



Prologue

Through the Eyes of a Child

If you had been walking across the William Jolley Bridge that sultry February morning, and if you had been looking out for it, you would have seen a cream-colored car with absinthe-green panels. A new 1957 Holden, it pointed south toward the Oral Deaf Preschool at Yeronga, a suburb of Brisbane, in Queensland, Australia. You would not have understood the significance of its journey at the time. Not even the participants in that journey could have reasonably anticipated what would follow in the years to come. The car was heading not just to a school, but to an entire new world of opportunity, a world that promised spoken speech as well as an education for little deaf children.

The driver of the car was my mother, a thirty-three-year-old woman with dark brown hair. She wore black-rimmed, bat-wing-style glasses that framed her olive-green eyes. The fierceness of her glasses was softened by her summer frock with its pattern of roses and a cinched waist. My mother looked ahead of the car in front of her and saw that the pace of the traffic had faltered. She pulled on the car's gearstick and tapped her fingers impatiently on the steering wheel.

I sat in the back seat of that car. I was three years old and had wispy blonde hair and a dimple in my left cheek when I smiled. But now my chin was crumpled in a fury of crying. A breeze filtered through the open windows. It lifted my hair off my forehead but did not ease the red flush

of my face. My cries must have sounded like the tearing of metal. My shrieks ebbed into the defeat of hiccoughs before gathering new strength for another onslaught of rage. I grabbed my left ear as if to peel it from my head. A pink button was pushed into its ridges and hollows. The plastic cord dangling from it was attached to a metal box the size of a cigarette pack, encased in the pocket of a grey gabardine shoulder harness strapped around my body. I yanked at the cord once, my hand whitening with the effort. I yanked it again, and then I gave it the hardest yank of all.

My mother heard the catch of breath and glanced up at the rearview mirror just in time to see the pink button wrenched free from my ear. It popped out with a force that launched it up, up, and out, out into the air beyond the car window. The button's cord traced a glorious arc before falling beneath the wheels of the cars behind us. I rested my head against the sticky vinyl of the car seat, my hair still fluttering in the breeze, my sea-green eyes blinking against the white clouds of softness falling into my ears.