

**A Concise Memoir of my**

**Life's Journey**

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**27<sup>th</sup> April 2004**

**Dedication**

**I dedicate these pages to the memory of my late husband, Val who showed me how to love and how to be loved and to have complete faith in me to bring up our children on my own.**

**My thanks are also due to my best friend, Pamela Cummings for the big role she played not only when Val died but throughout all the years to the present time.**

**My thanks also go to my family, firstly for bringing me up from the age of eight, for putting up with my temper, for the fact that they sacrificed their future to guarantee mine and for always being ready to pick up the pieces when things go wrong in my nuclear family**

**My last but not least thanks go to both my deceased parents who have shown me the way of never giving up when faced with adversity as well as my two beloved deceased sisters Carmen and Emily**

**Thanks to my two sons David and James who were my inspiration to carry on.**

**Thanks to my husband Emanuel For all of his constant loving care during these trying years of my life.**

I was born to Maltese parents. Both my father Nicholas and my mother Marie Therese were born in the village of Mosta. My father was born on Saturday 16 January 1904 and my mother was born on Saturday 16 April 1904, so Dad was precisely three months older than Mum. Dad was the first born in a family of four boys and one girl. His sister died of meningitis when she was only 15 years old. My father was a saddle maker by trade.

My mother was the first born of three girls and one boy. At the age of 16 together with her only brother Paul who was then 12 years old, her youngest sister Elvira who was 11 years old and her cousin Joseph who was 19 years old, emigrated to California in San Francisco. Her father had gone ahead of them and her mother remained in Malta with her second eldest daughter, Elena. From Malta they sailed to Le Havre in France, which was the port of departure to San Francisco. They sailed away on the ship, S.S. Rochambeau and they arrived in California on 17 September 1920. Her father had by then bought a house in Oakland Street, San Francisco. Mum used to work in a tobacco factory where she used to roll cigarettes. She returned to Malta some time in August 1929. My father had already shown interest in her before she left for San Francisco when she was only 16 years old. When he heard of her return to Malta he got in touch with her through a friend and they were married two months later on Sunday 20 October 1929, both of them 25 years old. Mum was the first bride from Mosta to get married with a hat instead of the "Faldetta" (hood of shame). They were married in their parish church of the Mosta Rotunda. During the Second World War they shifted from Mosta to Birkirkara, to a house which my father had built. My two remaining sisters and my brother still live in that house. It is a big house and is situated at 23 Dun Filippo Borg Street. I was Mum's 11th pregnancy but the 10<sup>th</sup> born

child. My parents lost four children in infancy, two girls and two boys, the eldest of which was 13 months old. In those days child mortality was very high. Those who survived were my eldest sister Doris, my brother Joseph, Carmen, Virginia, Emily and myself.

I was born at home on Thursday, 27<sup>th</sup> April 1944 at 11.15 a.m. They named me Theresa, Rosalia, Josephine. It was raining all day. My father registered my birth 7 days later on 3<sup>rd</sup> of May. My brother quite often reminds me that he had the chore (I prefer to call it 'Priveledge') of putting me to sleep every night. He tells me, because of course I don't remember, that I would sleep while he holds me and sings to me and as soon as he puts me down I start crying. At the end, one day he had enough of pacing up and down for a good hour and then as soon as he puts me down I start howling. That night I drove him to his wit's end and in desperation he started putting a little of his saliva on my drooping eyelids. It worked! I think he should have advertised this new-found method of putting babies to sleep the easy way, because it still worked in 1980 when my eldest son David was born. I used to spend hours pacing up and down with him and singing lullabies to him. He'll sleep in my arms and as soon as I put him down he's wide awake. I happened to mention this in a letter to my brother once and he soon reminded me of his remedy.

As I grew up everyone in the family pampered me and I must admit I felt spoilt. My sisters used to argue with each other as who of them was going to bathe me. I remember vividly, every Sunday morning Dad would take me to a Public Garden, called "San Anton Garden". He used to buy me an orange and there used to be a photographer there. This photographer used to put his head inside a black hood and Dad used to tell me to go in front of the camera so the man will take my photo. After taking the photo the man used to put the picture or so I thought, in a bucket of water. I quite

often wondered what happened to those photos because neither of my sisters or my brother have ever seen any of them. Neither did I. Recently the idea occurred to me that maybe my father used to make me believe that I was having my picture taken when in fact he never took any at all! It's taken me all these years to work him out! After that we used to go and visit Nannu Joseph at Mosta who was my maternal grandfather whom I adored.

I also remember every Sunday afternoon, our parents used to go upstairs for a siesta and my sisters and brother made use of that time to swing me on the washing lines. I used to love it, but every now and then, Mum will put her head out of the bathroom window and tell them to stop doing that because they can damage my spine! Maybe that's where my arthritis stems from! They also used to play "Siggu Bambin" which translated in English means "Jesus' Chair". They will cross their hands over each other and another one will sit me up on their crossed hands and they will run all through the backyard with me sitting on their crossed hands. I also have vivid memories of when I cut my curls and then I was afraid of them so I hid them under the couch. Little did I realise that Mum moves the couch to sweep. When she was brushing my hair I started to cry and accuse her that she was pulling my hair, causing it to fall. Mum was no fool, she realised that the hair was falling off because it was cut! I also remember when I pulled my sister Emily's hair, which she used to wear in a pony tail, because she would not give me the toy I wanted. My father nearly killed me that day for refusing to apologise to my sister.

Although I was very naughty at home yet in public I was very shy. Hard to believe that of me now, eh? One day, when I was about three years old we were coming out of the church and my sister Doris stopped to talk to the priest. I was holding on to her skirt and trying to hide behind her, when I suddenly fell and hit my chin against a sharp metal that was

there so people will brush off the dirt from the sole of their shoes before entering the church. My sister was very upset because she was afraid what Mum was going to tell her with all that blood pouring out. Needless to say, Mum was very upset, but not with my sister. I had to have stitches. As if that was not enough trouble, when my stitches were eventually removed, I was playing with my ball in our backyard when I fell and hit my chin against the kitchen step. Dad had to rush me again to the doctor's surgery for stitches in the same spot. I had never seen my father so livid. When we returned home from the doctor's surgery he got the ball and cut it into a thousand pieces and threw it in the well!

Mum had a difficult, traumatic time with my birth and she never really recovered completely from it. I was only 8 years old when on 11<sup>th</sup> November 1952 Dad woke me up to tell me that Mum had died. She died in her bed at home and I remember that day very vividly. In those days it was the custom that when someone dies, they smear a chalky substance on all the mirrors in the house and all photos hanging on the wall were turned face down, except the picture of the deceased.

All the furniture was draped as well. The doorknobs were taken off the front door as a sign of mourning. I still remember the eeriness of the house. Every time we say something it echoed. I remember trying to wake up Mum because she had promised me to make me homemade ravioli, her speciality, because I had been a good girl. When sometimes I recall the moment when Dad asked me to kiss "Mamma" for the last time, I can still remember the coldness of her cheeks to this very day. Mum was a very gentle person, very proud of her children. She was a good

doting mother and an excellent homemaker. She always tried to pass on her wisdom to us even though we were still very young. She was the one who taught us our first prayers and always made sure that before Dad returned from his shop at 8.00p.m. we were all bathed and ready for bed. She'll make us say our night prayers and then as soon as Dad comes, we all kiss him goodnight and Dad used to have his dinner in the bedroom with her.

By this time Dad had done away with the saddle making and as soon as they shifted to B'Kara he built two huge shops next to each other and he opened a furniture factory where he used to employ a good number of people to manufacture the furniture that he used to design as well as making and upholstering of lounge suites. His furniture was renowned throughout all of Malta and Gozo. People to this day when I am over in Malta to catch up with the family tell me, "I still have my bedroom suite which I bought from your Dad". He also employed a good number of French Polishers. The four brothers all shared in the business but it was all my father's creation. He was the Boss and what he says goes. The furniture factory was called "Four Brothers" and the shops were called, "Bonavia Bros. Furniture Maker". Dad also started to import prams and baby pushers as well as Slumberland mattresses from England. He also imported toys and luggage from Italy. Altogether we had five shops. When they retired we leased two of them and they sold the others .

I never witnessed my parents arguing. I always felt that my mother was the centre of Dad's life. When one of us was sick with the flu my Dad will come home from his shop at least twice during the day to check on us. I used to feel very proud when Dad used to come especially to visit me, and

quite often I used to pretend that I had a cough so I will have Dad's attention all to myself. I missed my mother terribly but Dad was a very strong man and I remember after Mum's funeral he called us all in the lounge room and he put me on his knees. He used to call me, "My Beautiful One". When we were all there Dad put his hand in his pocket and took out Mum's gold necklace with a crucifix hanging from it. He asked my eldest sister Doris to stand in the middle of the room and taking Mum's necklace in both his hands he put it over my sister Doris' neck and looking at all of us he said, "This is Mum's necklace. From now on Doris will take your mother's place. All of you will do what she says." Poor Doris ! By then she was only 21 years old. Since then till the present time she never stopped fulfilling Dad's orders. She still does all the shopping, cooks, cleans, washes and irons. She is on the go all the time. I have always looked on Doris as my second mother, but I never made her life easy when I was young.

Looking back in time, I think I felt the void of my mother and I rebelled. My behaviour left a lot to be desired. I used to answer back all the time, and after school I used to go to friends' places without letting any of my sisters know. I had no concept of time, so poor Dad had to walk the streets to try and find me. Luckily for me in those days there wasn't the dangers that exist nowadays.

When my mother died on 11th November 1952, Dad took me out of the State School and enrolled me at St Monica's School in B'Kara just around the corner from our house. Dad made sure I would not go on any more rendezvous during school hours and every day at 10.00a.m., he will leave his shop and come home ( it was only a three minutes walk from our shops to home ) where he will go upstairs and then on to

the roof. That was the time we were out for recess. He will blow the whistle to let me know that he was checking on me. I attended St Monica's school in B'Kara until Year Ten. Since the economy in Malta was still reeling from the devastation of two world wars, not many people could afford to give their children a private education. As there were only a handful of us who were continuing on to Year 11 we were transferred to St Monica's School in Mosta. At the end of that year the same thing happened. There were only three of us who continued to Year 12 and therefore we were transferred to the school to at Gzira. The class now consisted of only eight students. I sat my G.C.E. exams with the University of Oxford in the summer of 1961. I was too young to enter Teachers' College. One had to be seventeen and a half years old to be accepted irrespective of the score of marks attained. At that time there was a shortage of teachers, so very soon after the results were out I was called to start teaching in my own village of B'Kara. I couldn't believe that only four weeks before I was a student with my head buried in books, and now I had to teach. I had absolutely no idea as to what to expect and worse still as to what to do! When I arrived at the school, the Headmistress was very busy and the only welcome she gave me was, "Who are you? and when I told her my name she said, "Second Floor, Room 27." I was very tempted to go back home but I couldn't think of what I will tell my father. Finally I found a student who directed me to Room 27. Never in a million years did I expect to find a room full of teenagers jumping from desk to desk like monkeys! To make matters worse they gave me a class of Year Sevens. I felt my insides tightening inside me and my eyes started to burn as the salty tears surfaced. I did the only thing I could do. When I finally located the teacher's table I sat down and started flashing smiles to whoever cast a look at me. In about fifteen minutes or so they started coming up to me asking me what I was doing there. When I



told one of them that I was there to teach them, a big girl decided to do the job that the Headmistress failed to do. She announced me to the class in a clownish way. To this day I could still see her, standing on top of her desk taunting me "Come on then, teach us. Nobody else wants to!" At that point in time I don't know what possessed me and I said to her, "Sure, but first how about if you bring your chairs over here and we start by introducing ourselves to each other so we will be friends?" It was the only way I could deal with that situation and eventually I had them all around me, each of them telling me something about themselves. I have to admit that being thrown at the deep end was a shock to my system, but it turned out to be the best experience ever. Most of the children in that class were orphans who lived in an orphanage about six minutes walk from the school. I don't recall what I taught them, mainly, because I didn't teach them much! All I remember to have taught them was to respect each other. I also remember showing them how to knit. I saw my role there as being more of a friend and confidante to them rather than a teacher. They started to confide in me. For some of them I managed to boost their self-esteem a little whilst in others I tried to instil some because they had none. Some of the students in that class were older than me, because it was customary in those days to let them repeat the same year for up to three years. I think that year my students and I swapped roles. Rather than me teaching them, I think they taught me. They made me realise how fortunate I was to have a family to go to, someone who will worry about me if I am a few minutes late and I had a place to call home. It didn't take me long to realise that these children were starving for love. I approached the Mother Superior of the orphanage and she let me take them out for short hikes on Sundays. During those hikes I used to feel so fulfilled. It was clear to me that I chose the right career. Ever since I was seven

years old, I used to play with Mum's pot plants pretending they were my students. I remember me getting angry at the pot plants for not knowing their multiplication tables or forgetting a poem or didn't say 'Good Morning' to me or did not have the right uniform! (all pretence, of course!) But this class of 28 girls was for real. I had real human students now, not pot plants. Children who were deprived of family love and I felt an urge to help them start looking up at the sky rather than down to the ground.

During that year I started to notice a change in me. I started to mellow, to be more tolerant of others. I realised that I could do a lot of good as a teacher and I don't have to go to the Missions to do good to others, because quite often I used to toy with the idea of going there for a few years. I realised that I can do a lot of good by staying right where I was. Another fact that came to light was that these children came to school to be taught and here I was an emergency teacher, having absolutely no clue as to what was required of me. By the fourth week I had them all under control. They were no Philadelphia Lawyers but they acquired some values and the majority of them were able to read and write by the end of that year. Most of those children still remember me and write to me. Some of them are grandmothers now. They also come to visit me when I go over to Malta to catch up with my family.

Our family was stricken with grief once more. My sister Carmen who was only thirty four years of age died on 15<sup>th</sup> December 1967. She died ten days after her birthday. I was then twenty three years old. We all took it hard but mainly my father. As we started to reel back from that shock my sister Emily who was by then a Carmelite nun in Spain died on 17<sup>th</sup>

August 1969 at the age of twenty nine and only twenty months after my sister Carmen.

These situations, somehow, seemed to bond us closer to each other.

In Malta schools start in September and finish in August. In June 1962 having fulfilled the age criteria I went to Mater Admirabilis Training College, for a two year residential teaching course. The Sisters of the Sacred Heart from England and Ireland ran the college. I thoroughly enjoyed my college days. To me it was the best time of my life, mingling with others of the same age. We were allowed to go home every Saturday at 1.00p.m. and we had to be back on Monday at 8.30a.m. We were not allowed to speak Maltese. If we were caught speaking Maltese we were kept back and not allowed to go home. The reason they did that was so we will acquire fluency in the spoken English. The two years went by like lightning. Early in June of 1964 we sat our exams after heaps of cramming. I graduated at the end of June. In September of the same year I was assigned to a school only about ten minutes by car from home or twenty minutes by bus. I got along fine with both staff and students. This time I knew what to expect and I was trained, so I was well prepared.

In those days we could not buy any teaching aids. There were no shops to cater for such things. So when the school day was over at 4.00p.m. I used to go home and after a little break start making my teaching apparatus. I practically had the whole family involved. We used to enjoy that time together especially my Dad who every morning before he goes to his shop he used to come up to me and tell me, "Do you have any homework for me, Teacher? He always took some of my work to do while he was at the shop. He thoroughly enjoyed it and it gave him a diversion.

The year 1974 was a lucky one for me. It was April, a beautiful spring time in Malta with clear blue skies, lovely soft breeze and the perfume of rosebuds permeating everywhere. The chirping of the newly hatched birds follows you everywhere and somehow everyone looks healthy. All nature seems to come to life. It was the 23<sup>rd</sup> day of April when I went out for the first time with a handsome young man whose name was Val Parnis. He was on holidays from Australia where he had lived for thirty five years. Val was seven and a half years my senior. The day after we met on the 24<sup>th</sup> April which happened to be Holy Thursday he came to ask permission of my Dad to take me out. Dad grilled him about his family and poor Val looked at me for answers because he had been away from his family for such a long time and his Maltese vocabulary was very limited so we agreed that when I nod my head he would say "iva" meaning "yes" and if I arch my eyebrows he would say "le" meaning "No". At one point of the conversation my Dad asked Val if he was a smoker. He nearly blew it then. Not only did I have to arch my eyebrows to him a couple of times but I tried to warn him with a slight cough. From that day onwards Val used to smoke behind my father's back. Apparently satisfied with the answers Val gave him, my Dad proceeded to dictate to him the house rules that he has to have me home by 8.30p.m. We did eventually manage to stretch it until 9.00p.m. I felt very comfortable with Val and we had quite a few laughs because having lived in Australia for 35 years, his Maltese wasn't up to scratch. He soon became like one of us and he put his hand to anything that needed to be done. His best time though was when he used to go to my Dad's shop and keep him company. They grew on each other and Dad would take him down to his favourite coffee shop and introduce him to all his friends there. Anyone who

didn't know them would have mistaken them for a father and son.

We talked about everything and nothing but I used to feel so happy and secure with him. I was very straightforward with him and when my Dad told me that I will kill him because I could't cook not even fry an egg, I took it seriously and told Val that maybe he has picked the wrong woman. He then answered me by saying, "No need to worry about that. I am not a fussy eater. I am quite happy with a crust of bread and some cheese! Stupid me I believed him and on my birthday which was only two days after this episode he came over to my place and he gave me the most beautiful Birthday card I had ever seen. It was made out of satin and it was very big and presented in a special box. Then he gave me a large parcel and I wondered what he had got me because the parcel was quite heavy. Imagine how I felt when as soon as I opened the parcel I found myself staring at the biggest Cooking Book I had ever seen. I broke into tears and nothing he said to me made any sense. He kept trying to convince me that the only reason he bought me a Cooking Book was to ease my worry about cooking, that all I had to do was follow the recipes. I still use that book he gave me thirty years ago and our favourite recipe from it is Spanish Tortilla!

Our love for each other grew increasingly. We used to go to Mdina, the old City, every afternoon and watch the sunset while I worked on two tapestries that Val had bought me. More and more it became apparently clear to me that this man was meant for me, so there was no hesitation in accepting his proposal. He wanted to get married the day after or "within a week at least" and I had a hard time

convincing him that we were in Malta not in Australia and therefore we would do things the Maltese way! The only thing that finally persuaded him to wait was when I told him that if we marry in a hurry then people would think that I am pregnant. Oh no! He didn't want that because the thing he hated most while in Malta was the fact that people always minded each other's business . He hated tongues wagging! In those days in Malta when a female teacher gets married she had to resign from teaching. After ten years or more of continuous service you will get a gratuity, which is a sum of money calculated on the person's last salary and multiplied by the number of years of service. If you don't attend school until that particular year is fully completed then there will be no remuneration whatsoever.

I had given my word to Val when I accepted his proposal that I will marry him on the 15<sup>th</sup> September which was the date when my ten full years of service were up. School resumes after the summer break. Unfortunately the 15<sup>th</sup> of September in 1974 happened to be a Sunday and consequently I couldn't work on the 15<sup>th</sup> since schools don't open on Sundays. I rang up the Ministry for Education to seek permission but their answer was that I could get married but I will lose my gratuity. I didn't want to let all that hard work I put into those years to go unrecognised!

The first day of school that year was Monday the 16<sup>th</sup> September. Back then in Malta weddings were always held on a Sunday. The custom of getting married on a Saturday had just started, but very rarely one would see a wedding entourage on a Saturday. Imagine how I felt, when Val insisted that since I promised to marry him the very first day of school I should keep my word. I saw no use in arguing with him, after all I did promise and a promise should be honoured! So Monday, 16<sup>th</sup> September was the day set for

our wedding, precisely three months after our engagement. I thought the Deputy Headmistress who was Acting Principal at the time, would be understanding of the situation and let me off by signing in and out on the log book and go home. We all used to do that everyday, otherwise she used to call us back to sign out. Could anyone be more crazy? Who is going to spend the night at school! Not this one! She was afraid to taint her conscience by committing a sin! She kept insisting that I should stay all day. When it was thirty minutes before our hair appointment was due I just went to her and said "Goodbye! See you this evening at my wedding!" and with that I whisked off!

One great bonus of having our wedding on a Monday was the fact that we had no qualms about booking the Church, hiring the limousines, caterers and the venue for the reception. You should have seen the people as we were on the way to church and then as well when we were on our way to the Reception Venue. A wedding on a Monday? Who can those idiots be? I'm sure most of them thought we were nuts to get married on a Monday or worse! Maybe they thought we didn't know the days of the week! We couldn't care less about their staring. We only had eyes for each other. We were married at the Parish Church of St John of the Cross at Ta' Xbiex at 7.00p.m.

We had a huge reception at the exclusive "The Palms" in St Julian because my father knew a lot of business associates and he invited all of them.

A friend of the family, Dr Maurice and Mrs Mary Rose Said gave us the use of their holiday house called, "Little Princess", which is situated at Salina Bay. I took Val's mum with us for three days and she absolutely loved it. Val couldn't get over the fact that I invited my mother-in-law to live with us on our honeymoon. I was conscious of the fact

that Val had never really had his mother to himself and the prospect that we were going so far away from Malta I figured they'll enjoy some quality time together and besides I liked his mother very much.

We left Malta on 8<sup>th</sup> October 1974. We stopped in Melbourne to pick up Val's car with his few possessions and we finished staying a week because our suitcases were burgled. Not a good beginning in a land I had no idea what to expect! When all was said and done, we got into his station wagon and Val drove all the way through the Nullabor Plain till we reached Perth. He only had a few bouts of snooze. We stayed the night at the Motor Inn Hotel on Canning Highway in Applecross. The following day we went to Fremantle where we hired a Unit in "Ivanhoe Lodge" on High Road in Fremantle. We lived there for about three months and then decided to go house hunting.

It was a Sunday afternoon when we were taken by an estate agent to a house in Hamilton Hill. As soon as Val saw it he went straight out, but I lingered there for a while. When Val commented that "for sure this has to be the worst house in W.A. I softly said "I like it" He thought I was losing it. He couldn't believe after living in a lovely house in Malta for all those years how I could be happy "living in a dump." It was true that this house looked like a "dump" but somehow I felt drawn to it. Its only asset was the fact that it was sitting on a quarter of an acre block. When I considered the price tag of only \$A10 500 compared with the cheapest decent ones of \$A20,800 I thought we had a bargain on our hands. We both wanted children badly so a huge backyard will be great and will certainly come in handy when our offspring arrive. Both of us did a lot of work on that house. If only the walls could talk they'll tell you how much romance went on while



we hung wallpaper on all the walls of every room to hide the monstrosities!

The house was finished the following year and by this time we were already envisaging that the clatter of little feet was not for us. We had been trying but we had no success. We looked for recipes in all the libraries, but found none that worked for us.

It took Val quite a while when I rang him at work one day and told him that Dr Murray (now deceased) confirmed my pregnancy. He always used to tell me that we won't have girls because all his family bred nearly all boys. David was born on 26<sup>th</sup> February 1980 and his brother James followed on 22<sup>nd</sup> 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 17<sup>th</sup> August 1984 when David was four years old and James was only two years old.

I was devastated and if it wasn't for the support of my best friend, Pamela, and Brother John Carrigg, I honestly don't know how I could have gone through the first ten days after his death until I went to my family in Malta.

When I arrived in Malta I leaned heavily on my father for some advice since he too was widowed at a young age. I was only forty years old when Val died. I was determined to continue living in Australia. One of the reasons that we wanted to emigrate was so when we'll have children we could give them a good start in life.

One day, while in Malta I was crying my eyeballs out in the kitchen and my father came in and said to me, "Now what

are you achieving with all this crying? You can't bring him back.

My tears never brought your Mum back either. You have a mission to accomplish. You have to raise those two babies. Get on with it!"

At the time I could'nt understand why Dad was being so insensitive to my situation, but I needed that. It helped me to put things into perspective for myself. My work was cut out for me. I must bring up those boys to the best of my ability. Filled with good intentions and some plans for the future we left Malta at the end of January 1985 together with my sister Virginia. My father sent her to help me out and told her to stay as long as I needed her. My sister did more than her best to help me get on my feet. I wasn't an easy person to live with in those days. Virginia helped me carry on through life. She stayed with me for a whole year. She left in late January of 1986. In the interim my father died on 9<sup>th</sup> November 1985. I can never forget how much I owe my sister Virginia for putting up with me during those horrible months when I had to face life without Val by my side and for the sacrifice she made when after a phone call from Malta we were told that Dad's death was imminent and yet she decided to stay on with me. I know that must have been a hard decision for her to make and the choice was grim on both sides.

When Virginia left I had to knuckle down and I remember saying to myself, "I have a mission here, which is to carry on Val's wishes, which were to concentrate on the education of our boys, and that I tried to do to the very best of my ability.

When I look at my two young men I get mixed feelings. I get the feeling of exhilaration for a job well done, while on the

other hand I feel that Val has been cheated from watching his sons growing up and missing all the milestones his children achieved, but on the other hand I feel quite sure that without his help I wouldn't have been able to accomplish any of these.

I have two gorgeous young men. The eldest, David, has two degrees and runs his own lucrative computer business called PPS Systems, while James, acquired Honours First Class in Computer and Mathematical Sciences and joined his brother in business.

When James was 9 and David 11, I left them with their Auntie Martha to look after while I went over to Adelaide to watch the ordination of Albert Fullbrook. Uncle Bert, as we call him, came over on the boat from Malta with my late husband Val. While I was in Adelaide I met Uncle Bert's nephew Emanuel. We fell in love. Even though he lived in England we kept in touch over the phone nearly every day until he was able to come over from England to Western Australia and we could get married.

Emanuel came over on the 1<sup>st</sup> October 1991 and we got married on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of December 1991. The wedding was at Aquinas College Chapel and it was fitting that Uncle Bert married us and gave us a beautiful ceremony. In 1994, the new family: Emanuel, David, James, and I moved to our new home at 11 Mayne Close in Kardinya.

Even though we went through some rough patches in the middle, Emanuel has become a rock I have come to depend on. My sister Virginia died on the 13th of January 2006, and 10 months before, my sister Doris died. Having both of my remaining sisters die and also within a short period of time really shook me up and without my brother Joe, Emanuel,

and all of my friends shoulders to cry on I do not think I would have been able to pull through.

I don't think I ever fully recovered from the death of my sisters, and since then I have taken a few bad turns. In early 2007 I was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease, but in discussing it with people, it seems as if the signs of the disease were present even in 2006. Not long after my diagnoses of Alzheimer's I was diagnosed with breast cancer. This occurred in the middle of 2007. So not only was I losing my memory, but I also had cancer to deal with too.

I know for a fact, that without Emanuel by my side I would have not been able to cope through my battle with breast cancer. I can say with some confidence that after my double mastectomy, that all my cancer is now gone.

Even though I am cancer free, unfortunately I will never be Alzheimer's free. It has now gotten to a stage where I'm finding it hard to do even the most basic of tasks. I would not be able to survive without the constant supervision of my husband Emanuel's guiding hand.

Emanuel is retiring in the middle of this year 2009, to be able to look after me full time. My youngest son James is also to buy his house around about the same time. Emanuel and I will also be going over to visit Joe in Malta, for which I fear to be the last time that I will get to see my only remaining sibling.

I plan to make the very most of my visit to Malta. I will spend this time with Joe, to go over memories of the past and to have a really good time.

I would like to thank my very dear friends who take time out of their days to come and visit me and keep my spirits up. I would like to say a very big thank you to my dear friend Sina, who visits me on a very regular basis. I love you Sina. I would like to also thank Chris Kerin and all of my other friends that have helped me in my time of need.

I want to finish off my book with a dedication to Emanuel, my husband and my very best friend. Thank you very much Emanuel, I love you with all of my heart.

Tess Parnis