

Box Hill

Jenny Hello Gran, how are you today?

Gran Jenny love, this is a nice surprise.

J Here let me sort your pillows, there is that better?

G Just fine, thanks, now I can get a good look at you. So what have you been up to?

J Well, I'm sure Mum keeps you up to date with lots of boring stuff, but she doesn't know about my new boyfriend.

G So, tell me all, at least all you can tell your old Gran.

J It goes without saying he is gorgeous, intelligent and a real gentleman because, you'll love this bit, he comes from England, just like you.

G Well, well, what's he doing in deepest Oz?

J He's working on old Fraser's ranch, he's very good with horses. I told him you were from England and then I realised that I know very little about where you are from. We've grown up with the stories about when you arrived in Oz and how Great grand pa started his business in Adelaide until, well it became the largest in South Australia and the rest is history.

G I was only six when I left England, a long time ago. You know, I've been having very strange dreams while I've been in here, it must be all those drugs they are pumping into me. I often dream of England and people and places I haven't thought about for years, decades even. Pass me over my cup of water and give me a moment to get my thoughts in order.

J Here you are, just take your time and if you get tired just tell me to bugger off.

G My earliest memories are of the house we lived in, it was 35 Wellington Street, Balham London. Fancy me remembering the address. All the houses were the same, small and pretty dark inside, but it didn't bother us kids as we played outside in the street come rain or shine. Pa had a friend who worked on a farm deep in the countryside. I can remember visiting the farm a few times, we took the train and walked to the farm and then we walked up this big hill. Being the youngest I was usually carried on someone's shoulders. It was like being at the top of the world, and all of England was laid out in front of us. After London, the colours were so intense especially the greens, every shade and hue, and wild flowers everywhere. We picked posies, made daisy chains and threaded them through our hair. The air was fresh and filled with smells you could almost taste. I suppose it was all the wild herbs but of course I didn't know anything about herbs then.

J It all sounds quite idyllic, can you remember why your parents decided to emigrate to Oz?

G You have got to remember that this was in the early 1930s and there was the great Depression. Pa, however always had a job, he was a good worker and could turn his hand to anything. One day I was told that I was going to have a little brother or sister. Most of my friends had brothers and sisters and it didn't really worry me much. Then Ma became sick and the next thing was me and Ma catching the train to the countryside to stay with Pa's friends. Uncle Eddie and Auntie Doris, they weren't real relatives you just called any adult aunty or uncle. They didn't have any children of their own and I suppose I was quite spoilt by them. They gave me little jobs to do, look after the chooks,

water the veggie plot and in the evening Doris taught me how to knit while Ma dozed in a chair wrapped up in blankets. I don't know how long we stayed with them, it seemed like a long time. There was a young lad who also worked on the farm, I didn't like him, and tried to keep out of his way.

J It's all right Gran, if you want to stop or if it's too upsetting it's OK.

G No, it's all right Jenny love, I feel I've been hiding these memories for so long, it's time to bring them out into the open so they can finally blow away. Just give me a moment and pass me my cup again.

J If you're really sure, here let me hold your hand. That's better. I didn't mean for you to get upset.

G I've started so I'll finish my story. Box Hill that was the name of the place. I wanted to call it Box Mountain because it seemed so big to me. Anyway, one day all chores had been finished early and it was decided to walk up the hill and have our supper at the top. There were the four of us and the lad came along to help carry everything. It was wonderful up there listening to the birds and eating chunks of chewy homemade bread with cheese and pickles. The grownups and the lad drank beer and eventually they started dozing off, except the lad. I was picking wild flowers as usual and the lad told me that there were special pink flowers further along the path and offered to show me. I wasn't keen to go but I decided I really needed pink flowers. Anyway, we walked for about five minutes and then he knocked me to the ground behind some bushes. He put one hand over my mouth and with the other lifted my dress. I can remember his smell at this moment after all these years. Well, I bit down hard on his hand, he grunted in surprise and when he moved his hand I screamed at the top of my lungs. After that things were a bit of a blur and we headed back down the hill to the farm. Me sobbing in Uncle Eddie's arms and the lad nursing a bloody nose and a swollen hand. We returned to Balham shortly after that and before my next birthday we are on our way to Australia, the land of opportunities.

J Wow Gran what story. I think it's time to let you rest. I'll get in trouble with the nurses for tiring you out. Thank you for sharing that story with me.

G Yes I am feeling a bit tired now, but somehow I feel better for telling it. I wonder what memories I will relive in my dreams tonight. Bye Jenny girl, take care.