

Postscript...

I wrote this reflection nearly three years after my mother's death, and saw it as a postscript to my piece on the Warracknabeal Cemetery, written so many years previously. In fact, it completed the original, just as our mother's burial at Warracknabeal completed the cycle that began with her birth, a few blocks away, nearly 89 years before.

Our grandmother used to say that the old people were often called home at the turning of the seasons. If this is so, then our mother was right on target. She died on the first day of September, in her room facing the mountain under whose protecting shadow she had lived out her final years. For a life spent on the flat Wimmera plains, there was something comforting about that.

Our mother had coped with our father's premature death and the lonely years that followed. She had coped with the death of our aunt who was an emotional support for most of her life. She had coped with leaving her home and moving into the close community of the nursing home where her need for solitude and privacy were sometimes tested. But she could not cope with the loss of independence in her last months, as increasing debility robbed her of most of the pleasures she had always enjoyed.

When she finally died, shortly after 10.00 on that sunny morning which ushered in Spring, my tears were for my loss, not what she had given up. I was grateful that her unhappiness and frustration had ended; and for those of us who shared her final moments, and the hours that followed, that time was a blessing.

Our mother's funeral, at her suggestion, was held at Montrose, within the community which had ministered to her in those fading years. The following day she made her last trip home. We laid her to rest at Warracknabeal two days later and once again followed the shades of our forebears to that ordinary place made extraordinary by sorrow and memory.

The photographs my daughter took of us at the cemetery, after the burial, showed what looked like a beam of light, coming from above us and ending at the open grave. None of us saw it at the time, and neither reflections from other gravestones, nor the angle of the sun, seem to explain it. Perhaps it might be possible to rationalize it scientifically, but for me it carried the grace of a benediction. It was a benign acknowledgement that we had seen our mother's journey through to the end; that her pilgrimage had come full circle; that it was right that she had come home to that quiet place, and to the people whose love and loss had moulded her life.

It is a fact of human existence that most stories never end. The ripples of the mundane, as much as the tragic, the "what was" as much as the "should never have been", continue through many lives, often influencing generations totally unaware of what those influences were or are. For our children, our mother's death opened a glimpse into the past, and an opportunity to engage with our family story. It is a story irrevocably linked to what will follow, after we are long gone and possibilities undreamt come to pass.

Mitcham, 2012