

## Brian's memories of 'Granny' (Ellen Octavia Bond)

Although there are photos of Granny and Clive and Nell (my parents) and Alf and Cherry and my cousins Graham (Sam) and James at the old house in Victoria Ave any confidence that I have in my memory is from the time after that when the Sneyds went off to Takapuna and my parents, moved to a house in Koraha St in Meadowbank. Having said that, there are two events that hover on the extreme limit of my memory. One, when I chased Graham down the hall and in attempting to escape from me he crashed into a glass door, resulting in a severe gash to his arm... I suppose there was lots of blood and I bet Aunt Cherry had something to say! The second event was the removal of Graham and James' tonsils, performed by the GP on the kitchen table. I remember some screams!. I wonder if there was a cheap rate for doing two at a time.

At this time Granny bought a small faintly art-deco-ish house in Stirling Street and some years later my parents built a house in Sonia Ave. Both of these were quite close to the old family home in Victoria Avenue and this proximity meant that I saw quite a bit of Granny when I was young, probably more than my cousins who by now had moved to Takapuna. I have vivid memories of her house. There was a formal drawing room filled with the residue of the furniture she had brought from England. A large china cabinet with many small treasures, among them a set of pale green venetian crystal glasses which had a lovely ring to them when tapped and 'sang' beautifully when the rim was rubbed with a damp finger. My mother and Cherry took half each after Granny died and years later after my mothers death I gave the survivors, two I think, to Cherry to replenish the attrition her share had suffered. There were the 'Louis the Something' chairs and the better of two long-case clocks that later went to Takapuna. There was a box of exquisite miniature doll's house furniture of which more later. In the downstairs laundry there was an old wind-up gramophone and some very scratched records.

Granny's bedroom, or G-Granny as James would have it, contained two major points of interest. One was the commode, a throne-like mahogany chair which sat beside the double bed. A hinged lid covered the 'business' section beneath which there was a drawer which contained the enormous, heavy china piss pot. This was not emptied as regularly as it should have been, a fact which announced itself as soon as one entered the room. On one wall hung a photograph of James Shiner Bond in an oval wooden frame. I well remember occasions when Sam and I, probably my cousin James too, took turns firing a bow and arrow with a rubber sucker to score points for hitting poor JSB. Many years later when I was cleaning out the house at Sonia Avenue after my mother died I found this photo under the house, worm eaten and rotten. I nearly threw it on the large bonfire which I had burning merrily in the middle of the back lawn. The restorers did a great job on the photo itself and in a new mahogany frame today it hangs in my study in Dunedin looking just as impressive as it originally did.

At the sunny north side of the house was a small living room and an even smaller sunroom. The living room was where Granny Bond held court. I really do remember her with affection although it is true that when her patience had been tried by rambunctious young boys beyond the limit she could give a really impressive and scary tongue lashing. So that's where my aunt Cherry got that gene I guess. This was not a common event however and mostly I remember her as a benign, amorphous large lump, always in black clothing, sitting, for she did not move easily, in an equally large amorphous arm chair. She played games with us. 'Snap' which got noisier and noisier and frequently degenerated into arguments. During World War 2 a board game called 'Sink-the-Nazi-Navy' was a favourite, successful hits being accompanied by noisy shouted sound effects. Bombing

the Nazi navy game had an unfortunate spin-off. Back to that beautiful dolls house furniture. Today these would be highly sort after collectors items such was the detail and fine workmanship. Did I do this alone or were some of my dreadful cousins also guilty, but I do remember bombing the furniture. How sad, Just as well Granny was a bit deaf. And it must be said forgetful. She never really knew who was who among her grandchildren and just used the first name she thought of or tried several in hope of one being right.

As I got older I would often walk around to her house, it was only five minutes away and spend time with her. For a while she was taking a correspondence drawing class and we would do some drawings together. She had much more talent in that direction than me. She told me stories from her past but these have left me now. One, which I suppose is verifiable if true (James could do it I'm sure), is that Granny was related in some way to George Leigh Mallory, the charismatic and enigmatic mountaineer who lost his life on Mt Everest in 1924. Also that as a young woman she had been to Darjeeling, the setting off point for the long trek into Tibet that led to the northern approaches to Mt Everest. I think she told me that she had even been on part of this trek but that does seem a bit unlikely. Nevertheless, it sparked my interest in Mt Everest and over the years I've read just about every book on the subject and on George Mallory.

I used to cut her grass to supplement my pocket money and in my mid-teens I became one of her drivers. She had a rather nice Standard 14 saloon car although she didn't drive herself. I think my mum used to take her grocery shopping and sometimes I would be called upon if I was home from boarding school to drive her up to the Victoria Avenue shops. Mostly to the chemist and the newsagent where I think she bought raffle tickets. This was in the days when the only lottery was in Australia and some newsagents and barber shop windows displayed the sign "We post to Hobart". This was code for the lottery which I think was technically illegal. Granny always sat in the back seat looking sort of regal and observed the world outside with comments such as "Aren't people ghastly" and "The streets are running with blood". I think she was referring to the occasional motor accident. She loved a good murder and would follow the very detailed court reports in the newspaper avidly.

My secondary school years were spent as a boarder at King's College and so my visits to Granny became sporadic. Granny died in December 1955. I had not returned to Auckland for some time and didn't know she was ill and nobody bothered to tell me when she died. I am really sorry about that for I genuinely liked her and she not infrequently filled some emotional gaps in my own family life.