

LOVE, MARRIAGE, BABIES, THE WHOLE DARN THING, EXPECTATIONS AND REALITY

PAT'S STORY

LOVE: Pat found love. His name was Bill. Pat knew he went to Canberra High School but since he was born in 1927 and was therefore three years older than she was, she didn't remember him at school. In 1943 when he was 16 he joined the Australian Navy. Pat was surprised his mother signed his form allowing him to join up. He was on the Kanimbla and by a stroke of chance, was in the party of sailors who had picked up Pat's brother Jim when the war ended on Balikpapan Island. Jim was in the 2/10th AIF. Pat remembered that Bill had been a good swimmer and diver – handy skills if you are in the Navy! She recalled the swimming competitions held at the Manuka Swimming Pool in the 1930s and 40s.

When Bill was twenty he left the Navy and joined the company Prices Branch where Pat also worked. They knew each other in a friendly way and because Pat was on the switchboard she knew lots of other people. Tennis parties were organized with everyone from work and Pat, particularly, played a lot of tennis from an early age. Her family, especially her schoolteacher father Richard played tennis and cricket regularly and competed in tournaments at Queanbeyan, Manuka and Yass. Her mother was a champion tennis player. She was singles champion in 1935 and 1936 and had six children as well!

Pat played tennis at High School and her sister was a very, very good player. But Bill also played Rugby Union Football for the East's Club and Pat, who worked on the Switchboard at Prices Branch, knitted him a pair of football socks – they were red and white in colour. Another lady helped her with the socks but Pat remembered that since her hands were often free on the switchboard, it was a good and useful occupation – surely an early example of 'multi tasking'!

Pat had come to Canberra when she was only one in 1931 and had lived at the teacher's residence at Weetangera, where her father was the only teacher at the little school. They left in 1937 when the school closed and he became the teacher at the school in Hall. They lived in the school teacher's residence at Ginninderra Village, now part of the Gold Creek Tourist Centre on the Barton Highway. The school residences both had the Post Office and Telephone Exchange attached. Both Pat and her sister assisted their mother to operate the switchboards.

The telephone exchange became an integral part of Pat's life, especially at Weetangera where the telephone was in the kitchen! The school teacher's family in the semi rural Canberra of the 1940s was an important part of the community, particularly having the phone in the home. If there was an emergency the teachers family was a vital link in communication, and often Pat's mother had to help with minor problems in the small community.

While the school residence was not exactly a farm, most schoolteachers during the Depression and war years ran poultry and cows and most still travelled by horse and

sulky. Pat remembers that although there was rationing, in farming communities such as Ginninderra and Hall if someone killed a beast parts of it were shared.

Later Pat worked at JB Young's in Civic and came into Canberra on the workmen's bus at 6.30 in the morning, and returned at 4 in the afternoon. Sometimes she could walk over to the Belconnen Naval Station, now in the suburbs of Giralang and Kaleen, and pick up the bus from there. Alternatively she would ride a horse or use the sulky again to go to the naval station and leave the horse safely in the paddocks there while she went into Civic. There was also the opportunity to use the bus that stopped at the naval station at about 9 in the morning. This returned about 3 in the afternoon and was used mostly by women shopping in Civic.

Horses were part of the way of life in that school children from outlying areas often rode to school, leaving their horses in the school paddock. This was especially true of Hall village and Pat's father had a car, taking some students from Ginninderra. School teachers got a petrol ration during the war.

MARRIAGE: Pat and Bill married in 1950. They were married in St Christopher's Roman Catholic Cathedral in Manuka. It was a big wedding with 150 guests. Pat had already had a Kitchen Tea as well as an engagement party. With her father being the schoolteacher in the Village of Hall from 1937 until 1958, and having been heavily involved in all manner of local societies and associations, Pat remembers the generosity of the Hall and district community. Any girl who was getting married was feted with a lavish Kitchen Tea, mostly held in Kinleyside's Hall in the village. All the ladies contributed to a wonderful spread of their best recipes, and the tables were groaning under the weight of the cakes, sandwiches, biscuits, jellies and all manner of 'goodies'. Apart from the wonderful supper and dancing, there were also the presents. Everything for the kitchen was provided; toasters, electric jugs and water sets, Pat ended up with three or four toasters! Pat's aunts had already given her lots of embroidered supper cloths and doilies for her 'hope chest', also known as a 'glory box'. The engagement party had been held at the schoolmaster's residence at Ginninderra, in the old schoolroom, which is now a gift/toy shop.

But what a wedding! Apart from the 150 guests, Pat's mother had made the wedding cake, a fruit cake – it was three tiers high! The reception was held at the Canberra Hotel, now the Hyatt Hotel but there was no dancing as it had been a morning wedding.

BABIES: Pat and Bill settled happily into married life. They were able to get a government house in La Perouse Street in Griffith. It was very small but they had wonderful neighbours. Pat ended up living there for 49 years! She and Bill had 5 children in quick succession. They were born in 1952, 1953, 1955, 1959 and 1962 – ten years of having babies! There were four girls and one boy and they kept Pat so busy that she didn't work while they were growing up but she did her fair share of canteen duty at the local school!

THE WHOLE DARN THING... Canberra in the 1950s and 60s was expanding and developing into the National Capital. Suburbs originally only around Civic were now spreading out and the new concept of separate town centres was being put into place.

Life had become easier with families now owning cars and home life was easier with modern gadgets and appliances and – television! Pat remembers ironing with flat irons in the old 1880's Ginninderra schoolhouse and how the Mrs Pott's irons were a great improvement. Gadgets in the 1950s made life even easier. Even though the house was small everyone fitted in with the girls sharing a big room.

EXPECTATIONS: Pat had come from a large family, well respected in the Hall/Ginninderra community. One of a family of three sons and three daughters, her father had taught in the ACT region for twenty five years. When he retired in 1958 all his children and his fourteen grandchildren were living in the ACT. Memories of her father have fondly been recorded in a book on the Hall one teacher school where he taught for twenty years. His love of reading and nature study and his ability to inspire students have been emphasized. Pat had no other teacher apart from her father for all her primary school years. She remembers she was not allowed to call him 'Dad' at school, but homework which consisted of revision of spelling and times tables would naturally have been done! Her mother also taught sewing to the girls on Wednesday afternoons.

So Pat and her siblings had a wonderfully stimulating and supportive family background, and friends of her siblings would often stay at their home. They participated in everything and she remembers the village atmosphere of the Kitchen Teas, and dances as well as the film nights, known as the 'flicks', held at Kinleyside's Hall, later known as Rochford's Hall.

As a child Pat remembered the freedom to roam around the village and surrounding countryside. She remembered as children exploring the old Police Station and locking one of her friends in the cells! Another memory was of going into Civic once a week to shop at JB Young's, or visit with friends, play tennis and sometimes go to the cinema at the old Capitol Theatre. Saturday matinees were very popular with the young people enjoying cowboy movies and serials. After Hall Primary School, taught only by her father, Pat went on to Canberra High School in Acton, now the Canberra School of Art.

REALITY: Given the fact that Pat was born in the economic Depression years and part of her childhood and teenage years was spent whilst Australia was at war, her life would appear happy and comfortable. But there are always unexpected challenges that have to be dealt with.

Pat was at Canberra High School and it was the end of year exams. It was lunchtime and some boys were showing Pat, her sister and some friends a woodwork project. A piece of the project unexpectedly went flying through the air and unfortunately hit Pat in her right eye. She remembers it didn't hurt so she did her exam but later felt sick in the stomach. Later that night she could not sleep and her father realised that it was an emergency and they would have to try and save her eye.

Because of petrol rationing at the time the family had to apply at the police station to get petrol to drive Pat to Sydney to an eye specialist. She remembers being petrified being in a huge city and being left by herself in a hospital room, and not being able to do anything for a week. Several older women in the hospital looked out for her, which

helped, and the eye was saved, but was damaged. Gradually over the years, sight in that eye disappeared but the eye itself remains. Pat has coped with this set back and it has not diminished her ability to drive or to participate in her many activities.

The birth of a first child is often depicted as uncomplicated and blissful. But Pat was not able to see her first born, Michelle, for five days after her birth. She had to express milk for her, which is sometimes frustrating and daunting. What must her thoughts have been? Michelle was born as a 'face presentation' so her features, particularly the position of her tiny ears, had been distorted as she was being born. The nurses at the Canberra Hospital massaged her tiny features back into the right position until she was presentable enough for Pat to see her without becoming distressed. What a traumatic introduction to motherhood – but Pat coped.

Four other children later, Pat was still coping. The first two baby girls were eleven months apart in age so it was virtually like having twins. The girls were two and three when their next sister was born. Pat was so busy with her family of tiny girls but she managed to have a break of four years before the next little girl was born. Three years after that a little boy was born so Pat was incredibly busy. Her father died that year as well, and the Post Office and telephone exchange at her old home at the Ginninderra Schoolhouse also finally closed. Pat had lived there from 1937 until 1950.

But life does throw up challenges as Pat and Bill found in 1970. Their second child, a daughter, lost her life, aged fifteen and a half, as the result of a bike accident. The family just had to cope with this devastating tragedy.

In 1982 Pat had been travelling in northern NSW visiting her daughter in Armidale. The children were grown up – the youngest, her son, was now twenty. Pat then motored onto Tamworth visiting friends and she was generally taking her time and enjoying her trip. Little did she know of what was happening back home in Canberra. The two sons of a good friend had offered to help Bill move a huge beam of steel and to generally help him with some home renovations while Pat was away. They arrived at the house in Griffith and when Bill did not answer the door, they went around the back and let themselves in through the unlocked door. They found Bill, seemingly asleep in his favourite chair with their faithful dog at his feet, guarding him.

Mercifully he would not have known what hit him, as he had suffered a massive heart attack. Pat didn't have a chance to say goodbye, and sadly, could not be contacted as she was on her way home.

Pat has made a new life for herself in her retirement village with other active elderly citizens. She is always busy helping other seniors, especially those who, because of intellectual or physical impairment, are having difficulty coping with life. Pat's life has taken on another dimension, but in some ways, her choice of living in a retirement village mirrors her early life. As the daughter of the village school teacher, who manned the Post Office and telephone exchange which was the hub of communication in the early days of Canberra, she still continues this community service. Neighbours in the retirement village look out for one another, unlike young working people who spend most of their time at work, and a wonderful sense of community has been

preserved. Pat is a pivotal part, once again, of those vital commodities, communication, and caring!