

MOUNTAIN VIEWS

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OBITUARY

Blanche Gamble



★ "Her lovely face"

MRS Blanche Travastus Gamble died on August 15 at the age of 88 . . . a lovely lady known as 'Nan' to all her friends in Healesville where she lived for 42 years.

Blanche was born in 1904 at Balmain, Sydney. Her family came to Victoria when she was four years of age in the midst of a serious depression.

She grew up in Emerald Hill, now South Melbourne, and spent happy teenage years in Altona when it was a quiet seaside village . . . hence the choice by her family of the song 'Picking up Pebbles' which was sung at the end of the funeral service at Heritage Chapel last Tuesday. It was a moving service, attended by about 70 relatives and friends and distinguished by tributes from her children and grandchildren for, as the Reverend Tim Angus said, "She had the kind of lap that children could crawl into."

Numerous examples were given of the love, the devotion to family and the service to others that had characterised Blanche Gamble's life.

"For all this richness," said Tim, "for this woman of spirit, of courage, whose heart was large enough to be the warm heart and warm hub at the centre of family . . . we give thanks.

"She was ready to die," he said. "The pebbles that she had gathered from the different shores of her life had been arranged and burdens were ready to be laid down."

Despite her physical frailties Blanche had remained clear in mind and in charge of her affairs to the end, 'Picking up Pebbles' was a great favourite with Blanche, stirring memories from her early years lived by the sea, and the great love of ocean and shoreline that remained strong within her.

Blanche and her husband, Sam, reared their children at Coburg, where they lived for 25 years before coming to Healesville in 1950.

Sam died in 1978 and Blanche continued living alone in their Recreation Road (Badger Creek Road) home until five years ago when a serious fall made her realise that she could no longer cope without assistance. Her solution was to build a flat on to the home of Dot and Les Harsant and she enjoyed five years of peace and comfort there, sharing the lives of her widening family and watching her great grandchildren arrive and begin to thrive.

Although often in pain she was never known to complain. Her letter-writing continued to the end even though her arthritis-crippled hands made the going hard at times. She never missed any of the 34 children's and close adults' birthdays.

Friends and family visited often. She was never lonely. Her lovely face always had a welcoming smile that was invariably supported by the ever ready teapot.

Throughout her life Blanche was the sort of person others would turn to in time of trouble. During the war years she trained as a V.A.D. (member of the Voluntary Aid Detachment) and worked in Casualty at the Royal Melbourne Hospital.

When she first came to Healesville the same pattern of giving continued even though, from the age of 42, she began to suffer the arthritis that crippled her so badly in the last 20 years of her life.

During a crisis at the old Bush Nursing Hospital she and Sister Ann Tremellen kept its services going when an acute shortage of nurses threatened to close it. On one weekend in that period seven babies were born at that hospital!

As mother, grandmother and great-grandmother she gave and received much love. She was fortunate to have so many of her grandchildren born close by so that they, and she, knew the joy of their climbing into bed with her on mornings when they had stayed overnight. It was there that they were introduced to the demon tea, sipped from her saucer and later from a grown-up cup . . . her daughter, Dot, vows that if you put together all the cups of tea she made for her guests you would fill Maroondah Dam.

Blanche's daughter, Dot Harsant, said her mind was clear until the last. She gave her final instructions; she talked of her death and of those who had gone ahead and of those who would join her later . . . she was glad to cast off the body that had imprisoned her and prevented her doing to as many of the things she loved. But she never complained. Even though we all knew that she'd suffered great pain, her laughing blue eyes always reflected the smile with which she greeted everyone.

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Blanche Gamble

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Blanche had artistic talents in several fields, appreciated beauty in nature, and loved music. Most of all, she was a mother; one who could laugh with her children and grandchildren.

In 1985 she was elected the first life member of the Healesville Spinners' and Weavers' Group when she retired because of her health. All members will remember the years when she sat at the door of the Badger Creek Hall, collecting the admission money and chatting brightly to visitors who came into the Group's exhibitions.

In her last days her wider family came from all corners and sat and talked with her, put their arms around her and drew comfort from the knowledge that she knew they were there. She knew what she wanted and was at peace, knowing that the wheel would continue to turn on the hub she had built so strongly.

And from her grandchildren come these tributes.

Wendy Broughton (*nee* Penrose): "Where does one begin to describe our Nanna? The warmth she gave us when we looked into her soft, smiling face, the comfort we found in her arms . . . she warmed our hearts with her devotion and we warmed hers with a pride that only a nanna can have in her grandchildren."

Marny Hradsky (*nee* Harsant): "For two generations of children Nanna was the source of many good things: of cream sponges, tea sipped lukewarm from her saucer, of homemade icecream in the big yellow bowl with roses on it, of licorice all-sorts and jelly beans from the jar. Even better was the fun at family gatherings in the Recreation Road house. When our parents and aunts and uncles got together there was never shortage of that. We kids would watch the 'shenanigans' with enormous delight. Nan was generally the ringleader and at those times she seemed no older, or better, than we were."

Graham Harsant: "The times that stand out are the morning or afternoon, or for that matter the 'anytime', teas in Nan's kitchen, with the picture of Queen Elizabeth on the wall, Grandpa sitting in his chair in the corner puffing on his pipe, and the little silver sugar bowl with the spoon that hung from the centre of the handle. As small hands reached out for yet another slice of cake our parents' admonishments were always countered by Nan's reassurance that it was OK.

"We all have our special memories of Nan — the ready smile, the hugs, that twinkle in the eye that never faded, and the love she gave that enveloped us and, indeed, envelopes us all now."

It was Blanche's grandsons, Colin Gamble, Jon Penrose, Alan Gamble, Paul and Graham Harsant, who carried their beloved Nanna from the Chapel.

We send our fondest sympathy to Sam and Win Gamble, Dot and Les Harsant, Bill and Pearl Gamble, Bev and Bert Penrose and families . . . we know how much you will miss her.

