kept at a hefty level. This minimum reserve price scheme had been introduced in 1974; “it was founded by a proportion of the tax paid by growers on the value of shorn wool and administrated by the Australian Wool Corporation (AWC), which purchased wool not reaching the reserve price at auction. The wool was later sold during periods of higher prices”. Some of the AWC executives felt highly confident that this floor price could be maintained, even increased...Richard was a member of the Wool Council for four years and always believed that the floor price should remain at a conservative level.



The Ranch house and Ned



Shearing sheds in the snow



Above and below left: At Olokuna with the Smiths and Prattens, Painting of the 'Pink House' by Peter Holliger

Our wool clips became very valuable and I recall the excitement when after driving to Newcastle, we watched our commodity being auctioned in this huge auction house, with all the buyers lined up to evaluate the different fleece: French, Italians and Japanese companies were buying the finest wool. The bidding was fierce and heated, and that year our wool sold very well to a Japanese firm.

Rain was a life saver for us of course but heavy storms after a drought and at time of lambing were devastating for the ewes. At some stage the paddocks were being washed out and, with the cold of mid winter, the mothers suffered terribly and were dropping their lambs everywhere... walking away, and leaving them. We all rallied together including the boys, my mother and Allan the farmhand, and we drove everywhere, collecting the abandoned lambs, and putting the healthier ones in the shed with heaters on. We revived the others in warm baths and dried them indoors, near the fires, with heated towels or in the plate oven. We saved quite a few but a lot still died. Saving them was one thing but now we had to find their mothers, a near impossible task... So once again we had a little army of poddies to feed (but no more 2am feed for me...)



In June 1984, Jean-Charles passed his French baccalaureate in Canberra and then went back to France with Bernard and my parents for a holiday. He had applied (and was accepted) for a degree in electrical engineering at Sydney University. Bernard was dating Regine by then and, if I recall, they all travelled back to Sydney together.

The next tragic event would have the most painful effect on our families. On the 27th of December 1984 my parents, Jean Charles, Karin, and Karin's mother (Liselotte Gurshing) were all travelling to the Ranch in the family's old Kingswood when the accident occurred: Jean Charles was driving as he had his L plate and wanted to practice on a quiet country road, near the town of Coolah. But the road was in bad repairs on one particular section, and in attempting to overtake a truck, their car left the road and fell a few meters below, killing Jean-Charles instantly and injuring my mother, Liselotte and Karin.

The following weeks were spent in a haze with many trips to the Dubbo hospital. We attended Jean-Charles' funerals in that beautiful little Lutheran church in Sydney where Karin used to sing as part of the church choir. On that day, the church was full with family, friends and all of Jean-Charles' classmates and teachers. It was then, in this little church, that I came to the realization that our lives could never be the same again.

After the funerals, we asked Patrick if he would want to go camping near Port Macquarie with us. He agreed, and I think this time brought the cousins closer together. My mother had to have a couple of operations, particularly on her hand, as the tendons had been cut with glass shattering, but with re-education she slowly got the use of her fingers again. Karin and Liselotte went through a difficult recovery too but eventually they healed also. A few months later, Karin and Patrick went to live in Frankfurt and, with her mother and sisters' support and Patrick at her side, Karin settled down back in Germany. She got a job at the French school where Patrick had enrolled. Bernard went back to live near Montpellier, got a job in IT and he and Regine started their lives together.

Olakuna

1985 went...The rain had got sparser again. That year, the property next door, Olakuna, was offered for sale and Richard's parents proposed to buy the place: it was over 2000 acres and they asked Richard if he would manage the farm for them. When he agreed, they sold their beautiful property in Mittagong and proceeded with the purchase.

For a couple of months they lived in one of the two little cottages on Olakuna near the road, then moved right on top of the hill on a little plateau with glorious views over Mt Kaputar, where they built a mud brick guest cottage. From there, they supervised the construction of their main house, next to it, in western red cedar this time.

Audrey and Clive took very well to their new life and the local community made them feel very welcome. An old school friend of Audrey from 'Frensham' boarding school lived nearby just by chance, June Alison, and through her and her husband they gained a great introduction amongst people of their age group. That's when I realised how Australia was really a

small place in spite of the huge distances and boarding schools were still playing a big role in social communication, particularly in the country.

Audrey's youngest sister, Pamela Roberts, came to visit with her husband, Lisle. I had known their youngest son, Martin, at the UNSW as we stood on opposite sides of the 'circulation desk' at the university library. I thought he was bright and very friendly. A few years on, he went on to live in England where he met his wife, I believe. 'Uncle Cliff' and his wife, Myra, had good friends in Manilla, so they visited them and us in the process.

I think Barraba was too far west for Audrey's older sister: Noppy. She and her husband, Rex Money, had their own little farm near Richmond where they spent most week ends. But their daughters visited us particularly Carole and Pierre Roussel, with their son, Philippe. They were very fond of the Pink House and a couple of times they brought over some French relatives. Sadly Pierre died of cancer, when only in his late fifties.

After the Statham's move to Olakuna, our three families shared each others lives (except when my parents were in France as they still spent seven months a year in Montpellier). I always thought that having the extended family living close by was a great model from our forbearers and I, for one, (certainly Richard too) encouraged this closeness; we also knew the children benefited greatly from this interacting between the generations.

George enjoyed playing mind games and particularly chess with the boys, and of course he won every time until they started to beat him (Not too often)! George was quite impressed. I know they were also able to appreciate the dedication and talent of their grandmothers' respective crafts...And their cooking. I had mixed feelings about picnics but... we all went, cooking a chop or two at one of the dams, with every one in the extended family who was keen to follow! Clive had books on natural gardening and a healthy respect for the land and native vegetation: Sam listened and watched. Perhaps there was already a pattern forming in his mind as, eventually, he would follow the ecology path, all the way. But I had learnt already as a child that closeness often comes with a price and, as in every other family particularly in an isolated country situation like ours, we had to work at keeping our relations on a fair and friendly key. It was well worth the effort.

In 1986, a bomb shell fell on us: the Parsonages wanted out of the partnership. They had bought a farm in Wilberforce, two hours from Sydney, and as Sami's health had not improved, the new farm suited them far better.

We understood their situation, but with Richard's parents just settling in and building a house next door, selling our property was not an option; so, where to find the funds to buy the Parsonages out? A little creative thinking was required again.

We just had two excellent years of healthy wool prices, and there was money in the bank now (ear marked to pay off our hefty mortgage at some stage) but certainly not enough for us to buy the other half of the place. We knew that our house was a great asset after the work we put in: comfortable and big. The garden, although close to the creek and prone to severe frosts, was attractive and the house on the road could be a source of income for the buyers. So, we subdivided one hundred acres of land including the two houses in view to sell this section of the farm. We were getting used to moving by now and we had learnt after fourteen years of marriage, that no possession was ever permanent, only family relationships were the absolute certainty and our driving force.

A couple called 'The Taylors' acquired the subdivided holding (keeping the name) and we were then in a position to buy the Parsonages out and prepared to leave this part of the property. But this time we didn't have far to go. We were to move in the cute Pink House up the hill.

'Tumlong' and the 'The Stoekli I'

Our property was named "Tumlong", after a little town in India. The name appealed to us for sentimental reasons but it had also a pleasing aboriginal ring to it. So we moved from down the creek to the foot of Top Mountain and were quite excited at the prospect of reviving this most historical 'Pink House'. Fortunately the sale of the Ranch had left us with just enough funds to undertake an extension to the Pink House which could accommodate the five of us. We also arranged a spare house from Olakuna (which luckily the Stathams senior wanted removed) to be transported. It was lifted on a huge trailer and placed close by us for my parents' use.

This house was strategically placed, off setting the Pink house and out of sight, but enjoying the same beautiful views as we did...My parents named it 'The Stoekli'. No doubt, this addition had tested our ability to think out of the square, so to speak, but everyone was happy with the result.

Mum didn't waste any time making it look as cosy as our courtyard flat, Place Bellecour: she polished the floor boards, pasted attractive wall papers on the fibro walls and created a kitchen. Then, after all the hard work done (by Mum), George would sit on his new veranda, reading or writing as usual, occasionally looking up with a content expression. He greatly enjoyed watching Richard 'run after the sheep' as he put it. Those times were very creative mentally for him and, inspired by the quietness of the place, he kept producing books and articles to be published in Switzerland, Germany and England.

The word 'Stoekli' in Swiss dialect means a little house used on a Swiss farm by the older generation of farmers... George had shown us one day a thick book, beautifully illustrated with photos and stories of Stoeklis in all forms and shapes, scattered in green paddocks with gentle cows wearing colourful bells around their necks... grazing peacefully.

We had a 'Stoekli' now, even if our paddocks were far from that shade of Swiss green. I often thought that the view from the veranda, extending to the outback with kangaroos silhouettes cutting into the sunset, would look quite striking in that book.

By now, Richard and I had made good friends around Barraba, and one day Sandy Pratten talked us into starting a book discussion group. This idea was particularly favoured by the women but to our surprise, all men joined in as well. The full group would meet for dinners at each others house and smaller groups (women) at lunch time, over a cup of coffee in town. Some men surprised me as I had only heard them speak of the weather or their sheep in the past, but then they would rise to the occasion and expose their views with great confidence (Bill Mc Kid comes to mind). Some would fall asleep, discreetly, -sitting on the loo-. (No name)

The next year, my parents sold their house in Hazelbrook and went searching for a beach house that they hoped everyone in the family would enjoy (and not quite as far from us as Hezelbrook was). They eventually settled for a bungalow at Bonnie Hills with the view opening to the ocean, twenty km South of Port Macquarie.

Soon Richard and the boys got busy building a sand sailor as there was a huge stretch of beach between Bonnie Hills and Lake Kathie: it was a complete success (at first) and the speed they got to was quite incredible! But after a fair bit of rough treatment, the spoked wheels failed.



The 'Stoekli' on the road to Tumlong, a wing added at the Pink bouse, the Stoekli, Self with the boys at Bonnie hills. Making a puzzle at Olakuna.. Shearing shed: Oli with Jobno and Gavin.. Oli drumming in the shearing quarters.

We enjoyed spending holidays at Bonnie Hills but we couldn't get there as much as we had wanted to, and my parents felt isolated. They would sell the place three years later.

T.A.S.

Sam was now at boarding school: The Armidale School (TAS), two and half hours drive from Tumlong. He had won a music scholarship which later on was extended to a full academic scholarship for tuition and boarding. The little school at Barraba had serious limitations and most of his friends went away to school in year 7.

I understood painfully that sending our children to boarding school was the price we had to pay for living such a splendidly isolated life as we did. Sam was a good student (dux of the primary school) and like his friends, he was keen to go. We also hoped this school would extend him to his full abilities. Every three weekends he would come home, taking the bus to Tamworth where I'd pick him up. I have very fond memories of our trips back and forth, which gave us the best opportunity to have in depth 'one to one' talks about his new life. And of course there were many sports, theatrical or musical events which called us to Armidale regularly.

He made new friends there, one in particular called Tom Parsons who was French. His mother, Nicole, lived in Tamworth with her second husband (Australian) and two other sons by him. She was 'the Terror' of The Armidale School: when she marched through the courtyard, all the teachers hid or walked the long way. She occasionally had grievances and complaints about the way the school was run and of course she was spot on most of the time. Apart from attending the parents/teachers interviews, my preferred way of 'venting my concerns' was to write involved letters to the management. Still, Nicole would have got better results in the long run, no doubt, and I admired her for her gusto.

In spite of a kind of old fashioned way of running the school the TAS's headmaster and the teachers were very encouraging when it came to developing the children's abilities and potential. They certainly appeared this way to the parents anyway.

If I had to describe the staff effort with one word, which would it be? ‘Schizophrenic’ perhaps. It seemed to have two minds, and in spite of its great efforts to see the children shine, being a tall poppy was not really ‘on’ unless of course it was to do with SPORT.

The glorious year of the Wool

The previous year of 1988 had been ‘the glorious year of the Wool’. Demand for this fibre had become very strong from all over the world and, as part of the Bicentenary celebrations, a very important ‘Wool Expo’ was organised at the Opera House. Richard was in the Wool Council still and we both got invited to take part. The big fashion show was the *piece de resistance* attended to by politicians and dignitaries like Prince Charles and Princess Diana. My main thought at the time was that Diana wore thick make up and seemed older in real life but she was extremely gracious. After a group introduction, like everyone else, we followed them up the stairs. I always had a soft spot for Prince Charles, as I knew of his interests in art and architecture, but very importantly, already in those days, he favoured natural farming (which later on would become a passion of his).

The show was just dazzling, and beautifully staged. Wool of all microns, colours, weight and intricate patterns was presented by international fashion designers and glamorous models. The music was also innovative as well as the lighting and video effects. Right then, this fibre was IN as it had never been before, and wool growers regained hope and faith in their commodity. After so many years of struggle due mostly to droughts, this beautiful presentation of their products created a sense of euphoria and a feeling of great achievement.

We came back home feeling elated. Wool prices being good, people hung on to their sheep, buying more breeding stock and the sheep numbers increased dramatically around the country. Farmers gambled in the ‘wool future’. The major players who had recently entered the wool market were China and Russia, so a lot of optimism rested on the ongoing demand for wool from those two big buyers. In the meantime we kept going as we did before, managing Tumlong in a conservative way. Richard had some success in breeding cattle and enjoyed this diversification.



Audrey and Clive Statham with their dog: Anna, on their property (Nick and Oli behind)



A lunch at 'Tumlong'. Below: On Olakuna, looking towards Tumlong.





P. Holliger riding and holding four of the dogs. The boys 'biikykarting' with Hugh Mac Murtrie and Thomas Bauman



George holding a Joe.



Rick in the sheep yard.



Nick and Oli riding near the Stoekli (in back ground). Shearing shed at the top.



In Bonnie Hills with the sand sailor. Below, canoeing on lake keepit



He managed his parents farm the same way as ours; successfully breathing life back into some much eroded part of the property. Audrey and Clive were now an important part of the local community: Clive as a locum doctor and Audrey as an active participant of the Barraba Craft Centre called “The Clay Pan”. She was a clever embroiderer and very generous with imparting her knowledge. They also spent time in Sydney in their flat at Darling Point. On the farm, they both enjoyed gardening and planting native trees (the later was still Clive’s hobby). My parents had a different type of garden: their house was elevated at the front and provided a natural barrier which meant the stock was grazing right under their windows, and George loved watching them. Mum had trees and shrub on the fenced sides, like oleanders... (To our visitors’ dismay) and the garden looked after itself. At the time, one of my mother’s hobbies was to paint furniture with still life and everyday scenes as she had done in Switzerland.

Her inspiration came from the beautiful Australian wild flowers that she saw around her, particularly in the Blue Mountains and on the coast. She and George had bought a flat in Montpellier and shared their time between Bonnie Hills (still with them), ‘The Stoekli’ and France.

When they were away, we looked after their beautiful Labrador bitch, Daisy. She and our good work dog, Blacky, became best friends. (His father, Dog, had died from a brain tumour). Daisy couldn’t help being a “Retriever” and once or twice she brought dutifully a little lamb to the house, depositing him/her delicately on the veranda and, strangely, the lamb was not harmed at all. But the hard part was finding the mother again!

Brown or black snakes were of course a threat in the bush particularly to cheeky dogs that chased them. One day, Oli found our good work dog, Oscar, looking dead in the laundry where he had dragged himself. We rushed him to the vet with Oli nursing and comforting him all the way. We had to guess which type of snake had bitten him but Oscar made a remarkable recovery within just a few minutes of getting the anti venom.

But our favourite animal story was to do with our pet cockatoo: Dr Claw, or “Doc” for short. We had bought him in a Tamworth’s pet shop when he was still young enough to be handfed with a syringe. He learnt to bark like the dogs, whistle just like Richard (confusing when they went mustering all together) and repeat simple words like “Hello Doc”. He flew free all day, sometimes perching on my shoulder in the garden. But his special past time

was to follow the ute through the property, keeping Richard company when he was fencing or mustering.

He and our huge pet weather, Rambo, terrified my mother by pursuing her in the garden back to her house! They knew she was afraid and she and Oli were considered fair game: Doc chased, and Rambo charged...but if Oli turned back and faced him, Rambo 'sheepishly' would appear to lose interest. My mother kept running.

One day Rambo fell very sick. He was suffering from tetanus and the vet gave him very little time to live. Richard's father didn't want to hear any of it. He took Rambo to his shed and installed a kind of lever system hanging from the ceiling to get him up and down, and then proceeded to start his re-education. It took weeks but Rambo recovered.

Our dogs had a thing about kangaroos. They chased them every time they had a chance...One day our youngest sheep dog, Shorty, learnt his lesson. After being chased by Shorty through a couple of paddocks, this huge blackish Wallaroo changed tack and headed to the river. He crossed half way then stopped and faced his opponent. When Shorty swam to him, the Wallaroo took the dog's head between his paws and proceeded to drown him...That was clever. Fortunately Richard was fencing near by and rescued our silly dog just on time. The Wallaroo escaped, followed by Doc who was wondering what the fuss was all about.

Apart from Doc, we had lots of pigeons around the garden for a time, living in a very attractive house: Richard's effort. Fan tailed pigeons were my passion then: they kept company to Doc and other baby parrots occasionally saved from the rare but wild storms. (We would release them when they recovered). Pigeons and doves have the reputation of being peace lovers and gentle, but in fact they are deceptively cruel to each other, if kept in cages. We let them fly free during the day as for the first two years or so predator birds only struck on rare occasions (but things got worse as time went on and we eventually stopped breeding pigeons).

Sam and Oli loved horses but Nick preferred dogs. So, we decided to get one that he could call his own: 'Mr Hudson'. He was a wired hair terrier and came home every night looking like a little ball of grass seeds. Nick, patiently, plucked at the seeds and washed and combed Mr Hudson's hair. A daily ritual. It was a chore well worth the effort as far as Nick was concerned.

But this little dog had to do what all terriers love doing: chase anything that moves and, one sad Christmas night, Mr Hudson disappeared... We all called him and searched late into the night but he was never to be found again. We believed a snake might have taken him. So, the 'Dog Book' came out again: this book described the characteristics of every single breed of dogs and gave them points for health, beauty, kindness and so on. Two breeds got nearly 10 out of 10: Labradors and Dalmatians.

We already had a Labrador (George's) so Nick decided to get a Dalmatian. As it happened one was advertised in the SMH 'free to a good home'. Gavin Casey went to check out the family and their dog. As he was satisfied with both, Richard and Nick drove all the way to Double Bay to meet "Maud".

'A very friendly dog', her family said, but she was just a little too friendly with the new born baby! So, she had to go. This is the best think that could have happened to Maud. She loved Tumlong, Nick and all of us.

She was also well accepted by our canine colony and after being chased many times by Doc around the dining table, she finally faced him and they got to a status quo. Our two cats, Minou and Dave, kept away (although they had nothing to fear from the newcomer as Daisy was their best friend).

Shooters on the prowl

Dogs were a reassuring presence around as Tumlong could be quite a spooky place at night when no one was about. Richard used to go away for a few days at a time to attend agro- politic committee meetings, and one night, when he was away, I found myself confronted with intruders.

That night, Sam was also away as well as my parents. Oli was tucked up in bed, fast asleep, and Nick was with me when through the bay window we saw the lights of a truck popping up and down. I knew those: they were shooters' spot lights and I was not impressed at all as nobody had rang me to ask permission (they knew I would say no). I said to Nick to stay with Oli and that I would be back in a jiff, then I jumped in the ute, hoping to have a little talk with whoever it was. I drove around for ten minutes, but they had switched off their engine and lights. There was an eerie silence around by then. I quickly drove back home and that's when I realised my mistake: Nicko was understandably quite spooked out. I felt awful for having left him, even for a short time. I hugged him and tried to reassure him the best I could.

Then the dogs started to bark again as the shooting party sneaked away. As we stared through the bay window, we saw their lights going up the hill and slowly disappear down to the road. “They” had given up (we hoped). It was hard to feel safe in those circumstances but I eventually got used to spend the odd nights alone with the children. The dogs were a good barometer for intruders; they were tied up at the back of the garden, sometimes on long runs, all seven or eight of them.

Like at the Ranch, the garden at Tumlong was non-existent to start with and had to be built up from scratch, but we had a lovely view to the North and our top mountain framed the house on the South side. A perfect setting that lent itself to an open design with a round wooden fence partly encircling it; it had an organic and flowing feel. For me it was a question of trial and error and I used to move fully grown plants for instant effect, something I regret now (bad back).

Sandy Pratten was a district representative for the ‘Open Garden scheme’ and she encouraged us to take part of the scheme: the Senior Stathams with Olakuna and us with Tumlong. The real gardener was Audrey, of course and Richard and I tugged along. We worked for weeks to get our garden up to standard and enjoyed the challenge... to a point. Still, It was fun on the day as we had also created Christmas presents for people to buy: my little studio (the Cook’s room) was the ‘shop’, full of wooden bowls and the likes: Richard’s and the boys’ effort. Together with some watercolours and pressed wild flowers (a hobby of mine at the time), we ended up with quite a few items. We sold the lot.

The children also took some interest in the garden but mostly when they could jump on the lawnmower as fast as they could. They also helped Richard on the farm: drenching, marking lambs and moving sheep on motorbikes or horses, and also at shearing time, the most stressful time of the year, which lasted three weeks, during which time we didn’t pray for rain. Nick was weary of horses: when he was little he had fallen off Wally and been dragged with one foot still on the stirrup... He felt more in control on motorbikes... Oli was a keen rider and liked competing in those gym kana’s events, particularly jumping events. But like for Nick and Sam, motorbikes were his favourite mode of transport.

When he was about four years old, we had made a deal: he would be allowed to ride Sam and Nick’s 80’ motorbike only when he could put his feet

on the ground (no more of that standing on a brick to get on) and sure enough as soon as his big toe just touched the ground, he was off.

Sam enjoyed Pony camps when he was younger. Riding was quite an operation: he'd cover his body from head to toe and never touch his face, especially his eyes. As soon as he got home, he'd strip his gloves and other protective clothing straight into the washing machine and took a shower on the spot. This worked for the allergy, but not always, so we tried the homeopathic treatment of allergen drops put under the tongue... with some good results.

The three of them liked playing tennis, so we raided the ants' nests around the place and scraped loads of fine dirt with our tractor to make the court. It was cheap and worked well. (Except, oh surprise...the ants started to make their way to the garden and even the house in search of new homes!) We also created a little dam which caught the reflexions of the house and attracted wild life like kangaroos and parrots. Kangaroos were not hunted in the house paddock (my specific request, respected even by the dogs) and I think they knew that they were in a safe heaven, as they often visited; it had been their territory before we arrived and still was.

The Ranch's house goes in flames

One day when busy at the shearing shed, Richard saw some smoke coming from the Ranch, near the creek, in fact right above our old house! We jumped in the truck and couldn't believe our eyes when seeing our beautiful old house going into flames...

No one was around, the Taylors were obviously away so Richard kicked the front door open (slashing a nerve under his foot) and out came flying an army of Siamese cats, which had been locked in! We got all the hoses together and desperately tried to smother the flames, hoping the fire brigade wouldn't be too long. Of course, when they arrived twenty minutes later, there was nothing left...Nothing at all.

We had dragged a couple of pieces of furniture out but not a lot really, and this Saturday was 'black Saturday' for the Taylors, naturally, but also for us. We were still in shock when they arrived back from an antique auction in Tamworth, hours later. An electrical fault had been blamed for the fire. (No suspicious circumstances).



Sam in Montpellier at Bernard's and Regine's with Patrick, Sebastien and Julien.

The Taylors had a good insurance and they rebuilt the house in a similar style. As for us, we were just left with our memories and a few photos of the old place.

In year 9, Sam travelled for four months to Europe: first spending two months with Karin and Patrick in Frankfurt. He attended the French school where Karin was still teaching the small classes. (Sam was in Germany at the exciting time of the collapse of the Berlin wall).

Then he travelled to Montpellier (by himself) to stay with an exchange family. He went to a school with the oldest son and spent the weekends with Bernard and Regine who had bought a house there and had a new baby: Christophe. I have no doubt that the trip was a success and Sam came home speaking good French. Seeing the rest of the family and making new friends had been a real buzz for him as well. But the draw back was that coming back to TAS proved hard, I think.

At the Nut House

Nick, like Sam, had learnt the piano with the legendary Mrs Piggot, but when it was time for Oli to choose a teacher, I heard of Bill Bright...This very talented craftsman and musician was living on a farm called the “Nut House”, on the other side of Barraba. A harpsichord builder and player, Bill Bright built his instruments using local timbers (still does) and had the lids painted with Australian landscapes in the European tradition by the local artist, Rupert Richardson.

Bill was quite out of the square in his life style and philosophies and when he agreed to teach Oli (and Nick for a while), we jumped at the chance. At first I was driving to the Nuthouse with the boys, once or twice a week after school. Before the lessons, we would take a ritual cup of tea under the pepper tree and talk about Bill’s teaching philosophy, music and other related subjects. Oli enjoyed playing in the delightfully untidy garden and huge lake which was teeming with wild life.

There were kangaroos, a tamed fox, a faithful dog of course and an echidna which had made his home under the house (to Oli’s delight). But Bill’s peacock was his most entertaining pet. He used to sing at the top of his voice, accompanying certain melodies that came from the music room/ workshop: an independent and ‘state of the art’ building where harpsichords in different

stages of completion were lined up. All animals respected Bill's workshop but were offered, very graciously, the run of his cottage.

At regular intervals, Bill would invite one of his many musician friends (like Jeffrey Lancaster) to play with him in concerts given at the local Anglican church. He was raising money to restore an antique organ, which had been donated to the church and laid neglected under the building for ages. When it eventually sprang to life again it was cause for a magnificent concert with the little organ played by the talented organist, John O'Donnell.

After a year or so, Bill came to Tumlong to give his lessons and often stayed on for a meal. I am sure that Richard's later interest in promoting classical music concerts in the bush stemmed from those days. We also discussed books and films, often relating to the triumph of the human spirit in 'closed in' societies. Twenty five years earlier, the town of Barraba had experienced a serious defeat in that regard. We were new comers, but could still sense the bitterness that lingered on over many denied membership by a tennis club that "wound up rather than ease its membership rules!"

But in 1990, our little town was not closed in anymore, although still deeply divided on one particular issue: tree planting. Bill, Richard and I with a number of friends took part of a rather controversial committee whose members were determined to beautify Barraba in planting plane trees along the main street...A strange concept for many town residents who opposed the project with all their might...But the trees were eventually planted and the street looked great. The 'Barrarbor festival' is now an annual event in Barraba and is a fitting tribute to this great outcome.

The children coming to the Nuthouse (including ours) learnt to hear and play music with their heart, and going through stressful exams was not encouraged. Bill fostered in his pupils quiet confidence in their own abilities versus 'striving' and trying too hard to achieve results -like George's father playing Chopin and getting hugely unhappy and frustrated with his efforts- (Oli does not play classical pieces anymore, but music will always be with him. He now writes his own lyrics and songs and probably will do so for a long time to come).

Sam and Nick also got inspired but in a different way: Sam built his own guitar at Tumlong. The plans were by Jim Williams, it took two hundred hours of painstaking construction: with spruce top, rosewood back, sides and

neck, ebony fingerboard. And it played well! Nick developed further his interest in wood creations that would take him far.

For me, our talks under the pepper tree brought something that I didn't even realise I had been missing in my busy life: I started to read again on those issues that were familiar to me years ago: Carl Jung in particular, 'the physician of the soul'. Jung was not the only great explorer of the human mind, but he appealed to me through his humility and passion for unleashing 'the truth' in his patients -and also in himself-. In my view, he was a scientist and a philosopher with God in the balance.

“Le Flore”



It was 1990, I had not been back to France for fourteen years and I was seriously missing the people and places of my old life by then. I had always hoped that the five of us would all go over together some day, but if it had been 'bad timing' in the past – financially- it was even more so today with the drought back amongst us.

My parents had moved to their new flat in Montpellier, so they sent me a plane ticket to join them for a while, in great part to meet my new nephew: Christophe, who was now one year old. (*Left: self with Christophe at Frontignan*)

The little flat in Montpellier was in the suburb of 'Celleneuve', it overlooked a big park with mature plane trees and colourful shrubs like olianders and lavender. As usual, George was at his typewriter most of the day and Mum had found a new interest in cooking for the homeless of Celleneuve. It was a 'St Vincent de Paul' initiative and the little group of families that came for the diners at the centre increased overtime to around one hundred heads.

Nothing was too much for Dear Dolly and she was very much appreciated as a cook but also as a mender of clothes that were then distributed mostly to immigrant children.

Celleneuve was an old suburb and the recently built block of flats called “Le Flore”, although modest in height, contrasted in its ‘brandnewity’ with the adjacent little streets of the old village near the main square where people played *boules*. As we used to walk through those streets to get to my brother’s house, I marvelled at the colourful stone houses along the way, every window seal would have a mix of geraniums and petunias, permanently on display. Cars were a ‘no no’ through those narrow streets, which was as well: we could enjoy our short cut in peace and tranquillity.

Christophe was just starting to walk on his own when I got there. I had bought a duty free video camera at the airport and delighted in recording his first steps. Patrick was studying in the city and we visited his studio on the 6th floor of a historic building. I enjoyed seeing him, independent and motivated. Together we explored some familiar sites, like my mother’s little Romane Church, in Celleneuve, dating from the 12th century. The stone walls were bare and the windows tiny: obviously built for resisting aggressors during religious wars.

Bernard and Regine also invited me to their place ‘Frontignan’, a little village on the coast where they were spending their holidays with Christophe, Patrick and Regine’s other children: Sebastien, Julien and Marie. Mum let me go but...not for too long! I loved the place, a charming ‘waterfront’ pad.

As my time in France was coming to an end, Mum treated me to a surprise: she, and a couple of other members of the “Charrat” family had organized a little trip through the ‘Beaujolais’; they hired a bus which soon filled up with the members of Dolly’s mother side of the family. We had two days of catching up with each others, chatting in the bus and visiting the countryside, mostly Romane churches and other historic landmarks (as well as fat *Charolais* cattle). Of course, we had gastronomic meals on the way and in the evening a *fete* was put on at the hotel, near Tournus. My aunt Minon and cousin, Pierre, spent a full day with us. Mum and I didn’t know then that it would be the last time we would see Minon.

This trip was short but long enough in my view. I missed the children and kept wondering about how Richard was coping at home (quite well as it turned out).



Family trip in the Beajolais. My aunt Minon is standing at the back. Her son, Pierre, next to Dolly



The Pink house after we moved in.. The veranda: a handyartt and craft area.



Rosnay

Today, I was gladly interrupted in my writing spell as we had an interesting visitor at Rosnay: an artist from Millthorpe, Ada Clarke, a very English looking woman of sixty years old or so. She wore her long, shiny white hair loosely tied up at the back and she was dressed in fluid and colourful clothes. Just back from a painting trip to the Wyangala dam, she had spent the night at the Woodstock hotel. Quite an experience she said...The staff was a little worried" "Did you book they asked?" It was obvious that no one had been staying there for some time: they rang the owner and rushed to get the best room ready. At the back of Ada's car was the big painting that she did at the dam: the colours were dazzling...I was surprised at her interpretation of the landscape as artists often prefer to see the gloom and doom of droughts and use it to their advantage. But not 'this' artist.

Our little town of Canowindra is buzzing with talents and seems to attract artists from far afield, (like the painters Melissa Barber, David Isbister and Heather Valance to name only a few). The main street, often referred to as Bendy street, the 'crooked street', has retained its old fashioned character (wide verandas and old tiles in the shop fronts) and is hosting now the 'hundred mile dinner' a gourmet food event spreading all the way to the Fishes museum. Art galleries are opening up, as well as specialty shops like one of wooden toys only and hand made hats. At the moment, The balloon festival is on again in Canowindra. Mum went up once, it was a high flight and she was delighted to give Mais a ring on our mobile phone, floating way above the clouds. Those balloons come in all shapes (kookaburras, eagles) and colours and at regular intervals soar to the sky and down again, sometimes drifting along our

snakey river. They tend to land in farmers' paddocks and today, it's our turn. Ballons are not a novelty for us anymore, but early morning, Richard and I still have fun trying to identify the curious, photographers or thrill seekers waving at us from above, as we are lying in bed, upstairs. A little later, if we are lucky, the champagne will come: a thank you gesture for letting the basket land on our front lawn.

My mother, as usual, loves the excitement; she walks towards the balloonists with her arms wide open and claps as she usually do to show her enthusiasm



Ballons on Rosnay



David Miller's music students giving a little concert in front of the house.

Chapter XX: Ongoing drought

‘The wheels fall off the wool industry’

I came back from my trip to some bad news. There was now a wool crisis in Australia. The euphoria of 1988 had slowly disappeared when big buyers, particularly China and Russia, stopped buying our wool after an international recession and a world push for synthetic fibre. The high reserve price in place meant that more than half of the wool offered was being passed in at auctions, and the stockpile reached an ‘unreasonable’ level.

It became obvious that the reserve had been set too high by the AWC to start with. The international business world became nervous so John Kerin, then primary Industry and Energy Minister, toured Europe and speaking to the major congress in Europe, manufacturers, skippers and mills, assured everyone there would be no lowering of the floor price. “The decision of 700 cents as a floor price is immutable. The wool trade can now act in confidence” were his words.

On the 11th February 1991, John Kerin abandoned the reserve price scheme. The after effects of this decision were devastating internationally, and particularly in Italy and France. Quoting the press of the time; ‘In Prato, two of the leading clothes manufacturers called in the receivers, three producers of knitwear yarn in Biella declared bankruptcy’ and this is mentioning only a hand full of the many businesses which suffered’. Kerin was sued by wool processing companies, but to no avail as political promises are not legally enforceable contracts in Australia.

The Labour government of those days damaged greatly Australia’s credibility, which had been built up over more than one hundred years. To make things worse, the AWC was not given another chance at handling their own affairs, but no decision taken by them in regard to oversupply could have

had a more devastating effect than this lie by the government that attempted to con the world and bluff the Australian wool industry out of trouble.

From then on farmers in Australia were paid to shoot their sheep through the “Stock reduction scheme”. They would bulldoze huge holes in the ground and pile in the dead creatures. The drought had been cruel but this scheme, surely, was beating the drought in cruelty and affecting tragically the owners as well. Sadly, the rate of farmers’ suicide increased greatly during that period. All this was bad news for us obviously. We controlled our sheep number (but no mass killing), maintained our cattle herd and kept on regardless.

It was now Nick’s turn to go to T.A.S. (Year 9). Boarding was hard at first and by the end of the first term we were starting to think of another option (like Oli and I renting a house in Armidale and have the boys as ‘day students’). I agonised over the issue when suddenly, it looked like Nick was settling in. He became an all-rounder. He liked sport and music and kept going with his passion for woodwork in the beautiful, state-of-the-art wood work department at the school.

His friends were out of the mould and his best mate for a while was a Japanese/American, 3 years older than most in his class, called Zac. He eventually escaped from the school into the big world, just living a note on his desk. Years later, Nick caught up with him in Japan, but sadly Zac had been pulled through too many different cultures, without family support, and was finding it hard to cope, still on his own I believe.

Nicole Parsons’ partner, Jim, was a colleague of our old friend Dereck Thomasseti. They were both Qantas pilots. One day Derek landed a little aircraft in one of the paddock. He said he was just ‘dropping in’ for tea...I think from then on, Oli had decided on a pilot career for himself and regular visits to air shows became *—de rigueur—*. Richard loved old aircrafts and we all enjoyed the spectacle anyway. Gliding took their fancy too and after having had a go at the real thing it was decided that they would build a remote control model glider.

It took Richard and Oli many hours to build and when the big day came to launch it, we all drove to the Tamworth model aircraft club, as such delicate operation was best left to the professionals. Or so we thought. The ‘experts’ launched it too fast and crashed it! But the fun had been in the building of it, we kept telling Oli and ourselves.



Nick and Sam with the cat 'Dave' and 'Dr Claw'. Below; Oli on Ned.

Back home they fixed the glider well enough to at least have it fly, but the landing could never be controlled properly.

Tom Parsons' brother, Greg, was also a friend of Nick and we became all quite close to the Parsons family. Greg had a quirky sense of humour. One day, he put an ad in the Armidale gazette: "Wanted: dogs and cats, plump and in good health for reputable house" and signed: the TAS' kitchen. I wonder if the school cooking improved after the episode... we never asked.

Both, Nick and Sam had joined the band which was directed by an extremely energetic band master: Tim Scott and they both took part of plays and musicals events inspired by this very motivated music teacher. In sport Nick played football and bush sports, Sam hockey and tennis and bush sports. But sport never became 'the most' important part of their lives as some house masters would have hoped...

Around that time we asked Nick if he wanted to spend some time in France, like Sam had, but he decided to wait for after the HSC, to feel freer and have more time there.

After the wool crash Rick and I struggled on. Our cattle herd was now more important but dependant on the dams being full, which was less and less often. In the past, food on the table had originated mostly from wool. Our original borrowing from the bank was not yet reduced and we felt we were now going backwards. Lying awake at night, (not counting sheep) I often had to remind myself of the motivations we felt when, ten years earlier, we came to work the land. We had both been positive about our new life: Richard loved working with sheep and being self employed and for me, I enjoyed the excitement of doing things together with the whole family and being involved in a common goal...

If we had stayed in Sydney, I would have gone back to work and I doubt we would have had a third child (unthinkable, not having Oli), life might have been more comfortable financially and certainly more predictable. But, the harsh reality of droughts put aside, when moving to Barraba I had felt excited by the discovery of great natural beauty, so inspiring when painting in my studio (the Shearers' Cook room), and I really enjoyed the challenge of 'making do' in difficult situations. Also bringing up children in this environment became a dream come true for us both. In fact I saw our world

in great part through the boys' eyes, and I knew this childhood had given them real life values and an appreciation of what it is like to live in this striking, but also very harsh and needy environment...This last part was weighing heavily on us now.

A crisis

We didn't think of 'global warming' then, but when during the next half decade four out of five years (90-95) were again drought declared, it seemed obvious that we were experiencing more than random dry spells in this climate pattern. Everyone we knew was going through the same hardship, sometimes in a much worse way than we did, and relationships were suffering.

All my life, I felt that there must be an answer to any problem, but this time was different: we were losing control of our livelihood through no fault of our own. Sheep and cattle were getting bogged in the nearly empty dams and hand feeding started again; sometimes I felt the need to go out and shout in the wilderness. Rick and I didn't talk much anymore. We had good friends, whom with I could talk to, but I didn't. I knew that news travelled fast in farming communities: the last thing we needed was to have our families worrying about us (or me), not coping. And us worrying about them worrying about us: The same old vicious circle.

Then Bill Bright introduced me to a few of his friends in Tamworth. They didn't always come from a musical background and some had interests in psychology, eastern spirituality and philosophy. The talks we had, helped shift my frustrations and worries at the back of my mind, and bring forward more essential issues: we spoke of unconditional love but also of self fulfilment and ways to conciliate the two concepts. We spoke of letting go of the crippling effect of 'fear' (like fear of failure or not measuring up...fear of having to let go of everything one worked for). I didn't speak about our specific problems, but the topics discussed helped me a great deal. For me, it was a sort of counselling without the 'counselling' tag on it.

That year was Sam's last year at school. He had put a tremendous effort in his studies and became Dux of the school: it was an amazing feeling seeing his picture in the Armidale gazette. With his high marks, he was able to choose any course of his liking and decided on Economics/Law.

Encouraged by Richard's father, he applied for a place at St Paul's college, Clive's old college in Sydney, and was accepted. The college fees were met by Richard's parents, which was a great help for us, needless to say, on that first year. For the second year, Sam sought more independence and shared a house with a couple of ex Paulines like himself. He also worked in a restaurant at nights - "Good Fellas" - to pay for the rent.

As for Oli, with his brothers away, he was a little lonely and he jumped at the chance to go to France on my brother and cousin Jean Philippe's invitation. He travelled 'care of' the airhostess' and was invited to share the pilot's cabin! A real thrill, he said. On arrival, my mother waited for him and undertook to show him the Paris' sites. She was a little too eager and poor Oli kept falling asleep, standing up! Later on, the Duchez (in Lyon) had him to stay as their son Fabrice was of the same age and they could go to school together for a few weeks. He also spent three weeks with Bernard, Regine and Christophe, before coming back home. He was not quite twelve years old when he returned.

When Oli was away, I undertook a TAFE course in drawing and painting: a welcome diversion to the sight of dying stock. The only problem was the course took place at Gunnedah, not quite as far as Tamworth but on a dirt road. I loved the excursions with the class and the open air painting and I also met a couple of interesting women with sons at TAS as well.

But one day, I nearly crashed the car and gave myself quite a fright. Two semi trailers were driving on the dirt road coming the opposite way. I saw the first one naturally and squeezed to the left to let it pass, but with the huge cloud of dust it was impossible to see the second semi hogging the narrow road and tailing the first semi. I ended up in the ditch (with only superficial damage, amazingly) and from then on, gave the painting course a miss.

My parents were spending a great deal of time in France now. They wanted to be part of their new grand son's life too and Patrick was also in Montpellier at that time, doing a course in hospitality. So, sadly for us, the Stockli was often empty. But one day, our problems appeared of very little importance as we heard of the disturbing news concerning Richard's mother: she had bowel cancer. From then on, Audrey and Clive spent more and more time in Sydney, visiting doctors and hospitals.

Selling out?

When the drought took a turn for the worse again, the possibility of selling Tumlong entered my mind. It must have been on Richard's mind too, but not much was said at the time.

At the end of that year Nick went through his HSC. He had worked hard too and passed with excellent marks. His major work in woodwork had achieved such recognition that it got selected to tour NSW in a travelling exhibition, which last leg was to be the 'Power House Museum' in Sydney. It was a game table with four beautifully executed draws and inside compartments for cards and chess pieces. There was a chess board too and a lid that could be turned around: leather on one side and felt on the other. The table and chess board were inlaid with different types of wood.

Both Nick and Sam made us proud as they were quietly achieving their goals, each in their own field, and Oli was not far behind either. In France he had shown that he could fit in at school and learn not only the language, but also all the other subjects that regular French speaking twelve years old were required to learn. The drought took second place in our minds, for a while.

The following year, the hand feeding was more than ever in full swing. In many cases the ewes that followed the truck for a feed did not come back to their lambs, or lost them. Around nine hundreds lambs died. We kept losing also an unreasonable number of grown sheep or cattle, too weak to go on or bogged in dams. One day, the family got together and we discussed the possibility of selling out. At the end it was agreed that we would sell, if we could get our price (although we thought there was little chance of that).

The persistent drought in this part of Australia became so critical that, in October 1994, the 'Sydney Morning Herald' ran a special series of articles putting Barraba on the map (or on the spot) for seven days running! Our little town of twelve hundred inhabitants was chosen to represent the *worse* example of a drought stricken, "sinking in" community.

The papers were filled up with horror stories, day after day. If farmers were depressed before, I wonder how they were feeling now reading statements like this one: "Barraba is in big trouble...Farm debt is mounting, town business bleeding. The bush's myth making momentum is grinding to a halt as weariness, frustration and stress take hold. Dreams fracture. After three seasons drier than a water biscuit, there is little fat on which to live -

emotional, commercial, and agricultural” (end of quote). David Spencer was one of the interviewees and made a concluding statement on the last day’s article: “Barraba, a dying town? No. Rural industry will pull Barraba forward. You could push a four lane highway from Sydney to Brisbane through Tamworth and Texas and save a fortune because the land is flatter, away from the coast. Then Barraba would blossom. Me a dreamer? No, if I was I wouldn’t be breeding cattle (SMH, October 1994).

David and Margaret Spencer, owners of the Ironbark stud, turned out to be our buyers. (The highway didn’t get built, of course). The bargaining had been fierce, spreading through a few stressful months, but eventually we got very close to our price for Tumlong, and Richard’s parents for Olakuna. David and Margaret Spencer had built up a successful Hereford stud and wanted more country for their children. We had worked hard at improving the property over fifteen years and it was a good feeling to know that she would be kept safe in our neighbours’ hands.

Slowly a sense of hope and excitement came back into our lives. Rick and I talked more freely and at length. The deal was signed; we relaxed and made new plans. We would buy a smaller farm, with hopefully irrigation rights, closer to Sydney and no mortgage in tow this time. We wouldn’t rely on sheep anymore, as we had observed soil compaction and erosion as a result of their trekking up and down the hills. But no matter how relieved we were to be able to move on, Tumlong was to stay in our hearts for a long time to come.

We said good buy to our friends, some we had met at the first clearing sale. I will always remember that day; I was longing to belong, feeling that strong pull and happy to give in to it. Now, after fifteen years of getting to know this community, we knew we would miss it. Those friends’ names come to mind now: Sandy and Robert Pratten, Sarah and Roger Bowman, David and Dimity McMurtrie, Ted and Jenny Croft, Angie and Richard Bright, Richard and Jenny Holiday, Joe and Bill Mac Kid, Bronwyn and Donald MacDougall, Ann and Dave Smith, Wal and Rose Waldren, The Wittens, Bill Bright.

Some of them came to our farewell dinner at Tumlong, (including the Spencers). It was not a sad night, as we had so much to look forward to, but I somehow knew we wouldn’t see much of our friends anymore. Before leaving us that night, they had given us a farewell gift: a beautiful painting of the hills around Barraba, by Rupert Richardson. I had often come close to people and

places in the past and then moved away, turning the page over, but this time was harder somehow.

We staged a big clearing sale and it was strange to be on the sellers' side of the auction tables, for a change. It was a beautiful day and a big number of people came over, including friends and the auction went very well for us. We sold some furniture from the three houses and also sadly parted with our horses and work dogs (to good homes), the motorbikes...All the machinery, tools and tractors, the boys' faithful "paddock basher" (Rick's Mum wedding present) and of course, the sheep and cattle. Doc was going to be looked after by neighbours and Maud with Blacky plus Minou, (our remaining cat), by the Spencers until we returned for the final move.

For a time, Richard's mother seemed to be in remission and started to enjoy life more. She and Clive bought a comfortable apartment in Darling Point and settled there full time, but Audrey still needed regular check ups and treatments and we kept our fingers crossed for a full recovery. She carried on with her usual mental strength and optimism, trusting that all will be well. A great host, she loved giving dinner parties and I remember one particular night in their new apartment that she and Clive gave for their friends, Nancy Hume and John Gorton, -who were soon to be married-. It was a great place for entertaining friends and family and we enjoyed that little touch of sophistication every time we visited them.

We were in between farms: a perfect time to spend a few months in France, as a family. This possibility was raised (by me)...But at this stage all our belongings, furniture, and farm gear were still at Tumlong and needed to be transferred, as soon as possible, to their new destination... Unknown yet. The Spencers had agreed to let us store everything there (in the Stoekli) for the time we needed to relocate, but we felt the pressure to do so sooner than later. We still didn't have any clear plans for the future, and we didn't want to rush into anything.

Our old friends, Bill and Fiona Ogilvie, then asked us if we would be prepared to take part of their investment group as they wanted to buy or build a vineyard. Would we be interested in joining them and manage the vineyard? This was an interesting concept and we would look at possibilities during our explorative tour.

So, after buying a campervan we prepared to take the road and look at different farming options in general, and at vineyard land in particular.

Oli in Melbourne and the search for land



Oli was invited to stay in Melbourne with Nigel and Melenaita when we were away. At the time, Melenaita worked for the Arnott's company and Nigel studied for a bachelor degree in theology and a Doctorate in Classics. For the past thirteen years he and Melenaita had been involved in



Church affairs in Tonga and translating the bible in the Tongan language had been part of Nigel's work. After 'little' Audrey, they had two more children: Jonathan (left) and Gavin (right) who, amongst other farm activities, used to love helping in the shearing shed- like stuffing reluctant wool into the big wool press and riding on the motorbike with Oli..

Nick, by then, had gone to France and was staying with my parents and other family members and friends. He took a French course in Montpellier to start with and my mother told me how motivated he was to learn. I was not surprised. In Lyon he met the Duchez and their four children including Florence who was Nick's age. He was away all year and worked when he could. Building beach huts on the blue med. was one of the jobs he had for a couple of months, as well as working on a timber property in England. The place was called 'Sotterley Mill' in Suffolk. Oak had grown sustainably by the Barnes family since 1744: the older trees were kiln dried and made up into furniture in the joinery shop.

Sam had decided to complete his degree in France. But before leaving, he stayed for a while at the lovely 'tree house' (as it felt like) at Virginia and Gavin's place, a room just above Gavin's workshop: a very cosy addition to the main house, with a charming view over the garden. Sam was certainly not the only house mate staying at aunt Gin's then, and I can't resist including here a description of the little creatures that Ginny and Gavin used to keep in their back garden. The first one that comes to mind was a cheeky bantam rooster, very keen on guarding his territory (quite fiercely in fact) and a couple of delightful rabbits together with 'Kimba', the family cocker spaniel.

There were colourful budgies in a big cage off the kitchen and an old and very entertaining cockatoo called 'Peter' (those birds can live to eighty years old).

Peter used to belong to the Wilkinson family, -senior- and had been known to create havoc when the two older daughters of the house: Audrey and Noppy came home late at night after a party. The young girls might have preferred a 'discreet' entry (my guess) but Peter didn't see it this way, and would sing at the top of his voice: 'Audrey's home!' or "Noppy's home", recognising the sound of their respective cars.

As we started our trip together Rick and I, our minds went back through time... We remembered travelling across Asia, and how we felt then about starting a life together. Of course, we had no idea what the future would hold but it didn't matter. And right then, in that campervan, we felt that way again. We travelled as far as Kangaroo Island with Sam as he was not gone overseas yet.

From there, we progressed to South Australia, Mt Gambier, then North, through the inland to Cowra and we witnessed the devastating effect that the drought had everywhere: watching farmers still ploughing their dry 'sand' was tragic, often the top soil had blown away and accumulated against the fences, in some parts getting half way to the top.

We had considered Bill and Fiona's offer and decided to accept it. We would buy some land, build a vineyard and manage it for the group. Ideally this would be part of a mixed farming operation. Richard put his name down for a few courses on grape growing for the next few months, and we read everything we could put our hands on the subject. We had a lot to learn about building a vineyard but it's amazing how motivation can speed the process. We also visited a number of vineyards and olive groves and talked to the growers and winemakers.

The idea of growing perennial crops and trees with a drip irrigation system was appealing, particularly grapevines and olive trees, as we knew they were considered tough and very forgiving in droughty situation.

When I talked to my mother on the phone about our new project, she was thrilled and volunteered lots of information regarding the way things were done in the 'good old days' on her parents' vineyards.

The Hunter Valley appealed to me as it had a very arty community and the proximity from the coast and Sydney was a plus. But, it appeared, the area

was not the best for growing grapes with low chemical input because of the high level of humidity in the region. The soil types were not the ones we were after either. But the Mudgee area attracted both of us, if only we didn't have to install miles of pipes to irrigate from the distant river. Denman (Bill's ancestors' country) was also a possibility, but this was unchartered territory with variable soil types, and the land was also hard to irrigate. So we kept going to Cowra.

We picked up Oli from Melbourne. (He had a great time with Richard's brother and his family) and Maud and Blacky from the Spencers (Minou was to stay with them) but Dr Claw had parted company from our neighbours.

This is still a mystery as how but I have no doubt that the call of the wild had been powerful enough to inspire him to fly away for good. Still, we kept hoping that one day, he would appear at our doorstep in Cowra, as his intelligence and powerful instinct were not of any ordinary bird, on that we all agreed. So, we refused to mourn Doc: we felt he was happy...perhaps with a newly found mate on "Top Mountain", his favourite territory.

Maud and Blacky were not used to towns and assumed that the whole of Cowra was their new property, as there were no fences around our rented house. They would lie down in the middle of the streets for a snooze, blocking the traffic. After picking up the dogs from the pound a couple of times, it became obvious that it was us, their masters, who needed to conform to our new status of Townies and seriously start a retraining program for ourselves and our dogs.

Just looking around as far as Canowindra convinced us that this was the place to seriously investigate. We then decided to rent a house in Cowra for a couple of months and look for land.

As for Oli, conforming was not a problem. He seemed to fit in any environment and was now in year 8 at Cowra High. He made friends on day 1. And so did we, through him. We soon met his friends' parents: John and Heather Davidson, Fiona and Glen Morton and Louise and David Packer, all from Cowra.

After a very intensive year of study, Sam graduated at the University of Paul Valerie in Montpellier, majoring in Geography. Then, he and Nick travelled together and separately, particularly at sea: Sam sailing to the Azores and Nick on Sea Clouds.



Nick in Montpellier with Bernard, Patrick and Dolly



Sam in Lyon.

Below: Regine and Christophe.

Right: Maud





Nick at the Eiffel Tower. Oli at Tumlong



Rosnay

I have been researching 'weeds' lately and thanks to the 'weed forager's handbook's good tips I decided to expand my culinary skills to include some of those 'nature little crowbars', or at least their succulent leaves. Nettle soup (and tea) has always been a favourite in France, as its nutritional effects are seriously huge. So, Mum and I will put our gloves on and we'll have nettle soup to night. Note: The definition of 'weeds' is always controversial. One from the writer Victor Hugo attracted my attention. I quote: "My friends remember this, that there are no weeds and no worthless souls". (Except for Johnson grass surely!)

Here is a quick sketch of curious visitors eating ripe olives. I caught them in the action. We often see cockatoos in the 'hundred trees grove' near my mother's house.



Chapter XXI: The Central West of N.S.W. A new start

Creating a vineyard and olive grove.

We had a couple of properties lined up when Bill and his friends joined us to inspect them. I remember one particular lunch, at the ‘Infracombe Restaurant’, where we all discussed the possibilities of what was offered around. One property which stood out for us was called ‘Wilgaroo’. This property had been looked at by a vineyard guru, Brian Sainty, and some preliminary soil tests had already been done. Coming from Cowra and the little village of Billimari, the view on this valley spread all the way to the Belubula River and extended to the Nangar ranges. It was just breathtaking.

On the East, we could see Mt Canabolas (1100 meters) and from there a gentle slope took us to the quaint historic village of Canowindra (‘home’ in Aborigine), only eight km away from the property. This was another important cross road in our lives and we wanted to choose our new “terroir” for all the right reasons: an appropriate soil type for the plants and some water rights were of course crucial but also aspect, topography and rainfall had to be considered.

Wilgaroo looked neglected and over cleared, but it had this unmistakable aura that comes from deep down the earth, and you just know it would respond to a sensitive and nurturing approach to farming. This little piece of paradise was spreading in front of us like a blank canvas: we could see design, colour, and of course rich grape juice oozing out of it and we didn’t want to look any further.

We moved to our new place in September 1995 and it felt great to rename it “Rosnay”. We had thought of many other names but Rosnay seemed to tick all the boxes. It was soft country, stretching from Rivers Road to the

Belubula River, which was not as big as the Lachlan crossing Cowra but, it flowed freely in its windy bed (Belubula in Aborigine means ‘windy snake’). During those first wet seasons, it also produced an adjacent billabong, like a twin river attracting varied wild life.

Nick and Sam were still in Europe and during that (French) summer of 1995 they travelled together to Amsterdam and Corsica, meeting Tom and Greg Parsons there at their grandfather’s house. Then Nick came back to Sydney to study at the University of New South Wales (very familiar grounds for Rick and I), for a degree in landscape architecture. He shared a rented house in Surry Hills.

With his degree in his pocket, Sam was also to return to Australia but before that, he and his friend Sophie Powrie, took that trip to Africa mentioned earlier and they both attended Patrick’s wedding in Frankfurt. My nephew had met Tiffanie in Montpellier, as she was studying psychology and they were now expecting a baby. They had a little girl, Leonie, and the family at first shared the Gurshing’s house in Frankfurt with Karin and her sister Feli. Their mother, Liselotte, just managed to attend the wedding but sadly, died soon after of liver cancer.

Now, Rick and I were about to replant our roots in the Central West of NSW. An old friend of ours from Sydney happened to live in Orange: Eliszabeth Richards (Lizy) and we renewed our friendship, as if all those years had been, in fact, days only...She had lived in Queensland and from there had her house (a timber church) dismantled and moved on a bush block just outside Orange. A nurse in the old days, she was now writing a thesis on the First World War and the relationships between France and Australia, particularly relating to the medical corps.

Her study supervisor and friend was a relative of Richard by marriage, Carl Bridge: a history writer and professor in Armidale, who also taught Sam at T.A.S. for a while. After living in London for some time, he and his wife, Jenny, settled in Armidale. They had a daughter, Wendy and two sons Andrew and Harry who went to TAS with Nick and Sam. We renewed the relationship with Carl and Jenny in great part thanks to Lizy.

We also saw more of our friends Kathy and Simon Harrington as they lived in Canberra. I had met Simon and his mother and brother, Tom, at Arnold Grove on my first visit there in 1971, and Rick often spoke of the exciting times they had together on Simon’s ship in New Guinea, just before

we met. They visited us a couple of times at the Ranch and then at Tumlong with their three children.

But as fate would have it, not long after we bought the property, our little group of investors withdrew their offer of partnership due to a project that still needed all their financial commitment. The question now was: should we invest in a vineyard after all? But we had our heart set on the project by then, and after consulting the rest of the family, we decided to go ahead anyway. We bought this property in great part in function of its suitability for grapevines and olive trees and we would proceed as planned.

To help it financially we reduced our holding by selling some of the land to neighbours: Peter and Joyce Schembri. We also kept our ears and eyes open for a couple of new partners to join us in the vineyard project. One or two big wine companies (I recall Simeon's Wines) talked of possible long term contracts with us, but those contracts would come with 'strings attached', (like taking full control of our methods of production, regulating our irrigation rate and expecting an 'appropriate' yield, in other words standardizing our wine)...Not an ideal outcome for us, to say the least.

When my parents came back to Australia, we installed them in their new 'Stoekli II' and started renovations and extensions on the main homestead for ourselves. It was a pleasure showing my mother around and, as we walked down from the house to the river, we observed birds circling around the tall she-oaks and eucalyptus trees, like the yellow box that used to cover a great part of this country years ago. Soon we started to make land restoration plans and the introduction of more trees was high on the agenda. Planning the vineyards was also a big task: the Cowra region had proven very suitable for growing Chardonnay, but we needed more soil tests for evaluating the suitability of our land to other grape varieties and their water requirements.

In July of 1996, sadly, Richard's mother lost her battle with cancer. A few weeks earlier she and Clive had visited Rosnay and given us some welcome encouragements with our project. We were so pleased that they had seen us nearly settled. At the time, Audrey was going through another chemotherapy treatment and we thought she was in remission but it was not to be, at least not for long.

She had a bad reaction to the next treatment and didn't pull through. I don't think she suffered for long and this was a blessing, but she was only seventy six years old (born the same year as my mother and Karin's mother)

and we would miss her terribly. Dolly said Audrey had been her best friend in Australia...

Five weeks later, Richard's father also died. He had been due at Virginias's house for lunch and when he failed to turn up and didn't answer the phone, she went over to check. She found him lying peacefully on his bed; he died of a heart failure, we believe, at the age of eighty three. Sam was still overseas then, and was deeply sadden in receiving the news, being so far way. The boys had always felt close to their grandparents and were very distraught at losing two of them in such a short period of time. We all were.



When Sam came back to Australia, he was not quite twenty two years old. He was excited with the new project and keen to take part. He took a vine training job at the Ward family's new Swinging Bridge vineyard over the summer (with Richard and Nick), before making a trip to New Zealand on a sailing boat. In NZ he gained some valuable experience "wwoofing" on organic farms¹³, and on his return he enrolled for a post graduate course in agriculture and community development at Hawkesbury. At a later stage, he was offered a short term job as a farm hand at the Department of Land and Water Conservation's research farm at Cowra.

¹³ WWOOF stands for "Willing Workers on Organic Farms", and is an international organisation to connect farmers, students and travellers.



Audrey Statham ('Bunny') in the late thirties: a photograph by Monte Luke.



Seventy years ago: Audrey Wilkinson and Clive Statham's wedding.

He also studied organic farming in night classes at Cowra TAFE and then horticulture externally at Orange Ag College. All good training background for the possible career of ‘vigneron’.

We had been disappointed not to find suitable partners with the vineyard project, and had to sell more land in order to afford the future development of Rosnay, but a renewed sense of purpose came to us when we heard that Sam’s enthusiastic ideas for organic and biodynamic methods of production could be applicable to a relatively large holding, like Rosnay.

Growing our vegetables and fruit organically had come naturally in the past as we dislike pesticides residues on our dinner plates, but the question of growing fifty or sixty acres of grapes this way was another matter, quite a daunting prospect in fact. Sam drew us to look further into those practices and we found the possibilities not only exciting theoretically, but also ‘doable’ on our projected scale of development.

Now, entering into a conventional corporate vineyard agreement became more than ever an undesirable option. So, we can thank the next generation for this outcome, as there is no doubt that Sam’s gentle but determined push to give ‘natural’ farming a go arrived at a crucial time for us. With a little bit of luck, we thought, joining forces with nature rather than fighting it could work in the future, the same way as it did before the indiscriminate chemical push of the 1930’s. Soon we applied for our organic certification from the BFA and started the “in conversion” process (three years).

Those first few years proved to be a hard learning curve, but our first vineyard of eight hectares was planted in the winter of 1997. Oli had started year 10 at the Shore School and was now involved in a cultural exchange program in France at the Lycee Paul Cezanne in Valence, sharing his time with a host family there and the Duchez’ in Lyon.

With the irrigation system in place, and after having planted the vines, we left Sam in charge at Rosnay and decided to take a trip ourselves to France and Spain, to visit Oli, my family and some organic vineyards (including Dumas Gassac and Maison Chapoutier) and olive groves. This would be our first trip together, to my old country since we had announced to our families, on both sides, our intention to get married, twenty-three years earlier, and we couldn’t wait!

We saw everyone and we also had a great trip with Oli: by now, ‘totally French’ (turning to ‘totally Australian’ when back in the land of Oz). Rick also

expressed himself nicely in the language of Moliere, -after a glass or two of Daumas Gassac's excellent wine, of course-. A great prop up as he kept saying.

A set back

When in Spain, we started to visit regularly the internet cafes, as we were eager to hear from the boys and get news of the new planting. It was spring at Rosnay and time for the exciting moment of truth: Budburst. Quite a few vineyards in our region had ordered their dormant vines from the same specialized nursery, and everyone was now anxiously checking them for any sign of life. Each day Sam walked through the many rows of little bare sticks, only too rarely some furry buds would break through...Something was very wrong: a heartbreaking realisation for him and hearing of it, through The Line, also for us... The little rootlings had been heat treated at the nursery, as they normally are, but this procedure demands very careful control in order not to "cook" the roots...



As it turned out, the majority of the vines we put in were not dormant but dead at the onset. This was a huge set back for us, but we settled amicably with the nursery and got reimbursed for the rootlings (not for the labour or

the lost year of production). Still, we were luckier than some as we heard of a court action taking place later, involving the bigger vineyards.

As we tried to minimise expenses, the replanting became a family affair. I remember Ginny and Gavin joining the rescue operation with Nick, Oli and a few others including at least one Wwoofer (Ian from Danemark). They handled the water guns and gently placed the new rootlings in the ground: a real labour of love.

Wwoofers were great help all year around and we had many staying with us off and on: they worked part time in exchange for food, accommodation, some hands on experience in organic farming and family life.

We had all nationalities but one Wwoofer I remember especially fondly of was Joe...An English student who worked extremely hard and read avidly philosophy and English literature. He had been a friend of Audrey (the younger) in England. Joe had some talent for poetry and drawing as we found out when he and his friend Dave eventually left us. They had discovered a couple of wallabies near by and a platypus in the river, which they drew as part of a humoristic description of their lives at Rosnay (people swinging on a rope from side to side across the river and crashing in for a refreshing swim). They said seeing platypuses had been the highlights of their stay with us, and I envied them, as I was still trying to spot them without much success. Swinging across the river looked fun, except when Sam broke his wrist in at least three places, landing on the hard ground hand first!

We started to experiment as well with a few other farming ventures, as our income from the vineyards would be slow coming. We grew a couple of organic mustard crops for oil and planted a huge field of potatoes, but after harvest it became obvious that a farm from Victoria had just sent trucks full of organic potatoes to Sydney, and flooded the market. We sold the first lot and managed to have a little article printed in the SMH offering the left over potatoes, free for charities (or anyone else), as we couldn't afford to harvest what was left. Sam also grew organic pumpkins and watermelons, a very labour intensive operation.

Running free range chickens, ("Grange") was another experiment. We used the Joel Salatin method of moving the birds every day to new grass in "chook tractors". Richard and Sam built a number of those tractors to house the chickens as adults. For the one-day old chicks, they built a special house with heaters but we had frequent power cuts - a curse in this region -so, if a

storm was brewing, (usually in the middle of the night) we'd just rush across to make sure the little creatures wouldn't freeze to death! The "tractors" with the adult birds were being moved every day. We had been counting on an abattoir being opened in Blayney, but this didn't eventuate, and the logistics of sending the live chickens to Sydney for slaughter was simply nightmarish. The business became unsustainable.

'Rosnay Organic Farms' to become 'Rivers Road Organic farms'

The idea of forming an Organic Community Title project appealed to us the more as time went on. In 1998, Sam recommended this style of development, as he had studied and visited models of that kind. We anticipated some difficulties and possible clashes between participants, but we felt we could handle this side of things and make it work from both: a lifestyle and a commercial point of view. In subdividing the land, we placed an organic covenant in the Management Statement.

The twelve subdivided farm blocks shared the irrigation infrastructure, tree belts and roadways. A little 'ecovillage' was planned in the centre of the community with farming blocks radiating from it to the four cardinal points (European style)

The "Neighbours" who bought into the project became vegetable growers, olive and grape growers, and also graziers. Sheep had been my nightmare in the past but it was different now, with the cell grazing system in place. With careful control they were beneficial to the land and grazed through the vineyards in winter, the olive groves and everywhere else except the vegetables and the rows of young trees (we hoped). I still feel a little suspicious though and watch them with a hawk's eye, as soil compaction is the danger after rain.

The sheep enterprise: "Rosnay Organic Grazing" is run by Andrew Wooldridge and his partner Margie Crowther. 'Wooly' is a land management specialist, and Margie is in permaculture. Both knew Sam from the Cowra Permaculture group (and guitar playing). They became friends and started a band called "Static Nomadic" with Greg Mc Laren (singer), Shon Lowler (trumpet) Oli (drums). Simone joined them at a later stage as a singer. Soon

after buying their block, Wooly and Margie created “The Chop Club” now very popular, and providing the most delicious meat to its members.

“Gardner’s Ground” is a vineyard owned by Herb and Jenny Gardner, the first couple to invest in the project in the year 2000. Their support meant a lot to us, particularly in the early stages of the development.

Steve and Sue Brown followed; they moved from the South Coast and created an olive grove. They also worked locally.

Greg Kocanda and his wife Katie grow vegetables, and also own the Canowindra fruit shop, “Gaskill Greens”. The shop is a great meeting place for the locals who feel very lucky to be treated to the occasional organic produce in Canowindra. There are also a couple of other blocks owned by people who haven’t quite made the career move to Canowindra. We are all looking forward to them moving here.

A journey through time: strawbale building technology.

Having built my art studio (now the office) together, Sam and Nick made plans to build their own strawbale house on the little eco village to be. They had a perfect partnership: Sam on the tractor, lifting huge timber beams and Nick working them to precision and the two of them plus family, friends, Wwoofers and Sam’s girl friend, Simone, placing the bales in position and rendering the walls, with a mixture of our beautiful red earth and straw. It was an adventure and a journey through time as this way of building was being brought back from the past.

Over the next few years the other owners would do variations of strawbale and other natural building materials such as mud brick, cob and poured earth floors.

Nick’s talent and love for woodwork and design drew him to take a course at ‘Sturt wood school’ in Mittagong, which he enjoyed more than any course before. He also took another trip to Europe and worked as a carpenter and general handy man on a beautiful four masted square rig sailing ship called “Sea Cloud”: a masterpiece in the ancient art of ship building. She was first on dry dock in Rijeka, Croatia, when Nick started to work on her: repairing the timber work after a huge fire on board. Then she went at sea, taking paying passengers. Those few months on the ship provided Nick with valuable all around experience as a woodworker but also as a full member of

the crew. He also had the opportunity to travel the world working with interesting people of all nationalities, particularly Russians. On the first day he arrived on the ship, he was greeted with a number of little glasses of vodka that couldn't be refused and had to start his hard training with a hang over... A ritual amongst the crew I guess, or 'right of passage' for the newcomers.

When back in England Nick rang us one day with some shocking news, as he just had a car accident when travelling with Jo. Their car was driven off the road by a Mercedes Benz travelling on the wrong side of the road (to avoid a paddle...) and the two were very lucky to come out of it alive! Nick had concussion and Jo sustained face injuries...The car was a write off and it was the beginning of a long road back to recovery for both, but particularly for Jo who needed surgery. We felt helpless this far.

Oli had now completed his HSC. He, too, had an accident during that time: he was mugged and robbed, cowardly attacked from behind in the city when waiting for his friends who were buying a couple of pizzas. Like Nick, he suffered concussions but still managed to complete his exams and passed with good marks. The next year, he spent some time in Europe, travelling five thousand km on an ancient motorbike, which Peter Holliger had kindly given him (trusting his driving abilities and... above all... his good luck!). Then he worked in Norway, carting fish out of fishing boats.

When back in Sydney, Oli started a course in "Performance and sound engineering" at the Music Academy in Surry Hills (JMC). He then created his own recording studio in Newcastle and worked there for two years. He now lives in Sydney, writing music and lyrics for his own songs. (He formed a band for a while called: 'Oli and the Jukes'). As part of Rosnay, he also enjoyed promoting our wines and worked in setting up music events. Later on he worked for "Green Peace, recruiting passers by as his girl friend, Anasaskia, studied drama in Sydney.

Nigel and Melenaite's children are at uni: Audrey is completing a thesis in religious ethics in Melbourne after having studied for a few years in Oxford. Jonathan studies Law in Wollongong and Gavin civil engineering at the University of Sydney. They all have jobs too.

Sam and Nick are now both married. Sam and Simone (nee Le Mesurier) were married in November 2004. Simone worked in the plant nursery department at "Kibblers", in Cowra, as she was studying horticulture. I have described their first born: Molly Jade when she was one year old. She was

followed by a little sister: Georgia Willow. Sam is now the driving force at Rosnay and is heavily involved in every aspect of the business. Over the years he has also developed an excellent palate for wine.

Nick and Melissa Ellero were married in March 2008: Melissa worked at the Cowra Art Gallery and they soon had their first child: Carla Elise. The family lives in Canowindra in the old “Substation Power House”: an imposing warehouse, which they restored beautifully, as a house for the family and a workshop for Nick. George (or ‘Mais’ as I will refer to him now) called it “*Le Palais*”. Nick is now involved in an interesting project: as a fine woodworker and sculptor, he and a couple of other artists were commissioned to restore the Riverview school chapel in Hunter’s Hill, on our old patch.

My world has always been a ‘men’s world’ but not anymore as our sons’ wives and daughters provide such a lovely gender balance in our lives now. Richard is very much “hands on” at Rosnay and is as motivated a farmer as ever. If our relationship has come out the way it has through the difficult road of droughts and isolation (boarding school issues), it is in great part thanks to our beautiful sons. In those years as farmers in Barraba, they gave me the strength ‘to make it work’, no matter what.

Apart from work, Richard also enjoys promoting classical music events in the region and film festivals, as well as taking part in church activities. For me, I still paint, (mostly for labels) and enjoy experimenting with processing methods for new products (originally with the olives pickling and flavouring and now the figs in syrup using our own port, wine and grape jellies.). Looking after my mother is of course a priority but lately, I spent a fair bit of time writing... and having our three gorgeous granddaughters around.

I am thinking of a new project though: translating a couple of family documents (from French into English), particularly the book that Bernard put together with my father’s work in Africa: “Temoignages d’Afrique” and the “Dulong’s book”. I also intend to put together a hand bound artist book of diverse paintings and prints, which I have been working on in the past (one also with my father’s photographs in Africa). I look forward to revisite my ‘book binding experience’ of fourty years ago, in Zurich.

In 2008 my mother fell twice flat on her back and broke three vertebrae. That’s when she came to live with us. She is the Doyen of our family, so to speak, but we are sadly witnessing her constant struggle against the odds, as her condition slowly deteriorates and the anxieties come and go.

In spite of everything her eyes and smile are still warm, determined too and I'm glad I can still look after her. This is the big question of course and I don't want to gloss over the difficulties of such an undertaking. I have thankfully a very understanding family, particularly Richard who always sees the positive side of life in any difficult situation. He is also genuinely very fond of my mother and keeps saying that he wants her to stay with us as long as I can cope. Mum has always been such a strong figure in our lives, generous and willing to help in every way she could. Now, we are all happy to return her *'bienfaits'*.



Sam and Simone's wedding on 13th November 2004 at 'Scrubby': Alison and Bob Le Mesurier's property in Woolstock. Left with Leonie and Laurene. Right with Patrick Tiffanie and Leonie.



Nick and Melissa's wedding on 15th March, 2008 at the Holy Trinity Church, Borenore near Orange Right: Sam, Nick and Oli with their grandmother at the Old Convent, on that day.

A premonition



I had a strange premonition a few days ago: I started to think about my aunt Minon as I was walking through the fig trees in the most beautiful evening light. A powerful message settled in my mind and I strongly felt that something had happened to her; this message ended leaving me with a feeling of finality. Perhaps she is dead, I thought. I kept on picking figs and tried to put this thought out of my mind.

The next day, I received an email from Marie Claude Charrat announcing the death of my aunt. I asked her for the time of death and it was the day before, early morning Europe time, at the same moment when my aunt's message found me, walking through the fig trees at five o'clock in the afternoon. The confirmation of this premonition affected me a great deal as I was very fond of Minon: I always felt that she carried a great deal of pain and regrets in her heart through her entire life. In fact, when I was growing up she reminded me of the tragic Tolstoy character of Anna Karenina (except that Minon lived with her pain).

Mum reacted to the news with a heavy heart, but I knew that -blissfully in this case- she would forget in the next five minutes. We will probably never know now the reasons why the two sisters became estranged. (*Mais* never got on with Minon and this could explain some of it) but all my mother ever wanted was to know that Minon was all right. My aunt took heavy secrets to her grave, I'm afraid. She was a religious person; I hope her faith helped her at the end.

Her youngest daughter, Patricia, has emailed me her impressions of the funerals in Lausanne. She also rang us and talked at length to both, my mother and me; we were both thrilled to hear from her, even in those sad circumstances. Just as I thought Minon had converted to the Russian Orthodox faith and as their ritual dictated that the coffin stayed open until the end of the service, this was not an easy time for all concerned.

As for our dear cousin Pierre, no one could provide an address for him, but I hope to catch up with him in our next trip to France

Remi and Floyd.

In February 2010, Nick and Melissa had a little boy: Remi Isaac. He has a dimple on the chin, hazel eyes, blond hair, and looks a lot like Mel. Nick was offered a job in Perth at 'Form' in the Midland Ateliers and the family has now moved over on a 'bush' block, as it feels like, in the forested hills of Stoneville.

We flew over in May 2011 and were delighted to see them settled in their new house. Remi at 16 months old now runs around, as we can see on the video clips sent by Mel, he is a very active and solid little boy. Carla has golden curly hair and she still reminds me of Nick at the same age. She speaks well, has a very inquisitive mind and loves (expects) well thought through answers to her many questions. Sam and Simone have also a son now: Floyd Robert. He has black eyes, blond hair and a sweet smile. Molly and Georgia are best friends and both are sharp as a tack.



But 2010/11 was a period of loss also: In a short space of time Richard lost his brother in law, Gavin Casey, and two aunts on his father's side: Marjorie and Cecily Statham. Over the years, I got to know Richard's aunts through trips down to Melbourne and enjoyed this last connection with their generation. They both had full lives and living alone, they would have appreciated no doubt the younger generation's good care and attention that they received (especially from Audrey junior, living in Melbourne). Another aunt of Richard on her mother side, Mara Wilkinson, died somewhat earlier, after a long illness. Her husband, Cliff, is still fit and well and lives in Brisbane.

Years ago, Rick and I with Virginia and Gavin made a trip to Bali and Lombok, revisiting the places that we all loved, riding motorbikes everywhere as we used to. I had the flu unfortunately but still enjoyed this trip more than I could say. I also got to know Gavin a lot better. When he died of pneumonia at the age eighty, he had Virginia and all his children gathered around him; he said some personal words and good buys to each one and showed great strength of character when shaking his doctor's hand, thanking him for his efforts in taking care of him. A kindred spirit to Virginia, Gavin was also a thoughtful father and grandfather (of eighteen). Virginia is living

now in Avalon and is well surrounded by Gavin's children. She comes to Morebel occasionally -the little house that she bought near Canowindra-sometimes with Nigel, Melenaité and Tony Vale, an old friend from way back. They enjoy exploring the area: old caves and archaeological remains, amongst other interesting findings that this region had offered for more than two hundred and fifty million years -at the time of the Canowindra Grossi lung fish, represented now as fossil, in our local museum-.

Rosnay

Today is a pleasant spring morning at Rosnay and Molly is riding her bike from the straw house. She is now six years old and has started school. Georgie (GG) is following, chasing butterflies, laughing and chatting and little Floyd is trotting behind his sisters hanging onto Simone's hand. He is calling for the baby magpie that Richard rescued from the road, and very carefully holds him against his chest. The whole family is having lunch with us today. Sam does not have far to go as the office is only twenty meters away from the house. Oli is practicing his music. My mother... is sitting down at the lunch table, by herself, quite ready to start her meal and wondering what we are all waiting for.

To complete the party, the guests of honour, our 'wwoofers' of the last three months, are now arriving from the vineyards: Pietro - Italian- and Alexandra- French- both are leaving us soon. They have been such great company and we are sorry to see them go. The lunch today is for them, their farewell lunch. Carla and Remi, Nick and Mel are three thousands km away and we miss them, particularly in occasions like today.



Dolby and Oli at the Stoekli. Below from left: Richard, Oli, Mais, Nick Sam, Dolby.



Chapter XXII: Languedoc revisited



My thoughts move on to my nephew, Patrick Leclerc. He and Tiffanie, with their two daughters, Leonie and Laurene, (*left, with Bernard at Rosnay*) moved from Germany to Australia in 2004, just on time for Sam and Simone's wedding. Patrick is Australian as he had been twelve years old when, with his parents and brother, he arrived in Australia and no doubt those formative years spent in Sydney created a bond with 'down under'.

He also loved the outback as much as the ocean and both stirred his artistic side: when in Germany he gave it expression with very evocative paintings, the concept of it springing from his memory. He says, when he and his family landed in Australia, it felt like 'coming home'. The time of transition was not easy, naturally. Tiffanie and the children needed to learn the language and to acclimatise. They spent the first few months partly with us at Rosnay (when Patrick looked for work in Sydney), then renting a house and art gallery in Canowindra (The River Bank Gallery).

The little girls were six and eight years old and going to school in the village (as well as watching cartoons at home), they learnt English without even noticing it! In good time they moved on to Sydney where Patrick had got a job, still finding time to paint.

Five years on, Tiffanie and the girls lived in Pymble with Tiffanie's new partner, Mike Rundle, and his little daughter, Holly. In July 2011, Mike got posted to India so the family moved to New-Dehli.



Strawbale technology: early days at Rosnay: part of Sam and Simone's house built by Sam and Nick



Molly, Georgia and Floyd Statham, as toddlers, below Carla, Remi Statham. Louis Leclerc

Patrick and his partner, Beatrice Spiritu Sancto, are still in Clovelly and have now a baby boy called Louis. Patrick loves his job which is to welcome young foreigners to Australia, help them find work and accommodation and organize visas. We often rely on Patrick for our workforce at Rosnay.

Bernard and Regine visited our mother in April 2010 and were around when their new grandson was born in May of that year. Louis is an adorable and cheeky little boy, (I hear from Christophe: Bernard's and Regine's son).

Christophe studied Law for a couple of years at the Montpellier University but is now in Australia for a year, learning English. Bernard's ex wife, Karin, has still a close friendship with everyone in the family. She embraced Buddhism and is remarried to an Indonesian National whom I haven't met yet but is a 'nice guy' I hear. He is a Muslim and their relationship seems to transcend cultural and religious differences.

Lately my mother lost her balance, fell, and broke an arm. This is tough on her and she is not accepting the fibre glass cast on her arm and keeps picking at it, as she does not remember what it's there for. I remind her of the changes in the family to distract her. We talk of Oli who lives now on a bush block near Richmond and writes beautiful songs in the peace of glorious wilderness. He left 'Green Peace' sometimes ago and is now again promoting our wines (part time). He intends to live at Rosnay for a while as he has kindly agreed to look after Mum when Rick and I take a trip to France this August/September 2011.

This trip has been long awaited and Rick understands now my need to get closer to the places and people of my childhood and wants to share the excitement that this reconnection will provide. Our children did a long time ago and I hope our grandchildren will too, in good time.

Meeting my estranged cousins

When we returned from France in September, my mother showed no emotions as if we had not been away at all. She talked about her sister as she sometimes does, expecting her to 'turn up' somehow.

I can't pretend that Minon is still alive of course but the photos of her daughter, Patricia, displayed on our computer screen seem to trigger some recognition in Mum's eyes. She would probably notice a very obvious

resemblance between mother and daughter, the same as I did when I saw Patricia again, sixty years on, in Chalon sur Saone.

We were to meet at the train station. As Richard and I were inquiring about some time table for our next train stretch, Patricia turned up with Thierry, her husband, and they *knew* us immediately. My cousin felt as emotional to see me as I did to see her and they both were delighted to meet Rick.

They took us out of town to the typical *maison bourgignonne*, which they had just bought after leaving *La Rouviere*. The house still needed work but it had beautiful features such as stone floors and original heavy beams. We spent a couple of days with them and met one of their daughters, with her husband and their five sons. We saw more family members in Lyon and of course, Bernard and Regine, in Montpellier.

Then we drove to *Bernas*, my cousin's Claire property. Another emotional visit! Older relatives seem to remember me, but I didn't remember any of them...Except of course Claire and her younger sister, Catherine. During the five hundred years of family ownership, the property of *Bernas* has been handed down mostly from mother to daughter as, extraordinarily, sons were always reluctant to be born in the Bernas household. Even today, Claire is one of four daughters. The future of this beautiful place is now uncertain.

With Bernard and Regine's help, we also looked at some real estate in that region and around Montpellier. But with a budget of less than one hundred thousand dollars it was hard work. We decided to leave the search for the time being. Buying a house in France was meant to be a good investment, hopefully, (high Australian dollar with some part time renting out). But it was also a way, for me, to reconnect with the country that I had left decades ago and move back into Bernard and Regine's world as well as my cousins' (even if only from now and then).

We then headed to Switzerland, as seeing our old friends in Zurich, Peter and his partner Barbara was high on the agenda. We had a great time together. Laura, their daughter, was there too: she had just finished school and was ready to spread her wings. We also talked of Arthur. He and his wife, Gina, are now sharing their residence between Bali and Melbourne. Richard and I visited them in Melbourne a few years back.

Some relatives in France



Thierry and Patricia de Beauregard (in red) and daughter's family. Claire Poudroux (right) and relatives



Pierre and Veronique Dulong de Rosnay with son: Arnaud. Rick, Bernard and Regine



Marie Helene Duchez, son Fabrice in Lyon. (3d and 4th right)



Self with Regine,

We dined in a little Italian restaurant and Arthur and I spoke of old times while Gina and Richard enjoyed talking about their mutual interest in church affairs. Returning to Paris we stayed again with Wendy Bridge.

We also saw Claire's daughter, Gwenn, who cooked a beautiful dinner for us on her father's barge, moored on the Seine at the *Bois de Boulogne*. The weather was perfect as it had been during our five weeks stay in France.

Christmas 2011

Christmas seems to take more importance for us, year by year. Perhaps having my mother still around and our grandchildren growing in numbers each year gives the day special value. This year of 2011 was a particularly significant Christmas as both sides of the family were expected. The French contingent included Patrick, Beatrice and their son Louis (from Sydney) Karin (from Frankfurt), Leonie and Laurene Leclerc and Holly (from New Dehli). Bernard, Regine and Christophe Leclerc (from Montpellier). And of course Oli, Sam and Simone with Molly, Georgie and Floyd. Nick, Melissa, Carla and Remi (from Perth) came on the 24th for brunch.

My mother was thrilled to be the centre of the attention and so well surrounded and looked after by all. Every year, we think that this might be the last time she will be able to enjoy fully this togetherness. She seemed to vaguely recognize most (or perhaps just pretended to) but didn't know any names. Thankfully, she had only been mildly affected by a twenty four hour virus that violently hit most of us and four of our guests (who faced their fate very bravely). All recovered well.

This nasty little bug had escaped from the school and spread like a bushfire in the region (including Rosnay). Richard's side of the family, at the end, opted to stay away but we still saw them briefly in Morebel, on our way to Umina, where we were to spend ten days holiday. Bernard and Regine stayed at Rosnay with Dolly (and their granddaughters for a while). Karin helped out too and so patiently talked to 'Maman' (as she always called her) about their fifty years of shared experiences.

Vintage of 2012

The Vintages of 2008, 2009 and 2010 have been particularly good, which is amazing as three years of good production in a row is a rare occurrence. The vintage of 2012 is still not known. We have been very happy with the rain lately, but if we get too much, the grapes drown. Not enough and they fry. Still, we don't want to ever complain about too much rain even if the quality of the wine suffers somewhat.

After leaving the wool industry in 1995 and building the vineyard, we had been lucky to have good seasons for the first few years, then lengthy dry spells (to avoid the 'drought' word) affected the whole country again as well as a recession in the wine industry.



But lately there has been a big change in the weather pattern, again, and the vines are now responding well to the regular soaking rain since last October. Mildew, the *bete noire* of grape growers, has been minimal here, perhaps because the vines had grown slowly over the years (no artificial fertilizers or urea) and are stronger for it. Another positive: after a few shaky years, the wine industry in Australia seems to be on the way up again.

Rain also favoured good fig crops and we are kept very busy with the processing routine. Figs have been my special interest over the last few years and since the beginning of the harvest, many Wwoofers of all nationalities

have helped us cope with the production. We have finished experimenting with recipes (for now) and hope to have achieved the right balance of flavours with spices and other ingredients in our preserves. Only the olive trees look sad this year with an attack of lace bugs, which we hope to treat with heavy pruning and biodynamic means. We still expect a loss of one or two year's production. A set back in that regard.

It is not quite one year since our last trip overseas but we are preparing to go again. Richard will follow his project (and dream) for this European spring. He will walk the Camino de Compostella, nine hundred km in Spain, starting from St Jean- Pied- de- Port on the French side of the Pyrenees. He is confident and well prepared. We intend to part at St Jean, the cross road to the Camino. I will then watch him disappear slowly towards the horizon with his pilgrim's stick and nine kg back pack. Then turning the other way, I will focus on my own journey. Heading towards Montpellier (by train), I intend to start the house search again, on my own this time.

Richard was keen to escape the hard slog of visiting agents and real estates and I can't blame him for that. Right now he is totally focussed on his pilgrimage, which he sees as a physical challenge and a spiritual quest. Although he wants to do it alone, there will be many occasions to socialise along 'The Way' with kindred spirits no doubt. Sam, Simone and Oli will take charge of Rosnay and Dolly during our trip and we are determined to make the most of those precious weeks away, each in our own way.

A great homecoming

Visiting my old country is always great, but invariably returning home feels even better. This time the homecoming to Rosnay was just spectacular! We learnt that Sam had won 'The Pioneer Award for sustainability' and a travelling grant was offered by the department of Primary Industry. This is a well deserved Award considering his dedication to the cause and his hard work over the years. Sam gave credit to RROF (Rivers Road Organic Farms) of course, as all the members of our little community are pioneers of the organic movement, each in their own way.

To help stay on a high note, a couple of weeks later Rosnay Wines won a few medals at the national Cowra show, particularly a gold medal for the

Cabernet Sauvignon 2008, silver for the sparkling chardonnay and bronze for the preservative free 'Freedom'.

When we were away, Oli took great care of my mother and I know that it was not always easy. Still, he is adamant about wanting to help us keep her in the family *domus* (when he is around) as the 'respite care' unit of the aged care facility in Cowra had not been a great success in the past (Mum walked like a ghost in a maze of endless corridors, hoping in vain to find the bathroom or her own bed. The little pager around her neck didn't help either as she had forgotten what it was for, and she neatly put it away in her suitcase). This nurturing side of Oli's personality had always been there no doubt, but it is showing particularly with the care of his grandmother.



Oli playing at 'Woolstock', Rosnay. A yearly music festival started by Andrew Wooldrige years ago and getting more popular as time goes by. Right: 'Entertainment by Oli at Flickerfest' (in the garden).

Rick is already busy organising a couple of concerts at the Anglican Church. He had always been keen for the church to acquire a concert grand piano for David Miller (and others) to use when he and his students come each year on their 'Great Western Tour', and this project was now coming to realization. A beautiful instrument was found and soon installed in the church.

We also had another enjoyable 'Flickerfest', the short films festival that has always ended here for the last four years (after touring NSW). Woolly and Margie catered for around hundred and twenty people on that day (cooking their organic lamb) and we took care of the second course with a fig dish. Sam is the project manager for most of our promotions and Oli helps, always

ready to do wine tastings at music festivals and others (like the 'Body, Mind and Spirit Festival' where they both are at the moment)

We have decided this year to extend the business, and at the moment there is a hive of activity down at the sheds as we are doubling the size of our processing and cool rooms. The bigger production of figs and wine (and later, olives) is inducing us to create more space. The "cellar door" will find some room there as well, with a little winery attached in the future... we hope.

Perth

We just spent some great times visiting Nick and his family in Perth. Nick is preparing his exhibition at "Form" for next year and is also very busy with their house extension.

Carla is four years old this year and goes to a lovely Steiner kindergarten close to home. Remi speaks now fluently and we are seeing big changes in both of them. They might also have noticed some changes in us, particularly in Richard, who has lost a fair bit of weight walking the Camino (7 kg to be exact). The back of his legs and neck are still glowing with a healthy tan.

On this second visit to Nick and Mel's, we all went to Rottneest Island. The name is due to those lovely marsupials called 'quokkas'. It is said that Dutch explorers had them mixed up with rats, hence the name 'ratneest' in English. They are nothing like rats naturally, and very friendly. We might not see Carla and Remi as often as we'd like, but we spend some great quality time together when we do. We hired bikes and took long walks on the wonderful beaches of the island.

On the Camino.

Looking back on our trip to France and Spain, Richard did make it to Santiago de Compostella in record time and... kept going. (I hear this is not unusual as after nearly 900 km of walking, the legs simply refuse to stop). He finished his pilgrimage at the beautiful Celtic coast of Galicia where we met at last.

I had made the trip from Carcassonne to Santiago by bus, a tiring but interesting forty eight hour journey, particularly the last leg as the bus drove along the 'Camino' after Burgos.

From my high vantage point, I could see cyclers and walkers making their way to Santiago on the little dirt tracks, scattered in the country side, coming in and out of sight. As it appeared to me, the 'Spanish dream or miracle' had unfortunately been and gone and in some parts looked rather unfulfilled, with the remains very obvious: some new highways stopped abruptly like springing out of a 'Kafka' play, buildings unfinished and deserted as if they were locked in a time wrap. And yet Spain always manages to retain its old charm for me: its history, sunshine, fields of wild flowers and above all the friendliness of its inhabitants.

Rick captured the essence of his pilgrimage with many photos taken all along the way and had lots of stories to tell about the country and the people he met right through. Some of them are already published in the church gazette and 'Face Book'. But I won't go on: this is his story.

After reaching Santiago and visiting the Cathedral, I went on to the little fishing village of Finisterre, the small and charming place where Rick had ended his walk. He was waiting for me at the bus station and introduced me to his walking companions. Some told me their stories. All those men and women had shared a dream that lasted five weeks and even though it was all over, I could still feel the strong bond that had brought them together along - the way-.

A place in history: Villebazy, on the Cathar trail.

My own project in Occitanie had been lonely in that respect, but exciting all the same. Between Carcassonne and Limoux, in a little village called Villebazy, I found an old house (or it found me) begging for revival. It stood right in the middle of Cathar country. When I saw this ancient presbytery, attached to the little church, I couldn't believe my eyes, as I hadn't seen anything like this in my search before.

After looking through the house, I walked into the church and saw a couple of official looking individuals standing there with a variety of technical equipment and cameras. They were inspecting a lower section of crypt dating, as they were about to establish, as far back as the ninth century. I said nothing, just stood there in this special moment in history.

The house had beautiful original features (like oak beams and stairs) with all the criteria that Rick and I had been looking for the year before (including

the price tag), but it needed some restoration work after many years of neglect. For me, bringing back life into a worthwhile building as this one was a dream come true, and I couldn't wait to start. Somehow, I knew Rick would feel the same. I told him on the phone that I would commit fully to this project and manage it from home, by emails and photos, and therefore take special care in choosing the artisans who would work for us (and handy with the internet). I made enquiries right then.

George was a lover of history, and my mother of old stones, so I kept thinking of them as I walked through the streets of Limoux, Foix, Carcassonne, Lagrasse and Mirepoix, to name just a few of the Cathar towns. The story of the Cathars had a poignant place in history in that region. New religious ideas had come from the East through crusaders returning from the Holy Land and those ideas took like a bush fire amongst the population of Occitanie. Some historians (and story tellers like Kate Mosse) believe that this religion is older still and has flourished, unnoticed, in the back country of the Pyrenees for a long time before the first crusade even took place.

HN. When I got back to Australia, I started to read on the Cathars, and one particular book held my attention: 'Montaillou' by Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie (translated in English by Barbara Bray). It presents a fascinating sociological study of medieval life in Occitanie and includes direct testimonies of peasants, villagers and shepherds of Montaillou, the last village which actively supported the Cathar faith. After having disappeared for more than half a millennium, Catharism is reaching us now again through its many castles which are still standing in the area, perched on mountain tops. Those castles are a testimony to the courage and suffering of the people who hid behind their fortified walls.

It would be hard to sum up the essence of the Cathar dogma in a few words, but let's say that the New Testament (St John particularly) was the only holy text they considered valid. They didn't worship the cross, an instrument of torture for Christ ('evil's work' as any suffering was) and believed in the reincarnation of the soul to finally achieve a holy state through the 'consolation'. A life (or lives) on earth was seen as a hellish necessity - 'purgatory' in Catholic terms? – for one's salvation. The Cathars were considered 'heretics' as they believed in the existence of two principles equally powerful and eternal: the Good and the Bad'. The 'good men and women' of the Cathars also denied the final resurrection of the dead.

Although inspired by eastern philosophy (or their own ancient myths), they were true to Jesus' teaching and, like the Apostles, they practised poverty, were often artisans, and worshiped in each other's houses. They only accepted 'consolation' from a 'perfect' of renowned integrity (no sex or meat for those). I can see how the Roman Church of the day would have felt threatened by them. In a desperate attempt to compete, the Church tried to reform its ways but corruption was too far entrenched and the Cathars, becoming a real embarrassment, got 'pushed out' of the way for good. We know how cruelly.

In 1862, the castle of Saisac was subjected to some very active hunting for a hypothetical 'Holy Grail' believed to have been left in the custody of the last Cathars. Rennes le Chateau was also, and still is, under active investigation after the local abbe (Beranger Saunier) appeared to have enjoyed a mysterious source of income. People had always hoped to find treasures of immense value or maybe just a precious stone of special significance, a relic perhaps or some ancient documents that would confirm their spiritual beliefs or, if unlucky, chatter them to pieces. Others would regard the Holy Grail as a state of grace, a spiritual revelation or epiphany.

The Cathars left us a long lasting heritage which is now studied by Deodat Roche, the founder of the 'Societe des Etudes Cathares' in Carcassonne. Here is a quote from his 'cahiers' as a conclusion: "The Cathars of Occitanie proposed to the European world an esoteric evasion, until they all fell, victims of persecution. They eventually resurfaced through different movements that included the Rosicrucians and the Anthroposophy of Rudolf Steiner'. The Cathar's heritage seems to have had also an influence upon the social evolution which brought about the Revolution of 1789"

I was deep in my thoughts, walking through those sites, and always admiring the incredibly beautiful and surrealist landscape around me. Bernard and Regine were with me on my second visit over and after many diversions, we ended up at the old presbytery which, by then, had changed hands (to ours). I looked again at the special type of work that this ancient house demanded, took notes and photos. We then enjoyed a pic nic in the garden and strolled around the village.

Villebazy is a little place of one hundred people, perched on a hill top and relying on food vans. It reminded me of 'L'Abadie' somehow, the village of my childhood, near Nice (although less isolated with the shops of St Hilaire only 3,5km away). I wished, then, that my mother could still travel as I knew she would be enchanted by the place. It is surrounded by national parks (*parcs*

domenials), vineyards and poppy fields, is close to hot springs and the river Aude (with its waters coming straight from the Pyrenees clear and pure) and only an hour and a half by train from Carcassonne to my brother's place in Montpellier. After Bernard and Regine left Villebazy, I searched further for a couple of builders to quote for the work. Then I walked to the '*Mairie*' to see the Mayor, Monsieur Guy Serie and his friendly secretary, and we talked about my renovation plans and the history of the village, as well as the house. Guy Serie knew every secret dark corners of the old presbitary as he was, in fact, born in the house.

It would take a few months to restore the place to its former glory but, by vintage 2013, it was done, by 'correspondence' thanks to first a Dutchman and an Englishman (who pulled out the old wall papers) and eventually, the bulk of it, to a French builder from Villebazy who restored the ancient lime plasters and traditional tiles (*tomettes*) beautifully. The internet is a great tool with instant visual communication, and over those few months, I felt I was right there, making decisions with them, every step of the way.

After harvest at Rosnay, Rick and I went back to fit and furnished the place and we enjoyed the process in spite of the foul weather. The old floor tiles had just received their last coat of polish when we arrived and Rick was won over: he loved both, the house and its position in the village. After sourcing materials and furniture from the internet, he fitted out the kitchen beautifully.

The renovations were just as we both liked: simple, clean, bright and true to the original style. Strangely, it soon started to feel a little like a spiritual home for me (or *domus* as I like to call it). I couldn't expect Richard to feel the same way but he still established a 'human bond' with all the early risers working in the vineyards, or walking their dogs in the village and around. They would be thrilled when, on his regular biking excursions to the bakery, he'd stop and talked to them 'in French' and they wouldn't let him pedal on. At home, I waited patiently for my croissant. Gladly in fact.

As Sam had won a travelling grant the year before, he and his family had decided to go to France, partly as a study tour to look at vineyards and wine making methods in the Languedoc area. They are now just back after a very productive trip and Sam is already busy with interviews and reports. The children and Simone also produced a pile of drawings and written anecdotes

describing their adventures and everyday life in the Aude region, Montpellier, and other places in the Languedoc.

As for Oli, he is planning his long trip taking his vintage van across the continent with a couple of Swiss travelling companion. He intends to join a band in Perth for a while, staying with Nick and Mel to start with.



Church and presbytery in Villebazy. Below: back of house from garden.





Sam, Simone, Molly, Georgia and Floyd in France, 2013. Paris and The Pyrennees. (Sam and Simone's photos)



Molly and Gee.Gee. in Villebazy



With Leonie and Holly in Paris



Sam and Simone



Floyd at the Eiffel Tower, 2013,



Georgie walking in the rain, Paris.

Next page Molly in a Cathar ruin.





From left: Sam with Regine's daughters in law: Melanie and Elodie. Bernard, Simone, Christophe, Sebastien (Regine's oldest son) Vincent and Marie: Regine's daughter and son in law. Julien (Regine's other son).



The children with Christophe.

Nick's exhibition 2013

Nick's exhibition opened in May of this year 2013 with a full house on the day and some great publicity. A couple of months before, he had damaged his right thumb in the workshop, but he still managed to finish his work on time as well as build a studio for craft and/or guests in their garden. He and Mel sent us a beautiful book with the last five years of work at 'Form'.

At the end of winter, we flew over for our third visit and after spending time with the family in Perth and visiting Nick's exhibitions, we had a week altogether in Bali. We had a magic time riding motorbikes, visiting the monkeys 'in the jungle' of Ubud, and learning all about those intricate gods' offerings that Carla learnt to create. Both children improved their swimming greatly.

We are at the moment preparing for a federal election again, a depressing prospect. The latest political turmoil in Australia came about with the media relentless attacks on Julie Gillard. Tony Abbot's bullish schoolboy's behaviour in Parliament didn't help of course; neither did Kevin Rudd, her '*mauvais genie*', still lurking in the background and ready to pounce for the kill. Now that he has removed Julia Gillard from office and got his moment of glory, people wonder: will this be his "hundred days", his Waterloo? Regardless of the outcome of this next election, we will keep growing things the best way we know but the environment needs to be cared for, urgently, by the lawmakers. Whether they come from the left or right side of politics is, at the end, irrelevant as both parties seem to put business (like mining or 'fracking' in the food bowl of Australia and some National Parks) ahead of any environmental issues. Still, we might be surprised.

My story is now coming to an end and, politics aside, is finishing on a happy note indeed, but it had not started quite this way. The idea of recording my mother's life was born out of seeing her drift into a world where she could not exercise the control that had always sustained her. When she developed vascular dementia, we needed to adapt at seeing her change, and we had no idea of the exact course this illness would take. With time, her personality did alter in some ways but, little by little, we learnt to love this new person just as much.



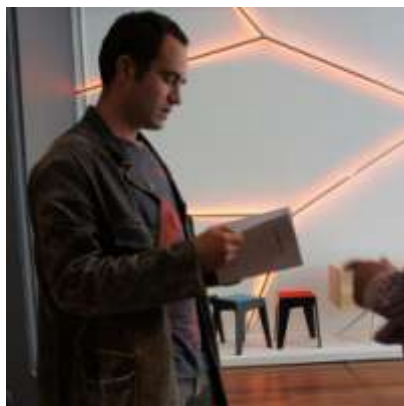
Carla and Remi in Rottnef Island, 201



Nick in the 'Pilbara', Western Australia.



Exhibition opening 2013,



Nick's exhibition. Bali 2013. Melissa and Carla watching 'the Barong' :



Carla and Remi: Perth 2013.





Carla learning to make offerings in Ubud, Bali.. Melissa in Perth.



Bali : Carla, Richard. Below :Carla and self in Ubud : Remi in his bug suit







Above; Nick's family, Richard and Oli. Below: Sam and Oli on Rosnay (from local paper)

There were difficult milestones to go across for me as well (like my own health) but looking at the past through Dolly's eyes (in part) helped both of us find answers to some questions unasked until lately. Six years of writing has indeed made a difference for me.

Going back in time (sixty six years now), an important chain of events was triggered on that fatal day when my father died in Africa, followed by the big decision for my mother to move to Nice and form a new relationship. From then on George, *Mais*, moved into our lives slowly and in such a way that in good time, we children, accepted him fully. In the past, I had questioned the secrecy of their relationship, but *Mais*, generously, came to assume the 'back stage' status in our family until my brother and I were old enough to go our own way.

He often had good advice for me: relationships between mother and daughter can be difficult at the best of times, and *Mais* in his wisdom acknowledged this fact when, as an adult, I'd confide in him on the subject. He would find the right words then; I think he understood about stress management as "blowing his top" had been his weak point and something he had always struggled to keep under control and come to term with (with better results as he got older and wiser). But there was a lot more to this unusual man's personality: loyalty to his commitments, worldliness, a good sense of fun (as a story teller) and of course, a powerful mind. He had an amazing knowledge, not just of facts and figures, but of the human heart as well. He talked about honesty in relationships, and individualism.

Mais adored my mother and put her on a pedestal, but he never underestimated the difficulties of dealing with the people we love the most. Witnessing my mother slowly feeling estranged from everything and everybody that she ever loved is heart breaking for all and hard to come to term with, there is no doubt about it. I also think of *Mais*' own last struggle in life, and all the things I didn't do or didn't say to him before he died. He was not my flesh and blood; I didn't look like him or even thought like him, but in every real way he became a father to me. He more than earned the title over the years.

I love France, the bond will be always there and I don't wish to fight that feeling as it is in the order of things, but I can say now that my life with Richard in Australia has been, and still is, the "purposefull life with some adventure woven into it" that we both had dreamt about in our overland

journey together in 1971. Of course, we didn't always lie on a bed of roses, far from it, and tragedies also came our way.

If I was to choose my own 'Holy Grail', it would be to better understand the divine principle that governs our destiny, particularly the one of those who leave this earth before their time. Also the consequences of us interfering with the laws of the universe, and the boundaries that morally, and ethically, we should impose on ourselves (the push for harmful chemicals and genetically modified organisms, are only two examples).

Who was our French ancestor?

Our grandchildren, grandnephews/nieces and their children might very well ask this question some day, as they would not have known our Dear Dolly *really*. I hope this story will help them understand what a special woman she is in spite of the confusion of her late years.

During the last few months, we have seen new changes in her. She smiles a lot and appears in peace from within. There is no more 'wants', desires or even taste for material things like food., music or entertainment in her life anymore and we see her completely detached from her *self* -in a Buddhist sense perhaps-. Through her entire life she asked herself questions that were often frowned upon by the Catholic Church and I think, for someone of her upbringing and generation, she was incredibly open minded and tolerant. Now, she seems to have reached her 'safe harbour' and the feelings of angst that came over her all those years ago do not show on her face anymore. They may be gone for good.

This story is not just about Dolly of course, it's about our whole family and the place of each one in her life and in this world of ours. Bernard and I have always looked up to her and still now, my mind keeps going back to the days when I thought she was just perfect. She was not, but she knew about generosity when given a raw deal, and how to bend and not break, through the tragedies in her life. Always faithful to her moto in life: "*Ecrivez les blessures sur du sable, les bienfaits sur du marbre*" (Write injuries in sand, kindnesses in marble), she was and still is an inspiration to all of us.

The end.

Following are some recent pictures of Dolly's eight great grandchildren, so far. (I have included Holly Rundle: Laurene and Leonie's stepsister)



Molly Jade Statham



Georgia Willow Statham



Floyd Robert Statham



Carla, Elise Statham



Remi, Isaac Statham.



Louis, Olivier Leclerc



Leonie Leclerc



Laurene Leclerc



Holly Rundle

Next pages: Gallery of family portraits.



Jean Charles Leclerc, Simone Leclerc Martinet (bis sister). Alberic Dulong de Rosnay, Dolly.



George Meister,

Jean Bernard, Jean Charles, Patrick and Karin Leclerc



Florence and Richard Statham (1972),

Sam and Nick Statham (1995)



Oli Statham

Jean- Charles Leclerc

Patrick Leclerc

Tiffanie Vidal



Sam and Simone Statham.

Nick and Melissa Statham,



Oli Statham, Karin Gursbing, Patrick Leclerc and Beatrice Spirito Sanctu, Nigel and Melanaite Statham, Johnno and



Nigel and Melanaite Statbam, Jobno and Audrey Statbam.



Gavin Statbam. Oli Statbam.

Virginia and Gavin Casey,

C. Roussel.



Richard and Florence Statbam (1988)

Nick and Melissa Statbam

Simone Statbam



George Meister

Dolly Meister (1988)

Christophe Leclerc ,

Pierre Dulong de Rosnay



Clive Statham



Virginia Casey



Audrey Statham



Angela Raymond



Regine and Bernard Leclerc. (2011)



Florence and Richard Statham 2013

Postscript: December 2013

Only a short time after I put the final word of this story, Dolly passed away. As the spring was moving on and the weather getting warmer, she used to go out every day a little longer. She would walk within the garden, follow the fence line, and watch the 'hundred trees grove' or the distant mountains, with an intense expression. We had built a solid fence around the house as in the past, she had wandered off amongst the olive trees, sometimes after sunset, giving us a terrible fright.

On the 28th of November, she collapsed in the garden: she died of a massive cerebral haemorrhage, alone on her favourite itinerary. According to her doctor, she passed away within a few minutes. That, at least, is a blessing. When I found her, lying on the grass, I was naturally terribly upset but she had a gentle expression and a faint smile on her face: this last vision of

serenity and peace will stay with me, with all of us, and comfort us as long as we live.

Our youngest grandchild, (not quite three years old) sometimes helped making Dolly's breakfast in the morning; he would bring her shoes if she had left them behind and brush her hair lovingly. He knew she was gone now and, wanting to make things better, he said to me with tears in his voice: "Mimi, let's find a new Grannie". "That would be nice Floyd, I replied, but I don't think we would ever find one quite like your Grannie. She was our guiding star and I like to believe, no *I know*, that she is still shining for us and looking over us from Heaven.

The cremation ceremony was simple, officiated by Father Ephram, a priest from Orange, and we are now planning a memorial service and burial of her ashes in the grounds of 'All Saints Anglican Church' in Canowindra where her beloved husband, our dear Mais, is buried. Dolly died as a practicing Roman Catholic, but throughout her life she also embraced other Christian denominations and, furthermore, any spiritual beliefs that would reflect God's love for us, and our love for each other.

A second urn of her ashes will be taken to France for a memorial service in Cogny, Saone et Loire, with my brother Bernard, his family and other relatives and friends who, on the other side of the world, are mourning her too: a fitting tribute to her life as she has always shared her time and affections equally between the two hemispheres.

In Australia, we will plant her favourite tree (a wattle) at the place where she spent her last moments, and create a little corner in the garden for us all to enjoy and remember her. The memorial service is planned for the 18th of January with a wake at Rosnay to celebrate her long and beautiful life.



Dolly at the 'Old Mill', Cowra.



Dolly with Floyd

Family tree: people in the book.

Lineage: Dulong, Dulong de Rosnay, (J.D.R's research)

- 1)- Perrot Dulong, vigneron, born 1581, died in Brienne in 1655. A son:
- 2)- Guillaume Dulong, (1612-1680) *tailleur d'habits* (tailor) = Jeanne Julienne > amongst other children:
- 3)- Jean Dulong (1641-1704), also *tailleur d'habits*, (tailor) = Marguerite Deton > amongst other children :
- 4)- Fiacre Dulong (1691-1753), *bourellier-colleron* (saddle and heavy collar maker for working horses) also *sonneur de cloches* (bell ringer) at the Brienne church = Marie Lizarde > amongst other children:

5)- Louis Claude Dulong (1722-1793), *marchand tapissier* or textile merchant = Marie Therese de Colonia > amongst other children:

6)- Claude Louis Dulong, surgeon, (1755-1781, died 26 years old) = Suzanne Janolle > 2 children: Louis Etienne and Louis Edme. (Suzanne remarried Francois Noel Surdun who had a daughter from a first marriage called Nanine Surdun. She married the diplomat, Constantin Stamaty who became a great friend of the family)

7)- Louis Etienne Dulong, born in 1780 at Rosnay (Aube), takes part of Napoleon's campaigns as 'General de brigade' (baron de l'Empire) then Lieutenant General aux Gardes du corps du Roi. (Comte de la Restauration). He died in Paris on the 20th of May 1828. He marries Esther de Sagey in 1804 in Besancon. Born in Ornans in 1785, she died in 1837. She is interred in the Montmartre cemetery, Paris.

Note: Our ancestor, on Esther de Sagey's side, Robert Le Fort defended the territories between the rivers Seine and Loire against Norman incursions and was killed in the process in Brissarte -Anjou- in the year of 866.

Louis Etienne and Esther had seven children: Hermand (=Marie Deville), Jean Paul (=Elisabeth Guillaume), Charles, (=Nelly de Kermoysan) Amelie (=Ferdinand Cornot de Cussy) Adele (= Paul Saint de Mannevieux), Louis, and our ancestor: Alberic

8)- Alberic, viconte Dulong de Rosnay. Born in 1818. Marries in 1846 Marie Maximilienne Ducret de Langes, born at Thoissey in 1818. They had:

Hermand following, 2) Adele (=Hippolyte de Weck), 3)Marthe, Marie, 4) Eugene, 5) Albane 6) Charles (= Juana Maria Monteserate-Negron y Cadavedo y Diaz), 7) Alix (nun at the Sacred Heart, Canada) 8) Etienne (=Elvire Richard)

9)- Hermand Dulong de Rosnay, born in Lyon in 1847. Dies at Pont de Vaux in 1924. Marries in 1878 at Versailles, Marguerite de Saint Phalle, born in Carcassonne in 1854. She dies in Maison Laffitte in 1930. She was the daughter of Edgar, marquis de Saint Phalle and Alice Leullion de Thorigny. They had

Marie (= Jean Meric de Bellefon 2) Alix (= Comte Ramon de la Cerda) 3) Alberic, following 4) Charles (=Aimee de Lamotte) 5) Hippolyte (=Marie Therese Havret) 6) Joseph Bruno (1=Anne Marie d'Arloz d'Entremont. 2=Yvette Senechal) 7) Albane.

10)- Alberic Francois Dulong de Rosnay. Born 1883 at Ormes (Saone et Loire). (Dolly's father). He dies in January 1966. Marries 1) in June 1917 at Macon, Marcelle Charrat, born in Lyon in 1894. Dies in October 1942. Interred in Cogny near her husband.2) Jeanette Monet: no children. Alberic and Marcelle had:

11)- Dolly, following 2) Minon (or Carmen) 3) Jean Hermand

-Minon (1921-2009) =1) Henri de Chevron- Vilette > Guylaine (who died in infancy), Roselyne (Joubert) Gabrielle, Patricia (Thibault de Beauregard). =2) C. Soukovkine > Pierre.

-Jean Dulong de Rosnay = Nicole Cinquin > Alberic, Pascale, Annick.

Dolly (1919-2013) = 1) Jean Charles Leclerc (1914-1946) they had > Jean-Bernard and Florence. = 2) George (or Jurg) Meister. Swiss born, historian and writer. 'Citizen of the world' (1920-2007). No issue.

Jean Bernard Leclerc (1944-) 1) = Karin Gurshing > Jean Charles (1967-1984) Patrick.. 2) = Regine > Christophe.

Patrick Leclerc (1969) =1) Tiffanie Vidal > Leonie, and Laurene Leclerc = 2) Beatrice Spiritu Sancto > Louis Leclerc.

Florence Leclerc (1946-) = Richard Statham, born Australia 1946 > Samuel, Nicholas, Oliver

Samuel Statham (1974-) = Simone Lemesurier > Molly, Georgia, Floyd Statham

Nicholas Statham (1977-) = Melissa Ellero > Carla and Remi Statham.

Oliver Statham (1981-)

Lineage: Charrat (Dolly's mother's side): more research needed

1) Charles Charrat = Elisabeth Perouse > five children: Rene, Marcelle, Gabrielle, Lucien, Louis.

Rene= Yvonne... > Helene, Colette and Danielle (Gormand)

2) Marcelle Charrat following

Gabrielle Charrat (Poucette) =Louis Cabaud> Chantal= Yves Nouvel

Lucien Charrat =...> Herve Charrat= Marie Claude...

Louis Charrat, artist painter. Not married.

Marcelle Charrat= Alberic Dulong de Rosnay> Dolly following, Minon, Jean-Hermand > See previous page

3) Dolly (1919-2013) = 1) Jean- Charles Leclerc (1914-1946) 2) George (or Jurg) Meister, Swiss born writer and historian. 'Citizen of the world'. No posterity.

1) > See previously.

Lineage: Leclerc (Dolly's first husband) -research in big part by George.Meister

1)- Charles- Louis Leclerc, (1776- 1870) Colonel, serves under Napoleon and Louis XVIII. Born in Paris \equiv Marie Eugenie Huder > amongst other children:

2)- Charles- Eugene Leclerc (1818-1868) = Henriette Lingre, (or leingre) born 1822, (parents: Florent: Lingre, and Henriette Croner. Sisters: Florence Lingre born 1826, Eugenie Lingre, born 1823, brothers: Louis Auguste Lingre, born 1821, Adolf Lingre born 1824.)

Charles- Eugene and Henriette had six children, the oldest: Henri Charles Leclerc was born in 1848. He was *capitaine de gendarmerie* and married Lucie Hulin, grand- daughter of General Pierre Auguste Hulin. Charles Eugene died at 49 years old in 1866 and Henriette, when widowed, opted in September 1872 to retain the French nationality for her and her younger children: Henri Florent Leclerc, born 1855, at 'La Petite Pierre' Jules Marie Leclerc, born 1857, at La Petite Pierre', Leon Marie Joseph Leclerc born 1862 at Srottene and Eugene Jean- Marie Leclerc, our grandfather, born at "La petite Pierre".

3)- Eugene Jean-Marie Leclerc, (1859-1938) = Emma Pouillin, (daughter of Joseph Pouillin and Melanie Saunier) > Henriette, Simone and Jean- Charles. -Henriette Leclerc= Victor Chavanel > Monique, Nicole and Jean Marc Chavanel.

Monique Chavanel married Jean Poudroux, > four daughters: Christine, Claire, Catherine and Francoise Poudroux

Nicole Chavanel married Pierre Coulougnon > two sons: Gilles and Pascal.

Jean Marc Chavanel = Francoise ...> Patrick and perhaps other children

-Simone Leclerc= Gaston Martinet > Jacquie and Micheline Martinet

-Jean Charles Leclerc : following

4) Jean Charles Leclerc (1914-1946) = Dolly Dulong de Rosnay (1919-2013)
> See previously.



Leclercs' headstones at 'La Petite Pierre'

Family tree (historical)

Fully translated in appreciation for Jean Dulong de Rosnay's thorough research through history. He had a special interest in Esther de Sagey as well as her three sisters' and wrote a book about them which he called "The four sisters" (*Les quatre soeurs*).

Lineage: Esther de Sagey (1785-1837), wife of Louis Etienne Dulong de Rosnay.(J.D.R)

Bloodline, families of Dulong de Rosnay, Sagey, Chaffoy, Pra, Choiseuil, Dreux, Capet)

Note 1: In this genealogy, there is a connection of place and time with the 'Saint-Saviour' family, on Richard's side. Adele, daughter of Robert II the Devot, married Richard's III, Duke of Normandy, who died in 1027. She was the sister of our ancestor: Henri I. See Chart I- Saint- Saviour of 'The Descent of the family

of Statham' written by Rev. S.P.H. Statham, late Scholar of Queen's college, Cambridge and Member of the Historical Society of France. (F.S.)

I- Robert Le Fort or 'L'Angevin', Duc de France, Count of Anjou defends the territories between the rivers Seine and Loire against Norman incursions. Was killed in Brissarte (Anjou) in the year of 866. He married Adelaide, widow of Conrad, Comte of Germany. They had:

1) Eudes, Comte de Paris and proclaimed King of France in 888 by the Lords of the land. Coronated in Bens by the Archbishop, Wautier. He died at la Fere on the 3d of January 898, leaving a son who died young.

2) Robert, following (also see Note 1, page 325)

II- Robert I, Duc de France. Coronated on 29th of June 922 in the church of St Remi de Reims was killed at the battle of Soissons on 15th of June 923. He married Beatrix de Vermandois. They had:

1) Hugues: following

2) Edme who married Raoul, Duke of Burgundy, King of France from 923 to 936

III- Hugues Le Grand. Also nicknamed 'The White' because of his complexion, and also 'l'Abbe' as he was the head of the Abbeys of Saint Denis, Saint- Germain des Pres, and Saint- Martin de Tours. Died in Dourdan in 956. He refused the crown and put it on Louis D'Outremer's head in 936. Married Hedwige or Avoye de Saxe, his third wife, daughter of Henri I L'Oiseleur, King of Germany and Sainte Mathilde de Westphalie (890-968). They had between other children:

IV- Hugues Capet, born in Paris in 938 or 939, Comte de Paris and Orleans, Duc de France in 956, elected King at Seulis by the Frank nobility on 1st July 987. Coronated in Reims on the 3d of July. Died 996 and was interred at the Abbey of St Denis with his father. He married in 970 Adelaide D'Aquitaine said also De Poitiers, daughter of Guillaume III. *Tete d'Etonpe*. Died in 1005. They had:

1) Robert, following

2) Hedwige married 1) Rainier, Comte de Hainant 2) Hugues, Comte de Dagsbourg

3) Gisele, married Hugues, Siegneur de St Riquier en Ponthieu

V- Robert II Le Pieux, Le Sage or Le Devot. Born in Orleans in 970. Associated to the throne and crowned in Reims with his father in 988. Ruled alone from 996. Interred at St Denis in 1031. Married 1) in 988, Rosala, called Suzanne, daughter of Beranger II, King of Italy, widow of Arnoul II Comte de Flandre. 2) Remarried in 996, Berthe de Bourgogne, daughter of Conrad Le Pacifique, Duke of Burgundy and Mathilde de France (sister of the King Lothaire) and widow of Eudes, Comte de Chartres. Pope Gregoire V excommunicated them for incest and put the kingdom in 'interdit'. Berthe is repudiated in 1001. 3) Remarried Constance d'Arles or de Provence called 'Blanche', Blandine and Candide because of her complexion, daughter of Guillaume I, Comte de Provence and Adele D'Anjou. With Constance, Robert Le Pieux had:

1) Hugues, associated to the Crown. Coronated in Campiagne, June 1017. Unmarried. Died 1026. Entered in the Abbey of St Corneille at Campiegne.

- 2) Henri, following.
- 3) Robert (1010-1075) Duke of Burgundy (from this branch came the kings of Portugal)
- 4) Eudes, died childless in 1054
- 5) Adelaide, also called Adele or Alix, married Renaud I, Comte de Nevers.
- 6) Adele, married 1) in 1026, Richard III, Duke of Normandy. (-see **'The descent of the family of Statham': Chart I- S. Saviour-** 2) in 1028 Baudouin V, Comte de Flandres. Died in 1079.

VI- Henri I. Born in 1008. Associated to the throne with his father. Coronated in Reims in 1027. Reigned alone in 1031. Died in 1060. He married 1) Mathilde, niece of the German Emperor Henri II. She died in 1043. 2) Agnes or Anne de Kiev or of Russia, daughter of Yaroslav Vladimirovitch, Grand Duke of the Russians from 1015 to 1054 and of Ingeborg de Norvege. Anne de Kiev was crowned in Reims with her husband Henri I in May 1049. She died in 1076. They had:

- 1) Philippe, following
- 2) Robert. Died young.
- 3) Hugues, said Le Grand, Comte de Chaumont. Crusader in 1096

VII- Philippe I. Born in 1052. Associated to the throne and crowned in Reims in 1059. Reigned alone in 1060 under the regency of Baudouin V, Comte de Flandres. Died in 1108. Married: 1) in 1072 Berthe de Hollande. Repudiated in 1092. Died in 1094. 2) in 1092: Bertrade de Montfort. Philippe and Bertrade were excommunicated 'a few' times. With Berthe, Philippe had:

- 1) Louis, following
- 3) Charles de France, Abbe de Senlis
- 4) Constance, who married 1) Hugues, Comte de Champagne. 2) In 1106 Bohemond I, prince d'Antioche. Died in 1125.

With Bertrade, Philippe had 3 more children: Philippe, Fleury and Cecile.

VIII- Louis VI Le Gros or 'Le Batailleur'. Born in Paris in 1081. Associated to the throne in 1100. Reigns alone from 1108. Coronated in Orleans by Daimbert, Archeveque of Sens, in 1108. He married: 1) in 1104, Lucienne de Rochefort. Repudiated in 1107. 2) in 1115, Adelaide de Maurienne, daughter of Humbert II. Louis and Adelaide had:

- 1) Philippe, born in 1116, associated to the throne. Died 1131
- 2) Louis VII or Le Pieux, born in 1119. King of France from 1137 to 1180. Married 1) Alienor D'Aquitaine. 2) Constance de Castille 3) Alix or Adele de Champagne who gave birth to Philippe Auguste.
- 3) Henri, Eveque de Beauvais, the Archbishop of Reims. Died in 1175.
- 4) Robert, Comte de Dreux, following
- 5) Hugues, died young
- 6) Philippe, bishop of Paris around 1159. Died 1161.
- 7) Pierre. Head of the Royal House of Courtenay
- 8) Constance. Married 1) Eustache, Comte de Boulogne, de Blois de Mortain, crowned King of England when his father was still alive. 2) Raymond V, Comte de Toulouse (A Cathar)

IX- Robert de France, Comte de Dreux, born in 1120. Go on Crusade in 1147 with his brother Louis VII and Alienor D'Aquitaine. Died in 1188. He married 1) Agnes de Garlande, Comtesse de Rochefort. They had a son who died in infancy. 2) In 1145: Agnes de Beaudemont. They had:

- 1) Robert, following
- 2) Henry, Bishop of Orleans from 1136 to 1197
- 3) Philippe, Bishop of Beauvais, parç de France.
- 4) Guillaume, Seigneur de Brayes et de Torey
- 5) Alix, wife of Raoul, sire de Coucy.
- 6) Elisabeth, dame de Baudemont, married Hughes, Seigneur de Brayes.

X- Robert II Le Jeune. Comte de Dreux...etc. Croisader in 1190. Excelled at 'Bouvines' in 1214. Died in 1218. Marries 1) Mahant de Bourgogne, 2) in 1184 Yolande de Coucy who died in 1222. They had:

- 1)- Robert III, Comte de Dreux etc....
- 2) Jean, Comte de Vienne et de Macon, marries Alix de Vienne, Comtesse de Forez
- 3) Geoffrey, 4) Alienor de Dreux marries 1) Hugues de Chateaufort 2) Robert de St Clair
- 5) Isabelle de Dreux marries Jean, Comte de Roussy
- 6) Alix de Dreux, following
- 7) Philippa de Dreux marries Henri, Comte de Bar
- 8) Agnes de Dreux marries the Comte d'Eu, Etienne de Bourgogne
- 9) Pierre, Comte de Bretagne de Richemont marries 1) Alix Comtesse de Bretagne. 2) Marguerite de Montagu-Garnache.

XI- Alix de Dreux, Dame de Salis et de Traves. Died in 1259. Marries 1) Gautier de Bourgogne etc... 2) Raynard II de Choiseul. They had ;

- 1) Jean, following
- 2) Robert, (first of the branch of the Seigneurs of Traves). Marries Isabelle de Rougemont.

XII- Jean I, Sire de Choiseul, Marries Berthenette, Dame d'Aigremont. They had :

XIII -Jean II, Sire de Choiseul et d'Aigremont. Died in 1308. Interred in the Abbey of Morimond. Marries Alix de la Fauche. *Surnommee De Nanteuil* .Died in 1318. They had:

- 1) Jean III, Sire de Choiseul. Died in 1336 and interred in Morimond with his wife, Alix de Grancey who died in 1320.
- 2) Regnier, following

XIV- Regnier I de Choiseul, Seigneur d'Aigremont . Marries Isabelle de Grancey. Died in 1335. They had:

XV- Regnier II de Choiseul, Seigneur d'Aigremont, de Fresnay etc... Died in 1339. Marries Isabeau de Loz, Dame de Chery Widow of Jean de Conflans, Seigneur of Vicilmaisons et de Vezilly. They had:

XVI- Regnier III de Choiseul, Seigneur d'Aigremont et de Fresnay. Lived in 1369. He marries Isabelle de Salm, Dame de Chery. They had:

- 1) Renault de Choiseul. We don't know his wife's name. They had sons.
- 2) Pierre, following

XVII- Pierre de Choiseul, Seigneur d'Aigremont, d'Arnoncourt et de Fresnay.... Died in 1401. Marries 1) Marguerite de Pailley, they had two sons who died young. 2) marries his cousin: Alix de Choiseul. They had:

XVIII- Pierre II de Choiseul, Seigneur d'Aigremont etc...Died 1465. He marries 1) Rosine de Clemont. 2) Richarde d'Oiselet, daughter of Jean, Sire de l'Oiselet et Marguerite de Vergy . Died 1497. They had :

1) Jean, following

2) Pierre, Seigneur de Doncourt and de Fresnoy. Marries Catherine de Plessis.

XIX- Jean de Choiseul, Seigneur d'Aigremont et de Meuse. Died 1485. Marries his cousin, Isabeau de Choiseul. They had :

XX- Pierre III de Choiseul, Baron d'Aigremont et de Meuse. Died 1527. Marries Anne de Saint Amadour. They had:

1) Philibert, Baron d'Aigremont and d'Ambonville. Marries Antoinette de Foucher de Feverieux.

2) Rene, following

XXI- Rene de Choiseul, baron de Meuse and de Beaupre, Chevalier de l'ordre du Roi. Marries Mahaut de Francieres, heiress of Laurent, Seigneur de Francieres and d'Antoinette d'Anneville or d'Ancienville. Rene and Mahaut had :

1) Chretien, Baron de Beaupre. Marries 1) Antoinette de Dinteville 2) Francoise d'Anglure

2) Maximilien, Baron de Neudy et de Meuse, Seigneur de Sorcy and de Germiny. Marries Catherine du Chatelet

3) Jean following

XXII- Jean de Choiseul, baron de Francieres, Gouverneur de Langres. Marries in 1607 Anne de Sautour, Dame d'Irouer, de Montigny et de Villeneuve de Vigenne. Widow of Jean de Rochefort, Seigneur de La Croisette and daughter of Francois de Santour, Seigneur de Montreuil and of Roberte de Vienne Clervant. Jean and Anne had:

1) Louis following 2) Theophile, died young.

XXIII- Louis de Choiseul, Marquis de Francieres, Baron de Neuvy et de Vancourt, Seigneur d'Irouer, etc....Gouverneur de Langres in 1649. Lieutenant General in the king's armies in 1658. Marries in 1632 Catherine de Nicey, daughter of Etienne, seigneur of Romilly Sur Seine, Fontainebeon...They had:

1) Claude, Comte de Choiseul, born 1663. *Doyen des marechaux de France*, Marquis de Francieres, Seigneur d'Irouer and de Fontainebeon. Died in Paris 1711

2) Francois, Prior of Randonvilliers , died 1671

3) Louis, died young, 4) Gabrielle: following,

5) Marie, Coadjutress of the Abbey of Saint Pierre de Poulangy, 6) Catherine, Abbess of the 'Monastere de Bemont', order of Citeaux, died in 1707.

XXIV- Gabrielle de Choiseul Francieres, born in 1641. Marries Charles Emmanuel de Pra(t) de Balay Saul (1630-1680). Seigneur de Pezeux, Gere, Argillieres. Governor and *Grand bailli* de langres. They had amongst other children:

XXV- Antide- M. de Pra, (1668-1756) Marquis de Pezeux. Marries Francoise de La Motte Villebray who died in 1736. They had:

XXVI- M. Claude de Pra (1691-1740) Marquis de Pezeux. Marries Louise de Largentier. They had :

XXVII- Jeanne Charlotte de Pra de Pezeux. Marries in 1756 in Besancon, Charles Francois de Chaffoy, baron de Munans et de Sorans, He died at the *echafaud revolutionaire*. Son of Hardoin de Chaffoy, Seigneur de Munans and Francoise de La Forest de Divonne. Jeanne Charlotte and Charles Francois had :

XXVIII- Claude (ine) Veronique de Chaffoy born in 1759. Died in Paris in 1815. Married in 1780 Jean Hermand, Vicomte de Sagey. Born in Ornans in 1755. Died in 1831. They had four daughters:

- 1) Julie (1781-1861). Marries Francois Teste (1764-1825),
- 2) Delphine (1783-1871). Marries Gabriel, Comte Richard de Boussiere,
- 3) Pauline 1784-1867). Had a son: Gabriel de Sagey -with a cousin de Choiseuil-
- 4) Esther, Charlotte, following

XXIX- Esther de Sagey, born in Ornans in 1785. Died in 1837. Interred in the Montmartre cemetery. Marries in 1804, in Besancon, Louis Etienne Dulong de Rosnay, born in 1780 at Rosnay (Aube). He takes part of Napoleon's campaigns as 'General de brigade' (baron de l'Empire), then Lieutenant General aux Gardes du corps du Roi. (Comte de la Restauration). He died in Paris on the 20th of May and was *inbume* at the cemetery of Montmartre in 1828. They had:

- 1) Hermand (1805-1894). Marries Marie Deville (1819-1901)
- 2) Jean Paul (1807- 1849). Marries Elisabeth Guillaume (1809-1960)
- 3) Charles (1808-1887). Marries Nelly de Kermoysan (1809-1904)
- 4) Amelie (1810-1890) Marries Ferdinand Corot, Chevalier de Cussy (1795-1866)
- 5) Adele (1815-1842) Marries Paul Emile Sain de Mannevieux (1793-1850)
- 6) Louis (1917-1851). Single.
- 7) Alberic, following

XXX- Alberic, Vicomte Dulong de Rosnay. (1818-1897) Born in Versailles. Marries in Boyer, in 1846, Marie Maximilienne Ducret de Langes (1826- 1918) born in Thoissey, daughter of Baron Antoine Ducret de Langes and d'Albane de l'Horme. They had:

- 1) Hermand following,
- 2) Adele (1848-1932) Marries Hyppolyte de Weck (1841- 1929)),
- 3) Marthe- Marie (1850-1851), 4) Eugene (1852- 1870) dies at Stettin. Prisoner following the battle of Sedan (r)
- 5) Albane (1855- 1930) single.
- 6) Charles (1857-1894) marries Juana Maria Monteserate-Negron y Cadavedo y Diaz (1871-1923),
- 7) Alix (1864-19430 (nun at the Sacred Heart in Montreal, Canada)
- 8) Etienne (1863-1939) marries Elvire Richard (1881-1966)

XXXI- Hermand Dulong de Rosnay, (1847-1924) born in Lyon. Dies at Pont de Vaux. Marries in 1878 at Versailles, Marguerite de Saint Phalle, born in Carcassonne in 1854. She

dies in Maison Laffitte in 1930. She was the daughter of Edgar, marquis de Saint Phalle and Alice Leullion de Thorigny. They had

- 1) Marie (1878-1970). Marries Jean- Meric de Bellefon (1876-1955)
- 2) Alix (1880-1970) .Marries Comte Ramon de la Cerda (1876-1947)
- 3) Alberic, following
- 4) Charles (1885-1941). Marries Aimee de Lamotte (1893-1947)
- 5) Hippolyte (1888-1972). Marries Marie- Therese Havret (1892-1954)
- 6) Joseph Bruno (1894-1976) Marries Anne- Marie d'Arloz d'Entremont (1896-1938)
- 7) Albane (1899- ?). single.

XXXII - Alberic Francois Dulong de Rosnay. (Dolly's father) (1883-1966) Born at Ormes (Saone et Loire). Marries 1) in June 1917 at Macon, Burgundy, Marcelle Charrat, (1894-1942) born in Lyon. Interred in Cogny, Burgundy, near her husband.2) Jeanette Monet: no issue. Alberic and Marcelle had:

- 1) Dolly, following
- 2) Minon (or Carmen) (1921-2009) =1) Henri de Chevron- Vilette > Guylaine (who died in infancy), Roselyne (Joubert) Gabrielle, Patricia (Thibault de Beauregard). =2) a son : Pierre Dulong de Rosnay.
- 3) Jean (Hermand) Jean Dulong de Rosnay, (born 1926). Marries Nicole Cinquin. They had Alberic, Pascale, and Annick.

XXXIII- Dolly Marie Elisabeth Dulong de Rosnay (1919-2013). Marries 1) Jean Charles Leclerc (1914-1946). They had > Jean- Bernard and Florence. = 2) George (or Jurg) Meister: Swiss born, historian and writer (1920-2007), no issue.

Note 2: Three generations of women, successively: Beatrix de Vermandois, Avoy de Saxe, and Adelaide (respectively wives of Robert I, Hugues Le Grand and Hugues Capet) were descendants of Charles Martel. The first one through Charlemagne and Pepin d'Italie, the second one through Ludolph de Saxe and Charlemagne, the third one, through Guillaume d'Aquitaine and Ida, daughter of Charles Martel: her 'trisaieus' in the VIth century had, between other children: Anibert, Blithilde, Carloman, Emergarde (J.D.R.)



Cemetery in Cogny, Saone et Loire, (Burgundy) France where some Dulong de Rosnays and my nephew, Jean- Charles Leclerc are buried.





Our reserve wines.

