**A Kind Man**

When the boyish merchant seaman first stepped on Australian soil in 1919 he was overwhelmed by both the blinding canvas of blue sky and the searing heat. Thomas Murray was born and raised in a crowded London tenement perched precariously close to the sluggish Thames River.Even in 1888 when Thomas was born, London was a bustling metropolis with many famous landmarks such as Westminster Abbey, St Paul’s Cathedral and the Bank of London. When he first saw Brisbane Thomas had never seen such a primitive excuse for a city with its houses built on sticks and dusty unpaved roads. He had also never seen such open spaces, such brightness and a city that seemed to shimmer with hope. Thomas Murray fell in love with the promise offered by this colourful, tropical city called Brisbane. Little did he know then but he was to discover another love in Brisbane; his future lifelong partner, an energetic, lively girl whose parents also hailed from London.

Before he was born, Thomas’ parents, Bridgette Welch and Michael Murray, migrated to London to escape the unrelenting poverty and famine in Ireland. They tried to raise their young family of seven children beside the bustling fish markets of the Thames River in London .It was here that Thomas became entranced by the constant stream of boats and the seductive sounds of the river as it flowed into the mysterious ocean. But the young family was beset by terrible tragedies. Thomas’ younger brother, two-year-old Michael, drowned in the Thames River. Then, devastatingly, both Bridgette and Michael died from the diphtheria so rampant in those cramped, unhygienic conditions. The children were sent to St Catherine’s Orphanage. Thomas never spoke of it, except to say that he often hid in cupboards to avoid the raging nuns. After his experiences there he also vowed to always be kind and he escaped as soon as he could by joining the navy at fourteen. He never returned to England. He never saw his family again.

His immediate connection with Brisbane was strengthened further when he met fellow Londoner, Cathleen Johanna Tibbits, a slim mercurial girl who never seemed to stop! He noticed her always scrubbing and cleaning the kitchen of the riverside hotel where he and his fellow sailors stayed. Other times she would sit and read huge tomes of books. She amused him with her quick wit and her never-ending energy. Despite her father being a formidable 6-foot-8, Cathleen was tiny and as thin as a whippet. She always singing as she worked and her green eyes sparkled with mischief. Cathleen never changed, even after ten children and living a demanding life until she was 90! In those early days Cathleen found herself drawn to the handsome young sailor with his dark lustrous locks and kind soulful eyes. She loved his gentle manner and ready laugh, then and until his death many years later.

Thomas was always a loyal man who never shirked his duty, so much so that he enlisted and fought in the second world war even though he was forty and three of his six sons were already fighting. However when his navy ship set sail from Brisbane in1919, Thomas was not aboard, he couldn’t leave Cathleen. He was promptly arrested and thrown into jail for being AWOL. Cathleen was a strong-minded girl and persuaded her parents to pay for Thomas’ release from the navy. It transpired that her English parents owned that hotel she was always scrubbing and could easily afford the steep fine. Thomas subsequently worked at three jobs to repay the debt.

Thomas and Cathleen married and settled in Morningside Brisbane where my father, their fifth child was born in 1926. Even though Thomas was married, working fulltime and studying, he was still being hounded by the police for being an illegal immigrant. Ironically, one of his sons, my father, ended his career as the Detective Inspector in charge of the Ipswich CIB. When Thomas gained his qualifications the family moved to Dunwich on Stradbroke Island where he worked as the chief engineer. It was an idyllic life, a life that Thomas could never have envisaged back in his impoverished childhood. He and Cathleen were very caring and not only supported their nine surviving children but helped many indigenous children on the island.

Nine children and twenty grandchildren resulted from this marriage. The grandchildren became very successful: teachers, scientists, doctors, lawyers, mathematicians, engineers, a naval officer, a Rhodes Scholar, and even a famous rugby player who played many tests for Australia . The night of Thomas’ death some of those grandchildren visited him in hospital. Despite his pain he noticed my cousin Jan wearing her new dress and said sweetly, “Don’t you look lovely in your new dress.”

That was my grandfather: he stayed true to his vow and was a kind man to the end.