



If You Knew Susie

THIS IS A PREVIEW SCRIPT. THE COMPLETE SCRIPT IS AVAILABLE FROM FOX PLAYS

The life and laughter of
Suzanne Catherine Du Val
1917 - 2000

*"Australia's answer to Jennifer Paterson
(from the television series, 'Two Fat Ladies')"*
Daphne Guinness

*"I wish I hadn't misspelt Sue Du Val's name in Vogue. She was
seen correcting all the copies at a Double Bay newsagency."*
Marion von Alderstein

Written by **Cenarth Fox**

Originally Performed by
Louise Whiteman nee du Val

Directed by
Kevin Trask

If You Knew Susie

The woman who changed Australia's eating habits

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Published by Fox Plays
www.foxplays.com

Synopsis

“She made the whole world laugh”
Franciscan priest and friend of Sue Du Val

Sue Du Val was a Sydney identity. The term “hostess with the mostest” applies perfectly to Missus Du Val. Running her midday cooking school, she was, literally, a legend in her own lunchtime. In her Woollahra home, where it was said her front door was always open, she gave cocktail and dinner parties, ran hilarious cooking classes and entertained anyone and everyone. She was a fantastic people person and no-one was excluded. She had the skill of successfully bringing people together enabling them to enjoy themselves and then some.

Sue was a superb cook, passionate animal-lover and keen gardener. She was also a paradox. She loved her grandchildren but couldn't remember their birthdays. She could swear like a trooper but never missed Mass. She befriended Labour prime ministers but steadfastly voted conservative. Once Sue was born, the mould was not so much broken as shattered.

During her lifetime, Sue was encouraged to write a book about her life. If she did, it's never been found. Hopefully this play will bring back happy memories for those who knew her and introduce others to a truly remarkable woman.

First Performance

The world premiere of *If You Knew Susie* was staged on Thursday April 26, 2007.



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Costumes and Movement

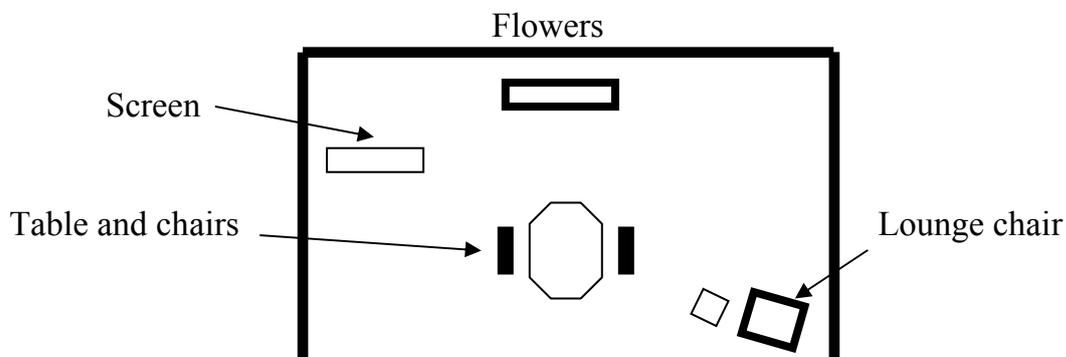
Sue is at home during the afternoon. She is giving a cooking class for a group of women and preparing for a TV cooking programme in which she is soon to appear. She could wear an apron at first and is happy to muck in re the ingredients. She is casually dressed.

There is some cheating regarding Sue's age in the play and her activities. She is not young in this play but her cooking classes and TV appearance took place when she was a younger woman. People who knew Sue may know the dates are wrong but poetic licence rules. Sue cannot recall tales of her middle age if she is only 35 – hence the cheating. She is fairly nimble and certainly fit enough to leap off a South American mountain. Her make-up is that worn for a normal day at Roslyndale Avenue.

Set Design

There is only one set – part of the interior of Sue's house although liberties have been taken. We are in the kitchen/living room and dining room combined. The kitchen table or bench is the main feature. Cooking equipment is on the bench together with ingredients and wine bottle and glasses. A small table and/or mini-sideboard are to one side or upstage and are used to display flowers, place a telephone and photographs.

A lounge chair is downstage to one side and is not used until late in the play.



Character

Sue was a real person and well-known to many. To portray her in any way other than who she was would be both unkind to Sue and theatrically disastrous. Sue was Sue.

Headings

The sub-headings throughout the script are not to be spoken but act as starting points for rehearsals.

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[Music is played just prior to the curtain. It's music from the 1920s to 1940s, a time when a young SUE was growing up in Australia. The music slowly fades when the play is ready to begin. As the house lights dim but not completely, and the music is fading, SUE is heard offstage]

SUE *[Calling]* I'll just be a minute. Pour yourselves a drink. And watch out for the cats.

[SUE enters wearing an apron and carrying a pot which she places on the table/bench] Now girls, this afternoon we're going to prepare a simple meal. *[To guest]* Darling, you haven't got a drink. *[Collects a glass herself and drinks]*

Remember the rules for my cooking classes – loads of fun, lashings of cream and copious amounts of alcohol. *[Proffers her glass to all her students]* Cheers. *[Drinks]*

[As she potters with plates, pots, etc] Now everyone needs one of these and, *[Realises her mistake]* oh silly me. *[Moves something on table]* If I seem even more eccentric today and start talking to an *[Indicates audience]* imaginary audience, it's because next week I'm doing a cooking segment on *The Mike Walsh Show*. *[Excitement from students, SUE calms them and reaches for plate on which are imaginary ingredients]* Yes all right, settle down. It's just a trial to see if I'm any good. *[Students tell her she will be wonderful. Mock modesty from SUE]* Thank you, ladies, most kind.

But back to business. Today we're going to prepare a wonderful French dish I call *Veal Fangio* named after the best Formula 1 racing driver ever - Juan Fangio; *[Raising eyebrows/smiling]* someone I got to know quite well. *[Reaction from students. Mock shock from SUE]* Please, I'm shocked, and me being such a good Catholic widow. How could you even think *[Pause. Twinkle in eye. Reminisces]* actually he was rather nice. *[Smiles, remembers]* He made love the way he drove – smooth gear changes, eased into tight corners and *[Accelerates into punch line, slaps table]* was a bloody fast finisher. *[Shrieks of laughter]*

Oh dear. *[Wiping eyes and collecting imaginary ingredients]* Now the shallots. *[Moves around watching the students as they prepare food]* Wash well but don't be too fussy with the slicing. It's the thought that counts. *[To student]* Preparation; get the beginning right and the end'll take care of itself. Bit like making love. *[Laughter then drinks]*

[Responds to comment from student] Oh lordy, lordy. I'd like a dollar every time someone asked me that. *[Students persist]* All right. I've never told my life story because I haven't got the time, I'm too lazy and no-one'd be interested. *[More protests from students and more false modesty from SUE]* Oh, please; flattery'll get you everywhere. *[SUE changes her mind and gives in to the students]* Oh, all right, let me practise speaking to the television viewers.

[Shaking her head, SUE moves downstage and addresses the real audience, the imaginary audience she referred to earlier] Ladies and gentlemen out there in television land, I realise you've tuned in to watch me cook but my students and friends are constantly urging me to pen my memoirs. "Tell all, Sue," they say, "tell all". I couldn't think of anything more boring. Okay, I've travelled a bit, thrown the odd party and generally had fun but hasn't everyone?

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[Turns back to still protesting students] Girls, are you *really* interested in Sue Du Val? *[Shocked]* Oh come now, *[Wanders towards them shaking her head]* you're just being kind. *[Is handed or picks up an imaginary or real piece of paper]* What's this? *[Shocked]* Topics for Sue's autobiography! *[At students]* Who wrote this? *[Pause, SUE looks at eager students then turns back to address audience]* They want me to tell my life story. Would you mind? I promise I'll finish quickly then get straight back to the *Veal Fangio*. *[Pause]* Did I tell you *he* was a fast finisher? *[Smiles. Shares intimate secret]* I chased him halfway across Europe.

[Back to ladies and pours herself another drink] You really are terrible and I need a drink. One of my friends says I'm often thirsty. *[Drinks then lectures the group]* And you can tell a great deal about someone by the way they make a gin and tonic.

[To women] So what exactly do you want to know? The what? The list? *[Finds list and reads. Does she need glasses?]* Sue's earliest memory? *[SUE stops and has to think about this]* Well knowing me, it was probably baring my bloomers. *[Throughout the play, SUE drinks from time to time. Her dialogue continues throughout]* I've always believed one should be oneself. Airs and graces tend to get in the way.

I was about five and took religious instruction at the local Catholic boys' school. *[Mimics a polite child – not herself]* We young gels walked quietly down stairs to the playground as refined young ladies.

Bugger that I thought. Life was meant to be fun. *[Mimes the routine as herself]* So I climbed on the banister and flew down backwards with me bloomers in full view. *[Starting to hitch her dress and addresses the real audience]*

[The audience is not warmed up enough to agree at this stage and do not show unbridled enthusiasm for an underwear sighting at this stage. Mock disappointment from SUE who continues]

My childhood was never dull. I was born in Newcastle in the family home called Halcyon, built by convicts and still standing today.

[Here SUE is reminiscing more as opposed to speaking to her listeners] My father was Archibald Aloysius Rankin, a tall, elegant man with the most beautiful hands. George Lambert painted my father's portrait many times – and mine. *[Indicating]* It's hanging in the hallway. *[To audience - checking]* Now you have heard of George Lambert, the great Australian war artist? *[Most haven't and SUE shakes her head in disbelief]*

Archie was a prominent lawyer in Newcastle and helped build the Royal Newcastle hospital, airport and golf club. He must have been inspired by his father-in-law, Edward Percy Simpson who helped found the Royal Sydney Golf Club.

[Going to table and bottle of wine] Time for a top-up. *[Re-fills her glass]* One of my friends says I'd have a party at the drop of an olive.

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FAMILY TREE

What's next? *[Student tells her]* Family tree? Well, where do I start? Archie's great uncle was Long John McDonald the whisky distiller. *[Toasts]* Cheers Long John. And Vera had a regal touch with a French aristocratic grandfather, the Marquis Auguste Pierre De Guerry Lauret.

The young Marquis was a close friend of Charles the 10th, King of France, and when His Majesty was sent packing, he and Great-Grandpa roamed Europe dropping in on all the local royals.

Eventually the Marquis settled in Australia and three generations later, here I am, mixing my French aristocratic blood with this fine Australian white. *[She toasts]* A votre sante.

[Remembers] Oh and there's a British royal connection though not by blood. Mum and Dad chaperoned the Duke and Duchess of York in 1921 showing the future King and Queen of England the glorious sights of Newcastle. *[Goes looking upstage]* There's a photograph here somewhere.

FX *Instrumental version of God Save the Queen/King plays quietly for one verse. SUE continues without pause*

[Back at real audience] Now I'm sure you've heard of Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother? *[Audience nod]* Of course you have. *[SUE finds photo and brings it down]* Here it is.

They say Vera and the Duchess were alike. *[Shows photo to audience]* Same quiet nature, same sense of humour, knew their place; and even looked alike.

[Taking photo back to its place] Now I'm afraid Oscar Wilde was wrong when he said, "All women become like their mothers" because I didn't.

Vera believed everyone should have their name in the paper twice – when you're born and when you die. *[Pause. Truthful statement]* I was never *out* of the papers. *[Drinks]*

I'm the youngest of four – and certainly the most outrageous. *[Looking at her watch]* And we're not going to finish this in five minutes so what's next? *[SUE looks at list]* School?

Well I boarded at Rose Bay Convent in Sydney where the nuns were very good at teaching bridge and speaking of which, in 1932 I saw the last span of the coat-hanger being put in place while Captain De Groot was at home polishing his sword. *[Smiling at audience]* And who amongst us has heard of Captain Francis De Groot? *[Smiles as someone indicates]* Oh well done.

Mind you the nuns must have been very good at imparting their faith because I've been a devout Catholic all my life. *[Smiles as if butter wouldn't melt in her mouth]*

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[Looks and sees flowers not ready. Swears] Oh shito! The flowers. [Goes upstage, collects some flowers and brings them down to small table where they are arranged in vase. SUE keeps talking as she arranges flowers]

NEWCASTLE

Growing up in Newcastle was ... different. I never cleaned my own shoes as we had a maid on every floor and they did everything *[Indicating her handiwork]* ah, except this. Vera did the flowers. The maids wore a beige dress by day and changed to brown for dinner. Cook prepared our meals and it was not proper for Vera to even set foot in the kitchen.

[Remembers with pleasure] I remember once when she did. There she was, the lady of the house, *[Mimes demonstration]* making butter. People talked about it for ages. *[Shock, gossip]* Missus Rankin was in the kitchen.

And then there was Ranji Rankin, a Tamil Indian Archie brought home to be our butler and general factotum. *[Mimes taking up tray and moves as RANJI]* He dressed completely in white with a magnificent turban. *[Becomes RANJI serving drinks]* “Brandy Cruster for the memsahib.”

He entertained us by removing his glass eye and lived in a shed at the bottom of the garden where he sang drunkenly into the night. *[Does she imitate RANJI singing? Perhaps a line of “It’s A Long Way to Tipperary”]*

[Comes back to flowers and arranges them at small table] For decades I bought flowers from George in Oxford Street and drove miles when the markets were open. Nothing lifts a room like fresh flowers. Now, what’s next? *[Pause as one of the students tells her]* Marriage? *[Slight discomfort]* Oh do we have to?

[Mood change. SUE finds some parts of her life-story to be painful. She could sit] This is too much for a Catholic widow.

[Decides to get it over with] I met the best-looking man in Sydney; dashing pilot, rugby-player and all-round good fun. Doctor Robert Du Val and I were married in St Mary’s Cathedral, Sydney in January 1939 and, even if I say so myself, we made a handsome couple.

[Collects photo from upstage]

There’s Bob; delicious isn’t he? *[Shows photo to audience]*

WORLD WAR 2

We sailed for England and stopped off in Monte Carlo where our honeymoon was gate crashed by that Austrian painter, Adolf What’s-‘is-name. We decamped to London just in time for the blitz. *[Photo put away. SUE takes single chair and it becomes an ambulance]*

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FX *Sounds of war, planes, bombs, ambulance, etc.*

[Lighting dims, special effects if possible with searchlights]

Bob joined the Royal Navy as a ship's doctor and I drove a London ambulance. *[She peers into the audience who are in the gloom]* I had trouble seeing at night *[Enacts her experiences]* so the other drivers fed me carrots. *[Steering with one hand and eating carrots with the other]* London was one hell of a place in 1940. Some nights I helped East-End kids remove nits from their hair.

During one air-raid I crawled under a table. *[SUE kneels and sticks her head in under the chair]* Mind you if the house scored a direct hit, the table would have been bloody useless. And this particular air-raid, sharing the underside of the table was none other than Rosa Lewis. *[In cockney]* "Hello Ducky," she said. "Ain't exactly the Cavendish." *[To audience]* You have heard of the Duchess of Duke Street? *[SUE climbs out dusting herself down and replaces chair. You know]* Television series, 30 episodes.

[Chair replaced] Being in the Royal Navy, Bob was based in Portsmouth so I found a flat in the town and couldn't believe the cheap rent. *[Indicating roof]* Bob knew why as he pointed to the huge skylight in the ceiling. It made our flat a prime target for German bombers.

We grabbed a weekend or two in London and stayed in Lady W's flat. She left for America giving us the run of the place. *[Plummy voice]* "I don't care what you do with the furniture, just take care of my exotic fish." Bob thought they looked a bit seedy so placed a sunlamp over the aquarium whereupon they all died.

Bob was appointed ship's doctor on *HMS Eskimo* and soon found himself in a serious naval battle off Norway. A German torpedo blew off the *Eskimo's* bow and there were many casualties as Bob leapt around the damaged ship. It was dangerous and terrifying but thank God he survived. The *Eskimo* limped into safe harbour and Bob's bravery was rewarded with a Distinguished Service Cross.

So with me in a borrowed hat from Harrods, off we went to Buckingham Palace to say hello to Mummy and Daddy's former chums, *[Curtsey]* King George the 6th and Queen Elizabeth.

FX *War-time sounds/lighting fade and previous lighting resumes – gradually*

We survived the war, came home to Sydney and started a family – a girl and a boy. *[SUE is serious and finds it hard to tell this part of her life-story]* But Bob was restless. He wanted something more. He returned to London and further study. Suddenly, out of the blue came shocking news. My husband was dead; unexpected, inexplicable and wretchedly sad.

In itself the news was devastating but far, far worse were the unanswered questions. Why? Was it a terrible accident? Was he depressed? Did he suffer and could I have done anything to prevent it?

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[Pause] Some things we'll never know. And if we all have a cross to bear, that was mine.

[Brightens a little] So, Suzanne, you're a widow with two young children and little money. What now? Back home to your parents? Find a new husband? Struggle on some modest pension?

[Remembering her decision. Becomes decisive. She could bang the table and move around gesticulating to her students] No. None of the above. It was time to stand up, Sue and live life to the full.

[Now on a roll as the good memories kick in] For years I'd seen how Australians ate the same boring, stodgy meals; the infamous chop and three vegetables where carrots were tortured, cabbage was boiled to death and potatoes were mashed until they begged for mercy. *[Uses hands to declare]* The great *[Strine for next word]* Orstraylian cuisine.

Oh and don't forget the mouth-watering puddings. *[Pause then imitates ocker housewife]* "Grab that can-opener, father and I'll pour some cream on these tinned apricots." *[The piece de rotten resistance]* And don't get me started on that appalling coffee powder or the cheese masquerading as laundry soap.

[Back to her enthusiastic self] You see I'd always loved fine food and good wine and hated bland and boring meals; I wanted something better, much better, so I thought, if I can learn to cook fine French food then teach it to others, I'll live a dream and earn my living at the same time. *[Rallying cry]* Europe is calling, Sue; your kitchens await!

COOKING TRAINING

I made a life-changing decision. With my children in boarding school, I headed to the kitchens of the Ritz in Paris and the Dorchester in London where I worked my fingers to the bone learning everything about French cooking.

The Marquis, my French great-grandfather would have been proud. I spent a week with the pastry chef, another with meat and poultry, a week on seafood and so on and was always washing pots and cleaning floors. It was an all-male staff and I became doubly popular when I gave away my weekly beer ration. *[Drinks wine]* Can't stand beer.

So armed with my knowledge of French cooking, I returned to Australia and set up home *[Indicating]* here in Woollahra. My mother-in-law, Helen, helped me buy two adjoining cottages and in time they became one.

And it was here in this house, I dragged Australians away from their soulless, tasteless meals and taught them how to cook and consume simple but sophisticated fare. I taught cooking so well to so many that the Sydney telephone directory listed my name with the word *Gastronome*.

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Not many know that when it came to the revolution in Australian cuisine, Sue Du Val was a leader of the pack. In fact I was so much in demand that for decades I catered for Sydney society in their homes and en masse in such venues as the Wentworth Hotel. For fifty years, cooking, cats and conversation filled my life and this house to overflowing. *[Goes over to table to finish flowers. In SUE'S mind the story-telling is over]* And that ladies is the menu of my life.

BOOK CONTENTS

[The students protest] Oh please. We're here to cook, laugh and drink, not to listen to the merry Catholic widow prattle on about her sordid past. *[Moving around table urging students to cook]* So come on, let's saute. *[Is handed another list. Shocked]* Another list? Where did this come from?

[Reading from new list. As she reads she gets louder and more exasperated] Language. Colours. Travel. Food. Alcohol. Animals. Religion. Sex. Politics. Neighbours. Famous People. Zippers. *[Emphatic, outrage]* My Funeral!

[Turns on students] There's something fishy here and it's not the trout for tonight's party. You've been talking to my friends. *[Discovers notebook and reads]* And you've been taking notes. *[Reads]* "Sue swears like a trooper." *[Snaps at students]* Bastards! Who the fox-trot uniform Charlie kilo told you that?

[Reads some more] "House painting?" *[Snaps again]* Well what colour *is* the sky?

[Reads again] "Flying carpets and crockery." "Cats, rats and spats." *[Smiling]* Oh very droll. *[To students]* And you want details on all of this? You'll be here for a long time. *[Indicating herself]* There's a lot of meat on these bones.

[Heads downstage and addresses audience] Viewers I do apologise for the interruption to the scheduled programme. My silly students are determined to make me spill the beans. Sue's selective snippets. *[Nudge nudge wink wink]* I promise I'll be quick.

[SUE moves back to the students and gets involved in the story-telling, her whole focus is on her memories]

COOKING CLASSES

My cooking classes were held right here and food was my salvation. I taught cooking, catered for wealthy families and had my friends round for wonderful dinner parties.

By day, *[Indicating students]* young housewives like you sat around this kitchen bench and learnt French cooking complete with lashings of cream, uproarious laughter and far too much alcohol.

[She swigs again]

By night I cooked for lavish dinner parties and private balls in the mansions of Darling Point, Bellevue Hill and Point Piper.

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In the evening I'd have the men over for their culinary capers. I started a fun-filled cooking revolution. None of this exact measurement, precise cooking-time stuff. I taught people how to cook delicious food in a simple way – and if they made a mistake I showed them how to rescue the meal.

[Sees cat, picks it up and cuddles it]

White Cat. Oooh. Hello darling. *[To audience and referring to students]* They know all about my cats. My house is a five-star hotel for strays.

[Indicating bowl] Only the finest silver bowls of course and naturally the felines feed on the dining-room table.

[Mimes putting cat on table and opens book, standing it up. This could be mimed or a real book]

A friend gave me a book *Teach Your Cats French* which I open at a new page and as the darlings dine I explain the day's pronunciation and vocabulary. I think all cats should learn to read French. *[Speaking to cat]* Madame Snow-Boots. Bonjour. Et vous, comment allez-vous? Que puis-je vous offrir?

[A pat and a peck for the puss before speaking directly to audience] And naturally they have free rein throughout the house including the kitchen. I'd have four or five bowls with gourmet ingredients and four or five cats as food critics. Once a student had the audacity to complain about a cat on the bench. *[At a student]* "Listen darling," I said. "I teach cooking not hygiene."

[Indicating wall]

This kitchen wall was once covered with a map of France and with each dish I'd point out the region whence it came. The map's gone now, enjoyed by the white ants.

[Goes over to wall] But the wall's been put to good use. *[Indicating]* See here. My guests mark their height then sign their name. In amongst the kids and locals there are some *real* celebrities. *[To students]* Come and have a look. *[They do and SUE wanders to one side and surreptitiously uses the phone. She calls to students]* See how many names you recognize.

[SUE watches as students look at wall as she goes to phone and dials. Pause then speaks on phone] Did you tell my students to make me write my life story? They've got a list of my lovers, cock-ups and drinking pals. ... Well who did? *[Stops as students wander back. Puts hand on mouthpiece]* Hang on.

[Speaks to students] Find the names? *[They did and want to know who someone is]* Rudolf? He's a dancer darling not the reindeer. Have another look.

[Watches as students have another look then is back into phone. Not happy] I don't want my private life in some bloody book. Next they'll be writing a play about me! *[Students return]* I'll speak to you later. *[Hangs up]*

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How did you get on? Yes there are some famous names but I have all sorts of friends and dinner guests. I'm just as happy with her Ladyship's driver as I am with her Ladyship. Take my neighbours – wonderful down-to-earth people. *[Aside]* Mind you one of them won the Archibald twice but that's another story. *[Beckons]* Come here. *[Students move to SUE who points offstage]*

BOULES

Go up the hall and look into the street. *[Students move]* Go on. *[Students exit and SUE calls to them]* See that patch of grass? Well that's where I entertain my neighbours playing boules. *[Students return]*

[SUE moves downstage facing audience. She calls students to her] Come down here. It's a game the French perfected where you toss *[Mimes a demonstration tossing imaginary boules into audience]* the boules as close to the jack as possible.

I asked the local mayor to flatten the grass and it became a top council priority. Once a workman told a neighbour, *[Aussie working-class accent]* "We have to get this job right." Then pointing to my house said, "That's where the mayor lives."

Neighbours wore different coloured berets and I made the most wonderful French Onion soup. It became a tradition – Sue's Bastille Day boules tournament.

NEIGHBOURS

[Still down front with her students either side of her. Change to sombre mood] Mind you not all my neighbours are so friendly. *[Speaks softly and points offstage]* Next door is a middle-aged woman living alone. And we all know what middle-aged women living alone are like. Eccentric, loud, rude, weird, and a candidate for the funny-farm ... *[Suddenly stops]* What are you writing? *[Trying to see the notes]* Not me! I'm describing the woman next-door!

And I'll only tell you about her if we change her name. Call her, Missus Fox-trot. No, Foxy.

Talk about crackers. I once caught her counting my empty bottles. And she's always on about tree branches. *[Imitates cranky neighbour]* "Your trees damage my fence. Your trees block my view."

Then it's the dogs. *[Imitates again]* "Your dogs never stop barking. I can't get to sleep because of your noisy dogs."

You're not going to believe this. The silly bitch got a tape-recorder and taped my dogs barking. They were missing their Mummy, poor darlings. I came home at my usual 2am, climbed into a bed covered with five cats and two dogs when suddenly, all hell broke loose.

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It was her next door. She put her tape-recorder under my window and turned up the volume. The cats were confused and the dogs barked at themselves but we all know [*Tapping head to indicate 'crazy'*] who was really barking.

Next week I'm in my bathers watering the front garden when Foxy walks past and accuses me of stuffing rags in her car exhaust. Well that was it. [*Mimes spraying Foxy*] I gave her a short spray with the hose, you know like we used to do as children. It was just a 'stop being a silly old bag' squirt but Foxy exploded.

She threw open my gate and charged at me shouting abuse. Naturally I gave as good as I got and she copped a soaking.

Now, and this'll *prove* she's nuts, she tried to grab the hose and turn it on me. I mean, how stupid is that? It was hot and I was in my bathers. Then off she goes to another neighbour claiming she's been assaulted.

But there's more insanity. You see I often have luncheon parties and my guests park their Rolls Royce, Bentley and Mercedes in front of my house.
[*SUE becomes Foxy to demonstrate this scene*]

Well this was simply too much for Foxy. [*Collects broom and folding chair and places them across front of stage. This is now SUE'S nature-strip*] Now all this is absolutely true. She owns a clapped out old campervan and parked it in front of my place. Then she set up a picnic.

She [*Sitting in fold-away chair*] dragged an extension cord from her house, boiled a jug and made herself a cup of tea. [*Hops up and sweeps*] Then she got a broom and swept my footpath before plugging in an old Hoover to vacuum the nature-strip.

My bemused luncheon guests had to walk around her campervan, step over her cord, vacuum cleaner and outdoor picnic setting before arriving for lunch.

Mind you I gave as good as I got and played a trick on her. I've had many cats over the years including several three-legged moggies. One was well over 20 and I started to call her *Aren't You Dead Yet*.

So whenever Foxy Next-Door gave me a hard time, I'd go into the garden and call the cat. [*Mimics herself*] "Aren't You Dead Yet! Aren't You Dead Yet!"

It's funny but later when she was ill in hospital, I took her some flowers. And if I go first, I'll not be surprised if she pops in here with her condolences. [*Philosophises*] Under all our nastiness, maybe there's a sliver of kindness trying to get out.

[*Putting away broom and chair*] But Foxy wasn't the only neighbour with whom I crossed swords. Bryan Westwood lived across the street. He was a very successful artist and won the Archibald twice - in 1989 and then in 1992 with his portrait of Paul Keating. [*To audience*] Anyone heard of Bryan Westwood? Paul Keating? [*SUE smiles*]

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Anyway I love colour and had the outside of my house painted blue which was too much for Bryan. *[Imitates Brian]* “Blue, Sue!” he cried. “You can’t have a blue house.” Well bugger him. The trees are green, the sky is blue. What’s wrong with nature?

So Bryan wrote letters begging me to change the colour. I refused. He even offered to paint the house himself. Now that would have been a laugh. Archibald prize-winning artist turns house painter. *[Defiant]* And this house will remain blue while I’m still alive.

[Moving around pointing out the various rooms] So outside is blue while inside the hall is purple, the dining-room emerald green and the sitting-room lemon-yellow. I love colour.

[Indicating imaginary wall] Now you will have noticed my house is full of flowers and art and if you look *[Indicates wall]* over there you’ll see an exquisite painting of flowers by Paul Jones, one of our greatest floral artists. *[She knows the answer even before asking the audience]* And you’ve never heard of Paul Jones. *[Almost an aside]* Art-lovers and collectors of coffee-table books certainly have.

It’s gone now but I used to have a Bryan Westwood painting *[Indicates into audience]* on that wall. It was his portrait of Paul Keating. Bryan didn’t want it, nor did Paul so I took it. Well, did that ruffle a few feathers?

Deliberately of course, I had the Keating portrait beside the dining-room table and when my blue-blooded, liberal-voting chums came to dinner, they had to eyeball the man they loved to hate. *[SUE uses a chair to demonstrate]*

The dinner guests would jostle to get a chair with its back to the portrait. They’d plead with me. “Sue, darling, please don’t make me sit facing that bastard.”

[Putting chair away] But don’t ask me about politics. I’ve had many prime ministers in this very room – labour and liberal - yet here, political discourse comes a very poor second to food, wine, art, gossip and damn good fun.

I enjoyed Paul Keating’s company immensely. In this room he wasn’t the snarling politician we saw on TV. He was interesting and funny and so much so that one election I thought *[She reflects on the time]* ‘I’ll change my vote’.

[Mimes being in the booth] For the first time I decided to vote Labour. I even made a special effort to dress well. *[Deadly serious]* I took up the pencil, and I swear this is true; my hand literally froze. I could not tick the Labour box.

[Cheeky] And I took the mickey out of another great Labour man. Diamond Jim McClelland was so called because of his stylish, immaculate clothes. I insisted he sit on a sofa much loved by the cats and Jim would go home with the back of his bespoke tailoring covered in feline fur.

If You Knew Susie 15

DOGS

FX *Dogs barking or music from How Much Is That Doggy In The Window?*

[Lost in her memories] I think I love dogs as much as I love cats. Or is it vice-versa? Anyway I decided to have a pooch party to celebrate the birthday of my darling Cleo the Bassett. I invited all my friends who had to bring their dog. “Not too many bitches,” I said as they can be really catty.

My friend Mervyn owned a magnificent smoking-jacket and had a doggy-coat made of the same material. All the pooches wore fancy hats with some wearing bejeweled collars.

Then we had a special canine cake with the great day spoilt only by some sneering journalist who wrote how the idle rich pampered their pooches; Sue Du Val’s name in the papers - again.

[Fade FX]

[Angry/Annoyed] Of course the fact that I’m neither idle nor rich and have adopted countless strays, abandoned or about to be put down dogs and cats doesn’t make good copy.

[Anger done]

I love all types of animals. I even had a pet rat once called Ratty. He lived under the kitchen floor *[Indicating]* and there was a special hole so he could pop in for a midnight feast. *[Calls to rat under the floor]* Hello Ratty.

And I remember giving a friend a birthday present of a baby wallaby. Trouble was the darn thing escaped and hopped down the street.

My son-in-law, who is English, had just arrived in Australia, literally that very day. Well it was all hands to the pump and I sent him door-knocking the streets of Woollahra and Double Bay. *[Imitating English accent]* “Oh I say, you haven’t seen a kangaroo have you?”

The ‘wallaby’ was found dining on a judge’s lawn tennis-court and the last laugh was on me because it was driven all the way to Bowral with Muggins here in the back-seat holding a plastic-bag to catch its droppings. No wonder the children called me Sue Poo.

Oh and I love horses and donkeys and once had a greyhound named *Waiter’s Eye*. *[Pause]* You could never catch it. *[Waits to see if the audience gets it]*

Now the wallaby story didn’t make the papers but another one did.

An article appeared listing Sydney’s worst-dressed women. There I was in print again. Some hack rang hoping to hear Sue explode. *[Picks up phone, mimics journalist]* “So Missus Du Val, how does it feel to be one of Sydney’s worst-dressed women?” *[As herself into phone]* “Well I have to be,” I said. “I always take the first on the pile.” That shut him up.

If You Knew Susie 16

[Sits down reflects] I'll be honest. I was an attractive young woman, some said glamorous. But as the years passed I concentrated more on others and less on myself. A friend once described me as 'a collection of contradictions'. *[SUE likes this description]*

"Sue, darling," he said, "your taste in clothes is quieter than your personality." I took it as a compliment. Some women never stop trying to look their best while others are too busy enjoying themselves. I'm the latter.

[To students] You want an example of clothes being quieter than personality? Hmmm.

[Smiles as she remembers] I was in New York visiting friends and didn't take a coat because it was April when I thought the weather would be warmish. It wasn't. A friend gave me his duffel-coat which I wore for a few days. *[To students]* Now you're too young to know what a duffel-coat looks like. *[Surprised]* You do? *[More surprised]* Your parents were beatniks? I am impressed.

One night I had drinks uptown with Lenny Bernstein followed by dinner in a very smart Park Avenue restaurant. As I left my friend threatened me. *[Imitating friend]* "Now Sue, do not come to the restaurant wearing that duffel coat." *[Grinning]* Silly boy.

I arrived at the restaurant where naturally any woman with even a smidgeon of self-respect, would have thrown away the coat or at the very least asked the maitre'd to burn it.

Not Sue Du Val. To the acute embarrassment of my friends and the stunned amazement of the other diners, *[Swans around pretending to wear the coat – into audience?]* I wore the duffel-coat not only into the restaurant but did a complete circuit a la some fashion model.

And once seated I turned to a fellow diner and said, "I know you". Actually I'd met his grandparents at Buckingham Palace in 1941. Anyway Prince Edward and I chatted away for ages. *[Waving finger at students]* Duffel coats and royalty, ladies – a potent mix.

FX *Music as per the pre-show choice begins softly and swells gradually*

[Heading offstage] I need to check on the grog for tonight's party. Let's take a break. And we can stroll round the garden too.

[Fade lights to black for 10 seconds and come up. Fade music. SUE & students return]

Yes I adore gardens and love gardening and trust me – the best place to grow tomatoes is in an old bath. *[Sees the recorder]* Hang on, *[Pointing]* what's that? In your hand? *[Discovers what it is]* A tape recorder! Have you lot been taping me out there in the garden?

PRE-RECORDED STORIES

Look, I agreed to tell my life story but not to have the jolly thing taped. *[Annoyed]* No, it's not all right. Let me hear the tape. Come on, play it.

If You Knew Susie 17

FX *Sue's voice is heard on tape and SUE comments live in-between tape excerpts.*

TAPE I had a dinner party here and most of the guests were old male friends but I invited this one woman who'd just returned from Europe.

SUE *[Live]* Not that story.

TAPE Over drinks she launched into tales of her many sexual conquests. I broke up the conversation, but over dinner she started again; chapter and verse of her orgasmic delights.

SUE I knew what was coming.

TAPE I waited for a pause in her monologue. *[SUE sits and prepares to be a tad unladylike]* "Goodness Tania," I said, "if I'd opened my legs that wide all the moths would have flown out." *[Sudden opening of her legs before launching into her next speech]*

SUE *[Live]* You can't tell that. Now what else is there?

TAPE I used taxis a lot because I was sometimes a little worse for wear. I'd come home in the wee small hours and five minutes after I arrived I'd have to ring the taxi company again.

SUE The staff knew my voice.

TAPE *[Imitating taxi receptionist]* "Good evening Missus Du Val," said the bloke on the switchboard who, incidentally, was a one-armed violinist. "What is it this time? Cigarettes or zipper?"

SUE *[Live]* I'd either run out of cigarettes or *[Demonstrates trying to reach around her back]* I couldn't undo my bloody zipper. *[Defensive]* Well who else was going to get me out of my dress?

TAPE I remember being invited to dinner at the opening of a Chinese restaurant with the premier of New South Wales as guest speaker. The speeches went on and on.

SUE *[Remembers with pain. Live]* Talk about boring!

TAPE The drinks kept coming but not the food. Finally, the speeches ended and the Emcee announced there would be a food offering to the gods put on the tables after which the main course would be served. We were starving.

SUE *[Live]* Starving.

TAPE So all this food was placed on the tables as an offering and that's when I may have disgraced myself. "Stuff the gods," I said. "I'm famished" and got stuck in.

If You Knew Susie 18

SUE *[Live]* But they weren't Catholic gods. Now I hope that's all. Did I say anything about my tippy adventures? *[Shocked]* I did?

TAPE Whilst I loved giving dinner parties I also loved being a guest. And with just me, the host and one or two others left, I'd collect the half-empty glasses of wine and liqueurs and pour them into a jug. *[Live SUE is grinning as she pours herself another drink]* We all had to drink it. Of course it was revolting and I gave it an appropriate name.

SUE *[Live SUE raises her glass to give a toast]* Old sandshoes. *[Back at students]* Now all this chat means we're never going to finish our *Veal Fangio*. Let's hear my life-story some other time. *[Slightly annoyed]* What? Travel? Oh all right.

Travel's great because you meet all sorts of people. I'll go for a day trip to see some beautiful garden or I'll spend a week camping in the African bush. I've always loved travel. Highlights? *[Thinking]*

TRAVEL

I enjoyed sailing down the Nile. Mind you Noel Coward was right when he wondered why the wrong people travel. The captain insisted we join him for drinks where I was accosted by this woman wearing Joyce Grenfell's old dentures and who could have snobbed for England.

[Mimics snobbish, upper-class Englishwoman] "Ow! You're from Orstraylia. How do you cope with all that terrible heat?"

I never knew how to be a snob so told her the truth. *[Winks. Slightly overdone Aussie accent]* "We all live in our bathers."

And on another, this time in Norway, I began to tire of the endless fiords, herring and Snapps. As we sailed past yet another isolated, picture-postcard village with its white houses and brightly coloured pink and blue doors, I turned to a ship's officer. "I suppose the villagers are interbred. *[Scandinavian accent. Deadly serious]* "Oh no, potatoes."

In Russia I left valuable pearls in my room and when I returned from the ballet the pearls were gone. I contacted security and next thing I was carted off and grilled by the KGB for hours. They thought *I* was the thief!

And I was 73 and in Rio de Janeiro when I launched myself into space with a spot of hang-gliding. I was connected to this young man and we had to run about twenty feet. *[Looks around]* I'll show you. *[Calls student]* Come and stand behind me. *[Student does]*

That's right. Now put your arms around my waist. Waist! You silly girl! Now *[Sue starts slowly]* left *[moves left leg forward]* right *[moves right leg forward]* left ... right ... faster *[they accelerate]* ... faster *[they accelerate and SUE gets up quite a pace in this funny walk. Sue mimes taking off]* Weeeeeeeeeee!

If You Knew Susie 19

We landed on the beach and you should have seen the crowd. They couldn't believe an old chook like me could go hang-gliding.

And I love unusual places like the spectacular Mt Hagen Festival in New Guinea. Michael Somare and Gough Whitlam were back-slapping one another and the festivities were supposedly alcohol-free. Needless to say my thermos was filled with gin and lemon.

Up the Sepik River, Pauline Hanson's off-sider, Mafia Jack, was running a tourist resort when his staff all quit leaving him with thirty French tourists. Lucky for him Sue Du Val was on hand and his Gallic guests had the finest French food they'd ever eaten. We of course had waiters' rights and there wasn't a dry throat in the kitchen. *[She toasts students]* Bon appetit.

[Does she place a chair or two as front seats in a car downstage and travels on a car journey] But my craziest adventure was driving from San Francisco to New York staying with friends along the way. There was me, an old pal and two young gay guys who were rather naughty giving Sue some homemade hash cookies. The boys neglected to tell me about the magic ingredients and there I was, seeing America through rose - *[the wine not the flower]* coloured glasses, having the time of my life.

It was around Oklahoma that I suspected my unbridled laughter was perhaps related to my intake of *[Spoken as in a flighty mood]* marry-jew-wana. *[Sings from Oklahoma!]* "Oh what a beautiful morning, Oh what a beautiful day."

[At audience] Now don't tell me you haven't heard of hash cookies?

A group of nuns certainly had. *[Putting chairs away or does one become a drinks trolley?]* We stayed in a convent because my friend knew one of the sisters. My reputation had preceded me. As we walked down this long corridor the Mother Superior hove into view pushing a tea-trolley. Tea-trolley? It was laden with every imaginable bottle of booze. *[Imitating American nun]* "Oh Missus Du Val, we understand you enjoy a tiny tipple." *[Grinning SUE pours herself a drink]*

The two young gay guys were a tad bored until the door flew open and there stood a brother dressed entirely in leather. *[Suddenly wishes to avoid making fun of the Church]* Not a religious brother, a sibling of one of the nuns. Any way this worldly chap had been summoned to show my fellow travellers some of the town's gay nightspots. It was never a dull moment travelling with Sue Du Val.

MANNERS

[She pushes trolley off or to one side] Now we really must call it a day. Sorry about the *Veal Fangio* but my party guests are due soon and I'm a stickler for good manners. Nothing annoys me more than bad manners.

If You Knew Susie 20

If I send an invitation I expect an answer within two days and after hosting a dinner party I expect a thank you note by return post and, the wittier the better.

I went to a friend's dinner party once and took my thank you note with me. It saved time and postage. "Mervyn, darling," I said handing over the note. "You know how I adore being at your balls."

[Rousing students] So chop, chop, time to tidy and *[Is stopped dead by request]* Cooking? What, now?

FOOD

There's food aplenty for the party. *[Has situation explained]* Oh talk about cooking. *[Looking at watch or clock]* But we haven't got time. *[Students persist]* Oh very well. *[Suddenly includes the audience]* And at last I can tell the television audience something they've tuned in to see.

[Addresses audience] I've always believed in quality ingredients cooked simply. Scrambled eggs, tomato on toast, the simplest of foods can be the best.

And my trick with scrambled eggs is just as the mix is ready to be served, add another yolk and quickly stir it through. Superb. *[Confidential]* Mind you, now I'm older I think I've accidentally added a little crunch to my scrambled eggs – *[Looks around then tells the secret]* it's best to keep the egg-shells *outside* the pan.

And toast covered with fresh tomatoes, *[Indicating]* grown in my back garden. Glorious. And salads – here's a good tip. Add a little of the leaves from your tomato plant to give it that extra tang.

And you don't need fancy ovens and stoves. I used to cook for a bunch of wine buffs including Doug Lamb, Thyne Reid and Len Evans. They'd be inside sampling eight different vintages of *Chateaux Margaux* while I'd be in the garden with a fag, a glass of red and on a portable gas-burner, I'd whip up fifty perfect caviar omelets.

[Heads back to table and to tidying up] But I'm not cooking tonight, ladies and ... *[Annoyed]* oh don't start that. Who said I was kind, generous and loyal? I could find plenty who'd tell you the exact opposite.

DOGGY TALE

Well of course it's true. Animals are the world's most lovely creatures. *[Agrees to tell story]* But only because it's about a dog.

A friend went overseas and asked if I would mind his pooch. Silly question but little did I know what would follow. The dog was fine and my friend wrote to say he'd be home in a few days but then, to my horror, the dog disappeared. Not lost, dog-napped.

If You Knew Susie 21

Can you believe I received extortion letters? “Pay up or we’ll kill the dog.” It was unbelievable. Then I was told the dog was in the suburb of Glebe so I rang some friends, printed flyers and started door-knocking the whole suburb. “Have you seen this beautiful dog?” Nothing.

Then I spotted a pub. It was full of beer-drinking, working-class, ocker men. I asked one of my refined gentlemen friends to stand on the bar and make an announcement.

Well did he get a serve. *[Imitating rough male drinkers]* “Piss off ya poofdah!” and that was one of the kind remarks.

My friend courageously continued. *[Imitates refined male friend]* “Do you realize that this wonderful woman, Suzanne Catherine Du Val, has lost her dog?”

More jeers from the mob. But someone in that pub knew about the missing pooch. The ransom was paid and I was told to go to the Woollahra fire station where the darling dog was safe and well.

We were so relieved but my friends couldn’t believe me when I ordered them all back to that pub in Glebe. This time I shouted the bar and the jeers soon turned to cheers.

[More sombre] No you’re right. Dogs are a major part of my life. *[She reflects on her favourite animals]* And dog people share something ... wonderful. *[Remembers]* I rang a friend once and told her a chap had died and would she come with me to his funeral. Of course she did and we were sitting in the church when my friend quietly asked me the name of the deceased.

“I don’t know,” I said. “We see him in the park. He’s the man with the three-legged dog.”

My dog Chelsea was a darling. She always went to Mass with me and would take a five dollar note down the aisle and drop it in the collection plate. One day I was heading towards the altar and asked a friend if he would hold Chelsea whilst I took communion.

He did but Chelsea just couldn’t bear to be apart and as I knelt and took communion, my dog came bounding down knocking over two old dears in the process.

Then a new priest introduced himself saying he’d just arrived from London where his last parish was in Chelsea. Well, hearing her name, Chelsea went straight to the priest in the hope of a pat or a titbit.

MISBEHAVIOUR

[Is momentarily lost in her happy memories before snapping out it] Now hang on. My life-story had better not paint me as Saint Sue. I am not Princess Perfect. I can be a bastard with the best of them. I’ve said and done things which’ll make your skin crawl. *[Told about the carpets]* Oh you’ve heard about that have you?

If You Knew Susie 22

Yes, after Bob died, I met the philanthropist Thyne Reid in the 1950s and he was the second love of my life; we had lunch almost every day for sixteen years and yes he was married. But we had an unusual relationship. We'd go on picnics with Thyne flying his own plane often to remote locations; once we went crocodile shooting. I'd pack a superb lunch and Thyne would pack his wife. The pilot, the wife and the mistress. *[Pause]* I told you it was unusual.

[Student asks about the carpets] Oh that. Yes it's true. The wealthy Mister Reid had an apartment on the 8th floor of the old Astor Building in Macquarie Street. One night I scooped up his Persian rugs and threw them out the window yelling, "You call yourself a millionaire with these shabby things on the floor!"

Fortunately no-one was injured and in the lobby, the very nice concierge had folded the rugs and placed them in the corner.

[SUE has an attack of the unhappy memories and again feels the pain at her loss when Thyne died. She excuses herself] I need a break. *[Waving at walls]* Have a look at the paintings. Have a drink.

[SUE moves downstage to one side where lights concentrate just on her. She's in the bathroom and talking to herself. She could be looking at an imaginary mirror, washing her hands etc]

How many years is it now, Suzanne? And still you miss him. *[Talks emotionally to Thyne and wipes her eyes]* I worshipped you, Thyne Reid. I worshipped the bloody ground you walked upon. So how *dare* you leave me like that! *[Pause]* Do you know I cried the day you died. I cried for the next five years. I'm *still* crying! Losing you was the greatest tragedy of my life. *[Wipes her face and recovers. Gives him a serve]* And, you bastard, you left me *nothing!*

FX *Water running or loo flushing*

[Lights come up and SUE returns to the room as if nothing has happened]

Now where were we? *[Student mentions SUE misbehaving]* Oh the *misbehaving* Sue. *[Not boasting]* Yes there was another time when I was not always sweetness and light. It was a dinner party in a Palm Beach holiday house and I'd had too much to drink. But again, I couldn't see the sense in a wealthy host having trite belongings including, would you believe, a twee Anne Hathaway dinner set.

So silly Sue made a scene, declared the crockery in bad taste and smashed some plates in the fireplace. *[Raises hands]* I know - outrageous behaviour - mea culpa.

[SUE heads to the small table] Well quite rightly I was told my behaviour was unacceptable and the next thing, *[SUE removes tablecloth and wraps herself therein]* the other diners, all male, removed the tablecloth, *[SUE wraps herself in tablecloth]* wrapped silly Sue therein, carried me downstairs kicking and screaming *[SUE hobbles towards the audience]* and locked me in a small room.

If You Knew Susie 23

[SUE mimes screaming and struggling] I carried on demanding to be set free. My host refused and soon the taxi was tooting its horn. I was about to be dispatched the thirty miles to Sydney.

[Unwraps herself and speaks calmly] Fortunately, *very* fortunately I was released and allowed to stay. And to the eternal credit of my friends, the matter was never discussed again and I *hope* I learnt my lesson.

[Pointing at students] So none of this ‘Sue is a Saint’ business, all right?

[Student mentions restaurants. SUE annoyed] That’s not bad behaviour; that’s me trying to raise standards in the fabulous fifties because trust me, in those days we were gastronomically ignorant. All I did was ask for a pepper-grinder. *[Student reckons there’s more to the tale]* All right, my exact words to that snooty waiter were, “I’m not moving from this bloody seat until you produce a pepper-grinder.” What’s wrong with that?

[Student mentions potatoes] Oh for heaven’s sake. I was right. The potatoes were *not* cooked. *[Student mentions the tour]* No, get your facts right. I told the waiter the potatoes weren’t cooked. The waiter told the chef then came back saying the chef said *[Mocking]* they were cooked. So, yes, I did take the potatoes around the restaurant asking other diners what they thought. And that is not eccentric behaviour. *[How dare he]* One boring old fart told me to ‘piss off’. *[Student suggests this might have been embarrassing]* Well I wasn’t embarrassed.

GETTING PERSONAL

[SUE uses the tablecloth as a skirt or shawl. Asks audience for an opinion]
What do you think? Top of the pile? My sort of outfit? *[Sits to discuss her feet]* Now I was fashionable when it came to my feet. I used to buy stylish shoes but my shapely legs didn’t go with my terrible toes – comes from decades of standing in kitchens.

I have bunions and used to buy shoes which were too tight. I’d always say, “They’re just hurting a little bit but they won’t when I get home.” *[Feels her long-suffering feet]* But they did hurt and I often gave away my shoes.

[Goes to tapestry] Perhaps that’s why I’ve taken to tapestry in my autumnal years. It’s a challenge and something artistic I can do ‘sitting down’. *[Warning STUDENTS]* Don’t you dare tell anyone but I’ve been known to take my tapestry when driving and *[Does she stitch even miming it?]* will occasionally tackle some needlepoint whilst waiting for the lights to change.

[SUE becomes reflective. Sore feet, long life, many people, places and events, puts aside tapestry]
I’ve had an interesting life. I’ve loved having people around. I’ve been a widow for fifty years. And I really like the saying, “If you’re passing, don’t.”

[Amused] Quite a few burglars took my advice. That's what comes from having your name in the papers; burglars can read. Mind you never locking my front door didn't help and of course I have to leave a window open for the cats.

After the umpteenth burglary I put a sign on the front door. "Piss off, you've taken the lot."

And where's the honour amongst thieves? Helen Du Val, bought some interesting furniture in Egypt and one piece, a chair, stood over there *[Indicates]* in the hall. Then one of those interior-design magazines took a photo and a week after publication the chair was stolen.

Twenty years later I was looking through a catalogue of a well-known Sydney auction-house and would you believe, they were selling my chair! Bloody cheek of them!

Naturally I told the auctioneers the chair was mine. *[Imitating pompous auctioneer]* "Well, does madam have proof of ownership?" Of course I didn't and had to pay thousands to buy back my own chair. Bastards!

[Change of pace. She is becoming more reflective in her old age] People are strange. And many other things too. They're wonderful, terrible, enchanting and boring. I've been friends with so many and once in a while, knowing the famous has its advantages. I lost a cat once and was heartbroken. I had notices printed and knocked on countless doors but no, she was gone. Then I thought, "Why not ring my friend John Laws?"

Any way John kindly told his listeners that my beautiful white cat was missing and someone rang to say a cat matching that description was wandering the streets of Bondi Junction – miles away; *[Fondly remembers the happy moment]* but she was found.

Sadly cats and the famous haven't always had a happy ending. Rudolf Nureyev and Margot Fonteyn always popped in when dancing in Sydney and Rudolf was sitting *[Waves in the right direction]* in *that* chair when one of my cats climbed on his lap. The great man didn't like cats and brushed it away rather rudely. Well famous or not, that was a definite no-no and in plain bloody English I told him so; another Rudolf with a nose turning red.

And don't believe all those stories of a falling out between me and Patrick White. People say he was difficult, even cold. I'll tell you a story about that so-called, hard-hearted old man. He came here one day when one of my cats had just died.

I was in the kitchen, where else? and someone told Patrick about the cat. Next thing he's joined me and without saying a word he embraced me to show his concern for my grief.

MORTALITY

[Even more reflective] Ah, grief. It comes to all of us.

[SUE goes to lie on the chaise-lounge which becomes her bed. The tablecloth becomes a rug/sheet]

If You Knew Susie 26

[Muses] It would be really nice if the men wore ties with animal prints on them.

Dying is sad but it's not without its humour. I love laughter and even more I like to make others laugh.

I was desperately sad once when a friend died. I went for a walk in Rose Bay Park and bumped into Len Evans. He hadn't heard about Doug Lamb's death and could see I was terribly upset. He suggested we go for a drink. In a nearby restaurant I had a stiff whisky, reminisced about our late friend and began to cheer up. Then we shared a bottle of *Dom Perignon*.

[Music of If Your Knew Susie begins quietly]

I felt so much better. "That was lovely," I sighed. "And what a lovely champagne. Pity Doug's not here to drink it." *[Pause and she remembers]* "But then," I said, "there wouldn't be enough for the three of us." *[SUE laughs quietly]*

FX *Doorbell rings*

That'll be my guests. *[Calling quietly]* Come in, have a drink. *[She weakly raises her glass]*
Cheers. *[Sighs]* This is all too much for a Catholic widow.

[SUE raises a glass in a silent toast as the lights dim and the music of If You Knew Susie swells]

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