

The rented bungalow in Beecroft was for us only a very temporary affair. Our first priority was to find a house, large enough, not too expensive, not too far away from the centre, new if possible, and in pleasant surroundings. We drove to estate agents far and wide, to all possible areas, and invariably the agents made suggestions of houses, they thought 'perfect' for our requirements. Ann and I learnt quickly to discriminate right from the agent's first words, and I started a card index of each house we saw. When we exchanged contracts for our 'right' house on 29 September 1950, it had taken us only four months to find it, and I could sell my index of 50 houses!

The address was 14 Sirius Avenue, Mosman, an old suburb on the North Shore of Sydney's world-famous harbour, and our 'perfect' house was separated from the Harbour itself only by a Nature Reservation of a belt of trees and wild growing castor-oil bushes. Nobody could ever build in front of us and spoil the view. It was brand-new, had no garden as yet, no air-conditioning (practically unknown then), but had central heating (quite essential for the damp and cool winters). One old eucalypt tree had been kindly left by the builders and I started to plant trees, as fast as possible, a veritable *Arboretum*. I remember that on a trip to Canberra, I pulled out of the ground a small poplar seedling and planted it at home. It grew 3 meters in the first year but had to be removed as its roots threatened the foundations of the house.

We were equally unlucky with a mulberry tree, whose red fruits spoilt the lawn, but lucky with banana seedlings near the kitchen which multiplied and bore many fruit from their, at first red and quite obscene-looking, bunch. There is another unlucky tree story connected with our house. On 30 May 1953, a day of double celebrations, the day it was announced that Mount Everest had been climbed for the first time by Hillary and Tenzing, and also the official birthday of Queen Elizabeth II. On that day I decided to use this holiday to cut down the old eucalypt tree.

It stood right in front of our terrace, and I secured it with a strong rope from falling into the street below. But the rope was not strong enough, it fell across the overhead electricity supply wires, cutting them with a beautiful display of sparks and depriving the district of electrical power. You should have heard the exclamations of "bloody pom" from the neighbours when they found out that I had been the cause of the local disaster. ('Pom' or 'Pommy', is the favourite Australian swearword for an Englishman, supposed to originate from his rosy cheeks, resembling a pomegranate).

We even hired a sheep to keep down the grass, but it preferred the flowers!