

Jessie Jane Hawkes and Ordinary Life: How she inspired my Make-Believe World

My maternal Grandparents and Great Grandparents were born and bred in Hobart, Tasmania. My Great Grandparents graves can be found in North Hobart as part of a walkway. All were simple, religious, working class folk.

For the first thirteen years of my life I shared a bedroom, on and off, with my Grandmother Jessie Jane. Nana was severely crippled from arthritis, I never saw her walk. She had six children. She moved from Hobart to Victoria in the late 1920's with my Grandfather John James Jasper Hawkes. My Grandfather passed away 6 weeks after my parents married. Nana's care was then shared between my Mother and one of her sisters. She had no belongings other than her clothes and wedding ring. It was a sad, simple and physically painful life for Jessie, however she remained strong due to her Christian faith.

When I was a small child, my family also had little money, but we had lots of love and our imagination. I loved my Nan, she never complained and helped feed my virulent imaginings in very simple ways. Nan and I would talk and laugh about her fictitious boyfriend "Peg Leg" who often makes an appearance in my work. From her makeshift wheel chair she would teach me how to cook, sew and she was always a willing participant in my doll parades. In this body of sentimental "doll" works, I have depicted my lessons from Nana.

Jessie Jane is represented as a Tasmanian Tiger, the extinct animal being metaphor for the extinction of my family in Tasmania. Each doll has a body that is shaped like the Tasmanian map where the narratives occur. Nan and I made lots of rag dolls recycled from old clothes and stockings. As I reflect on my life I am grateful for the experiences I had with my Nana and how she taught me to be resourceful. I think her very ordinary life helped create a very extraordinary life for me. I think she would be amazed where our chats about Peg Leg, our cupcake making, love of animals and doll making has taken me.

Pamela Irving 2017