

# *Grandma's Recollections*



*In collaboration with Hannah Durie and Tayla Townsend*

---

## INDEX

Page 3	My Younger Years
Page 3	Letter from my Father
Page 4	My Dad
Page 5	My Mum
Page 5	My family moves to Thirlmere
Page 7	Our holidays with our grandparents
Page 8	The War ends
Page 8	My family moves to Abbotsford
Page 9	Leaving school
Page 10	My life with Tony (Grandad)
Page 11	The travelling years
Page 13	A Code to live by
Page 14	Computer poem
Page 15	Letter from Tayla and Hannah

---

My dear grandchildren,

Every generation has its unique milestones. For example my mother was born in 1903 and lived in a time of no electricity and motor cars, yet also experienced a man walking on the moon before she died in 1988. Here we are, now in the 21<sup>st</sup> century where everything happens at such an extremely fast rate it is difficult to keep up. With this in mind I thought you may be interested in knowing something about how life has been for me over the last eighty years.

### My Younger Years

I (Rita) was born into a Catholic family on the 20th of August 1937 at Crown Street Women's Hospital, Sydney. I am the youngest of three children; my brother Louis was born in 1932 and my sister Josephine was born in 1936. We lived at Campsie, a suburb of Sydney.



Irene Lutton with Rita, Josie, & Louis



Herb Lutton

When World War II broke out on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of September 1939, it changed all of our lives. We were part of the British Empire, so in July 1940 my Dad, like so many others, enlisted in the Army and was transported overseas to “fight for King and Country”.

**This is a letter my father wrote to my mother the night before he left to go overseas with the Army:**

*Dear sweet,*

*When you receive this letter I will be on board the liner bound to somewhere, God only knows. I left you all this morning under peaceful circumstances; I will always remember you and the children as such.*

*I kissed them goodbye as they lay asleep with no thought of worry or care and may God keep it so until I return to you all.*

*As a soldier's wife you will have to keep your chin up and keep on smiling. I will try to smile through it all come what may - I am in God's hands. Pray for me as I'll need them (your prayers).*

*With best love sweet, and to the best three kids in the world.*

*Yours ever,*

*Herb*

---

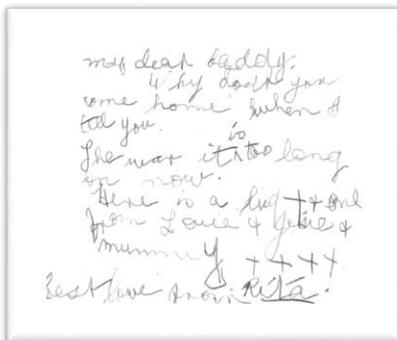
## My Dad

Herbert William Lutton was born in Erskineville NSW on 24<sup>th</sup> March 1904, the fourth child of Rankin Davidson Lutton and Christina McIntyre Lutton (nee Currans). He spent a great deal of time on properties in the Nyngan district where many of his mother's relations lived. He loved nothing more than going out with the men to round up the stray cattle, not just on school holidays, but whenever he got the chance. His mother said that if he had spent more time at school and less time out with the men, he could have achieved great things.

In his own way, he did achieve greatness as he had a wonderful caring nature and was always there for anyone in need. He visited the sick and those in jail - even the neighbours children were brought to him if they needed medical help. Once a little boy jumped on a piece of glass, cutting an artery and he was there to stem the flow. There were no doctors or ambulances nearby in those days. A more serious time was when a neighbour under the influence of too much liquor was waving a gun around at his family. His son came running to get Dad who calmly went into their house, removed everyone and then sat at the table and talked to the boy's dad until the police arrived.

While he was in the army overseas, mum made sure we all wrote to him and he carried our letters with him all the time. He brought them back with him and that's how we still have them to this day. It was years after both mum and dad had died that we finally read all of his letters, and it gave us great insight into his character. As an example, he once organised a surprise 21<sup>st</sup> birthday party for a young lad in their group. Dad thought it such a shame to have to spend your 21<sup>st</sup> in such a wretched place and was thrilled how happy it made him.

Here are two letters I sent to Dad. As I was only three, I drew a house with lots of windows to keep him cool. So mum wrote a message for me. The other letter was when I was about six and my frustration was certainly showing because daddy wasn't coming home.



Daddy come home



Keeping Daddy cool

Dad was a good letter writer. His letters read like a travel guide and - having converted to the Catholic faith when he married Mum - he was very interested in the Middle East. He spoke many times of his journey and how he was able to visit the Holy Places. He said he remembered how the teachings of the Catholic faith came to life while he was there. Listening to my father share these stories

helped me to understand more fully my faith and its history and to hear him tell it with such conviction would have made it difficult not to believe.

## **My Mum**

Catherine Irene Lutton (nee Williams) was born in Burruga NSW on 25<sup>th</sup> November 1903, the youngest of three children of Mary Aloisius Madigan and Samuel “Happy” Williams. As her father was a “powder monkey“ at different mines, they lived in very humble surroundings, either in tents or simple houses usually made from “wattle and daub” (wattle saplings with mud in between the rows to seal them) and a packed earth floor. In 1906 the family moved to Redfern. Mum recalled she and her sister Doris watching the gas lighter light the street lights in the evening and putting them out in the morning. All transport was by horse driven vehicles.

Mum trained in “Typing and Shorthand” but confessed in later years that as a country girl she was not confident enough to use these skills.

There were many strings to her bow: Governess, Mother’s Helper, Lady’s Companion and saleswoman to name a few. There were many hobbies: cake decorating, needlework, knitting, dressmaking, gardening and cooking were other skills mastered. Ballroom dancing, social committees, poetry were also pastimes she enjoyed. Mum had a great deal of spirit to achieve so much from her humble beginnings, continuing to do so throughout her whole life. With her many accomplishments, Mum created a friendly home full of warmth and love, surrounded by a beautiful garden.

## **My family move to Thirlmere**

After a scare when two Japanese submarines were detected in Sydney Harbour, it was decided to move the family to the country town of Thirlmere where my mother had lived as a child. I was three years old when we moved, so my first real memories were of Thirlmere.

Even though the homes in the Sydney area were basic, the cottage we moved to was extremely basic indeed. It had four rooms; a kitchen, dining, lounge and bedroom with a veranda running across the back and the front, with no bathroom or laundry. There was no electricity, only a pan system for a toilet and no running water - just two water tanks. As the saying goes “if you haven’t got the best, make the best of what you have” and that is what we all did.



**Mum & Rita**

Water was boiled on the fuel stove in a large tin container. We bathed in an 80 cm diameter zinc tub which was placed in front of the stove. On washing day, mum would use the same procedure and wring the clothes out, including the sheets, by hand, before hanging them on the old clothesline which had two parallel lines. After filling one line, this was hoisted up by a long length of sapling which had a vee shape at the top, called a clothes prop, to hold the washing in place while the bottom line was filled. It was a far cry from today’s washing day using washing machines and dryers.

---

Because of the shortage of school teachers, as so many were away fighting for our freedom, I didn't commence school until I turned six and went straight into first class. However as I had not completed at least six months, I had to repeat the year. School was very basic with bare boards - and hot in summer. There was no such thing as flyscreens or air conditioning. However, in winter, the teachers would light the open fire and on wet days we could take off our shoes and dry them in front of the fire.

Learning was mainly from charts and what was written on the blackboard. We did a lot of repetitious learning of tables, spelling, poetry and songs. Most of us can still recite our times table even now. We had spelling bees where we all stood around the perimeter of the room, and if you spelled the word correctly you went up one place and if you got it wrong you went down one place. It was very different from today with calculators, computers, overheads, internet etc.



Rita & Josie 1st  
Communion

On the third Saturday of each month the priest from Picton would come and say mass for us in the local picture theatre (actually it was just a community hall). Mum instructed us in our faith and when it was time for us to make our First Communion, she tutored us. Father Reeves used to call on us at home to check on our progress. I think Mum did a good job since when we moved to Abbotsford I won the Religion Prize in 3rd and 4th class. I have always had a strong faith and it has been such a support to me over my lifetime.

During the war years, only essential items were manufactured, so everything was in short supply - clothing, many food items, toys of any kind, luxuries etc. We were allocated coupons for food, clothing and other essentials so we all learned not to waste anything and to recycle whatever we could. This would be more difficult now as everyone has so much, whereas we lived in a time where we all had mostly basic possessions.

Even shopping was much simpler. We "did the messages" at the local shop owned by Mr Middleton. There were no supermarkets with numerous brands of everything to choose from, just the basics and the shopkeeper would collect every item for you from behind a long counter.



Sample of typical shop

Freezers hadn't been invented, so no one had a refrigerator and there was no frozen food. We didn't even have an ice chest; we only had a meat safe which was a square metal cupboard covered with small holes that hung in the breeze on the back veranda. We shopped regularly for perishable items like meat, butter etc. Milk was delivered in a horse-drawn cart twice a day. Any items of clothing etc. were wrapped in brown paper and tied with string as there was no such thing as sticky tape or plastic bags. We paid cash for everything as there were no credit cards of any kind.

---

We had a very happy and carefree childhood. We roamed the “bush” freely, picking fruit from an abandoned orchard where the house had burned down, or played down at the creek where we spent most of our free time in the summer. We climbed trees, made cubby houses from young saplings Louis cut, or just used our imagination which took us to faraway places, pretending we were on the lookout for pirates etc. We played marbles, chasings, skipping, hopscotch, or picked freesias from the bank on the railway tracks, which was safe as only two trains came daily - one each morning and the other at night. I often think of this when my own freesias are in bloom.



Rita Louis & Josie

Another exciting thing we did was go rabbiting with our brother Louis. We would go out late in the afternoon and set the traps by springing the trap open and then placing a piece of newspaper gently over the spring before covering it with dirt to prevent it from springing back. I remember how cold it was in the early hours of the morning, still dark, carrying a hurricane lamp in our gloved hands and wearing every possible item of clothing we could find. We walked across the frost covered grass that crunched under our feet as we collected the traps and any rabbits caught. Josie and I were sad to see the rabbits in the traps but glad once they were put out of their misery. For Louis it was an opportunity to make some pocket money, as he would skin the rabbits for Mum to cook and then dry the skins by turning them inside out and hanging them on a wire line.

Very few people owned cars and hardly anyone had a telephone in their home. Thirlmere was such a small town we didn't have a postman, so we collected our mail from the post office. If we needed to make a phone call we did it at the post office and the postmaster rang through to the exchange and they dialed the number. If a message was important, we sent a telegram which was also organised at the post office. Telegrams were the equivalent of an email or facsimile in today's world.

### **Our holidays with our grandparents at Rockdale**

I fondly remember the excitement for my brother Louis, my sister Josie and myself as we travelled with Mum down to Sydney from Thirlmere on the steam train on our way to my grandparents' home for our school holidays at Rockdale. It was usual for Gran, with a big smile on her face, to be waiting at the gate when we got off the bus at her house.



Grandma Rita & Josie

We would always have a trip to Brighton-le-Sands Beach which we enjoyed so much, as our home was many miles inland. However this also meant we had a few days of severe sunburn as we had very fair skin, but it was worth it. Josie and I couldn't swim, but Gran used to take us into the water and somehow keep us afloat in her arms.

Another exciting activity was to watch our Grandfather, our Dad, and our Uncles working in the foundry which was in the backyard of my Grandparents' home.

---

Naturally we needed to stay well back in a safe area, as they placed the moulded patterns in very fine black soil in rows which were then filled with molten metal that was heated to an extremely high temperature. When these cooled somewhat they used huge tongs to carry them outside where they were plunged into a cask of water to cool further. This part was exciting, as a great plume of steam rose up and gave off a loud hissing noise and we would squeal with delight.

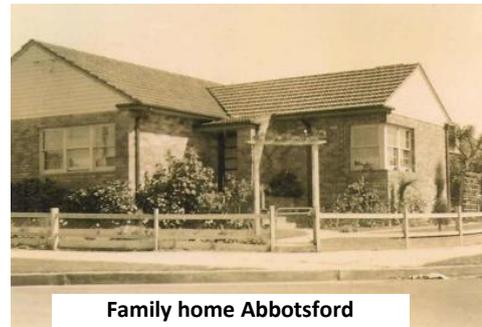
The best activity by far was the cupboard under the stairs. Josie and I would play in there for hours each day. It was such an adventure reading old magazines, comics, and books and just looking through all of Gran's knick-knacks etc. We were always a little sad when the holidays were over, but once we were back in Thirlmere we soon settled down.

## **The War ends**

News that the War was over was announced while we were at school and we were allowed to go home. As Josie, Louis and I headed for home, Mum came to meet us with outstretched arms and hugged us all. The War was over and Daddy was coming home.

## **The family moves to Abbotsford**

It was on Tuesday 7th May 1946 that we bid farewell to Thirlmere and moved to Abbotsford.



**Family home Abbotsford**

It was the May school holidays when we moved and it was all very exciting. The house seemed so big after the tiny weatherboard home in Thirlmere. It was quite something to move into a modern three bedroom brick house, with a gas stove in the kitchen, a lounge room, dining room, bathroom with a gas heater and overhead shower and an indoor toilet (with flushing water I might add). There was a laundry with two large wash tubs with a wringer attached and a gas copper in which to boil the clothes. There were no synthetic clothes in those days only cotton and wool fabrics, so the cotton ones were boiled and the woollen ones were hand washed.

When the school holidays ended, we had to start at new schools. Josie and I were enrolled at All Hallows Primary school at Five Dock while Louis was enrolled at St Benedict's at Broadway Sydney. I was in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade.

After finishing primary school at the end of 6<sup>th</sup> grade I joined Josie at Domremy College at Five Dock in 1950. High school was called 1<sup>st</sup> year (now year 7) and most children only went to 3<sup>rd</sup> year which is the equivalent of year 10 today. Only those considering university continued on to 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> years.

---

The curriculum was very basic with Maths, English, History, Geography, Art and French. We sang in the school choir, recited beautiful poetry and had elocution lessons, which taught us how to pronounce our vowels correctly.

For sport I played tennis (I won the School Tennis Tournament in 6<sup>th</sup> grade), vigoro and basketball, now called netball. It was a different story at home where I played cricket, football, soccer (with the boys) and sometimes judo with my brother Louis as I was very much the tomboy. Girls didn't play football or soccer in team sports then, nor did they do boxing or the like. Our sports uniform was nothing like today's uniforms as you can see in the photo. It had to be 5 cm below the knee and each pleat had to be ironed in place separately.



Sports photo Rita centre front row

We also took piano lessons, firstly from a very formal teacher where we were required to go to the Conservatorium of Music and sit exams. At the annual concert, Josie and I played a duet "Havana March" from the opera Carmen. We later received instruction from another teacher who was more inclined to give us more modern pieces to play.

By now Mum had entered the workforce, so before we left for school we made our beds, washed up and if we had time we peeled the vegetables for dinner. However, the hardest chore for us was to put the cat out before we left. The problem was our school uniform, which was navy with black stockings. You can imagine the difficulty in catching a ginger cat without getting hair all over our uniforms. We mostly walked to school, but if it was raining we sometimes caught the tram.

Most Saturdays we went to the pictures and on Sundays we often hired pushbikes. It was very safe as there were very few cars on the road.

## Leaving School

I left school in December 1952 and still keep in touch with many of my classmates. I attained my Secretarial Certificate of Achievement in 1953 and always worked in this field. In today's world I would have been a Personal Assistant.

My favourite pastime was ballroom dancing; in fact Josie and I usually went three times each week. These dances were the equivalent of on-line dating today, however we had the enjoyment of the dancing as well.

If a boy was taking a girl out on a date he would call for her at her home and if going to the "pictures" or to dinner he would always wear a suit and a tie. The boy always paid for everything even if the girl offered to provide some money.

Sundays were very much a day for recreation. Most people went to church. Only very small shops called "the corner store" were open and there was no formal

---

sport played. The CYO (Catholic Youth Organization) was the main social group. We went on hikes, bus trips, dances, picnics etc.

Television (black and white of course) arrived in 1956 just in time for the Olympic Games in Melbourne. It was around 1958 before we had our own television and it was not until 1<sup>st</sup> March 1975 that colour television permanently came to Australia.

I was born before:

television	computers	polio shots	frozen food
ball point pens	air conditioning	mobile phones	the pill
credit cards	washing machines	clothes dryers	penicillin
seatbelts	shopping centres	plastic ware	

In my day we were taught to be polite to everyone and to show respect to our elders. Also, to stand up and take responsibility for our actions. It was unusual to use bad language. We got married first then lived together.

“Grass” was mowed, “coke” was a cold drink, “pot” was something your mother cooked in, “aids” were helpers in the school office, “chip” meant a piece of wood, “hardware” was found in a hardware store and “software” wasn’t even a word.

### **My life with Tony (Grandad)**

We met at a dance at Lane Cove in 1962. The first thing that struck me was his wacky sense of humour. He was a good ballroom dancer. It was many years later that he diversified into a more individual style of dance similar to the “chicken dance” but fun all the same.



**Tony & Rita at dance**



**Rita Wedding Day**

I was still living at home and did so until the day I was married. This was the more traditional way people lived back then. We dated for a year and announced our engagement on 18<sup>th</sup> May 1963 and married on 4<sup>th</sup> July 1964.

We set up home in a flat in Drummoyne where we stayed for 2 ½ years until our first home was built in Cromer, moving in on 14<sup>th</sup> October 1966 where we stayed for 32 years.



**Family home Cromer**

Even though I had helped Mum in her garden with the pruning etc., it was still very much a learning experience creating my own garden. Living on a hill of mostly rock also was a challenge. However, with loads of advice from Mum and Josie, it developed well.

---



Stephen Peter & Martin

Our children arrived with the birth of Martin in 1968, Stephen in 1969 and later Peter in 1974.

While staying at home with the children, I enjoyed many pastimes including cooking, sewing, gardening, pottery, tennis, Toastmasters, iridology, calligraphy, first aid, photography, bible studies, interior decorating, computers and some child psychology courses (looking back I'm wondering whether or not it helped!)

As with all families, life was fairly hectic particularly after the children started school. On joining the Mothers Club, there were working bees, tennis tournaments, luncheons, fashion parades, setting up a Playgroup for the parish, and various committees. I was also involved with church activities, teaching scripture, preparing parents for the baptism of their children, Catholic Women's' League and the Frail Aged Group, just to name a few.

It was not until 1984 that I returned to the workforce after a refresher course at Brookvale TAFE. My most enjoyable position was as a Receptionist at St Luke's Grammar School from 1988, firstly when it was all girls (which I enjoyed very much being in an all-male household myself) and later with the boys and girls when the school became co-ed. I remained there until I retired in April 1999, just prior to our move to Tumby Umbi.

Of course it was inevitable that the boys would all grow up and take their place in society just as Tony and I did. For all the trials and tribulations of rearing the boys, I am very proud of their achievements. Even though they are all individuals, I hope they will always stay close.

My forty odd years of marriage to Tony was a mixture of ups and downs as is the usual case when rearing a family. Schooling, sport, injuries, car and motorbike accidents, parties, holidays, the list goes on, but the important thing is that we survived. With the boys moving on with their own adventures, Tony and I were then back to being a couple on our own.

On 31<sup>st</sup> July 1999, we moved from Cromer to Tumby Umbi into our new home which we built for our retirement years. We settled in and made new friends through our activities in the exercise classes we joined and also through the church community of Wyong. We both joined the St Vincent de Paul (although Tony has been a member for over 40 years) and found this work very rewarding. I joined a card making group and enjoy the company of this group immensely.

## **The Travelling Years**

In 1990 we took our first overseas trip through Canada, Europe, and the British Isles. Our next trip was in 1996 when we travelled through Greece, Turkey,

---

Sweden, St Petersburg Russia, Norway, Barcelona, Disney World, Florida, across America to San Francisco and home to beautiful Australia.

In 2001/2002 we travelled around Australia and this is a must for all Australians to fully appreciate the full beauty of this ancient land. As a gift to ourselves for surviving forty years of marriage we did a trip to New Zealand in 2004. In 2006 accompanied by Josie and Max we spent four weeks travelling around Tasmania.

That was the end of our travelling days as Tony's health deteriorated during 2007.

It was only six months after we moved to the Central Coast that Tony was diagnosed with prostate cancer and after a long battle he passed away on 25<sup>th</sup> January, 2008. I now live alone for the first time in my life. But life goes on and we must accept situations as they come to us. We must truly count our blessings and I have had many. We must be willing to let go of the life we planned in order to have the life that is waiting for us. Having you all in my life has been such a joy and filled the gap left by Tony's passing.



I became a grandmother myself on 26<sup>th</sup> December, 1991 with the birth of Chloe Beth Kerr, Martin & Sara's eldest child. It was a very exciting time for us all. This was a new beginning for me, as I was not only a parent but I was now starting the next stage of my life's journey as a grandparent.

Luci Alex & Livi

The excitement hasn't diminished with the arrival of each and every one of you. As you know, I now have nine and I have enjoyed everything from the first nurse when each of you was born right through every stage as you have grown; all the funny little conversations, and also the serious ones we have had about everything. I have enjoyed the things I have learned from all of you, particularly about computers. There is something special about being a grandparent.



Grandma & grandchildren

These memories bring to my mind all the wonderful visits you grandchildren have made to me and their grandfather over the years. I remember our "tea parties" in my china coffee pot filled with apple or orange juice and the little golden glass coffee cups. Also the homemade biscuits or cakes that you helped make. There were many highlights such as working in the garden and each planting your own choice of plant. Making a frame from shells around my mirror near the BBQ was great fun. Also writing the names of each plant on stones placed beneath the plant, to name just a few. I often think of you when I'm in the garden. There were lots of games, craft, painting, playing Chess, Uno, Grab, Canasta etc. I especially enjoyed our conversations.

I remember Timothy riding his billy cart that he and his Dad had made together, down my driveway. I must confess I worried the whole time that someone would get hurt. This eventually happened when Johanna - age three- decided to take a ride down the driveway on my garden trolley with disastrous results. I'm sure you

---

all remember the screams and the blood when her head hit the brick wall right on the edge. Fortunately we all survived.

On the whole the memories are good. We all had a great time. I hope you all learnt something from me as I certainly have learned from all of you.

The years go by.....you all grow up but still you come and visit me and its different now. We now talk about your futures and what you are all doing. I so appreciate your company and time in this busy world.

I would just like to express a few of my thoughts...Let's call it

### **"A Code to Live By"**

Always do your best  
Have a sense of humour  
Have fun  
Show kindness  
Don't speak in anger  
Be honest  
If you can't say something nice, say nothing

Remember life is all about constant change. You will have ups and downs throughout your life but no phase will last forever. These are "life lessons" the learning curves from which we grow.

Have a spiritual belief, it will help you in the hard times and give you a moral code to live by.

Strive to be independent: be able to look after yourself and pay your way by learning to cook, clean, do your washing, handle your finances, etc. in other words be able to survive all the everyday things in our lives. Help financially wherever you live; if unable to financially, then help physically towards the upkeep.

As you go through life try to keep a journal of the special events in your life and include the date. So much is forgotten as the years go by. By doing this, when you are much older your memories of the past will be so much richer. Also keep a record of things of interest your family tell you about their lives. It is not until we are older that we can appreciate the rich history of our family.

It's important to have a plan in mind for each day, it's a starting point even if you decide to do something different, and it prevents procrastination. We always feel better at the end of each day if we have achieved something.

Every life has chapters: babyhood, childhood, adolescence, adulthood, companion years, carer and the twilight years.

**Remember life is not a rehearsal so go for it and enjoy the ride.**

I can't believe I have just reached the grand old age of eighty. The celebration with all the family with the exception of Jake who was travelling overseas, was the highlight. It was humbling to hear comments from everyone; at times I thought they must have been talking about someone else. However it was lovely to feel the love of all of my family.

It's important to exercise the body and the brain so I will continue to learn new things. I have just started learning Mah Jong and will continue with my card making. I'll even continue with all the challenges that computers present. My gardening challenge these days, with help, is making it as maintenance free as possible, so different these days compared to planning new designs and ideas with different plants etc.

### **The computer swallowed Grandma**

The computer swallowed Grandma  
Yes, honestly it's true!  
She pressed 'control' and 'enter'  
And disappeared from view.  
It devoured her completely,  
The thought just makes me squirm.  
She must have caught a virus  
Or been eaten by a worm.  
I've searched through the recycle bin  
And files of every kind  
I've even used the Internet,  
But nothing did I find.  
In desperation, I asked Jeeves  
My searches to refine.  
The reply from him was negative,  
Not a thing was found 'online'.  
So if inside your 'Inbox'  
My Grandma you should see,  
Please 'Copy', 'Scan' and 'Paste' her  
And send her back to me.

I have now entered yet another phase of my life different from any of the others.  
It reminds me of the verse....

*Reader pause as you pass by  
As you are now so once was I  
As I am now so you will be  
Prepare yourself to follow me*

Rita Kerr  
October, 2017

---

## **Our journey with Rita**

Our journey with Rita has been so special and so memorable. Both of us have learnt many life lessons that we now cherish as well as “codes to live by”. We have gained much wisdom and light through talking with you Rita. We would like to thank you for everything and for letting us take a glance into your life story.

Being so young, sometimes you can get so caught up in today’s society and media. But talking with Rita and sharing stories amongst each other has made us so grateful for the things we have now like electricity, colour television, hot water systems etc. We just don’t know how you survived!

Our love goes with you!

Hannah and Tayla

---