

Diary entries - December 8 1943 to September 18 1945

Wednesday, December 8

I was going to keep my silence till I got a job, but it has gone so long now I'd better work up the scraps I pencilled last Sunday.

On Tuesday November 16 we caught the train, I had a corridor seat, with Daisy next to me and Jean Dudley (*cousin*) next to her. At Mooroopna Jean Dudley got out. Two people got in – a man and his wife. Besides us there were four airmen.

We got to Spencer Street without having had our tickets taken. So had to troop through the one barrier gate. In front of our train was one whose windows were crowded with red coated war prisoners, looking fit and self content. When we got out into the crowd there was still no sign of Merl, so Daisy got hold of a taxi and after several minutes wait we set out.

At 53 Burnell Street [*in West Brunswick, the home of Lester's maternal grandparents*], we were first greeted by an officious little Pom. 'Lie down, Trip,' came a brisk voice and Belle [*Pauline Isabelle, aunt. Remained single and died at the age of 101*], still better looking than many of her nieces, came in sight, and welcomed us. Grandma was lying down, unwell, but before dinner she came out and greeted us cheerfully. We knew what to expect, she has forgotten my identity and even the fact that I am staying here, many times in the past four weeks. That is the kind of fog she lives in, that causes her to do things and undo them straight after; to bring in washing others have just hung out, and hang out what they have just brought in; to tell you the same – or else something quite different – over and over; to live in a kind of twilight of forgetfulness that Grandad is dead, that has caused constant repetition of the comforting phrase 'The menfolk are all away working in the country' to serve instead of the news that he was dead that used to come every time as a bitter shock; to keep forgetting she belongs here and insisting she must go home, and setting out on those treks which so quickly exhaust her, to be brought home by her daughters after a time as though she had just been out on

any work, or was coming back after being away, or was just arriving on a visit, as circumstances dictated. Yet no matter what muddles she causes, or how many times she repeats something, or has to be told something else, they always speak to her in the same gentle – almost too gentle, in Belle’s case, often – tone of voice, and behave in the same patient and kindly manner.

Friday, January 14

Today the wind raged from the north. There was a dirty haze all over the sky and a smell of burning in the air. As I waited in Melville road for the tram, there was a smother of smoke in the hollow up Coburg way, but I could scarcely look at it for the hot ferocity of the wind in my eyes. ...

Collins Street, as I walked down the shady side, was a lovely haven both from wind and heat.

I reached Craig’s buildings about quarter to two, and managed to find Mr Dawson alone. He told me Mr Anderson had told him that I didn’t quite measure up to his requirements, but that they had something else in view for me. Mr Weatherly would be back in about ten minutes and he would give me a call.

The wait in old Room 10 seemed nearly so long, if not so hopeless, as that other. I sat in the same corner and listened to the same weary complaints about the manpower. [*Lester talks with other men in the waiting room*]. Eventually he disclosed that he had stopped a whole heap of shrapnel...he hadn’t a bladder, only an affair of wire and rubber tubes and cotton wool; he hadn’t pissed for 32 days after his wounding; yet he would be classed A one and ordered back to sea because he was a seaman – if he was only a soldier he would’t be class B. He would have to be dodging the U boats for the sake of this tribe of bludgers, and here he came back to his diatribe against the national service, now partnered in a minor key by a dark skinned young man who sat where the one armed man had sat.

...Perhaps my affairs were helped along by the advent of a stout perspiring middle-aged man, who sat near me a while, then plunged out and collared someone in the passage. Soon he came in with an irate small man whom I didn't recognise as Mr Dawson till he turned after ticking off and fixing up the stout man. He then stepped over and told me he would see to me in just a minute.

A few minutes later he came in with a card which he filled in and got me to sign; then gave to me. ...Mr Dawson advised me to take a tram to Bourke Street so as to get quicker to the place, at 191 Queen Street, as the man was waiting for me. I got one from Collins Street after watching on pass at Flinders Lane. Then I toiled up the hill into a baking wind and arrived at Queen Street weary and perspiring, consequently nervous.

I located 191 as the Law Chambers, and found that Davey, Garcia and J G Davis were on the fourth floor. ...Once with Mr Davis, much of my tension went off, save from my voice, which remained distressingly husky though not now shaky. He was a middle aged man, elderly might be a better word – with a faint trace of moustache and a voice which, through its high throated englishness had a pompous tint, was quite kindly. After remarking that it was a wretched day, he went into the details and I felt with increasing certainty that I did not displease him. I soon found that I was wanted chiefly as an audit clerk and that their aim was to get back to an all male staff. The young women were all right as far as they went, but they were a bit too irresponsible and didn't measure up to the desirable standard.

[This entry finishes abruptly and is immediately followed by the names and authors of books Lester read and/or bought. It continues through to 1964. Reading the exercise book upside down from the back he lists crits of books he has bought through to 1951.]

[The diary continues, on sheets of very thin paper, written in pencil.]

We got on increasingly well until the question of salary came up, when I found that the salary he had had in mind evidently was less than the £6/5/- I had been earning. First would I expect no less? Oh yes! Secondly, would I be satisfied with that? Well I naturally hoped for more if I could get it. He explained that to take me on would involve replacing some woman – my heart fell at that, I hate the notion of ousting anybody – and they would be taking an important step to replace a woman with a man on a salary of £6/5/- (in other words they would have to feel sure it was worth while). He would have to see his partner, who was away at present, but he felt that I was the right man for the job. (I felt fairly sure of this, when he even suggested staggering my hours to avoid the peak, say ten to 6, or nine thirty am to five thirty pm.) If I rang them on Monday at ten thirty am he would be able to let me know, and he showed me out hoping that he would be able to tell me they had agreed to take me on. I left him feeling that so far as he was concerned I would do, and that if anything decided them against me, it would be the salary.

I left that building in an easier frame of mind than I have left such a building for a long time...

Though a little down in the dumps that I face the prospect of as low paid a job as the last, and an auditing job at that, there is the sense of (still slightly anxious) relief that my long hunt seems on the verge of ending. Besides, there is always the hope that my auditing work will lead me to an eventual position with some industrial or trading concern.

Sunday, January 23

Last Monday I rang Mr Davis from the Cumming Street phone. He made a great deal of work of telling me that they had discussed it over and over and had been unable to see how they could 'fit me in'. I would have to be accompanied wherever I went by a girl to show me the procedure, and to carry work that was required to be brought back to the office. Etc. Etc. Several times he asked me apologetically that I

saw that didn't I? He ended promising that he would see if any of the members of his Institute (Commonwealth) wanted a man for inside work, which I know meant exactly nothing. I took it all very calmly.

I went in to see Mr Dawson again that afternoon. When I had waited in room ten for a time, he asked me if I would take a Government job. I told him it was the last thing I wanted. He said they would have great difficulty in fitting me in anywhere else, partly owing to my disability and partly because there not much call for my type of labour. He said the salary would be £5/15/- and I told him I didn't like that, either. He repeated his previous remarks, and asked how would £300/-/- a year sound to me. I said reluctantly it sounded a little bit better. He went out of the room then and in a few seconds I had realised it was about ninepence halfpenny better.

When he came back he said he would send me up to the public service commissioner, whom he thought would give me a job.

I took the tram to Russell Street, walked along to Bourke Street and back along it a little way to the Commonwealth Savings Bank, which I rightly guessed to be the building he had meant when he said the Bank of NSW.

A high speed lift took me to the floor, and the office door was directly opposite. There was a waiting-room-office with a hard bench and a counter and several rather pleasant faced girls behind it. As several people were waiting, I sat down, till one of the girls asked me what I wanted. While I waited I saw a notice about examinations, held as required, which lowered my estimation of my chances, and I thought it highly likely that again I would be returned to Mr Dawson's hands. I was to think it more than once before the day was out. Still with distaste for the public service, I feared the thought of another failure and the likelihood that it might be some time before another man was found to send me to.

When the girl gave me a form to fill in, I gave her the letter, and when she came out she said Mr Peeler would see me presently. Bye and bye he called me in, a small youngish man with glasses and a rather round face and prim lips.

His catechism was carried out with the application form before him, on which he made numerous notes. I hadn't my character references with me (I thought – later, after a feverish hunt through my suitcase, I found them in my wallet) and he disapproved of me for having never asked for business references. This was the first time I had been required to produce references.

Finally he raised my hopes a fraction by telling me there were several places I might fill. First, he would try the audit office. He rang someone there and the someone required a quarter of an hour to think it over. I waited out on the hard bench again till he called me back. Then he told me the someone couldn't see me but that someone else at the Audit Office could, who thought he might be able to fit me in. (How I have come to hate that phrase.) He gave me another slip of paper ... (bearing an address) ... I set off feeling as though I didn't care for anything in the wide world, that life could do its worst with me, that whether to get the job or not to get the job was less desirable the difference was a hairbreadth. The building was a rough black one, the very place to work at a job one despised, and where one was of no account.

Mr Healy called me in. ... He quickly had a misadventure with the letters after my name, due to his own inattention and his starting off by assuming I was a member of the Australasian Institute of Secretaries. When I was putting him right about it and laying out my qualifications he got it into his head that it was the Association of Accountants with whom I had not qualified, and told me that I could not then use the letters AAA. I corrected him with an edge to my voice and he slashed a pencil through his beginnings and said we would begin again. We did so, but I felt this inauspicious beginning had queered me.

We went on quite smoothly and almost unnoticeably my stocks rose. He got to the stage of asking how I could get about and remarking that it had not take me long to get down from the Public Service . Still, he almost startled me when without further ado, he told me that he thought I would prove satisfactory, and asked when I could start. I begged a few days grace to help my sister hunt permanent board, not because I expected we would find it during that time, but because I wanted a little while to taste freedom with the certainty of a job. ...he grew quite affable and solicitous about my travelling the peak period...

I came out in a crowded tram, wondering if it could be read through the mingled expressions of my face that I was no longer one of the great unwashed. For with unhappiness that I had this job contested relief that I had a job, modest though the wage was, uninviting as the public service and auditing were, and limited as the prospects were.

Mr Healy had warned me that it was only a war time appointment, and I dissembled a mighty resolve to get hold of another job before peace, and worry a release out of my employers. Uppermost however, is coming the intent that out of my fitful imagination, uncertain perception and undependable observation, I must weave the payable stories I have so long dreamed of. How I would love to be the worst money grub in Grub Street, provided I did grub pay dirt. [*Lester was never published but when he died he left behind reams of poetry, short stories, partial novels, completed plays, and criticisms of books, plays, opera, musical evenings, and ballets.*]

Next morning, to my surprise, both Merl and the change (of clothing) landed out. Tom had come down on the Monday to Heidelberg Hospital, for treatment of whatever his stomach complaint may turn out to be. Merl had met him and gone as far as Ivanhoe, and seen him into the bus.

Merl stayed to lunch, and then she and I went over by the Victoria Street bus to see Jean Appelt, who had mentioned a woman who was thinking of taking a boarder. It

was lunch hour at the licorice factory, and we had a long wait at the corner of Sydney Road before Jean, and a one-armed woman, Kate, came along.

On Thursday morning, feeling not at all nervous, but far from lighthearted, I called again on Mr Peeler. He looked over my references, gave me an employment note for Mr Healy, and a form of certificate of acquaintance etc. to be returned within several days and wished me the best. ...He also told me that if I joined the Temporary Clerks' Association, it would mean a salary of three hundred and twenty-two pounds, nearly as good as the old one.

...told me the hours were eight forty-five am to five fifteen pm (inward deep groans) and on Saturday eight forty-five am to midday (deeper groans at having to work Saturdays).

I went up to the second floor...to the Meat Board offices, and they showed me the room where I was to work, in which was another man, a Mr Varlee or Varley..... We say little other than widely spaced friendly remarks about the weather and the plenitude of work, and of course good morning and good night, but I think in a small way we are company to one another. Also he lends me his Sun quizzical every lunch hour.

An auditors life at the moment is a solitary one, though that doesn't worry me much, but I know definitely now that I would never enjoy auditing whether public service or otherwise. [*Lester remained with the government and became internal auditor of the Repatriation Department, later Veteran's Affairs.*]

Tram travel has not been difficult. Going in I have twice been resigned a seat (and once found an empty one). Coming out, on Thursday, I watched people piling onto a tram at the terminus and others running up to a tram waiting just over the points. I copied the latter with the next tram that came to the points and found a seat with the back of my neck in the sunlight.

Today is fine, with occasional cloud. Daisy and the kids are due out after tea, also Robbie Canet and his wife [*Ivy*], and his mother [*Gertrude*]. Uncle Bob [*Robert Canet, husband of Gertrude*] himself is due to tea. I am rather curious to see Ivy [*Ivy Crowley, died 1948*]. She's reported to be fat, to have a hair lip, to be an incessant talker, to run Rob down before his face and behind his back without check from any of her in-laws and to be madly jealous of Auntie Gertie. It sounds like first rate material for a divorce.

Monday January 24

Daisy and the kids turned up first, and after a while Uncle Bob, Rob, Ivy and their daughter Beverley, and Mavis [*daughter of Robert*] and her daughter Patricia. Grandma had wandered out and the visitors had brought her back, but it meant that I alone had had tea. Belle was not even cleaned, and while Jessie and Auntie Renee held the fort in the lounge, which had been specially cleared of my bed and gear she snatched a few apricots and fled to her bedroom.

The evening passed away very pleasantly on the whole. Grandma was in good form, enlivened by the company and even exchanging sallies with Ivy. The kids were kept in quite good order, Mavis especially being firm, but of course their limbs never rested for ten seconds and a weather eye was cocked on the furniture.

Tonight Grandma had one of her bad moods. For the very first time I am in the gun – Belle with me, but that is almost a daily occurrence. I came into it about an hour after it had started, when grandma, coming in on me where I was writing a letter home in the kitchen, got an impression that I was some importunate cavalier calling on her girls and making himself a nuisance generally. I soon filled my fountain pen and sneaked into the lounge to finish the letter. I am still there in two minds whether to leave my shave till the morning or to risk running into her when I ask for some hot water.

Thursday, January 27

The week has passed uneventfully and the work gone forward speedily. Yesterday I made a tentative attempt at reconciling the mutton debits, but there was an apparent discrepancy of forty-four pounds. Mr Wood this morning went over the outline with me, but only succeeded in tying himself up in a number of points, as its easy to lose the thread of the work when you are not actually doing it. Pending a detailed check I went ahead with the pig meats which weren't in nearly such number and had the satisfaction of getting them out to the very penny.

Sunday, January 30

On Friday night Merl came out to tell me she had found me a place in Kambrook Road, North Caulfield. It was a private home and full board, only coming to thirty-five shillings a week. It was right near Balaclava Road and between five and ten minutes walk from Caulfield Station. ..Merl says they seem nice people and they tell her they live very quietly. It will be quite handy to Merl's down there. [*Lester moved in with Mrs Niddrie and her son, Ian, and daughter, Leslie. They formed such a close bond that when Lester bought his own home, approximately 1956 in Chadstone, Mrs Niddrie moved with him and lived there until her death.*]

Thursday, February 3

I finished the Heart of Midlothian on Sunday. Till Effie's pardon I liked the book perhaps better than either Waverley or Ivanhoe....once Effie was pardoned, for as a story it really ended there, despite the miscellaneous threads of theme that still needed tying up and which Scott proceeded at some length to tie up. To change the metaphor again, I thought the book thenceforth to be a rather unconscionable time a dying.

Monday, February 7

On Saturday I went to see 'The Foreman went to France' and 'Rhythm Parade'. 'Rhythm Parade' was better than I expected. Ninety percent floor show, it didn't

waste time having a story, and the few little scenes that tied the acts together were often comical That wicked, dumb, little blonde who led the ballet. I'd like to have my boots under her bed.

I shaved rather mournfully and packed all I could, leaving Merl to fit in as much of the rest as possible. Going to a new home is a lot worse than going to a new job. I then wrote an envelope 'THANK YUH' (it looks sillier and sillier by repetition, as I told Dad and Mum in a letter home to-night) and put two fivers in. That left me enough to pay a fortnights' board in advance and about thirty shillings over.

Uncle Charlie and Gavan came about half past four to five. Gavan looks a little like Dave Canet did...[*Niel Gavan Canet was stabbed to death in Caulfield in 1958 at the age of 28*]

Merl came not long after and did my packing. Before we left the lounge room she shoved the envelope under my pillow, as a place where they wouldn't be likely to find it before we went, and where Grandma wouldn't come rummaging.

I shook hands with them all and thanked them for their hospitality. Pauline [*Pauline Gardiner, cousin*] came home just as I was leaving, and gave me an invitation to her 20th birthday party, on the 22nd.

We caught the tram, after a ten minutes wait enjoying the coolness of a fierce wind. We left the tram at Royal Park Station, but the gates were already closing. However, as there was no train in sight we hoped for the best, but when we got to the ticket window, we weren't looked at till the train came in. With hands full of change and tickets and my little case I hurried onto the platform and boarded the waiting train in a flurry. As this train was only going through to Malvern we got off at Spencer Street...

Merl drifted into conversation on meat rationing with a middle aged woman... I remained in silent admiration of the utter and unrelieved ugliness of railway stations, this one being noway improved by the dullness of the day and the grime of the atmosphere.

When we got to Caulfield we got a weekly ticket, which cost 4/9. Then we took the tram to Kambrook Road, which is three stops and approximately as many (if not more) turns.

Mrs Niddrie's house, number 10, is about four houses up. She answered our ring and revealed herself a short plump middle aged woman, with glasses, serious eyes, and straight short hair. Round a twisting passage, she showed me my room, a large one, with a broad double window, a little fire place, with girls' photos over it, a small green painted slightly time worn dressing-table with a good mirror to affect the lack of handles to one and a half of the drawers and a tendency to rock, a nice light brown wardrobe that had a half-length mirror in front of it, but again was defective in the matter of a handle, a sewing machine (for somewhere to keep it, the rooms being large, as I said), two wicker chairs and a dark leather wooden-armed chair and a little octagonal table or stand, a good big carpet almost as large as the square of lino it lay on, and a towel rail with two towels on it. How do I remember all this? I'm sitting on the arm chair, writing at the little stand under the light, and inventorying it all.

After Merl had unpacked we said ta-ta till Tuesday. Then I went into the sitting room round another twist, through a strait between a little stand and a handsome wireless, into a crowded room, laden with comfortable chairs and sofa, a handsome buffet beside the handsome wireless, ice chest and corner table, and overhung with photographs.

Wednesday, February 9

I spent an enjoyable evening with Merl last night.

This afternoon a woman came into the room and I suddenly realised it was Bell. When she produced a telegram my heart was momentarily in my mouth, but it was from Ulva, simply stating he would be on leave at Morgan to February 18 and wishing me all the best. Apparently he meant in my job, which may be news to him, and also he may mean me to infer I may see him when he passes through, as the telegram was from Albury. Leaning over the table Bell softly told me I was a 'naughty boy' and invited me and Merl out to tea Sunday week.

Last night I got down to Merl's before 8. [*She boarded with a Mrs Russell in Chloris Crescent, Caulfield, not far from Lester*]. Merl and I had a good yap and she was pleasantly surprised when I produced some home-grown tomatoes from Mrs Niddrie, who also wanted to know if she liked rhubarb. (She did.)

Thursday February 10

This morning when Mr Kerr came in he told me he would send Mr Dunbar down to carry the necessary papers and that I should then come up to 'Commerce' to go over the pig meat and mutton with him. So presently I went up to the building at the corner of Market Street.

The Audit Office is on the fifth floor. There in a large room were Mr Kerr, Mr Wood, Mr Dunbar, and two others, a Mr Llewellyn and a Mr Mason. I spent the morning there with Mr Kerr (frequently interrupted by the phone) and had a drink of tea (which, together with poor Mr Varley, I have missed out on more than once in the last couple of days, since the women started to make it, each lot for their own room – they didn't omit Mr Ingram or Mr Graham, of course -), brought to me by Mr Dunbar in a scalding hot glass. I also had lunch there, with another welcome glassa, and then returned to the Meat Board.

Tonight there were three letters. Dud's letter explained the telegram. It told me for a start he was being posted to Parkes, almost straight off, then in a post script, that the

posting was delayed for a week. ...which, also to his disgust, will increase his term as instructor, by at least another 12 months.

Monday, February 14

What a futile thing this diary really is. How few and how faint glimpses I've given to the wonderful days (in retrospect) I have passed, and the vividness of the most vapid person I ever met. Not one glimpse of the wild bloodshot eye and flushed loose face of Bill Foley drunk, of the worn small features of Mrs Foley crumpling with the emotion that tears shreds out of her voice; to name only two of the people of the days when I first started keeping the diary, let alone all those who had passed out of my life before it - ...This all came to me the other night, when Mrs Niddrie talked to me at some length. She can hold her end up, in fact talk for both of us quite willingly, but not interminably, like some jockeys – her daughter is married to one, Peacock, over in India – with, one of her little weaknesses, a tendency to intrude, in passing.

And what do my thoughts profit me.

Ian Niddrie [*Mrs Niddrie's son*] was home over the weekend. I saw him at one meal and spoke to him twice during it. He is very small.

Leslie Niddrie [*daughter*] and Joan Reed (the niece) got home last night. I saw them (without my glasses) when they were completing their breakfast; I sat opposite Joan at tea; I said hullo to Leslie when she came in, later. I haven't had time to size them up, if I ever do.

I was over at Merl's for tea yesterday. Tom was home. He gets his discharge and a fortnight's leave tomorrow. They go up to Lexton [*Victoria, where Tom grew up*] on Tuesday, come back Monday, and go up to Daisy's on Tuesday next. Tom's nerve doctor is going to try and get him a Melbourne posting where he can live out,

and he won't go north any more. So his tummy should settle down bye and bye.
Beddo.

Tuesday February 15

This morning it was raining lightly, so I wore my rain coat, but when I got to town the rain had left off, and was nowhere the rest of the day, so I lugged that cursed rain coat home over my arm.

Newsboys in Elizabeth Street shouted ten bushfire deaths, at Flinders Street the later editions claimed twelve. Whichever, it is terrible enough. If the rain we had this morning put them out, it would be a better fortune than we could dare hope. And only the other day I was reading an intelligently written, if Victorian fashioned, book of Mrs Niddrie's called 'Australian Pictures' published in 1886. In a chapter called 'The Squatter and the Land', referring to Black Thursday, 1851, and the Otway fires 1885, he says that fortunately such a thing could never happen again. The country was now too well prepared and organised.

Thursday, February 24

This is another spasmodic attempt to keep up my diary. No moving accidents have occurred in the last nine days.

On Sunday afternoon I went out to Grandma's. As I had expected it was a birthday celebration for Pauline, whose twentieth birthday was on Tuesday. I took half a dozen ...floral hankies. (Merl warned me against anything expensive) and thought they looked terribly flimsy.

After a salad – the day I don't enjoy a salad I'll be ill – we passed on to jelly and trifle. The trifle belied its name, rich and sweet it warned me to stop two or three spoonfuls before it vanished, and everybody else got pretty full too. Still I had room for a good slice of birthday cake. I ate the two chocolates I scored. (On these

occasions – and some others – they break their diet, and have chocolates instead of candies.)

A little while after tea Auntie Daisy [*Hoarey*] came round. I always warm to the sight of her.

Work goes on as usual, from meat canning accounts to mutton for canning and dehydration. Almost every day there is something over which, if I cannot pass the buck to Mr Kerr, I must wrestle with one of my two mortal terrors, the dread of having to ask for things, and the dread of having to ask about things. For instance, to take the most recent case, I have today drawn up a memorandum at his suggestion asking the meat control about certain matters – one matter was practically transcription from a draft of his, the other from a draft of my own, in which I drew his attention to the matters.

He will look over the memorandum, tomorrow, and it is my current fear that he will tell me to ask Mr Ingram to get one of the girls to type it up (on top of the quadruplicate list of canned meat queries etc. they've just completed) instead of taking the few steps into his office to ask him. Another fear, incidentally, is that I shall have to sign the memo; I'd sooner my name wasn't connected with its mild casting of rather severe aspersions.

Saturday, February 26

Claudius the God was a peculiar novel. As the blurb said, it was rather history disguised as fiction than the other way. As such it was so informative that it came almost as a shock to read the three accounts of Claudius' death, with their implicit reminder that much of the history of those times, as of other times, was chiefly conjecture, even to historians close to the events.

Today I stayed in town. I bought an Argus and turned up the shows while eating a salad in the Civic. As the show didn't start till twenty past one, I was pretty early.

However, as a number of people waited, I did too... As time went on, one of the attendants or ushers, came over to me, and asked would I like to come inside... I think my refusal sounded sufficiently grateful. I often reproach myself afterwards, for the gruffness of my tone, which seems to persist, however grateful I feel, if I'm the slightest bit embarrassed. It harked me back – frankly, the very sight of his uniform had – to the first time I visited the Capitol (today was the third time) in 1932, to see Congorilla. Miss Vance [*probably a supervisor at the Yooralla Crippled Children's Home where Lester spent some time*] took Hugh Iskov and me. When booking the tickets she had spoken fairly to one of the attendants, and he carried me up the steps – today, merely a slight nuisance – and after the show carried me out again from my seat to the car. A word about steps. Every time I go to the lavatory at work, I descend the four short twisting stages to the floor below, and then climb them, without discomfort or hesitation but with great wariness.

Latterly I decided the subway to Elizabeth Street would cut five minutes off my journey to and from work, and the broad shallow metal steps are no trouble, and I am never jostled. Then of course, there are those awful tram steps, which used to pervade my sleep when I first came down, till the handles of my crutches were fixed, and I gained the confidence in getting in and especially out. [*During his lifetime Lester travelled constantly on public transport and had numerous falls getting on to and off trams and trains*]

Merl and Tom should be home now, as I am due to have tea with them tomorrow. I'd be narked if they weren't there.

Wednesday March 1

Today is Dud's birthday. On my way over to Merl and Tom on Sunday I posted him a letter. When I got over there I found from them that in a letter home he had said his Parkes posting was knocked on the head, that he was to remain at Quinly for several months and then get an operational posting.

Merl and Tom enjoyed their holiday. (Tom was to report to Heidelberg, yesterday). At Lexton Tom was given a welcome home. At Wunghnu they played cricket with all the kids and took a fancy to Noel Carlisle. Tom gave Maurice and Sid his football. They were down home [*Tallygaroopna*] one day. Dad was not too well. He had to go and lie down a couple of times.

Last night I walked over to Uncle Charlies. Monty and Gavan were both there. Beverley, the only daughter, and youngest of all the third generation Canets, is a thin, dark, brown-eyed brown skinned girl about ten or eleven. Gavan and Monty went out at 25 past eight. I stayed till about 10.

Thursday March 9

Last Friday night I went over to Merl's and picked up my new pyjamas and hankies, and my little clock, which had been at a repairers in Glenferrie Road for the last fortnight. Tom had gone back to Benalla on Wednesday, strongly recommended by the hospital doctor to apply for a Melbourne posting on health reasons [*Tom had been with the RAAF on Horn Island*]. On my way home later in the evening I got on the same Darling Road tram as Uncle Charlie, Auntie Kitty [*Katherine McCauley, died 1946*] and Beverley. They had been down to Point Ormond after a hot day, but the night had turned chilly.

On Saturday afternoon I stayed in town to see *We Dive at Dawn*. It's the first time I've taken an active dislike to a theatre. ...when I got inside, the theatre looked like something fallen into a heavy plush torpor. The upper story, balcony, or whatever it is, seemed to hang so low over us, I felt as though it must obscure half the picture, though of course it didn't. Still, *We Dive at Dawn* was even worth going to the Atheneum and sitting through the howling wilderness of the support, Miss London Limited.... ..and that I'd find a fair bit to chortle at, but if that's Arthur Askey, I've had him.

Still as I said, *We Dive at Dawn* was worth all that. In fact, I'd place it as the best war picture I've seen. This, in spite of the fact that I had conceived an aversion to the idea of the achievement it portrays. No British submarine has bagged a battleship this war, and it seemed like scaling too much the heights of fanciful success. (In the same way I distrust commando pictures, as with all their publicity, the actual published successes of the commandos are very few – certainly they are far outnumbered by their screen exploits.)

Also I bought *Charles Dickens and Other Victorians* by Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, which I have now completed. ...Dickens, to me, is the style of styles. I was especially delighted to find he too loved 'Little Dorrit', which remains, and probably will remain, my favourite Dickens book, and so, my favourite of all books.

Today the rain set in, morning to night, its steadily misting now, though the tiles give no sound of it. (My one objection to tiles, the one virtue of an iron roof, the lovely lullaby at night, sweeter than any music). I hope the drought has broken in the country, more particularly at home, where they've been drinking channel water.

Sunday, March 12

On Friday night I went over to Merl's on the off chance of finding her home. ...A little idiot came round the corner with a soldier's hat and I think khaki jumper, and a big boy's short navy trousers reaching down to his knees. He said 'Heil Hitler' and sat down on the seat by me. As unostentatiously as I could I got up and pretended to look for the tram, and talked to him while standing. His speech... was a thick voiced series of trite questions about what was wrong with me, and why I didn't try exercise to make my leg stiff, and he concluded with the information that he had just come back from New Guinea. Other people came along then to divert his slightly embarrassing and very tedious attentions.

Many pages missing....

Apparently now in Tallygaroopna on holidays

Wednesday April 12

On Monday afternoon I went into Aunt Jane's for a few minutes. Miss Larsen was there, taking her leave after doing something for them. I said a few words to Uncle Alec, who, as he grows frailer, seems to look kinder, and went in to Aunt Jane where she lay in bed. She gave me a feeble hand, and in a much weaker voice said much the same as the last time I went in to see her, some months back. ...She prayed to go, but she still stayed on; and the other unhappy things she says, for she has never been a cheerful sufferer. She thought I shouldn't have gone to town and commented on my parent's health. She looks very frail, and I think I mayn't see her again – or Uncle Alec who, with his cancer, may go at any time.

On Tuesday morning, I regretfully farewelled Mum and Dad. The leading first class carriage looked empty, so I sedately followed it as it nearly ran out of the station.

The journey..... was woeful. We double stopped at every station to Seymour.

We reached Spencer Street at 2.20 or 2.25 and as Dave Anderson summed it up, when we exchanged words at the tram stop, 'It was a bitch of a trip. The worst I ever had.' I even got a bad headache out of it.

Thursday April 13

At lunch time I strolled up to Cole's or Woolworth's and bought a couple of pads for transcribing and brushing up my verse (when I get round to it) which I managed to fit into the case on Tuesday. That once-given-up-for-burnt-verse.

To-night Mrs Niddrie lit a fire in my room. She hasn't been able to get me registered for wood to kindle the coke yet.

Saturday April 15

[A *parade...*] Then a band of sailors or marines passed, then a parade of uniformed women. More bands and more women. Bands and women, bands and women. Clearly it was wholly a servicewomen's parade. Women of all shapes and profiles and faces passed, to my unaccustomed eye marching smartly enough. I think a uniform accentuates the individual features by its very uniformity...

Last night I went over to Merl's. ... When I mentioned sending Sid a book she told me how she had forgotten to get a present and had ended up sending only a letter with a letter to Daisy. 'But I've been a good aunt,' she said. 'I haven't often let birthdays or Christmasses go by without a present, and anyway, I did make him a nice little gift. I told him that in September I hoped to present him with a little cousin. 'Weeeeellll,' I exclaimed in delight. 'It's high time we had another nephew, or niece. I'd rather like it to be a niece – we've got a couple of nephews.' She had just broken the news all round. Merl said Tom had been at her and at her to tell us all, but for reasons best known to psychology she had kept putting it off. Of course I never notice things like that. She is keeping it from Mrs Russell as long as she can, as Semnells [*fellow boarders in Chloris Crescent*] did with their baby – they even sneaked a pram in one night – but she expects Mrs Russell will find it out from snooping into her room, before she sights the physical evidence.

Sunday April 23

I went to see Merl on Friday night. She was pretty concerned about Tom, who had been sent down on Monday night, under cover of a document marked 'Secret', to go to the Records Office, Chapel Street, on Tuesday. Lo and behold, most of the other Horn Island chaps turned up, each subpoenaed in the same way. The whisper spread among them that if they weren't complaisant at the interview, they would be bugged back to Horn Island. So as each man went in and the Flight Lieutenant asked him would he be willing to work as a stores clerk at Chapel Street, he answered 'yes' though often, as in Tom's case, most reluctantly. For all his eagerness to come back to town, he is certain he could not succeed as a stores clerk,

any clerical labour being the last thing in his opinion for which he is fitted, a strange sort of trade to set him to after two years as a general hand when he joined up [*the RAAF*] eager to learn some kind of aircraft work. And all this under a document marked 'secret', paid fares and a meal ticket, when each man could so easily have been asked through his C.O. With Tom's health as it is, and Merl's as hers is, he is now hoping fervently for a discharge and return to the trams, as happened in the last few weeks with a B class friend of his.

May 8

Saw Ulva at Merl's.. He looked well and was happy. Had had a week at Somers, prior to being posted to Mildura and fighter operational training. He is in S.A. now on leave [*his fiancée Cynthia Bartlett lived at Victor Harbour*]

Monday May 15

This afternoon an attractive girl with pale rimmed glasses and one front tooth grown dim came in and said 'Mr Dudley?I don't know if you remember me. I met you once at my mother's.' 'Oh are you Marj Killeen?' I explained that, knowing from what Mrs Killeen once said, that Marj worked at commerce, I had recognised her name on a pay sheet, but omitted to explain, what would still not have been quite the truth, that I hadn't liked to seek her among 400 odd people. I wouldn't, anyway, have sought the girl who inspired those 98 lines of most melancholy if not musical verse. And here she came unsought. I smiled to myself for quite 10 minutes afterwards at that simple romance-deflating fact, for it was a fact that her coming in had without so much as a start or tremor put the finish to 'that morbid while, quite free of heartache,' had wiped away that remotest imagery which, though my recollection of her had been quite untroubled since about 1 week after I last saw her, still set her in a little aloof niche that I rather liked. And by and by I began to feel a little sorry and deflated that she had come unsought and ended it thus, but this feeling I believe was partly caused by that same old feeling of dissatisfaction that always comes on me, whether my manner, though I thought it cordial at the time,

had seemed too offhand, the certainty that I hadn't asked the questions it would have been courteous to ask, or made the remarks and comments that intelligence ought to suggest.

Sunday May 21

Last Tuesday, using 20 of Dad's coupons, I bought a dark grey sports coat, at Myers, and had two long waits for lifts. On Wednesday I used a further 12 on a blue shirt with attached collar, at Buckley and Nunn's after an unsuccessful hunt through Myers and the Leviathan. The coat cost £3/11/2 and the shirt 14/6.

Monday May 22

This morning, when Mrs Niddrie called me, it was very dim, and outside I could hear the rain drops pattering on the palm tree. This intensified my usual loathness (especially my Monday morning loathness) to get up, and my disinclination to unravel the problem of getting into another day's and week's work, with all its new tasks which I should have to fossick out to such a large extent by myself, often to break ground new, so far as Food Control goes, to Mr Kerr, and with all the new acquaintances I should have to make and ask questions of (a task for which I now seldom feel nervous dread, but for which I have as deep a disinclination as ever). At such times I can almost assure myself that if I ever win Tatt's I'll live on the interest, relatively meagre though it may be, and not go any more to work either on my own account or anybody else's. [*Lester worked until he was 60*]

(Mr Kerr) then told me my rise had been approved – £370/-/- (£330 plus cost of living) and increase of £48/-/-. It's funny to think that if I had gone to a job at that figure (a little over £7 a week on a 287 day year) on coming down [*to Melbourne*] I'd have felt a feeling of disappointment somewhat akin to the dreary dissatisfaction with which I faced this job at an expected £5/15/- a week. Now I feel a slight glow of pleasure, a definite feeling of satisfaction that I'll have a little over £1 net extra

every fortnight. I'll get a war savings certificate a fortnight again like I used to at the cannery.

Tuesday May 30

I went to see Merl on Friday night and Merl and Tom on Sunday afternoon, staying as usual till after 10. They were both going up to Ballarat on the Monday (and back that night) to see Tom's brother Jim [*Mann*] (whom I met at Merl's a couple of weeks ago and whom Tom hasn't seen for three years) and his wife [*Grace*] and their new twin daughters [*Joy and Glennis*]

Monday June 5

[*Issue of new ration books*] At 9 am we quickly had a queue and thereafter for almost six hours we were wearing out our eyesight on identity cards and ration books in every condition. Some looked as though they'd been issued yesterday and never touched by hand, the vast majority looked more or less depreciated and a number were in very bad condition. Identity cards torn in half, identity cards with the change of address pasted over the name of the person, books that had fallen into every sort of grease or tried to flutter in confetti when you touched them, and one identity card and book steeped in sugar. Early in the piece I let one card too many go – it was easy to do, as in the pile they were something like the pages of a new book.

The relievers were not well managed, and as it neared three we still hadn't had lunch, while, more important, my bladder was full and complaining [*'frantic' crossed out*]. Mr Kerr then stood on the end of our queue and diverted the traffic and we finished it with our 278th issue.

I lay down all the evening and had no tea. Nicky, Mrs Niddries' black and rusty brown glossy, pampered, content, still kittenishly-overgrown tomcat, curled up at my feet.

Monday June 5

Today, discovering Myer's bookshop, I was delighted with a lavish display of Collin's pocket classics, and bought 'Great Expectations' though I'm buying them faster than I'm reading them. Result – a host of partly read books. I was particularly glad to get this book – however, nothing thrills me like getting an Everyman's I really want.

Saturday June 24

Another brief recount.

Went home on my birthday arriving five minutes after 12 after a tolerable but uncomfortable journey.

The kids [*nephews Maurice and Sid Roughsedge*] were down on Saturday and again on Monday, when they had dinner and went for a walk with me. Through the slaughter-yards, over the shallow channel by the uncomfortably swaying fence to the old rifle butts where Sid still dug up a few intact-shaped bullets and we discovered a great dead pig that had left off smelling,

Tuesday I was back to Melbourne at half past 1 and at work soon after 2.

The day before my birthday I received a ten shilling note from Val to buy a book or whatever I fancied. The following Saturday I saw an advert by Cheshires that they had fresh supplies of Random Harvest. So on Monday my book was bought and it has now been read.

Wednesday July 5

A week ago tonight I was sitting in the King's seeing first an unexpectedly amusing 'Kid from Texas' and then an expectedly pleasing 'Pride and Prejudice'.

Needless to say, I'd have enjoyed the film better if I hadn't twice read and loved the book. I was merely tolerant of the workmanlike difference of plot; and inevitably, if you have enjoyed a book which is more important for its people than its plot, you will have formed your own conception of them, and one so clear that no actor or actress will give just *that* portrayal. This was particularly so with Elizabeth, of course, and Mr Darcy, Charlotte, Mr Bingley and Jane. Greer Garson was a lovable Elizabeth, though another Elizabeth, still a lovable Elizabeth. Laurence Olivier I went prepared to dislike, and disliked. Apart from the fact that he wasn't my Darcy, and I didn't care for his face, his Vivien Leigh publicity predisposed me to dislike him. When a man and woman betray the spouse of one of them in the next street it is sordid adultery.

Saturday July 8

Thursday and Friday mornings I was again at the Debt Board. It was pretty straightforward work, and my part is now finished. I was going up with Mr Kerr on Monday morning to complete the whole show, but he countermanded it in favour of my completing the contracts audit which has dragged on a long time.

Last night I was again over at Merl's and she had a telegram from Dud that he expected to be down Saturday or Sunday

This afternoon after my bath I lay down for a rest and kept drowsing and thinking it would be strange if I actually went to sleep in the daytime. Then suddenly I was awake in the dusk and reluctantly getting up to turn on the light found it was six o'clock.

Tuesday July 10

Ulva hadn't arrived when I reached Merl's and he didn't arrive. However, we were pleasant company for one another and Merl showed me the pretty pink frock she and Tom bought for *her [the unborn baby]*.

I still haven't banked Mum and Dad's 'trust' thirty bob. [*Lester sent money to his parents on a regular basis*] Friday I went down to do so and decided rightly I'd only have time to get a war savings certificate and some chocolates to take over to Merl. Yesterday the time went in getting their 'remittance' thirty shillings, which, as I hadn't yet written their letter went in PN's instead of registered and in buying razor blades and toothpaste.

I need a hair cut. That's another thing I've been putting off from night to night, and for a lot longer than the bank. Each time the lighted door of Boardman's swings into view as the tram turns into Balaclava Road I think to myself 'It's too late – I missed the Dande [*nong train*] tonight' or 'It's too cold and windy' or 'It's too dull' or 'It's too frosty' and I trudge home with a sense of relief and guilt and watch the next line of seven golden windowed carriages come swaying, screeching along the embankment with their hundreds of people and feel still better as I push open the front gate.

[*went to the Princess Theatre*] I was up there far ahead of time. A drunk or dope boo'd at me as I rounded the corner after getting off the tram but I calmly disdained him. Perhaps because it is not well lit, more likely because not so much trodden, the good old bitumen gave me confidence to walk on steadily till I came to the glimmering muddy corner of Bourke Street. The other side I slowed down painfully on concrete.

Sunday July 16

On Friday night I went over to see the girls [*Merl and Val*]. We all had an enjoyable evening, and they walked down to the tram with me. Bankstown [*where Val is living and working*] is 35 minutes run from Sydney and the control section she works at is a couple of miles from the aerodrome where the Mosquito broke up.

Yesterday without remembering that it was 16 years since I fell ill [*with polio. Two of his cousins, who also lived in Tallygaroopna, fell ill the same day*] I stayed in town and went to the Central...

Monday July 24

On Tuesday I got a letter from Merl telling me Ulva was there on Monday and would be back late Friday night, going north Saturday afternoon. She said to come over before Friday as that night she was going to bed early with Tom's niece's wedding in the offing [*Beryl Giacometti and Ian McCallum*]. I went over on Wednesday night. This combined with a haircut I had tardily had on Tuesday 'the coldest day for 7 years' gave me a bad cold and I now have a bad cough.

On Saturday morning I was round at Merl's soon after 9. Merl and Tom and Ulva were just finishing breakfast. Ulva was to go in to the R.T.O. so I decided I would go with him. He turns out to have topped his course at Mildura – the course comprising 60 odd men. He only missed Spitfires because he topped the bombing – the Kitty's [*Kittyhawks*] of course being used extensively as fighter bombers. 'If I'd known that I'd have scattered them for a wide,' he said. Still he is very fond of the Kitty's, and thinks he has more chance of seeing action in them. He made a belly landing his first time up in a Kitty when the motor cut out. He didn't dare put down the wheels as he couldn't judge his approach properly the first time up. He made a Wirra satellite, hitting a ridge of dirt just after he landed which put the plane half on its nose and tore off the windscoop and most of the belly, and he shot along for a considerable distance in a blind cloud of dust. The Wirra instructors were complimenting him on his landing when the C.F.I. arrived and roared the daylights out of him for not putting his wheels down. 'That's another plane to the Japs,' he said. However the instructors came to his rescue, one saying that if he had put his wheels down he probably wouldn't 've made the field, and another that if he had been on wheels when he hit the ridge of dirt he'd probably have turned the plane over. Anyway he was graded 'above average' on the course.

We then went downtown and I waited outside Dunklings while Dud went in to chose a ring [*an engagement ring for Cynthia Bartlett*] from the display – stocks to be available October, November.

When we got back to Chloris Crescent Daisy and Maurice were there. Maurice looks well, but his legs are thin. He willingly displayed his appendix scar.

We didn't go in to town with Dud, but said good bye to him on the spot. I had brought him some chocolates – two pounds weight... and a writing compendium from Myer's costing 17/3 and not worth it, bought reluctantly after much heartburning as to what I could give Dud for a going away present.

Yesterday I went out to grandma's in response to a letter from Pauline saying that most of the family would roll up. They were celebrating grandma's 85th birthday, which is tomorrow.

Tuesday July 25

On Friday night I went over to Merl's. There was a letter from Ulva for me, written from Sandgate. It was chiefly to thank me for the writing compendium. If I'd known it would have been so acceptable I'd have bought him a 31/3 one instead of a 17/3 one. As it was I left it in its brown paper wrapping (after unwrapping it to rub the price off of course) and when I gave it to him with the chocolates when he was about to go, just termed it stationery.

Wednesday August 2

I am back at Food Control to finish up the contracts, a tedious job. I'd love to write a mock solemn story composed entirely of the contents of a fictitious file, but can't think of a suitable commodity as practically everything I think of is under some form of control or has contracts for it too conspicuously routed through Food Control or Supply and Shipping.

My soul dwelt more and more on chocolates.

I walked up the south side of Collins Street, turned into Swanston Street and went into a shop. All I could see were red cartons of James' home made chocolates. I never think a box of chocolates a good buy, still I asked the prices which were 5/- and 3/9. I laid out 3/9 and with reproach in my heart intensified by speculation whether the 5/- [box] would have been a better buy, I walked over Collins Street and back along the north side with that red box burning a hole in my pocket.

...I went into Food Control about the time I'm usually emerging from it, to spend almost half an hour of reading Smith's [*Weekly*] and/or Silas Marner. Vengefully I broke open my box, my yearning now overriding thoughts of preserving any of it till Friday night. Miserly I hid the remnants in my case before Mr Anderson came in. ...Yes, I am going to use the chocolate box for a pen and pencil case. Thank goodness Friday's chocolates [*he always took them to Merl's*] will come in the next pay period.

Thursday August 17

Well, well, here I am back again between covers. [*This diary is in an exercise book*]. I wonder how much more or less diligent a diarist I will be than when I attended so scappily to scraps of writing paper.

I bought a couple of £1/-/- postal notes for the Argus Limbless Soldiers' Appeal, which ought to wipe off the balance that has been accruing since I began to keep my books. I also bought this exercise book.

Sunday August 19

On Friday night as usual, I went over to see Tom and Merl. Tom now has a Wednesday-Saturday monthly leave which he doesn't like, in place of the old

Thursday Tuesday morning leave. It means no Saturday night home and a day less. I took over a pound of chocolates but Merl isn't touching any since her tooth operation which left a root in due to the dentist who first attempted it having broken the tooth. She may have to have the gum slit 'afterwards' if the root doesn't work out. She should have had her teeth out many months ago. However I can't talk as my hollow will probably need pulling instead of filling by the time I get round to the dentist. However, this is not due to fear – though I hate fillings – but my usual lethargic procrastination mixed with financial unwillingness.

In Bambra Road a man walking level with me said in a cheery tone 'How are you going'. As I acknowledged his remark I saw a great hump between his shoulders. If I wasn't a cripple I wouldn't have minded. But being a cripple I've no wish to associate with cripples or people otherwise deformed. We continued on together [*to vote*] while he passed somewhat mazy remarks on the inconvenience of not being able to vote at Queen's Hall, and what a silly business it all was, in tones which sounded to me as though he had drunk just enough to dim his wit a little. But when he remarked 'A lot of good it's going to us. What is there in it for you and me' I froze or rather became abstracted, and was doubly glad when we reached the school. Such remarks touch me nearly and are no less offensive from someone in a similar position.

Yesterday afternoon I went out to grandma's. The fine day was hazing over, and I had a dull widespread – sinus-ey? – suspicion of a headache and an uncomfortable griping feeling far down my abdomen. Very shortly I got chilblains so my misery was complete.

The first thing I did after I walked in and found them round Grandma, who had just taken a bad turn and was groaning on the chair, was to go into the loungeroom and take off my calliper and rub rub rub those chilblains.

Sunday September 3

On Thursday I got a letter from Merl saying not to come over, as she has the mumps. Tom got ten days leave to nurse her.

On Friday, having been paid.. Fixing on a World Classic American Critical Essays, which cost only 3/6 I gave the little middle-aged man £1. As he counted my change he asked the name of the book for reference to customers' enquiries and went on counting my change to 10/-. Though I knew it was wrong I walked straight out. Several yards down the street I turned, hesitated and was lost. Rather than tell the bookseller, who I don't believe purposely shortchanged me, and who might in spite of my return still believe he had given me the right change, I went on and left that 10/- to its fate. As I went I sorted the change out in my mind and decided Charity would have to bear the loss.

October 4

Belle rang me on Tuesday afternoon [*October 3*] to say Merl had a daughter [*Diana*]. Leslie (Canet) Young [*cousin*] had rung her. Tom landed over about 6, as promised, to find I know that Diana Lynette had come into this life. I'll be able to see Merl on Sunday, at the hospital, also I hope, my niece.

Tuesday October 10

On Friday I visited Tom. He was quite pleased with life. Diana weighed six pounds seven ounces and both were well. The tramways have applied for him to the Manpower, and when he goes back he'll put in his application for a discharge.

I woke at about 8 on Sunday morning and then suddenly found it was 11. This was my worst sleep in as I usually get up about 10. I had a bath before dinner [*probably the midday meal*] and had not finished it when Tom came. Mrs Niddrie had invited him over for dinner.

We left about 25 to 3. The day was warm, windy and dull, and I took my coat in case it turned bad during the night, as I was going on to Grandma's. As usual I was beaten to the fare and rode free to Elsternwick. ...Merl looked well and happy. Shortly afterwards Leslie and Ron [*Young*] came in. Leslie is going to have a baby in January. I didn't have a chance to slip my pound (present) to Merl, till the others had gone to the nursery door, to which the sister was bringing Diana. I followed them, and had a ten-second glimpse of which my one dim memory is of tightly shut eyes amid plenty of muffling.

Nickie, Mrs Niddrie's cat, got a bait apparently intended for the neighbours' dog. She has been a very sick but generally quite patient. Her occasional meows, however, were so pitiful Mrs Niddrie and Leslie were going to take her to the vet this evening and have her destroyed. Chiefly due to Ian's arguments they have let her fight on and it looks as though she may pull through.

Sunday October 15

Well, Nick died at 11 o'clock that night. Mrs Niddrie, once said to me, speaking on the subject of corpses, for which she expressed utter contempt, 'So far as I'm concerned, when I'm done with it, they can hang my carcass out on the clothes-line'. She dug a hole three feet deep in the earth under Nick's well-loved bush by the lavatory, tenderly wrapped Nick in brown paper, and so buried her. She also transplanted a lily of the valley to the spot.

I saw Merl on Wednesday night. Her sister-in-law Mrs [*Eva*] Giacometti and niece May (or Thelma, the names are very much interchanged) came there soon afterwards, too. They left before I did and Merl successfully begged me a look at Diana. I had a good look. What I saw was a comically-bewildered, clear-skinned, slightly screwed up-faced little baby, turning blank eyes from voice to voice. Our little Diana. Life is a very new affair for her.

On Thursday...I went into Dunklings to see about Dud's ring. After a long long while at his inventory and looking at rings, he said he had one very similar to the first choice, but I was afraid to say yes off my own bat, besides I had no money with me. I left feeling I had acted with no boldness and little circumspection, as I usually feel after transacting business, especially on behalf of others. I have £30/8/6 in one bank and £18/14/10 in the other, ..however £15/10/- of it is earmarked for my parents, under the fortnightly scheme of £1/10/- sent home and £1/10/- banked.

Tuesday October 24

On Friday night I went over to see Merl and Diana at 9 Chloris Crescent, and again on Sunday. Diana, like all new babies, so far as I'm concerned, is decidedly not beautiful. However, since she's my niece, her tiny face is quaintly attractive. There is an almost continual wrinkle between her ever moving deep blue eyes, and she unselfconsciously crumples up her face in laughable ways, but her expression on the whole is at once alive and placid. She takes this world calmly...

Wednesday October 25

Today, staggering my lunch hour again, I went into Dunklings, resolving, if need be, to take the alternative ring rather than wait longer for Dud's answer. To my joy, the old chap had the first choice ring, altered, and set aside in an envelope. As I waited, a girl in a blue frock who had looked at the card, said 'Where is Neil, now.' [*Ulva's first name was Neil but his family either referred to him as Ulva or Dud*] I remember his mentioning some girl, probably one Esmá Callaghan...She also asked if he was a flying officer yet, and said 'I thought so.' The ring came to £48/10/- (I had forgotten to note that one day last week a bank cheque came for £55/-/-, the same day I received 10/7 cheque for interest on my bonds) and they are posting it to Cynthia. I wrote to both Dud and Cynthia tonight and will cable him tomorrow.

Wednesday November 1

In further cruises I picked up three more tins of condensed milk, a tin of Horlicks, and a jar of shaving cream. On Friday I went into Griffith's Royal Arcade shop and paid for a one pound parcel from Dad and Mum. So that they will feel they are really giving it I deducted it from the thirty shillings I usually send home. When I was over at Merl's that night she suggested we pool resources for Ulva's hamper. The upshot was that on Monday night she packed my tomato soup, Horlicks, shaving cream (with some insulating tape wound tightly round as a guard we hope against melting and overflowing) and one tin of condensed milk, and of her own, a cellophane-wrap of biscuits, a packet of seeded raisins, a tin of sliced peaches, some lollies coated to resist the heat, a teeny packet of cocoa, and one or two other things. She is also seeing a shop about sending him a cake for one.

Thursday November 2

Today was Mrs Niddries' birthday. I bought her a 5/- box of chocolates at James' Swanston Street.

That was yesterday. The past week I have been working all the morning at Food Control, on the June 30 trial balance. That means I take my lunch there and have my case to carry when I leave. As a consequence my aimless block wanderings have contracted, especially as I haven't been looking out for things for Ulva this week. Today, however, my craving for chocolate was intensified by my gift to Mrs Niddrie. With my usual feeling of wanting to spend money on something, loath to spend money on anything, and still more loath to think what to prospect spending it on, all my mind turned to chocolates.

Tonight, sated with some of those, and three of five of my chocolates Leslie brought in with a specimen of copperplate calligraphy she wanted to show me – I wonder why people waste money on chocolates. Now it is almost half of an Everyman gone, which makes me still more intent on passing the fortnight with

Val's Reader's Union 'Francis Drake', and making this fortnight show the heaviest 'profit' on my relaxation provision to date, following last period's heavy overdraft.

I got a letter from Cynthia today, thanking me, but mentioning that the ring is too small. 'I don't know why it should be too small, unless my fingers have put on more weight... I guess I had better return it immediately seeing I can't wear it as it is, and maybe they will alter it again for me.'

Sunday November 5

On Thursday or Friday morning I awoke with the pieces of a tooth lying on my tongue. I had been putting off the filling from month to month just as I put off a haircut from week to week. So I rang Gibson's, in Collins Street just up from Swanston Street, and at eleven o'clock next Wednesday morning it will come out.

Monday November 6

Tomorrow's a holiday - 'Cup Day'. The first Tuesday in November being a standard gazettal, it matters not that Cup Day is now on a Saturday, and that anyway this is war time. However, it's all right by me.

I drew Martial Law in the Meat Control sweep and he ran third in the Hotham Handicap, so I got 6/- - a return, as it happens, of the three sweeps, including this, that I've been in at Meat Control.

I just had an interlude then while I dipped my forefinger through a jagged rent in a tin of condensed milk. I must have looked very silly. On Saturday night after we came home from the pictures my thoughts once more tended to the three surviving tins of condensed milk I had bought in looking out things for Dud. I picked out a tin of Croft's and tried to open it with everything I had rather than borrow Mrs Niddries' tin opener. Razor blades and what not, and I finally made two tiny holes with a broken trouser press. I sucked through one, Dud-fashion, and found the strife

had cost me my appetite. Next morning I joined the two holes in that ragged tear, by using my back door key as a lever. Appetite still gone. Determination to buy a tin-opener, rather than be chuckled at, borrowing Mrs Niddrie's'.

Tonight I prised the tear a little wider, dipped in my fore finger, and feasted a while, picking out one little bit of metal that had fallen in (the others must have sunk – I must drain the tin before the milk is contaminated). Then I put the tin back in the wardrobe with a piece of brown paper over it to keep fluff off but allow the air to circulate, and resolved to pilfer Mrs Niddrie's tin opener when she's gone to work tomorrow.

Sunday afternoon and night I wrote 'Vain Nostalgia' an idea I got a few days before while saying over some of my old verse to myself as a change from thinking of women. ...I'm not sure whether it's verse or poetry. The quality's very uneven.

Tuesday November 7

I did the dirty with the tin opener.

Thursday November 9

On Saturday I'll stay in town and I think see Jane Eyre at the Regent. I don't doubt that this version of my well-loved book will disappoint somewhat. I'm curious, after seeing stills of her, how Joan Fontaine can portray small, slight, plain, green-eyed Jane. I'm prepared too not to like Orson Welles, though on the other hand he may make a very good Rochester.

Saturday November 11

Tom was home on leave when I got across last night. Diana was 98 percent placid, and still thriving. Merl is going up to Daisy's next Friday, and may stay a month. I'll say ta-ta to them on Wednesday, which night I may also see Val, who hopes to be there on her way to Molloy's. Val's visit to Molloy's is 'unofficial' – she is

anxious for a rest, which she would be unable completely to enjoy home, and doesn't want Dad and Mum to know in case they'd feel hurt. Merl showed me the cake she had baked for-me-for-Dud. It cost 4/6 and I gave her 2/- more towards its freight and the freight of the other parcel we sent.

Jane Eyre was an RKO picture. My enjoyment of course would have been greater but for having read the book two or three times.

Monday November 13

I am at the nadir of my financial hopes. Neither of my two 10/- in the Cup turned up a prize – anyway the second, which was to be drawn on Saturday, hasn't resulted in a telegram. ...I am carrying £16/-/- but it is an illusion. Six pounds and ten shillings is Dud's. The rest is unbanked thirty shillings for mum and dad. I can see only suicide ahead. The weather is a fitting background for these gloomy forebodings.

Saturday November 18

On Tuesday I went over to Merl's, having received a note from her that Val would be there that night. I was fortunate coming home from work in obtaining a half pound block of Cadbury's at a shop near the station where I had gone to get a malted milk. However, the final upshot was that I ate most of it myself.

Val looked well, and had a different hairdo that looks quite nice. She is expecting any time to be offered her discharge or a re-muster. She is inclining very much to the discharge. I'll see her again on Tuesday or Wednesday when she gets back from Molloy's. She wrote home after all that she was going to Molloy's. Merl and Diana were due to go up to Daisy's last night.

Monday November 20

Yesterday was fine, though hazed over, till after I had set out for grandma's at quarter to four. It then started to turn dull and the clouds were so full of dust they had an eerie brown look. (Riverina dustbowl problem affecting Melbourne). ... This morning, however, the windows and sill were foul with the rusty streaks, and the bitumen footpaths are crusted all over with it. The newspaper accounts make interesting reading. I'd like very much to have been home [*Tallygaroopna*]. I respond to these weather freaks even if I experience discomfort. I actually rather enjoyed – though retrospect of course intensified the enjoyment – that red sky day, Easter Saturday, 1938, which I turned into brisk and still readable rhyme.

I didn't realise till I got out there that it would be Bell's birthday. I had been down here a year on Thursday, November 16, and it was the Friday, three days after, that Bell held her celebrated birthday party at which all the town uncles and aunts except Henry were present. Yesterday Stanley and Eileen, Honorine and Alf, and Auntie Daisy were there. Auntie Daisy made the cake, and she or they, or both, have made Ulva a cake, and will make Val one, with the aid of butter from coupons mum sent down.

During the evening Stan and Alf and I tackled the Argus Marathon crossword, but there were still paddocks of it scarcely trodden, when we folded in at supper time.

Today I had a letter from Dud, dated Nov 8. He said he had hit his eye with a hammer banging at the roof of a hut. They had shifted camp and he had been grounded and put in charge of the new erection, so the sore eye meant a few more days grounding. He didn't say if the new camp was farther afield. He is doing sketching to kill time, so that some drawing paper and coloured pencils would come in handy. He is sending home, by Jack Ford, of Maringi, some photos taken by his camera gun when strafing the ack-ack on a ship. 'We sank her with our bombs a couple of minutes later.'

Tuesday November 21

Val left rather less than ten minutes ago – it is not yet ten. She arrived before seven thirty and we had a very enjoyable talk, while munching some chocolates I bought towards the occasion. She said the weather at Waubra on Sunday was very dirty and depressing and was maybe the reason why Wilbur, her watch, keeps stopping and starting and must get repaired.

I enquired at Norman's today for drawing paper and coloured pencils. They had large sheets costing ninepence of which I bought half a dozen. They only had three or so kinds of coloured pencils, so I'll try elsewhere, and if unsuccessful, will resort to crayons and water colours, though neither are so satisfactory from our Dudley standpoint, a pencil being the easiest medium with us, and into the bargain might have trouble to make the journey.

Wednesday November 22

I finished lunch unexpectedly early, and was out in the beautiful sunshine at 1.15, but early as I was, Val was there at Altson's corner. She wanted to get out of the crowd, as she hates cities, but there was little hope of that in lunch hour. [*They walked and walked*]. Along Flinders Street to Elizabeth St, and up it to Norman's window, pointing out Reliance House name in great letters on its side wall. ... We then walked up to Queen Street, where I pointed out No. 47, to which Val took me seven years ago to see the people of the Society for Crippled Children.

Friday November 24

Yesterday morning as I went round to Meat Control, just after 10, somebody spoke to me, and waking to my surroundings I found it was Val behind dark glasses. We talked for a minute in the sunshine outside the bank, and again kissed good-bye. She was leaving on a quarter to one 'Troopy'.

After I bought a couple of pencils – '3B' suggested by Val, but marked 'Royal Sovereign Wartime Substitute' – I went upstairs, and as she had spoken of a

scarcity of brushes, decided to make sure of these before buying paints. All I could see on display were what looked like pointed sticks, putting me in mind without expressing it to myself, of Oriental artists' material. I was not surprised to learn on inquiry, being told that the only ordinary brushes in stock were coarse ones, that those 'pointed sticks' were Chinese brushes, but it did surprise me that they were actually fine white bristle brushes. [*Bought numerous items for Ulva and wrapped them Saturday night*].

Sunday November 26

I sat up so long at that parcel, with my light, green sports coat and no jumper underneath, while the night turned cooler and cooler, that my nose was running badly before I went to bed. I had such a bad night of it, though I got in a fair amount of sleep, as always, that when I awoke, blowy as ever, at 5, I discovered the bottom sheet had worked down to my ankles. The morning passed in wintertime misery, and I was glad to leave Meat Control at 10 to 12, 5 minutes after Mr Pearce.

That parcel troubled me sorely. I already had the sheets of paper folded at a size I consider suitable for the parcel. But the paints were a problem. The little tubes were too liable to pitch about in their box, and perhaps aggravate the danger of leaking. But wrapping them separately in torn newspaper was a hard job and the paper refused to adapt itself to insulating the tube caps and seams. When they were finally wrapped they pressed against the lid, raising the fear that pressure on the parcel might spill the beans, through the inner pressure of the wrapping nullifying the pressure-resistance of the box. I reduced the wrapping a bit, but barely sufficient to allay my fears. I put the paint box, the pencils and the brush, in the middle of the drawing paper. I wrapped them first in newspaper, then green wrapping paper, then brown paper, and tied them up. Yesterday morning at work I pasted the seams, and partly re-tied the parcel. I'll tie it right up on Monday and mail it.

Wednesday November 29

The week has been hot. Yesterday was muggy, but otherwise it was enjoyable, though I perspire at lunch time walking round getting light into my eyes and fresh(er) air into my lungs, glancing at the women's attractive print dresses and wishing more daylight showed between their legs.

Tuesday December 5

This morning when I awoke, well before 6, I followed my usual custom of putting on my socks and underpants so that, when I woke again about 7, I would have less dressing to do.

Saturday December 9

Several days this week I have been prospecting for presents. With the kids and Diana in mind I looked in on Tim the Toyman, where I may get a rabbit, if it isn't too dear. At Robertson and Mullin's 'The High Window' for Dad, cost 9/-. I read it to make sure it wasn't too sexy, and enjoyed its wisecracking private detective, and so came out very cheaply on my fortnight with a charge of only 7/- to 'Relaxation'.

Saturday December 23

Well on the Monday having had a guinea filling and finding that the 'Federal Story' was not yet out on sale, but was hoped for by Christmas, I went to McGill's and got myself 'King's Row'. During the rest of the week I read it. A very strong novel, with a very considerable range of humankind, too packed to be carried in all essentials to a film, but very clearly close kindred to *the* film.

Last Sunday I went out to Grandma's where Stanley, Eileen and Auntie Daisy were in attendance. I had Mum's light suitcase emptied of my books and papers and took it home without much trouble.

Christmas Day. I first thought of checking my case through from Caulfield, but decided I wanted it with me when I got home, and for another thing it had no lock.

When the train came, its passengers of course took a long time to unload themselves and work their way past, but eventually the flow diminished and we surged back again to our old places. The engine stood before and everybody, it seemed, but myself, even Henry (Gawne of the accounts section), had to treat it like wet paint and touch it, then discover the grime on their fingers. As for me, containing myself in impatience fortified by Henry's presence against the ever-increasing number of people, I looked it over, and listened to its rhythmical slow panting, and tried to fashion consonants for the hoarse vowels, and watched the little fluff of vapour that marked each panting motion.

Long, long, it seemed after the empty train had backed out – it was, in fact quarter to five, the latest I've known our train backed slowly in. By that time of course a very large proportion of travellers had arrived, and in the lottery now to be drawn the fact that you had arrived early on the offchance of an early shunt-in, meant nothing. You might draw the position of a door – you might not. ...I lost Henry and found myself on the outside of a frantic throng, held back by a big blue coated woman, who made no headway whatever, while people either side pressed on past, tangling with each others' cases of which my crutches fell so foul I had no hope, even if that woman hadn't been bobbing back against me. I was dead anxious to see how I'd get on without Henry and I was in despair. The result of course was that I was almost last in, as at Easter. Another time I'll bore in from the *side* with 'manners towards none'.

At the second compartment I found Henry had got us both a seat. After I was seated he told me that an elderly woman the other side had wanted to dispute his reservation of a seat in the corner with my bag. He had answered 'Allright I'm reserving it for a boy on crutches who's coming in in a minute. Take it if you want to.' (It wasn't till many miles had passed that I noticed a sticker additional to the

‘please lift armrests’. It said ‘Placing of articles on a seat to reserve it for another person is forbidden. Penalty £5/-/-’.

Saturday was a cloudy, dusty, cold squally day with rain early in the morning. Sid was down, on messages, before I was up and went home a while after I got up. I scarcely strayed outside, except to see the delphiniums, marigolds, carnations, petunias, and nasturtiums, in various stages of growth, on which mum is concentrating instead of vegetables. Her garden, compared with its large area, has materialised in few but lovely flowers, and the well-laid out plots either side of the curving path are designed to and pray God will – produce within the next several months something of that dream garden for which mum has always yearned.

On Sunday, most of which was fine with a fair breeze, Maurice and Sid came down early in the afternoon. We went for a walk. Through the rec [*recreation ground*] – having looked at the dark yellow waters of the full dam, now boatless; Mr Green bought the old boat from Uncle Bert [*Albert Canet*] – past the remnants of the ‘kangaroo apple’ trees. Over the short sparse grass of the paddocks to ‘Larsen’s bush’. The paddocks are very dry but not so bare and dusty here as my imagination was prepared for.

We lingered a while at the block discussing inter alia the day over three years ago when Sid and I spent an amusing but almost entirely profitless half hour trying with rushes to help yabbies up the boards of the block to the upper level. The lower level had been very low indeed and the would-be migrants – I never saw it before or since, except on a re-visit a couple of days later – were laboriously climbing from the water up the wet, sheer and slimy boards. It was a distance of probably more than six feet to the top and not one yabby we saw made the distance.

We went on to that other block, in Caldwell’s old place, nearly to the divergence of another channel at right angles to this. When we got to the dam through which I had driven Ginger in the gig when as an ambitious 6 year old I turned him the wrong

way, I had once more to re-hearse it to the boys. Now the dam was empty, and we walked through it, kicking at the pine cones that covered it. Actually the spot is more memorable to me for another afternoon of that channel making time when Ulva and I sat on a log under a tarpaulin and watched fork lightning (almost the only fork lightning I have seen) seemingly trickle down the sky.

Today being Christmas day the boys and Daisy were down early. They brought the Christmas cake, partly fractured, three quarter pound blocks (*chocolate*) for us Dudleys, and a bottle of lemon juice cordial.

We had a gory and messy time plucking the chook, and the boys contributed their mite towards gutting it, Daisy having the lion's share. I'd never make a slaughterman; I disliked this job.

Friday December 29

The sands of the year, and of my holiday, ('and of Ulva's life – though we didn't know it) [*written in years later by Lester*] are running out. How have I spent my holiday? I have never in my year or so of diary writing taken a straight long look at my home or my home-life. I'll try now.

'The wracked and faded house' of a triple sonnet now over 2 years old grows more wracked and still more faded. The 'dining room', our meal room, living room, entrance hall and my bedroom – mum's when I'm not here – is worse worn as to lino, dustier than ever this dry summer, and still seldom quite tidy, due to mum's chronic inclination to destroy what her children impatiently look on as rubbish or what, due to her lapses of health, lack of physical endurance and preoccupation with whatever work she feels forced to give priority to (and a flower garden is little enough compensation for the years of ill-health and worry) and lack of space elsewhere (already cluttered up) to shift things to, inevitably becomes rubbish as a plant out of place becomes a weed. Dad doesn't help with his time-weary bringing back of books and magazines that had been stowed away, but dad is too frail and

shaky and through his 33 years of married life has retained much of a bachelor's indifference – no doubt accentuated by the amount of camp life he has had during the years. However, I didn't set out on this to criticise mum and dad; anything I've written has been merely in explanation of the reasons for what I am describing.

I feel as though I've looked in writing already needlessly long at my home. I'll remember whatever will be remembered without the aid of writing. I don't love the wretched boards, but when the day comes – I hope it will – when they disappear and a neat new home rises on the centre of the property, the egotistic, self-translated attachment I've had to the place will feel each time I think of the planted over spot rather lost and shut out of a past whose shabby, pimpled youth I'm in no hurry to forget.

I am seldom-if-ever-up before 11. By that time I've had breakfast in bed. Usually several buttered wheat-bix and a slice or two of jam and Peggy's forlorn attempt at continued production of cream. My meals are all I miss of Melbourne – the lovely fresh fruit and fresh vegetables, and even the cooked vegetables. Dad and Mum, lacking their own supplies, without any fruiterer calling, seldom eat vegetables save potatoes and onions – seldom have these, because they seldom have a cooked meal – and have got too apathetic to seek to restore what they badly need to their diet. But, there, I'm back on that subject.

During what's left of the morning I lie on my bed-cum-couch or sit on the old low chair chasing tunes on the wireless or curl in the big easy chair.

In the afternoon it's as the morning.

In the evening with variations. The variations chiefly consist in sauntering – if you can saunter on crutches – in the vicinity of Mum as she works at the planting of the lawn in the cool shade; watching Liberators (*planes*) drone seemingly slowly overhead; their lights as yet dimmer than their great dark shapes, their 4 engines,

twin fins, narrow fuselage and 'high aspect ratio' distinctive wings; strolling over to the dam and wishing there was something to row on it...strolling round the rec with Mum in last nights moonlight; this evening sitting in the back yard first with Mum's company then with Dad's, looking at the tiny full moon – very tiny it looks when it gets up from the edges – the bas relief of widely scattered clouds, the few hand-picked stars (that caret-mark lost it its spontaneity) the light dusk blue, the dark softly stirring trees, the earth dimly lit by the slanting light, listening to that soft stir of the trees, the few bull-frogs and fewer throaty-croakers, the ceaseless whir of the crickets, the occasional drone of engines – including a plane that passed unlit - - and the odd scattered subdued other sounds, wishing my days of verse weren't dead. I like being outside, but the flies drive me in by day and the mosquitoes by night. Yet I'm very content, and will be sorry to go back. This is home. That's all there is to it.

Sunday December 31

Last night I stood at the bottom of the big yard, trying without success to weave a poem out of the rushes. They cluster in the low-lying triangle between the rec drive, our fence, and the floodbank, fed by the overflow of our dam.

Well, it's the last day of the year, and what's much more to the point, the second last day of my stay. I'm not sure just how long I'll have home next time.

1945

Friday January 5

On Tuesday morning the train came in with the corridor carriages in front, and obligingly stopped instead of carrying them out of the platform. At Seymour, the man sitting opposite me went out the window, and even then only got a soft drink, due to the remoteness of the carriage from the tea-room.

The train pulled in at nearly 2, and I took a taxi down to Food Control, where I left my case while I went to the Civic and had some assorted sandwiches and coffee. I was back at work at 2.45.

Next morning I spent at the Farmers' Debts Board, doing the six monthly Commonwealth audit. This I repeated yesterday morning and this morning, with the variant this morning that I went up to Mr Studman's office in the Commonwealth Sub-Treasury for my pay and a cup of tea. I concluded the audit neatly at lunch time with a very little Brockle-ising of a few cards. (Mr Pearce's term for taking the minutes as read, after the practice of an old time auditor Brocklehurst, who was wont to say, when passing things in a hurry 'It's a hundred to one it's right'.)

Monday January 8

On Saturday, as I was lying down after lunch for a brief rest and read of the paper before going over to Merl's, Mrs Niddrie showed in Uncle Charlie. With my mind flying to the goods and chattels still not picked up from Grandma's, I exchanged the usual conversational preliminaries with him.

He sat down and said 'I'm afraid I haven't very good news for you' (that won't mean definitely killed, is it injured (I hope) or missing?) 'though there's still hope' (missing – where?) 'Ulva's been brought down by ack-ack fire over the Celebes. They were strafing the Jap positions.' (Strafing – low level – and a quick plunge into earth or sea.)

He didn't try to hold out extravagant hopes, but wasn't inclined to be pessimistic. Darrill was posted missing for 14 months before they got word he was a prisoner of the Japs. But Darrill was an infantryman, one of the many thousands taken together in Malaya. It didn't do to place too devout a faith in the chances of a fighter pilot strafing enemy positions, probably hit at a low level, or of a single airman falling into the hands of the men (and Japanese at that, though I have heard account of our own men in similar cases) whom he has just been strafing. And through all the

confident hopes expressed by Tom, by Merl, by Auntie Daisy, by Mrs Niddrie, by Leslie, and the hopes which my thoughts have necessarily woven into their examination of the multiplicity of things that could have happened, that single likelihood has ever recurred as a sober probability to be faced. Hit at low level, and a quick plunge into earth or water. If only the engine or propeller was hit, being a good pilot, and veteran of two low-level crash landings, he would have a good chance of getting down, whether or not he was properly treated afterwards. But a wing or the tail-unit may have been shot off, or the controls smashed, or himself hit. And then would come the crash, the explosion and the fire. His body – well, that's immaterial if the life is gone, which pray God it hasn't – and will always picture him in the garb of his tall browned keen good-looking body and face. One can't help thinking out fantastic tales of escape, even capture, and I suppose it does little harm, if one keeps squarely in mind that most likely of events, and facts that probability that Ulva is now a memory. [*Ulva was never found*]

The telegram copied out by Mum in a letter I received today reads –
'410222 Flying Officer U. N. Dudley missing.

'Regret inform you that your son Flying Officer Ulva Neil Dudley is missing as result air operations on 4th January 1945. (Last Thursday – what were we doing on Thursday – what was I thinking and feeling? I probably shut my eyes on several of those half-frightened prayers for both Ulva and Darrill that I say silently day after day – but there was no premonition).

'Known details are: he was pilot of Kittyhawk aircraft detailed for straffing against the enemy which was apparently hit by enemy ack-ack fire near Lake Tandans in the Celebes and failed to return to base. The Minister for Air join with Air Board in expressing sincere sympathy in your anxiety. When any further information is received it will be conveyed to you immediately.

'Airforce. 391 Little Collins Street, Melbourne.'

Mum has subjoined 'Above is exactly what came, tho portion of it looks badly put.' Maybe she was referring to the relative clauses in the sentence giving the known details, or to the fact that 'join' was written instead of 'joins' (which may be her or the post-office's mistake.)

The word 'apparently' gives room for belief that his plane was not seen to crash, which vastly widens the possible area wherein he may have come down, still without wiping out the worst likelihood.

Uncle Charlie said Daisy had rung Grandma's with the news the previous night. He also said that Auntie Daisy and Jessie were coming out during the afternoon to his place, I gave him Merl's address. However they went first to Mrs Niddries', who directed them as best she could, and at the Depot a trammie directed them to the actual address and locality.

After a couple of minutes chat with Tom and Merl and Diana I rather bluntly gave the news. I couldn't use Uncle Charlie's words, because they were at once too painful and too important a memory. I think I said 'Uncle Charlie called in to see me before – after lunch – when he was on his way home.' Then raising my eyes to Merl's I said 'Ulva's missing.' They were both shocked, of course, but inclined from the first to look on the brighter side. Tom in fact was very confident of the chances of making a crash landing, rating them far more highly than I could. Like me, they had had a letter within the past several days, and we were glad he had got some of the parcels. As both letters were dated about a week before Christmas there was a possibility that in the ensuing fortnight and odd days more had reached him. His letter to Merl contained a suggestion – my letter, had been sealed before it came to him – that he and I club together for electric light for home. In his letter to me he mentioned again his and Cynthia's plans for wedding on his leave, which he expected in February. In both letters he mentioned a bracelet of shillings he was

making for Cynthia, so if it is ultimately sent home among his effects we will see that she gets it.

Merl decided, in case no one else had done it, that she should write to Cynthia's mother, and it is good that she did, as mum's letter today requested that I write a letter to her father and get some man to write the envelope. Merl worded her letter well. She printed the envelope and marked the top corner 'private'. Not knowing Mrs Bartlett's initials, she addressed it to Mrs Barlett, c/- Miss C Bartlett.' All these circumstances, combined, on reflection leave me with little hope that there will be no foreboding roused in Cynthia's mind when in her post office job she sees the letter.

Yesterday I went out to Grandma's though I had little wish to go. (I rang Belle up on Saturday morning to say I'd be out as usual. Her tones were markedly different – a mixture of gentleness, absence and disinterested reserve, but I didn't remotely connect them with Ulva. There is no sensitive awareness about me.)

I was glad when I got there. The greetings and talk passed as any other day. The way was probably paved by Jessie and Auntie Daisy coming to see us at Caulfield. They had their own little tragedy too yesterday. Tup, their 8 or 9 year old Pom, was sick, with heart trouble, a very miserable, lack lustre, tremulous little dog as he lay on the kitchen hearth. Presently Belle thought it best to carry him to the lounge, and very soon they were calling the vet, who had already been up several times. Poor Tup was presently chloroformed, and the vet and Uncle Jack Canet buried him in a neatly made little grave under the peach tree, marked by a stick. Belle will miss him very much – the daylong round will seem the duller for the absence of her warmly loved and loving pet, and the others were gloomed, both for Tup and for Belle. Even while I was comparing my own likely loss in my mind with the magnitude of this little dog's death, its nearness and the tender human feeling that accompanied it – displayed apparently by the vet just as by the others – could not but make me sorry too.

After tea Daisy called from Aunt Jane Campbell's. She hadn't known I would be there. We had several minutes' talk. She mentioned mum's wish, expressed in her letter, that I should convey the news to Cynthia and I told her what Merl had done (I also told mum in a letter I then had in my pocket and which she would get today). Daisy told me Dad and Mum had taken it wonderfully, and were 'quite sure he would come back'. (God grant it.) I think they had steeled themselves from the first to meet such news. They had sent or were sending a telegram to Valerie's adjutant to give the news to her in the gentlest manner possible. I think Valerie will be very worried, but she had probably thought often enough of the possibility herself to face up to it.

The heavy heartedness has gradually lifted since the first cold contraction, and since the afternoon when calmly with open eyes and shut mouth I now and then prayed 'God rest him.' Now I'm praying 'God save him,' and occasionally 'Thy will be done' that little utterance with which I tried to fortify myself against the too likely bad news in the news sessions of 1940-1941, in the days when I lived home. The heavy-heartedness has lifted, but the sense of something having gone out of the day lingers and most likely will persist a long time. It clouds everything to which I would normally look forward with interest or mild enjoyment in the course of a day or night. Sunshine – shade – a meal – a rest – a read – a meeting – a talk. I don't have to try and forget the anxiety – inevitably my thoughts turn to other things, and as inevitably return. That's as it should be. Memory will not fret and mar itself on a thing like this; one's mind will recreate itself, but it will not become forgetting.

Sunday January 28

This is the 8th day of my leave, which began on the due date, January 20th.

Tom is out of the Air Force – rather, next door to it. The Monday before I came home he came down, being posted to the ED or PD, or whatever it is, but as he had to go before a medical board, the actual discharge – which was the result of a

tramways-manpower request – was delayed. Merl and Tom were counting on going up to Lexton together for a month before he went back on the trams so that they could see to the house, which they have not visited for a year now. However as the board was put off first to Wednesday of this week and now to some time next week, Merl will not get away with him, as she has Leslie Young's washing to do when Leslie is 'brought to bed' – as Leslie did for Merl – and also from the 17th of February will be in residence at Mrs Niddrie's as Mrs Niddrie and Joan are going away for a fortnight to Warbuton.

I reached Tally about 11 o'clock still in good nick. Val and Maurice met me, Val had been home about a week, was to have left Tally the following morning, but as Dad was sick and in hospital, she had wired for and been granted an extra seven days, so went away only yesterday morning. I had had a letter from mum the day before saying 'Just a few lines to tell you Pop is in the Mooroopna Hospital under observation for may-be a few days or week or so. He and Val went up to Numurkah yesterday to pay Dr Coombs a visit. Dr prescribed ...but Dad got a bad turn in the night, nothing much seemingly, but we didn't like it, got out of bed and couldn't get back without my help. Then seemed queerish. Val went over to Humphries and he and Mrs came over, after sending Keith to ring Dr Coombs about him and get him to send for ambulance to take him to Mooroopna. He had sat in the big chair for about 3 days after the word came that Ulva was missing.

February 1 1945

On the Sunday Val and I went up to the crossing, where Doug Carnegie [*later marries Val*] picked us up and took us in the see Dad. Miss Bertha Carnegie [*Doug's sister*] was in the car; she is very deaf. Dad looked weak and shaky, but according to the others was better than he had been. ...

Val is putting in for a discharge on account of her parents' health and her adjutant tells her she should not have much difficulty in getting out. Radar girls are little wanted now... We are hoping to get electric lights and points installed, but before

reaching that desired state, want new linos for all the floors. Val managed to bespeak a lino for the dining room.....

Wednesday February 14

Have just remembered 5 minutes after clearing time (a damned early half past 8) that to-morrow is Daisy's birthday. I bought a postal note last week to send her. Now she won't hear from me till Saturday.

Jan 29, Foundation Day, I went up to Daisy's and didn't return to Tally till Wednesday afternoon train. On Tuesday we went into Shep.

In Shep I had my hair cut, the barber asking me where I'd been lately, as did the only taxi-driver, Oswald, I ran into. I called in on Mr Thompson for a while before going back to the station. He asked me if it was my brother who was missing.

The following Tuesday morning (the interim passing quietly, restless nights with Dad feeling the heat very badly, even when it wasn't noticeably hot; the house falling back day by day into its wonted untidiness and dirty floors, though I did what I could to help poor mum – dusting and even sweeping; visits from Daisy, Sid and Maurice on Saturday, and from Sid on Sunday, when he and I went for a walk) Dad carried my case up to the station where I consigned it through to Caulfield. ... Though tolerably crowded, the train made excellent time and was in about 5 past 1. After lunch I went to the Tatler, chiefly to see a newsreel Daisy had spoken of – 'Island Target'. Though I watched the Kittyhawk pilots' faces to the best of my ability, I couldn't find Dud among them.

On Friday I went over to see Merl and Diana. The room was in darkness but unlocked and there was a note on the table saying 'Be back about 9. Make yourself comfortable. Love from Merl and Diana.' There were a couple of old Lifes, and a Saturday Evening Post on the arm of a chair so the time passed pleasantly. They had just come back that day and had been in to see Leslie and her new baby [*Judith*

Young]. Diana was a prohibited person – the Margaret Coles wing of the Alfred – but somehow did not get an ejection order.

Sunday February 18

As Mrs Niddrie was leaving yesterday before dinner, after getting next week's ticket, I took the tram right through to South Caulfield junction and walked up to 9 Chloris Crescent, where I had dinner. We came over here after 5, Tom and Merl pushing (respectively) the bike under the baby's bath tub laden with chattels and the pram laden above with Diana and in the tray underneath various other chattels. I was lazy and took the tram...

Leslie [*Niddrie*] came home for tea, having had a day at the racecourse and won over three pounds. To-night she arrived at the stage of feeding Diana. Ian [*Niddrie*] was home this afternoon and to tea, but as Leslie sleeps in his room he will not be back again till next weekend, when she will probably be up at Warbuton.

Wednesday February 21

Life with the Manns [*at Mrs Niddrie's house*] continues serenely. I am already quite used to coming home to Tom and Merl and Diana. Diana, too, is given to sleeping at night.

Friday February 23

Today we learnt that we had lunch till 3, on account of the Duke. Though I would have liked to see him pass, I have not the patience to wait on a sufficiently well-placed vantage point. About two o'clock I walked through Orient House, Collins Way and McKillop Street, to Bourke Street. The crowds were thronging at the intersection. Myers and other buildings were festooned.

[*back at work*] fell to work on the Export Mutton Cash Book to the tune of sudden and brief cheering as the royal pair whizzed on their way – too hurriedly for most of the watchers who had been waiting a long time.

Saturday February 24

Today Mr Kerr finished up for three weeks. ‘Moll Flanders’ being returned to me by Mr Wood, who succeeded Mr Pearce to it, Mr Kerr caught sight of it on my table and remarked jocularly that it was not the sort of book for a boy of my age. (The fact, of course, is that Moll in no way compares for sexual provocativeness and entirely lacks the atmosphere of the average modern novel.) He reminisced that he had read it many years ago and accepted my offer of the loan, to read on his leave.

Monday February 26

Yesterday afternoon in fine weather I went out to Grandma’s. Both back and front gate were padlocked, but I felt all over the floor of the letter box for the key. To my disgust I couldn’t find it, so I got a small boy to climb over the fence and knock. When Pauline came out she showed me that the key hung on a nail near the top of the box. [*The gates were locked to prevent Grandma from wandering*]

Stanley and Eileen, Honorine and Alf, and Pauline’s friend Irene came to the tea. That made two Honorine’s (counting Auntie Renee), Pauline, Eileen and Irene. Pauline displayed all her presents on her bed... Just before I left I slipped an envelope with a card and one pound and one shilling on her bed among the presents. She rang me up this afternoon and said ‘You’re a silent cuss.’

Tuesday February 27

I was in a new second class carriage this morning for the first time. It has upholstery at the back, as in 1st class carriages, but harder.

Wednesday February 28

Tomorrow is Ulva's birthday. I wonder is it. He would be 26.

Friday March 2

Every time the 5.13 Dandenong approaches 6 platform from the Williamstown end I rain down silent curses on the railways for leaving off bringing it out of the yards at that time. Tonight there was a single seat left in the compartment I got into.

Sunday March 4

I arrived round at Chloris Crescent (on Saturday) about 10 to 1. Merl and I had a snack but awaited Tom's return shortly after 2 before having proper dinner. Diana was extremely lively. The shopping round of the morning had thoroughly wakened her, and with cheeks glowing she lay on her blue shawl on the floor, kicked her feet about and shook the rattle – usually smiting herself on the face, which added a little surprised blinking to the toothless ecstasy of the grin she lavished on the ceiling (perfectly well aware she was being looked at). She kept breaking out into a yelp perilously like that squeal Sid loved to inflict on everybody's ears in his pram days.

Monday March 5

At lunchtime I got Mum's and Dad's postal notes, skirted through Myer's in vain search of something to read ...and down by Coles to the Book Depot. There I picked up two Everyman's, Dombey and Son, and Defoe's Journal of the Plague Year, for 9/-. They were in the new format, and unless she made a mistake and charged me 4/6 each, the old stock rate now applying. I conclude Dombey and Son was a mark down to 4/4 due to its slack, somewhat rumply seemingly once water-soaked jacket, though the book itself looks intact. Anyway, my distaste for that jacket prevented me from querying the price. I'm fond of smart dustjackets and always try pathetically to keep them from getting frayed and soiled. [*Lester covered many of the books he bought in his early years in tissue paper.*]

When the Dandenong train pulled in tonight I was second into a compartment with few vacant seats. Perforce I chose the middle of one of the three-seaters, though it was the wrong side for my station, a hindrance in a crowded train. I was startled as I sat to come partly on the thigh of a middle-aged woman who had plonked herself down as I was in the very act of sitting, so that I became that fourth person who sits forward... I was furious and chagrined with the woman, being denied a back rest, which is very important to me. Though denied that back rest, I didn't move an inch forward from the position in which I sat, and retrieved my balance by keeping my left elbow and wasted left hip jammed hard against the woman's bulky thigh, while trying equally hard not to crowd against the girl on my right. Those thigh muscles kept constricting and wincing, and I thought savagely and fluently (though the mildest and most incoherent of people in actual utterance) of the things I would say to her if she asked me to sit further forward. At Armadale or Malvern she shot thankfully across to the window as a woman vacated it, and I moved back to the backrest...It was a very few inches my back moved before it reached the rest – I must have been sitting right back on that woman, I hope.

Thursday March 7

The amateur hour is on with all its wonted loudness, which means most of an hour with fingers in my ears, to shut out the interviews or items which tickle my queer nerve of sensitivity.

Saturday March 10

I had meant on the 8th to make some well chosen comment on it being the 16th anniversary of my trip to the Children's, However will let that pass and pass on to the new exercise book.

Saturday March 10 (Cont.)

Yesterday I was surprised at lunchtime to find there had been rain and the streets were greasy. Shut away from the day these weather changes are often surprising.

Fortunately there were no more downpours and after eating my lunch at Meat Control I bought this exercise book and 3/- [*worth*] of chocolates to take over to Merl and Tom and help them eat.

Mrs Niddrie packed my battered lunch case to bursting point with vegetables from her garden. I sighed with relief when I set it down on Merl's table.

When I had been talking to Merl and while at the window into the kitchen I looked back to give Diana a smile and was surprised at the toothless smile that came back out of the pram. Emboldened, for I have had few real smiles hitherto from her, I went over to her, and during the next hour and a bit got far more smiles than I had previously won in the whole of her short life.

After finishing lunch early [*at a restaurant in Melbourne on Saturday*] – the coffee was abominable and I slipped over, coming out, on the wet floor I had crossed cautiously coming in, and then forgotten – I spent a bit over half an hour in the Tatler.

Wednesday March 14

I spent Sunday afternoon and evening with Merl and Tom. As usual, I took my shaving brush across, being very unfond of Tom's bristling horror. However, I cleverly left it there, as I discovered on Monday night when I was just about to dip it in my shaving mug to moisten my stubble. I wasn't very peeved, as I was going across again anyway. Daisy had rung me in the morning from Lang's factory and said she would be out at Chloris Crescent that night. - is this moment on her way up to Wunghnu unless she missed the train.

Sunday March 25

At lunch time on Friday there was another loan march on. As I have never the patience to go out into the street in time to get a front row view, I never attend.

However when the march music was in full swing, I shut the Atlantic Meeting, which I had been reading at Meat Control, having gone round there for lunch, and sallied forth about quarter to two.

As we approached Balaclava Junction [*in a tram*] the inspector stepped in front of the tram, which halted just at the shunt. The conny ordered us out and once on the road I saw a mountainous breakdown engine was working at the overhead wires at the junction. Round the corner on the left hand line was a tram marked 'City'. I hurried aboard and a few seconds after I was seated the tram moved off. I then noticed the conductor was Tom. When he came up my end he said 'Guess who's home?' I naturally guessed Val and he said she had arrived that afternoon, posted to the P.D. at the MCG.

[*Lester goes to Merl's and Tom's*]. Val sat in the midst of her luggage in the living room and I had to explain why I wasn't surprised. Diana was awake, and I nursed her for a couple of minutes before she was put to bed. She had cut a tooth that day and there was a likelihood of more yet. This afternoon, if it remains fine, we are taking her to the beach and getting some snaps. (Leslie obtained a film for Merl.) Val, as she had already prophesied, was very sorry, both at leaving the good times of Dolaris Bay and leaving Sydney – and Pats. She had obtained through Pats, a kettle-like electric jug, a toaster and an iron. All that remains now, is to get the electricity.

Tom came home well on time, and mentioned he would be looking out for me on the tram that clocks at South Caulfield Junction at 11.06 (p.m.) [*Tom was working shifts*]. I said I'd be catching it. I began to be sorry I had said it when well before 11 Val was yawning hopelessly, and looking like a girl who had not many hours come off the Sydney train. However I stuck it out till I was sure I'd miss the previous tram, then bade them goodnight and strolled up to the junction, where I deadheaded with Tom's tram. As I had expected, he dumped my fare and a transfer [*ticket*] into

my hand. The fault at the junction had been repaired, and I had his company, interspersed with forays among the few passengers, to Kambrook Road.

Monday March 26

[*Sunday*] The day remained fine and about five to three we set off and caught a Darling Road tram (which obligingly waited for Tom) up to Balaclava Junction. We just caught a St Kilda Beach tram...

At the terminus we strolled down between Luna Park and the Palais, then turned back along Marine Parade by the little train park, then under an arch onto the promenade where we spent over an hour. During that time four snaps were taken of Diana with various of us, and after we returned home four more were taken in the back yard.

I had my hair cut.

Tuesday March 27

At lunchtime, having received my pass book back yesterday shy the £10 for the bond and plus the receipt for the bond, I strolled up to the bank and lodged my wages cheque, the first lodgment for many months.

I'll do a little stitch in time to one of my new sports coats now, and then scratch my head a little over what to take in my little lunch case, which will comprise all my luggage.

Saturday March 31

I left work at half past 3, carrying my little lunch case, and a tied up bundle comprising Pix and Smiths, H V Morton's 'In Search of Scotland' ...and my own 'Plain Speaker'. In one pocket was a pound of chocolates. The train was backed in maybe ten minutes after we were admitted to the platform. As it approached, a man

with a dark, parted moustache (an ex-this war's army-moustache – who like myself had been craning to see if the last carriage would be a first) came to me and asked if I was going first or second. He then offered to get me a seat and took my little case. The last carriage was a first and took the usual agonising time to back up. We were for its rearmost door and though there were not many of us we formed a little bunch that joggled along, losing that moving door as odd passengers waiting further on still attached themselves to it. My benefactor kept pace with it, but I was separated from him by several people including a little stooped old lady, while immediately behind me another old lady embarrassed me and drove me into witless assurances that I was all right (I wasn't – I was wishing to hell the platform would swallow her) by the concern she expressed that I would be hurt in that crush (which was a very tiny and well behaved crush compared with other orgies I have indulged in.)

Needless to say, - she was the only pretty girl in whose company I have ever made the trip – I found her more interesting than all the rest of my fellow travellers that night. Towards the end of the journey I overheard she was married: I never think to look at women's fingers, they have so much more interesting parts.

...this will be the place to set down my expenses, till I return to Melbourne and my cash book. Wed Mar 28 Trams 2d, A(rgus) and H(erald) 4d, Pix and Smith's 10d, chocolates 4/-, board £3/10/-, orange and lemon drinks 11d (I think), basket of fruit 1/-. That seems all for that day, thank goodness. Oh, Civic 2/-, I had no room in my case for lunch. Sat (today) 2/- to Sid to buy us some soft drinks for tomorrows' walk, if it 'materialises'. (What a word, but I have a sneaking regard for it.)

I saw with unmistakable fatality that 'How Susan Felt', which I posted months ago, still hadn't even made 'Mainly for Contributors'. Do I put enough postage on the envelopes? I wouldn't dare put a dead-letter return address on them – I'd hate Mrs Niddrie to see an envelope with my writing and 'MS' come back marked, 'insufficient postage', 'refused by addressee', if that's what happens. And for the

very self conscious reason of the address and the 'MS' I wouldn't take it to get it weighed.....

Dad was at the platform gate [*Tallygaroopna*] (one cannot call it ticket gate, though shut firmly while the train was in). He is stooped and gaunt and frail as before. He cannot sit or lie in one place more than a few minutes. Some evenings, much of the daytime, he is not still for ten minutes, I might say five minutes. He more often than not needs help to get up, and sometimes to get down into the right place. His getting to bed at night among all his cushions is a protracted and painful job of much trial and error. His speaking voice, which was never clear, has dwindled down.....

Wednesday April 4

.....to a husk of itself, and as mum was never good at distinguishing what he said, he is now more provoked by her inability to get what he is saying right at once. His consciousness of his all round frailty – inability to hold a paper still enough to read with ease, defective eyesight into the bargain, defective hearing, difficulty of speech, and inability to get properly comfortable in or out of bed, makes life a day after day dreariness for him, and does not tend to improve his temper, especially with mum's shocking memory. The wireless is practically his only form of recreation, and aside from the matter of programmes, there are only three stations that come over very well at night – 3AR, LO and SR.

Daisy and the boys came down late on the afternoon of Thursday. On Good Friday the headwind kept the boys at home, but next morning about midday as I was coming home from a walk through the bush beyond the Presy Church, they crept out from their hiding place behind a tree... As I had entered the bush Sid gave several brief pert whistles, but after stopping and looking around I put the noises down as bird's. Moral: be very circumspect in making water in a timber paddock, as the boys were watching me as they whistled, and I would not have seen them had I been engaged in relieving myself: they could have been nieces. Anyway, on that walk I had taken a writing pad (without a cardboard back) and pencil, with a usual

nebulous idea of writing vastly about all subjects. I reckoned without the difficulty of finding a rest for the pad, and the strength of the wind.

In the afternoon we went out to the channel where it goes out of Burns's into Strangs. Again we struck across the paddock by the schoolground, but in the direction of the railway, which we crossed where the gates lead into the blind lane. We crossed the roadway and into a stubble paddock of Burn's, receiving a hail before we had gone many yards, from Ken Mackenzie, who was biking towards Tally. ...Among these trees, near the channel, Sidy started up a bunny which we lost to sight under the log fence that runs by the channel up to the boundary fence of Strang's. We followed this, Sid and I on the channel bank, Maurice on the other side. Soon one of them was sure he had the bunny located in a log. Maurice fed a wire up the log while Sid guarded the far end. A fatal doubt then assailed Maurice and he left his end to take a peek through Sid's end. In a twinkling the bunny was out, scampering back along the bank and we lost him to view along the little wattles that grow along a chain or two of the bank.

An incident of some note, in these days of crockery shortage, then took place. After returning our three big old white cups to the schoolbag he was carrying, Maurice unthinkingly picked up the bag and threw it into the air, to catch it, as he so often does with other articles. Of course he had to miss the bag and it thudded to earth, Sid reminding him as it fell that it contained the cups. ..We opened the bag out came the handle-less cup intact; there were the shattered remains of the other two. To save Maurice's face I told Mum in his presence that he had dropped the bag. After he had gone, knowing she would still forgive him, I told her the story and she was very amused.

On Tuesday morning I said goodbye to both Dad and Mum at home and went up to the station. My only refreshment was a basket of fruit won without bloodshed but with extreme violence at Seymour.

On Tuesday night I went over to Chrloris Crescent, to take Val Mum's ration card, and Merl copies of the letters from Squadron Leader Kimpton and the Padre, and return her the snaps of Cynthia's sisters, brothers and mother. Diana has two teeth now.

Tuesday April 10

On Friday night I went over to Merl's again. Val was away visiting a friend. She came here last night to say goodbye till June. She got her discharge on Saturday and went home [*to Tallygaroopna*] on this morning's train. She will have to have an operation some time or other for the stone in her sub-maxillary gland, or whatever it is, but rather than wait several weeks to have it at the air force's cost, she decided to get home at once and get the house in order for the installation of the light. She feels very sorry at leaving the service and Dolan's Bay .

Saturday April 14

Yesterday, my funds being most welcomingly replenished by the paymaster, I bought some chocolates to take over to Merl and Tom. I also went into Woolworth's and bought three skeins of darning wool, two light brown, one white.

Sunday April 15

To continue (*Friday...*) We had been at work a little while when Mr Wood of the Vegetable Control staff put his head in the door and said in his usual measured and portentous tones 'Did you know Roosevelt is dead? It just came over.'

We took it in our wonted way. Mr Dunbar stammered out to me, in between 'reallies' and other apologetic prefaces, after Mr Pearce's comments had damped the first enthusiasm of his regrets, and when Mr Pearce was out of the room, that he didn't know what I thought, but he was afraid the Poles had lost a good friend, that he had always had an interest in the Polish question, and he thought they had not been justly treated. (He should have known something of what I thought, as once

before I had told him that so far as I knew the Curzon Line was justice; I was not terribly fond of the Poles, considering them to have been quite as good as needs be at pogroms (even before I read 'The Brothers Ashkenazi'), but was afraid that the power of Russia did make it doubtful whether Poland's future would be free of foreign interference; and after all, I consider the Baltic states, about whom it is diplomatically assumed no question exists because they 'voted' to be incorporated in the Soviet, to be a question involving far greater moral issues – a case where the utterly helpless have been swallowed without being able to make a cry.)

I have read innumerable criticisms of Roosevelt. I have read innumerable praises of him. I did not attempt to join the discussion, which petered out with defensive and placating murmurs by Mr Dunbar, because I would inevitably have been forced onto one side or other of the argument. Roosevelt was a great man. A very great man, if degrees of greatness exist. In his capacity as twelve years and four times elected President of one of the two most powerful nations in the world, and the one in which the glare of publicity and freedom of utterance is by far the greatest, he will tower in the perspective of history. His stature will not be dwarfed by comparison with the leaders of this age or of any age that has been. His faults in diplomacy, administration and leadership will not be forgotten; his personal faults and foibles will be recounted, though without the animus of today. But these things will be set in proportion against the things he achieved, the things he died working to achieve; the man he was. He will be seen as a less rugged embodiment of the same nobility that Abraham Lincoln embodied. To attempt to set him above or below that man is invidious. He walked on a vaster stage, and became his place there. To be associated with Lincoln in men's minds when seeking a comparison, is the measure of his greatness.

Tuesday, April 17

Tonight I feel as though I have a cold. My soft palate has a dry, hawked-up feeling, underneath, and above a feeling like snow-laden eaves, only it's mucous, not snow. My nose is snuffling, but has not got to that terrible three blows a minute wet stage.

Today nothing happened except a dull sky to start with and sunshine later. I had Mondayitis with demurrage to pay. At lunch time I bought a one pound PN [*postal note*] for home (I'll register £2/-/- next week and clear off the whole £3/-/- each fortnight) and two packets of Butter Menthols in a vain effort to soothe away that dryness.

Wednesday, April 18

Mr Kerr gave me a pat on the back over a Meat Canning Committee file today. Way back last October, in the course of the latest instalment of queries in cross-correspondence over the manner of offsetting the advance of £120,000 by Supply and Shipping M.C.C. to H.J. Heinz Co. Pty Ltd., I worked out that through price revisions of which S and S had availed themselves, a net sum of £530/17/11 was recoverable from Heinz. Mr Ingram then invoiced Heinz with the sum, using my detailed statement, and it was recovered on October 19. Through some piece of shelving my report in which I treated this matter as merely incidental to the main business of getting the file queries answered and in which it was chiefly embodied in an attachment, was not dealt with till the last day or so.

Thursday, April 19

So Ernie Pyle's war is ended. I liked his little daily gossip in the Argus, and had previously come to like him from occasional references in newspapers and magazines. It is saddening to think he had to go.

Saturday, April 21

Learnt today the good news that we are to be paid the difference between thirty-six and three quarter hours and forty and a half hours. ...we worked out it'll make £7/16/3 a week....a difference of £1/8/11 per fortnight, which, unfortunately, won't be net. Still it'll be a few bob into one of my necessitous funds or provisions. Seeing I've saved less than £9 since July last year, I need a fillip, especially in the

light of there being three people at home now instead of two, and Ulva's allotment probably soon ending. I wish my rise would come, though I've no hankering for the responsibilities of an inspector.

Today, not feeling like anything dramatic or grim, but something light, bright, silly and begirled, I went to the St James and saw MGM's 'Blonde Fever' and 'Bathing Beauty'. Both passed the time enjoyably. Even in the lightest comedy I still get a feeling of impatience at the eternal theme of boy (or man) chases desperately after fractious and kick-in-the-pantsable girl (or woman).

Monday, April 23

I spent Sunday at home. It was brightened by the sight of an item in Saturday's paper stating that from April 30 main line country train bookings will be resumed. Provided I book seven days in advance there'll be no rushing up at 3 or half past on the Friday of King's birthday weekend.

Tonight there was a great wad of people on the platform when I got up there. The Caulfield train didn't come till 5.25, two minutes after the Oakleigh is due out, and the Oakleigh was three minutes late again. So I missed my tram this end, cost myself 6d for a spider, and felt peeved as usual.

There was a letter from Cynthia on my table tonight.

Wednesday, April 25

Today is a beautiful day. It is four in the afternoon now. I've just had a cuppa and a piece of cake. I wonder how Maurice spent his birthday. I wonder where Dud is. I wonder about it all. Four years ago I could write poetry....

Wednesday, May 2

I spent Friday night with Merl and Tom.

Sunday I was out at Grandma's and I'll be going again on Sunday week, when they'll hold Auntie Renee's birthday. I must take out a box of chocolates.

Saturday I broke my long run of Civic lunches and dropped in at 'The Ginger Jar' a place in Flinders Lane I had often glanced at irresolutely while my crutches carried me on my customary way to the Civic. I'll drop in somewhere else next week.

Thursday, May 3

By whatever means Hitler is dead or will die, there will still probably be rumours in 20 or 25 years that he is alive and in disguise. I incline to believe he is dead, chance how he died. I always believed he would commit suicide when his cause collapsed, but he may have been killed before he was ready, or been murdered, or simply died of illness.

Himmler's intrigues to negotiate surrender are somewhat alarming in one respect – his person. However one doubts that even the British would extend the immoral clemency of King's evidence to this creature. That he should live, while betraying countless lesser criminals to stern justice, is unthinkable. He, as much as Goebbels, as Hitler if he lives, as Goering, as the beast of Belsen and all the others, must be condemned and destroyed, and it will be sheer imbecility if cumbrous legal machinery is used to impale them in a protracted trial.

Saturday, May 5

Last night I went over to Merl's carrying in my little case a pumpkin which was very heavy by the time I got there. Miss Diana Mann, very rosy cheeked and wideawake, was there to simper at me, but Tom didn't get home till 9.30. Our baby also howled lustily after she was put to bed and finally had to be brought out, one of the disadvantages of living in rooms being that you have to study other people's patience.

Monday, May 7

1945. There was a time not a decade ago, when if I had cast my thoughts forward to this year as distinct from another, it would have seemed a remote and happily inapproachable period. If that bygone time was one of the hypochondriac age, there would have been questions on my chances of survival – or my epitaphs. My horizons dared extend only a little way ahead – into each new year I advanced any frontiers just a hazy space. But however I would have thought of it it would have seemed remote and unapproachable across a space of years teeming with action, fecundity of invention, self-glorification, and love.

Now I have crossed those years and seen my facility and volume of expression dwindle and so fall away that my brief daily personal record is almost my only means of expression left. What I have done with those years I have often wondered. And 1945 is here.

In September 1939, I was ragged, and had far more pimples and blackheads than I have now. I lived home an invalid pensioner. At the time in our poverty I was studying nothing but self expression. I passed my days in dreams only a little more immature and no more unsatisfied than the dreams of today. I could write, tempered as I was by defects of rhythm, by queer notions of necessity of qualifying words to obtain preciseness in any given remark or description, by queer notions that my verse would not suffer by some self conscious would
Be humorous whimsy tacked onto a straightforward rhyme.

My writings began to dwindle, their force spent, as much of itself as of the onset of war, and the later onset of study. My themes changed to preoccupation with war itself. For nearly two years I was an avid reader and writer on the war, and much as I wrote, seemed to miss innumerable subjects that craved to be talked of (in my usual disgruntled tones). Then, came the onset of the work day world. In 1942 I went out into the world of a boarding house, more peopled but even narrower in a

mental sense than my own world, where the impact of new personalities gave me little chance to sort out ideas of people, and far less chance than before to collect my thoughts on the war, in which I had reached the nadir of my belief, not in victory, but in our cause. I went through 1942 and 1943, not unhappy; better fed and housed and clothed, and probably with far more pleasures than I had known home. Yet because I was no longer writing copiously, each year, as I was living it, and still more, after it was done, seemed to have slipped away in a barren succession of days, and was gone nowhere. I forgot, what I dimly remember now, that even the years from 1937 to 1940, while I was passing through them, seemed in immediate retrospect barren stretches of days and hours between writings, that there was always the sense of reach exceeding grasp. Even now, when I have at least this imperfect record to preserve some of my hours, to look through it, as I have often done, is to get anew a sense of all that was unwritten.

Wednesday, May 9

Yesterday morning I tried to find in the faces of my fellow travellers any sign that the war in Europe was ended. But for the evidence of the wireless and the great black headlines in the papers, one would not have thought it. Their faces, no more than mine, expressed elation or thankfulness. The flags on the buildings were plentiful, yet one could have taken it for a loan rally day, or any United Nations day. I didn't even notice people wearing flags though the papers say many did. Only in scraps of conversation overheard was there real evidence that people's minds, as mine, were continually returning to the theme. To some shallow natures – to Leslie's [*Niddrie*], I fear – to the girls who stood before me in the registration queue at the post office, it meant 'tomorrow' was a holiday. To some, such as the liftman at the Commercial Bank building, talking to somebody who commented on the absence of gaiety, it meant that we were still to lose lives, were losing them at that moment on Larakan. To some, with airmen kin or closer, in the European theatre, it meant a feeling of profound thankfulness, probably not unmixed with a nagging dread that some accident might yet end hope of return for ever. To many, many, it meant a forlorn lifting of hope that the missing might now be known safe.

To many, many, a saddening remembrance, together, if their natures could grope out of sorrow's inward-turning for a time, with thankfulness that the loss of other young lives was now stayed in one continent, and would the sooner be stayed in another.

When I came away from work last night my curious eyes, like those of the other homeward bound people, dwelt on a wide and profuse carpet of torn coloured paper and streamers, on both sides of Elizabeth Street, but chiefly over by the E.S. and A. Bank. Later, at tea, Joan said she heard they had been hurling showers of paper out of Norman's upper windows, so that must have been the source.

Thursday, May 10

I forgot to say how I passed V. Day. All the morning, while the sun shone fitfully, I lay on my bed reading, and determined to go over to Merl's straight after dinner. Dinner was late and I changed so as not to lose time after dinner. Dinner remained late, the clouds grew thicker, the sun more fitful, and in disgust I changed back. We finished dinner about 1.30.

All the afternoon I lay under the bedspread, not even reading. At night I read a couple of essays out of 'The Plain Speaker'. That was my V.E Day.

Sunday, May 13

Today I was to go out to Grandma's where they were holding a birthday party for Auntie Renee. However all day there has been a steady soaking rain which is still falling at 7.45, giving hopes that the drought may break all over the state. I deliberated whether or not to eat the little box of chocolates I bought, but have now wrapped it up and addressed it, so will not have to red ink 3/9 from general to relaxation.

Today waking up that I was onto Val's birthday (May 16) I flurried about Robertson and Mullins and finally chose a book, 'Coast of Tragedy', which in spite of its forbidding title, should contain good stories of shipwreck on the Australian coast in the past 300 years. I hope.

Wednesday, May 30

On the Sunday I went over to Merls for dinner. The idea was to go out to West Brunswick for a joint christening of Diana and Judith Mary Young. However, Judith was ill, and as Merl wants to get her teeth out as soon as possible, christening's off indefinitely. In the afternoon we went on the city tram, Tom and Merl leaving at St Kilda Junction to see the Young's, myself continuing to the city and Grandma's. At Merl's I had been snivelling, and at Grandma's, it was a first class cold.

On the Tuesday I went home at lunch time and stayed away on Wednesday. On Thursday night I decided I'd have to give 'Double Indemnity' a miss. Friday I got an increment up to £382 a year (£11/10/1 in the envelope; £11/5/8 previously). The lousy bastards still haven't brought the extra hours pay into effect and my rise, even if it were next week and retrospective two or three months, has lost its enchantment. If I could only win Tatt's I'd tell them to stick the job up their jacks.

Saturday I saw MGM's 'Gaslight' at the Metro. It was preceded by the horror camp film as portrayed by Metro. It was the newspaper photograph's in motion, only less blurred. Unbelievably shrunken corpses of people dead of starvation were perhaps the ghastliest feature.

On Sunday Merl and I ate chook while Tom ate something else. Tom dislikes chook and this was the first Merl has brought since her marriage, although not the first, of course, she's eaten. We enjoyed ourselves.

I still have a heavy cough and I'd rather be without it.

The night is very cold and my wood isn't burning well. I'm going to poke my shins into it and read a bit more of the Duchess of Malfi or of Hazlitt.

Saturday, June 2

Last night going over to Merl's I fell getting into the tram and hurt my thumbs a little and my dignity a great deal. A man rose to help me as I got on, I said 'I'm alright thanks' and fell into the tram. I didn't trip on anything, just lost my balance. Reconstruction of the crime doesn't disclose whether his touch on my arm upset my unstable poise or whether my mind on him upset it.

Monday, June 4

I had another fall tonight – in the train, rising onto my crutches at Caulfield and at the same time trying to squeeze round somebody. My right armpit missed the crutch and I fell forward on my hands onto somebody's knees. Not a disastrous fall, but embarrassing and infuriating.

At lunch time I went up to the Metro to get a stall for Wednesday night, the first night of 'Meet Me In St Louis'. There was not an exceptionally long queue, but as I stood on the steps, the man in uniform came to me and asked me what session I wanted a ticket for, what part of the theatre, took my money and got my ticket. I don't look for such favours, and they often embarrass one when given, but I can't help but feel the kindness or consideration of the action.

Tuesday, June 5

Today I went to the State Savings Bank and drew out £16 which I took to the Elizabeth Street Post Office and turned into a money order, as requested by mum, for insurance. After interest 6/9d had been added I had the princely sum to my credit of £3/1/7. S.S.Bank Interest and Commonwealth Bank Interest, and bond interest will give me just a large enough sum to necessitate inclusion in my next

return, which, even with the two shillings in the pound flat rebate on the bonds, will probably occasion an extra tax on my composite income in excess of the interest earned. I must try and work it out. If such is the case, war savings certificates are going to replace most of my bank balances and maybe bonds too – for it will be a long time before I have £280/-/- in savings, so they'll offer a good field for as long as the war lasts.

Thursday, June 7

Today I received a nasty jolt when half way through the morning Mr Hardy drew my attention to a railways advert in which it was announced that bookings were suspended for June 15, 16 and 18. After some thought I decided I'd take the Friday without pay and go home on the Thursday night (I had set my heart on a reserved seat and not having to turn up ages before the train pulled out). I sought and was given permission to go to Spencer Street to get my ticket. At Spencer Street the clerk, a pleasant mannered man, reminded me there was no Thursday night train.... I walked sorrowfully away, but after deliberating outside for a couple of minutes, went back and got a ticket for next Thursday morning, plus one shilling for booking seat number 28, car number 1. That means two and a half days without pay, but since the money won't have come it will be felt less than an outgoing. And I'll have the four and a half days, which will be my last home till Christmas.

Wednesday, June 13

I didn't go to the pictures on Saturday. On Sunday, a foggy day, I went out to grandma's. Irene, Pauline's friend, was there, and Stanley and Eileen came up for tea too. Pauline had asked me on my previous visit when was my birthday. Incidentally it was Saturday – my 24th. On Friday night Diana 'gave' me a tie, and Merl and Tom gave me a hanky and a pair of socks. I had a feeling when she [*Pauline*] asked me she meant to give me a present, but cannot quibble out of answering those questions. Tonight I had the feeling there was a birthday cake in the air too, and sure enough when they called us out of the lounge where we –

Pauline, Irene and I - had been sitting, there was a flickering light from 24 candles on a small substantial cake baked by Pauline, and noticed (since I don't eat icing) but decorated with rosettes and some lolly decoration in the middle. I blew all the candles out in one breath. By my plate was an envelope and when I opened it it held a striped tie. 'Blimey' I said, and they all burst out laughing. Someone lifted the decoration off the cake and underneath was a little oval of paper with BLIMEY pencilled on it.

My visit cost me a £1 for one of Gracie Fields concerts. Talking of it with Mrs Niddrie and Joan I had voiced my opinion that a quid was far too much to pay. However Pauline and Auntie Renee were both bent on going and I started to mull it over again. 'Why not come with us the night we go,' said Pauline and I was lost. I forked it out there and then. I still think it's not worth it, but after all there must come occasions when one must do a quid in cold blood. If the seat had been only ten shillings cheaper I'd have insisted they go at my expense, but three quid.....

They put some of the cake – nearly half of it I found afterwards – in the little case for me to take home. I had earlier rang Bill and asked could they spare one pound of tea – half for Meat Control and half to take home. They instead provided a full one pound to take home, and would only take the money for the Meat Control half pound.

Last night I went over to Merl's. Tom was on night shift, but came home for tea. Merl showed me the proofs of Diana's studio portraits – one solemn, one smiling. She isn't very fond of the solemn one (which she terms sullen) and they aren't even going to get a copy of it for themselves. I'm going to get both – one as their gift, one as my own buy.

I must leave off now and pack as few things as possible, then get to bed and sleep – if the wireless will let me. Leslie's turned it up to hear the gong session while she's in the bathroom.

Thursday, June 21

I chose the medium case and packed pyjamas, hankies, shaving outfit, toothbrush and paste, hairbrush, chocolates and sweets, various periodicals, my half cake (half of which, again, I ate at Seymour), my diary, and 'cash book' (both deadweight as I didn't touch either), glasses case, and a jar of cumquat jam from Mrs Niddrie to mum. Light as it was, the case proved a drag at Spencer Street.

I was down for my wash at 6.15, caught a tram at 7.5, much earlier than I had wanted to, as a heavy fog making the early dawn very dim indeed, raised fears of train delays which might cause a breathless, heartpounding last minute scramble, - weighed down with the case. As I got off the tram leaving my case to reach from the gangway, a man came round from the rear gangway and reached it out. I recognised him as a broad built, somewhat thick lipped and rough looking man with whom I sometimes exchange a goodnight on the 5.48 tram. He carried my case to the centre platform, whether he was bound apparently to some train down the line from No 3 platform.

[Lester catches train to Tallygaroopna]

At Shepparton I was surprised by the advent of Val. She had been in shopping, she was travelling second class, but was going to relieve me of my case. We had been talking for a while when the warning bell rang and in a twinkling she was yards away without my case. However it was no encumbrance to disembark at Tally, though now additionally weighted with my raincoat ...

Sid came down that night on a shopping errand, but I didn't see Daisy or Maurice till Sunday.

The place looked tidier and cleaner, naturally, with Val home, and the better for the new green lino on the dining room floor, and for the old dining room lino cut down for the kitchen, and an old secondhand lino in good condition in the vestibule in

place of the old worn out covering. Even the bedroom was partly covered. But of course the place continues to suffer from the junk mum will hoard up till she dies – when Val will most likely burn it without looking at it. This is one of the worst bones of contention, and main causes of Vals dissatisfaction with being home. The worst is the electric light. Val has doubts enough whether the S.E.C. (if they ever come out) will ok the home for wiring, but on top of that mum is averse to the whole idea of the intrusion of workmen into the house, and contends there is no need for a light anywhere but the dining room and maybe kitchen, while as for points! She even has some quaint idea that the electric light we have in Tally isn't as good as that in Melbourne...It's chiefly for this reason that Val didn't come back with me and go up to Waubra to the Molloy's – she dreaded the S.E.C. might turn up in her absence and mum either kybosh the whole idea or very severely curtail it.

However there is one very good outcome of Val's return. Dad is decidedly improved, his speech is easier (having some measure of suction now), his movements easier, he's not nearly so helpless – he was alarmingly frail at Easter, having to be helped to change position, and change position again and again, and fed every meal. Now and then when his hands get shakier, he still has to be fed. But the improvement is heartening.

When Sid came down on Saturday morning, again alone, he brought the new ferrets – or rather polecats, dark brown affairs – a huge buck and a tiny doe. He and I took them out to Mick Burn's timber paddock where we failed to locate any bunnies.

On Saturday Daisy and Maurice came down for dinner. In the afternoon the boys and I crossed the paddock...

Sid stayed the night, sleeping with Val. Other evenings Val had played crib with me, having taught me the 99% I had forgotten. I taught Sid the game, which he

picked up very readily (he was playing patience at 5 or 6), though often a bit troubled what to discard to kitty. To my disappointment all the luck broke my way.

The next morning Val carried my case up to the train and much to my relief, just as I was about to enter a dog box first we noticed vacant seats in the nearest compartment of the adjacent and only corridor first. After the train pulled out I shut my door, bringing my compartment into line with all the other compartments. It made the compartment warmer – and besides, it's funny how a closed door tends to put people off looking in for empty seats. ..I had the same wicked underlying wish that those other people had – that people might bypass my compartment. And it worked, so well that I was feeling much compunction by the time my compunction was banished by the entry, at Toolamba, of two quiet youths. Most of the way I read with considerable enjoyment Arnold Haskell's 'Waltzing Matilda' which will still last me several lunchtimes at the rate I read.

We made Melbourne as near as no difference to scheduled time, and after sandwiches and coffee I was back at Meat Control at 1.30 where Mr Kerr soon looked in on me. About 4 o'clock I developed a bilious eyeache which cost me my tea (I starved till breakfast) and almost my lunch. I lay sickly still all evening. The train journey was the merest contributory factor, and the archcriminals were constipation and that Snack [*block of chocolate*]. Constipation always upsets my stomach and is still troubling me today.

Tuesday June 26

On Friday our higher extra hours-pay was given us, retrospective three pay periods, but without the tax deducted, so I'm still in the dark, till I get my group certificate and salary slip, what to enter up for taxation and gross salary in my expense accounts. But with £13/12/10 in my envelope (the increase of £2/1/11 without tax off, is so small I hope its retrospective three weeks, not three pay periods, otherwise it looks cockeyed). I decided to splash out. I had dark designs on Ilka Chase's 'Past Imperfect' but first Collins Book Depot disappointed and then the 288 Little Collins

Street Book Depot had none left. But while fossicking before asking I lit once again on John Buchan's 'Oliver Cromwell' and achieved a long felt wish at the expense of 30/-. The cost is hurting less and less as the book goes on. I'll be glad to get back to it – I'm nearing Marston Moor.

Tonight after coming through the ticket gate a voice croaked 'I thought I wasn't mistaken last night' and by me appeared the flushed and familiar face of Bill Foley. They are living just up around the corner a bit from Derby Road where I catch the tram at the station. In the walk down to the stop I learnt that Mrs Foley had been 'laid up for 9 months' following pleurisy in which her lung had collapsed. (That let me know they were still living together). ... We had no time to talk at the stop as a late tram came up, but I gave Bill my address and wished to be remembered (rather sent my regards) and he said they would stroll round to see me some Sunday afternoon. I was not very surprised, as I always had a feeling (especially living near Caulfield racecourse) that I would run into Bill or Mrs again someday. I liked them both, in spite of the hectic life.

Wednesday, June 27

Today at lunch time I went up to Commonwealth Bank and got my interest entered up – ten shillings and fivepence bank interest and nine shillings and ninepence as half year's interest on the bonds. I'll include the bond interest in my tax return as a reluctant matter of course, but the bank interest is a poser. Seventeen shillings and twopence in all (with 6/9d in the State Savings Bank) and I'd very much like to leave it out of my return as the extra tax it will occasion on my composite income will probably exceed 17/2d, due to the inequitable method in force.

I got a letter from Cynthia on Monday night and one from mum last night. From design or forgetfulness mum didn't tell me they aren't going to get the electric power on. Merl told me on Friday night Val had written her to that effect during the week – mum had asked her if she would drop the idea. I felt angry at first and felt like writing a letter of decided reproof but telling mum she was being inconsiderate

to Val would probably make Val's life at home less pleasant than it is now. I feel apathetically disgusted now. Val is the sufferer, but I'm glad I'm not going home before Christmas. I had that lamp light last week. No wonder Val goes to bed so early.

Monday, July 2

Friday night I spent with Merl who was to get her remaining teeth extracted on the living room table at 8 o'clock the on the following morning. Tom would be looking after for Diana.

At Grandma's yesterday I found Pauline had not written for the tickets yet (broke). Today the advertisement said preferential booking closed for all advertised concerts, so our deck is blue unless they extend the season. Had it not been that Auntie Renee was going I would have insisted in the first place on paying Pauline's passage – but then of course we would not have been going, just us two together. Anyway I have the cold comfort of having a quid I thought I had kissed goodbye.

Today, a cold day. I went reluctantly to the Farmer's Debts Board. Distance heightens its disenchantment, but I'll be glad to cut its dull routine as short as I can.

Tonight Tom came over. Leslie answered the door, and took him inside. That made me uncertain as to whether it was my Tom, and highly speculative as to the reason for his visit. However, after a talk with Mrs Niddrie and Leslie he came in and soon revealed that the reason was to discuss the pro's and con's of a 5 roomed house he's going to look over tomorrow near Glenhuntly Road. £850 of which he would have to owe about £500 which he'd like to pay off with interest in about 7 years if he takes it. The chief con's are the ultimate size of the interest on £850 – and above all, whether he'll be able to have undisputed occupancy, as there's a tenant. However, he'll have some light on the subject when I get across tomorrow.

Monday, July 9

The house prospect was regretfully abandoned without even viewing the house when they learned the tenant was a trammie who had been there for 22 years. Even then Tom – who has an every man for himself streak – might have pressed on with it if he had had any hope of getting the trammie out. However Merl, with whom the cons were evidently weighing more than the pro's, scotched the dream when she learnt the tenant was a trammie, and in fact would not have been at all keen on having to seek admission in the face of anyone.

I visited them on Tuesday night and again Sunday afternoon. On the first occasion Merl's gums were very sore, but the second time she was sinking anything – not always well chewed, however.

On Saturday I had a letter from mum. Over several pages she revealed the root of her objection to the money Dad borrowed from Auntie Nellie – between 50 and 100 with interest – many years ago, though why couldn't she have said so when the scheme was first mooted? If I could only win even a hundred in Tatt's I'd send every damn penny of it home and Mum would have no excuse – if she doesn't dig up another personal debt – against the electricity. In any case her reason still doesn't hold good for Val, and she doesn't seem to have considered Val in connection with it at all.

On Friday I decided to sally out in the drizzle and see if it wasn't too late to get a seat for Casanova Brown. My decision after Les's comment on the trailer had damped me, was 'financed' by the fact that my pay envelope was intact – they're a long while with my deduction unless it was out of that £13/12/10 which I still haven't been able to mathematise – containing £12/8/10 after deduction of £3/14/- tax; and that on Thursday night I at last received my assessment, £9/10/- is the tax which will give back £4/6/- of my group deduction. I'll wait till the next pay period before collecting it, in case that is the lean fortnight.

Today at work seeing that Deanna Durbin can't help singing next Thursday at the State, I broke my thirteen year drought there and bought tickets for myself and Mrs Niddrie for Saturday night; I know she'd like to go.

Tuesday, July 10

I meant to have a haircut tonight but clean forgot. I'll try and remember tomorrow night. I bet I'll get a cold. I'm overdue to have it cut – as always.

These are curious pages. I haven't even mentioned Mr Curtin and don't feel like the task now. We were not surprised by his death of course, though no less sorry. He was a great man, and a good one. Ill health and bitter politics had roughened his temper, but more than most of his detractors he expressed the better aspirations of Australia. He wielded a moral influence more potent probably than any previous politician and was a legend in his lifetime (unfortunately, perhaps, for such statements as 'Mr Curtin saved Australia when he asked the Americans to come and help us' are wild generalisations and usually accompanied by bitter and badly informed criticisms of his opponents, especially the 'arch traitor', Menzies). When the emotional fervour has been replaced by a clearer viewpoint, there will still glow on his record a most kindly light, and little charity will be needed to dispatch his shortcomings.

Thursday, July 12

Today it drizzled almost the whole time and the streets were very slippery except in the open. I went over to Whitcome and Tombs at lunch time and after much mental turmoil, seeing nothing anywhere, bought for mum's birthday a volume of Raymond Gram Livings commentaries, styled 'Preview of History'. I'll wrap it now.

Tuesday, July 17

On Saturday night Mrs Niddrie and I went to see Deanna at the State. At lunch time and for an hour afterwards I had the most ferocious attack of chillblains for years, so I was worried what would develop during the show. However, though twinges kept me restless I was not unbearably troubled with them.

For an hour and a half or so, then, Deanna in technicolor pleased me in a film delightfully pervaded by Akim Tamiroff at his funniest, with the inimitable assistance of someone whose name I don't know. The technicolor was good, the singing charming, the story negligible, the incidents laughable.

Last night I went over to Merl's as Val was coming out for the evening. She is staying at the Y.W.C.A. for several days before going up to Waubra. She looks well.

Monday, July 23

Every night bar Saturday of the intervening period I was out.

On Thursday out for chocolates for the night I thought I'd said the Talona Building entrance for Diana's photo. It wasn't there, but as I turned away Val called me from the other side of the passage. She had Diana and Merl was upstairs waiting for the photos. I stayed with them over ten minutes, during which time Diana was getting tired and a bit fretful. After I left Val lulled her off to sleep. It was ten minutes after that before Merl came down - and then with only two of the photos, the coloured one, and its sepia version which now adorns my table. The others had black marks joining the eyebrows and Merl insisted that they be properly touched up and left them.

Mine's a beauty. I've got to grin foolishly every time I catch its impish, laughing glance and see the lifted arms. The colour one brings out its points even better - noway overdone, but they forgot to colour in the blue eyes.

Bell and Auntie Rose had brought in my ticket on Wednesday afternoon so I was able to take my seat when I arrived at quarter to 8. Hard, bench-like seats with a teeny bit of leather to sit on, no arm rests and one joined to another underneath. It was the first time I had been in the Town Hall since I roared there in a pram at an afternoon concert in 1929 in the days when I went to Yooralla. I hadn't missed it.all the time I was worrying what sort of a cricked neck I'd get bending my head to see Gracie and the centre of the stage round the tall woman in front of me.

I wanted to see Gracie, not to see if she was any different, but to see her while I was listening to her. Late in the performance a hard chocolate took down on portion of the tooth that should have been filled last Tuesday. That, or other causes, made the side of my tongue sore and as the I had had a blistery pimple for over a week, which keeps swelling and deflating, I was dreaming cancers next day.

On Friday night I visited Merl, heard the tale of woe, and got my trophy. The imp with sleeping soundly. She has four teeth now and several almost through.

I had an afternoon and night home on Saturday.

Yesterday I visited the Canet's with whom Auntie Rose is having a holiday. A welcome, seldom seen visitor was Auntie Daisy. Grandma's birthday will be held next Sunday and several sons of the house are expected out, but I will not be out.

Thursday, July 26

Today I obtained my tax refund. This morning Mr Kerr told me he had learnt unofficially that I am to advance to £394 as the inspectorship has gone by the board. £394 is £24 (next grade up) from the £370 grade of which I am in the second year (£382). Not even a £48 lift. Wishing wont get me out of the audit office. But how I wish.

Monday, August 13

I went to the Crystal.... But what made the night worthwhile was the epic of the Franklin. It seemed unbelievable that a hull could be floating in that tower of smoke and white bursts of explosions.

Of course my life suffered an impact. So did 2,000,000,000 other peoples'. Endless speculative visias opened of sudden economic dislocations as industries and the world are repowered, of staggering unforeseeable disasters when research misses its footing, of calculated disasters when warped minds out of some schoolboy thriller take to piracy and levy toll of the world, of insidious, unknown horrors that may affect the bodies of millions before the full implications of the radioactivity being unloosed can be grasped and methods of control created. In other words, a succession of doubts and fears rather than hopes. A feeling at 24 of being in the world geared to move infinitely faster than my mind cares to contemplate, or my will craves to live. Strange to think I read almost with disinterest and with definite disbelief not long ago in(a Smith's Weekly) article of the speculations of the possibility of the atom bomb. Actually, I don't feel that such fuels need to be rendered obsolete and that the world of science will go on unleashing the forces in uranium for ever. I feel that when science has advanced a bit the mere plebeian arrangements that make up the atoms of lesser substances will be used more widely and safely.

Tuesday August 14

Still no news, so I thought I'd print it.

I had a malted tonight, but it tasted as if they were still using the powdered milk.

Sunday August 19

Last Wednesday morning Les [*Leslie Niddrie*] got a bit excited over the breakfast news. I was in the lavatory at the time, but her version was that if there was no announcement by midday there would be a holiday. Of course it was the other way

round as I found from the paper on the way in and from a newly stenciled staff instruction at Food Control.

Soon after nine Mr Pearce or Mr Dunbar came into the room and said 'They're knocking off. Peace has been declared. That's the story going about anyway.' I then became aware of the excited pitch of voices in other rooms and the passage and the increased bustle of feet. Through it, a vaguer but insistent sound, came the stir of excitement outside the walls.

Looking through the window of Mr Kerr's room we saw torn paper descending from the Australian [*Hotel*] and other buildings and people turning on the pastured damp pavement to look out of the lane into Elizabeth Street. The shrill sound of voices was pierced again by whirring and ringing noises and tootings that were not just traffic warnings.

Presently we heard that so far Mr Chifley had made no announcement but that Mr Attlee had definitely announced it. As we talked it over we kept wondering what would happen about the pay, as the head office told us it was in process of being made up, that having been the arrangement in case the VP days were Thursday and Friday. Mr Pearce got onto Mr Kerr once but it soon became impossible to phone anywhere. About 10 we learnt Mr Chifley was speaking and decided that after morning tea we would go home. Mr Kerr came in then and said that the pay was being held over till Friday.

During the hour of waiting Mr Dunbar and I went out once and stood in the light rain at the mouth of the lane. People were not thronging to any extent, except on the footpaths and cars and trams continued to run. But paper was incessantly fluttering down and opposite on the verandah roof of White's Shoe Store a dozen or more brightly clad girls leaned against the wall cheering and waving.

Before I came out I ate my cake, put my book *Kilvert's Diary* (RU), and a banana in the drawer, left the case on the table, but put my lunch in my pocket lest I should

need it. Out in Elizabeth Street where the road was now swarming, chiefly with people on their way to the station, I decided to see something at least before I left the city. I picked my way slowly over the wet footpath and street, through the innumerable scatter, till I reached Little Collins which was nearly empty. All the shops were shut and the grills of the arcades with men in attendance to let stragglers out.

At Swanston the thickened gathering was along the middle of the road, where some kind of procession was all the time passing. I started to drift in the din down towards the intersection, noticing one photographer in khaki on the MU verandah roof. The throng got thicker and thicker and suddenly I became aware of small crocodiles of boys bending low and bursting through people. Round and round me they weaved, while the eddies they caused pushed at me from all sides. Foolishly, I let myself be carried on instead of turning back. I still think I could have extricated myself. But at that moment two soldiers by me were saying 'We better get him out of this, over to the footpath'. As I turned away from them towards the footpath one had me by both elbows and then one arm. To it he clung grimly thereafter. People were jammed too tightly on the kerb and I turned left, toward the far side. ...Even when he got me to the far footpath, he and his mate, who was trailing up, kept with me to the mouth of the lane. He dropped his hand on my shoulder and we went our ways. I went mine deeply touched by their consideration, but furious with myself for not having got out in time, and with a face streaming with sweat.

At 6 platform there was a thick crowd and I decided to go to the front entrance and cool off if possible, and then maybe take a tram to Merl's. At the front entrance the noise was even more feverish – a hectic hilarity that sounded as though people were trying to work themselves into the same undirected excitement the adolescents were so easily achieving. There was a sense of disorganised, quite aimless jubilation, at once bewildering and itself bewildered, so that one had a frustrated feeling that it was impossible to look anywhere in the mass and find anything to remember.

Every now and then a harmony of squeals would arise and cease. I watched six mounted policemen slowly advancing down the middle of Swanston Street. Then as I could see nothing over the people in front of me except distant heads, I moved to the opening, with little better success. But I did see something fly through the air several times and occasion fresh squeals. Presently, when I was in my best vantage point, it landed quite near. It was a dead fish. A youth pounced on it and threw it back. Soon its head came back. I then decided the wind had cooled me off enough and filled my eyes with tears and that I had exhausted the possibilities of the place. Still it was reluctantly I went back through the grills and out a further grill to the relative emptiness of Princes Bridge. Others too were making their way over it to the trams that were shunting at City Road. More were coming in, mostly long rows of youths or girls arm in arm, often blowing cardboard trumpets. Their individual noises sounded as loud as the incessant uproar of the city, which in its very vastness had been vague and far away.

As depressed and dull as the sky I skirmished along the banked trams, not seeing a Carnegie or East Brighton till they had filled or passed to the head of the shunt, and foolishly scorning a Darling Road. I woke up afterwards it would have taken me to S. Caulfield Junction as cheaply as an East Brighton – I was thinking of the tenpenny fare to Caulfield. Ten minutes afterwards an East Brighton came to me, and though I knew the next would be a Carnegie which would take me right to the depot, I got on the East Brighton, as owing to the continual reshuffle on the shunt, the Carnegie coming up might not have stopped near me.

I was puzzled along Balaclava Road by the continual roaring of an aeroplane. I realized afterwards it must have been something tied on the back, as a Darling Road I got off later had a rusty kero tin trailing. All the children of St Kilda and Caulfield must have been armed with chalk, for the trams were soon scrawled over.

Still as dreary I walked slowly from the junction to Merl's, getting hot again on the way. I could still feel that city pulsating 7 miles away, and knew I could not be of it,

even if I went in again. I had not even been more than mildly amused by girls playing ring a rosy around and between two policemen at City Road, for every sight came home to myself.

‘Thank goodness,’ said Val’s voice, as I entered the living room. ‘We were wondering however you got on. Do you know I went from the GPO (maybe she meant Elizabeth St PO) to Princes Bridge, and it took me half an hour to get through.’ She had come back from Waubra on Monday night and was staying at Evelyn’s [*probably Evelyn Hoarey a cousin*]. She and Evelyn were going in to the city that night (against Val’s will for she hates crowds).

Tom and Merl suggested I accompany them, as Mrs Semmle was going to mind Diana. After Val had left, I decided I’d better go over to Mrs Niddrie’s just in case she had become anxious. I walked to the junction in one of the most violent north winds I remember, it nearly blew me over as I crossed Hawthorn Road. The tram I caught was the one with the tin trailing. Mrs Niddrie was most decidedly perturbed, and glad to see me. She said Les had struggled in at midday almost in tears.

[*Lester misses a tram back to Merl’s and walks*]. Had there been two me’s and one had waited for the next tram, both would probably have deadheaded at the gate, but the one who walked would have been threepence richer, a precious saving in those two days. We were dommed to disappointment, for no Mrs Semmle came home. Even at 9 we would stil have gone in.

Next morning Mrs Niddrie suggested I go with her and Les into the City that night. I was nothing loth though privately wondering whether es minded. The morning was lovely, and Mrs Niddrie and I decided to go out in the afternoon. [*They go to the City*].As we crossed the bridge (Princes) we were passed by several brilliantly decorated children on small briliantly decorated bikes.

We looked for a moment at an impromptu band under the station's eastern veranda (well surrounded) and went on up Swanston Street. It was a sightseeing throng right to Collins Street, not a reveller's throng, nowhere jam packed except in the entrance to Flinders Lane where something was going on. People, girls anyway, still blew little cardboard trumpets, but it was with a licensed well established air, not an impromptu gaiety. ...Over everything was spread an air of general happiness and curiosity, and still an air that there was nothing you could point to and say 'These are the celebrations'.

Once again the throng was before the Town Hall, where community singing was being held, and people seemed to have lodged in openings all the way up the façade. An announcer said 'If anyone else throws a rocket into the band, we will leave off playing to you.'

As some sailors passed us one, his face daubed with lipstick, clapped me on the shoulder and asked how I was. I think he was a little drunk, for that was the only greeting that passed between my unengaging face and any other in the city save Mrs Niddries.

'Look at that dirty brat,' said Mrs Niddrie, between the London and Mullen's. A boy of at least 4 or 5 stood on the kerb blithely pissing into the gutter. As we passed the State Savings Bank, three pipers in bright red tartan came along, following by three young girls in the same, and a column of mere people.

An elderly drunk pushed past me saying at large 'Go to pot.' When we went round the corner he was standing swearing a bit and grumbling to himself. He was the only nastiness in the whole day.

Up towards Russell Street was a small crowd and continual banging. Over the crowd, as we approached it, bobbed either a huge mask or the head of the dragon – we didn't try to push in. Most of the people who looked Chinese were standing back a bit grinning in great amusement. 'I don't think we'll bother to go in tonight,

do you?’ asked Mrs Niddrie. I agreed, though, in spite of sore armpits, if she had bown hot I would have too. I was dying to be in there at night. I had missed what to me was the night. [*Lester and Mrs Niddrie babysit Diana to enable Merl and Tom to go into the city that night*]

So Mrs Niddrie and I sat down, by the fire, and I tried to fence my mind from the first peacetime Amateur Hour with Australian Journal stories and survived it somehow. Merl and Tom got back about 10.35, when I was wondering if the Darling Roads were on the Sunday night schedule. Tom walked up to the junction with us and we caught the 11.26 (or was it 36?). Mrs Niddrie and Les stayed up with the wireless on for a long time and next morning I had to walke them.

On Friday it felt like a double Monday. My leaden soul did not even glimmer to an envelope containing £13/8/1 being my rise retrospective to I think July 12. At night for the third day in succession, I went over to Merl’s, still feeling Monday was the wrong day to be visiting her. Val was there again, this time to sleep.

Last Monday night Leslie brought home a stray black and white pup someone had christened Whisky. Long haired, flop eared, hair spilling over wicked eyes, pot bellied, and with a saddle of black, he captivated Mrs Niddrie. She is convinced Skipper, as she now calls him, is a (lost) thoroughbred, but so far she has not traced the advert (and she’s not entirely anxious too, though the damn thing nips her heels, tears her stockings, chews her slippers, drinks himself bloated, scratches all day to the tune of several shillings worth of powers and vain hunts for fleas and lice, and occasionally widdles on the floor). Tim, the neighbour’s tabby cat, who has his meals here, was at the door within two minutes, setting up an awful din. His nose is still out of joint, and Whisky’s has been scratched several times.

Merl and Tom move to 4 Flowers Street tomorrow. When I was over at Chloris Crescent (dinner, tea, supper) Val and I went for a walk which took in Flowers

Street. The house is old and unattractive behind a high hedge but the large yard, the freedom from Mrs Russell (than whom the old man who will be retaining a room could not be worse) the scope for Diana – their hearts are high.

Val started this week at Hilliers' chocolate factory in South Melbourne. She is still at Evelyn's (insistence) and has a long way to go to work. Gets up at 6. Starts quarter to 8, ends about 5. 5 day week. About £3/3/-. Very easy going place. Everybody eats chocolates all day.

Saturday September 8

Skipper – Whisky – puppy has gone. Mrs Niddrie advertised him, and though no one claimed him a woman at Ascot Vale wrote asking if in that event they could have him to replace an old terrier they had just lost. As puppy had proved himself a tie and an incorrigible floor-widdler and stocking chewer, in spite of his loveableness, Mrs Niddrie was glad of the offer.

I visited the Mann's at Flowers Street Friday week and again last night. On the former occasion Val was with them – with some tasty chocolates. They were well settled in by last night.

Thursday September 13

On the new system we work 8.45 am to 5.06 pm as from tonight. Tomorrow the pay envelope will be the same as last week; the next pay day it will be a woeful 18/- or more lighter. Still – two lovely days off per week. If only it was every day off – on an independent income.

Last night I was happy to see Darrill Canet's name in an official Singapore list of released POW. I wrote a little note to Auntie Kitty, who has been sick for a long time. I look, less intensively for Don Strang, Don Trewin, and the Tremellen boys

still living. I look, without any expectation, in both likely and unlikely columns for 410222 F/O Dudley U.N. I had a letter from poor Cynthia tonight. She has her hopes and fears – maybe more fears than hopes, especially since atrocity revelations are flooding in. Poor Mum. How she must feel, reading them.

Sunday September 10

Yesterday I didn't go to work. I sat in the sunshine all the morning and as a result was drowsy all the afternoon.

Tuesday September 18

A must get for tomorrow or the next day is a new diary exercise-book. A must-do now is a letter home. I wish I could think of another story to write. I have no hopes (except in my realm of fancy) of two short stories I have sent to the publishers of Man and Cavalcade, after two previous shots at the Australian Journal and one at Smith's. I've no idea where to send my short story about a little boy, Jimmy ... which, unless I prune it, is too long for Man or Cavalcade, and too crudely spoken for the Australian Journal. Woes of the indigent.