

A Fortunate Life

A. B. Facey

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A Fortunate Life

A. B. Facey was born in 1894 and grew up on the Kalgoorlie goldfields and in the wheat-belt of Western Australia. His father died before he was two and he was deserted by his mother soon afterwards. He was looked after by his grandmother until he was eight years old, when he went out to work.

His many jobs included droving, hammering spikes on the railway line from Merredin to Wickepin and boxing in a travelling troupe. He was in the Eleventh Battalion at the Gallipoli landing; after the war, he became a farmer under the Soldier Settlement Scheme but was forced off the land during the Depression. He joined the tramways and was active in the Tramways Union.

A. B. Facey, who had no formal education, taught himself to read and write. He made the first notes on his life soon after World War I, and filled notebooks with his accounts of his experiences. Finally, on his children's urging, he submitted the handwritten manuscript to the Fremantle Arts Centre Press. He died in 1982, nine months after *A Fortunate Life* had been published to wide acclaim.



A. B. Facey, 1914, aged twenty

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I dedicate this book
to the memory of my wife, Evelyn.
It was her patience and understanding
which made it become a reality.

Starting Out
1894-1905

Many people had little feeling
or sympathy for those in need.



1

A Prelude

I was born in the year 1894 at Maidstone in Victoria. My father left for Western Australia just after this, taking with him my two older brothers, Joseph and Vernon. The discovery of gold in the West had been booming and thousands believed that a fortune was to be made. At that time there were seven children in our family: I had four brothers - Joseph, Vernon, Eric and Roy - and two sisters - Laura and Myra. My mother stayed at Maidstone with the younger children and my father arranged to send money over to support us until he could find us a home.

In 1896 Mother got word that Father was very ill. Typhoid fever had broken out and hundreds were dying of this terrible disease. A few days later Mother received the sad news that Father had died. When Mother had got over this terrible shock, she decided to go over to the West, as Joseph and Vernon were still only teenagers. Mother left the rest of us with our grandparents at Barkers Creek. I was then nearly two years old.

Barkers Creek was situated sixty-three miles from Melbourne on the Bendigo road, three miles from the small town of Castlemaine. Grandpa and Grandma, whose surname was Carr, had a small property with a few acres of orchard and a five-roomed house. There were no aged pensions in those days, nor were there any free doctors, hospitals and medicine, nor baby bonuses or endowment payments. So my grandparents had to live, and keep us children, on their own resources. Our mother was to send money to support us, but although she wrote many letters she always made excuses for not being able to send us anything.

At the age of seventy-seven, Grandpa was a big man, over six feet tall and weighing around two hundred pounds. Grandma was a small woman in her early sixties, about five feet tall, and between seven and a half and eight stone. They were very poor. Grandpa depended on odd jobs, such as ploughing orchards and pruning, to get a few pounds to keep us all. He, with my brothers, Eric and Roy, trapped rabbits, and the boys used to go out picking fruit on Saturday mornings during the fruit season.

Early in the year of 1898 Grandpa became very ill. A doctor came from Castlemaine twice a week to give him treatment, but his condition got worse and he died in October that year. I had turned four years old in August and remember Grandpa's illness and his funeral quite well.

After this tragedy Grandma became very worried as our only bread winner had been taken. She wrote to our mother telling her of our plight and asked for financial help. Although Mother wrote, she was unable to send any money. She said that she had married the man who had employed her as a housekeeper, as she was forced to find work when she found that Father had died not leaving enough money for her to live on. Our two older brothers found it hard to get jobs, as they were too young to go down the mines on the Goldfields. The surface gold had been worked out, leaving the mines and woodcutting in the bush as the only ways of obtaining work.

Grandma was shocked at hearing all this after the terrible ordeal she had just been through. She went out working - house-cleaning, washing and ironing. She was also an expert midwife. Nearly all the babies born in and around Barkers Creek were attended and helped by Grandma Carr and very few women needed a doctor. Grandma knew as much as any doctor on the subject.

My brother Eric, who was then twelve years old, had to leave school and go to work. My eldest sister Laura went to help our uncle who had lost his wife in an accident. He was a hawker, carrying stores, drapery, medicines and anything he could sell. My sister was ten years old, and Uncle's place was about three miles from Castlemaine on the Ballarat railway line at a place called Campbells Creek. The accident had happened at a railway crossing. Our aunt was killed and Uncle's spine was hurt so badly that he lost the use of his legs and never walked again. He had three children, all very young.

Early in 1899 Grandma became very ill and was unable to work. In fact, she had to be seen by a doctor, who put her to bed. She had some internal complaint and the doctor came to see her twice a week for about three weeks. She was able to get up after that, but could only walk around for a short while. We were in terrible financial distress but at least Grandma could get around again.

My brother Eric's wages were all we had and they amounted to twelve shillings and sixpence a week - not very much to feed five of us.

Grandma overcame the financial trouble temporarily by getting a forward payment on her apple crop. The apples were a good eating variety and were easy to sell when ripe. Grandma recovered from her sickness but found that the paid work she had been doing had been given to others. Many people had little feeling or sympathy for those in need.

Things got so bad that Grandma decided to try and sell her property and take us over to the West to our mother. She put it up for sale and many people came to see it but they all said the price was too high. She wanted three hundred pounds for the property, which consisted of twelve acres of land, a five-roomed house, eight acres of orchard in full profit and a nice vegetable garden - all good loam. The agent advised Grandma to reduce the price to two hundred pounds. This she did and finally sold it for one hundred and sixty pounds. Some overdue bills had to be paid out of this.

About the second week in August 1899, we left Barkers Creek and went to Footscray, a suburb of Melbourne, where one of Grandma's daughters lived. We all stayed there until everything was arranged for our trip to Western Australia.

The Journey Begins

It was the first week in September, 1899, when we arrived at Port Melbourne to embark onto the old tramp steamer *Coolgardie*. Just before we went aboard I nearly lost my life. The wharf labourers were unloading bananas from the *Coolgardie* and this fascinated me as I hadn't seen so many bananas before - there were thousands of them scattered all about the place. They had come from Queensland. I went to pick one up and one of the men shouted, 'Hey, drop that!' I got such a shock that I jumped, and being so close to the wharf edge I overbalanced and fell between the wharf and the ship into the sea.

There were steps at intervals leading down under the wharf to the lavatory landings. People used to fish from these landings and, luckily for me, a man who happened to be trying his luck saw me fall into the water. He grabbed me and pulled me out, but not before I had swallowed plenty of dirty salt water. I couldn't swim. The man carried me up the steps to the wharf. I was sopping wet and feeling very sick. I'll never forget the look of anger on dear old Grandma's face. She lost control of herself and gave me a hiding with her umbrella, and to make things worse, she made me strip off all my clothes while she opened one of our travelling trunks and got me a change of clothes. I had only just turned five years old and Grandma had taught us to be modest so this hurt me more than the ducking and hiding I got.

Finally we boarded the *Coolgardie* and sailed for the West. I had never been to sea before and didn't know about seasickness. The trip to Port Adelaide was very calm and we all enjoyed being at sea, but after we left there, bound for Albany in Western Australia, the sea was terribly rough and we all got very seasick.

Owing to Grandma not having much money we had to travel steerage. It was the cheapest way to travel and the passengers were packed together with very little room to move, especially in the cabins. The one that Grandma, my sister Myra, my brother Roy and I were in had twelve sleeping bunks. Grandma and Myra slept together in one bunk, and Roy and I slept in another. The other ten bunks were all taken by women. (Eric, being older, was in an all-male cabin.) Everyone was terribly seasick.

We arrived at Albany but didn't get off the ship. We went on to Fremantle and disembarked there. At last we had arrived in Western Australia. When our luggage was brought off the ship we didn't have much - two travelling trunks and a large travelling bag and three travelling rugs. Between us we carried these to the Fremantle Railway Station, about two hundred yards from the wharf.

There was no one to meet us. Grandma had expected our mother or at least our Aunt Alice to be at the wharf. Aunt Alice, who was Grandma's eldest daughter, had come over from Victoria with her husband, Archie McCall, and their family at the same time as our father. She had five daughters, Alice, Ada (Daisy), Mary and May, and one son, Archie, who was called Bill, and they lived three and a half miles out of Kalgoorlie on the goldfields.

At the railway station we put our belongings near a seat and Roy, Myra and I were told to stay there until Grandma came back. She took our older brother Eric with her and went into the town of Fremantle. They came back about an hour later and we all boarded a train for Perth.

It was only a short ride to Perth - about forty minutes. We arrived at about midday, and were again left at the railway station with our luggage. This time Grandma went out alone. When she came back she brought us some sandwiches, cake and also some bottles of cool drink. We were very hungry and made short work of such luxuries.

After this Grandma had a long talk with the Station Master. There was still no one to meet us and Grandma looked very worried. We waited on the platform until about five o'clock that afternoon (the time went quickly because we were very interested watching the trains coming and going). The railway station at Perth looked very small after the Melbourne stations.

It was between five and six o'clock when we got on the Goldfields train. After a while the train moved out and we were on our way - to our mother, we thought. We were all very tired. I remember the train going through a long tunnel, and just after that darkness came and I went to sleep. I was awakened later, it was still dark, and Grandma said we had to get off the train as that was as far as her money would take us. She said the name of this place was Northam, a small country town - only a few houses, one hotel and the Post Office, which was also a store.

After getting off the train we again waited with our luggage while Grandma had a long talk with the Station Master. He came with her to us and then showed Grandma an unused railway carriage that we could sleep in for the rest of that night. We made ourselves at home in it. Grandma slept on one seat, my brothers on the other seat, and Myra and I on the floor.

Next morning Grandma and Myra went to the ladies waiting-room and changed their clothes and freshened up. We boys had a wash under a tap and changed our clothes in the railway carriage, then we joined Grandma and Myra on the platform where we had a breakfast of sandwiches and a glass of milk.

We then took all our luggage and went to the Northam Post Office. Grandma went into the building leaving us kids outside. She was in there for quite a while. When she came out she said she had sent a letter to our mother and Aunt Alice, asking for money. Then she told us that we would have to find a place somewhere out of town to make a camp until she got a reply to her letters. So we set off all carrying something.

After we had gone a little way along the road leading out of the town a man came along. He had a spring-cart, and seeing us he stopped, thinking we were going to some place out of town, and asked if we would like a lift. He told us that he was a bachelor, his place was fifteen miles out of Northam and he would be glad to help if he could. Grandma spoke to him, explaining our plight, and he told us that there was a Government Reserve about a mile further on. There was plenty of water and we could make a camp there for a few days, as there was plenty of bush and scrub that we could use. He said that they didn't get much wet weather this time of year.

We got into the spring cart with our luggage and were pleased at not having to carry the things. At the spot that the man pointed out to Grandma, we got off the cart, thanking the stranger for his help. We carried our things and put them under a beautiful shady tree, then Grandma sent Eric over to the farm-house, about half a mile away. We could see it from the spot where we intended to make camp. Eric was to try to borrow an axe and spade, and to do this Grandma said he was to tell the people why we wanted the tools.

When Eric came back a man came with him. The man told us that he had a cow and some fowls, and offered us milk and eggs, and said his wife would be glad to give us any bread we wanted. He helped Eric to cut poles out of the bushes and scrub. About an hour later we had somewhere to sleep and have our meals in.

The next day Eric cut more poles and we all carried and dragged them in and built another bush mia-mia. Grandma said the ground that we had slept on in our camp was very damp, so before we built the new mia-mia we had to carry dry twigs and leaves and small sticks to build a fire on the ground to dry it out. When the fire burnt out we scraped all the hot ash and coals off, then built the mia-mia. We used this one to sleep in and had our meals in the other one. After about three days we got used to living like this.

The people living around where we camped were very good to us. I am sure that none of us will ever forget those wonderful people. They kept us supplied with fresh meat and eggs, bread, vegetables, milk and many other things. They would not hear of any kind of payment. Grandma offered to let the boys work to pay for the goods.

Each day Eric walked into the Post Office in Northam, hoping for a letter from our mother or Aunt Alice. We had to wait nearly three weeks before a letter came. Aunt Alice wrote, and in the envelope was a money order for the Northam Post Office sufficient to pay our fares to Kalgoorlie. Our mother didn't write.

Eric arrived back with the letter near midday; Grandma explained what was in it and said we would catch the train that night. So we packed our few things, returned all the things that the people had lent us, and the man that first helped us make camp came and drove us to Northam Railway Station. Grandma thanked him and all the other good people for their kindness.

Just before midday we arrived at Kalgoorlie and Aunt Alice was there to meet us. We had been unable to see what the country was like as we had travelled during darkness for most of the way and slept during daylight. Aunt Alice had her two older daughters with her. Grandma, Aunt Alice and Myra left the two girl cousins to help the rest of us take the luggage out to Aunt Alice's place. Grandma and Aunt Alice went to see our mother. We found out later that Mother wouldn't have us at her place but was glad to keep our sister Myra. Grandma said our mother was going to have another baby.

On The Goldfields

When we arrived at Aunt Alice's place we were dog-tired and hungry. Aunt's place, which was only a hut, was built near a big hill. It consisted of bush poles for uprights

with hessian pulled tight around the poles making an enclosed space of about thirty-six feet by twelve feet, sub-divided into three big rooms. The outside walls were whitewashed with a solution of chalky clay mixed with water which stiffened the hessian and made the inside private. The roof was bush timber and galvanised iron. The three rooms of the hut were used as bedrooms. A few feet away from the hut was another structure, the kitchen, and this had a fireplace at one end and a large table with a long stool along one wall. The kitchen was fourteen feet by sixteen feet. We were to have all our meals in this room.

We had been there about an hour when Aunt Alice and Grandma arrived. They had left Myra with Mother. We were told that our older brothers, Joseph and Vernon, were no longer living with Mother. Joseph had left Kalgoorlie to work with a surveyor and Vernon had joined the Australian navy.

Grandma said that she had had a long talk with Mother about our situation and that Mother was very ill and would see us when she was well enough. So until then we were to make Aunt Alice's place our home. The house and furniture showed that Aunt Alice didn't enjoy a surplus of money. There were many families living in similar circumstances.

The surface gold was just about prospected out, and the men had to find other means of employment to keep their families. Aunt Alice's husband, Archie, was away chopping wood for the mines at Boulder, and for the many condensers that were condensing the water for all the Goldfields people. In those days there was no fresh water, and it became too costly to have water carted. There was plenty of salt water underground so this was pumped up from wells and bores and converted to drinking water by the condensers. There was a large condenser about a mile from Aunt's place and the water obtained from there had to be carried home in buckets. It cost two shillings a gallon if you carted it yourself, or two shillings and six-pence a gallon if you had it delivered. The condenser people wouldn't deliver less than fifty gallons at a time and as Aunt Alice couldn't afford to buy that much at one time we had to go and get it.

Uncle Archie used to come home every two or three weeks, and we had been there for about a week when he came home. That was the first time I had seen him. He would come home on Saturday and go away again on Sunday afternoon. When he went away this time he took Eric and Roy with him. Eric was nearly fourteen years old and Roy was nearly eleven. Uncle said Eric could help with the wood stacking and Roy would be useful around the camp boiling the billy, washing-up the dishes and doing many other little jobs. So my brothers could not go to school.

Aunt's three older girls - Alice, Daisy and Mary - went to school in Kalgoorlie and they had to walk nearly eight miles each school day.

We lived there with Aunt Alice until 1902. Uncle and my brothers came home for a weekend once a month and two Christmases came and went.

We used to have a lot of fun when a heavy shower of rain came and made the ground very wet. We would all go out into the diggings looking for gold that had had the earth washed off it, and between us we found quite a few pieces. It was worth twenty shillings an ounce.

Aunt Alice found another way to make a few shillings - she took in washing and ironing. She made us kids - May, Bill and myself (she now had another child, Jim, but he was still a baby) - go to the camps and get the washing, and after it was washed and ironed, take it back to the owners and collect the money.

Also, Grandma and Aunt Alice used to take all us kids, who were too young to walk the long distance to school, to hunt miles around for places where prospectors had camped. The prospectors lived on tinned foods. When the tins were emptied they were just thrown into heaps near the camps.

Aunt and Grandma gathered the tins, then we would gather bushes, scrub and sticks, spread them onto the ground, and pile the tins on top. A pile would be left for a few days until the bushes and scrub, which were mostly green, dried enough to burn. Then we would come back and set it alight. The heat from the fire would melt the solder that was in the tins, and it would fall down into the ashes and onto the ground.

Then, when the fire finished burning and cooled off we used to sieve the ashes and the ground under the ashes, to get the solder that had melted into small lumps. We put these into a bag and took them home. When we had enough Aunt Alice would melt them in an iron pot. Then she would wet a small piece of level ground, make impressions in the damp soil to the size of a stick of solder, and pour the melted solder into them. When the solder cooled she used to wash it and take it into Kalgoorlie where she got five shillings a pound for it. A fairly large heap of tins would be worth about thirty shillings. All this used to help, and, as Aunt Alice said, it gave us something to do.

In August 1901, just before my seventh birthday, Uncle came home one weekend and didn't go back on the Sunday afternoon. He sent my two brothers back, to carry on with the wood-chopping as usual, and then, on Monday, dressed himself up in his best suit. I heard him tell Grandma that he was going to Perth to see about the land the State Government was offering to encourage people to settle as farmers.

Uncle was away for over two weeks and when he returned he had selected one thousand acres of first class land under the Government's conditional purchase scheme, and a homestead block for himself, Aunt Alice and Grandma. The Government was giving a homestead block to any approved person over the age of twenty-one for twenty shillings, and that land, one hundred and sixty acres, became the freehold property of the person concerned. The conditional purchase land could be obtained at twenty shillings per acre for the first class land, and second class and other land was priced according to its classification. Some of the poor land could be purchased for as low as two shillings and sixpence per acre.

Uncle's one thousand acres were classified first class. The conditions of purchase were that the settler paid nothing for the first five years, then paid so much a half year for the next twenty years to complete the purchase. The Government wouldn't sell land straight out as a cash sale.

Uncle went out to my brothers and brought them and all the tools home. He had got a new job working as a plate-layer on the railway the Government was building from Kalgoorlie to another gold find. Uncle had worked on a railway construction job in South Australia before coming to Western Australia. Eric got a job on the same gang as Uncle. His job was one of messenger, and bringing tools to the men and so on - they called him a 'nipper'. Uncle's wages were good on this new job and so were Eric's. Roy got a job in Kalgoorlie with a grocer, helping to deliver groceries and doing odd jobs around the shop. This was the first job that Roy would be earning wages at, as he had never been paid by Uncle Archie.

The new jobs meant we were all home together at night, and we had Christmas 1901 together. After Christmas, Uncle and Eric had to camp out, as their work was getting too far away to travel to and from each day. So Uncle arranged for Aunt Alice and Grandma to take all the kids and leave Kalgoorlie and go to York. Uncle's land was twenty-six miles east of a town named Narrogin (a native name) and York was about one hundred miles north from Narrogin.

So we packed all our goods and chattels. A man with a horse and four-wheeled trolley came and took them to the Kalgoorlie Railway Station. My brother Roy stayed with the grocer and was paid six shillings a week and keep. Our uncle got his groceries from this store, and Roy's wages helped to pay for them.



A Long Walk

We left Kalgoorlie in February, late in the evening, and arrived at York the afternoon of the next day. We kids had to wait at the railway station while Aunt and Grandma found a place for us to stay. We waited for about two hours before they came back with a carrier. He had two horses hitched to a four-wheeled lorry. We all helped the man to pack our household goods and luggage onto the lorry (the heavy beds, and so forth, had come on a special train), then we all piled on and away we went.

Aunt had rented an old mud house about four miles out of York on the banks of the Avon River. This was too far out for us young ones to go to school. I was then seven

years old and had had no schooling, but eight miles was a little too far, so Grandma said.

This old mud house, which cost five shillings a week to rent, was all Aunt could afford. It had one big living-room with a large fireplace, and three bedrooms. I'll never forget the first night we spent there. There hadn't been anyone living there for some years. We got settled for the night, beds fixed and made, and a nice fire going in the big fireplace. Aunt Alice got out the lamps, filled them with kerosene and lit them, and we all seemed pleased although very tired.

Then Aunt and Grandma fixed a meal, mostly bread and jam. We were all sitting at the table, the women and girls were talking about the trip, when suddenly there was a terrible scream. Two of the girls jumped onto the table pointing to the floor where there was a big black snake, over six feet long, with its head raised about eight inches from the ground. The screams of the girls seemed to make the snake stop. He was staring at us. Grandma said, 'Don't move! Stay still!' She took off her apron and put it on the floor a few feet away from the snake, then walked backwards towards the door, then through the door and all the time she kept saying, 'Don't move. Leave it to me.' Then she appeared again through the door with a long-handled shovel in her hands. She walked across the floor as if she was going to pass the snake, then suddenly turned quickly, and hit the snake with the blade of the shovel cutting its head off. Oh! what a relief that was to us all.

Just before this happened we were all sleepy and tired, but I don't think any of us had any sleep that night because of the snake, and a possum that kept running over the roof. Two days later Aunt killed another snake, a much smaller one, at the back of the house. The floor of this old house was dirt, and there were little holes going under the walls to the outside, but after the killing of the first snake we blocked up all the holes we could find. Grandma said that the snakes would be looking for somewhere to stay for the winter, as it was nearly the end of February. It wasn't until near the end of April that the rains came and the snakes were forgotten.

We kids were very happy living there. It was so different to Kalgoorlie. There was plenty of water and wood; we only had to fetch the wood out of the bush. The nearest neighbour was a mile away. We lived there until the end of August, and one day, just after my eighth birthday, Uncle and my brothers came. They had finished the railway work, and Uncle had come to make arrangements to go onto his land and start farming.

The McCalls were one of the first families to settle in the wheat-belt of Western Australia under the Government land settlement schemes.

We kids thought we would be going by train to Narrogin, but we got a surprise when Uncle said he didn't have enough money to pay all our fares because he would have to buy a horse and cart and harness. We would need these to be able to get our stores from time to time, as we would be twenty-six miles away from the nearest town of Narrogin.

So Uncle bought the horse and cart and we set off by road. Uncle said we could take our time; the land was about one hundred and forty miles by road from York, so we could do it in short stages. There would be plenty of water along the road, and at night we could pitch tents to sleep in. So about a week later, having purchased the horse, cart and harness, early one morning in the first week of September 1902, we packed all our belongings onto the cart and left the old mud house for Uncle's 'dream land'.

Uncle Archie was born on a farm in South Australia, and when he was old enough to work and understand, his father, who had skills as a veterinary surgeon, taught him all about animals. Now Uncle had his chance to fulfil the ambition of his life, and, as he would be one of the first settlers in the great wheat-belt, with the knowledge of animals he could be of great help to other settlers. When Uncle's father died, the farm in South Australia hadn't been big enough for the four sons, who had all married, so Uncle went to Victoria just after he and Aunt Alice married. He worked the mines at Bendigo, and on the building of some of Victoria's railways, and also on many farms. Now Uncle was returning to the land and he and the women were very excited about the venture.

Uncle didn't have much money but he said there were many ways of making some until we got the farm going. He explained that there were thousands of possums in the bush up where we were heading, and that their skins were worth a shilling each. He said he had bought the necessary string and fine wire to make the snares to catch them. Also, he told us, there were hundreds of kangaroos and their meat was good to eat. He intended to buy a kangaroo dog so that we would be okay for meat. All these possibilities we discussed at meal times before we left, and all the way to the wonderful land.

The trip was hard. Only one person was allowed to ride up on the cart and that was the driver. Uncle, Aunt and Grandma did all the driving while the rest of us walked. We averaged about ten miles a day while travelling, but there were about five days when it rained and we camped on those days. The trip took us nearly three weeks, but we made it. We kids went without boots on the trip - it was Grandma's idea, as we couldn't afford to buy new ones when the ones we had were worn out.

Uncle's Settlement

The night before we expected to arrive at Uncle's land, Uncle, Aunt, Grandma and Eric got to making possum snares under Uncle's directions. They made about two hundred between them. Uncle said we were camped at a place called Gillimanning - an Aboriginal name - but no one lived near, and his land was about eight miles away. We had spent the rest of the money we had in the last town, a place called Pingelly, by purchasing stores such as flour, baking powder, golden syrup and jam. We had followed the road along the railway line until we reached Pingelly, then we had gone in an easterly direction along an old bush track.

We were all up early the next morning, very excited. We were soon to see this wonderful land that Uncle Archie spoke about so much. We had our breakfast and were soon on our way. About two hours later we arrived, and Uncle took a map out of his pocket and checked the survey pegs. He stood up and said, 'That's it, that's my land,' pointing to a big belt of tall trees and undergrowth, and I thought, 'A chicken would find it hard to get through.'

Aunt Alice, Uncle and Grandma left us sitting under a nice shady tree while they walked over Uncle's land to find a suitable place to camp. About an hour later they came back, explaining that they had found the spot where they would camp and later hoped to build a house. We moved to the place they had picked out and Uncle and my brothers set about putting up the tents. They also made a fireplace for the women to do the cooking. Towards evening Uncle and my brothers set some snares for possum. We were all very tired and went to bed early that night. We didn't expect anything to trouble us, as Uncle said that the blacks around this place were friendly.

When everyone had turned in and everything seemed quiet, there was a terrible frightening howl; long, sharp and very clear. Then a few minutes later another one further away, and another one closer. These howls frightened the wits out of me. In

another tent Grandma and Aunt's three older daughters were in bed, and the girls all ran out to Uncle and started to cry. The howling made by the dingoes went on all night, and when a howl sounded close to our camp I could feel a shiver go up my spine.

We spent the next few days looking around, and towards the evenings, setting snares for possum. The first morning Uncle and the boys caught twenty-two possums. They skinned them and pegged the skins out on big trees. Uncle called the trees 'white gums'. The skins were nailed on with small nails. These skins, when dry, were about nine inches wide and about one foot long, although some would stretch to bigger than this, and some smaller. When dry they were worth a shilling each. They had to be nailed at least six feet off the ground to stop the dingoes pulling them off and destroying them. Aunt, Grandma and we kids used to stand on a box to nail them out.

Uncle had bought a kangaroo dog for three pounds while we were in Pingelly. The man that sold it to him said it was a good dog and would kill a kangaroo, then come back to whoever took it out hunting. It would then trot back slowly to where it had killed the 'roo. They used to call this 'kill show'. Uncle and Eric went out hunting with the dog early the second morning and sure enough, the dog caught two 'roos -one fairly big, the other about three parts grown. The smaller ones, we found out, were the best for eating. The meat looked like steak but tasted a little different, but very nice. Up to this part of my life I hadn't been given much meat because Grandma couldn't afford to buy it.

The main work from then on for the women, girls and us kids was setting snares for possums. (They called Aunt's youngest daughter, her son Bill and me 'the kids'.) We always stuck together, we were all scared stiff of the dingoes. They came around a lot for the first few weeks.

Uncle Archie and my brothers were busy building a house. I suppose it would be called a humpy. They cut the poles about twelve feet long, and six inches thick at one end and about three to four inches thick at the other. They cut hundreds of them and carted them to where they intended to build the humpy. They then cut the smallest ends off the poles with a handsaw to make them all the same length and level. Then they dug two trenches three feet deep and twelve feet apart, both fifty feet long. They put the poles side by side in the trenches on their ends, the thickest ends in the trenches, then shovelled the earth back in, tramping it tight around and on each side of the pole. When the poles were put the full length of the trenches they formed two walls fifty feet long. Then Uncle and the boys dug a trench at each end and put poles in them in the same way, joining the two fifty foot walls together. Then they put up two dividing walls, also in the same way, making a twelve by twelve room at each end of the structure and leaving a living and dining-room in the centre, twenty-six feet by