

Scratch Pad 66

A WONDERFUL LIFE:

ELIZABETH JEAN (BETTY) GILLESPIE:

6 JUNE 1918–4 MARCH 2007



The Triplet girls: (l. to r.)

Above: **1940**: Win, the youngest; Daisy; my mother Betty; her older sister Ruby.

Below: **mid 1980s**: in reverse order: Ruby; my mother; Daisy; Win.



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Photos: Sourced throughout where possible. Front cover: top photo: probably by Len or Ted Triplett; bottom photo: almost certainly by Jeanette Gillespie.

A wonderful life:

Elizabeth Jean (Betty) Gillespie:
6 June 1918–4 March 2007

On Friday, 25 January 2007, I received news from my sister Jeanette that my mother, Betty Gillespie, had fallen at home on the day before, and had broken her hip. She had suffered falls a few years before, because of blackouts (probably a result of mini-strokes), and had been treated with the medication *Waufaren*. She had never broken bones during those falls. This time was different.

My mother was now aged 88, and would be 89 in June. Two Christmases in a row, 2005 and 2006, she had told us she was feeling very weak. In early 2006, she had been diagnosed as having zero levels of folate, and had been treated for that condition. In May, when Jeanette and I visited her for Mother's Day, she seemed much cheerier than she had five months before. She seemed okay to me when I phoned her, but my other sister Robin had been shocked at her thinness and frailty when she visited from Brisbane in October. Because of a hip replacement operation in September, Jeanette had been unable to visit my mother for six weeks. By the time we visited her at Christmas 2006, she was again feeling very weak, and her day-to-day memory had become uncertain. Jeanette put off her annual holiday in northern Victoria, and stayed with Mum for a week in early January. By the time she went home, my mother was feeling stronger. Jeanette discovered that my mother had not been taking her *Waufaren* for some time, and might not have been eating very well.

Jeanette arranged that carers of one type or another, especially from the Royal District Nursing Service, would call in on Mum every day. On 24 January, one of them was getting out of the car to visit her. Mum waved from the window. She set out to unlock and open the door. By the time



My mother Betty Gillespie, probably early 1990s, photo probably taken by Jeanette Gillespie.

the nurse reached the door, my mother had fallen badly, her head was covered in blood, and she felt great pain in her leg. An ambulance was called, Mum was rushed to hospital, and an X-ray showed that she had broken her hip. She was operated on a day later.

Because it was school holidays, Jeanette was able to travel straight down to Rosebud. She stayed at my mother's unit every day, travelling up and down to Frankston Hospital, staying by Mum's side for anything up to six hours a day.

In Loving Memory Of
Elizabeth (Betty) Gillespie

12.6.1918 - 4.3.2007



Church of Christ Tootgarook
March 8 2007

Officiating: Rev Mal Giezendanner
Directors: Morningside Funerals

A Wonderful Life

The world was still at war on June 12th, 1918, but in the peaceful farming community of Rochester, in northern Victoria, a new life was being born – a life which would, 88 years later, leave the world a better place.

Elizabeth Jean Triplett was born to Margaret Amelia (nee Heffernan) and Richard Edgar Triplett, hardworking Christian farming folk who greatly loved their family. "Elizabeth" very quickly became "Betty", sister to Daisy, Ruby, Ted and Bill. Len, Winnie and Laurence were later added to the family, although the family sadly lost Laurence at about 5 months of age.

Betty recalled the years on the Rochester farm with great fondness – the open air, the fun and games, and the beautiful fresh food (particularly the juicy oranges, of which Betty ate 12 at one sitting!)

The family left the farm and came to Oakleigh when Betty was about 6. Her Dad had a bad heart and sadly died when she was about 12. These were difficult years, living off the farm rental. A good family friend, Mr Marriott, helped tide them over with fresh fruit and vegetables till they all were working.

Betty attended Oakleigh State School and the family all went to the Oakleigh Church of Christ. Eventually, Betty obtained work dressmaking in the city, and enjoyed her teenage years with her 3 closest sisters, the 3 of them persuading everyone they were "triplets", which, of course, they were – in name! Betty and Daisy in particular enjoyed many outings together.

It was during this period when a group of young people, one of whom was Frank Gillespie, went skating. Never being a sporting type, Frank fell and broke his arm. Betty chose to accompany Frank home and a relationship blossomed from then on.

Frank went off to war and Betty kept working. They were married on 2nd July, 1942, but Frank had to go back to the war. Betty left her job in the city, her sister, Ruby, taking her place, and Betty went to work in a plant farm with her sister-in-law, Dorrie. Betty saved all Frank's army pay and when he was discharged, they were able to buy a house in Haughton Road, Oakleigh.

Within three and a half years, three children had arrived, and with the third, Jeanette, a car was necessary. Cars were often the bane of their lives, with all of us remembering many break-downs and boiling radiators!

The family was very much involved in Church life, at Oakleigh Church of Christ, then at Glen Waverley and Sunshine (after a move to Melton) and West Preston. After the children had all flown the coop, Frank and Betty eventually moved to Belgrave Heights, where they attended the Patch Church of Christ. On retirement, they moved to Rye, then Rosebud and from 1978 attended the Tootgarook Church of Christ.

Betty and the family lost their beloved husband and father Frank in 1989, but Betty was determined to continue living independently.

Betty's life has always meant involvement in the Church congregation of which she has been a part. She was always involved with the Christian Women's Fellowship, and for many years used her dressmaking skills in sewing for the Dorcas Society. Whenever there was some baking needed, you could depend on Betty to make some tasty fairy cakes. She was usually on the flower and communion rosters and had a talent for reading the Bible in Church. In her teenage days, she also taught Sunday School. She used to say she had never been bored in her life – nor lonely, as she was as comfortable with her own company as with the company of others.

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BRUCE GILLESPIE'S MEMORIES:

"OUR MOTHER — THE LADY WE COULD NEVER TAKE FOR GRANTED."

My two sharpest memories of my mother are 41 years apart.

In 1961, when I was fifteen, I suffered for many months from unspecified bowel complaints. My mother accompanied me from specialist to specialist, who offered little help, and my family even dabbled briefly with some very expensive alternative medicine, which did no good at all. Finally, after yet another specialist offered the usual non-conclusions, my mother burst into tears. I was shocked to the core. I had ever seen my mother cry before. For the first time in my life, perhaps, I realised just how totally she was involved in the problems of me and my sisters. What seemed to me a shocking lapse did the trick, though. This specialist agreed to take out my appendix. When he did the operation at the end of 1961, he found nothing wrong with my appendix, but he did straighten my bowel. My pains disappeared

In August 2002, my mother travelled to the Sunshine Coast, Queensland, to attend my sister Robin's second wedding, to Grant Mitchell. Jeanette and Mum stretched the occasion into a week's holiday, while I flew up just the weekend. Robin and Grant's wedding was on the sand at Mooloolaba — a perfect winter's day in Queensland: sun, sand and a warm bracing wind. Later we adjourned to a nearby restaurant for a long lunch. I don't think I was looking forward to the wedding meal. I consider myself a shy person, and I didn't know many of the people there. I took a lesson from my mother, who was then 84 and still in good health. Quite deliberately, she worked the room, just like an executive or film star. She caught up with her grandchildren (and my nephews) Colin and Philip, made friends with their friends, and talked to many people she had never met before. This was certainly Robin and Grant's occasion, but my mother was the star of the show!

These little memories merely tell me that I could never take my mother for granted. When I was a kid I did take her for granted. She was always there. She worked tirelessly for us, and also for Oakleigh Church of Christ, then the Glen Waverley Church, and state and national church organisations. She supported the three of us when my father found us a bit hard to take. The three of us together often quarrelled; any two of us by ourselves gave no trouble. Mum put up with all that. When I was a late teenager and early adult, I went in directions Mum did not approve of or understand, but she always supported me. I remember in particular that she would not take more than token board money from me when I was living with her and dad for two years after being away from home for two years. This kindness enabled me to save enough to make my long trip to America and England in 1974.

After Mum and Dad moved to Rosebud in 1979, I saw much less of them. I saw little of what Mum had to go through as Dad began to lose his short-term memory, and then as he suffered from his last illness. He died in 1989. I've seen little of the enormous amount of effort that Mum has put into the work of Tootgarook Church or into her friendships here. I do know that she has been a centre of a wide range of friendships and contacts. Perhaps I always took her too much for granted, but she never took us, her family, for granted. She welcomed my wife Elaine into the clan.

My mother lived much longer than she ever expected to, and she accepted quite peacefully the end of her life. But she did know that she was at the centre of our lives, and we will always miss her at that centre

ROBIN MITCHELL'S MEMORIES:

As I was growing up, I remember Mum as always being there for us – she was always home after school, she ran me to netball matches and stayed to watch, she always allowed me to do my homework, without me having to help much around the house, and was always there in the holidays.

Some of our best moments were picnics in the Dandenong Ranges hunting for lyrebirds, trips to Edithvale Beach on hot summer days and trips to the city for pantomines in the summer school holidays.

I thank Mum for her quiet, non-assuming Christian witness always.

JEANETTE GILLESPIE – “A GOOD CUP OF TEA”

It's not hard to tell by looking at Mum's offspring that food has been one central theme of our lives!

Our family always ate at the table together, with grace being said before the meal, and conversation encouraged. A treasured memory of Mum's devotion to us is her saying to me at dinner one night – “I don't mind how long you talk or what you say – I love to listen just because you are my daughter”.

Food was good and wholesome, but five things spring to mind – particularly in recent years:

Chicken – “Buy me a roast chicken” was a common call. **Cheese** – until her fall we thought Mum's bones were indestructible with all the cheese she ate. **Jam** – either plum or apricot from her friend Alice's tree. **Chocolates** – Dad always gave her Roses Chocolates and we continued the tradition. **TEA** – yes, that panacea for all ills – Mum loved her cups of tea – many of them daily!

We have grown up surrounded by love and goodness and unselfishness, though certainly not without boundaries and discipline. Mum had two sayings when we did something wrong or silly – “You little rascal” was said with a twinkle in her eye. However, “You little hound” meant you were in for it!

Though it has been sad to see Mum suffering over the past 5 weeks, it has been a time of great preciousness to have been able to care for her and share many memories, smiles and cuddles. It was such a privilege to have here as my darling Mum – and to hear her say “Don't be sad sweetie-pies – I've had a wonderful life.”

Mum seemed to improve rapidly after the operation, beginning the set of various exercises that must be done after such an operation. She was not moving much out of bed when I first visited her at Frankston Hospital (a two-and-a-half-hour trip each way from Greensborough), but we were able to talk.

During February I was desperately trying to push through a huge workload, after having received no paying work from mid October to mid January, so I did not visit again for several weeks. After school term resumed, Jeanette took weeks from her long service leave to stay in Rosebud, visiting Mum for much of each day. She reported that Mum was doing well enough to be transferred to West Rosebud Rehabilitation Hospital. Jeanette was unimpressed by the place — she found she had to do lots of the little nursing jobs for Mum that should have been carried out by the staff. Worse, my mother picked up a urinary tract infection while there, so she was transferred back to Frankston Hospital for some days. From there she was sent to Mt Eliza Rehabilitation Hospital.

At first she seemed to be doing quite well. At Mt Eliza for about a week she could use the walker to get to the toilet, and could take very short walks down the corridor and back. However, by the time I visited next, on 21 February, my mother had changed greatly. She was barely able to get out of bed, had little energy, and kept her eyes shut most of the time, even when talking to us. Jeanette and I took her in a wheelchair out into the garden for awhile, then to the hospital kiosk, and back to her ward.

That was on my own personal Disaster Day. When I had got out of the car at the Mt Eliza Centre I found I had lost my wallet. This had never happened before. Jeanette drove me straight back to the spot where she had been parked in Frankston. No wallet on the footpath. We filled in a report at the Frankston Police Station, while Jeanette used her mobile phone to cancel my VisaCard. I still don't know how I lost my wallet that day, because I can always feel it in my side pocket. Jeanette suspects that my pocket had been picked while I was waiting outside the station after getting off the Frankston train. If so, this had also never happened before.

Apart from the enjoyable night of my sixtieth birthday, February was a horrible month. A week later, on 28 February, when I visited, Mum was quite bedridden, and could not speak. She kept trying to talk, but could not say the words.

Two days later, I arrived at monthly Film Night at Race and Iola Mathews' place. They had taken a phone call from Duncan, Jeanette's partner. He was coming down from Guildford, where he lives, and was able to call in for me in South Yarra. So I went with him from there to Rosebud Hospital, where my mother was not expected to outlive the night.

Jeanette had already been there for some hours. She, Duncan and I found that my mother



Jeanette and Robin, on the beach at Rosebud, sunset on the day of my mother's funeral, 8 March 2007. (Photo: Duncan Brown.)

now bore little resemblance to the person I knew. Her body was disappearing, she could say nothing, and she seemed to be unconscious most of the time. Jeanette, who had spent the last six weeks devoted to Mum, trying to will her to live, thinks that Mum did understand her whispered message that we had arrived.

We gave up our vigil at midnight, went back to Mum's unit, and had a good night's sleep. We visited again in the morning; no change. Duncan drove me to Frankston station, I travelled home by train, and at midday next day Jeanette rang to say my mother had died at 11 a.m. on Sunday, 4 March.

By then I felt mainly relief that my mother's ordeal of the last few weeks was over. If only she could have spent her final weeks at home instead of in a hospital. Her hearing levels had never deteriorated, so the background noise levels in hospital had distressed her greatly. Otherwise, she seemed at peace; she had enjoyed her whole life, but now she seemed content that it was finishing.

I also felt great relief that Jeanette's ordeal was over. She had undergone her own health problems during recent years, and was still recovering from the hip replacement. I have never experienced anything like the strong link that Jeanette kept up with my mother — truly she had become the mother to her own mother, patiently feeding her enormous amounts of love and care, trying to find a way for Mum to regain her strength and survive the operation and the weeks later.

Jeanette stayed down at Rosebud, and my sister Robin came back from Brisbane to help her

Two funerals and a wedding



These photos of (mainly) the Triplet side of our family were taken a year apart.

Top: My Aunt Ruby's funeral, December 2004, Rowville Baptist Church. She was the oldest of the Triplets. Her husband was Ern Thomas, and her son is John, married to Wendy.

From left: my Uncle Jim Clague, husband of my Aunt Daisy (sixth from left); Carol Clague, wife of my cousin Brian (fifth from left); Jeanette my sister; my mother, looking much as she did during most of her last 20 years; Brian Clague, Aunt Daisy; Aunt Win; me; Marg Boyce (Aunt Win's daughter).



Middle: The wedding of Emma Thomas to Andrew Burfitt, Rowville Baptist Church, November 2005.

From left: my cousin Marg, with husband Vic Boyce; my cousin Graham and his wife Loris (Graham is the son of my Uncle Bill and Aunt Doris); my cousin Malcolm (son of Aunt Win); my mother, looking very much thinner and more frail than she had a year before; me; my cousin John Thomas, and his wife Wendy (the proud parents of the bride); Carol Clague and Aunt Daisy; Aunt Win; Aunt Elva (was married to my Uncle Ted Triplet, who died some years ago), and Jeanette.



Bottom: My mother's funeral, Tootgarook Church of Christ, 8 March 2007:

Back row: representatives of the Gillespie side of the family are Frank Draeger and my cousin Mardy; then Triplets: Wendy and John Thomas; Elaine and me; Marg and Vic Boyce; Grant Mitchell, my sister Robin's husband; my cousin Brian Clague; and Alan and Barbara Condron, and in front of them Bob and Maureen Daff (from the Gillespie side).

Front row: Duncan Brown and my sisters Jeanette Gillespie and Robin Mitchell; Aunt Daisy, the last of the eight Triplets; Mum's grandchild Colin, with greatgrandchild Ryan, and partner Stacey.

Bystanders were roped in to take the actual photos. All photos were supplied to me by **Jeanette Gillespie**.

with arrangements. The funeral was to be on Thursday, 8 March, at Tootgarook Church of Christ, with the same minister, Mal Geizendanner, who had officiated at my father's funeral 18 years earlier. Our family first met Mal in 1959, when we transferred to Glen Waverley Church of Christ, which was that year his first ministry.

Mum's 'little sister', Win, 84, had died four weeks before her, of cancer. My cousins Marg and Malcolm, and Marg's husband Vic, had decided to have a celebration of her life at Chelsea Church of Christ in 10 March. Both services were within two days of each other. Quite a few of our relatives attended both.

On the night before my mother's funeral, Grant Mitchell, my sister Robin's second husband, flew in from Brisbane. He hired a car at the airport, stayed overnight at our place, then drove us and Sally Yeoland (who by 8 a.m. had already travelled to Greensborough by bus from Preston) down to Rosebud. We really appreciated Sally joining us, as she and John Bangsund had driven Elaine and me to the same church 18 years before for my father's funeral. At present John is not well enough to travel.

The funeral, like most Church of Christ funerals, was a relatively cheerful affair, as death is seen very much as a transfer to the next life rather than an ending of this one. Also, the previous six weeks had prepared Jeanette, Robin and me for the event. As Mum said to Jeanette one day in Frankston Hospital: 'Don't be sad, sweetie. I've had a wonderful life.'

There were not as many people at the funeral from the church itself as might have been the case if my mother had died a couple of years ago. The most deflating aspect of her last few years had been outliving most of her friends. Len, a friend we had met in May, had died of cancer a few days before Mum's death. Jeanette tells me 70 people attended, including Mum's remaining sister, my Auntie Daisy, many of our cousins, and many other friends. We were pleased that our cousins on the Gillespie side, Bob and Maureen Daff, and Barbara and Alan Condron, could attend.

My Auntie Win's 'life celebration', at Chelsea Church of Christ two days later, was also cheerful. Because it was a Saturday, even more cousins turned up. As at my mother's funeral, there was a display of family photos. During afternoon tea after the service, we cousins vowed we would keep up with each other. During of the service, I realised I had known little about my aunt during the last thirty years of her life — she received nothing but praise from her son-in-law Vic and grandson Trent. She and my Uncle Ron McCallum, the wittiest plumber in the eastern suburbs, had retired to Queensland, but he died there quite a few years ago. After Auntie Win came back to Victoria, she suffered her first bout of stomach cancer. She became interested in a wide range of health activities, such as aerobics, and joined an older women's singing group that performed all

around the area. The cancer returned about a year ago.

Where does this leave we orphans?

Jeanette had taken the last three months of last year off in order to recover from a hip replacement operation. (She needed one at the age of 55; and my sister Robin desperately needs one at the age of 59.) Then she had all February and most of March off as well, so she is finding it rather exhausting to return to teaching. She spent an extra week at Rosebud, sorting through the vast number of photographs my mother had kept. My mother got rid of a whole lot of stuff we wished she'd kept, but she did keep the photos, including many I have never seen. Jeanette is amazingly calm and efficient about everything, but she is also overcommitted.

Robin has been finding it difficult to move around, so she suffered quite a bit of pain from undertaking two trips to Melbourne a few weeks apart. She is also trying to keep faith with clients in Brisbane and nearer home. She and Grant have just taken out a mortgage on a house in Lansborough, Queensland, so this recent loss of income has come at a bad time.

The most upset person has been Colin, my nephew and my mother's eldest grandchild. About a year ago, Colin and Stacey became partners. Their first child, Ryan, is Mum's first great-grandson. Colin has been sent on a two-month course in Adelaide by the army, so Stacey is staying with a sister. Then, I take it, both of them go back to Darwin for a while before Colin is being sent to Iraq for six months. He had little preparation for losing his beloved grandmother, and found attending the funeral very hard. It was good to catch up with him, Stacey and baby Ryan.

It's very difficult to write about my mother . . .

. . . but I will try anyway. My first attempt is included in the the funeral pamphlet (reprinted in this issue of **brg**). With one day to write something before the funeral, it was hard to say something expressive.

My mother was an essentially serious-minded person who was also mainly cheerful. She had little sense of nostalgia, and always lived in hope of the next adventure, until her last year or so. She came from a serious age: the age of the Depression, which in Australia ran from mid 1920s until the beginning of World War II. Deprived of both parents by the time she was 21, she found a way to succeed in life without ever becoming bitter. Her idea of success had little to do with wealth, and much to do with the duties and rewards that came from her religion, and being a wife and mother.

Married in 1942, she had to wait until 1946 until Frank, my father, returned from the war to begin the actual marriage. Her savings from her job enabled them to buy a house in Oakleigh. I was born in February 1947. After September



My mother carrying me, 1947: the only time I've ever inspired a look of adoration. (Photo: Frank Gillespie.)

1951, when Jeanette was born, my mother faced the job of organising a household of three children under five.

It's customary for children to blame their parents for anything that goes wrong in life. Nobody much considers the parent who has to care for a fairly grumpy child (me, by most accounts), then taking on the responsibility for a second child (Robin) fourteen months later, and a third, Jeanette, three years later. My mother succeeded well.

I remember my first day of school, February 1953. It was hot. Hundreds of us baby-boomer kids rolled up to Oakleigh State School. We covered the school ground. The teachers had little idea of what to do with us. One large group of kids were told they were too young, and to go away and return in July. The rest of us sat on the floor of the hall of the Infants' School (grades 1 and 2). I was already aged 6, so I was put into a Grade 1 — all 52 of us. The 'bubs', over 70 of them, stayed in the hall. I remember being puzzled and panic-stricken, but also hoping for the best from school (since I hadn't liked kindergarten much). As happened so many times during those years, my mother stayed patient while I went through various stages of upset.

Every morning for the rest of our schooling, she packed our lunches (except on Monday morning, when we were given lunch money, because there was no fresh bread delivered on Sundays). She also took on the job of making porridge each morning early enough for the three of us and my father. Occasionally — horrors! — my mother forgot to put the salt in the porridge. We would all grumble away at the table while my mother tried



Days at the beach — it was good to be alive. Me, Jeanette held by Mum, and Robin, 1953, probably at Rosebud. (Photo: Frank Gillespie.)

to fix the situation by putting in the salt afterward. This didn't quite work.

As Jeanette says in the note she wrote for the funeral, food features in many of our best memories of childhood. Christmas was our favourite time of the year. Not only did my parents spend money they swore they didn't have for presents we didn't really believe we could swindle out of them, but each year we enjoyed the sheer pleasure of Christmas morning. My mother must have put aside spare change for months beforehand, enabling her to pack a Christmas stocking for each of us. Each stocking would include small chocolates (eaten very quickly), trinkety boys and balloons, and a vast number of nuts of various types. Mum would bring out the nutcracker, rarely used during the rest of the year. No pre-roasted or pre-salted nuts in those days — their shells all had to be cracked open. All this happened very early on Christmas morning. It was the only day of the year when we didn't have to eat porridge for breakfast. The nuts and lollies filled us up until Christmas dinner, which was rarely served before 2 p.m., as either Mum or Dad would have attended the Christmas Morning service at church.

My mother was a very good cook, her concoctions limited only by the budget and the extreme conservatism of the taste of her husband and children. Once she even tried cooking tripe for us! Only once. At the basic level of ordinary dinners, we often had stews and mashed potatoes because in that way Mum could make the ingredients go further. Every few weeks we ate rabbit, because it was much cheaper than any other meat. She could bake cakes that were lighter than any I've ever tasted since, and sometimes she would even bake a chocolate cake. This disappeared so fast when we arrived home from school that all her

effort must have seemed wasted. My mother cooked perfect scrambled eggs, and once a year my own favourite, 'egg and bacon pie' (which only many years later was called 'quiche').

Childhood pleasures included our trips to the beach, usually to Edithvale for day trips, and later to Macrae, near Rosebud, for annual holidays. Mum enjoyed swimming, paddling, or sitting on the beach watching us swim, and Dad didn't. He preferred drives into the countryside, and we didn't. Every such trip usually ended with the outcry, 'Next time I'll leave you kids at home', but he never kept his promise.

The little piece I wrote for the funeral tells of a difficult time in all our lives: my first three years of secondary school. In Form 1 (Year 7) I contracted papillomas on my feet, probably from the floors of the shower recesses at Oakleigh Swimming Pool, which had been newly opened during that last summer we spent in Oakleigh (1958–59). I was sent to a specialist in St Kilda Road for treatment. My mother accompanied me the first two times I took the trip in from Oakleigh, then sat me down in front of a map of Melbourne so that I could learn the streets and take the trip by myself. For me, these trips were a lark (especially the fun of discovering all the bookshops in Melbourne), but the expense and anxiety must have been difficult for my parents.

In early Form 2, the standard compulsory TB X-ray discovered that I had spondylosis of the spine. In other words, my spine was bent sideways so that one shoulder was higher than another. You can see this clearly in every photo taken of me from Grade 2 onwards — I was always being told to 'stand up straight' — but finally an identifiable medical condition was diagnosed. My mother took me to yet another specialist in St Kilda Road. I had to wear a brace on my back for 14 months. More worry and expense for my mother. I didn't worry too much, as this condition meant that I could escape compulsory phys. ed and sport for a year and a half.

I wrote about my third bout of illness in my little piece written for the funeral (pp. 5–6). At the end of three years of traipsing me around from one specialist to another, my mother must have really wondered whether I would have any sort of life at all. It was her continuing nightmare rather than mine.

My father had the worry of earning a living, but much of the emotional weight of supporting the family rested on my mother. I'm still grateful that she did not go to work until the early sixties, when she took a part-time job in a cake shop in Syndal. We three kids had contempt for 'latchkey children', because *our* mother was always there when we needed her.

Yet my mother and I were always niggling at each other. Only after our Christmas 2006 visit did Jeanette say it so well: 'But you and Mum are so like each other! No wonder you get on each other's nerves.' My mother's great strength was

her sense of what was right in the world. Christian values were right; there were no others. Our world existed side by side with, but did not impinge upon, that other world in which 'non-believers' drank and smoked, and their children waited at home for their parents to come home from the pub. That was the wicked world out there, but it was not our world.

I tried to be the 'good Christian boy' my mother wanted me to be, but I resented aspects of this upbringing. Necessarily I seemed holier-than-thou, even naive, at school. (My real sin at school, though, was coming top of the class year after year, while having no ability at games or sport.) Even in primary school, I felt that my parents took too many things on trust; already my reading was revealing a wider field of knowledge than could be found in the Bible and biblical exegeses. Our Church of Christ preachers, wonderful orators though they were, told congregations to 'have faith' and 'not think too much'. I had a growing new faith, which flourished during my teenage years: I came to believe in thinking itself. I wanted to be a scientist until I discovered that a scientist's main tool is maths. In 1959, I discovered fantasy and science fiction. From Grade 1, I wanted to be a writer, and later an editor, after I discovered the concept of the 'fanzine'.

My mother could hardly hide her disappointment that I had taken the 'wrong direction' in life. She never understood my interest in science fiction, or why fandom provided a congenial social group for a chronic non-joiner like me. She didn't appreciate the great honours that fandom has heaped upon me; instead I should have been 'making a success' of my life.

Yet . . . all my most basic beliefs still come from my parents, even if my behaviour doesn't exemplify them — my belief in fairness of all toward all, equality of income, privilege and opportunity, a contempt for those who cling to their own soap-boxes. Unfortunately, a contempt for the making of money means that I rarely have any.

I might never have been a reader if my Mum and Dad had not read to me regularly from an early age. Long before I could read, I loved books. Our house was filled with books: not only the Bible and religious books, but children's story books, atlases, novels, reference books and *Arthur Mee's Children's Encyclopedia*.

I grew up at the end of the Golden Age of Radio: not only the ABC's *Argonauts' Club*, but also radio plays based the great books: Howard Shelley's reading of *The Wind in the Willows*; Orson Welles reducing us to floods of tears with *The Happy Prince*; Claude Rains' equally lachrymose *The Snow Goose*. Book and radio treasures showed me that the world, the universe, was much wider and more bountiful than the mundane world of Oakleigh, Victoria.

There is no way of simplifying the relationship between me and my parents. My parents put up with me and my moods during my teenage years.



In the eyes of my parents I did score one bullseye in my life — in 1968 I graduated BA from Melbourne University and became a teacher, however briefly: (l. to r.): Jeanette, me, Mum and Dad. As this was the official event photo, my father got to be in it instead of taking it.

When in 1964 Robin, Jeanette and I each won Dux of our year at Bacchus Marsh High School, my father confided to the local paper that it was because we did not have a television set in the house. For this, eternal thanks!

My parents always welcomed me home when I came down at weekends to Bacchus Marsh from Ararat, where I attempted to teach secondary school for two years. They did their best to hide their disappointment when I resigned from the Education Department at the beginning of 1971. What would I do for a living? I had no idea. The Department rang me, offering me a series of bribes to stay officially a teacher. The last of these bribes was a job in Publications Branch, about which I had never heard. For two and a half years I was paid a teacher's salary (in real terms, about twice what a teacher today would earn at the same level) for the 'job' of editing and writing. I had moved back to my parents' place when I left Ararat. My mother would take no more than minimum board from me, although I was probably earning more than my father during those years.

For the only time in my life, I saved money, which enabled me to travel overseas in 1973. Eventually I was offered a flat in Carlton Street, but my parents had supported me when I needed support most.

I never had the same strong relationship with my mother that she had with Jeanette and Robin. Elaine and I don't have a car, and Rosebud is a long way from the nearest railway station. Thanks to Jeanette, we were able to visit Mum at least twice every year after my father died in 1989. She had to take over all the tasks of running the household that my father had always performed. Only during late 2005 and through 2006 did she suddenly have difficulty running the house. She had always showed enormous optimistic courage, but during the last year or so suddenly she lost her optimism. She admitted to 'feeling just a little bit old'. I don't think she left the world; her world slipped away from her, and she went on to a world she firmly believed would be much better.

The Triplet family

Below left: Elaine, Mum and me, Rosebud Beach, Mother's Day 2001 (photo: Jeanette Gillespie). Below right: Mum, me and Jeanette at Robin and Grant's wedding on the beach at Mooloolaba, July 2002 (photo: Robin Mitchell).





The Triplets, 1970: Aunt Doris in front of Uncle Bill; Uncle Ern in front of Aunt Ruby; Aunt Elva in front of Uncle Ted; Aunt Joyce in front of my mother; my sister Jeanette in front of my Uncle Len; Uncle Jim in front of Aunt Daisy; and Uncle Ron in front of Aunt Win. Wasn't yesterday wonderful, especially the hats? Since my father isn't in the photo, I presume he took it.



The Triplets, 1988, at Uncle Bill's 80th birthday: l. to r.: Back row: Aunt Doris, Uncle Jim, cousin Graham behind Loris; me behind Aunt Win on one side and cousin Malcolm on the other; Aunt Daisy; Uncle Ted behind cousin Fran; Mum behind Aunt Elva; unknown behind unknown behind unknown (presumably second cousins). Front row: Uncle Bill; Jeanette; cousin John with Wendy; Aunt Ruby. I think the three children are those of John and Wendy. Again, I presume my father is the photographer, since he isn't in the photo.

Both my parents came from large families. Over the years I've written a fair amount about the Gillespie side of our family, especially the contributions made to my life by my Auntie Linda, who was like a second mother to me, and my Auntie Bet and Uncle Ian.

The Triplets began, as my Auntie Daisy discovered some years ago, as the Triplots, who were Huguenot refugees from France to Cornwall in the thirteenth century. Like my Gillespie forebears, all my greatparents on the Triplet side emigrated to Australia in the middle of the nineteenth century. People still had large families in the early twentieth century, so there were eight Triplet children (see p. 4), one of whom died very young. The other seven and their families spread throughout Australia, which is why I haven't seen some of them for many years.

The Triplets tend to be a strong, longlived people, with a vigorous practical skills. No wonder I've always felt like the ugly duckling on both sides of the family, as I have no engineering, mathematical or practical skills, and my only enduring interests are literature, films and music. I do hope I've inherited Triplet longevity.

My mother's oldest brother Bill, and my Auntie Doris, lived in Queensland for many years. My cousin Graham, and his wife Loris, live in Victoria, but Ian and his wife Beverly live in Queensland. The last time I saw either Bill or Doris was at Bill's 80th birthday in 1988. That was one of the largest groups of the Triplets ever assembled. Uncle Bill died only two or three years ago, and Auntie Doris still lives in Queensland.

My Auntie Ruby, who married Ern Thomas, and produced my cousin John, acted as mother to the rest of the family after both their parents died. For many years she and Uncle Ern ran a flower garden in South Clayton. Eventually they were able to buy a farm in South Gippsland. John married Wendy, and they had three children.

The younger Triplet girls, Daisy, Mum and Win, used to pass themselves off as triplets when they went out together. Auntie Daisy later married Jim Clague, an engineer. They had two children, Susanne (who died in a traffic accident in Europe when she was in her twenties) and Brian, who became a top engineer. We saw little of them for some years because during the 1940s and early 1950s Jim was working at the tungsten mine on King Island in the middle of Bass Strait. Before Jeanette was born, Robin and I travelled by DC3 with Mum to visit them. Mum said later that we fought non-stop with our cousins, making it a miserable holiday for the adults. I retain only a vague memory of windswept, grand King Island, a place I would love to visit again some day.

One day in the mid 1950s we met Brian and Susanne coming in our front gate at Haughton Road, Oakleigh. The whole family had returned to the mainland. They settled in South Oakleigh.

Much later, Auntie Dais and Uncle Jim settled in a retirement village in Rosebud, which was part of the reason why my mother and father retired to the area. Brian and Carol have lived on the southern Mornington Peninsula for many years, as Brian was working at the gigantic industrial plant there. Recently he has worked in China.

My Auntie Win married Ron McCallum, and they lived in Oakleigh until they took the ill-fated retirement to Queensland. Of their children, Malcolm still lives in Oakleigh, and Marg met Vic overseas. When they returned to Melbourne, Elaine and I had dinner with them, and we vowed to keep up with each other. After Uncle Ron's death, Auntie Win moved down the Mornington Peninsula to Chelsea, and Marg and Vic moved to Traralgon in Gippsland, and had two children. It takes funerals and weddings for us to catch up.

My Uncle Ted was an engineer for the SEC, which meant he and my Auntie Elva moved around Victoria a lot. Every time we saw the family, they occupied a different house. They had three gorgeous daughters, Jennifer, Debbie and Fran, and a much younger brother, Geoffrey. Debbie married, moved to Western Australia, and had six kids. I haven't seen her in at least thirty years. Fran married a bloke she met on an African safari, and they settled down in Oakleigh. Jennifer became an artist. We had dinner a couple of times, then lost contact. Geoffrey had a high-flying IT job in Sweden, which has enabled him to retire altogether, although he is much younger than I am. My Uncle Ted suffered a stroke more than ten years before he died a few years ago. It's our fault that we don't see Auntie Elva very often, or the other members of her family.

The most mysterious branch of the family were the 'rich relatives'. I'm not sure what my Uncle Len did for a living that gave him a much better income than anybody else in the family, but he and my Auntie Joyce lived in North Balwyn. They were the first people we knew to buy a TV set in time to watch the 1956 Olympic Games. That trip to their place to watch the modern marvel of TV was the last time I saw my cousin John. The last time I saw my cousin Coral was when she was thirteen. A year or two later, Mum and my aunts were oohing and ahing about Coral's fabulous modelling career. As Coral Knowles, she still hits the society gossip pages from time to time, but I haven't met her since 1959. Uncle Len died of a heart attack while jogging on the beach when he was 50. Jeanette managed to get in touch with Auntie Joyce before Mum's funeral, and we hope to catch up with her again.

We cousins have been talking about returning to the family reunions that our parents held during the 1980s and early 90s. Let's hope so.

— Bruce Gillespie, 9 April 2007

After the funeral . . . photos by Jeanette Gillespie



Robin and Grant Mitchell and grandson Ryan.



Stacey and Colin and baby Ryan.



Jeanette Gillespie and Duncan Brown.



Bruce Gillespie and Elaine Cochrane.



Sally Yeoland — thanks for being with us on the day, Sally.



My cousin Barbara, her husband Alan Condron, and Pastor Mal Geizendanner, who conducted Mum's funeral service.



My cousin Brian, and his mother, my Auntie Daisy, last of her generation of Triplets.



My cousin Bob Daff and his wife Maureen.