

Vicki Quinlan, 30 Sep 2005

I'LL NEVER BUY A BLUE NIGHTIE

[Cameo that Merle wore for her wedding belonged to Gladys. Vicki may have photo of Vicki and grandma's copper.]

[BT03]: We lived there and Nanna and Pop, there was a little side bit, it went further; and this used to be the Stock Agent's, there wasn't a cafe.

[QV01]: She looks so happy and peaceful, doesn't she. But if you have a look at my father I bet he's not. He's not even smiling. She has a whimsical look. I don't know. I think there's a tinge of sadness about her.

It's funny seeing those photos when she was a child because you don't of your mother as a child. You can see she never plucked her eyebrows.

Roylyn is after Roy; the Lyn is not named after anyone.

1.00: Probably that part where I said that we were in the yard with the horse's barley. I've got a photo somewhere of that. There's a copper and I'm holding my dress like this, and my brother's standing next to me, my other brother wasn't born, and Pop is just to my right. I remember that day because that was the day that we ate the barley and molasses as I was telling you, and Pop said: "Quick, come and have some before your grandmother sees", because we weren't allowed to eat it. He used to mix it up in the copper for the horses. Pop used to let us; it used to give us the runs! My brother and I used to get the runs and then Nanna would know that Pop had given it to us and she used to rouse on him.

2.05: I remember going over to the betting room with Nanna, in the afternoon and she used to have a billy of tea and make a big tray of sandwiches. It was a tiny room, as I remember, I used to see my Pop and my father, and the room probably, from my memory, maybe as big as that sun room there. We used to walk from the back of Nanna's house with all the sandwiches into the back of the billiard room and the betting shop. The barber shop faced their bedroom, where you walked in the side, and there was a little turn around at the back, it was like a little out-building, and we used to walk through the door and that's where the betting shop was. I remember there being stacks of smoke, as a child there was cigarette smoke everywhere. And since Pop died of lung cancer, and he was in a hotel, he was a publican, I assume that's where the lung cancer came from.

He was born in Taroon, in 1899, 15th April. Nanna was born in Richmond and I know that Nanna and her family left Richmond for her mother to get work. Apparently her mother left them in Richmond with somebody to mind them and got on the train and went to JC and she found work there; and then came back for the other children. This is Matilda, Matilda Alice Graham.

Nanna and Pop were married in JC. I don't have the marriage certificate but I think it's January [1929?].

I remember going into the billiard room but it was mainly because my father used to play billiard's there and I used to have to go over there and tell him to come home for tea. I don't ever recall seeing Pop in the billiard room. But I do remember seeing him in the barber shop and I used to love, he had this wooden brush with white hair on it and I used to go over there and he used to put powder on it and run it round my neck! Not the shaving brush, the brush that they used to take the hair off when they had finished. Nanna had it in the bottom draw of her dressing table in their bedroom in Townsville. I used to open the bottom drawer and see it and think... it was sort of a feeling of everything was all right.

5.25: I remember mum permed my hair once; and I remember her taking my brother and I to the hospital to get our tonsils out. When we were growing up you just got to a certain age and everybody had their tonsils and adnoids out. I remember her taking me to the hospital and I remember them putting this thing over my face. I don't remember anything else. Then mum brought up ice cream. She used to make icecream; and we had ice cream.

6.00:

And that incident.

We weren't living in the big house then,
we were living in the flat opposite that corner building.
Mum pushed the piano across the door one night
and my father wanted to get in
and she wouldn't let him in.

I was lying on my bed.
It was pink
and I had Miss Muffit on my bed **.

I was tracing Miss Muffit...

And my mother...
was with somebody else.

It wasn't until we were in New Guinea that I realized the significance of that. I just remember the bed, and my father wanting to get in.

And she pushed this piano.
Well, she had to have help, of course,
to push the piano across.
And then my father coming home and wanting to get in;
the piano still across the door.
I never felt frightened.
I guess I was just observing.
I think I probably fell asleep
and woke up when my father was wanting to get in.

He had to go around and climb through the window and move the piano.
He was trying to push the piano and I was in my bed looking. There was always a piano in the house because my mother played the piano really well.

I didn't recognize the face until when I looked...
Now that's quite amazing,
for I have looked at that...
You know how you can look at a photo and not look at a photo?
I've seen that photo so often.
It was only when I looked at that photo –
well, yesterday with you,
[When you asked me who that man was]
– that I recognised his face.

I can't believe it because when I asked my mother, after my father left her in New Guinea, y'know how in the back of your mind you think that maybe it's not true, maybe it's something as a child that you dreamt. My mother confirmed it. Yes, she did – after dad left her. I remember where she was, she was leaning over the table and I said:

– Mum, I have to ask you about something, and I really have to know...

I was probably late twenties:

– Can you tell me truthfully if I dreamt it and it never happened. It's something I've been carrying all my life and I really don't know.

I explained to her how I remembered it and she looked at me really bewildered and she said:

– I can't believe that you remember that.

Meaning that she thought I was too young to remember. She said to me:

– If your father and I ever get back together, don't ever mention this.

I don't remember what happened to the fellow that night. I just remember them being together, embracing and kissing.

10.00: We had a coke stove and I remember dad filling up the coke stove. We used to have this galvanised chute thing and it had a spout on it and he'd go out and get the coke and when he opened it to put the coke in, he tipped the soup over. That's what I first remember about dad, probably because the soup spilt and I was standing in the kitchen and he told me to move: "Quickly move! Get out the way." I remember being pushed.

Dad was in the PO and he even used to work on the exchange. I remember looking through my parents' bedroom window which would have been on the footpath, and they were big windows, and looking at my mother go across. There was like a canvas camp bed, he used to sleep there and mum used to walk across with tea for him. Somebody had to be on the exchange overnight.

He got transferred to Gilliat. He must have met mum. I do know though, before they were married he got transferred. I remember Nanna telling me the story that Les, my father, had actually phoned up and said he didn't want to get married.

I'll tell you when my grandmother told me this story: after my mother's funeral. Nanna was one to keep up appearances. And she said: "Your grandfather had to ring your father and tell him to get down to JC by", I think, "the Friday night, before the wedding. She said Merle was in tears for a few days and my grandfather got on the phone and told Les to get

down here for the wedding. Les wanted to call it off. That's what Nanna told me.

They went on the train to Townsville for their honeymoon, I know that, because Nanna said "You were probably conceived on that train ride".

12.45: [Leave JC]: I can't remember the move. We went to Nelia after JC and we used to go to the Nelia school, my brother and I; and then my mother calling into the school, when she was going to give birth to Robert, who's my younger brother, and my father said: "Do you want to come to JC with me in the ambulance?" I said no and then, the school was across the railway line, I remember Nanna coming to pick me up then I wished that I would have went. I remember what my mother wore, she had on a sort of a pink nightie with creamy lace, and I remember her stomach because she was just lying there in the back of an ambulance, and my brother was born twelve weeks premature at JC. He's fifty this year, 1955.

I remember dad going to the Masons with his little bag of goodies and my mother didn't like it, she always used to go on about it. We went to Nelia because Pop bought the Nelia Hotel. So I guess he probably sold up in JC when we moved to Nelia. All of us were at Nelia. And I think soon after my younger brother was born we moved to Townsville until 57 or 58. Mum and dad used to fight a lot. We lived next door to Nanna and Pop. They had a big house at 6 Picadilly Street that was divided into two flats, well big houses actually. Dad came home from work one night and he said "I've put in for a job in New Guinea", and my mother was really upset about it. He said "Well I'm going. I've gotta get away from the in-laws". And she said "Well I'm not going". Dad went first and we went afterwards. We made lots of visits back to Townsville because my father's contract included airfares back to Australia. He was Post Master.

15.40: He must have left the PO when he worked for Roy in JC. I remember when dad used to do the exchange he was also pencilling for Pop. So he probably still worked at the PO and only worked for Pop on a Saturday. My recollection is he didn't work all the time for Pop.

We were in NG from 1958 till we left in 1975. I married in NG. I went to boarding school in Townsville though. I was St Patrick's Townsville and the boys went to St Theresa's, Abergowrie.

Another thing about Pop, he had these cream pants on and, he liked to dress

up my grandfather, and he had a white shirt on and a red tie, I'm pretty sure it was a bow tie, and we must have went to a race meeting because we called in to Cloncurry to see Bob Katter (Snr), he was a friend of my grandfather's. Pop had a beautiful car, a big cream Humber Super Snipe. At the back was a travelling rug, I remember the colours, I've still got it up there, I must have fallen asleep, Nanna reached over and covered me with the rug.

Pop died in 1972 in Townsville and is buried there. I came down from NG for the funeral. My mother's birthday is the 18th of May, and that's when I was telling you that Sunday afternoon at three o'clock I was lying in the bed next to him and the tears were running from his eyes, and I said

- Poppy, why are you crying?
- Because they're cutting up my little girl.

I'll never forget that. He was really upset. Mum's birthday was the 18th of May and Pop died on the 17th May, the year after mum [1971].

She died in Townsville. What had happened mum and dad split up. Because dad's job had a house, mum was not entitled to a house, and dad had gone and got another house, so my mother had to move out of the house. I said "Well you can come and live with us" and she said "No, I've spoken to Nanna and Pop and I'm going south". She called it south, going back home to her mother and father in Townsville, in 1970. I was married in 68. I remember Pop ringing me up, it was a Friday night. It was hard to get phone calls to NG then. When you spoke to Australia you used to get like a whirring in the background. Clyde [husband] went to the football, he came home, and I said I had a phone call from Pop. I really couldn't understand the phone call. I thought Pop said:

- Your mother's been hit by a truck in the street.
- Is she all right?
- No, she's dead. I'll ring you at seven in the morning, we might get a clearer line.

He phoned early in the morning and said mum had died in her sleep at 12.30 the night before. Clyde and I had to go and tell my father. He had moved and he didn't have a phone on. He was getting ready to pack up and have holidays. I remember he was going on holidays in a couple of weeks time because he said "I'll go to Townsville and see your mother and maybe

we can get back together again." Clyde and I went around to the house, we knocked on the back door but he didn't answer so we went in and walked down to his bedroom. When I called out to him in the bedroom, there was a lot of chatting, and another pair of legs got out of the bed, and then he came out from the kitchen on to the back deck and he said:

- What's up? What's up?
- Dad, mum's dead.
- Don't you tell me things about your mother like that.
- Dad, she's dead.

He was physically shaken and then Clyde continued because I couldn't speak. The next thing I remember after that, we were flying down from NG and my father's sitting next to me in the plane and he said to me "If your grandparents say anything to me I won't stay for the funeral I'll just pack up and go. I thought nothing of it then but as I got older I came to realise: typical Dad, it's all about *him*. My mother was dead but it was still all about him. I knew Nanna and Pop wouldn't say anything because Nanna had too much class. They picked us up at the airport. She had the post mortem on the Sunday. I can't remember what day the funeral was. I know that my grandmother paid for the funeral because my father said he had no money. She's buried one aisle back from Pop.

What happened was, her aorta tore and she was instantly dead. She'd been down to Delma's that night, she'd been to work that day. She'd actually been to the doctor because she wasn't feeling well for a few days and Nanna said that she had some kidney infection. She used to go down to Delma's to have a glass of Scotch. I think it was her way of coping. Nanna told me: She went down to Delma's, like she always did through the week, she came home, we had a cup of tea together, and we went to bed, we'd only just gone to bed and I heard a noise like Woooo, and I asked "Are you all right Merle?" and there was no answer. I got out of bed, turned on the hall way light, and went into your mother's room and she hadn't even pulled the blanket up. I knew, just looking at her that she was already dead. It was like somebody stabbed me in the heart. I called out to Roy to ring for a doctor.

Nanna and I were sleeping in the bed that night, together, the bed that mum had died in, and auntie Kate came around in the afternoon and took all the washing. I was lying next to Nanna and I couldn't sleep and she said to me "Can't you sleep because your mother died here last night?" And I said "I don't know". The dressing table was still like my mother had left it. I

remember saying to my Nanna: "Are these the sheets that mum died in?" "No dear, she wet the bed when she died." I remember lying there thinking about it, how you just... I don't know... afraid of death.

26.10: I've got all of Nanna's letters that she wrote to me. I've got them pasted in a book. Before Pop died she said I fear that I'm going to lose your grandfather soon. I knew he was sick, but not desperately sick. Nanna phoned me, it was in the afternoon, she said "I've got some bad news, your grandfather passed away very peacefully in the Townsville General hospital. She didn't mention that he had lung cancer. Never mentioned once to me. She told me afterwards. Auntie Kate took her to the hospital to be with him when he died, because she couldn't drive.

Nanna lived in Townsville but she always came to us every November and stayed until the kids went back to school in February. Wherever we were Nanna came because she said the boys and myself were her only family. 1988 we moved here. Well she lived with us when she broke her hip. She came down one Christmas and I was getting the car out of the garage and she said she'd walk out the front because it was more level, she didn't like the slope. She had a red and white dress on and her white handbag, she was still a stickler for matching shoes and handbag, and I backed the car and got out to help her: "Nanna, come on we're going" and she seemed to turn but not move her legs which tripped her over. She just fell. I tried to lift her and she called out: "Where's my mother?" I said: "Nanna, *I'm* here, it's all right". "Ooh, I'm paining dear", she said, "I'm paining. "

We called the ambulance and they took her to hospital where they pinned and plated her. I saw the X-ray and her bones looked like beehive. I was blaming myself but the doctor said it was only a matter of time before she fell the wrong way. [1990]

She came home here for a little while, a few months, and she was fine and I was working. Nanna threw in the towel after that. She more or less gave up. Once she broke that hip I think she was always frightened of falling again, so wouldn't move around a lot.

She was at Nazareth House at Wynnum when she died. I used to say "C'mon, let's get the walker and walk", because there's a big verandah, "up and down, Nanna. The Physio said you've gotta walk." "Oh, leave me alone, dear", she'd say, "Leave me alone. Everytime you come here you hound me". That was her favourite saying.

Her house in Townsville was terrible. She wasn't looking after herself. She hadn't cleaned behind things and what she'd done, everything started to smell and she'd got baby powder and sprinkled it over her shoes and hat boxes so it didn't smell. And for Nanna not to go to church, that was the first year she wouldn't go to church. We were brought up Catholic and we have this thing that we've been brainwashed with that says if you miss mass you commit mortal sin, so I said [in a high voice]: "Nanna, if you miss mass you'll commit mortal sin and you'll go to hell." She used to walk to church every day in Townsville. Pop used to say: "They've only got to ring the bells and Gladys'll be up there".

Evelyn [Graham] was the only JC person at her funeral.

31.10: I don't ever remember wads of money in his top pocket, ever, but I do remember that he, because he started to have a belly by then, he seemed to have pockets that were like, this long. And he used to take off his pants – I never saw him take off his pants of course – he used to hang them up by the braces on the back of the bathroom door, because I remember looking at the long pockets and feeling, which probably was that much (a couple of inches), and he had the second biggest safety pin I've ever seen, tied on top of the notes. Now he left his pants like that with the money in it. And he always wore braces.

In Townsville when he used to come home from a race meeting, that front bedroom where my mother died, he used to get the betting bag and open it up upside down and all this money would fall all over the bed, and he would do the banking on Monday, and I was allowed to put it in order and Pop used to give us some silver.

[Molasses and barley]: I don't think he gave that type of food to the horses every day because it always seemed to be on a Monday because my Nanna always used to put the sheets in the copper on a Monday. He would mix up this molasses and barley and my grandmother used to say:

"Roy, Roy, when will you be finished doing that?"

"I don't know why you want it Gladys, you've got a good washing machine over there."

It was one of those round things and if something got caught you flipped up that chrome thing and it released it. And she used to say "Just finish what

you're doing so I can use that copper."

I never heard my grandmother swear, you know that? And she used to say to me, if she didn't want to answer anything she used to go like this [put her finger across her lips]. I'd rather not say yes or no than tell a lie.

She used to read the cards, she'd read cards for people and tell their fortune. Playing cards, they didn't have those mystical type cards. We were talking about it in Townsville and I said "Nanna, one day I'm gonna have my cards read." And she said "No you're not. Don't mess with the devil." And I just thought that's Nanna being Nanna. And then she said to me: "I'll tell you" she said, "and nobody knows, but I used to read the cards. I had a gift of reading cards." Before here mother died, her mother used to say to her: "Glady, read my cards". And Nanna said I read the cards and the Death card came up, and Nanna said she didn't have the gift that day. At her mother's insistence she shuffled the cards and the Death card came up twice, and then a third time. The Ace of Spades. And by the end of the week her mother was dead, she'd had a stroke.

35.30: Pop always talked about JC. Pop always felt that he should have continued working but he had a stroke. Pop and my brother went in the Humber to JC for a doctor's visit. Nanna stayed back at Nelia hotel. He'd been to the doctor and he had some tablets. We were sitting in the car my brother and I, waiting, and he fell asleep on my lap on the back seat. I remember looking into Gannon's and Pop was drinking and it was maybe mid afternoon and we started driving home. By that time I was in the front seat. He pulled over the side of the road and he was shaking and he said "I can't drive the car, Love". He put me on his lap and said I'd have to steer. The combination of alcohol and the tablets... There was a whole lot of lights at Nelia hotel, I remember that and coming across the railway line. It was dark and there were heaps of people.

37.10: He was a wonderful man; gentle, kind, never a bad word.

She was a pretty hard business woman, my Nanna. I remember her saying to me when Pop wanted to buy the Nelia Hotel, she said to him: "Roy, if you want to be a publican, there's one thing you've gotta promise me is that you will not touch a drink." I'm not saying that my grandfather was an alcoholic or a boozier, he had a few drinks and liked to have a good time. She told him that if he want to go we'll make a go of it and we'll go from there sort of thing.

Nanna used to say to me from as far back as I can remember, she'd give us money and we'd want to spend it all and she'd say: "No, you must put some away for a rainy day." I'd loaned somebody money and I mentioned it to her that somebody owed me ten dollars, and she said: "Well you'll never see your money again and that person will never be your friend again." She said: "Just remember, Dear, all through your life, that money is your number one and only friend. It's the only thing that will look after you."

38.40: To be quite honest with you, I didn't know my mother as a person because she died, I went to boarding school and I remember things when I came home from holidays in NG but she always seemed that she wasn't happy. Yeah, my mother wasn't always happy in NG. I don't know if it's because she left mum and pop, or... I don't think she ever liked JC.

I remember once saying to dad how wonderful my grandfather was and why couldn't he be more like my grandfather, and then he said "Your grandfather was a mean, shrewd bastard; you don't know the side of him that I've seen." And from that time onwards I was really hurt and virtually that was... My... my father... and I never saw eye to eye because he was an alcoholic. In NG that's all they did was drink. He was President of the Rugby League Club and President of the Hawks club, he may have been in the Masons because that little black bag was in NG, but me being at boarding school I don't know what their life was like but I do know coming home from boarding school, I used to have holidays with Nanna and Pop through the year, I'd only go home once a year, so how do you get to know somebody who's your mother, she had me, she nurtured me, but as a person I never knew her because I was robbed of that [said bitterly]. I remember coming home one holidays and my mother didn't even know I'd had my period. She'd packed me up with all the stuff and I came home one holidays and she said: "have you menstruated yet?" And I said "No" – and I hadn't. Then when I came home after I did and she asked me and I hid it from her. But of course mum's know. I got my period when I was home and she said: "Why did you lie to me?"

I felt mum wasn't there for all those milestones. Sister Immaculata ** who was a Mercy nun at the boarding school, the day I got my period I was lying in bed and she came to the dormitory and – clap! clap! – she clapped her hands at me, everybody had to be out of bed and on their knees because we were going to six o'clock mass. I went to get out of bed and there was all this blood in the bed. She came a ripped back the quilt and sheets from

me and she said: "You stay there, Dear, I'll come back for you." I didn't know. I thought something was wrong with me. I was really upset the whole time until Sister Immaculata came back, she came back with a cup of tea and a piece of toast. She said "Now, do you know all about this?" I said: "No, not really, except my mother's given me the pads" And she said: "Well how about I draw you a bath and you hop in and get yourself cleaned up and I'll get this mess cleaned up here and we'll talk about it." So when I came out from having a bath she said to me: "Now you'll get this every month and you'll get it like this for the rest of your life until you don't have them anymore." My mother hadn't explained things to me. Mum and I never had any real closeness. I remember one day I was heading back to boarding school and the plane was ready to go and I used to do this every year: the day before the plane went I never spoke to my mother. As soon as the plane took off from Port Moresby I would cry all the way to Townsville. I never told my mother until one day in New Guinea when I was married, because I started to get close to her then, and I said: "Y'know mum, when I went to boarding school, the plane used to take off and I used to cry all the way to Townsville." And she said to me: "And you know when your father drove me home from the airport, I cried all the way home".

I'm glad she said that to me because I used to wonder why they would send me away, why I couldn't stay in NG with them.

44.00: [Doubts about her paternity]: Well, only because of my blood grouping. It's impossible for me to have the blood group that I've got. Everybody else in my family is O-positive and I'm O-negative. It's impossible. I've asked the doctors up at Redlands where I work. Both my brothers are O-positive. They just look at me and go: "I can't explain it" – probably to save my feelings. [She identified Orr in the wedding photo as the fella she remembers with her mother]

I'll tell you something about Nanna the morning she died, and I honestly believe this. We got phoned up at two or three o'clock in the morning and we went into the Mater Hospital:

My brother turned up,
Les.
Not my brother Robert;
he was living in Sydney.

I was holding on to her

and the staff were coming in and doing checks on her
and she made that –
"Uurrrwwhh"
– that terrible noise.

I had my hand on her neck
and her heart went for 93 beats after she took her last breath...
and...
I fe...
I felt...
I felt her pass through me.
And instead of feeling sad I had this *unbelievable*...
I'd never had the feeling before,
...unbelievable feeling of, like,
ecstasy and excitement and happiness.
But God I loved her.

Sorry...

Not a day goes by but I don't think of Nanna...

I can't believe I'm crying.

But not a day goes by but I don't think of her...

And yet... I can...
A day can go by and I not think of my mother,
but I think of my grandmother...
She was just...
I don't know...

Sorry.

I can't explain the feeling that I got,
but I believe she had a spirit,
she *has* a spirit,
and it went through me on her way out.

Then I stayed back after everybody went
and I washed her...
and I dried her...

and then they came and took her and she had a blue nightie on.
And my mother was in a blue nightie as well...

I don't own a blue nightie.

I'll never buy a blue nightie...

She was a wonderful woman.

Bloody hard woman though. Bloody hard all right!