

First Love

A Memoir of Tawa Flat

Philip Marshall

In 1951, my parents move from Lower Hutt to the fast-growing borough of Tawa Flat. Our new home is at 29 Tawa Terrace.

I'm enrolled at Tawa Flat school when I turn five. My teachers notice that I squint when looking at the blackboard, and appear unable to see it clearly. My parents take me to an optometrist. I'm found to be long-sighted with astigmatism in one eye. I get my first pair of spectacles. It's a novel experience to see things around me more clearly.

To get to school, I walk down Tawa Terrace, cross Duncan Street, and then descend a track to the overbridge at Tawa railway station. Sometimes I linger on the overbridge to enjoy the sight of a train passing beneath it.

I then walk along Oxford Street to school. There are lots of children walking to school and very few cars on the roads.

I enjoy morning story time. We sit on the mat drinking our milk while the teacher reads to us. I love Enid Blyton's stories about Noddy and his friends Big Ears, Mr and Mrs Tubby Bear, Mr Plod the policeman, and Noddy's car, which makes a "Parp, Parp" sound to let everyone in Toyland know that Noddy is coming.

One morning I hear a spluttering sound behind me and feel something warm on my back. It has a sour smell. A little girl behind me has thrown up. It seems she ate an orange before drinking her milk, which is something we shouldn't do. The teacher sends for an older boy who has a bike and he takes me home for a change of clothes.

Now that I can see print on the page, I make good progress through the Janet and John readers.

"This is Janet. This is John. This is mother. This is father. Look, Janet look. Come to the shop. I see a horse!"

I'm soon able to read books for my own pleasure. I'm lucky to live in a home

with many books. My father is editor of a magazine called *New Zealand Parent and Child*. He brings home copies of many newly published children's books that he's been sent to review. I remember the titles to this day.

One morning on my way to school, a little girl named Diane stops and offers me a ride on the back of her bicycle. I have to grip her shoulders tightly and stretch out my legs to avoid capsizing us.

Is it just a coincidence, Diane, that you are named for the Goddess of Love? I fall in love for the first time in my life that day.

On my way home from school, I see a pink flower growing on the bank that leads up from the railway overbridge. I would like to pick the flower and give it to you, Diane, but it's too high for me to reach.

Where are you today, Diane? I wanted to marry you when I grew up!

Sadly, early in 1955 we move to Christchurch. I'm enrolled in a new school, in Burwood, and fall in love with another girl, Caroline by name. But that's another story.



ABOVE: Our new home at 29 Tawa Terrace, Tawa Flat, 1951.

RIGHT: My brother Mark and I outside the house.



BELOW: Mark and I with school friends Anne and John Turner.

