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'But that's the way it has always been, we've always moved after a couple of years in one spot.' Norma smiled as she gazed over her spectacles at me, responding as the knowing matriarch to my question. 'We've had so many homes, it's a wonder we don't just call the whole place one big home,' she added.

Following relatives and work, our small family travelled from Sydney to Perth in the early 1950s. Norma's recollection of that initial big trip was interwoven with nappies, baby blankets and her milk running dry from the stress of the move. She missed her mother, her friends and the green city of her youth; Sydney. Dad had returned from the war and begun to rebuild his shell-shocked life on the western frontier. Over the next fifteen years our family grew familiar with the three hour or more road trip back and forth from towns in the south west to Perth, singing our way to weekend gatherings, keeping our family connections alive and in harmony. Particular trees and buildings, smells and sights became landmarks; markers of mileage and sites of relief for all of us.

We shifted from house to house, never staying in one location long enough to really get friendships consolidated. I think that's why whenever we did land in a new school, in a new town, I worked really hard at being friendly, eager to join a fraternity of locals who knew the ropes and knew the roads. Those early days were times of open-armed information gathering. Where was the best place to play, who had the best bike for borrowing, whose mother made the best after-school snack? Norma always said that the first holiday break after arriving in a new town caused her anxiety due to all three of us children going out exploring and finding our personal place in the local landscape.

Our father followed the resources of work, often travelling further afield from the home base and we don't have strong memories of his presence in the houses of our youth. Norma, with her enterprising spirit of adventure and enquiry was our guide, showing us the roads to resources of our own. She always knew how to get to the shops or schools, and we relied on her totally in the early days of arriving in new towns throughout the years of our childhood. Norma helped us understand where we were by having us map our new landscapes making them our own and very personal. We walked roads, built dams on rivers, climbed trees and rode bikes to beaches, navigating our way through new neighbourhoods, using our maps and landmarks.

Moving from town to town became a routine that our family expected and with each new town, a routine of navigation and mapping started over again. Reading maps became second nature to all of us. I look at those maps now and am pulled back through the years to places now gone; the back steps that led to lanes, rivers and beaches and those long flat horizons.

When I was in grade five we lived in Bunbury. I had joined the class half way through the school year and I was invited to introduce myself to my fellow students. What a nerve-wracking experience that was but I brought in my collection of maps to show where I had come from. I stood up and said my name and then began to hold up each map of the previous towns I had lived in. Sometimes I had drawn several maps of the same town, each containing new elements of specialness. This was who I was, a mover and a maker of landscape maps. The maps drew the landscapes, the ones that lie behind your eyes when you close them at night. The ones you return to when you are alone. The smells that ricochet off your childhood, your adolescence, your memories of home. The sound of your tread on laterite and sand, the crunch of dry leaves, the smell of earth, the river and eucalyptus: these were the smells of Bunbury. When I stood in front of my class on that first day I had already begun to draw my map of this new place. The route between home and school had shown me possible spots of interest. Bunbury was coming into my knowing.

I asked Norma what she remembered most about the fifteen years of movement from place to place and she said, 'Washing lines, wood stoves and loneliness. We landed in a place to make the most of the situation for as long as we could. Your father was working so hard, often away from home for weeks at a time and I just never knew how long we were going to be there. I rarely planted a veggie garden, didn't know if we'd be around to reap the rewards. You kids were off exploring, collecting insects and flowers. Remember the flowers you used to press in your exercise books? But I was at home on my own. I wasn't going to go out without your father, or leave you girls at home at night. We were always busy but I was lonely. We never had long enough to make friendships that would last.' She paused a moment, seemed to turn something around in her mind and then added 'and we were never invited to join in with the locals.'

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Patsy Vizents.