

Life as a Child in the Years 1933 – 1949 : Ada Fawcett

I, Ada Lovella Fawcett (Nee Spencer) was born in St Joachim's Hospital, Victoria Park, WA, on the 5/5/1933 to Lily & Vivian Spencer. I am the eldest of three siblings – Ada, Lila & David. We are fifth generation Australian, as our paternal great great Grandparents, Charles & Elizabeth Spencer, arrived in Fremantle aboard the Calista, arriving on 5/8/1829, which was the fourth ship in the first Contingent to come to Fremantle. Charles and his younger son, Joshua, eventually bought land in Serpentine, up above the Serpentine Falls. They built a little house made of pugged earth (clay mixed with blackboy rushes for reinforcement) and hand hewn shingles. All the family called this house "Carralong" because it is the banks of the Carralong Creek, but, on today's records, it is known as "Spencer Cottage."

Joshua eventually married Mary Ann Moore and one of their many children, was Charles Christopher Spencer, who was my Grandfather. He was actually born in this little house. One of Charles' sons was Vivian Claude Spencer and he was my father, who eventually bought the land with this little house still intact.. When I was around ten years old, my father would move the whole family to this farm for the summer so that he could grow his summer market garden – tomatoes, water melons, tomatoes, etc. He also made these shade houses, using tea tree branches for the roof and planted his cauliflower seeds, which became seedlings, which were transplanted out in winter on his Selkirk Road property. At weekends, we would help him carry the produce to the ends of the lanes to the road, ready to be picked up and put on the horse drawn sledge. It was then taken to the shady trees, where it would be packed and sorted for market. Our Dad had an old Chev truck to transport the produce to the market. We knew exactly which watermelons to accidentally drop, so that we could put our fist into the middle of them and so enjoy the sweet, richly coloured red flesh! Dad reopened up all the original water channels which my ancestors used for irrigating, so he could do the same. We also loved paddling along all these many channels. We also enjoyed catching the tadpoles. The water gravitated from the Serpentine River. There were all these cape gooseberry plants growing where the River was tapped, from the early days and they produced so well – we kids just loved them! When we lived here, it was so primitive and mother cooked on this big open fire place with all the hanging pots. We children had a marvellous time at this house for six months of the year. There were so many different fruit trees, now over 100 years old, which our ancestors had brought with them, growing all along the Carralong Creek. We used to pick all the fruit and the figs we would put them onto metal trays, then put these on the house roof to dry. We would have dried figs in jars well into the winter, - nice. Oh what a feast we had and all the fun of climbing up all the trees. Dad's workman, Bob Taylor, put a stone wall across the ford in the Serpentine River, which our ancestors had used for crossing the River, making it deep enough to learn to swim. Once we could swim, we were allowed to swim in the "big pool" as we called it, further down the River. We had so much fun in the River. One thing we didn't enjoy much, was helping Mother wash our clothes and sheets in the River, but it saved carrying water, as this is what we did using buckets, for the house requirements. Our daily bath was a swim in the River, but it did get a bit cold by the time we moved back to Dad's original farm on Selkirk Road for winter. To go to the Serpentine School we used to ride our ponies beside the Falls, on the track our ancestors put in and took their bullock teams and wagon up and down twice a year to go to Fremantle, to get flour, sugar, mail etc twice a year. It must have been such a hard life for the women back then. We kids were known as the three Spencer Mountaineers at the School.

Also every School Christmas Holidays, the whole family would camp in tents in the bush in Mandurah and we would walk into the town and go to the Vacation swimming lessons. We all did well at these and ended up with our Bronze Life saving Certificate.

Now back to my life on "Clover Hollow," Selkirk Rd, Serpentine. When married, my Dad purchased a four bedroom, timber cladding and iron roof house from a Peel Estate property and had it transported to his property. He built a very big cement tank, which filled up with water in the winter when it rained. All the water on the roof was channelled into gutters, which ran into the tank. We had to be very careful how much water we used in the summer months. When I was about eight years old, Dad built a brick and Cement tank twice the size of the other one. This one was at the Shed, which had a much bigger roof catchment area. Also because it was on a hill, we were able to have gravitated water and so had running water in the house – this was great. When living here we did so many different things. We played the usual hop scotch, skipping, walking in the bush – when I was a child there were so many beautiful wild flowers growing and we loved to pick a bunch of them and present them to Mother. It always made her smile when she received them. Her life was so hard, no power and only a No 1 Metter's wood stove. All the ironing was done with flat irons heated on the stove top. Later she did have a petrol one, which popped

when you lit it – I hated it. Mum was a very plain cook, but we did have very nourishing meals as we had a vegie garden, a small orchard, lots of sheep, so Dad would butcher a “killer” for meat and a jersey cow, which gave lots of milk, which had all this beautiful thick cream in it. We would scald the milk (bring it to the boil and not let it boil over, because it made such a terrible mess} then we would cool it and let it stand. The cream came to the top and you would skim it off. Bread with homemade jam and clotted cream was so yummy. From the cream, we also made our own butter. You had to stir the cream till the butter milk came out, then you would pat the butter with wooden pats to get all the milk out, add some salt and it was done. This was a job we girls often had to do. Mother would make lovely light scones using the butter milk, then out would come the jam & cream again – yum. All of us children could milk the cow and we had chooks, which we had to be feed, also the picking up of the eggs daily was our job. We bred our own chickens and we all loved playing with these.

Because it was so hilly (up in the Darling Ranges), we couldn’t ride bicycles, so our Dad would catch the Brumbies (wild horses) running wild out in the bush, then he and his workman would break them in, so that we could ride them to the Serpentine Old Bridge School. We had a horse paddock to put the horses in during the day. When we were little, the big boys would resaddle our horses to come home, but as soon as we could do it ourselves, we would. Lots of children rode horses and a few had a horse and cart to get to school. Many walked, some long distances and some without shoes, when I went to school. A lot of parents didn’t even have a vehicle. We only had a truck, which had no doors, but had a toolbox each side in the cab, so Lila and I sat in one each and David sat in the middle between Mum and Dad. Dad needed it to take all his produce to market. My ancestors also went to this school, only it was a different building, which burnt down in a bush fire.

The workman (Bob) would ride with us, all on our horses to the local agricultural shows, in Serpentine, Byford and Kelmscott, so that we could enter the different horse events. We all took out quite a few prizes, which was the highlight of the day. It was also good fun. For the Kelmscott Show, which was about 25 miles away, we would ride our horses the day before to my Aunt’s in Kelmscott, paddock the horses over night on her farm and we would share beds with our cousins and our Aunt and Uncle would give us our meals. We had lots of fun with our cousins and kept getting told off in the early night for talking too much and were told to go to sleep several times. We would ride in the Show the next day, then back to our Aunt’s for the night, then next morning, ride the long trek back to home. We mainly only walked the horses so as not to tire them. Today, everyone has horse floats, but I am talking about back in the 1940’s.

When kids we would climb the gum trees, I falling out of one twice, first time winding myself and couldn’t answer my Mum who was calling for lunch and another time, the branch came down on top of me and pierced my leg badly, my siblings lifted the branch off me – I was lucky it didn’t get an artery, but it revealed all the red and yellow flesh – looked terrible and took ages to heal – hurt when I rode my horses for several months. Another time I got hurt reasonably badly, was when Dad had come in for lunch from ploughing a paddock, with the horse to feed and water it and it had the chains and halter still on. I was approx six years old and already there as I had opened the gate for him, when Lila ran up to him and startled the horse and it took off, the chains flying around and one wrapped itself around my leg, dragging me down the hill as it went. Luckily there was a fence and it couldn’t go too far, but went far enough for me to be covered in cuts, grazes and bruises. It was summer time and I can still see all those jolly bush flies trying to cover me because I was lying on a bed on the verandah – it was horrible! It took ages to get better.

For fun we used to mimic our Dad and his caring of his sheep. We would get all the chips of wood from the woodheap and hammer them into the ground and make old fashioned post fences for all our paddocks. For sheep we would gather all the redgum tree nuts, look for big nuts for our rams and the little jarrah tree nuts for our lambs. We had a hole in the ground for our sheep dip and so our imaginations would go, - we sorted, shifted and dipped our sheep. For many ours we would do this – nice fresh air and lots of sunshine. We only had one neighbour a mile away on the S/W Highway and one of their sons, Ross Williams, was the same age as my brother David. In the summer, he would walk up to us, then the four of us would walk two miles down to the Serpentine River, swim all afternoon, then walk the two miles back to our house, grab an orange each off the tree, then the four of us would walk Ross back the mile to his home. His Mum would give us a cordial drink and a big piece of this beautiful fruit cake she would make, it was almost like a Christmas cake. After that rest, the three of us would then walk the mile back to our home, feeling quite tired. It is no wonder we are all so fit today. We would walk the three miles into the Serpentine township quite a lot too.

Another thing we did, was to get ourselves curled up inside a small truck tyre, tuck our toes and fingers in the opening, then be pushed and so roll down the short hill, bang into the fence and fall out. Roll the tyre back up the hill and do it all over again! The workman also put shafts and two wheels onto a wooden apple fruit case, then harness it up to the young calves. We would have quite rough but fun rides in this, all done in a small yard, so the calf couldn't go too far.

In the winter my Dad grew a lot of cauliflowers, potatoes and swedes. When we were older, we used to help him wash the swedes and potatoes in a tub – he siphoned the water from a dam close by. We also helped carry the cauliflowers out from the patch to the ends of the rows ready for picking up. He would pile the truck really high by putting the leaves of the caulies to the centre of the truck. Caulies had the leaves left on in those days. He would never let us ride with him when he went the mile down from the hills to the flats in case the brakes failed – we all always had to walk. Here again, we would eat the raw cauliflower and the swedes. We didn't like raw potatoes, however, we used to gather wood, make a fire and roast the potatoes, also apples and eggs, the latter being wrapped in lots of wet newspaper. We were real little bushies, but what an enjoyable childhood we had. Lila and I did all our high schooling at the Primary school by way of correspondence lessons – the work was supervised by the headmaster and posted to Perth to be marked fortnightly. I went to the UWA in Perth to sit for my Junior Exam – I was so nervous, but I passed quite well. David went to Perth Boys School in Perth for his high schooling. We did do some more refined things like, reading, fancy work sewing, crocheting and knitting. Our Mother was one who would not let us cook with her. We used candles for light to do our homework and had an open fire in the lounge room for warmth in the winter.

Well, that is my story. I had a very busy but healthy childhood growing up. We were very disciplined and had to remember our manners, none of which did me any harm! Here I am now 91 years, still very healthy, and walking everywhere, plus playing Carpet Bowls three times a week.