

My story

1930

I was born at "Ewell Vineyards" near Glenelg, South Australia and had one brother, Robert. We lived there with dogs, ponies, cats, ducks, kangaroos and koalas. There was also a house cow and occasionally a pig which was fattened and killed.

Rupe, the old gardener, came every morning and milked the cow, fed the animals (not the horses), chopped wood and took it into the fireplaces. Rupe also did the same work at Sid Hamilton's, except for a cow and animals, and he worked for Hamiltons for 60 years, mainly looking after Clydesdale horses, ploughs and trolleys. There was Tingy, a black girl who looked after Robert and I, and did house work and cooking. Clara came each week and did the washing, ironing and mangling.

Mother rode and showed horses. I rode from the age of 4 and my first pony was called Tuck. Robert rode Tuck to Woodlands to school, and he was stabled there for the day before being ridden home again after school. He also rode him to Morphettville later and went up to school at Queens School. There were stables at the general store at Morphettville in those days.

Mum mainly had hunters and jumpers and did not compete in hack classes. She had a very special horse called Skipper. He was a black, and was really an idol of the public and won everything at the Royal Show and local shows. Jack Robin was another jumper. He never took the place of Skipper, but he did quite well. She also had a grey mare temporarily whose name I've forgotten, but she was very tall and difficult to get a bridle on – no doubt badly treated and handled by a previous owner. Old Mr Sheidow from Tapleys Hills was trying to sell her to Mum. Ab McDonald, a horse trainer at Morphettville, would exercise his horses past the stables at "Ewell" and would stop and help Mum with this mare.

After Tuck, my special pony, was Toy, a lovely bay pony 12.2 hands high, and I always rode him in pony hack and riding classes. I started riding him when I was 7 years old and did so until I was 15. I rode other people's ponies at shows for them, too.

We had a funny experience with a small Shetland skewbald pony who always went in harness – his owner, Joyce Hecker of Brighton, had infantile paralysis as a younger child and when she recovered she was unable to ride, so always drove in her trap. Barb Ashton and I always rode him for her at the Royal Shows and he would pig all the way around the ring.

At this stage, I went to Woodlands Kindergarten at Glenelg and I can always remember waiting and waiting for Mum to pick me up. She was always late and sometimes, when all the boarders had gone into the boarding house, I would walk home as I didn't want to be by myself at school.

I went to England with the parents in 1936-1937, and Robert was left home with Tingy, and who else, I don't know. I went to school in England and was kept in for laughing like an Australian.

At this stage, my parents were not getting on so well. Eric drinking too much and Mum dashing about too, so they divorced. Robert was sent to Saints as a boarder and I stayed with Mum. At first we had a tiny flat in St Peters (a suburb). I remember my mother waking in the night crying out and feeling me in bed to see if I was still there. There was quite a lot of trouble over who had which child and money, of course. Robert stayed with Dad and Mum and I went to Melbourne and stayed with Jean Burgoyne (a sister of Aunt Girt's) and Aunty Jean was in the process of divorcing Dr Ian McNeil, her then husband, and she was sending off furniture little by little!

We briefly moved to a bed-sit and I'm not sure where it was in Melbourne, and then to a very nice flat in Murphy Street, South Yarra, called "Mayfield". When I go to Melbourne, I go to see it again.

There was a dear old gardener/caretaker for the flats called Barclay, and Mother was always late. He would take me home with him at dark to his little house, it underneath the Railway line near Punt Road, and he and his wife were very good to me. Robert would write to me at the Crest Pantom Hills School, where I was a boarder, as I was rather pale etc and ask where Mum was. I would write back and say I didn't know as she hadn't visited on visiting days for ages. After leaving the Crest, I went to St Catherines as a day girl. It was in Heyington Place, Toorak, and was a beautiful school. There I met Ruth de Winter, Elizabeth Richards and Catherine Anne Aikman, who I still see when I go to Brisbane. The Aikmans had a huge house on the corner of Heyington Place, and they were very good to me, as were the de Winters and the Richards. Also, Ann Berriman was a good friend and now lives in Adelaide married to Bill Wills.

Robert and David Harvey used to come over and stay at "Mayfield" during winter holidays, but this was never very successful.

Every Christmas holidays, we would come to Adelaide at stay at Cape Jervis Station in the Cottage. Also, Robert and David Harvey and pony Toy were there. Another holiday was on Kangaroo Island with Mum, Robert, Harv, me and Di, and flew in a Dragon Rapide. I'm not sure if that was 1937 or 1939.

We also stayed another Christmas holiday at the Goolwa Hotel and the Corio Hotel. Toy always came over from Cape Jervis and was stabled at the Hotels where they all had stables in those days. Aunt Nancy also had a dear little cottage next to where Napier Birks had a large place on the Goolwa Lakes.

I was at St Catherines for two or three years, and the last year, as a boarder, and then came back to Adelaide as a boarder at Girton in 1941 until the end of 1947. There I met many super girls and particularly, Judy Anne Ingoldby, who has been a life long friend.

In the meantime, Mum, with the help of Jack Harvey, had been looking for a property. The Harveys of One Tree Hill were originally friends of Robert's, particularly David, and we all became friends. After

looking at many properties, she bought at Yankalilla in 1940 and called it "Wychwood". It was Aunt Nancy Burton (Hamilton) who helped her name it. I think Sid Ayres helped her financially and loaned her money but when he died his estate discovered this and so Vi McEacheran came to the rescue financially.

Mother milked cows when she first went to Wychwood, and later just fattened lambs. She had an old pensioner cripple who milked the cows with her and we called him Monkey, as he was up to many tricks.

I would come home for school holidays and it was great to have Toy, dogs and cats again.

Barb Ashton and I rode from Wychwood to Cape Jervis and stayed with Vi and Aunty Mac and had great fun riding to the beach on our ponies, specially the Fishery Beach, which was part of Cape Jervis Station then and entirely private.

By now, I rode "Gaiety", and one day we were swimming at the Fishery Beach. It was a hot, humid and thundery day, and when the storm broke, the ponies pulled away from the bushes we had tied them to. We were running all over the beach trying to catch them with nothing on.

We had a great time, and one Sunday, when Vi and Aunty Mac had gone to church, we tried on all Vi's hats.

Michael also rode to Cape Jervis one holiday with me. He stayed a lot at Wychwood and he and I watered all the pines on the driveway (from the gate) a lot with the water tank on the horse and cart. Judy Ann would also ride down to Wychwood on "Raffles" and stay.

At this time, Dad started coming down to Wychwood again, and so the next thing, I became a day girl for the last year at Girton, as my parents had remarried. Robert and I really know nothing about it, but Aunt Nancy said they were only divorced for about two years. So we lived again at "Ewell".

I used to ride my bike to Morphetville and catch the tram to Victoria Square and walk to Grenfell Street and catch the tram to Kensington Park.

During my last year of boarding school at Girton, on a Sunday after church, of course, my mother picked me up and we went down to Ewell. There I had to sign a lot of legal papers in the presence of a lawyer (Ernest Williamson, I think). My mother had agreed to remarry Eric if he made shares of a company within Ewell Vineyards Winery to me and it was called Dunrobin. Eric had the controlling share.

I remember, when a day girl for a year, Robert had to drive me to the tram when it rained, but when I came home I had to walk home!

While at Girton, I won running cups in all sections and was in the A tennis and basketball teams. I left school in 1947 and as it was just after the war, all the parents gave coming out dances for their daughters, so in July, I had a dance with Robert who was 21. It was 1948.

From then on, Robert and I went to a dance almost every weekend from June to August. That year, I did ballet at Joanne Priest's Studio and met Rosalie Ann Taylor. I wanted to do extra lessons in teaching riding or phys ed, but Mum wouldn't hear of it, so she sent me off nursing. Dord & I went together and hated it. However, looking back, it was a help with ill babies in the bush.

After two years of nursing, Aunty Girt saved me and off I went to Wellington, New Zealand, and stayed for six months. I had a marvellous time – the English Navy was in Wellington and also with Wellington being the political capital of New Zealand, Charles Sutherland and Aunty Girt went to all the embassy parties and took me.

I had met John before I went to New Zealand, and mother kept writing and saying I must come home, but I wasn't in any hurry. I did come home and landed at Parafield, got the bus into North Terrace and a taxi to Ewell. It was about 7.15 pm, Eric and Mum's dinner hour, when I got home.

John and I were engaged in 1951 and married in 1952 and lived happily ever after.

Suzanne McTaggart (nee Hamilton) (mother Doreen Hamilton nee Chambers) (sister of Robert Hamilton)

2008