

I will start the eulogy for my Mum, Tess Parnis Cini, with sections from a memoir she wrote for her 60th birthday in 2004.

I will then read parts of an extremely well written and heart-felt letter from Fr Bert Fullbrook. Fr Bert is Emanuel's Uncle and also a school mate of my late father, Valentine.

I will then finish with a dedication I wrote to Mum.

I have summarised Mum's 6500-word account of life, but have kept her own words and perspective.

I will now speak as Mum.

Dedication

I dedicate this memoir to my late husband Val, who showed me how to love and how to be loved.

I also give heartfelt thanks to Pamela Cummings and John Carrigg. Their support necessary to carry me through the 10-day interval between Val's death and the return to my family in Malta.

Early Years

My father Nicholas Bonavia and mother Marie Therese Bonavia whose maiden name was Camilleri were both born in the Maltese village of Mosta.

I was born at our home in Birkirkara on a rainy Thursday, 27th April 1944 at 11.15am. My parents named me Theresa, Rosalia, Josephine. I was the youngest of a family of 10

siblings, four of which died in infancy. The survivors were Doris, Joseph, Carmen, Virginia, and Emily. My mother died when I was 8. Doris, the eldest sibling, was charged with the role of Mother of the family, formalised by my father donning my Mother's gold necklace onto her neck. Doris was 21 at that time.

My father was a successful business man that owned and ran a furniture factory named "Four Brothers". My father was from a family of 4 brothers. We also had shops to sell the furniture which were called "Bonavia Bros. Furniture Maker".

I attended school and finished year 12. I then sat the G.C.E. exams with the University of Oxford in 1961. At this stage I was too young to enter Teachers' College, but with Malta war stricken at the time, I was instructed to start teaching immediately. My first assignment was a class of year 7's in Birkirkara.

My sister Carmen died at the age of 34, followed closely by Emily at the age of 29. Leaving behind my Father, my sisters Doris and Virginia, my brother Joseph, and myself. I was 23 at the time.

Love and Australia

In 1974 I met a handsome young man whose name was Val Parnis. He was back in Malta (the country of his birth) on holidays from Australia where he had already lived for 35 years. We went out for the first time on the 23rd of April 1974, and married on the 16th of September that same year.

We left Malta for Australia on the 8th of October 1974. We landed in Melbourne to pick up Val's station wagon and then drove the Nullabor Plain to Perth. We rented in Fremantle for 3 months, after which we purchased a house in Hamilton Hill.

Children

David was born on the 26th of February 1980 and his brother James followed on the 22nd of March 1982. I never saw a prouder dad than my husband. These two boys filled our hearts with so much joy! But alas! For Val it was very short-lived. He died suddenly at work of a massive heart attack on the 17th of August 1984 when David was 4 years old and James was 2 years old.

My sister Virginia was appointed by my father to be with me in Australia and to help me fulfil my wish of raising my boys with a chance for the future. I owe my Sister Virginia greatly for her support, for putting up with me during that trying time, and for the sacrifices she made. For a full year she stayed with me in Australia, not even leaving my side when we heard that Dad's death was imminent and also upon hearing of his death. I owe her everything.

This ends my summarisation of Mum's memoir, I would now like to read part of the letter from Father Bert Fullbrook.

This is how I'd like to remember Tess.

The first time I met her was at Tardun WA in 1978 at a school re-union. Valentine (Val), a class mate of mine, introduced me to his wife. Tess was then a beautiful 34 year old young lady in her prime.

I remember Tess as a competent teacher, a superb organizer, and a loving, devoted mother of David and James. Single-handedly, Tess put her two boys through primary school and through Aquinas. Later she supported her two boys through university and was proud of their academic achievement.

I invited Tess to my ordination in Adelaide in 1991. It was in Adelaide that Tess met Emanuel, and the two fell in love in the space of a week. It was my privilege to officiate at their wedding at Aquinas chapel on the 22nd of December 1991. Tess, the organizer, was at her best. The memory of that wedding has stayed happily with me over the years.

On the 2nd of December 1996, Tess pulled me out of hospital for the day. Tess the organiser, had planned a surprise party for my sixtieth birthday. After my stay in hospital she also nursed me through my first few days of rehab.

These are my memories of Tess, the organizer, the friend, the energetic woman, and the gracious giver of hospitality.

I would now like to read my dedication to Mum, albeit short, I hope it does her justice

To a very good woman
Tess, Tessie, Mrs Cini, Mrs Parnis. Mum.
Determined, intelligent, and straightforward;
Kind, loving, and caring;
Robbed young of a husband and robbed later of a mind.

Thank you, Mum.
I love you, Mum.
I am because of you, Mum.