

1/59 Fifth Street

Bicton 6157

8.3.07

Dear Bob and Chris,

This has taken me much longer than I had planned it to, but at last I have finished it. I can't guarantee that this is accurate, but it's how I remember it all. Probably Tom would know more because he was older, but he won't write his memories down. Caught at the right moment he is very interesting, but the problem is getting him going.

You will have to put up with my erratic writing, because along with reverse street parking I don't compute! Added to which I have inherited the family tremor, and sometimes my hand refuses to work.

Chris, I was so sorry when I heard of your loss of **Waverley**, I only met her once at Pat's, and I thought she was pretty special.

Pat seemed very happy with her new abode and is leading a very social life.

With best wishes. Love, Meg.

The Wiese family and my mother's family, the Leishmans, and later my father, when he took over Linton in 1922, were neighbours and close friends from their first settlement.

My grandfather, Matthew Leishman took on the farm in 1905, having left a legacy from his father, a Church of Scotland minister of Linton Parish in Scotland, hence the name of the farm.

A Mr English, who had another man had taken up the farm six months before, had planted an orchard and started to build a house.

My grandfather had no experience of farming and having borrowed money of a high rate of interest from Sir Joshua Simmonds in South Australia. A financier, often the initial flutter had trouble making ends meet. In spite of this, all of his eight children seemed to have loved their place and regarded their childhood as very happy.

I do not know when Mr. and Mrs. Wiese took up their land, but I was told it was just after they married and that they arrived with 300 sheep, tools and a swag.

Later when the Weiss children started going to the Highbury school, Ernie drove them up in a spring cart. The young Leishmans had to march and my Aunts told me when the cart came along, Ernie would whip up the horse and tell them they could have a ride if they could jump on. They were always late.

He was a great tease, but always so kind. I cannot imagine he ever left them behind. Aunt Helen fell under the wheel one morning when she was trying to climb in and the wheel went over her, breaking her collarbone. She did not tell her mother for three weeks because she did not want Ernie to get into trouble.

Aunt Helen shared a birthdate with the twins. Frank and Kellie and Lilne Kellie joined a sisterhood, Anglican. After training as a nurse, she worked as a medical missionary in the Solomon Islands, and she knew Hedrides for 30 years.

After a lot of adventures avoiding the Japanese in World War II, a typhoon wiped out the mission and the four sisters disbanded. Then they joined the Roman Catholic Church, and she began a Cadmelite. Needless to say, for my Protestant family, this was the equivalent, in reverse of Henry VIII dissolving the monasteries and some members unhappily were never deconcoiled. Fortunately, she felt she made the right choice.

None of them seem to have learned much at the school. Aunt Marjorie said the only thing she learned was how to spell "car." An old Mr Wilson teaching her have to break string when she helped him call the mail in the post office, after school came out and after the train came in. On the other hand, proved useful all her life.

My mother told me that when Bill was born, Mrs Weise could not feed him and my grandmother lent or gave her a milking cow, which his mother said saved his life.

A story you probably know, and which Evelyn White tells me is quite true was about Dinah, the Aboriginal being, stealing Laurie when he was a baby. When he was recovered from the rabbit warren where Dinah had hidden him, Dinah said he wanted to introduce red hair into the tribe.

I remember Dinah very clearly, as we often saw him walking along the road, and when he called into the farm for tea, sugar, flour and tobacco. He always carried a handful of spears and a boomerang. He had a sugar bag with a liender twine strap for his supplies and often a possum or roo tail for his dinner.

He was a regular visitor and always knew everything about the family, asking for news of absent members.

My mother said that once he told my grandmother she was on his land and should not be there.

She was most indignant and after he left, she said, "Fancy him saying that to me, what a cheek!!"

I have met some of his descendants in **Pingelly** and I think the Reillys are connected too. Mr. Weiss was a very good blacksmith and my father, who was a horseman and definitely non-mechanical, always took broken machinery parts to him to fix.

The forge was in a shed, like most at that time, had walls of **samhosts** side by side and a hay hatch. As time went by, the walls took a leak to **horr** and the hay went grey with a musty smell.

Mr. Weiss was a tall, lanky man with a big moustache and he really always had the butt of a cigarette **twerched** in the corner of his mouth under it. Later on, when he had a car, I think a long, green **Essex** with a clip on **celluloid** windows, he took my mother and me to Narrogin for some function. I sat beside him in the front seat and was fascinated because he had a butt in both corners of his mouth. In retrospect, I never remember ever seeing him light a cigarette or for that matter, hearing him speak.

I loved both him and Mrs Wiese and never missed the chance to visit them. They were so welcoming and warm and time never seemed to bother them or any of the family. They all spoiled me. Rosie and Alice would take me to the orchard to pick mulberries or almonds and

make large batches of almond toffee, pouring it out of the more onto big serving dishes which would be collector's items now. They would take me down to the sheds to look at the new calves, her camels and the newest batches of puppies and kittens.

I loved the house which I think was stone and mud batt. The actual kitchen was quite small, so everyone had meals at a long table with benches each side in the big nestbule at the back of the house. The walls were netting, thickly covered with doliches creeper which made it cool and airy in summer.

The sitting room was on a lower level, I think, and was rather dark. There was a dark leather sofa with a carved wooden back and two large photographs of Mrs Wiese's parents, (I believe) in gold oval frames hanging above the fireplace. They were highly tinted with rather grim looks. A white coloured paper string curtain that rustled in the breeze to keep flies out in the doorway. I thought it was the height of elegance and longed to have one.

The other highlight for me was the lavatory down the yard. The wide plank seat had two holes, a big one for grown-ups and beside it, a small one for children. This and the string curtain had priority in the home I dreamed about having when I grew up.

Many years after, when Mrs Wiese had had a stroke and lost the use of his arm, he set to making mud batts and build onto the house. He was a wonderful, indomitable man.

Mrs. Wiese was still very pretty, small with blue eyes and pink cheeks. She seemed always to be working, which with such a large family was understandable but she always had time to make people feel loved and wanted.

For a long time, Rosie and Albie drove up to Linton on Wednesday afternoons for piano lessons with my mother. There certainly was some music, but it was interspersed by gales of laughter. Alice had a laconic wit and a wonderful deep guffaw. I doubt if they learnt much. Rosie was very pretty and gentle. Both of them did painting on fabric with heated wax, which was a craze at the time. For years I cherished a noile pillow sham Rosie made for me. It was very dainty with lace, round she edge and pink roses painted with this stuff in the corners.

When Rosie married Mort, the whole district came to their reception in the Highbury Hall. At midnight we all trooped down to the siding to see the happy couple onto the train to Albany for their honeymoon. I was about nine and cried my eyes out as the train chugged off because I feel I had lost her.

It was bitterly cold the night Kathy and Ernie took me to see Micah's Circus. It was before they were married. As the circus started, I forgot the sharp sting of frosty air on my bare legs. I was in another world.

The girl's acrobats in pink tutus and ballet shoes were the highlight for me. They spun round on an apparatus pulled up to the top of the tent, supported only by headbands and stood up on their backs of four beautiful white ponies cantering around the ring in unison. Meanwhile, the girls juggled, did handstands and formed pyramids. The lighting was dim and as the event were performed, fine dust rose in a haze, but it was sheer unadulterated magic for me.

Ernie always seemed much older than the rest of the family. He had a dry wit, loved tricks and before he spoke in a slow drawl, worked his mouth as if he was rehearsing his words before he spoke them.

On the morning of the children's sports day, he always drove up to the Narrogin ice works to collect a cherie of ice cream for us. He brought it back, packed with salt and milk over bags over it to keep it cool.

We children watched down the road for him and escorted the horse and sully onto the sports ground as if he were royalty.

It was in our eyes because ice cream was such a treat. We were given little cups of it. They were called terry licks and the creamy yellow, slightly salty mixture melted almost before we could eat it.

Ernie found Pat Gerton, Warburton, when he died in his tent on his block which was near Ernie's place. He went over when he heard the dogs barking and found Pat. I think he died following an attack of flu.

Pat was a very gentle, fair-haired young man. When he came in to get mail and stores and we were there too, he always bought a bag of lollies. I feel very sad when I heard that he had died because I really liked him, not because of the lollies alone. He is buried near other family members at a little Saint Merberg's church east of Mount Barther.

When I was in Melbourne last year, I spent a day reminiscing with Sibyl Latham, and we agreed one of the best nights of our lives was Bill Weise's 21st birthday party.

It was meant to be a surprise to Bill, but as everyone in the district was given a party when they turned 21, he probably had his suspicions.

Possibly to encourage him to change out of his morning clothes, Mrs Weiss had invited us to tea, invited us to tea at the boys house on Pedler's. It was dark by the time he and Laurie came in. I remember Mrs Weise going out into the yard when they were having a wash in a tin dish, and a bit of muttering going on, but whether he did change or not, I do not remember. All of the boys wore grey flannel singlets for work.

Their house was quite substantial with four rooms, I seem to remember. There was a big fire in the front room where we had tea, roast mutton, preserved pears, and custard.

It had been a very wet year, oh happy days, and not only was the road in from the gate very muddy, but the little creek between the gate and the house, although it was not wide, had steep sides and was running a **hasher**. We had crossed into the slushy without incident, but clearly buggies and cars could not cross.

Laurie was prepared, and by the time the first guest arrived he had a horse harnessed into the spring cart ready to ferry them over.

There were shrieks of dismay when the ladies tried to climb in without getting wet and muddy, and even wilder shrieks as the cart tilted down into the water, and the horse slid and scrambled up the other side. The one thing that showed up clearly was a snowy white bandage round Laurie's head, covering the gash where he had kicked by a horse. It was all great fun for us children.

The ladies sorted themselves out and gathering up their baskets of cones and settled in the kitchen to gossip and get supper ready. All these functions someone was detailed off to collect the merengue tea, tins, cups and saucers from the hall.

The older men settled themselves by the fire for card playing. My father who was a bridge and something fanatic was always well to the fore. These men were separated like tribal elders and always given the best things for supper.

The boys organised us young ones into the games out of the flat. Two big fires were going to give us light and boil the billies. We played drop the something, twos and threes, prisoners base and chasey.

It was a frosty night and when the moon come up everything turned silver. Heaven knows when everyone got home but I was sure no one minded the late hour.

Accidents with horses happen regularly, people being tossed off or kicked, but generally the damage was minor. My father was reaching in a very pretty light chestnut mare, a bit feisty, and because he did not have enough work to quieten her down, he lent her to Laurie and Bill to work in the spring cart.

Her mother had a very placid temperament, but unfortunately, Gerette, as she called, had inherited. She came home after a few days. Always by shining a spring cart was beneath her she kicked it to bits.

Laurie and Bill came to visit us regularly for tea and cards. They usually unharnessed the horse and tied it to a fence post outside the front gate. These evenings tended to be late, after midnight, and often the horse got fed up, undid the rope with its teeth and went

home. Once when they left it harnessed up to the cart it took off, carriage and all getting stuck in the bushes down the road. On one glorious occasion, it took the **hall** and a length of netting until it was caught up in nearly half a mile away. I loved it when they had to stay overnight and we **tracked** the house next morning.

Lori dropped in a lot, usually with a fresh **kill** of roo or a couple of ducks. I remember the look of embarrassed disbelief on his face when my father told him they were leprechauns and fairies on the river flats of **Pedlars**. He told me the same and I never knew it really believed there were or not but I was grown up or before I stopped keeping a sharp lookout. There was rumor that treasure was buried on **Pedlars**. Ill-gotten gains from a jewellery theft. I dreamt of finding a rusty tin box full of diamonds, rubies, pearls and other precious gems. That coupled with the **possibility** of little people **coveting** on the river flats gave me the feeling it was haunted and mysterious.

During the summer on Sunday afternoons people for people **foregathered** at **Wolwolling** pool for a picnic and a swim it was not quite the **"grey greasy linghops"** but did have certain drawbacks. Bark from the trees gave it a golden brown colour, there were snags and mud around the edges and leeches were an ever-present hazard. In the heat no one minded.

None of the women or children could swim across the pool to the sandy edge of the other side, so we had to troop down to a shallow ford on the south end of the pool. We changed in the bushes and splashed around in the shallow water.

One Sunday the young men with Frank and Laurie to the **forefront**, sneaked around and gathering up all of the clothes took them back to the other side and hung them in the trees.

They were horrified shrieks from the swimmers, and I remember someone moaning, "I wore my old holy singlet, and the horrors have hung it up."

Eventually, the older non-swimming ladies made them take them down and return them.

They left them in the heap and when everyone scrambled out of the water and began grabbing garments and tut tutting, it was like hens around a pile of mash.

One year, a wire was strung across the pool so the non-swimmers could cross. It made a huge success until unfortunately the line broke one afternoon. My mother was in the middle of the pool and she said she would have drowned if Laurie had not taken her to shore.

Bill was the mainstay of the Highbury Cricket team but he and Laurie were always late. This created a problem for the team, especially if they had an away game because they could not do without them.

We had one of the few telephones in the district. We were Highbury 1 for a long time there was only three others. Almost every Saturday afternoon during the season the phone would ring and questions came, "Have the boys gone passed yet?"

In winter, if the river was too deep to go to get the car through and there was a donny on at the hall, the boys, Rosie and Alice, had to come in the spring cart. The girls would moan about the difficulty of keeping the mud off their long dresses getting in and out of the cart.

During the spring, Sunday hikes were all the rage. Those who could walked two or three miles to a chosen site and someone with a truck took every one back to the store. We smaller children hung around the boys, fighting to hold their hands as we walked along. We must have been a dreadful nuisance but none of them ever seemed to mind. Lawrie nearly

always had a bag of sweets for us, giving him the edge in the popularity stakes. The hikes metered out as the weather had been hotter and harvest started.

When Bonnie came to teach at the Piesseville School, she joined the young people in Highbury and made quite an impact. She was well regarded as a teacher and for years I kept a hand-painted programme from one of her school concerts, which she had decorated with gum nut babies she had painted on each one.

When her sister Audrey visited, they always drove up for a musical afternoon with my mother. Mother was an accomplished pianists and had a very good voice, so music played a big part of her enjoyment of life. There was a lot of singing and a lot of laughing on those days.

Weekend camps were popular for a while. One Sunday a lot of the people joined young ones when they had a weekend camp at, I think, Minijan Pool.

Bonnie had rigged up a bush by threading two saplings through a couple of wheat bags. She had hauled it up about eight feet into a sheath and balanced it onto branches.

She climbed up for a rest and a read after picnic lunch but come down shouting when Frank began to chop the tree down.

Laurie was very pleased with himself as he had caught a duck by swimming underwater and grabbing its legs. He coated it with clay and cooked it in the cold coals. He offered it to the older ladies, but they were less than enthusiastic, and my mother said it was disgusting.

When war broke out, everything changed. Some of the young men joined up, Mark Halusler and Laurie among the first to go. Mark to his death, Laurie was captured. My brother Tom

was ahead in the 10th Light horse and was sent to patrol the coast between Geraldton and Bunbury and horseback. He was allowed home to help with seeding, shearing and harvest but when the light horse was disbanded and things became grim in the north, he went east, trained at the something jungle complex and then the islands.

It was a hard time for families left behind. My parents had each lost a brother in World War I and it was an anxious time. Very little information about the serious something Australia faced came out.

The Lone Guard was formed and women in Perth spent canteens for service personnel, i.e. the colour patch, which served cheap meals for those on leave. Knitting groups and fundraisers for troop comforts took over from social events. In the Highbury, any function was a fundraiser to help the war effort.

Food parcels were sent to relative overseas. I remember my mother sending four eggs packed in a treacle tin to which added dripping to stop them breaking. Unhappily, the slow trip through the tropics proved too much for both eggs and dripping and the Scottish cousins who received them were less than appreciative.

Sugar, butter, tea, tobacco and petrol were rationed and people bargained for coupons from each other. Tea for my mother and tobacco for my father were very important. People made a sort of ertzats coffee by roasting and grinding wheat but it was pretty awful.

My father fixed up a gas hooduelr on an old car and the drum of living coals on the back, spitting out sparks as we drove along. It was a constant fire hazard.

I had just finished school and was at home waiting for an interview for nursing training (which I refused and joined the WAARF to train as a radar operator to my mother's horror.) Your mother had to go to hospital and asked if I would ask if I would go over and help your father with your children.

Although I had some domestic skills, I knew nothing about small children and something rather overwhelmed. It was better when your mother came home and although she had to stay in bed, she could tell me what to do. It was so inept. I must have driven your parents mad.

Much later, after the war was over, when Frank had married Kylie and they were living on the farm next door along the East Road, they had a New Year's Day duck shoot for the whole Weise Clan. Tom and I were invited to join them. **Richie**, the first wife and four children were there too.

Kylie put on a great feast for lunch and then while we cleaned up, the men went off for a shoot. She was a marvellous cook, and I remember that no sooner were the decks cleaned from the meal when she began taking sponge cake after sponge cake out of the freezer compartment of the refrigerator and whipped up cream to lather over them.

The men came back with bags of ducks, over a hundred. We were all standing around in the kitchen listening to the exploits when Darryl, who was about four, came in brandishing a carving knife and advanced on one of his young girl cousins.

Kylie screamed and went to leap forward to get the knife but Frank held her back and said in his slow drawl, "Let's just see what he is going to do with it." Fortunately someone else took it away before Darryl could do anything with it.

I remember another story about Daryl too, when he was about four and a bushfire broke out near the farm. Frank had a lot of drums of water standing on a ramp ready for such an outbreak and when the helpers arrived they began loading them on the back of a truck to take out to the blaze. Daryl was watching them and when they had picked one up he said, "That one's got petrol in it." but they took no notice of him. He said it again but he was told to get out of the way.

Daryl was right and it was sheer good luck that no one had injured in the congregation.

The war made big changes and nothing ever seemed the same afterwards.

I went off to do the other things but I often reflect on my good fortune in having spent my formative years among the wonderful people with strong principles and a sense of fun and who loved me.