

**I Want  
to be a  
Patternmaker**

*a memoir*

**John Looker**

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# Contents

Introduction: What a Patternmaker Does	vii
Preface	ix
Chapter 1 Early History	1
Chapter 2 School and Ears	7
Chapter 3 Dad Joins the Army	13
Chapter 4 Flaky Entrance to a New School	21
Chapter 5 Practical Subjects at Last	27
Chapter 6 My Apprenticeship Starts	37
Chapter 7 Finding my Way in the Workshop	41
Chapter 8 Mundane and Interesting Jobs	49
Chapter 9 Learning to Dance	53
Chapter 10 National Service	57
Chapter 11 Apprenticeship Schooling	63
Chapter 12 On my way to England	69
Chapter 13 Sailing the Suez	75
Chapter 14 Finding my Relations	81
Chapter 15 Car Work in Coventry and Oxford	89

Chapter 16	Travels on my Excelsior	97
Chapter 17	Landladies and Getting Married	107
Chapter 18	Sailing Home	115
Chapter 19	Working for the General	127
Chapter 20	Sponsoring Migrants	135
Chapter 21	Alf Meets a Possum	145
Chapter 22	A Start in the High Schools	153
Chapter 23	Moving to the Country	163
Chapter 24	Could I Teach my Trade?	171
Chapter 25	I Can't Ski	175
Chapter 26	I Join RMIT	183
Chapter 27	Back to School	187
Chapter 28	My Marine Period	197
Chapter 29	Finally, a Bachelor of Arts	203
Chapter 30	Lois Marries and I travel to the USA	207
Chapter 31	Lincoln, Nebraska	219
Chapter 32	A Patternmaking School in Boston	225
Chapter 33	Writing Text Books	229
Chapter 34	A Bus Trip to Perth	237
Chapter 35	My Retirement Lathe	243

Chapter 36	Leaving Springvale	249
Chapter 37	Learning about CNC	257
Chapter 38	Retirement	265
Chapter 39	World Trip	275
Chapter 40	Coach Tour of Europe	283
Chapter 41	My Second USA Trip	293
Chapter 42	Part Time Work	301
Chapter 43	Working with Syd, Paul and John	305
Chapter 44	Landslip on my Workshop	311
Chapter 45	Experimental Engine Work	329
Chapter 46	Mum Takes a Drink	337
Chapter 47	False Whisky	343
Chapter 48	Cradle Mountain Walk	349
Chapter 49	Our Friend Elma Takes her Leave	359
Chapter 50	Master for the Last Time	363
Chapter 51	Getting Along with Len	369
Chapter 52	A Ship's Wheel for the Doctor	375
Chapter 53	A Grandmother Clock for Lois	381
Chapter 54	Moving to Wynyard in Tasmania	389
Chapter 55	Our Grandchildren	395



## Introduction:

# What a Patternmaker Does

**A**n engineering patternmaker is one who produces a tool (called a pattern) for a foundry to produce a casting in whichever metal the customer requires. For ease of work, the patterns are made of wood and if many castings are required, metal or resin patterns are then made from the wood master.

The moulding process used by the moulder in a foundry requires him to pack sand around the pattern inside an open metal box. The pattern is then withdrawn from the sand mould, and the cavity left behind is filled with molten metal to make a casting.

To allow the pattern to be withdrawn from the mould, all vertical surfaces must have taper (increasing in size from top to bottom) so as to allow a clean lift. If there is any undercut part the mould would be destroyed.

This method produces the outside shape of a casting. However, in almost all cases there needs to be an internal shape, giving a wall thickness. To achieve this, a corebox is made by the patternmaker. This box, when filled with sand by the coremaker

(another branch of moulding) and set hard, gives a male shape of the internal form of the casting. This core has to be accurately placed in the mould before any metal is poured into the cavity. For this to happen, the corebox is usually made longer and extra mating pieces included on the pattern. These are called coreprints, forming cavities in the mould to support the cores. Some moulds require multiple cores, even fitting within each other.

If the designed casting will not mould, due to undercuts, the patternmaker has to use the core method to reproduce those problem parts in core. This means that sometimes a pattern looks very different to the final casting, due to external coreprints. Patterns have to be made accurately and with dry stable timber. They must also be made oversize to allow for contraction as the casting cools to ambient temperature.



# Preface

I truly wish that one of my ancestors had written an account of their lives. I don't know if it would shed any light on any characteristics that I might have, but it would be interesting to know.

It is with this view that I have written about my life in order that any grandchildren or future family members who might want to delve into the life and times of Jean and I, can do so.

Changes in technology and living conditions have been greater in my lifetime than any previous period in history. If my grandfather Charlie was alive today, he would be amazed at the changes in lifestyle and opportunities that are available now. When I started work in the patternshop that my grandfather had retired from only a few short years previously, the means of working and workshop machinery was the same as when he first started work over 50 years before me. Admittedly, his wages were less and his hours of work were much longer but since that time the changes have been tremendous.

When I worked in England, I carved full sized car models to shape by hand in mahogany. Now, all such die work is carried out by computer controlled machines; there is not a piece of timber in sight. Changes have been monumental, on the scale of the industrial revolution in Britain. For myself, I am happy to have spent some of my working life in the, 'Hands-on', period.

The author George Orwell once said, 'People, who write autobiographies only put in the good bits and leave out anything against the author'. What I have written are the memories of what my life was like, as I lived it and have seen it through my eyes. Others may well have seen it differently; that is fine because that is the nature of people.

I have relied not only on a good memory, but I am assisted by the many diaries I have kept over time.

Writing this memoir has allowed me to reflect and revisit many of the things that have happened in my lifetime and, when you read this, you will understand that not everything went according to plan. There have been some miscalculations such as when I went snow skiing and nearly drowned. Fortunately, I didn't and I learned a valuable lesson from the episode and never looked at another pair of skis.

I have taken the view from all that I have done, many a lesson has been learned, and my mistakes have made me what I am today. My advice to you, if you make an error, just accept it, fix it if you can and as the saying goes, 'Move on'.

I hope you enjoy reading my Memoir; I certainly have enjoyed writing it.

## Chapter 1

# Early History

I was born in Hughesdale in Victoria, Australia, on March 9th, 1934, the first born of my English parents, Lionel Kenneth and Doris May Looker. Of course, one's history doesn't start at birth; it has much to do with the events leading up to that time - particularly the experiences of my parents and grandparents.

On my father's side, his mother, Sarah, was born in England on the 13th April, 1875. She was seventh in a family of nine children, six girls and three boys. Sarah met my grandfather, Charles Lawrence Looker (who had two sisters, Rose and Ada), and they married at St. Johns Anglican Church in Newbury, England, on August 7th 1905. They had two sons, Lionel, my father, who was born on April 24th, 1908 and Jack Vernon, born January 24th 1912. Jack's life was a short one, and he died on June 10th 1938. However, I do remember seeing him when I was about four years old.

Sarah and Charles Looker left London with their two sons on a ship bound for Australia on August 2nd 1912. They landed in Melbourne and stayed in the Oakleigh area. They arrived on September 12th and during their stay my father attended the primary school. My grandfather found work as an engineering patternmaker, a trade he was apprenticed to for seven years in England. His apprenticeship years were all about learning and very little pay. In fact, he told me that he received no pay in his first year. My father said that his father started work by 6.00 am, and that it was his job to take him his breakfast at the patternshop before going to school. This was at a time after the family had returned to England. On July 11th, 1914 the family boarded a ship in Melbourne and returned to London. They arrived there on August 30th, right at the start of the First World War.

They spent some time in England before again returning to Australia. My father wanted to become a patternmaker like his father, but that was not to be. That may have been due to cost, as my great grandfather had to pay 100 pounds for his son, Charles, to enter his apprenticeship. My father became apprenticed to the grocery trade with International Stores in England.

My mother and father courted in Newbury, England. However, my mother, Doris, was born in London on November 21st 1909, the eldest of three children. Her sister, Evelyn Violet, was born on May 23rd 1914 and then Maurice John (always called John) was born on July 20th 1920. Mum's mother, Eliza Louisa Palmer was born on February 3rd 1884. I remember her as not very tall and a hard worker. She met John Ager, born September 10th 1886, and they married at St. Mathews Anglican Church, Willesden, London, on December 26th 1908. They were business people and at one stage had a plant nursery and then a laundry. It was hard work and the children were expected to do

their share. Eliza Louisa (called Louisa) was reckoned to be the driving force behind each enterprise.

Returning to the Looker side of the family, Sarah, Charles and family sailed from London again on October 6th 1927 and arrived in Melbourne once more on November 13th. This time they stayed and bought a house at 1 Hotham Street in Hughesdale, a suburb of Melbourne. My father was 19 when he arrived in Australia this time. The next year, 1928, my mother, who was 19 by this time, left her family in Leamington Spa and travelled on her own to Melbourne by ship to marry her fiancé, Lionel. She boarded at 1 Hotham Street and went to work in a laundry at St. Albans.

Mum told me some stories about her voyage to Australia. She said someone on board had a recording of the 'Teddy Bears Picnic,' which he played constantly on a wind-up gramophone. She did not want to hear that tune ever again. When the ship reached Perth, she went ashore with a girlfriend she had met during the voyage. The pair went to meet and stay the day with relatives of this girlfriend. Somehow there was a mix-up in the time they expected the ship to sail. When they arrived at the port of Fremantle, it was to see the ship on its way in the distance. They had to find a small boat to take them to the ship, which stopped, and they had to climb a rope ladder to climb aboard. I believe her greatest concern was to find she had tar on her light coloured dress.

Mum and Dad were married at Holy Trinity church in Oakleigh on January 9th, 1932. Mum continued to work and Dad worked at a grocery store in Malvern. When I was born some two years later, Mum and Dad were still living with his parents at Hotham Street. When I was 18 months old the three of us moved to a rented house in Tamar Grove in what was called

'The Broadway' in Oakleigh. Mum was very keen to make this move, particularly as I was a noisy baby, crying most nights. Dad had his job, but his father, Charles, could only find occasional work in his trade of patternmaking. I was told that he would sometimes receive a telegram from a large engineering works, Ruwolts, in Richmond, to say there was work to make a pattern. When the pattern was finished, so was his employment until the next time. Such was life for many during the depression period of the 1930s.

After the short stint at Tamar Grove, the offer of a house in Calembeena Avenue, Oakleigh, was a major step forward. It was owned by the State Bank and due to the depression; the occupiers could not keep up the payments. The bank painted the interior of the house while we were in it. This was the home I grew up in, and it was not sold until some 25 years later.

For my earliest memory, I was being bathed in a tin bath on the kitchen table. Dad's brother, Jack, came to visit us. I would have been about four years old, and it would have been a short time before he died. It is the only time that I remember him. I was told that he had an interest in classical music, the same as I do. He did teach piano at Hotham Street, but Nana was not keen on the idea. I was told that he learnt to play the organ under Doctor Floyd on the St. Paul's Cathedral organ in Melbourne. Doctor Floyd was a well-known musician and was often heard on the radio. In his later years, he gave school broadcasts for students. I was interested in them, but my classmates weren't.

My next early memory brings me to the age of five in 1939. This was a time of a changing world. The depression was ending and World War II was declared in September of that year. But for me, it was a mastoid problem in my right ear. Although I have no memory of the events leading up to being admitted to the

Eye and Ear Hospital in East Melbourne, I do remember being in a hospital bed there. My parents later told me that I was put in a men's ward as there was no room in the children's ward. I remember seeing green lights set in the floor. They must have been for the night staff to find their way about without disturbing the patients. I also remember my grandmother (Nana) arriving in the daytime with a small pair of scissors to tease away and cut off pieces of sticking plaster from around my ear and the top of my head. I believe it was an operation that was performed with very little time to spare before the condition became meningitis.

Incidentally, there was a coincidence here as a girl, Elaine Wilson, who lived in Hughesdale, suffered the same condition and was operated on by the same surgeon. Unfortunately for him, he received a splinter from the infected bone in his eye. Elaine was some five months younger than me, and I did not know of her then, but I did meet her as a teenager and we spent a lot of time in each other's company.

*John Looker - I Want to be a Patternmaker*



## Chapter 2

# School and Ears

The time I am writing about, 1939, our family was now complete with the addition of my two sisters. June Patricia was born on June 13th 1936. Perhaps because she was born a winter baby, she was certainly tougher than I was and looked after my interests on many occasions. June did suffer from asthma, but when she was about three years old our doctor (Dr. Mulchay) was called because she was quite sick. He told Mum that June told him all she really wanted was a stew for lunch. Such a thing seemed well out of place, but the doctor said that perhaps she should give it to her. She did and June recovered very quickly.

Joan Elizabeth was born nearly two years later on May 22nd, 1938. I don't remember Joan having any illnesses apart from the usual childhood complaints from which we all suffered; whooping cough, chicken pox and other things. I suppose that because I was the eldest and a male, I should have been helping to look after the two girls. However, in fact, they were quite capable of looking after themselves. In those early times June

and I looked on Joan as a whinger, but of course it was us trying to be superior and keeping secrets to ourselves, which was a situation not unknown in families.

I started primary school in February 1940, a month before I was six years old. It was called the Hughesdale State School, and I could go there by walking the length of our street, across some waste ground and directly in the rear entrance gate. It was a distance of about 600 metres. I made a somewhat shaky start on my first day. The way my mother told the story, when we were let out at morning recess, I walked straight home. I believe she walked me back again.

Although I had the mastoid operation on my right ear in 1939, I was plagued with troubles with my left ear until I was ten. Each winter, starting around the beginning of June the ear would start a continuous discharge, and I would have to attend the outpatients department at the Eye and Ear Hospital. Mum soon learned the way that the system worked. We would walk to the Oakleigh railway station (about 1km) and take the train to the city. A tram up to Collins Street would take us directly to the hospital. Mum would hand my hospital card to the receptionist and as this was in the morning, we were free until 2.30 in the afternoon. The trick was to put the card in as soon as possible as the patients were dealt with in strict rotation.

We then went back down the Collins Street hill to Swanston Street and into the downstairs eatery at Coles. They had swivel chairs and I usually had a treat of a meat pie. At times we were there daily and Mum became known to the waitresses. Then it was back again to the hospital where we sat on long forms without backs, and waited for our turn to be called to the doctor. I remember the doctors had round chrome plated discs with a small hole to see through in the centre. These arrangements

were attached to the head with a band. My impression was that they treated you rather roughly, but I suppose they didn't have much to be joyful about.

The usual procedure was for the doctor to pull out of the ear a long length of tape which had been soaked in some dark brown liquid. After some prodding around with a probe the doctor would reverse the procedure and pack in another length of tape. After the treatment, it was down the hill again to Flinders Street Station and a train back to Oakleigh. I must have looked a sight as I wore a scarf around my head and tied under my chin. My memory of it was that it was a black and grey one with squares of each colour. Much of this happened while Dad was away in the army and overseas on the Island of Bougainville. This, of course, put a lot of pressure on Mum as she had my two sisters to look after as well as anything to do with the house. I am sure the neighbours helped out on hospital visit days.

On the non-hospital days Mum had to be the doctor. At least twice a day I would have to go into the dining room and lay my head on the polished Blackwood table while Mum put drops in my ear. The final drops were peroxide, and it felt like there was an explosion taking place inside the ear. To this day, I can remember the noise and rumbling that took place over 70 years ago. In 1944 it appeared that I would require an operation on my left ear, but I was saved by a new drug: penicillin. It had been developed during the war, and it stopped my ear problems straight away. How fortunate I was!

When June started school it was a great help to me. She was the strong one while I was the timid one. With a scarf around my head during the winter I must have appeared an easy mark to the other students, but June often came to my rescue. She was only small, but she had a way about her that soon put a brake on the older boys attacking her brother.

Joan, being the youngest, had a different schooling. Kindergartens were becoming popular as the first step before grade one of the primary school. The kindergarten was in a hall in Holy Trinity Church in Oakleigh. Ironically this was the church that Mum and Dad were married in, although that was in 1932. This was now wartime, 1942, and Joan at four years of age went on a bus each morning to her kindergarten. I remember thinking that big changes were taking place when my youngest sister, at four years of age goes on a bus on her own and travels about three kilometres each way. Of course, Mum took her to the bus and picked her up.

Still, at about this time I did have confidence to travel to the city by train by myself. As this was wartime Mum made all our clothes even though she needed coupons to purchase the materials. There were times when she was busy making clothes; she would send me to Melbourne to buy materials. The shop was called 'Cleggs' and I had specific instructions as to what to buy. I think it was from these times that I developed an interest in various materials and their names. I had watched Mum feeling material between her fingers before she purchased, and I developed the same manner.

Dad was working at Crooks National Stores, grocers, as manager of their Bentleigh store up to early 1942. He sometimes dinked me there on his bicycle on a Saturday morning. It would have been a fair old job for him as it was about half an hour each way at least. I did learn some of the methods of the old time grocers before the introduction of self-service. Customers would enter the shop and often sit on a stool provided at the counter. They would then list the items they wished to purchase and the grocer would write this down on a docket of which there was a carbon copy. When they had completed their order the costs were added up, and a time was negotiated for the delivery of

said items. These would usually be delivered in a potato box. It never ceased to amaze me how Dad could add up a bill with such speed. It was of course in the days of pounds, shillings and pence. The pence also included halfpennies as well. By this time farthings (half a halfpenny) were not used in Australia. However, Dad would just run his pencil up each column of figures, as if he was drawing a line and entering the total in each as he went. He was quicker than the amounts could be entered into a calculator.

There were a lot of interesting things that took place in a grocer's shop. For instance, the butter would arrive in a wooden butter box, fastened with wire. Once the wire was broken open, the block of butter, which was a cube about 300mm and covered in greaseproof butter paper, was then placed on a marble slab behind some muslin curtains. Within this small cubicle was a jug of water, which contained wooden butter pats. These items had handles and the main section had grooves so as to pat the butter cut from the slab. The company advertised itself as having 'best butter' and Dad prided himself in cutting the customer's order precisely - with no bits added to make up the weight. The measuring was done on a balance scale, and I do remember cheese being cut and weighed in this way except that the cheese was cut with a wire on the marble slab. Mum would buy our groceries from the same company, but locally. Dad was not happy with the local chap's cutting of the butter, which he said had a poultice plastered on it.

I would go out to the back of the shop and weigh up goods that came in bulk. These were mostly potatoes and sugar. The paper bags had to be folded a certain way to seal the contents. I didn't always manage this well and Dad had to refold some of them. There was a beautiful dog out the back, an Irish Red Setter called Rusty. I didn't realize it at the time, but he was there primarily to keep the rats at bay - not just for me to play with.

The butter boxes were made from thin pine and not much use for anything else. However, dates came in boxes made of pine about 12mm thick. Dad decided that he could make use of this material to reseat some of the dining room chairs where the upholstery was well worn. It was not an easy job as the timber had sticky dates clinging to it despite the paper wrapping. Dad planed these pieces with a wooden 'boat plane' which belonged to his father. We had a small shed at the back of our house, which would be lucky to be two metres square. The outside was weatherboard, but the pieces were only off cuts and no longer than 40 centimetres long. They came from a mill in East Oakleigh, later to be called Huntingdale. Uncle Claude worked there. He had married Rose, a sister of Dad's father, Charles. Claude would bring a few pieces, whenever he could and the shed was gradually built over time. I have no memory of it being built, but Dad told me about it.

Returning to the pieces of the date box, I do remember the episode and how the throat of the plane kept jamming with the sticky mess. Dad spent all his spare time at this task in this very small shed, with barely enough room to do the planing. When Dad attached the finished pieces to the chairs they gave a reasonably flat surface, even though each piece was only about 80mm wide and the thickness had reduced with planing. The trouble was that when anyone sat on one of these chairs the pieces would flex against each other. The result was of course that it pinched your bum! Once you were settled on one of these 'date box' chairs you had to keep still, or it would pinch you. Dad took a lot of stick over this, but the chairs lasted some time, and the material cost was nil.

## Chapter 3

# Dad Joins the Army

I couldn't say that my primary school days in the 1940s were happy times. I was not really interested in sport, but any time that I could spend outside the classroom I deemed well worth it. I was tall and could run fairly fast; I often made the team for sprints, relays, even the school team. When the opportunity came to learn the drums for the school marching band, I not only enjoyed it, but it meant being let out of class for the first hour on a Monday morning.

I still remember the teachers. In the first grade was Miss Rule and then came Miss McDonald, a taller woman than Miss Rule, and I think I was in her class for two years. Next was Miss Martin, a somewhat short and rotund lady. Her brother owned the shoe shop in Atherton Road, Oakleigh. She tried valiantly to teach us to parse a sentence into its various parts. I am sure some of the class understood it, but I certainly didn't.

She did do something for the boys in the class. Each of us was provided with a piece of wood with a design on it. We were to colour in the figure and then polish it with shellac, using the

rubbing method. I have since wondered whether her brother may have influenced her in this. Up to this time, all the teachers were female and the reason, to some extent, would have been the fact that it was wartime and the males were in the services. However, my next teacher was a Mr. Keyes, an older teacher, possibly brought back from retirement. I found him a fair man, but he could not teach me to understand arithmetic.

My last year at primary school was the sixth grade in 1945. The previous year the Government Housing Commission decided to build 100 houses on the land we used to cross from the end of our street to the school gate. They were called Commission Homes, and they were prefabricated from reinforced concrete. The walls were poured as a slab on a horizontal platform. They were lifted into position by crane and then concrete was poured into a metal former at the intersection of two walls. I was very interested to see how the whole procedure worked. The Government must have been pretty sure at this stage that the allies were going to win the war and that when those in the services returned home, there would be a housing shortage, which there was.

The first stage of this operation was to put a large number of stumps in the ground. These were concrete and although we were told not to touch them, we used to step from the top of one stump to the next. Of course the inevitable happened, and I slipped off one stump and fell forward, hitting my head on the stump in front. I was lucky not to sustain any permanent damage from it. Soon after that the whole area was out of bounds, and we had to walk down a lane, Long Place, and then along Dallas Avenue to school; it added to the journey.

The time during each winter that I was off school was not wasted. Mum taught me to do many things. I did cooking and found



that I could make quite good scones and making the porridge in the mornings became my job. Next, Mum taught me to knit, and I was soon making pairs of socks on four needles. She helped with turning the heel, but I soon managed that and even casting off.

When I was eight years old I remember Dad polishing his shoes while resting them on a kitchen chair, and he was saying to Mum that he had decided to join up in the army. Mum was devastated and told him he shouldn't go as it was his job to look after her and us three children. My recollection is that the way the war was going, Dad considered that he would be called up anyway, and he would rather volunteer than that.

He enlisted on the 23rd April, 1942 and wasn't discharged until 29th November, 1945, a total of 1,327 days. I am sure Mum keenly felt every one of them. His initial training was at Mount Martha and Mum took me to see him one Sunday. We had to travel to Frankston first by train and then by bus. Dad was sharing a tent with another chap, and he engaged me in conversation about his rifle and pack while Mum and Dad went off by themselves. Next, he went for further training in Queensland and joined a signal unit. This had some interest for him as he was always interested in radio. He learnt more about that and soon became proficient in sending and receiving Morse code.

He didn't know where he would be sent in Australia, so he drew a large map of the country on a sheet of white card and listed likely places on it. He gave each place a number and so when Mum received a letter, she noted the number he quoted and was therefore, able to know where he was. All mail was censored; he couldn't say where he was. He told me on one occasion that while he was on a troop train in Queensland the soldiers managed to

steal a couple of cases of tinned fruit. The military police tried to uncover the plot, but they never found the culprits or the missing fruit. I suppose any distraction from the monotony of troop train travel would seem worthwhile.

At some stage while in Queensland his CO happened to be a chap who had married a cousin of his, Hilda. She was the daughter of Ada, Dad's father's sister. Although the family (Kuring) lived in Hughesdale, within walking distance of home, Dad took no interest in Ray Kuring and to my knowledge never visited. During Dad's time in Queensland he was driving an army jeep and lost control of it in making a turn and smashed into a pub door. Ray, being his CO, had to deal with the publican. I can imagine Dad having unkind thoughts about it all.

Dad was then posted to New Guinea, and his final posting was to the Island of Bougainville. He told me that the US troops would set up to show movies in a jungle clearing. He said that the Japanese used to gather in the dark at the edge of the clearing to watch the pictures.

Life was hard for Mum while Dad was away. Being the eldest I tried to help as much as possible. I would look after and feed the chooks (stupid things). They were forever escaping and had to be chased back to the hen house. I even chopped off their heads when Mum wanted one for dinner. It was not something that I was ever happy about, but the neighbours did it, and I found it was expected of me. I used to dig garden beds in the back yard, generally to grow onions.

In our washhouse, we had a large copper which was bricked in, with a fireplace underneath. Mum lit a fire each Monday morning and the clothes were put in and left to boil. She used a wooden copper stick to retrieve the hot clothes and deposit them into one of the twin concrete troughs. Next, the clothes

were put through a hand wringer, which was clamped between the two troughs. Some energy was needed to turn the handle of the wringer, which happened to be my job.

The washing was then hung out in the yard on long parallel lines and elevated with a wooden prop. The next thing was to drain the water out of the copper, one saucepan at a time. Sometimes the water was not wasted and was carried through the house and into the bath. Of course the water lost much of its heat in the process, and I can still picture the water as a light brown gluggy substance. The dirty clothes accounted for its colour, and the washing soap brought about a highly viscous liquid. I think I was last in the family to hop into the bath, but I only had to pull the plug to release the water instead of using a saucepan and bucket.

There were occasions though when we used the water heater above the bath. It was called a 'Little Hero' and burnt wood as fuel. It was not an easy job to get it going, but often the problem was to stop it. The water would boil and the whole unit would vibrate as if it would rocket up into space. We would leave the bathroom fast, regardless of whether we had clothes on or not and wait for our 'Little Hero' to settle down.

Mum made friends with a lady who lived at the back of us. She was Welsh and her name was Doris Letts. Her husband had died and she looked after her brother with his two girls, Kathleen and Marion as well as her own daughter, Joan. It was Joan, who was very good to me, although she was probably eight years older than me. She took an interest in what I was doing, and as I was very shy, it became important to me that such a pretty girl would take an interest in what I did. She even took me to the pictures at the Plaza cinema in Oakleigh one night when I would have been about 10 years old. I wore a pair of long

trousers that night for the first time. They had belonged to a boy called Ivan, who lived in the house next door to my Nana in Hotham Street; I thought going out to the pictures with Joan was better than Christmas.

Of course, going to the pictures on a Saturday afternoon for the matinee at the Paramount cinema was a regular treat. I went with our next door neighbour, Alex McLennan and the boy over the road, Don Heathcote. We watched cowboy pictures as well as a serial. One of them was Captain Midnight and there was nothing he could not do. I do remember being annoyed when the serial started, to find the situation the hero was in the previous week was now altered so that he could escape. I thought that was cheating, but of course it got us all back again the next week. The entrance cost was one shilling and Mum always managed to find that for me.

Mum did seem to manage alright, but there was one occasion when Dad was declared to be absent without leave (AWOL). The first Mum knew of this was when her money paid every payday at the post office ceased. I was with Mum when she confronted the clerk at the post office, and I remember feeling sorry for him. Mum really got stuck into him and said it had to be a mistake and how was she to manage herself and three children without any money. Apparently, Dad had been transferred to another unit, and the paper work had not caught up. The situation was resolved but I don't know how long it took; we children were certainly happy that Mum was back to her old self again.

During the time that Dad was away, Mum was a regular churchgoer at the Emanuel Church of England. I became a choir boy until my voice broke. Sundays were largely filled up with Sunday school in the morning and then church at four in the afternoon. Normally, this would have been held in the

early evening, but during wartime, there was little street lighting when the sun went down. I had to wear a surplice and cassock as a choir boy and on occasions I was asked to be in the choir at the big church, Holy Trinity, in Oakleigh. This was a big deal as they had a proper electric organ, not one that you had to pump the bellows with your feet as you played. They also had a choir mistress. She was very strict and she was not keen on having me foisted upon her, and she didn't expect me to actually sing.

During winter time the little church creaked and groaned as the wind moved it. The church had no permanent ministers and a number of young ministers in training at a college in Melbourne took turns to visit each Sunday. Because it wasn't realistic for them to do a morning service (which I attended now and then), return to the city to have lunch and return again in the afternoon and go back after the service, the ladies of the church provided them with a meal and a place to rest in the afternoon. Mum did this on a number of occasions, but soon found that the neighbours thought this offer of charity was not really acceptable behaviour while her husband was away. Mum continued to do this anyway, well knowing that her husband was overseas in the fighting to defend Australia, whereas all of her neighbours' husbands were still at home. All of us children enjoyed having a visitor for lunch on a Sunday. It was a different conversation to what we were used to.

The neighbours did help us out in different ways. Hec McLennan, next door, worked at a shoe store in Prahran. I wore out the soles of my shoes very quickly and Hec took over the job of keeping the families' shoes soled, heeled and with metal tips on the toes and heels. I don't think Mum and my two sisters gave him much work, but I certainly did. As both my feet leaned inwards, I scuffed that side of my shoes very quickly. I was with Mum at one time when he handed the latest repair of my shoes over

the fence, and he commented that he had never known anyone wear out shoe leather like I did.

Mrs Heathcote, who lived in the house opposite, took me and her son, Don, to the football on some Saturdays during the season. Their family were all interested in the North Melbourne Club, and those were the ones that we went to see. When we went to the North Melbourne ground we would wait outside the players' rooms to see them and shout encouragement. I was never a sporting person, but I did appreciate the time, money and effort to entertain me. We always travelled by train and tram, and it was usually well and truly dark by the time we arrived back home.