**Entry number 1**

**A Child’s Freedom**

From my earliest days, along with my brother Pete and Sister Meredith, life growing up on our farm was simply unrestrained childhood adventure. Often, either on horseback or foot, we roamed the Neerim countryside for miles, followed dust, winding cattle tracks along reedy creeks, watched beautiful, flitting Blue Wren’s guarding their finely woven nests secreted in knurled thorn bushes, or alternatively, explored dark cavernous gullies filled with mossy, towering Tree Ferns where lurid red, orange and white fungi flashed warnings of their poison.

With our trusty horses, Merry and I rode at breakneck speed along dirt fire tracks to follow the Tarago River deep into hazy blue mountain ranges. On these rides, the enveloping bush canopy soon became a deep green cavern, flashed by shafts of sunlight, punctuated by the sharp crack of Whip birds, or clear crystal chimes of Bell birds and where the heavy smell of decaying wet Bark tannin and eucalyptus wafted up from deep, dank, darkening gullies.

But, tranquil days of autumn were the best time. Sometimes when the phosphorescent disk of an Easter moon filled the sky and washed the landscape a pale silver in its glow, Merry and I recklessly galloped through purpled moon shadows and over ghostly fields. We were truly free spirits then and deeply in love with out big-hearted equine companions.

The sweet grassy smell of a horse, their soft silky noses, wise trusting beautiful brown eyes, soft furry ears, strong muscled flanks, smooth rumps and elegant legs made them incomparable childhood companions.

Riding bareback with nothing but a piece of green Hay Band around the horse’s nose, we pretended to be free-spirited American Plain Indians, but it was the sweet smell of our horses hides, the gentle sway of their ambling walk, the steady clop, clop, clop of their tireless hooves, which remained forever rhythmic and soothing to my soul.

However, in the classroom, my heart was never so free. It lay far, far away, back on the farm with horses and dogs; riding after cattle with wind in my face and warm sun on my back. Life was not about maths, or boring grammar, I thought, daydreaming as I looked out the classroom window on a hot summer’s day where an azure sky sank into sleepy, pulsating vapours.

Captive to my desk, I could only hear distant, clear, ringing tones of Ken McKenzie’s blacksmiths hammer: Dong – dong – Dong – ding, ding! Dong- Dong – Dong – ding, ding! The tolling anvil like a clear summonsing bell of the Angelis, beckoned me to return to an outside world which I loved, where the land and sounds of horse, dogs and cattle held me entranced. My heart fairly burst with the love for this other place which was freedom to me. Thus, as I remember, my early school years just drifted away, dreamlike, into an infinite, blue, sleepy summer haze.