

Early Life

My parents separated when I was quite young, and it affected all of us four children.

The circumstances of the separation determined that our mother had to move from Echuca to Melbourne in 1937. It was from this time on that we lived with our maternal grandparents, aunts and uncles. They took very good care of us while our mother worked. Thankfully, all our relatives were extremely loving people, and those early days were very good ones.

When I was three years old, we lived in a small home in Middle Park. Later, because there were so many of us, we moved to a larger house not far away.

Our mother was our main supporter when we attended school. She purchased and operated a milk bar in which each of us children worked before and after school. After leaving school, we would work in the shop for a full year before each of us started a job of our own.

After separating from Dad, our mother led a chaste life and never seemed to have any romantic attachments. She had an older male friend who frequently helped her. He knew her from the time they had worked together at a locksmith's factory in Footscray. They had become quite good friends, and he would frequently bring gifts for us all. With hindsight, I am sure he would have wanted much more, but Mum was an old fashioned girl, and it wasn't to be.

Mum was an astute businesswoman. She was quite successful in operating the milk bar on Canterbury Road in Middle Park. After operating it for quite some time, she eventually sold it and bought a baby clothing shop in Highett. But that did not turn out to be profitable, and she lost quite a lot of money on the venture. She wound that business up and bought another milk bar, this time it was in Gardenvale. Once again, she was able to turn a tidy profit and the business became quite successful.

I don't remember much about my father. Mum was never forthcoming in talking to us about him. In the early days, when I was still quite young, I remember that he would sometimes arrive at our school and brought us sweets. I suppose he was trying to make an effort, but I will never know or understand how he could have just walked out and left all of us the way he did. I don't know what went through his conscience or what he reflected on in later life. All I can say is that I am sorry for him because he missed so much.

I believe he died at St Vincent's Hospital in Melbourne sometime during the 1960s, that was more than 50 years ago, and I was having difficulties of my own at that time.



My Sister Patricia

Pat was born on 9 July 1931, the eldest of us four girls. She was incredibly good at sport. At age 24, she captained a netball team that toured England.

Academically, Pat was an excellent student and quite competitive. After she left school, she took a job as a bookkeeper at a large dairy based in Port Melbourne. She rode her bicycle to work each day.

Pat was always popular and had many boyfriends. When she was 27, she married a local boy, Michael McCarthy who, like us, was a Catholic. They had six children, and led a busy life looking after their large family. Michael had to hold down two jobs to support them all, while Pat worked two hours every evening as a cleaner at the local school.

Sadly, Michael died on 19 August 2009 of prostate cancer, leaving Pat alone in their large home in East Bentleigh.

Bernice Braletitch

One of their sons, Sean, was injured in a trail bike accident when he was 20, and he remained a paraplegic.

Pat, who recently turned 80, has now sold the big family home and has moved to a smaller unit nearby.



My Sister Leonie

Leonie was one year older than me. She was born on the 30th of March 1933.

Leonie was reasonably good at school, although unlike the rest of us, she was a late starter.

My three sisters and I attended Kilbride Catholic Secondary School in Albert Park, where the nuns looked after us very well. Although we were not brilliant, the nuns were very kind and they helped us in many ways, including academically. As a result of their influence, we remained loyal to the sisters all of our lives.

Leonie was proving to be an exceptionally good seamstress, and it held her in good stead when she later became a Sacred Heart nun. But she didn't stay in the sisterhood. Six years later she left the order and took up a position in a Commonwealth Government Department office on Bourke Street in Melbourne.

Sometime later, Leonie was able to take time off from her job in order to travel to Papua New Guinea and work as a lay teacher in a local school.

Leonie and Mum were keen AFL (Australian Football League) supporter. They would often go to football matches together. At the end of each season, they would camp outside the M.C.G. (Melbourne Cricket Ground) for days waiting to buy tickets to the semi and grand finals. While Leonie barracked for the South Melbourne team, Mum followed the Richmond tigers.

Leonie was also a very keen follower of cricket, which might have been as a result of the games we played together as children. Those games were always a lot of fun, and Leonie would always be the wicket keeper. Mum and Leonie also travelled to the country each year for the annual Easter Stawell Gift foot race that is held over three days.

Sadly, Leonie died prematurely at age 48. There was some evidence that the specialist doctor treating her, might have been negligent; but our mother refused to entertain any idea of taking legal action, The television show, '60 Minutes', wanted to telecast the story, but my mother refused their offer.

The specialist doctor who was treating her at the time was a psychiatrist specialising in drug and alcohol addiction. He was treating Leonie for depression. After Leonie died, I asked him what he had put on her certificate of death. His answer was, "Cardiac Failure".

It was a sad end for Leonie. She had been at home for the weekend, when she took ill on the Saturday evening. She was rushed by ambulance to Cedar Court Hospital, where it took four hours before a hospital doctor could come to see her. When he finally examined her, they couldn't find a bed, so they arranged her transfer to the Prince Henry Hospital.

Poor Leonie died in the ambulance on the way. We were very distressed at the circumstances surrounding her sudden death; we all thought it could have been easily avoided if proper procedures were adhered to.

We were given strong legal advice to sue the hospital as well as the doctor, but Mum wouldn't hear any of it. It would not bring Leonie back to us.



Bernice Braletitch

My Sister Alene

Alene is the youngest in the family. She was born on the 13 April 1935 and was everyone's darling.

To obviate the need to go twice through the ordeal of saying goodbye, Mum requested for Alene and I to enter the convent together on February 11th, 1953. I with the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart in Balwyn and Alene with the Society of Sacred Heart in Glen Iris, both in Melbourne, Victoria. Alene's order was mainly involved in the education of girls. This order consisted of two sections, one of teacher nuns and the other of coadjutrix who were responsible for the smooth running of the boarding school. Alene joined the latter as she did not have any teaching qualifications.

From 1960 to 1970 Alene moved around the province as the need of the community demanded from Melbourne to Rose Bay and Bowral in NSW.

Following the 1960's Second Vatican Council directives, changes were made which allowed Alene to be trained as a primary school teacher. Following a time of illness and recovery from surgery Alene began her studies in 1970. In 1973 she commenced teaching at Christ the King primary school. However Alene had hearing problems, which made classroom teaching too difficult, therefore in 1983 Alene was offered the position of home liaison officer at the secondary college in Braybrook, which entailed one to one meetings and interviews.

In May 1991 she was given permission to live at home caring for our elderly mother. This was a very special time. Alene returned to Braybrook community when Mum died in January 1994.

Alene was involved in a very serious motorcar accident in 1994 in which one of the sisters was killed. As part of her recuperation Alene went to New Zealand for three months. After this time she answered an advertisement in the local paper from the Sunshine special developmental school looking for volunteers to help with their programme. She was delighted to be accepted and worked there three days a week.

In 1998 the sisters left Braybrook and moved to the Sunshine North parish. Alene continued her work at the school and she started coming to me two days a week so that Alex could have some time to do things that needed doing and to have a well earned break from looking after me. Alene and I enjoyed this time.

In 2007 Alene had back surgery and it took a long time for her to recover from this. In 2009 her mental health caused her to be hospitalised. After some weeks she rejoined the community at Glen Iris. A second period of hospitalisation followed. She has now become a resident at St. Catherine's Aged care facility in Balwyn North where she receives very good care.

When we were all growing up in the 30s and 40s, private telephones were a luxury that very few people could afford and, even if they were wealthy, they were not easily available.

There were public telephone boxes located at a few intersections and at post offices for making outward calls. However, to be able to receive calls families had to make arrangements with nearby shops, which had telephones, especially when one needed to receive what was called 'trunk calls'. These were calls either from overseas, interstate or country Victoria. When a trunk call was received for a resident and customer of my mother's shop, my sister Alene and we three girls took turns to run to their house to alert them. The Postmaster General's Department (P.M.G.) telephone operator in the city timed calls and every three minutes the caller was charged at very expensive rates.

Alene is residing at St Catherine's hostel and Nursing home, in North Balwyn. Residents are accommodated in single rooms or in the high care unit of the nursing home. They have a large dinning room where residents are served three meals a day.

When I visited her one day, I gave her a box of stationary and cards to try to encourage her to write to us. Christmas was a good time as many people went to visit. Eventually she perked up a little and found that the in house activities were good for her. One of the sisters in her order drove her for Christmas to Barat in Glen Iris, which is the motherhouse. It made her very happy.

Alene will probably make St Catherine's her permanent home now, although she will in many ways remain attached to her order. She has now taken over the management of the Chapel, which I think is good for her.

Alene's battle with depression has been difficult; during the long time she didn't write or phone us, we were concerned about her.

Bernice Braletitch

I have mentioned elsewhere in this book that I suffer from severe depression, so I have an understanding of how difficult life can be when depression occurs. I still have some terrible episodes myself. But Alene's health is improving, and I've been able to travel to Balwyn North to see her a few times.

My grand children went to see her not long ago; their visit brought her joy.



My Mother

Mum moved from Echuca to Melbourne with us four little girls. During World War II, she worked at a locksmith's factory in Footscray. Mum worked very hard to pay the fees of an expensive school we attended. As I mentioned earlier, when Mum was working, we stayed with mother's relatives, and we were well looked after.

To enable me to have music lessons after school, Mum had to work an extra job, waitressing. She would do this in the evenings at mansions in East Melbourne. She not only paid for the music lessons, but also bought me a second hand piano.

We were living with Kath and Norienne in their small home in Middle Park, but because there were so many of us, we had to move to a larger home nearby.

My grandparents were wonderful; they were very loving. We called them Nana and Grandpa. They, and our aunties, looked after us very caringly.

Grandpa worked for the Department of Agriculture, and Nana stayed home and looked after us children while our mum was at work. When Grandpa was in his early sixties, the Department transferred him to Colac. My grandparents had to move, and our extended happy family was split up. This was traumatic for us four girls. Our grandparents' move to Colac was a big shock to us four girls because we had all become quite attached to them. My mother had to find a different kind of employment because she no longer had her own mother to care for us. She bought a milk bar, and that was the start of successful business ventures.

My mother was a very strong person; she had to be. She had worked hard at the locksmiths during the war. I believe she lost the top part of her finger whilst operating one of the machines. Mum always worked hard; we didn't realise it at the time as we were at school, but when I think back to those times I remember, we all had bikes. Even the two younger sisters, myself included. Of course they were second-hand bikes, but still a big expense for Mum.

We were also attending a private school. I believe the nuns made it easier for Mum to pay some of the school fees, but there were still a lot of other costs that she had to pay. When all of us children wanted to learn music, there was never any question. We all had piano lessons, and Mum had to take a second job so that she could earn enough to afford buying that piano.

Mum's waitressing job was for evening meals; she would hurry from her job in Footscray to get to East Melbourne in time for her to serve dinner to the restaurant's rich clients.

Mum's day would see her setting off in the morning by train at 6.30am, and she would not return home again till 9 o'clock in the evening; hers was quite a long day.

Mum also made sure that we did a lot of sport such as diving, swimming, tennis, running and netball. We lived near Albert Park. We had the beach at one end of the street and Albert Park Lake at the other end. We were good swimmers; I was a good diver and won a trophy. The Commodore of the Albert Park Lake was a family friend who would sometimes take us on his yacht, a treat we thoroughly enjoyed. I also remember that we often climbed the trees surrounding the leafy lake.

Every year, Mum and Grandpa went to the Easter Stawell Gift foot race event. Mum was billeted with the same family in Stawell for 50 years, and where she would go with my sister Leonie, as I recounted earlier.

As Mum's health deteriorated, Alene took special leave from the convent, and went to live at our mother's house in Carnegie. Alene cared for her every need for two and a half years. Alene received a carer's pension, which she used to buy Mum records of Frank Sinatra and other singers. As Mum was a sports enthusiast, Alene bought her relevant books and games programmes.

Mum liked to watch the sports programmes and commentaries on the TV. She was very happy with Alene caring for her at home, a familiar environment, and where she did not have to worry about anything. Once a week, I would relieve Alene so that she could visit her Sisters' community. I would wash Mum's hair and shower her. My other sister Pat also visited regularly and also managed all Mum's financial matters.

In mid-December 1992, Mum went to the Caulfield Medical Centre Hospital for a small operation on her left knee. After a few days, the physiotherapist took her for exercises, and she seemed to progress. I often visited her and she enjoyed the Dixie ice cream I usually brought her.

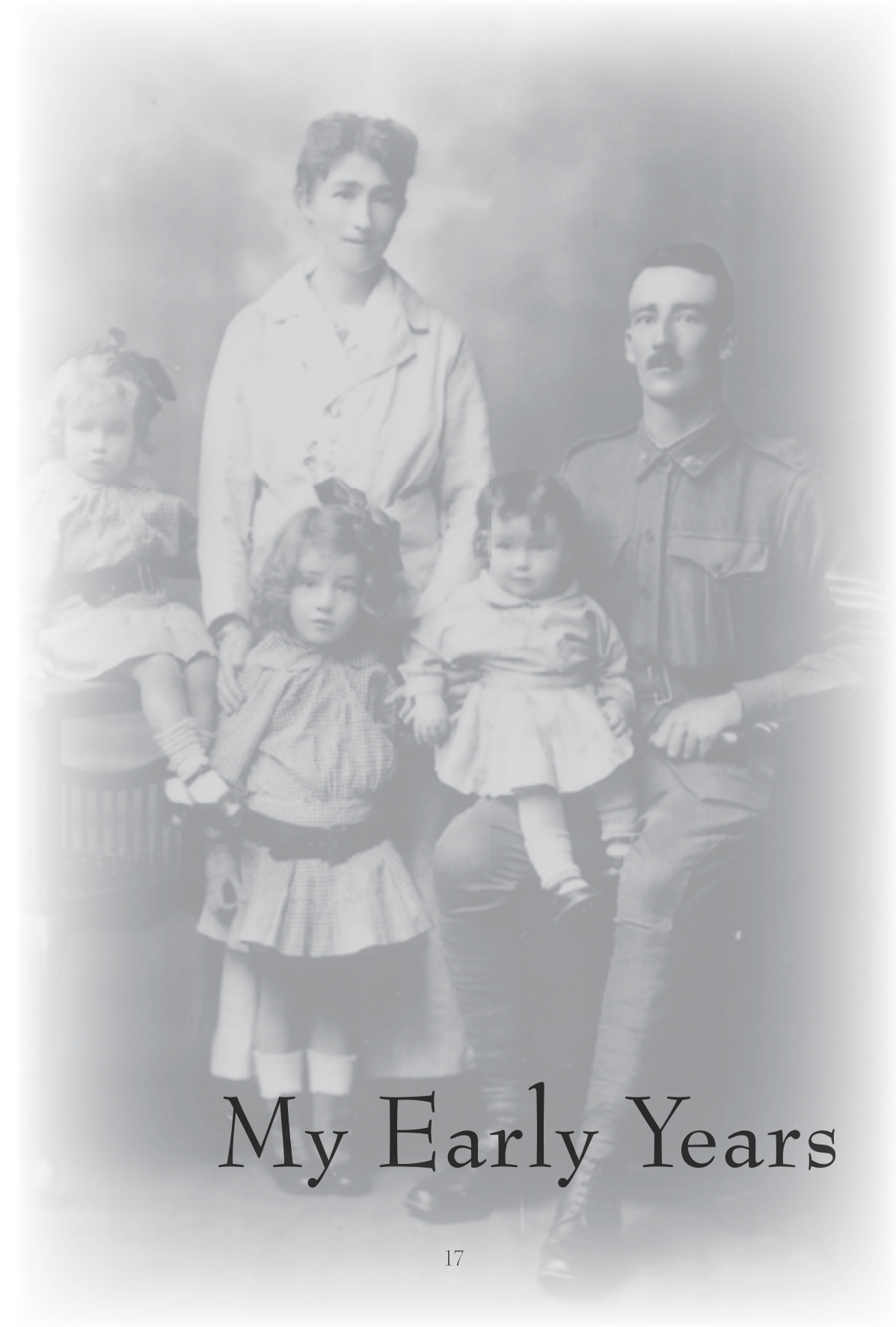
One day, she asked for another one. I had to run to the downstairs kiosk before they shut down for the day. Mum was unable to feed herself at that time.

When I returned, Mum was propped up in bed, but she was unconscious, and had vomited. I alerted the nurse who contacted the doctor. After his visit, he advised us that Mum had had a massive cerebral stroke, and may die that day. Mum did not regain consciousness and died five days later on Saturday 1 January 1994. She was 82. The family kept vigil day and night.

I have a photo of my mother smoking, taken in the 1980s. Mum used to smoke and drink ale every day. When she died, she left me and my other sisters about \$64,000 each, except for Alene, the nun, to whom she left \$10,000. Mum said nuns had everything, and she was right.

Alene put the money in a bank account and with the interest bought me flowers when she visited me twice a week to care for me and allow Alex to have a break for a few hours.





My Early Years

Bernice Braletitch

*My grandparents,
Lillian (Nana) and
Eric John Dwyer with
daughters Kath,
Margaret and Alice.
Circa 1916*



Doherty sisters - 1936



The 4 Doherty sisters, from left: Alene Doherty, Bernice, Leonie and Patricia is sitting at the piano keyboard. Circa 1938



The Doherty sisters from left in the back Patricia and Leonie, in the front Alene and Bernice - 1940

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Nana and Grandpa - 1940s



Nana - 1940





*Doherty family on the front porch of 94 Hambleton St.
Middle Park, Vic.
From left Bernice (white socks) Patricia, Margaret (mother),
Leonie and Alene. Circa 1942*



Lillian Dwyer - 1940s



*L to R: Nana Dwyer, Norienne Peterson (née Dwyer)
Kath Quirk (née Dwyer) during WWII*

*Auntie Nan Dwyer as
Sergeant in the Australian
Women's Army Service.
Taken at Burwood in
Sydney during WWII*



*Patricia Doherty
captain of Australian
Ladies Basketball team -
1956*





*Mick and Patricia
McCarthy at
Carmelite Church,
Middle Park -
February 2nd, 1958*



*Mick and Patricia McCarthy
cutting the cake -
February 2nd, 1958*