

# Happy despite the hardships

By Laura Dobra | Published 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2018

Edith Baker, 84, known simply as ‘Nan’ to many, is content in her little cottage in Gingin with her beloved cats, Jimmy and Ella. You would never guess the struggles she has endured in her lifetime.

During the Second World War, Edith and her nine siblings lived in a tent near Merredin Peak with their parents, Albert and Mable Bowdidge. When a hurricane lamp was knocked over, the family lost their home and most of their belongings. They were destitute.

With only a push bike, one child in a pram and a few rugs, the family walked 80 kilometres from Merredin to Tammin. ‘We didn’t have shoes, couldn’t afford shoes,’ Edith says, ‘cause that was during the war.’

Their plight made *The Daily News*, with the Perth paper seeking public help to find the Bowdidges a home. The Child Welfare Department stepped in and housed seven of the youngest children, including Edith, until a house was found for the whole family in Parkerville. Edith’s father Albert then joined the army leaving Mable to raise all the children.

Edith began work at age 14, child-minding and performing household duties for Perth doctors, before meeting her first husband Lionel at a dance when she was 17. Lionel and Edith had three children together, but eventually Lionel’s gambling addiction ruined their marriage. Edith left him but the children had to move to South Fremantle to live with their paternal grandmother. Without child support or a car, Edith rarely saw her children except for their birthdays.

Edith worked full-time at the National Hotel Fremantle, where she met her second husband, Frank. However, she was later dealt another blow with the tragic death of her 25 year old son Victor in a workplace accident.

In 1999 her husband of 38 years, Frank, passed away and shortly afterward Edith was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. ‘They gave me 90 days to live, they said that’s the maximum you will live.’ But she is still here.

Edith moved to Gingin so her daughter Maureen could look after her. She continued working well into her seventies, making salad bowls in Maureen’s family business, The Loose Leaf Lettuce Company.

Living in Gingin with her cats, and staying busy with baking and gardening keeps her going. ‘Here, I’m happy,’ Edith smiles.



*Edith with her self-decorated hat for Melbourne Cup 2005 at The Loose Leaf Lettuce Company*