

Margaret Hudson
Open Foundation Course
Thursday morning

Oral History
containing
Interview with Mrs Alice Ellis
and Mrs Ruth Croll.
Plus 1,000 word Essay.

9th October, 1986

ORAL HISTORY

of

MRS. ALICE ELLIS.

interviewed

19th September, 1986.

Mrs. Alice Victoria Ellis was born on the 17th November, 1897 at Lobbs Hole, New South Wales, the sixth child of Thomas and Agnes Eldridge. Alice's mother Agnes, had been the daughter of a comfortable sheep property owner, where with her eight brothers and sisters she had led an active life sharing the work load of cooking, cleaning, laundry and general hand. Alice believes her mother suffered considerable disenchantment after her marriage as she believed Thomas to be in a secure job. After a big wedding Agnes discovered Thomas was a worker at a big mine at Kiandra. Here many English and Chinese immigrants lived in miserable conditions trying to eke out a living while enduring impoverished living conditions. Recollections of anti-Chinese feeling resulting in killing also creeps into Alice's story. When the mine ran out of production, these immigrants were stranded poverty stricken in a foreign land. Alice's first memories are of her mother living in a house at Lobbs Hole desperately struggling to feed herself and her children on a subsistence income, while her husband lived near the mine at Kiandra. When this mine failed Thomas found work as a farm labourer, returning to the worked out mine with his mates whenever the opportunity arose. Even as a farm labourer he did not live with his family. His fleeting fortnightly visits home seemed to yield little except an additional child occasionally, thereby increasing the burden on Agnes. Alice believes in fact that Agnes and Thomas lived most of their married life in this manner; Thomas away at work while Agnes trod the treadmill of cleaning, providing and caring for the children.

Alice's childhood memories reflect Agnes' concern with survival, enriched by childlike pranks and fears, disciplined by Agnes's tall and stately figure presiding over her correct table where bible reading concluded the evening meals. Their food supplies of flour, sugar and tea were collected from Kiandra by Agnes. Leaving the children in the care of a relative, she would ride one horse and lead another along the sometimes treacherous path. Some hills caused Agnes to dismount and walk the horses around the most dangerous precipices. With each order come a large bag of boiled and conversation lollies; a token of good will from the store keeper. This trip would involve an entire day. Boiled puddings were a favourite as they were economical and filling, and the bread was all home made. Jellies were set by ever so gently climbing up the side of the water tank and lowering the mould into the water. This was retrieved by scooping the floating jelly out with a bucket and it was heaven help the child who lost the jelly. A creek ran close by which provided water for a very large vegetable garden.

Buckets were made from kerosine drums; one drum cut in half made two child size buckets. Large tins which once contained the rare luxury of fruit, made excellent dippers. Alice's brothers made and attached the handles. These implements were used to cart the water for the vegetable garden. This work was both heavy and hazardous as one day a black snake wrapped itself around the leg of Alice's sister. Hearing her screams and seeing the snake, Agnes ordered the child to stay still. Eventually the snake unwrapped itself and slid away while the child, Alice remembers with a twinkle in her eye, was not much help for the rest of the day. Rabbits were also part of the staple diet. Alice would take her traps out and set them late in the evening, returning with a kerosine lamp at 8.30 p.m. Often this yielded three or four rabbits, before the traps were reset again. One night as Alice was resetting a trap a kangaroo jumped over her. Startled and scared she lost the lamp and had to grope her way home in the dark. Her mother, enquiring where the lamp was upon her return thought it very amusing when informed

"the damned kangaroo got it."

Alice had to return next morning and find it. Besides making rabbit stew, the rabbit skins were dried on wire the shape and size of an enormous hairpin. Alice sold these for one shilling. Turkeys provided the egg supply plus poultry for some meals, while goats provided the milk. Each goat had a bell around it's neck to enable it's owner to find it. After school the children had to bring the goats home. Alice recalls the children were very like mountain goats themselves as the goats stayed where they were found and the children had to scale some high places to herd them home. Sometimes they would not return till nearly dark. Their mother would often be out looking for them. She kept a large bell in case any child became lost; the sound of the bell could lead them home. Alice cannot recall getting lost. There was always someone selling fish caught in the river at Lobb's Hole and corn meat which was far too salty, came from Agnes' father, till he died. The lighting in the house was candles initially which were replaced by kerosine lamps. Beds were wooden bunks made by Thomas, with chopped up corn husks in bags, used as mattresses. Hessian took the place of blankets. Alice remembers the strong smell of the corn husks when two or three beds were in the one room. When a wooden slat broke, Agnes was the one who would repair it. Agnes also made the children's clothes; underwear was made out of flour bags. Other clothes were made out of a strong cheap material and for best the girls received a red twill dress. This was kept clean and lasted for years. Alice hated it.

The one teacher, fifteen pupil school was approximately a twenty minute walk for the Eldridge children. Alice's first teacher was a man who didn't like Lobbs Hole so left and his replacement was a woman. Slates and chalk (later slate pencils) were limited because everything was rubbed out, thereby placing great demands upon a child's memory. Arithmetic sums, for example, were written on the blackboard of a morning; if these were not finished at school, the child had to remember them and complete them at home.

Alice was labelled a dunce by her teacher (whose face is indelibly etched in Alice's memory while the name eludes her). Whether Alice was labelled a dunce because her memory failed the slate board system we will never know,

however labelled she was and stood behind the blackboard. One day the teacher decided that Alice's time could be more productively spent so armed her with a matchbox and sent her in search of manna. Manna was small white lumps of dried blossom that fell from a certain type of tree and was delicious to eat.

Possessing a lively sense of humour, an unkind feeling toward her teacher, and the opportunity, Alice filled the matchbox with a mixture of manna and the white part of bird droppings. The test came in the tasting and the daintiness which the teacher employed in savouring the 'manna' quickly turned to hostility as she applied three 'cuts' (sharp slaps) to the incorrigible Alice. When Alice told her mother the teacher said she was a dunce, her mother merely replied

"Well so you are."

The journey home from school was filled with its own delights. The Eldridge's neighbour had an orchard of fruit trees with a fence, that any child could climb through, as protection. It was peach season; to dangle such a delicacy in front of hungry children seemed to invite trespassers. Alice was up the tree with peach in hand when the orchard's protector fired the salt peter. Unharmful but mobilized by the sting (as it stung and smarted badly) Alice dropped the peach and scampered home. The orchard protector and owner followed with a bucket of peaches in hand and an explanation for Agnes. The children by climbing the trees were breaking the branches. If they only asked he would give them a peach. He left the peaches as a gift, and left Alice to receive further punishment from Agnes. The peach supply was also banned. This was the mode of Alice's childhood spent in a small house which consisted of a kitchen and a couple of bedrooms. Agnes kept the earthen floors swept with brooms she made herself (or made by the young children) out of grasses or a particular shrub. Each branch of the shrub cut to ensure a firm even broom.

When Alice was about twelve years old two things happened that altered her life. Her father had received an injury which, although minor, resulted in blood poisoning. By the time he was brought home to Agnes, Thomas was seriously ill; lacking the medical knowledge we have now, it was only a matter of weeks before he died. The second occurrence was that Alice went to live with Agnes' sister Sarah Mackay. Sarah's husband owned an hotel in Adaminaby plus a big sheep station with an eight bedroom homestead on it. For five shillings per week the young Alice did all the cleaning, laundrying, cooking for the Mackay family. It was now the twelve year old Alice who was woken every morning at daybreak, trod the same treadmill Agnes did (although under different circumstances) to fall into bed exhausted at midnight. When shearing season came so did twenty five extra mouths to feed and it was Alice who prepared the meals and provided mountains of morning and afternoon teas.

She still cringes at the memory of catching her sleeve on a doornob and dropping the eighteen good plates she was carrying. Auntie had something to say about that. Then when it was convenient Alice was also conscripted to skin and clean sheep ready for her to cut up the next morning. Alice's uncle commanded obedience with the aid of his stock whip.

Within a year of her coming to live with the Mackays, Alice was sent to stay with a cousin, _____ to assist his wife during the latter part of her pregnancy. Sam was the caretaker of the defunct Kylvie mine which was situated three miles from town. It was following a day of heavy rain that Mrs. Clugston felt she needed the midwife to come. By now the creek was flooded with the water over the footbridge. Sam told Alice she must walk to town to bring the nurse as he could not find the pony. Alice believed he could find the pony but was reluctant to cross the flooded creek. Sam also argued that if anything should happen while he was away Alice would be useless so it was better for her to go. Thus Alice was forced to walk the three miles to town in the dark, which necessitated crossing the flooded footbridge on the way. Alice recalls the water was already waist level when she was going into town. After finding the nurse and her Chinese husband they then boarded the sulky owned by the Chinese husband and headed back to the Clugstons. The pony was flogged to force it to cross the flooded creek. Mrs. Clugston was of small build and with each of her four pregnancies birth was difficult. The nurse stayed two days before the baby was delivered: the first.

Back at the Mackays, Alice became good friends with her cousin Sarah; all the work could not dim Alice's mischievous nature and Alice found a kindred spirit and ally in Sarah. Sarah made delicious cakes and pastries while Alice prepared other foods. It was Sarah who organized her brother to leave a pony and sulky some distance from the house so the girls could sneak off to the dances at Adaminaby. It was also Sarah who accompanied Alice when they both left the property 'Mountain View' to find jobs in Sydney. The seventeen year old Alice found a waitressing job at Sergeants but one glimpse at all those customers terrified the shy country girl. Auntie Sarah meanwhile, recognised her need for Alice and wrote to Sarah to ask Alice to return. The five shillings per week she had received for the past five years would be increased to ten shillings, plus Auntie would give Alice twenty pounds bonus if she would return. Gladly Alice left her terrifying waitressing job and returned to the familiar drudgery. Not only was it shearing time when Alice returned, but Uncle was having up to fifty weekend house guests from his hotel: all of whom had to be fed.

Although the Mackays helped the widowed Agnes by giving her the job of laundress for the hotel plus the occasional clothes, their relationship with Alice was always employer and domestic help. This is evidenced by an accident Alice had. Auntie Sarah wished to post her daughter two dozen eggs which were packed in a tea tin.

They owned a fine car but thought it more thrifty to send Alice to town on an old race horse: an unsuitable mount for Alice to begin with. A couple of miles from home the horse put its foot in a rabbit hole and threw its rider. Concerned when the riderless horse returned home, the Mackays searched for Alice in their car, but when they found her bruised and badly shaken but well, they sent her home on a pony. The car was too good for her. Ironically the house guests did Alice a favour as despite the extra work, the constant contact with strangers gave her confidence. Patching old clothes and making them last she quickly saved sixty-two pounds. Alice arranged with the mailman to meet her next day when she was packed and taken to Cooma. Here she found employment as a domestic in an hotel which paid twenty-nine and sixpence per week: nineteen shillings more than she had received from the Mackays. This was the type of work Alice continued in until she married in Junee on the 7th July, 1921.

While Alice worked for her aunt she was able to see her mother fairly regularly, as following Thomas' death Agnes had moved from Lobbs Hole for employment and now lived at Adaminaby. However when Alice left for Cooma and later Junee, visits with her mother were impractical. From that point on she was very much on her own.

ORAL HISTORY

of

MRS. RUTH EMELYN CROLL

interviewed

24th September, 1986.

Frederick Bloore, Government appointee in Mauritius before becoming a school teacher in the Newcastle area, and Christopher Lean, settler at Fosterton, were the grandfathers of our subject MRS. RUTH EMELYN CROLL. While living with his wife and three children on the island of Mauritius in the Indian Ocean, off the African coast, Frederick Bloore was forced to take six months leave due to ill health. He decided to use this opportunity to make the three month trip to Australia where he found the climate enjoyable while the business prospects were promising. He remained in Australia, urgently sending a message to his wife to pack up and follow him. Frederick's daughter Leda was eight years old when she made the trip with her mother and two siblings to Australia. The Bloore's settled in the Newcastle area where Frederick quickly found employment as a school teacher; anyone with education and of suitable character qualified for this role. Following a brief appointment at a place Ruth believes was called Eggleton, in the Newcastle Port Stephens area, Frederick became first Government appointed teacher at the Dangog School. Prior to his appointment Clergy had run the school. Thus Ruth's mother, Leda, lived a refined and relatively comfortable life prior to her marriage to John Lean. John Lean was the third of the six sons who inherited the equally divided property of Christopher Lean. However the two youngest sons were not happy with this prospect, as the division of the property 'Figtree' had left each son with quite small portions, so these two sections were divided again equally between the remaining four sons. This proved to be the beginnings of a basically self contained community : four sons plus their wives and in time their sixteen children.

Ruth emphasizes the strict role of women during this period of Australian history. John, who was considered a progressive man, was emphatic that a woman's place was in the home and therefore would never entertain any thought of Leda assisting on the land. Still Leda's work was hard, demanding and constant. Roy, John and Leda's first born arrived in 1900 with Ruth following in 1902. The brother and sister were good mates. In 1907 when a school was opened, on land donated for the purpose about a mile from the Lean home, Ruth was sent along at the young age of five years to make up sufficient numbers. Due to lifestyle and sheer physical effort in getting to and from school, children usually began school later than five years of age. The school at that time had staggered finishing times with the boys being dismissed half an hour before the girls. The idea was that the boys go straight home. Ruth had to cross a river by using a swing bridge on her way home and from this vantage point she could see the boys swimming some distance up the river.

Instead of going straight home the boys had stripped off and gone swimming in the nude. On one occasion Ruth paused on the swing bridge so watch the boys romping in the water. Due to the distance Ruth was unable to see anything she was not supposed to see, however someone told on her and she received three smacks from the teacher for looking. The disobedient boys who had failed to go directly home, but instead were exposing themselves while swimming, were overlooked. When Ruth was a big school girl of seven and Roy nine years old, they were informed there was going to be another baby. Horror of horrors! An intruder; Ruth and Roy were united in their jealous and hostile thoughts to the unknown infant. The newcomer was to be delivered at home with the assistance of a midwife Mrs. Kennedy. Prior to Mrs. Kennedy's arrival, Ruth had been taught to make junket in her enthusiasm to learn cooking. The unhappy twosome were also instructed to obey Mrs. Kennedy for the period that she would be caring for them while their mother rested. Somehow the midwife learnt Ruth could make junket and demanded that the child make one junket every day. This lasted for a fortnight. Ruth grew to dislike junket and Mrs. Kennedy. Finally Muriel arrived: a lovely child with a sweet disposition, but it took a long time before her brother and sister appreciated her. Ruth recalls the infant Muriel often suffered because of Ruth and Roy's unkind behaviour toward her. The cousins all combined to create their own entertainment when chores were completed: there was a tennis court and cricket was a favourite. It was a full life and the children were never idle. Ruth was also given her own garden plot after one overzealous but indiscreet attempt at weeding her mother's. The children also made tennis nets for the courts using macramé, likewise hammocks and fishing nets were made in the same way. Their clothes were all made at home including the underwear from flour bags. Wax was bought to make their own candles and chicken fat was used in the soap making.

Fowls in fact proved an important asset. Not only did they provide the fat for soap, plus eggs and poultry, but their feathers were washed in warm soapy water, dried by being laid out on paper and tossed at intervals, then used for mattresses and pillows. (The blankets were the forerunners of the ones we use today.) Any broken china was smashed up very finely and fed to the fowls as shell grit. There were fruit trees, a large vegetable garden plus crops which included corn. The corn was used to feed the fowls and pigs with any surplus being sold. Sugar bags would be made into aprons or covers for the animals. The milk produced on the dairy farm had to be separated before the cream was sold. Rarely milk was sold as it was all needed to feed calves and pigs. In time the Leans received weekly visits from a baker, butcher and mailman which eased or solved the need to make bread and kill their own meat.

Up to thirty children attended the Fosterton school where you could attend till the school leaving age of fourteen years or grade six. Ruth worked hard in order to obtain a bursary as she saw this as being her hope of continuing at school. She hoped to pursue an academic career, perhaps as a teacher, and felt if she earned the fifty pound per year bursary it would verify her ambition. The twelve year old succeeded and travelled by train on a Monday morning from Dungog to Maitland where she attended the Maitland Girls High School. She boarded at a private boarding house with twelve other students during the week, returning home to Dungog on the Friday afternoon train. Two or three other Dungog girls shared this routine with Ruth. Ruth felt fortunate enjoying the uncommon opportunity of a secondary education. However it was not to last as a message from her father informed her of her mother's ill health, thereby necessitating Ruth's return home to take control of the housework.

Life at 'Figtree' had suffered change over the past four years. About the time Ruth went to Maitland school her Grandmother and Grandfather Bloore had retired and come to live at the Lean's. With the advent of World War 1, Ruth's Uncle Willie Lean had joined the defence forces and was earning a poor two shillings per day. In order to assist the finances, his wife began a boarding house, filling her house to overflowing with boarders. John and Leda took Willie's two youngest children to live with them to assist Willie's wife in her endeavour. Indeed Ruth lost the privacy and privilege of her own room with the war refugees who now inhabited her family home. Ruth was nearly seventeen when she returned home to keep house till her mother's health returned and she was restless. Sick of housework and with her 'pin feathers' showing, she was ready to fly the coop. An intelligent mind, stimulated by a secondary education and coupled with new horizons, Ruth balked at being shackled to the repetition and restrictiveness of 'woman's work'. However living conditions did improve after the war. Kerosine lamps had replaced candles. Now home produced acetylene gas was pumped through to the rooms for lighting. Ruth's family enjoyed a built in copper while others continued to do their laundry in kerosine tins on open fires. They were also one of the first to install a bath and have a bathroom. Previously bathing had been done in a tub in the kitchen; each family member taking their turn according to their age. The water for the bath was either from tanks, or in dry weather, carted in milk cans from the river. Ruth's father also owned the areas first 'T' model Ford car. The steep Wallarobba Hill on the road to Maitland used to cause Cobb and Co. passengers to dismount and walk up and down the hill as it was too steep for the horses to pull any extra load over. Now it still proved an obstacle as the Ford could not receive the petrol flow when going forward up such a steep incline, so the cars were forced to climb in reverse. Then

Then there was the advent of the telephone. Ruth recalls her family shared a party line with John's four brothers and their families. It was difficult to enjoy a private conversation as other people trying to use their phone could inadvertently listen to your conversation. The telephone was used for business and private calls. Ruth points out that codes became necessary in order to keep ones private and love life, private. Social occasions increased after the war. There were more dances; one of Leda's friends of dancing age would always be engaged to chaperone Ruth and be responsible for her behaviour. It was etiquette to call on a family you may like to befriend, and in return they would call on you. Harvest time was another sociable time as neighbours clubbed together and efficiently completed all the harvesting as a team. At night the youngsters would take their lamps and continue the shredding and bagging of crops in sheds amidst much singing and merriment. Thus the sting of the urgent and hard work the harvest entailed, was relaxed. Family celebrations or summer picnics were held by the river while dances and concerts during winter happened in the school hall with an accordion and violin providing the music. People would walk miles to see a 'Magic Lantern' show. This was the early slide projector displaying its pictures on a sheet.

The Depression years gave Ruth her only break from 'woman's work' during this period. John told his eldest daughter he could now only afford to house and feed her, so following a short course at the local Convent, Ruth found employment in an office of a transport company.

At one point during her restless years, Ruth thought marriage her only escape from Dungog. She yearned to see what was over the hills to the east, west and north. After careful deliberation Ruth decided that marriage to a Methodist minister was the best chance as this offered new horizons every three years. Alas not one of the Methodist ministers at that time succumbed to Ruth's charms. Finally however after seven years of waiting it was the son of a local timber mill owner who Ruth married. She believes time and the nesting instinct finally wrought her contentment.

Margaret Hudson
O.F.C.

Thursday morning.

While interviews with eighty eight year old Mrs. Alice Ellis and eighty four year old Mrs. Ruth Croll confirm that the role of women in early twentieth century Australia was subject to male dominance, it also displays the subjection of children to parents plus the wastelessness and innovativeness of the general population. Thomas Eldridge, the father of Alice, was a compulsive gold miner. It would appear he practised a degree of deception in stating his financial position to the women he hoped to marry, thereby reducing Agnes from a life of economic security and hard work, to that of an impoverished wife imprisoned in the daily drudge of motherhood. Whether Agnes chose to live away from the Kiandra mine in an attempt to maintain her level of inherited dignity, we shall never know; what we do know is that in Alice's memory her parents rarely shared the same roof for periods beyond a few days. While the independent Thomas worked hard at his employment he still enjoyed a freedom unknown to Agnes. Her long hours were caught up in sheer survival. She shouldered the responsible struggles of a single parent, while being burdened with the emotional millstones of marriage, that is the extra pregnancies bringing extra mouths to feed, coupled with the loneliness and concern for her absent husband. Thomas had successfully albeit ignorantly reduced Agnes from what Anne Summers would define as one of God's Police to a 'Damned Whore': Agnes qualifying by her membership of the 'Casual Poor'. Perhaps this is best illustrated when we consider Agnes' sister Sarah Mackay. Due to a financially prudent marriage Sarah was freed from most of the physical and emotional struggles. Her condescending tokens of financial assistance to Agnes and Alice effectually ingrained their low status by placing them in receipt of charity. This charity was sufficient to maintain life but never consciously allowing Agnes or Alice the opportunity to achieve any dignity or self respect. Societies role women haphazardly found themselves in not only separated woman from woman but caused an hierarchical chasm between sisters. Thus vulnerable because of sex, financial need and being the age of a child, Alice was exploited by the rabbit skin buyer paying her less than Agnes believed due, and an adult male cousin, Sam Clugston, who preferred to risk the twelve year old life in the flood, rather than his own.

However it was the six years of virtual slavery for the Mackays which really highlight the exploitation and contempt for the poor. Excessive working conditions plus adult responsibilities, miserable wages and total lack of self confidence kept Alice a prisoner. The degree of financial exploitation is seen when earning ten shillings per week Alice escapes to Cooma and receives twenty nine and sixpence per week for the same type of domestic work and shorter hours.

Ruth placed great emphasis upon the acceptable role of women in her experience. She quickly points out that her father, John Lean, was considered a progressive thinker in his time and insisted upon the segregation of work: a woman's work was in the home. This undoubtedly was progressive at that point in history as prior to this time there is evidence which testifies that women were not only expected to be child bearers and rearers, plus complete all household requirements, but also assist the husband on the land in a variety of occupations. This consideration found John's wife Leda, as trapped in the household duties as Agnes. However Leda escaped the financial burden plus the load of total management and discipline of their children, as John was a considerate and ever present husband. The episode with Ruth being punished for watching the boys swimming also implies society's double standards. Firstly, the boy always being dismissed first hints at the privileges extended to their sex. Secondly the punishment shows an inconsistency in what is fair: surely the boys loitering plus nude swimming should have been as offensive to the moral police as Ruth's 'watching'. The fact Ruth, and not the boys, was punished speaks of how easily a girl, still innocent of sexual motivation and differences, could trespass in a male ordered society. Likewise Ruth's ambition and reasons for marrying a Methodist minister also reveals the sheer lack of choice available to a female, when a girl is prepared to sell herself in marriage in order to gain an opportunity to travel. A similar occurrence also happened when Ruth wished to pursue Nursing; until Leda discovered a trusted friend who was a matron in a Brisbane hospital, she would not entertain the thought of Ruth entering a world of strangers, unchaperoned. Was a single woman she was gainfully employed, that vulnerable in the male society and if so why did the fathers act for better protection?

It must be noted that while Ruth had to forfeit her career as a Nurse or Teacher, her brother Roy also forfeited his ambition to enter Law. Roy did not share the feeling for the land his father had and thus both Roy and Ruth were denied their careers due to their father's standards. Likewise Alice endured much hard work and deprivation through poverty before and after her father's premature death, but so did her brothers.

As we compare and contrast the histories of these two women who in the 1900's enjoy a friendship together, each possessing a lively sense of humour and a keen mind, we discover the similarities of their lives and that of their mothers. The abhorrence of waste coupled with the need, which caused broken crockery to be turned into shell grit and empty fruit tins into dippers, is to be found in each life. The conscription of both the privileged settlers daughter and the impoverished miners daughter into domestic work; the natural gift of every woman as propaganda would have it. It is interesting that Ruth aspires to clerical and teaching positions; both employments considered suitable in the expanded view of womans work. However both are still male dominant areas and Ruth enjoys employment only when it is convenient to her father. Agnes and Leda, the mothers, both came from financially secure childhoods and after marriage both were imprisoned in domestic duty.

It is also in this area of domestic duties where we find Agnes and Leda contrast. John and Thomas support the theory that where men are situated on society's hierarchical ladder determines how they treat their women. John the settler, proves a considerate husband to Leda; while we cannot definitely contribute the relatively small number of children (three) to John's consideration, we do know that he insisted the children be responsible for the tidiness of their rooms, and it was he who compelled Ruth to take over the home duties. On the other hand Thomas, an employee, displays deceit and neglect of his wife. He also was the father of nine. The contrast continues in the standards of living. Transport was a noticeable factor; for Alice to leave the district meant isolation while Ruth's family could afford the then luxury of travel.

The privileged settler's family also enjoyed feather mattresses, woollen blankets and wooden floors, while the miner's family endured mattresses stuffed with corn husks, hessian blankets and earthen floors. The self esteem of Ruth and Alice is also at odds. Ruth enjoyed a self confidence which enabled her to aim for and cope with a secondary education away from home. Alice meanwhile was told she was a dunce by her teacher and had this confirmed by her mother. She also fled Sydney as a teenager; too shy and devoid of self confidence to escape her aunt's exploitation. The fact these ladies enjoy a mutual respect today is a comment upon Alice's scholarly potential if nurtured and not condemned as a child. It is noticeable in Ruth's story that the War and Depression influence her life while these events seem insignificant in the lives of the poor.

This research supports the claims that a woman's lot was determined by the men in her life; women's ability to design their own lives extremely limited. While this applied clearly to the financially poor, their rich sisters endured a similar situation under the facade of more material comfort. It also reinforces the extra exploitation suffered by poor women but perhaps the saddest and most ironic of all is that women were as guilty of inflicting oppression on other women as men were.