

Jean McLennan

Born 15th June 1911 – probably at 151 Darley Road Randwick.

A story by Jean Jordan about her Mum.

Jean Amy McLennan was the seventh child for Catherine and Alexander, John, died at three weeks, Isabel Sloan, Jessie Anne Finlayson, Alexander Hannibal, Sheila Agnes Rose, Donald Stuart, and after Mum Norman Eric and Joan Ivy May (Maisie).

Mum had a lot to say about her childhood, older and younger brothers and sisters and how she found them. Isabel, 11 years older, was always regarded as being very wise and very knowledgeable and experienced and for Mum always the wise older sister. Most of their relationship was after Isabel was married, lived next door and had their first five children while there. Jessie was a talented seamstress and knitter who made clothes for Isabel's children and no doubt Mum as well. I think she was always good to Mum. After she became a teacher much of the time she worked in the country. When Jessie was in Leeton, boarding with Mrs Lang, Mum was taken along for a year and attended school there. She won the breast stroke race, held in a dam, and onlookers from above said she looked like a frog. Mum was a good swimmer as they all were, with Clovelly nearby during their childhoods and Dadda keen that they could all swim well. Mum said that Mrs Lang was houseproud, no sitting on the beds I suppose, and was always ready to go out with her husband, no matter how busy she was, would don her hat and go with him. Mum got to know the family well, of course and we have always loved our association with Jean Lang (Walmsley) but always called Lang in our family. Jess was a great mate for her and as said before, when Jean came to Sydney she stayed with the Macs. Mum probably went to Auntie Nancy's farm at Cherry Tree Hill, Maisie and Dorothy Martin probably did as Dorothy met and married Alan Diamond and lived happily on a nice farm, had a bunch of kids.

Sheila was just that much older than Mum to be a bit of a boss, Mum said she always needed to be going out, to tennis or such, and Hal would be waiting so the chores were left behind. Don had wanted his Mother to 'send the baby back to God' when Mum was born, but I think Mum always adored her nearest brother, and was also fond of Sandy, visited him regularly when he was old and in a nursing home. She provided what she could for both of them when they were out of work, especially cigarettes. Norman was her lovely little brother, very committed politically later on, and Mum was so sad when he died young. Maisie was a good mate. They did the washing up together, and after they had finished, Maisie used to want to play Sergeant's (the cafe chain), and put all the plates and cutlery on the table and rattle them. Mum said that she wasn't so keen. Maisie had a keen sense of humour and loved to write. There are lots of letters, many from South Africa to Mum. When she returned and was so unwell for the rest of her life, Mum was a frequent visitor at the hospitals and looked after her children from time to time, especially Margaret. Lex not so often, he didn't like having to have a bath at our place, and Dad had little patience.

She said she spent lots of time playing in Centennial Park and Queens park – which is opposite the house. Mumma (Catherine Sloan) McLennan) would let them go as far as 'one last shot' – a statue that was in the park – one of a group commemorating the American Civil War. Before she could swim, she walked a plank across part of a lake or storm water channel and Sandy wobbled the plank and she fell in - but knew to put her arms up and that she would rise in the water. Her hands touched the plank and she got out – somehow. Once she ate some acorns and subsequently had a type of seizure. She used to walk to "Little Coogee" i.e. Clovelly to swim. Dadda was keen on the water and I think they all learned to swim there. Mum thought her father to be very wise, well read and politically alert. He was able to discuss the literature that Jessie and probably Sheila had to study at Teachers' College. They were readers in that house, well, some were for sure. She used to walk up the hill of Avoca St to school past the Little Sisters of the Poor and watched thunderstorms from the verandah – thought the thunder was the Little Sisters building falling down and looked for the patch of blue sky – enough to make a pair of sailors pants.

He father "Dadda" (Alexander McLennan) and Mr O'Connor solved the world's problems on that verandah, regularly and we always had to set the table once Dadda's arrival was imminent – so that he would be reassured that dinner was on the way and newspapers were the table cloth. They used to read them too and when there was an interesting bit Sandy would say 'show' in his gruff voice. He was always a problem for "Mumma" – she would chase him with a whip of hedge – but he was hard to catch. Alcohol was not permitted in the house because Dadda was a Recchabite and Mumma said vanilla gave as good a flavour to cooking. She remembers when her brother Don McLennan was sent to the local corner shop to buy three dozen pegs – came back with eggs - very expensive for the poor family – they were a luxury item for those fed bread and dripping and Long Bay Cake (a wholemeal loaf that Mumma made).

Jean Lang, became a friend of the family and often visited on her days off from Prince Henry (nurse training) she would make sponge cakes with eggs they couldn't spare – ordinary fare for the girl from the country. She had seen her fiancé killed in a Joy Flight . She later met Bob, married, not completing her training – lived happily ever after at 'Wyoming' Brundah, and gave my family much pleasure in our stays there, recipients of her superb hospitality and cooking. The McLennan boys all smoked and drank, rather too much eventually. During the depression Mum kept her job at the Statisticians Dept, on reduced pay and was always being asked for money for smokes for the boys.

Mum went to school until aged 14 & needed to leave to work to help support the household and she did . When she was to leave school to learn to operate the comptometer/calculating machine, her teacher indicated that it was a rare skill and she'd have little chance of success. Mum worked at the Stats for years & left when she married and after several years of no pregnancy, went back to work and that did the trick. She looked very smart in the street photos of the time. Mum loved all her nephews and nieces, always gave to them & when visiting Blaxland Mervyn would make remarks about 'your rich auntie'. Doreen asked Jean how long they were staying as 'we've only got two cups'

Mum and my family went to Blaxland often and helped look after her Mother, who was primarily cared for by Jessie - who hated daylight saving, it meant she had to get up in the dark all year, as she bathed her Mother before going to work. Isabel also had caring responsibilities, during the days that Jess was at work. Mum and Sheila on weekends. Pop apparently remained active until he died. He just went for a lie down after lunch, a month after Mumma died – and in half an hour died himself.

Mum took me with her to Blaxland on the steam train (doodoo) – got coal dust in the eyes from looking out the window. I don't recall much of my Grandparents – just an old lady sitting in the gloom of Jessie's lounge room. Doreen has clear recollections of Mumma as a very quiet lovely woman but she was rather immobile at that time.

The House Grandfather and Grandmother (McLennan) lived in the house Jessie had built. Jessie had managed eventually to get a loan for Mervyn to build the house. There was quite some difficulty, Jessie being female. She and Dadda planned the house to be sited facing north – to ensure the sunny verandah. Pop later solved the problems of the world with Will Baxter, Edie's husband. The house "Inverness" in Taringha St, was very important along with "Yallambee" for weekends and school holidays for me to be with my cousins and Aunts. Eventually Sheila and Hal Cleary moved to Blaxland also to "Balmacarra" Ross Crescent and that was lovely too for our children.

Mum loved dancing and was very involved with the social events at the Randwick Literary Institute which had been founded largely by McLennan efforts. Dadda was socially active in the Progress Association, getting the tram to Clovelly and getting the Institute. He had a stint on council. Mum's Aunt Nancy's dancing school played some role for many of them but then she married George Rudd and went to 'Cherry Tree Hill' Inverell to live. They went to Paddington Town Hall dances where she met Les Jacups (take me home Bill). He never let her go, but was not regarded as ideal by some. Jessie found brothers-in-law wanting and said Mum was never as bright and happy as before.

As a child used to play in the storm water drains, even under the intersection of Darley and Avoca and used to run up the trunk of the Monkey Puzzle tree just inside Centennial Park (that's where we put her ashes). Mumma said that one day she was hammering something on the fence and was annoyed by a comment by the neighbour, almost hit him. Was a salutary lesson about how easy it is to do something in anger so watch out for hammers? At the Darley Rd home they were allowed to sit on the beds – some friends liked to come there as their Mothers were houseproud and didn't permit bed-sitting. Mum had lots of friends, there a photos of several, Sybil Grealisch stayed friend for ever, one died of TB as a young adult, maybe Phyllis Hall.

Mum and Dad lived at 38 Cavendish Street Stanmore, from marriage in 20th September 1938, I think, until 1946 and I was three and a half when we went to Dorrigo to live. My Dad had worked on the road building around Dorrigo and was badly injured, losing three fingers on his left hand, leaving thumb and forefinger. The doctor tidied them up the in his rooms, I think, what anaesthetic was used is dubious. Dad said that the doc said it was best to finish the job that the engine had begun. He got compo, enough to buy the house at 38 Gloucester Road Hurstville, something he did without consulting his wife! It was under rent control and was about 20 years before he got access to it.

The Stanmore flat was upstairs on the SW corner of the house. A living room – walk into – with a dining table and single bed sofa – wooden back that slipped behind, then a corridor kitchenette (where I drained the sugar from the dregs of teacups), then a bedroom that looked over the backyard and shed that was also a dwelling.

Mrs Muller lived in the adjacent flat and Mrs Cutts was the owner/landlady. She always kept a lookout for whoever went up the stairs. Doreen on visits from the hospital would come in to have a rest and a meal, delighted in giving “Mrs Cats” the slip. Mum and I once found Doreen asleep on the sofa bed. Dad always teased her for using tomato sauce – said it caused pimples. I'm not sure if Muller had a dog, but I apparently used to say 'mulla mulla mulla' like calling a dog – about Mrs Muller.

In the back yard shed lived a man who took a bowl of boiling water that he had cooked fish in out the door to dispose of it as I skipped by a copped and got a scald on my right thigh. Led to lots of visits to Dr Ramsey along the road at Enmore for dressings with ung vita, I think, by the recollection of the colour and consistency of the ointment.

We moved to Dorrigo and Dad had a stint of share farming on the Maize's dairy farm. We had a small flat in the house and Dad and Mum did all the milking. Subsequently, for years we had holidays at Smith's place at Dorrigo, Dad and I loved it but I think Mum found it less than engaging with all that housework and cooking.

Time at Narwee started in 1947 after Mum's brother Don was widowed. We moved in after about 6 months share farming at Dorrigo to housekeep for Don. He was a baker, kept early hours, and late too, probably at the pub or maybe at Worsley's where his son Ian was then living, with his late mother's sister and her family and his grandfather, Pompa. I only recall Don coming in late. He was a rather shadowy figure to me. At some time later he and Ian and Pompa went to NZ where his brother Norman and family were, to start a new life. She said that soon after we moved there she thought about having another baby, but was put off when a neighbour, Enid Thomas said something like she didn't suppose Mum would have another at her age. I don't think Dad was keen anyhow.

I had my fourth birthday not long after arriving at Narwee, 13 Narwee Avenue, and we stayed there for ten years. During that time Mum was very active in the community. She was a member of the Methodist congregation and found plenty to do there. She started a girls group, the Rays, sunbeams for Jesus, together with Mrs Nunn they held meetings once a week for girls aged from about 7 to about 12. There was a formal meeting with a hymn and a prayer, induction of officers, treasurers etc. It was run like a proper meeting. Afterwards there was always an activity, we often had mock weddings, with everyone having a role, and Mum would then provide fruit salad for the breakfast, not sure if there was ice-cream as well. They arranged excursions, bush walks to the Royal National Park was one, led by Mr Sutton, Betty's Dad, to the Blue Pool where we mixed dough and wrapped it around a stick to make a pocket for the jam. Think we burnt chops as well. It was great fun & we had partners and were quite adventurous going through that bush.

Mum was very friendly with Mr Brand, the minister, a great fellow who, amongst other things was the caller at square dances that we had. The church also had socials regularly, Saturday evenings, of games and dances. We probably did some dancing at Rays too, not sure. Anyhow, the church was the centre of our social life. Mum was able to confide in Mr Brand about her worries, I know, later he asked me how Maisie was as she was the subject of lots of Mum's concerns. Dad didn't go to church but was there to assist in lots of ways at the fetes & in the preparations and the setting up of the various stalls. Mum used to be involved in the sweet stall and was first helper to Mrs Cox who was the champion maker of sweets. Dad made the cardboard baskets that held the sweets. He made a pattern out of tin for the rabbit sided, baskets. Mum was also involved with the Narwee Public School. She and Dad were strong petitioners, via the Progress Association, for the school to be built. When it wasn't a brick school several of the Progress folk declined to send their kids there. It started as a two roomed portable and progressed year by year as the housing commission population grew. Mum was Treasurer for several years of the Mothers' Club. They didn't get a P and C for some time. Mum was fond of the staff there and I had a happy time in all my years there.

I started in 2nd class, had been to Penhurst for the first 18 months, in kinder and first class. I had Mrs Cox in second class and supplied several of the readers as I had as gifts from Sheila. Mr Potter, Cecil George was the third class teacher and head master, always a supporter for me, then I had Mr R. E. Gillan for fourth, fifth and sixth classes. Mum liked him too,

even tho' he voted Liberal. He gave himself away telling us that Menzies had a 'silver tongue'. But otherwise he was faultless. I always felt contented that Mum was involved in that school, and the church, it seemed normal to me.

Mum had lots of friends through school and church, as well as neighbours and tennis women. She played tennis every Tuesday with a nice crowd. We often had visitors, in for a cup of tea and Mum liked to go around to Mrs Nunn's house, an original place, possibly a farm house on the other side of the line, and she said she loved to sit in her big blue chair and chat and drink a cup of tea. Mrs Nunn was quite a bit older, and had the care of her grandson, Leonard, Lennie, as there was some difficulty with his parents. He had a brother who was often around, but I'm not sure if he lived there too or not. Len was a little younger than me and not overburdened but nice. Sandra and I used to swing him around at the dances, once let him go and away he went, in the strip the willow. Lennie died at about 17 of testicular cancer, at Sydney Hospital. During those years at Narwee we had Margaret Davidson to stay at least a couple of times for quite a long period while Maisie was in hospital.

We finally got to move to Hurstville in 1958, when I was 15. After several jobs I applied to learn the Burroughs bookkeeping machine. At the interview the boss asked Mum if she would go back to work, on the comptometer, and so she then enjoyed about 15 years of working, mostly part time, earning money and making more friends. She and Dad got into the Old Time Dancing and the Scottish country dancing and had years of every Saturday night on the town. They also played bowls, not sure when that started but they had a very full and busy older age.

Dad had a heart stopping attack and was rather weakened when he was 77 or 78. Mum had become less happy with the organising of life stuff and we made a plan to put in our flat at the back of our house at 15 Darley. This was finished around September 1988. We had a big lunch party for their 50th wedding anniversary, 20th September 1988 and not long after, they moved in. Dad only lived about a year and a half after that, but had had a great 80th birthday celebration on our big verandah on September 24th 1989.

Mum's time at our place was as good as we could make it. I think they were moderately happy to be with us, though I never felt that I quite came up to scratch. Mum continued cooking their meals for a fair while, but became more reluctant to continue, so meals on wheels came in. Dad needed to go to medical appointments and it was hard to get them to use a taxi, and a problem as the rest of us were at work. The good times were that Dad and Keith used to go to Franklins together and Dad was a keen shopper for his cakes and frankfurts. He lurched around the supermarket without a problem except the time when the checkout chic was a bloke and Dad didn't want him touching his goods. Dad's vision had a rather narrow field

.Mum came with us to all and any of the events we went to at the school, Nicholas's concerts, him on the double bass, and to Kirsty's plays at Penrith. It was at Nick's concert that Dad had one of his faints, passed out. Keith and I carried him outside and lay him down, and he came to quickly, to be surrounded by doctors, it was Sydney High, of course. These faints had occurred on the bus when Mum and Dad we going to town. The Bus stopped, everybody off and ambulance called.

Understandably, Mum found this all a bit much and it added to their difficulties in getting around. Dad used to say that at least being at our place was not as bad as the old men's home. A lot of this is about Dad, but Mum was there, doing her best to manage the changed circumstances. After Dad died she became more willing to use taxis – to go the hairdressers at North Randwick and to the doctors at Paddington. She actually managed this quite well, apparently telling the taxi drivers where to go. Perhaps they had taken her the long way round some time, not sure. When Dad was still alive, John Donaldson took them for a run. He said, never again, they directed him all the way, he said. So, they got old. Mum's hearing deteriorated quite some, all due to our speaking too quietly, she said, but it did make dinner table talk a bit of a trial for her. She did come out to dinner for her birthday most years as I recall. One time we were at the Spot, Balzac's, with all of us including Galea when Mum did the pass out after dessert. We laid her on the floor and the ambulance was called. She woke up quickly, was given a puff of oxygen and we went home. It must have been just too much food. All the years that Mum was in the back flat there were no breakins at our house and these had been regular in the previous 20 years of our time there.

A story by Jean Jordan - 2015.

