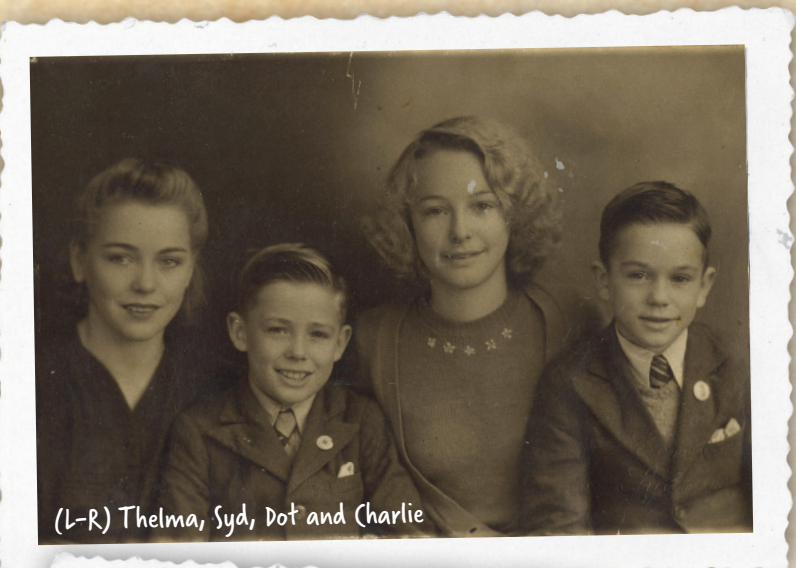




(L-R) Thelma, Syla, Dot and Charlie



Jan (left) and sister Gileen

Charles Henry Scroggy – Charlie for short – was born on May 29, 1935, the youngest son of Robert and Doris Scroggy. He grew up in La Perouse, the peninsula on the northern

headland of Botany Bay. Charlie had two half-brothers, Bob and Sydney, from Robert's previous marriage, and four full siblings: Bill, Thelma, Dot and Syd.

At the time, La Perouse was one of the only places in Australia where European Australians and Indigenous Australians went to school together. Many of Charlie's closest mates were Indigenous. As a boy, he and his friends would swim and fish at the local beaches and collect golf balls from nearby New South Wales Golf Club for pocket money.

Anyone who knew Charlie knew of his love of sport. The St George Dragons were one of his lifelong passions. And of course, he played too. Rugby league, cricket, soccer, baseball, golf – he played them all. He was an especially talented golfer – at his peak, he had a handicap of six. But no matter what sport he played, he excelled. Charlie was a competitor.

His mother, Doris, was known for her easy-going nature and sense of humour, and Charlie picked up some of that too. Doris used to love listening to radio announcer Frank Hyde, who was famous for singing "Danny Boy" on-air. One day, Charlie phoned her, pretending to be Hyde and encouraging her to sing "Danny Boy" for the listeners on

his show. Never shy, Doris began belting out the tune – until she heard chuckles coming from the other room and realised it was a prank. She called Charlie a few names that day. Janice Gifford – Jan for short – was born on October 21, 1938, the youngest daughter of Arthur and Clare Gifford. Sadly, Jan never got to know her father. He died in World War II when Jan was just two years old. Arthur was one of the "Rats of Tobruk", the name given to the mostly Australian soldiers who spent eight months living in the trenches of Tobruk, Libya, defending Egypt resolutely from the advancing Germans. He didn't make it out of the trenches alive.

With Arthur gone, Clare was left a widow. She never remarried – couldn't find anyone as good as him, she'd always say. The couple's eldest children, Jack and Alf, were fully grown and also soldiers, so Clare was left to raise Bill, Daphne, Jewel, Val, Colleen and Jan on her own.

The Giffords lived on Hargrave Street, Paddington, in Sydney's east. As a single-parent family in lean times, life was tough. But they got by, and Clare ensured there were always enough toys for the kids. Not that they needed them – Jan and her sisters found ways to keep themselves occupied. Sometimes, they'd wander to Centennial Park to catch tadpoles in a jar. Other times, they'd stand on the top balcony of their double-storey home as trams went by, waiting for their favourite driver to ring the bell at them. "We called him Ding Dong," Jan laughs.

They also played a game where they lined up cigarette cards (which were issued as collectibles with cigarette packets up until the 1940s) against a wall and tossed marbles to try and knock them over. It was simple, and nobody ever won or lost, but they passed countless hours playing that game. "Those were just the things you did in those days," Jan says. "We didn't have much."

By Sydney standards, it was a fair distance between La Perouse and Paddington. Nonetheless, Charlie Scroggy and Jan Gifford were about to find each other. And the next stage of their lives – together – was about to begin.

Second time's a charm

As Jan grew into a young lady, tossing marbles and catching tadpoles didn't quite cut it anymore. Instead, she loved going to dances. Late in 1955, Jan and three girlfriends heard about a dance down south at La Perouse. It was a bit of a trek, but they decided to check it out.

Frankly, Jan wasn't all that taken with the young men there. Not the first time, at least. But the girls had a fun night out, so they hopped in a taxi and went to the next La Perouse dance. And this time, Charlie went too. "The second time I went, that's when I saw him – and that was it for me," Jan says. "I knew there was something special about him straight away. I knew he was the one for me."

Sure enough, Charlie felt the same way, and after a few months of dating, Jan and Charlie married. It was August 1956, two months before Jan's 18th birthday. At first, Clare didn't approve – she thought Jan was too young. (Mind you, Jan suspects this was mostly because she was reluctant to let go of her youngest daughter!) Eventually, though, Clare came around. After all, Jan wasn't about to change her mind.

While Clare took some convincing, Doris was another story. She and Jan got on like a house on fire. "Doris would call us up, and Charlie would answer," Jan says. "And she'd say, 'How are you Charlie?' And he'd say, 'Yeah, good Mum.' And then she'd say, 'Yeah okay, great. Can you put Jan on now please?' – like I was her own daughter. I was lucky. I got a good mother-in-law."

As the couple settled into married life, Charlie plied his trade as a wood machinist at the Berryman Furniture factory in Matraville. The young couple wasted no time starting a family – first came Michael, then Garry, then Steven, and then Susan. "Finally, a girl after three boys," Jan smiles.

At the time, property owners were reluctant to rent to young families, so Charlie and Jan had to wait for the Housing Commission to issue them a place. Unfortunately, the waiting list was long. Fortunately, the on-site caretaker at Berryman had been on the same waiting list for a while, and when his family was issued a house, he suggested Charlie take his place on the Berryman premises.

It was dusty, and the room had no plumbing – Jan had to walk back and forth from the factory with a bucket just to get water – but it was rent-free as long as Charlie kept an eye on the factory at night. Until they got a home of their own, it would do just fine.

A home in Miller

In 1964, Jan and Charlie finally made it to the front of the Housing Commission queue. They were granted their very own four-bedroom house in Miller, a new neighbourhood on the recently developed Green Valley Housing Estate in Sydney's south-west. "It was just an empty house. We hardly had anything," Jan says. "But everyone in the neighbourhood was in the same boat – all these brand-new houses and nothing to put in them. We probably should have taken some furniture from Berryman!"

Luckily, the nearby shopping centre, Waltons, offered fortnightly payment plans on furniture. Slowly, the Miller house became a home. Sometimes, though, Charlie and Jan had to get a bit more creative. The front yard, for example, had no grass – it was just clay. So, Charlie collected grass runners from the canal next to Berryman,



Jan as a young woman

where he still worked, placed them in old potato sacks, brought them home, soaked them in the laundry tub for a few days and then laid them in the front yard. He kept them well-watered, and eventually, they grew into a lawn.

Plainly, money was scarce. But Charlie worked hard, day and night, to provide. He also kept his love of sport, transitioning from playing into coaching. Soon enough, everyone in Miller knew Charlie as the cricket coach and the soccer coach. He was so dedicated to coaching that he'd often pick up as many as 10 kids (along with his sons) in his van on a Saturday to drive them to games, because a lot of the parents couldn't or wouldn't.

While Charlie worked hard through the week and coached on weekends, Jan worked hard around the home. Nobody ever went wanting, and come Christmas, the kids always had toys under the tree. What's more, Miller was a great neighbourhood in which to grow up. It was mostly young families just like the Scroggys, and Miller Road was full of kids playing in the street. Jan and Charlie were comfortable knowing the area was safe, and Michael, Garry, Steven and Sue ran around till it got dark, building billycarts and racing bikes around the block.

Once they were home, however, the kids had to help with housework. "Sue was always the first to jump up and do the dishes while I was still finishing my cup of tea," Jan says. "And I'd say, 'Wait Sue,' and she'd say, 'No, Mum, you finish your cup of tea.' But thing is, I wanted to make sure the boys washed and wiped up too. I decided that had to be the way. And you know what? I think they all turned out better husbands for it."

Mind you, Jan needed a break now and then – she suffered from severe asthma, and would experience attacks regularly. "I started to get it at the furniture factory, because Charlie would have this leather apron full of dust," Jan says. "But I still got it at Miller. If it was daytime, I'd be ringing the doctor to come up and give me an injection. If it was night, I'd be sitting with the front door open at 2am just trying to breathe."

Asthma aside, life in Miller was good, and after a few years the couple decided they were ready for more children. Craig arrived in 1968, followed by Kim in 1972. The Scroggy family was complete.



(L-R) Garry, Susan, Steven and Michael

October 20, 1979

The '70s marched on, and the kids grew. As teens, Michael and Garry were boisterous and often brawling with each other. Jan remembers Sue running home from the local park, yelling that her brothers were at it again. "Mind you, they behaved themselves as soon as

Charlie got home from work!" Jan says. "But really, they were good kids."

Steven was quieter than his siblings. He was fond of animals; he had a pet possum, a pet galah, and a love of dogs – particularly greyhounds. "Unlike Garry, Steven liked to stay on Michael's good side, because Michael was old enough to drive him down to the greyhound track," Jan laughs.

Soon enough, Steven got his greyhound trainer's licence and even brought a greyhound home. Sue would be patting it, "Jan says. "And Steven said to her, 'Don't pat it! They're not pets!' Steven's passion for the greyhound industry was clear, and it wasn't long before he landed a job taking care of greyhounds for a local trainer. Since he didn't have a car of his own, he moved into a granny flat at the rear of the property where he worked.

He was heading back there on the night he died.

It was the early hours of October 20, 1979, and Steven and four friends were near Warwick Farm Racecourse, driving home from a night out at Parramatta, when they were involved in a tragic accident. All four friends were killed instantly. Steven was taken to hospital in a critical condition.

"It was 3am, maybe 4am in the morning when the police knocked on our door," Jan says. "We went straight to the hospital. Sue stayed home with Craig and Kim, because they were only young. When the policeman came up to Charlie at the hospital, he knew straight away it was bad. And then the policeman said, 'I'm sorry. Your son has passed away.'"

Jan and Charlie's world stopped.

The doctor approached them next. He explained that, initially, he was telling the nurses he thought Steven would live, but would be in a wheelchair for the rest of his life. According to the doctor, it was at that moment that Steven flatlined. Almost as if Steven thought, "Nope – that's not for me."

"Terrible. Absolutely terrible," Jan says, reflecting on that day.

"That's nothing worse than losing a child. You never get over it, no matter how many years. It was the day before my birthday, too. And later, at Christmas, I still had to go shopping and buy toys for Kim and Craig. I remember I'd go in the shop, and I'd hear the Christmas songs playing. That was the hardest part, because I knew Steven wouldn't be there this Christmas."

Life after Steven

As the decade turned, Michael moved to Newcastle. He had two kids of his own: Shane and Daniel, the first of Jan and Charlie's grandkids. Garry had been in the army for a few years. But Jan and Charlie still had Sue, Craig and Kim – 17, 11 and 7 years old respectively – to care for. Life wasn't the same, but it went on nonetheless.

Miller remained a great place to grow up, and Craig and Kim played in the street just like their older siblings once did. The neighbourhood was as safe as ever. But one neighbour, two doors down, was a little bit... odd. "She was weird," Jan says. "She used to tell everyone she was a witch. People would book her and she'd go around to their house to do readings."

That was all well and good – her business, after all – until one day, inexplicably, she told Craig and Kim that she'd been responsible for Steven's death. That she'd made it happen. When Jan found out, she was fuming. "I was so wild," Jan says. "So, I went up there, and she was out the front yard with her groceries. I said, 'Who do you think you are



Kim and Craig



(L-R) Steven, Susan, Craig, Kim and Garry



Michael: "When I was around 10, Dad took me, Garry and our cousin Chris fishing in a hire rowboat at La Perouse. We were in the middle of the bay when a strong southerly came up. The wind

got so strong we ended up on the other side of the boys' home at La Perouse. I'll never forget the look on Dad's face as the more he rowed, the closer we got to the rocks. Luckily, we got close enough to get on the beach. But it was too dangerous to get back on the water, so we had to carry the boat all the way back to the hire shed."



Garry: "On Friday evenings we used to go down to the Green Valley Hotel. In those days, kids weren't allowed inside so we would hang out in the carpark with Mum and Dad and lots of other

families. Dad would be inside having a drink with mates, and he'd bring out drinks for Mum and all us kids. We would then buy fish and chips wrapped in newspaper from the local fish shop and spend the rest of the evening playing cricket or chasing each other around the carpark while our parents sat around laughing and talking."



Susan: "When I was 12, I got my licence and my own car, and I was often staying out too late for a weeknight. Since it was winter, Dad would always get out of bed

and place a blanket over my windshield because otherwise there would be ice on the car when I went to drive it in the mornings. It made it safer for me. I do now wonder why he didn't tell me to put the bloody blanket on the car myself when I got home! But he never did."



Craig: "It would have been so hard for Mum and Dad with so many kids, yet we were the only family with a pool and they made sure we had a great Christmas. Dad had a second job selling

hot dogs at the golf course and going there with him early in the morning was always an adventure – looking for golf balls, and of course the free hot dogs. Mum worked 24/7 taking care of us kids and again she made sure we never went without. I can still hear Mum saying, 'You wait till your father gets home,' if I was playing up!"



Kim: "I know Mum and Dad mustn't have had a lot of money but I think back to Christmas, Easter, fireworks on cracker night and we never went without. We'd be up

super early sitting outside with the other kids in the neighbourhood showing each other what we got for Christmas. On New Year's Eve we'd stay up till midnight and then walk around the street with the other kids, banging the lids of pots and pans together and wishing everyone a Happy New Year."

Jan AND Charlie

This is the story of a husband and wife whose strength, determination and love for each other conquered everything life threw at them.



One year

In 1983, Charlie bought an old Kombi and converted it into an ice cream van, and he and Jan – along with Craig and Kim, still kids at the time – moved to Newcastle. Michael was already up there; Sue had moved there too, and had a family of her own not too far off. Garry was back in Sydney, home from the army and recently married. Charlie ran the ice cream van with the help of Michael and Craig, and he and Jan, now approaching retirement, were ready to start seeing more of Australia.

"We always said we'd go travelling around the country towns," Jan says. "Charlie's mum grew up in Broken Hill.

We were gonna go back there and have a look."

One evening, Charlie came home from a day selling ice cream. Jan noticed he was slurring his words. "If you didn't know him, you'd have thought he was drunk," Jan says. But she could tell he wasn't drunk. Something else was wrong.

The voice trouble persisted, so Charlie began to see doctors. During one visit, Charlie asked Jan to stay in the waiting room while he spoke with a specialist. A few minutes later, he emerged from the office and motioned her towards the exit. "When we got in the lift, I asked him what was wrong. He said, 'I'll explain when we get in the car,'" Jan says. "So, I'm still thinking it's nothing." They got back to the car, and Jan asked him again: what's wrong?

"That's when he told me he had a year to live," Jan says.

"At first, Jan didn't believe him. She thought he was making a bad joke:

"I said, 'Don't be so bloody stupid. Tell me what's really wrong.'" But Charlie wasn't joking. He repeated himself: he had been diagnosed with motor neurone disease. The specialist gave him one year.

Motor neurone disease (MND) is the name of a group of diseases in which nerve cells – which control the muscles that allow us to move, speak, breathe and swallow – stop working normally. Specifically, Charlie had amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), the most common type of MND. In Australia, the terms MND and ALS are generally used interchangeably.

The day he was diagnosed, Charlie went straight out on the ice cream van to work with Craig. Jan sat at home in the garage, crying, trying to wrap her head around what was happening. "I really thought he only had a year to live," Jan says.

Soon, many of the things Charlie loved to do – such as playing golf and other sports – became impossible. It was a reality that caused him incredible frustration. He'd be walking Kim to her netball game and found he couldn't keep up; he was short of breath, and his leg muscles were too weak. Gradually, he lost the ability to speak clearly. Then, the ability to walk. "But he wouldn't give in," Jan says. "He used to say to me, 'Never give up. Think positive.' That's what he always used to say: *think positive*. And you know what? It worked. Because he lived a hell of a lot longer than one year."

Indeed, a year passed, and then another. Charlie's body weakened as MND took its toll. But it soon became apparent the one-year diagnosis was off the mark. Clearly, the specialist hadn't factored in Charlie's resolve.

As Charlie's reality changed, however, so did Jan's. She was no longer just his wife; she was also now his carer. The thing about MND is that, while it affects the patients worst of all, it also affects those closest to them. Charlie was now confined to a chair, his speech muffled and unclear. Jan helped him to dress. She helped him to eat. She helped him to shower. Every night, she would wake up two to three times to turn him over in his MND-customised bed, because he was unable to do so on his own.

And not once did Jan complain. Wouldn't have even known how to. After all, this was the same man she'd spotted out of hundreds of others at a dance in La Perouse 30 years earlier. The one she knew was special.

He was special, alright. How many people are told they have a year to live and are still laughing their way through life 20 years later?

The move to Lurnea

Charlie and Jan moved back to Sydney, to a home in Lurnea, just up the road from Miller. As they settled in and life with MND became the new normal, the grandkids began to arrive thick and fast. Michael's boys, Shane and Daniel, were already at school in the mid-80s. By 1990, there was also Nicole, Renee and Jason (from Sue), Adam and Carly (from Garry); and Mathew, Michelle and Steven (from Craig).

Family gatherings at the Lurnea house were hectic, to say the least. The annual Christmas get-together was on Boxing Day. The cricket was always on the TV in the living room where Charlie sat, and the spread on the kitchen table was always bountiful. And just as she'd done for her – and as Clare had done for her – Jan made sure the grandkids had plenty of toys under the tree.

Naturally, the young ones ran amok. They'd scoff down their lunch and then run outside to climb on the backyard swing set or play up and down the wheelchair ramp beside the house. "They all wanted a turn riding Charlie's wheelchair on that ramp," Jan recalls. "I said to him you better bloody be careful or you won't have a wheelchair soon!"

When the family wasn't around, Charlie and Jan had their routine. They loved the races – every Wednesday and Saturday, Jan walked to the TAB at Lurnea shops to place their bets for the day. "Charlie played the Daily Double," Jan says. "He'd always take horses 2 and 4 at Randwick. One day though, Randwick wasn't on, so I asked if he wanted to take the Daily Double at Melbourne. He said no, but I said, 'You might as well – you could be lucky.' Well, you know what? It got up. And it was a good one too – he and Sue won \$800 that day."



All 16 of Jan and Charlie's grandkids

Soon, computers became a part of our lives. In 1994, Kim's husband, Shaun, set up a PC for Charlie and showed him how to use it. "Charlie loved that," Jan says. "When he got motor neurone, his voice was the first thing that went. But with the computer, he could write up what he wanted to say." Whether it was letting Jan know what he needed, penning a poem, or having a conversation with his grandkids, the computer allowed Charlie to communicate in a way he thought he'd lost.

By the turn of the millennium, there were more grandkids on the scene. Kim's first child Rebecca arrived, followed by Blake. Sue had two more girls, Emma and Hayley. Craig added Rhiannon and Nathan to his family. Sixteen grandkids in total.

For Jan and Charlie, life with MND was hard. Yes, there was pain. Yes, there were sleepless nights. And yes, they never got to travel Australia as they'd planned. But Charlie kept fighting. He kept positive. And Jan was right there by his side, every step of the way, without question.

Because of his courage and determination, and Jan's care and devotion, Charlie met every one of his grandkids. His youngest, Blake and Hayley, were born in the year 2000 – 15 years after he was told he had one year to live.

That specialist hadn't given Charlie a diagnosis. He'd given him a challenge. And competitor he was, Charlie had won.

Hello from New Zealand

By 2003-04, Charlie and Jan were almost two decades in to life with MND. Of course, by then, we didn't just have computers; we also had the internet. For Charlie, that added another wonderful outlet. There was a growing online community of MND sufferers, and Charlie could log on to chat rooms and talk with people around the world who could relate to him in a way few could.

Jan, meanwhile, went about her usual routines. She'd assist Charlie in the shower, she'd cook and help to feed him, and she'd help him turn over a couple of times a night. She placed their beds and Daily Doubles. And, of course, she did her regular housework.

One of the many jobs Jan did around the house was to wash the bedroom curtains. It was something she'd done dozens of times before. One day in 2004, however, she was putting the curtains back on the rod in the bedroom, and she did it a little differently. "Usually, I'd stand on the chair," Jan says. "I don't know why, but that day I decided to stand on Charlie's bed."

The brake wasn't on, and the bed

moved. Jan fell and broke her hip.

"I had something cooking on the stove at the time, and I could hear Charlie in the other room. He was worried about a fire," Jan says. "And I remember just thinking, I've got to get that stove off."

With her hip broken – half-crawling, half-walking – Jan made her way from the bedroom, up the hallway and into the kitchen, and lifted herself up to switch off the stove. It took half an hour.

"How I got there I'll never know," Jan says. "Afterwards, I was just

standing there in the dining room, holding myself up against the chair. The phone was on the other side of the house. I wanted to walk over to phone Susan, but I thought if I tried, I'd collapse, and Charlie would be even more worried. I just stood there, trying not to faint."

Charlie may have been worried, but he too was taking action. He'd never turned his computer on himself before. It was too far away; Jan always did it for him. Somehow, Charlie managed to reach towards the floor and press the power button on his PC. "I thought, 'God, he'll fall out of his chair,'" Jan says. "Then we'd have been in trouble."

The computer launched, and Charlie logged onto the MND chat room. A friend in New Zealand – Jill, a fellow MND sufferer – was online at the time. Charlie typed out a message, explaining what had happened and passing on a phone number for Sue, who lived up the road in Miller. Sue was baffled to receive a call from New Zealand... until the caller explained the situation.

Sue's son, Jason, hopped on his bike and rode straight over. He was the first to arrive on the scene. "He couldn't get inside, because the screen door was locked," Jan says. "And I said, 'Don't worry Jason, just break the screen!'" Soon after, the paramedics arrived and gave Jan something for the pain. The ordeal was over.

If Jan hadn't been able to drag herself to the kitchen, or if Charlie hadn't been able to switch on his computer, who knows what might have happened. Once again, their courage and determination triumphed. And across the ditch, a woman named Jill had a hell of a story to share about her friend Charlie and his wife Jan.

Life after Charlie

On August 11, 2007, Charlie's fight finally ended as motor neurone took his

life. After his passing, Jan lived with Kim and her family in Lurnea for many years before moving into a place of her own in Ashcroft (not too far from Miller and Lurnea), where she lives at time of writing. She recently celebrated her 80th birthday, and also attended a huge Gifford family reunion where she reunited with her surviving sisters, Jewel and Val.

She has had a tough run at times – particularly due to a hospital mishap prior to Charlie's passing, which left her a paraplegic – but no matter the circumstances, her easy-going nature, sense of humour and love for her family have always prevailed. "Family is the most important thing," Jan says. "It's important for everyone to stay together."

Speaking of family, from Jan and Charlie's six kids and 16 grandkids came even more great grandkids: 17 and counting. They include Jordan, Tyler and Mia (from Renee); Chloe, Madison and Dylan (from Nicole); Hunter, Noah and Ivy (from Michelle); Logan, Henry and Claire (from Mathew); Cameron (from Jason); Mason, Charlotte and Georgia (from Rhiannon); and Jaxon (from Daniel). At time of writing, there were also two more on the way, from Renee and Emma.

Mind you, all of these great grandkids have forced Jan to draw a line in the sand when it comes to those Christmas presents. As she's quick to assert, "We bought them for my kids till they were 18, and we bought them for the grandkids till they were 18, but I don't buy them for the great grandkids. They've got their own grandparents for that!"

No one could dispute that she's earned the reprieve.



Charlie and Jan at Kim and Shaun's wedding



Charlie with one of his many golf trophies



(L-R) Charlie, Colleen, Gail, Jan, Daphne and Alf



Most of the Scroggy family together at Jan's 80th birthday