

My life story by Kerry Edwards

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My earliest memory is playing in my back yard with my cousin Sandra and my running inside to ask my mother how old I was. She looked up from breast-feeding Stephen and told me I was five so this must have been about November 1965 before I was six the next month.

I was born on Boxing Day 26 December 1959 in the Kingston Soldiers Memorial Hospital in Kingston SE South Australia after my mother was in labour all through Christmas Day.

I lived with my sister Lea and brothers Peter and Stephen in a house my father and mother had built at the end of a short street, near some paddocks and over the back fence from my father's brother Don and his family. My mother had a wood stove in the kitchen and a twin tub washer in the laundry. We had a pot of tea with our evening meal each night and one of my jobs was to wash the dishes in the evening by standing on a foot stool - playing 'mother' with the teapot. My mother made most of our clothes and cut our hair. There was a rainwater tank in our back yard with a cubby house underneath until my father built a new cubby house. In the middle of the back lawn was a Hills hoist clothesline and half the back yard was a vegetable garden. We spent many hours riding our bikes around the cement paths and playing under the tank stand. One afternoon I dropped a brick on my big toe and running inside crying to mum.

My parents were friends with the Brockoff's and their son Mark used to play in our yard with me when they visited and I have a small black and white photo of us riding pretend horses. I remember making a mud pie and making Mark eat a slice before he was allowed to come inside my cubby-house. I let him take the stones (which were a garnish) off first. He did it!

My father ran three businesses: a milk delivery round; cooking crayfish for SAFCOL (South Australian Fishermen's Co-operative Limited) in a shed on our property; and selling drums of petrol from a depot on the adjoining property. My mother took in sewing and mending while looking after four children under six years old.

My father tells a story of me sitting in the front seat of his milk delivery van and driving the car out onto the street when I was too young to see over the dashboard or remember this. He came running from inside a shop and stopped the car before I could really get going. Occasionally I'd go with my father to pick up the milk from the farmer or deliver it to the people of the town. Milk was delivered to the door and ladled into the householder's containers. This was before the days of bottled or carton milk. In the glove box my father kept early morning snacks of slices of bread and butter (not margarine). The butter was sliced too and looked like cheese.

My grandfather Pop (Ernest) Edwards used to take me into the large shed in our backyard to watch my father lowering large metal tubs full of crayfish (correct name is salt water lobster) into boiling water to cook them. There were also saw crays lined up along a table, draining and cooling. Pop used to break open legs and we'd eat the meat. The crayfish industry was just starting and only whole crayfish were sold with none exported. We fed our pet cat left over pieces of crayfish, so it wasn't expensive.

Kingston didn't have a Kindergarten and there wasn't a reception year, so I started school in Grade 1. I used to walk to and from school with Geraldine Starling from across the road. One afternoon I thought it was home time so I walked home to be told it was recess time. The school dentist used to visit in a caravan on the school grounds and make me talk with a mouth full of cotton balls with the dentist's assistant laughing at me. In later years my dentist was a farmer just out of Naracoorte who had a dentist surgery in his home.

Soon after I started school in 1965, we moved house as my parents bought the Kingston SE Dry Cleaners (later adding a laundry service) with the house next door. The house which was very run down with four bedrooms, one bathroom with the toilet in a built on room off the back porch. A trip during the night included unlocking the back door. The laundry and dry cleaner's building was old and it was fun to play on the roof. We used to climb up the fuel tank adjacent to the building and walk across to the front to 'spy' on the people driving down the road. That is, until Dad caught us and told us to get down. We had a large back yard and an empty block of land next door, so had plenty of room to ride pushbikes and motorbikes and keep animals. Over the years we had a black sheep, several rabbits, gold fish, frogs, tadpoles, birds, cats and a dog named Spotty.

At the back of our property was Kingston's only tennis club with pines trees on the dividing line. We often climbed the trees and hid amongst them, smoking, to get out of Sunday-school. Children could buy cigarettes then and they even came in handy children's size packets of 10. We had just enough if we all pooled our pocket money.

My parents both played golf regularly so I spent a lot of time at the golf course with my sister and brothers. Sometimes we played in the rock quarry next door. When I was very young, maybe 5 or 6 years old, I hitch-hiked back into Kingston and got a ride in a little old car with a little old man who was on the local council. He knew who I was, so dropped me off at my grandparents (Clyde and Rene Usher). There wasn't a phone at the Golf Club, so I was driven back out there by Papa and Nanny. No-one had noticed I had gone.

At school I was friends with Desma Connolley who came to Kingston SE from Sydney NSW and also with Karen McKinnon, who became my step-sister many years later. Karen died on 18 November 1980 in Perth WA.

About this time Dad learnt to fly and was building an airplane in our back shed. On one flight to Adelaide my youngest brother Stephen cried because he thought we were going to bump into the clouds.

My father's parents (Ernest and Jean Edwards) lived in Adelaide SA and we visited occasionally during the school holidays. They lived in an old house in Hindmarsh and had a large back yard filled with bird cages, which my Pop made and sold. One cage had a white cocky that was kept as a pet and would say "want a cup of tea". In a small area of the yard was a pet Kangaroo. I stayed occasionally with my Aunty Margaret (Dad's sister), Uncle Ray, and their children Janice and Keith in Adelaide during the school holidays.

My mother's parents (Clyde and Rene Usher) lived in Kingston SE and owned a Four Square store selling groceries and general items. We used to do our grocery shopping after hours as a whole family and if lucky could pick out a treat. We saw them often and I occasionally helped out in the shop after school. On one occasion (but there may have been more), my grand-mother (Rene Usher) took me to see a play, I think in Mt Gambier. On trips to Adelaide I would often shop with her at wholesale outlets for clothes for the store and was able to pick out something for myself. I remember shopping with her at Moore's Emporium (an exclusive department store) in Adelaide, which is now the Law Courts building, and seeing the skylight above the staircase. I very often stayed with my spinster great-auntie Jean Usher (Clyde Usher's sister) and her mother 'Granny' my great-grandmother (Flora Usher, nee Rawlings) in Adelaide during the school holidays. I remember the small old house at Keswick with an outside toilet before they moved to Everard Park. I saw my second cousins Naomi and Ailie (children of Doug and Joan Usher) often and we went swimming at the Unley swimming pool, which was walking distance from Auntie Jean's house at Everard Park.

My parents were friends with Keith and Jan Rankin, and they often got together to play cards. I remember when Keith and Jan adopted Robert then later Julieanne. After they moved to Millicent I stayed with them occasionally. I remember when Keith died in 1978. In 1984 Jan and my father married so she became my stepmother.

My parents separated when I was about 13 years old, with my sister, brothers and I living with my father. They divorced in 1976. About this time my mother's brother, Graham Usher married Betty Parker and I often visited after school. I remember helping out when my cousins Wayne and Matthew were born. My mother moved to Adelaide and lived with Barry McKinnon (they're still together today). My sister, brothers and I visited during the school holidays, often staying with Auntie Jean (my great Auntie and Clyde Usher's sister) while mum was at work.

When starting high school I was asked if I wanted to be a nurse or secretary. They were pretty much the choices for a female in the 1970's. I chose secretary, so learnt to type, which has come in handy. I completed 12 years at the Kingston Area School and left just before I was 18 years old. I worked for a short time at a local hairdressing salon but soon learned that wasn't the occupation for me. With not a lot of career opportunities in Kingston I moved to Adelaide and lived with my mother while attending a course at Prides

Business College. I applied for a few jobs and started with the Savings Bank of South Australia the same week that Elvis died (the singer Elvis Presley died on 16 August 1977).

The following year, at 18 years old I met Tony Bird (son of Max and Joyce Bird of Devonport TAS) who was 27 years old and divorced with two sons. We married the same year on 7th October 1978 in a formal white wedding in Kingston SE SA. A year later we travelled and worked in Tasmania as the start of an around Australia working holiday but came back to Adelaide to live after only a few months as our money ran out. I worked for a credit union for a few months. Tony joined the RAAF (Royal Australian Air Force). While living at Plympton we planned a family and I was pregnant enough to be sick but not pregnant enough to make an announcement, at my 21st birthday party on 26 December 1980. From the start Tony insisted on naming the baby Max or Maxine after his father Maxwell. We had a son, so he was named Max, on 10 September 1981. Ten days later Tony moved to Wagga Wagga NSW to live and train with the RAAF to be a chef. Tony's family lived in Tasmania and his father visited once to see Max as a baby. I tried hard to encourage Tony to have a relationship with Max, for Max's sake but Tony said it was easier for him to have no contact and he has kept to this. Tony's family must have also felt this way because no-one has ever contacted us. We divorced in December 1982. I realised after it was too late that Tony was an alcoholic. In 1985 the Christies Beach Magistrates Court allowed me to change Max's surname to mine, so Max felt part of the Edwards family.

After living with my father for a few months, Max and I moved back and lived in a granny-flat at my mothers and later to a unit at Edwardstown in Adelaide, which my father owned for a while.

In 1983 when I was 24 years old, I met John Deed who was 41 years old and a grandfather. He moved in shortly after. John told me he couldn't have any more children but soon after he moved in I discovered I was pregnant. This was an ectopic pregnancy, so I lost the child. I wasn't able to have any more children, which was something that took me years to get over. I asked John to move out the same year.

Early in 1985 I met Hans Preuss and his friend Mignon Balnaves at a party. Mignon and I were friends for many years but have now lost touch. Hans worked for Australia Post and also at a fishing tackle shop on week-ends. In November 1985 I started working for the State Bank of South Australia again (formerly the Savings Bank of South Australia). Hans, Max and I moved to Hackham to rent from the South Australian Housing Trust. We bought a 25% share of the house under a scheme where we rented the remaining 75%, and then when we had more equity we were able to buy the remaining 75% share. Hans and I married on 7 June 1986 in a small ceremony at the Registry Office in Adelaide. Mignon was my witness. My son Max was 4 years old and in the wedding party; in his eyes, we were all getting married. He wore a black three-piece suit with a bow tie and looked very cute.

Max and I were always close and we spent a lot of time together. I watched Max play all of his basket ball games. We travelled on holiday and visited places of interest here in Adelaide most weekends. I love Max with all my heart.

In 1987 I started studying part-time for an Associate Diploma of Accounting and graduated at the end of 1991 after 4 years of part-time study. On the day of my graduation ceremony in early 1992 my mother asked my sister Lea to congratulate me. She did but it was the last time she spoke to me. She has always been insure and jealous, breaking or taking anything of mine. My only crime was being born first. After a few months break, I studied a few additional subjects out of interest over the next 2 years.

Hans' father Max Preuss (another Max!) committed suicide about 1988 by setting off explosives in each room of the house he owned with his wife Helene, to burn it down and then he shot himself in the head in the kitchen. The police said it was lucky the wiring caught under the back screen door and the explosives in the shed didn't trigger or the houses each side would have also gone up. Han's mother Helene was out with her sister, Mita, on the night and came home to find the house on fire. Mita sister was visiting from Germany and lost all her belongings including her passport, which was a struggle for her as she couldn't speak English. This made front page news in the papers and on TV with the press hounding us for a story. Hans was investigated by the police for two days before his father's death was declared a suicide.

On 6 July 1988 while working at Seacombe Gardens (opposite the Marion shopping centre) two masked gunman with sawn-off shotguns held up the branch. They were caught only days later and went to jail. A customer who was on the phone with a staff member at the time called the police, but the police attended the wrong branch in confusion. Later the bank changed the branch name to Marion to help prevent this happening again. Before I could tell Max what happened he heard the news on the TV and had an Asthma attack and spent the night in the Flinders Medical Centre. Max has now grown out of Asthma.

On 3 May 1990 while working at Noarlunga Centre (in Colonnades Shopping Centre), a man held up the branch by giving one of the tellers a note. He was never caught. Although I was in the lunchroom upstairs at the time, this brought back memories of the earlier hold up. I saw the bank's staff counsellor, Norm Sidebotham, a few times and was put under hypnosis which helped a lot, although I now don't watch movies with robberies!

When my friend Clare Spalding was diagnosed with a brain tumour, she asked me to be her Power of Attorney, which I was until she died in early 1991. She left her four-year-old son Christopher, who lived with foster parents until he died of cancer when he was 16 years old.

Hans loved his fishing more than me and I left him in October 1992 and we divorced on 3 December 1993. When I went to court for our divorce, Max

decided he wanted to come too. He said we had all got married so now we all needed to get divorced. He was 12 years old.

Max and I lived in my mother's caravan in a caravan park for a short while. Then in January 1993 I bought a unit at Morphett Vale. Max changed from Hackham East Primary School to Reynella South Primary School, and then attended Wirrianda High School. I was working part-time at Noarlunga Centre where I met Liz Coleman. We are still friends and keep in touch even though Liz now lives in Landsdowne NSW. I moved to the city to work in about 1994, changing to full-time work in about 1995. About this time, my employer, the State Bank 'crashed' (financial crisis). This made work difficult. Eventually State Bank was divided into two, with the 'good' bank becoming BankSA, which was bought by Advance Bank then later by St George Bank which merged with Westpac Bank in 2008. I have been in the BankSA John Martins Christmas Pageant twice, as a honey-bee then as a present.

About 1994 I was elected as Strata Secretary and Treasurer for the Strata Plan units where I live, which are positions I still hold. Living in a block of 19 units has its good and bad points. The good is the community atmosphere and getting to know lovely neighbours like Margaret Collett.

Tracey McGregor moved into a unit in our complex about 1995 and we are still friends. She moved out with her partner Mark a few years later. In 1994 I met Peter Herd and we dated for 3 years. Peter has three children and the five of us travelled to Queensland for a month long holiday in 1996, which also included Brisbane, Sydney and Canberra.

I met Maureen Gent through Peter, as he played soccer with her ex-husband Stephen Caggiano. Maureen and I have been friends since then and she stayed with me for a short while before she moved back to England in late 2002 and again after she moved back to Adelaide in early 2003. Maureen's ex-husband found their separation difficult and has caused a lot of trouble. Maureen and I each took out Domestic Violence Restraining orders; with mine also covering Max as he was also threatened.

In 1997 Robert Davidson came from Sydney to Adelaide for a short work contact with my employer BankSA and we became friends. We worked together again in 2001 but have now lost touch. I met his partner of 6 years Greg Smith and also became friends. Greg and his new partner Jeff Clancy married in 2006, hyphenating their surnames to Clancy-Smith. Regrettably I wasn't able to attend their wedding in the Blue Mountains NSW. Even though we've never lived in the same city, we're still friends today and meet up at locations around Australia.

About 1999 I started working with Ann Marie Betros and later her husband Jean-Marie Hetu and we remain friends.

My son Max met Melissa Cook on 22 November 1999 and having nowhere to live she moved in to live with us about January 2000. In September the same year they moved into a unit next door and on 22 November 2000 became

parents of Devin. I was a grandmother at 40 years old. On 11 August 2005 Taya was born, on 1 Apr 2006 they married and in June 2006 bought a house near me at Morphett Vale SA.

About 1999 I started volunteering with St Jude's Players, an amateur theatre company at Brighton. Geoff Brittain (whom I worked with at BankSA) was on their committee and asked me to come along. The first couple of years I did 'front of house' (showing people to their seats). The second couple of years I spent on their committee involved in membership, publicity and helped develop their website. They gave me a medal in 2000 and 2002 at the end of year Christmas Shows.

In October 2002 I accepted a retrenchment package from BankSA which allowed me to pay off my mortgage, renovate my unit and invest a small amount in the share market. In January 2003 I started working for the Child Support Agency which is a very different job but with lots of nice staff members, including Jill Safonne and Greg Venn.

Late in 2002 Geoff Brittain, Michelle Milette and I started work on the 'Festival of Brittain 2003' season of three shows, each with a different company. The year 2003 was busy but lots of fun and very rewarding. I met and worked with lots of nice people, including Shelly and Jim Howe. Our shows "scooped the awards" for the year. In April 2004 we incorporated our own company REDchilli Theatre Company Inc. I left in September 2005.

Coming up to his 70th birthday on 16 August 2004 my father became ill and spent his birthday in hospital in Mt Gambier SA. He deteriorated rapidly and the doctors feared he would not survive. He was flown to the Royal Adelaide Hospital where they operated to find cancer. After being in a coma for a week and a slow recovery, he was transferred to the hospital in Kingston for a short stay before going home and is well but the cancer has returned. In January 2008 he and his wife Jan moved into the Kingston Retirement Village.

On 8 December 2008 my step-mother Jan Edwards collapsed at home and was taken to the Royal Adelaide Hospital where she was diagnosed with a brain aneurism and died a week later. Her funeral was on 19 December in Kingston SE SA with many family and friends attending.

I love to travel and between 1993 and 1999 Max and I holidayed in Darwin, Alice Springs, Sydney, and Melbourne and of course we have visited Kingston SE often. I've also travelled to Perth and Cairns. At the end of 1998 Hong Kong was my first overseas trip. In February 2004 I went on a tour on my own of the top part of the south island and all of the north island of New Zealand; in November 2006 Greg Venn and I spent 2 weeks in America and Mexico; in January 2005 my father and I flew over Antarctica on a day flight and in October 2008 my mother and I cruised to Fiji, stopping at 5 islands. For the months of May, June and July 2008 I was transferred to Darwin to work and spent a lot of time looking around, including one days travel to Alice Springs for work. My father John and his wife Jan visited for a few days, as did my mother Marcelle for a week. In March 2009 I worked in Port Augusta

SA for a week. In December 2009 I have a trip planned to celebrate my 50th birthday – a fly drive of the south island of New Zealand, with friends Greg Venn, Greg and Jeff Clancy-Smith.

I started researching my family tree in about 1996. In 1998 I organised an Edwards's family reunion at the Belair National Park and started a website. My mother has helped with the research since she retired and to date we have found over 8,000 family members and had two books printed.