

# St Alipius



Dear Sir or Ma'am,

My Papa has said I am to come to St Alipius so I write to tell you about myself. My name is Cara and I am 10 years old, nearly 11 mind you. We come from County Cork and arrived here in Ballarat two weeks ago today.

My Mama was lost to the potato famine a few years ago. It was such a hard few years. Papa was travelling a lot, trying to find people who could still afford to buy his Ale. Mama stayed at home with us and tried to grow some food. No one wanted a new bonnet so she had no work. I think she gave all her food to us children and left none for herself. Eventually she got so weak she caught a fever and couldn't fight it off. I still pray for her every day, God rest her soul.

Since then my older sister, Brigid, has looked after us. Patrick works with Papa and I help Brigid with the little ones: my two brothers and three younger sisters. Father Downing told Papa I should come to school before I'm old enough to work. A few years learning my letters will help me get a good job and help Papa he said. I hope I can find work as a shop keeper.

After Mama died Papa decided he could stay in Ireland no longer. We went to live with Uncle Cormac in Limerick and Papa and Patrick set sail for Australia. We were lucky to have Uncle Cormac or else we may have ended up in those dreadful workhouses. A year later Papa wrote to us and said he and Patrick had found some gold and had enough money for our passage. Finally we were able to join him.

It took us three months on the ship from Limerick, cramped down in steerage. We shared our cabin with another family and four of us were so tightly jammed in the one bunk I couldn't even scratch my nose. All the waste sloshed around on the floor as the ship rolled in the waves.

Patrick came and met us in Geelong and brought a pony to carry our belongings and some more supplies. The walk to Ballarat took a week as the little ones were very slow. When we arrived we found that Papa had built us a fine little hut. There is no floor and no glass, but it has a fine bark roof and Brigid and I have sewn some canvas to cover the windows at night. I am just happy to be together with Papa and Patrick once more.

Yours faithfully,

Cara Murphy

